How does Openness about Personal, Sexual and Gender Identities Influence Teacher Leaders’ Self-Perceptions of Authenticity?

Abstract

This article utilizes the model of authentic leadership by Bill George and his colleagues to explore the extent to which openness about personal sexual and gender identities influence teacher leaders’ self-perceptions of authenticity in the workplace. Forty-three teachers in senior leadership roles were asked to complete George’s authentic leadership self-assessment tool. They were then invited to provide written comments reflecting on their performance in five key areas identified by George et~~.~~ al’s: Purpose – Passion; Values –Behaviour; Heart – Compassion; Relationships – Connectedness, and; Self-discipline – Consistency. The responses of twenty-three teacher leaders self-identifying as either Lesbian, Gay. Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) were compared with twenty teacher leaders self-identifying as heterosexual and cis gendered. Results show that LGBT teacher leaders rated themselves more negatively than their heterosexual /cis counterparts in all areas except Values-Behaviour, where they often reported that they overperformed as a defence against discrimination. LGBT teacher leaders rated themselves lowest in the key area of Relationships – Connectedness, with their reflections revealing tensions around being authentic in their relationships with colleagues~~,~~ while keeping their sexual identity private.

Introduction

Authenticity has a history that can be traced back to ancient Greece where it had at its roots phrases such as ‘know thyself’ and ‘to thine own self be true’. It appeared in Leadership and Management theory in the 1960s as a means to describe how leaders define their own role and relationships within their organisations. More recently, authentic leadership has been adopted by School Leaders in the United Kingdom as an approach which aims to augment cohesive school communities (Begley, 2003; Auerbach, 2012) with partial but not complete success (Ladkin & Spiller, 2013).

Definitions of authentic leadership abound but for the purpose of this article, Sparrowe’s (2005) description of authenticity is adopted. Sparrowe describes authenticity as, the leader’s self-awareness of their fundamental values and purpose, and the concordance of these values and purposes with those of the leader’s followers. In common with Sparrowe, it is important to note that authenticity emerges in relation to interactions with others and self-awareness and self-regulation need validation that can only come from other people. The definition of inauthenticity is more challenging. Bass & Steidlmeier (1999), identify the hallmark of inauthentic or pseudo-transformational leadership as unbridled self-interest in which leaders treat their followers as means to their own ends (p186). However, Price (2003) argues that values do not lead unambiguously to one and only one action, and positive values whilst both worthy, can be in conflict with one another. Similarly, leading from one’s own sense of purpose is only moral in and of itself if the purposes of the leader are moral.

This article, utilizes the model of Authentic Leadership by Bill George et.al (2007). Broadly subscribing to the belief that people are most effective in leadership roles when they are able to be themselves, George et.al’s model has five dimensions, each associated with an observable characteristic that demonstrates authenticity in leadership. The dimensions are: Purpose and Passion, Values and Behaviour, Relationships and Connectedness, Self-discipline and Consistency, and Heart and Compassion.

In 2007, George and his colleagues surveyed 125 leaders from across a range of different sectors in the USA. They ranged in age from 23 to 93 and were described as a diverse group of women and men from a wide array of racial, religious, socioeconomic backgrounds, and nationalities. Half of those surveyed were CEOs of American companies, and the other half included non-profit leaders, mid-career leaders, and young leaders. The sexual identities of those surveyed by George et. al. was not revealed and so it was not known whether sexual identity had bearing upon leader authenticity from this research. This article seeks to determine the extent to which LGBT identities affect the ability of school leaders to be authentic in their school workplace. Although for LGBT people coming out is an important facet of authenticity, it should be noted that this article does not equate the notion of authenticity with the extent to which the LGBT teachers were ‘out’ in their school workplaces. Instead it seeks to identify the way in which George et al’s five dimensions of authenticity were interpreted and lived by those identifying along different genders and sexualities, acknowledging that it is perfectly possible to describe oneself as authentic yet keep gender and sexual identity in the private realm.

George et al’s authentic leadership self-assessment tool was completed by 43 school leaders, and the responses of 23 leaders identifying as LGBT were compared with 20 who identified as heterosexual and of cis gender identity.

The socio-political background to this study warrants explanation. Diversity in school leadership in the UK has suffered through an enduring culture of moral panic related to LGBT identities and the education of children. In 1988 in the UK, the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher was responsible for the implementation of Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which stated that:

A local authority shall not - (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;(b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

Although Section 28 referred only to local authorities, the common belief at the time was that schools under local authority jurisdiction were indirectly bound by the same rules (Gray, 2010). Though the Section 28 legislation was never enforced, in the 15 years between 1988 and its repeal in 2003, many LGBT teachers feared the loss of their jobs if their sexual identity was revealed.

Since the repeal of Section 28 in 2003, several pieces of legislation have helped to give LGBT teacher leaders occupational security in the UK. The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and Part 3 of The Equality Act 2006 gave all employees the right to be protected from homophobic bullying, preventing any employer to discriminate against, or to harass workers, on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (Rudoe, 2010). The Equality Act, 2010 categorised sexual and gender identity as protected characteristics from workplace discrimination. Whilst anti-discrimination policies are symbolically important in school communities, LGBT teachers report that equality policies have not enhanced their feelings of personal or professional security, nor have they made them any more willing to disclose their sexual orientation to either their colleagues or students (Lee, 2019b).

In 2019, the Conservatives, under Prime Minister Theresa May, to some extent atoned for their Section 28 Bill, by legislating that from 2020, compulsory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in schools would include recognition of same-sex couples and families for the first time. Whilst this was broadly welcomed by teaching and LGBT communities, some parents and faith communities were vehemently against the new ruling claiming it was counter to religious teachings, particularly Islam and Catholicism. The RSE guidelines state that parents may not withdraw their children from health and relationships education. They will be allowed to withdraw their children from sex education at primary school, but at secondary school, parents will have to request withdrawal from the sex education aspects of RSE, and Headteachers can deny the request in exceptional circumstances. Once students reach the age of fifteen, they can override their parents’ wishes and attend the inclusive sex education lessons even if their parents do not approve. Government Ministers have been accused of mounting a state takeover of parenting and a Parliamentary petition signed by 106,000 people has called on the Government to give parents the right to opt their children out of both Relationship and Sex Education.

In May 2019, parents held a rally outside Parliament during the time the RSE guidance was being debated, calling for the full right of withdrawal from RSE lessons to be awarded to parents. Protests took place outside schools too, beginning in Birmingham where an openly gay teacher, Andrew Moffatt had introduced a ‘No Outsiders’ programme some four years earlier. No Outsiders is a package of children’s books depicting some characters in same-sex relationships. Protests quickly spread to other schools using the No Outsiders resources, notably in Manchester, Bradford, Northamptonshire and Kent.

Headteachers and teachers in schools called for urgent support from the Government amid fears that the disruption could escalate further. Section 28 left a legacy of caution and anxiety for the LGBT teachers who experienced it (Lee 2019a) and many of these teachers now draw parallels between Section 28 and the RSE controversy. Despite equalities legislation protecting LGBT employees, the lived experiences of many LGBT teachers suggests that schools are not yet places where LGBT teachers, and in particular LGBT teacher leaders, are able to be their authentic selves. For example, Lee (2019b) found that 64% of the LGBT teachers surveyed had accessed help for anxiety or depression linked to a perceived incompatibility between their sexual and gender identities and roles as teacher. In the same study, Lee also found that 38% of teachers had experienced homophobia in their school workplace on at least one occasion and more than half of the teachers believed their their LGBT identities had been a barrier to promotion.

This article begins by setting out the theoretical perspectives underpinning this article. It then reviews pertinent literature, before exploring George et al’s model of Authentic Leadership. The methods used to collect data from school leaders are described, before the findings are presented and discussed. Finally, the salient issues are brought together in concluding comments.

Theoretical Perspectives

This article rejects essentialist delineations of gender and sexuality recognising that they perpetuate heteronormativity when identity is described as biologically determined. Instead it subscribes to a Butlerian poststructuralist paradigm where gender and sexual identities are multiple and fragmented, and are constructed in relations to others and within systems of power and knowledge. Binary gender identification categories of male and female become interwoven with sexuality because they are understood in relation to whom a person desires, but are the ‘performative effect of reiterative acts’ (Butler, 1990 p.33). Behaviours associated with gender and sexuality are repeated and ‘congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ (1990 p.33). In other words, rather than being expressions of an innate identity acts and gestures of gender and sexuality are learned and are repeated over time to create the illusion of a stable identity core. Gender and sexual identity has then, according to Butler, ‘no ontological status apart from the acts which together form its reality’ (1990, p.136). Instead identity categories are ‘instruments of regulatory regimes’ and ‘the normalising categories of oppressive structures’ (1990, p13-14).

In common with Butler, this article posits that sexuality and gender transcend the private and become intertwined with social and political discourses of power, aimed at the preservation of social institutions, such as the family, the state and education (Gray, 2010). Social institutions sanction those identities and relationships that conform to the norms and values of heterosexuality – male masculinity and female femininity – but in doing so render individuals who do not appear to fit as excluded or Othered.

Norms and expectations of gender and sexuality are key to formulating the climate in contemporary school communities. Schools privilege biologically predetermined, hierarchically dichotomised and power-ridden categories of gendered and sexual identity (Gray, 2010). Rigid binaries of male/female, boy/girl are engineered from the earliest years of formal education and school stakeholders are compelled into understanding, accepting and engaging in the practices of gender regulation and heteronormativity (Renold, 2002).

The culture of heteronormativity differs between schools due to the societal influences of the demographic and location in which each school is situated (Toomey *et al*., 2012). When LGBT teachers feel forced to remain closeted, they perpetuate the heteronormative discourse and engage a literal silencing about their real life (Paechter, 2002).However, coming out does not necessarily require a declarative statement. Khayatt (1997) states, “telling may occur through the ways in which our bodies are inevitably read by students and/or through what we include in and leave out of syllabi” (p.112).

Sedgwick posits that disclosure of sexual or gender identity does not necessarily place agency with the person disclosing. In other words, the deliberate wish not to know a person’s sexuality can be an act of power over them. Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell is an act of pseudo-tolerance in school communities. Most commonly associated with the Clinton Administration in the USA, Lesbian and gay soldiers were allowed to serve in the American armed forces as long as they did not refer to their sexual or identity or betray it within their actions and physical presentation. Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell is frequently applied to schools (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Thompson-Lee, 2017) are refers to the lack of a safe space in the classroom or the staffroom for a teacher to speak their LGBT identity into existence. It is vital to recognize therefore that this article recognises that teacher leader authenticity is co-constructed between the LGBT teacher and the rest of the school community, and constantly revisited and refined in different contexts.

Literature

The development of professional identity is a complex and multifaceted and, according to Cruz-González et.al (2020) involves both ‘being’ and ‘doing’ professional identity (p.17). They add that for school leaders extensive professional responsibility is layered on top of the complexities of being and doing and this can make the role of the school leader particularly unattractive to teachers.

Professional identity is then, in a perpetual state of development. Individuals reflect on their own professional pathways and the identity changes that resulted and from this form a practised identity based on the way they interpret their autobiographic story (Layen, 2015; Thompson-Lee, 2017; Terrell et al. 2018).

George et. al advocate that leadership emerges from the life story of individuals (2007). Narrative intelligence is used by leaders to create their own leadership story and it is this that becomes the basis of communicating with trust and positive influence. When the narrative is one to which school stakeholders can relate, it builds positive energy and creates alliances, as the followers adopt the leader’s narrative as their own. According to George et al, authentic leaders constantly test themselves through real-world experiences, framing and reframing their leadership narrative to ensure they remain intelligible and convincing to their followers as a leader.

George et al. found that most of the leaders interviewed for their study had at one point or other been profoundly shaped by an adverse or traumatic experience. As a consequence of this, the most authentic leaders in George et al’s study were those who did not lead for their own success or gratification, rather they were motivated by their adverse experience(s) to serve other people and make a positive difference. According to George et al, the most authentic leaders, brought people together around a shared mission and values. From interviews with his leader participants he identified five principles that are key to authentic leadership:

Purpose - Passion:

Authentic leaders understands their purpose, which is driven by passion that emanates from their narrative.

Values - Behaviour:

Authentic leaders live their values, practicing them through their behaviours and setting an example for others to follow. These value behaviours are particularly tested when leaders are under pressure, or there are periods of adversity for their workplace community.

Heart - Compassion:

Authentic leaders help their followers to see the worth and deeper purpose of their work.

Relationships - Connectedness:

Authentic leaders create enduring and genuine relationships through their authentic connection with their workplace community.

Self-discipline - Consistency:

Authentic leaders convert their values into consistent actions that others can rely on.

Authentic leadership requires integrity, reflection and honesty to help persuade and engage followers in a common purpose and shared goals. Followers in turn maybe inspired to adopt the values of the leader and engage in transformative leadership behaviours themselves (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). This serves the interests of the leader, their followers and in the case of the school workplace, the academic success of its children and young people.

Authentic leadership promotes the largely noncontroversial aims of transparency, self-awareness, and attention to followers. However, LGBT leaders may, according to Fine (2017), face particular obstacles to fully enacting and reflecting authentic leadership. For LGBT school leaders, those obstacles can be considerable; they must navigate complex cultural and political school environments, whilst under scrutiny of a host of different school stakeholders. It can then, be extremely challenging for LGBT school leaders to be their authentic selves within their school communities. LGBT teachers who manage to traverse conservative school communities whilst identifying as LGBT, must otherwise betray nothing in their behaviour or communication with others that is different to their heterosexual/cis gendered peers.

Fine (2017) observes that it may be problematic for LGBT leaders to be authentic and conform to the well-established norms of gendered presentation. The traits of conventional leadership such as ambition, strength, power and assertiveness are all imbued with notions of masculinity and so it is important for the male school leader to subscribe to this model of masculinity. However, the expectations of female leaders differ in that their femininity must be apparent so that they are intelligible to follows. Fassinger, et.al. (2010), state that there is an obvious and ironic double bind for some lesbian leaders because a lesbian might not be viewed as a ‘real’ woman, but as a woman, she presents a non-traditional (non-masculine) embodiment of leadership.

The body is then an important consideration in the practice of authentic leadership. The leader’s bodily cues serve to support the presentation of authenticity (Wilhoit, 2013). When this is not possible, due to femininity in gay men, masculinity in lesbians, or via a transgender identity presentation, it can often compromise the ability of LGBT leaders to be read as authentic by their followers.

Lugg and Tooms (2010) researching identity erasure in queer school leadership found that the attire of female school leaders in particular an expensive ‘St John’s suit’ served as a panoptican, reassuring school stakeholders of their competence in the role. Lugg and Tooms described the St John’s suit as ‘a sexist and heterosexist straight-jacket, tightly defining what a ‘real’ female public school administrator looked like.’ (2010, p.86)

Authentic leadership has, according to Fine (2017), an inherent risk for LGBT leaders. Bold disclosures are needed to develop a level of vulnerability, trust, and mutual understanding to motivate followers. For LGBT teacher leaders, this may mean coming out in the school community, something Fassinger et.al (2010) describe as having the potential to either help or hinder the exercise of authentic leadership, depending on how colleagues respond to such a disclosure. In her article, “The problem of coming out”, Rasmussen (2004) considers the moral, political and pedagogical issues that necessarily influence educational discourses of the closet and coming out. She suggests that coming out discourses tend to forge a relationship between inclusivity and coming out, a relationship that, she claims, situates the closet “as a zone of shame and exclusion” (p.144). Rasmussen asserts that by encouraging teachers to come out, it leaves those who are unable to do so feeling that they have somehow abdicated their moral responsibility as a role model to young people.

Lineback et.al (2016), found that the LGBT teachers in their study tried to remain as invisible as possible in their schools so as to not draw attention to themselves, acknowledging that this strategy was not conducive to job promotion. Fahie (2016) too, found that LGBT teacher participants in his study avoided opportunities for promotion, as to do so would ‘increase their professional profile and raise their level of visibility within the local community’ (p.402). Those LGBT teachers aspiring to or achieving positions of school leadership must manage the intersection of their professional and personal identities in the school workplace, perpetually making decisions about what to share (and what not to share) about their personal lives . LGBT people who are out at work report better mental health and higher levels of self confidence and self-esteem (Kosciw, Palmer and Kull, 2015).

Wang et.al (2018) note the intensification of school leadership and call for greater support for health and well-being. Wang et.al (2018) suggest that building trust and fostering positive working relationships with various stakeholders is an important part of principals’ work—highlighting the importance of taking the time to build positive relationships with stakeholders both within and beyond the school community. Wang et.al call for greater control and autonomy for school leaders and advocate more powerful voice in decision-making. They suggest there should be less interference via policies and initiatives and greater rewards for institutional success. Wang et.al recognise the challenges that school leadership brings. When there is an additional raft of complexities linked to the formation of relationships with others and the intersection of the personal and professional, it is no wonder many LGBT teachers leave school leadership or do not pursue it in the first place (Courtney 2014).

Methodological approach

Before embarking on a description of the methods used to carry out this study, it is necessary to revisit the theoretical perspectives underpinning this article. It is recognised that gender and sexual identity have no ontological status and being a subject is understood as the outcome of discursive practices (Butler, 1990). Sexual identity, gender, identity, teacher identity and leader identity are understood to be fluid and constantly produced and reproduced in response to social, cultural and political influences. Schools, more than most other workplaces, are however are entrenched in rigid binaries are require teachers to be role models who are beyond reproach (Thompson-Lee, 2017). Therefore it is in recognition of the rigid depictions of sexual and gender identity within the school workplace that participants were asked to self-identify and were categorised as either LGBT or heterosexual and cis gendered. It is important to note therefore, that membership of the identity categories is a snap-shot in time and is not an indelible representation of sexuality and gender.

Forty three Teacher Leaders participated in the study. They were asked to compete a self-assessment questionnaire based on the one deployed by George et.al. They were also invited to comment on their scores via free text comments boxes (see appendix 1). Eleven of the participants identified as gay men, nine as lesbians or gay women with a further two identifying as having a ‘trans history’ and one identifying as non-binary. The rest were heterosexual and cis gendered participants. All were part of the researcher’s professional networks and were contacted by email to be invited to take part.

Participants were deemed to be in a school leadership role if they had a place on their school’s leadership team or committee. Participants were either Headteachers (or Heads of School), Deputy Headteachers, Assistant Headteachers or Heads of Teaching Schools Alliances (TSA), responsible for the training of teachers new to the profession. Twenty three of these identified as LGBT and twenty as heterosexual and cis gendered. The sexual and gender identities, and roles of the participants are shown in figure 1:

Figure 1: Gender and Sexual Identities and Roles of School Senior Leaders.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Leadership Roles | | | |  |
| Sexual identity | Headteacher | Deputy Headteacher | Assistant Headteacher | Head of TSA | Number of participants |
| Lesbian / Gay woman | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 9 |
| Gay man | 8 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 11 |
| Transgender or non-binary | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Heterosexual cis Man | 9 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| Heterosexual cis Woman | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Total number of participants | 20 | 16 | 17 | 2 | 43 |

The majority of male participants were Headteachers (17/22). The majority of female participants were either Deputy, Assistant Headteachers or TSA leads (15 /18). None of the trans or non- binary participants were Headteachers or Deputies, but instead were either Assistant Headteachers or Heads of TSAs. The table below shows a percentage breakdown of male and female participants by role .

Figure2: Percentage of participants in leadership roles by gender identity.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Male Headteachers | Female Headteachers | Male Deputies Assistants  TSA leads | Female Deputies Assistants  TSA leads | Trans or non-binary Headteachers | Trans or non-binary Deputies Assistants  TSA leads |
| 77% | 16% | 23% | 84% | 0% | 100% |

It is beyond the scope of this article to fully interrogate the gender balance within the leadership roles of participants, but it is worthy of brief comment here. The male / female split between participants was largely similar but there were more than six times more men in Headteacher roles than there were women.

Despite teaching being seen as ‘women’s work’ (Acker, 1994), there is under-representation of women in Headteacher roles. Leadership theory and practice has frequently couched leadership as a “male norm” (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Patterson et al., 2012) or at best as gender neutral and transcending gender. This assumes that the gendered body is not important to the way in which leadership is enacted. Depictions of male and female leadership have consequently remained fairly fixed and the role of the school leader remains largely entrenched in an essentialist paradigm of identity that posits male and female gender as stable, natural and inherent. Although there is evidence that the behaviours of female leaders are rated more positively by their followers, when compared by their male counterparts, evidence by Eagly (2005) suggests that female leaders are judged less favourably overall than male leaders by both male and female followers. The success of female leaders is closely aligned with the extent to which they display leadership traits in a way that does not compromise their femininity (Powell and Butterfield, 2016). There is evidence that women followers are sometimes critical of female leaders who lack femininity but it is male followers who most are most ardently opposed to female leaders who display masculine traits (Eagly and Karau 2002). Kruger (2008) found that both male and female teachers preferred to work for a male leader than a female one. Drawing on a study by van Eck et al. (1994), Kruger states that even where teaching teams were exclusively female (most usually in primary schools), the preference of the female teachers was for a male leader. Kruger observed that women in schools have lower status if they are the gender minority but conversely, men in a gender minority in schools have higher status. It is perhaps unsurprising then that in this study there were fifteen male school leaders compared with only three females.

It appears that through teacher expectations and the attachment of a certain status to

male and female leadership behaviour, biologically determined sex differences

become gender differences in leadership. Thus, men have more freedom to adopt different styles of leadership without invoking negative reactions (2008. p164)

Whilst the age and experience of participants was not explicitly sought, they were each asked how long they had been in their current leadership roles. The results in the table below suggest that male leaders stayed in their roles for shorter periods than their female counterparts.

Figure 3: Time spent in leadership role(s) by sexual/gender identity

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Sexual / gender Identity** | **Range of years in role(s)** | **Average number of years in leadership role(s)** |
| Lesbian or gay woman | 1-8 | 4 |
| Gay man | 1-3 | 2 |
| Trans or non-binary | 1-2 | 1 |
| Heterosexual Cis Man | 1-4 | 2 |
| Heterosexual Cis Woman | 3-12 | 6 |

Heterosexual women and lesbians had been in their roles the longest, with gay men and trans / non binary participants only one or two years into their current leadership positions on average. Heterosexual / cis men had spent between one and four years in their current leadership roles.

It is important to acknowledge the background of the researcher. She identifies as a lesbian, is a teacher by background and acts as a mentor on an LGBT school leadership programme. It is imperative then to recognise that the sense-making that has taken place for the purpose of this article has been co-constructed by both the participants and the researcher, with the latter contextualising the written responses through the lens of interpreting the written reflections in light of her own challenges as a lesbian teacher leader (Thompson-Lee; 2017).

As the self-assessment questionnaire was designed for use by corporate America, a few of the phrases in the questions were altered slightly so that the meaning and context was clearer and more applicable to education. For example, statement 12, originally said*, I always tell the truth, both within and outside of the company because integrity runs deep* *within the fabric of my soul*. This was altered to read, *I always tell the truth, both within and outside of the school workplace because integrity runs deep within the fabric of my soul*. Statement 15 was also altered slightly from *I would never act in a way that is inconsistent with the company's values,* to instead say: *I would never act in a way that is inconsistent with the school’s values.*

It is important to acknowledge that the corporate world and world of Education differ significantly and this article does not suppose that business leadership and school leadership are similar or interchangeable. Although the academisation of schools in the UK has necessitated that schools are run more like businesses, this article recognises that business and education each have a very different organizational environment and teachers when compared with their counterparts in business, have constraints and pressures imposed by a host of different stakeholders.

The data set of forty three self-assessments, along with the free text comments in each subsection was analysed initially by collating the scores by sexual / gender identity. Then, utilizing emergent coding (Carspecken,2001) across the free text responses, the comments were collated according to the sexual and gender identities of the teacher leaders. The collated comments produced a number of themes under each of George et al’s five principles of authentic leadership. These are summarised in the table below:

Figure 4: Authentic Leadership Themes raised by participants

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Authentic Leadership Characteristic** | **Theme** |
| Purpose - Passion | Putting the children at the centre of the school mission  Social Justice  Being proud of the school. |
| Values - Behaviour: | The importance of modelling the behaviours that leaders wish to see in their followers.  Being a role model for colleagues and students. |
| Heart - Compassion: | Social Justice.  The importance of education in transforming lives.  Teaching as a vocation, not just a job. |
| Relationships - Connectedness | Being yourself in the workplace.  Honest communications.  Valuing relationships amongst colleagues.  The school as a community.  The school as a family. |
| Self-discipline – Consistency – | Managing emotion.  The importance of consistency as a leader.  Fairness as vital to good leadership.  Responding not reacting when under pressure. |

Results

Scores ranging from one to twenty in each of the five characteristics of authentic leadership were collated according to the sexual and or gender identities of each of the school leaders. Figure 5 below shows the average score on each characteristic split by sexual/gender identity.

Figure 5: Authentic Leadership Self-assessment rating (out of 20) by sexual / gender identity.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Scores by Sexual and Gender Identities** | | | | |
| **Authentic Leadership dimensions** | Lesbians /gay women | Gay men | Trans  Non-binary | Heterosexual Cis men | Heterosexual Cis Women |
| Purpose - Passion: | 16 | 16 | 15 | 19 | 19 |
| Values - Behaviour: | 18 | 19 | 17 | 16 | 15 |
| Heart - Compassion: | 16 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 19 |
| Relationships -Connectedness: | 12 | 14 | 10 | 16 | 17 |
| Self-discipline - Consistency: | 17 | 15 | 14 | 17 | 13 |
| **Total average score** | **79/100** | **70/100** | **72/100** | **85/100** | **83/100** |

The scores show that overall heterosexual / cis gendered men and women assessed themselves as being more authentic leaders than their LGBT counterparts, scoring an average of 85/100 and 83/100 respectively. Gay men assessed themselves as least authentic overall, scoring an average of 70/100.

Heterosexual / cis male and female leaders, were clearer on their purpose and assessed themselves as highly passionate about their leadership roles, scoring an average of 19/20. Lesbian and gay male leaders rated themselves lower at an average of 16/20 whilst non-binary/trans leaders assessed themselves as only 15/20 overall. Reflective comments from participants offered a clue to the variation in scores: A heterosexual female Deputy Headteacher stated:

When things get tough, I always remind myself who we are doing this for. I also think of my own children. They are not at my school, but I would want their teacher to give 100% and so it’s important that I do the same for the children I teach.

The comment by this leader contrasts with a comment from a gay male Deputy Headteacher, who appeared to be driven much more by a desire to make school stakeholders proud. He wrote:

I want my institution to thrive and for us to make staff, students, parents and governors proud to be a part of XXXXXXXXXX (school name redacted)

It may be that this clearer sense of purpose and passion is a consequence of heterosexual leaders being more likely to be parents when compared to their LGBT peers. Parenting can naturally lead to a greater sense of investment in the future of young people. The heterosexual Deputy Headteacher alluded to this when she wrote of giving her best for children because she would want the same level of commitment from teachers of her own children at another school. Wenzel (2002) found similarities between parent socialization models and teachers’ influence on student outcomes, suggesting striking similarities between teaching and parenting.

In Values – Behaviour, LGBT teacher leaders scored more highly than their heterosexual/cis counterparts and with average scores of 18 lesbian, 19 gay men and 17 trans/non-binary versus 16 for heterosexual / cis men and 15 for heterosexual / cis women. LGBT school leaders here raised the importance of being a positive role model, not only for young people, but also for their staff. A gay male Headteacher wrote,

I model what I want to see in others – I’m the first in every morning and usually the last to leave.

Fassinger, et.al. (2010), state that in studies of gay and lesbian leadership, many LGBT leaders overcompensate for their sexual or gender identity by achieving and demonstrating high competence, hoping that their ability will safeguard them against discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of their sexual identity (see also Snyder, 2006; Lugg and Tooms, 2010) Rudoe, 2013; Thompson-Lee, 2017 ). LGBT teachers place inordinate amounts of time and energy into their teaching, often over-performing in order to develop a positive professional reputation as an outstanding teacher or teacher leader. Tooms (2007) concurs. The queer school administrators in her study avoided conflict concerning their sexual identity by making efforts to downplay that aspect of their personhood related to the following seven constructs. (a) work ethic; (b) the presentation of self; (c) a ‘straightened’ office; (d) efforts to fit and partner loyalty; (e) the explicit revelation of identity; (f) encounters with insensitive empathy; and (g) political advocacy (Tooms 2007,p 610). The tendency to believe that high achievement would compensate for an LGBT identity was apparent in the responses of the LGBT teacher leaders in this study. A lesbian Deputy Headteacher wrote:

‘Although they would never overtly get rid of me for being gay, I have always made sure I am beyond reproach, just in case’

In Heart-Compassion, once again male and female heterosexual/cis gendered leaders rated themselves more highly (19 and 17 /20 respectively) than LGBT teacher leaders who scored 16/20.

Two of the lesbian teacher leaders wrote of being motivated by social justice and making society fairer for all. One wrote:

I am committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure that our young people have choices and can be whoever and whatever they want to be.

This comment could be interpreted several ways. At one level it describes the way in which education enables young people to achieve their ambitions and achieve financial security. However, it also hints at the trope in which historically, LGBT people have left their childhood communities, migrating to cities where there is greater diversity and anonymity, making it easier to live openly in LGBT relationships. This is often achieved via education, when young people leave their communities to attend university.

In contrast, both heterosexual /cis female Headteachers described their staff body as an extension of their family. One of them wrote;

My staff are like my family. The atmosphere is such that we can go to each other when we feel down and need picking back up again.

This comment suggests that like in a family, this heterosexual Headteacher, was able to be her authentic self and that the school workplace was a safe space in which she could be herself and talk about problems in an atmosphere of mutual support. LGBT people are used to creating families of choice (Green & Mitchell, 2008; Dewaele, 2016), yet none of the LGBT teacher leaders described their colleagues or school communities as a family, suggesting that they may not interact with school stakeholders as freely as their heterosexual peers.

In Relationships – Connectedness, LGBT teacher leaders scored well-below their heterosexual /cis gendered peers, scoring an average of 12/20 compared with 16.5/20. Heterosexual/ cis gendered leaders raised once again the notion of the school community as an extension of family. One female Deputy Headteacher wrote of school staff facing good days bad days together. A heterosexual/cis Assistant Headteacher similarly stated;

In our school, we face challenges together, united as a family.

LGBT teacher leaders again, made no reference at all to family when commenting on relationships and connectedness with their colleagues. Instead, reflections focussed on the necessary separation of professional and personal identities and the issue of privacy. A gay male Assistant Headteacher wrote:

I have a personal self and a professional self and I like to keep them separate as much as possible. Staff know that I’m gay but I worry that talking about my partner at school is too intimate.

The lower scores on Relationships – Connectedness by LGBT leaders hint at some of the challenges facing them in the workplace. A transgender teacher leader wrote.

Everyone at school says I’m a private person but I wish they would ask me more about my life outside.

This statement hints at the cycle that can occur when LGBT teachers lack the opportunity to speak their gender and sexual identities into existence. Consequently, heterosexual / cis colleagues misinterpret this absence of personal or intimate information as a desire for privacy and so do not ask personal questions of their colleagues.

LGBT school leaders who were out in their school communities, described having more authentic relationships with colleagues than those who were not. A gay male Headteacher who had come out to his entire school community including students and their parents, recognised the importance of relationships to authentic leadership. He wrote:

Relationships are super-important. My staff trust me far more since I came out. They challenge homophobic or careless comments by students and parents that I would never dare do.

This comment suggests that by coming out and sharing this intimate information about himself, trust amongst his colleagues had grown and crucially his staff were now protective of him by challenging homophobic comments more voraciously than he felt able to do himself.

In the fifth and final of George et al’s authentic leadership traits, Self-discipline – Consistency, there was no clear distinction between LGBT and heterosexual/cis gendered leaders with both groups scoring themselves on an average at 15/20.However, males scored more highly on this than females, with men scoring themselves as 17/20 compared with women at 14/20. In the corresponding comments by participants, the management of emotion was a key theme but men and women perceived emotion very differently. Men seemed to deem emotion as a necessary and desirable attribute in authentic leadership, compared with the women leaders, who were more self-critical and tended to associate displays of emotion as a weakness.

A heterosexual / cis male Deputy Headteacher wrote:

If I am in a bad mood, my staff know by now, it is only because I care and this school really matters to me.

Female leaders were harsher on themselves. A lesbian Assistant Headteacher new to her role wrote:

This is the thing I’m working on. It is so important to not let those you manage know if you are worried or upset about something.

A female heterosexual /cis Deputy Headteacher identified the importance of responding rather than reacting, particularly during adversity. She wrote:

I try my best to always respond rather than react to situations. I think consistency is really important in a leader and I always hated it when my managers were inconsistent. There is nothing worse than not knowing what reaction you’re going to get.

This leader acknowledged the tensions that can exist between being authentic and being consistent. However, she recognises the importance of predictability and not letting emotion lead to an inconsistency of response when dealing with followers.

Discussion

Heterosexual/cis gendered teachers rated themselves as more authentic in four of the five areas identified by George et al. The only exception to this was the Values and Behaviour dimension in which LGBT teacher leaders scored themselves more positively.

As this study involved self-assessment rather than assessment by a third party, the confidence and self-esteem of the respondents must be considered in relation to the scores. Wang, et.al. (2018) researched the Intensification of school leadership in Canada. They found that as a result of work intensification, work demand, external policy influence, organizational support, and the relationships with colleagues and teaching unions are having a significant impact on school leader job satisfaction. For LGBT teacher leaders, one must add to this the day-to-day management of potentially incompatible personal and professional identities through vigilance, concealment, assimilation and acts of pseudo-heterosexuality, creating additional pressure on top of what is already a very demanding job. LGBT participants reported being ambitious but lacking the confidence to put themselves into Headteacher roles where they would be more visible within the school community. The relationship LGBT teacher leaders have with their school communities is more complex, not least because they lack the dominant sense of belonging that their heterosexual/cis leader colleagues take for granted. It is not entirely incumbent on LGBT teacher leaders to determine the confidence with which they engage with their workplace, however. The organisational climate of the school community sets cultural norms and expectations and it is these that influence the extent to which the LGBT school leader can be their authentic self. Drawing on the experiences of queer School Adminstrators in the USA, Tooms found that they continually searched for clues to delineate the levels of acceptance from others constantly negotiating the extent to which they were able to fit in within their school communities. The school leaders Toom studied, described school leadership as a ‘labor of love and fear’ (p.601) and resulted in them ultimately needing to make considerable personal sacrifices to maintain their job security. In common with Toom’s and the majority of others studying LGBT school leadership (see, Lugg and Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg and Tooms, 2010; Courtney, 2014), the participants in this study accepted the heteronormative status quo within their school communities and adopted behaviours and built relationships that allowed them to survive within it. Tooms (2007) describes queer school leaders and workaholics and overachievers (p.623) and there is evidence from the responses of participants in this study that they recognise that adherence to the status quo is vital. This is captured aptly by the Lesbian Deputy Headteacher who states:‘Although they would never overtly get rid of me for being gay, I have always made sure I am beyond reproach, just in case’

LGBT school leaders believed a lack of authenticity resulted from their need to manage the intersection of their personal and professional identities and many equated their own authenticity with being out in their school workplaces. LGBT teacher leaders who were not able to come out in the workplace feared that they were deceiving their colleagues by keeping details of their personal relationships in the private realm. Being open about sexual identity fulfils a basic need to confirm and affirm one’s identity. Disclosure allows individuals to form an authentic and stable sense of self (Ragins, 2004), and reduces the cognitive dissonance and burden of identity management within the school workplace (King et.al 2008). LGBT teachers who enter into a ‘Don’t ask, Don’t tell’ relationship with their school communities often feel that their personal identities are being silenced (Thompson-Lee 2017). It is important to note that for LGBT teacher leaders, authenticity is not simply coming out. It is possible to keep sexual or gender identity in the private realm yet perform well on each of George et al’s dimensions of authentic leadership. However, interpersonal workplace relationships often rely on transactional processes in which there is an exchange of personal information which over time builds trust. When a school leader is unusually silent about an aspect of their life, this can of course provoke in followers a lack of trust which then spreads beyond the private and into matters central to the workplace.

LGBT teacher leaders tended not to subscribe to the notion of the school community as family to the same extent as their heterosexual/cis counterparts. LGBT receive less emotional support from their families of origin when compared to heterosexual couples (Kurdek and Schmitt, 1987). Although tolerance and understanding of LGBT partnerships has developed in recent times, LGBT individuals and their partners sometimes find themselves estranged from their families of origin, or find themselves managing relationships with their families of origin that are difficult and stressful (Rostosky et. al 2004). This can make the explanation of family potentially more complex for LGBT teacher leaders and may explain why LGBT participants avoided using it in relation to school communities.

LGBT school leaders in this study worried that they did not have much in common with colleagues, which adversely affected their ability to form authentic relationships. A number cited not having their own children as a factor in their perceived failure to find common ground. In 2015, LGBT people were permitted to marry in the UK and this signalled the evolution of LGBT relationships into mainstream consciousness. Since then, there has been a baby boom amongst lesbian couples in particular which will, once their children enter the education system, force schools to recognise LGBT families more than many currently do. The UK’s new inclusive Relationships and Sex Education from September 2020 will, if it is not overturned by the Johnson administration, lead schools to recognise LGBT families within the curriculum.

There is evidence to suggest that the adversity typically experienced by LGBT teacher leaders, makes them ideally placed to be exemplary authentic leaders. For example, Fassinger, et. al. (2010) observes that marginalisation might allow LGBT leaders to ‘see differently, hear differently, and thus potentially challenge the conventional wisdom’ (p. 451). They suggest that LGBT leaders have a superior bicultural perspective, making them uniquely placed in team building. Fassinger et. al (2010) also state that LGBT leaders have to develop an understanding of the rules by which the main-stream culture operates, but they simultaneously are able to envision new and more inclusive ways of accomplishing success’ (p. 450). They add that the freedom to set social and relationship rules, gives LGBT leaders the latitude ‘to create boundaries that will work where none exist from tools that may be only partially suited to the task’ (p. 452)

In his book, *The G Quotient* , Snyder (2006) identified that LGBT leaders through adverse experiences may embrace difference and create cultures that value a diversity of strengths. LGBT people often develop excellent emotional intelligence becoming adept at reading situations, honing skills through the constant horizon scanning necessary to determine whether or not it is safe to be out, every time one enters a new environment or meets someone new. Synder believes that LGBT leaders are often more discerning and make better decisions when recruiting employees. This is because they have highly developed instincts from years of proceeding cautiously with people new to them as a means of protecting themselves from discrimination.

Despite LGBT leaders in this study scoring below their heterosexual/cis gendered peers for Relationships and Connectedness, Snyder believes instead that LGBT leaders are skilful in identifying where it is possible to connect with others, with whom they may not naturally have much in common. Where LGBT teacher leaders in this study were out in their school communities, they rated themselves as having more authentic relationships with colleagues than their LGBT peers who were not.

Like Snyder, Shallenberger asserted that the adversity endured through being othered by society, enabled gay men to develop an array of particular skills, valuable to leadership. The skills identified by Shallenberger included, sensitivity to diverse employees, tolerance of ambiguity, understanding of oppression, creativity, courage and risk taking.

Scores relating to the Authentic Leadership trait of Self-discipline and Consistency, did not differ according to sexual identity but did differ by gender. This was particularly prevalent with regard to the management of emotion, where male teacher leaders aligned emotion with passion and determination, and female teacher leaders conversely associated displays of emotion with weakness. A number of studies suggest female leaders are viewed more negatively by followers when they display emotion (Eagly, 2005; Kruger, 2008). Lewis (2000) found that female leaders received lower ratings from their workplace followers when expressing anger, whilst followers of male leaders more readily tolerated anger in male leaders. Fishbach et al, (2015) similarly found that women leaders experience a conflict between emotions suitable for their role as leader and those appropriate for their role as a woman. They described this conflict as and additional role stressor which may keep women from striving for senior leadership positions.

Conclusion

This article has drawn on George et al’s authentic leadership self-assessment tool to explore the extent to which sexual and gender identity affects the way in which teacher leaders feel able to be their authentic selves in the school workplace. Schools remain entrenched in the biologically predetermined and power-ridden categorisations of male and female, seen from the toys in the reception class ‘home corner’ right through to expectations of school leavers at their prom. In school staff, the rigid binaries of male or female are evident from the way in which pupils are expected to address them as Mr, Mrs or Miss.

The findings in this article share much in common with Tooms (2007). This study has demonstrated that achieving a sense of authenticity is perceived to be more complex for LGBT school leaders than for their heterosexual and cis gendered peers. LGBT school leaders must navigate complex cultural and political school environments, and understand implicit rules and norms within a school community before they can lead it or even participate in it. Although LGBT leaders are positioned to drive through cultural changes within their school communities, changes must not threaten hegemonic heteronormativity. LGBT school leaders must then fit in to schools as they are and be as Tooms (2007) explains ‘the right kind of queer’ (p.623). Whilst this article shares a good deal in common with Tooms, it does however identify that the autobiographical experiences of LGBT people make them ideally placed to be exceptional school leaders in certain areas. Lesbian and Gay school leaders scored higher than their heterosexual counterparts on the authentic leadership traits of Values and behaviour. There was evidence that fear of prejudice based on their sexual and gender identities led to LGBT leaders committing inordinate amounts of time and energy into their performance as leaders. This additional effort appeared to provide LGBT teachers with a clear sense of what needed to be done to enact their values positively into highly effective behaviours. Further research should explore the extent to which the adversity experienced by many LGBT teachers equip them with distinctive attributes that are conducive to highly effective school leadership.

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Appendix 1: Self-Assessment Tool



**Authentic Leadership Self-Assessment Survey**

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

I am happy for the information provided in this self-assessment to be used in the research project.

**About you**

Which of these best describes your gender identity: Please circle the most appropriate or add an identity of your own in the box below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cis male | Cis female | Transgender | Non-binary | Queer |
| Alternatively, please add your own identity here: | | | | |

Which of these best describes your sexual identity: Please circle the most appropriate or add an identity of your own in the box below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Heterosexual | Bisexual | Gay | Lesbian /Gay woman | Queer |
| Alternatively, please add your own identity here: | | | | |

What is your current role: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in senior leadership roles in schools \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please consider each of the statements below and rate yourself between 5 (Always) and 1 (Never) according to each of the statements

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | This is true…… | Always | Mostly | Occasionally | Seldom | Never |
| 1. | I know what is important to me professionally and the direction I must take to achieve my goals. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. | The actions I take are always aligned with my values. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. | I enjoy helping others to understand the value and deeper purpose of their work. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | I enjoy creating genuine relationships through my connections at work. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. | My team knows they can always rely on me because my values ensure I'm always consistent with the actions I take. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. | I always put our pupils / students at the heart of everything I do. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. | When facing decisions, I normally consult with my team, however, the most important thing that affects the outcome are my deeply held values. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. | One of the main reasons my team not only follows me, but also dedicate themselves to the common cause, is that they feel I'm genuinely interested in serving them. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. | One thing my team will never accuse me of is being a detached leader. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. | I have strong self-discipline. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. | My sense of purpose helps my team to realise their potential by providing meaning in their work. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. | I always tell the truth, both within and outside of the school workplace because integrity is important to me. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. | I enjoy getting to know the life stories of those with whom I work with as it gives me the opportunity to develop relationships. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14. | Trust is built and sustained in the depths of the relationships I have with my team. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15. | I would never act in a way that is inconsistent with the School’s values. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16. | I tell the whole truth, as painful as it may be. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17. | My values are shaped by personal beliefs, introspection, experiences, and consultation with others. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 18. | My team entrust their own aspirations to me because they know I am reliable . | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 19. | I never present a false front to others, as I fear it may harm our relationship. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 20. | I would never set double standards for my team and myself. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

|  |
| --- |
| Score  Purpose - Passion:  Authentic leaders understands their purpose, which is driven by passion that emanates from their narrative.  Values - Behaviour:  Authentic leaders live their values, practicing them through their behaviours and setting an example for others to follow. These value behaviours are particularly tested when leaders are under pressure, or there are periods of adversity for their workplace community.  Heart - Compassion:  Authentic leaders help their followers to see the worth and deeper purpose of their work.  Relationships - Connectedness:  Authentic leaders create enduring and genuine relationships through their authentic connection with their workplace community.  Self-discipline - Consistency:  Authentic leaders convert their values into consistent actions that others can rely on.  **Use the text boxes below to reflect on your scores and make any further comments about what authentic leadership means to you.**  Purpose - Passion:  Values - Behaviour:  Heart - Compassion:  Relationships - Connectedness:  Self-discipline - Consistency:  Any other comments  Thank-you for taking the time to complete this self-assessment exercise. |