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Wickford Teaching School Alliance

# Courageous Leaders

Lesbians don't become  
Headteachers.

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## Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 - 2003

- *“A local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”.*
- The existence of Section 28 caused confusion and harm. Teachers were confused about what they could and could not say and do, and whether they could help pupils dealing with homophobic bullying and abuse. Local authorities were unclear as to what legitimate services they could provide for lesbian, gay and bisexual members of their communities.



## Changing Landscape

- Equality Act 2010
- Civil Partnership Act 2005
- Equal Marriage 2015



## Courageous Leaders Project

- 4 year DfE funded project.
- Led by Wickford Teaching Schools Alliance in Essex.
- Aspiring LGBT+ School leaders from across the entire UK (Aberdeen to Cornwall) meet 3 times a year together.
- .
- 10 in year 1 & 10 in year 2
- 20 in year 3 & 20 in year 4

# Courageous Leaders

- Jane -What did we do?
- Craft of Communication
- Etc..... Jane please add
- Inspirational speeches by LGBT+ leaders and the stories behind their struggles to overcome prejudice.
- 1:1 mentoring from a Headteacher or other senior leaders in Education



# Courageous Leaders

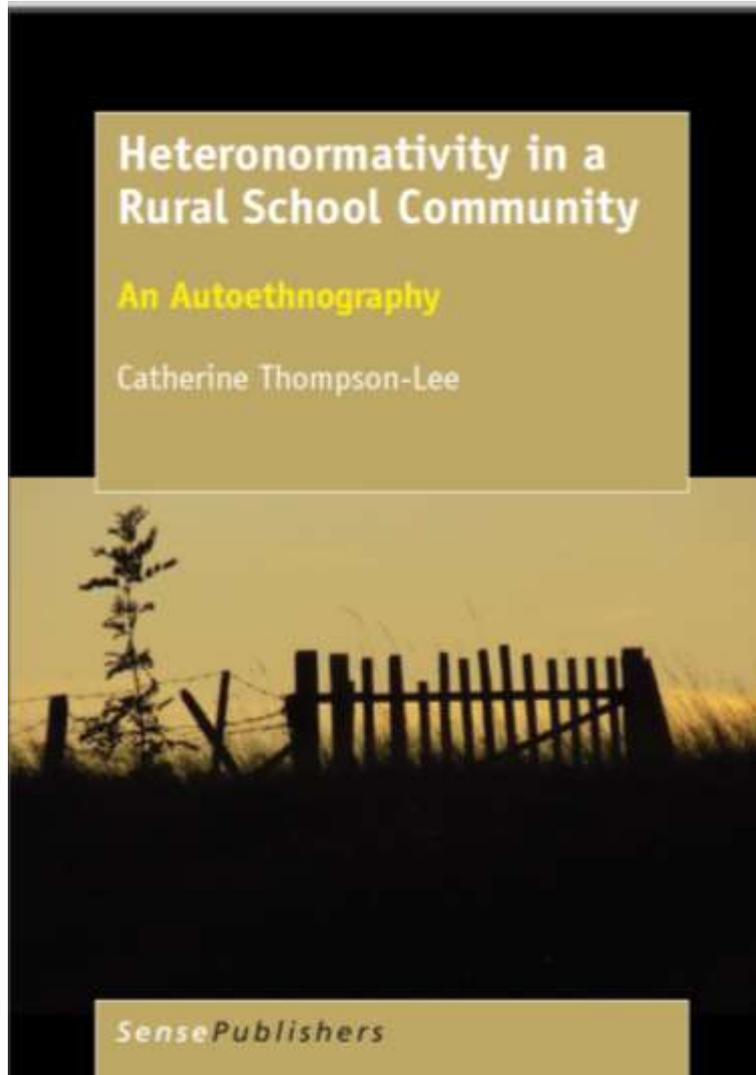
- As a consequence of the programme I am more confident in my professional life, whilst being an out LGBT+ member of the school community. I feel I am able to articulate and communicate with greater effect – both personally and in a larger forum.
- Personal highlights included feeling a real sense of community between the group, and having the opportunity to step outside my usual working and social circle to discuss and share LGBT issues within education.
- The size of the community that is out there to call on for support made a strong impression on me and I realised that so long as the right culture is created in school, there should be no reason why anybody should be worried about talking about these issues in school.



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Lee, C. 2017 Heteronormativity in a Rural School Community. Sense Publications Rotterdam and New York.



## Online Survey: Rural V's Urban /Suburban

- Piloted with 9 LGBT+ teachers at Courageous Leaders day
- 24 questions mixture of multiple choice and free text comments
  - Do LGBT+ teachers think that their sexuality has adversely affected their opportunities for promotion?
  - Do LGBT+ teachers hear homophobic language at school?
  - Do LGBT+ teachers think their teacher identity and sexual identity are compatible?
  - Do LGBT+ teachers suffer anxiety or depression linked to their sexuality and role as teacher?



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## Spreading the Word





## The Data

- 105 respondents in total over 2 month period.
- 73% female, 23% male, 4% other (including non-binary, agendered, gender queer, trans).
- 43% identified as lesbian, 30% as gay, 8% as bisexual and 18% as other (including homoflexible, queer, pansexual).
- 1 and 36 years in teaching with the average time serving as a teacher being 13.5 years.
- 39 % of respondents taught in primary and 58% taught in secondary schools. Other respondents taught in through schools or in early years.



# Which of the following people at school are aware of your sexual identity?





## Which of the following people at school are aware of your sexual identity?

*I'm out to a few children but this has not been through choice. (lesbian teacher village school)*

*When I got married I didn't make a fuss about this at work and I didn't change my name. I am a proud lesbian but feel wary at work. This is not because of staff or students but due to parents. My school is in a rural community and I have kept my sexuality quiet at times as I have been worried about people's reactions. I want to do more to raise awareness of lgbt issues, especially for students. (lesbian teacher village school)*

*I now act as a role model for students and take an active role in the student Pride Club. (bisexual teacher city school)*

*I felt obliged as queer students were being marginalised and their needs were ignored by teachers. (gay male teacher city school)*



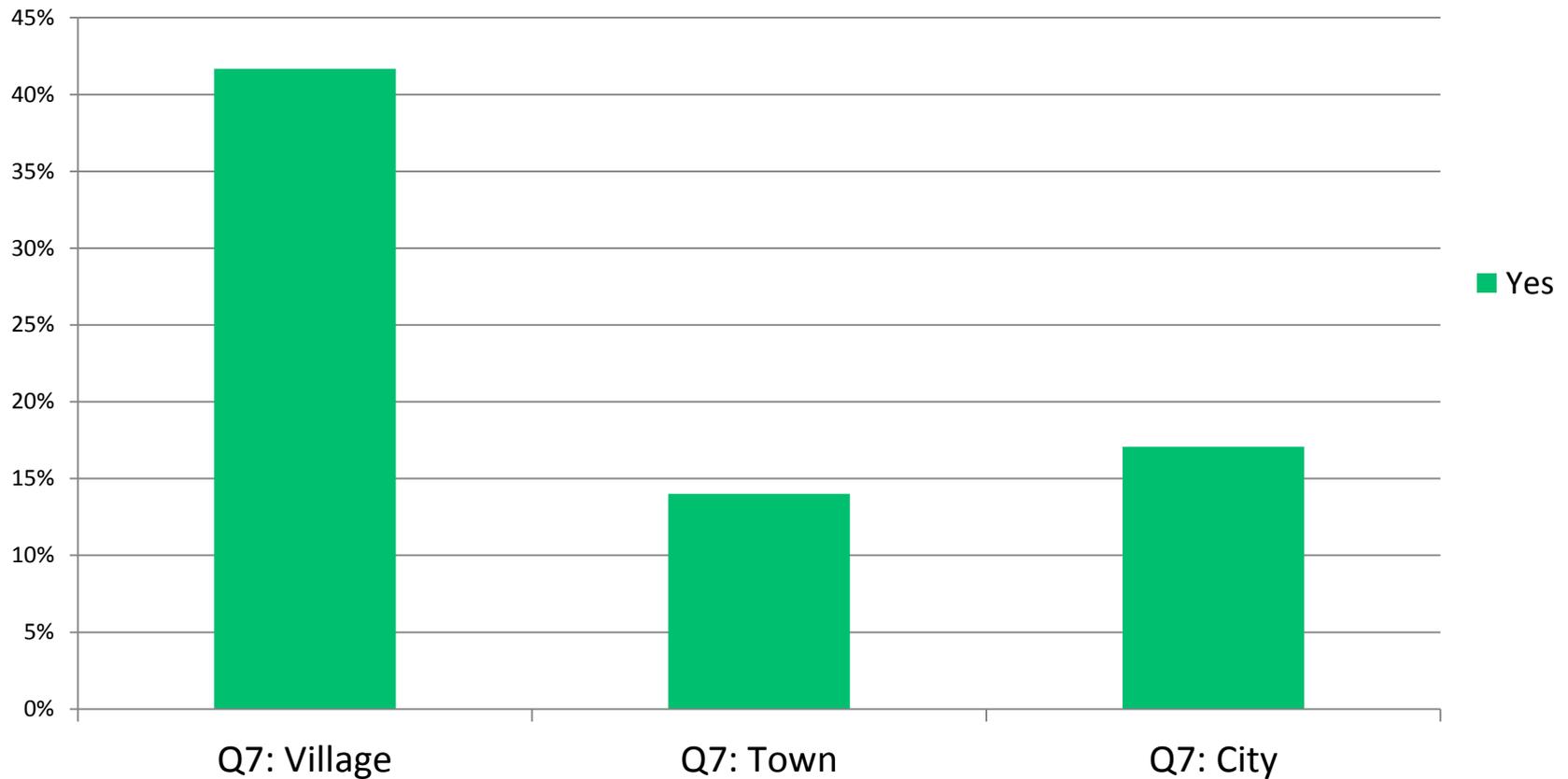
# Which of the following people at school are aware of your sexual identity?

It's difficult because straight teachers are okay to talk about their husbands/wives but it feels like an overshare to say I have a female partner. (lesbian teacher village school)

I was no longer avoiding questions/dancing around the subject. I felt that I was honestly myself. There were no negative reactions from students in my first - long term - school (five years). They just wanted to ask, very sensible questions, when the news broke (I was pictured at a demonstration, in the local paper). Most of them thought that I was courageous. As a teacher of English, who often asked students to write of their life experiences, being 'out' felt right. I feel that I had their respect, which made the job of teaching a lot easier (gay male teacher town school)



# Do you think your sexuality identity has ever been a barrier to your promotion?





## Do you think your sexuality identity has ever been a barrier to your promotion?

*Was 'warned' by head teacher not to tell anyone about my sexuality as lesbians don't become head teachers. (lesbian teacher in village school)*

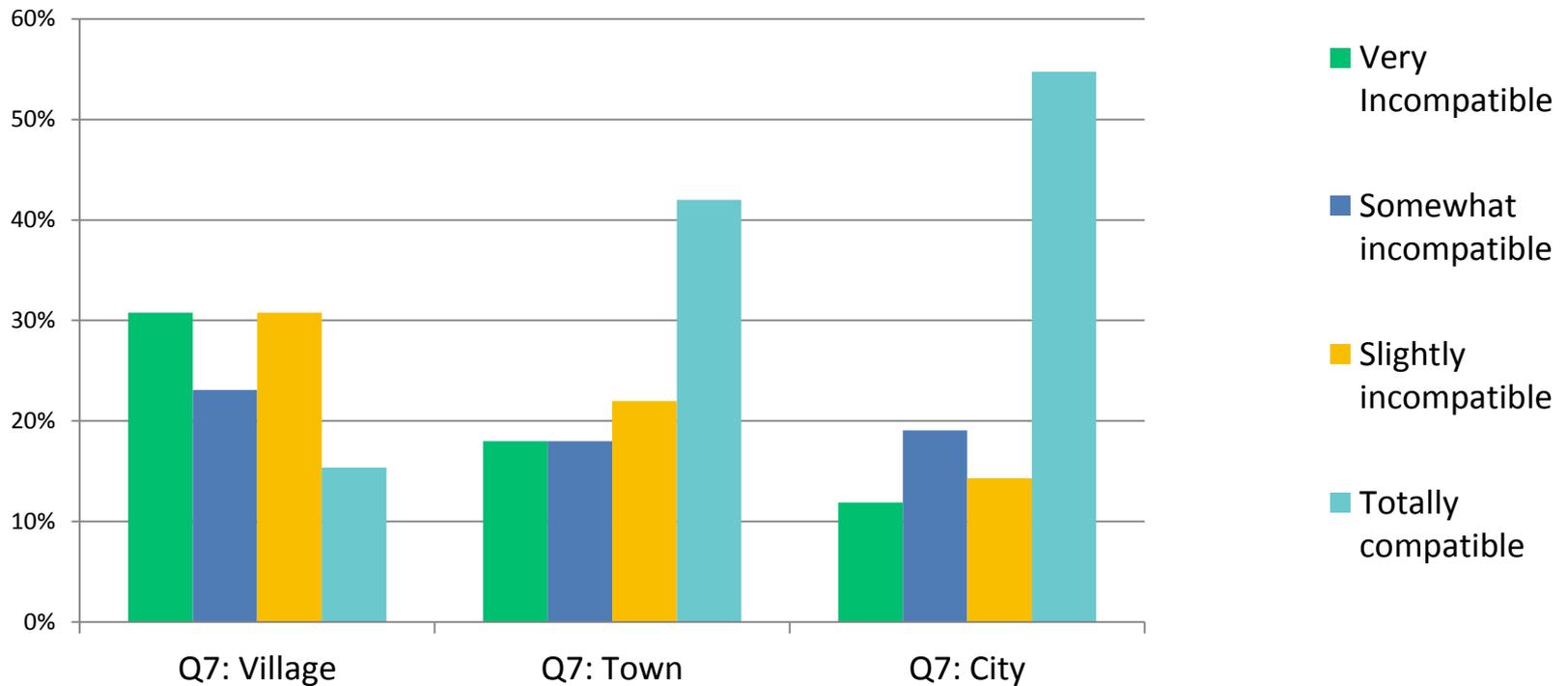
*Although schools have equal opps policies, school culture is largely homophobic and unconscious of this. (gay male teacher in village school)*

*being 'openly gay' led to me being treated differently by students than they would another male teacher, often leading to 'alpha male' challenges. I felt unable to put myself forward for promotion as I was seen as a problem teacher. (gay male teacher town school)*

*In terms of application to other schools, I have noticed that my applications progress further when I do not mention my work to improve LGBT visibility in schools. (lesbian teacher in city school)*



# To what extent do you feel that your sexual identity and identity as a teacher is compatible?





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Was told by previous head that I was "the gossip of the local head teachers briefing" (lesbian teacher village school)

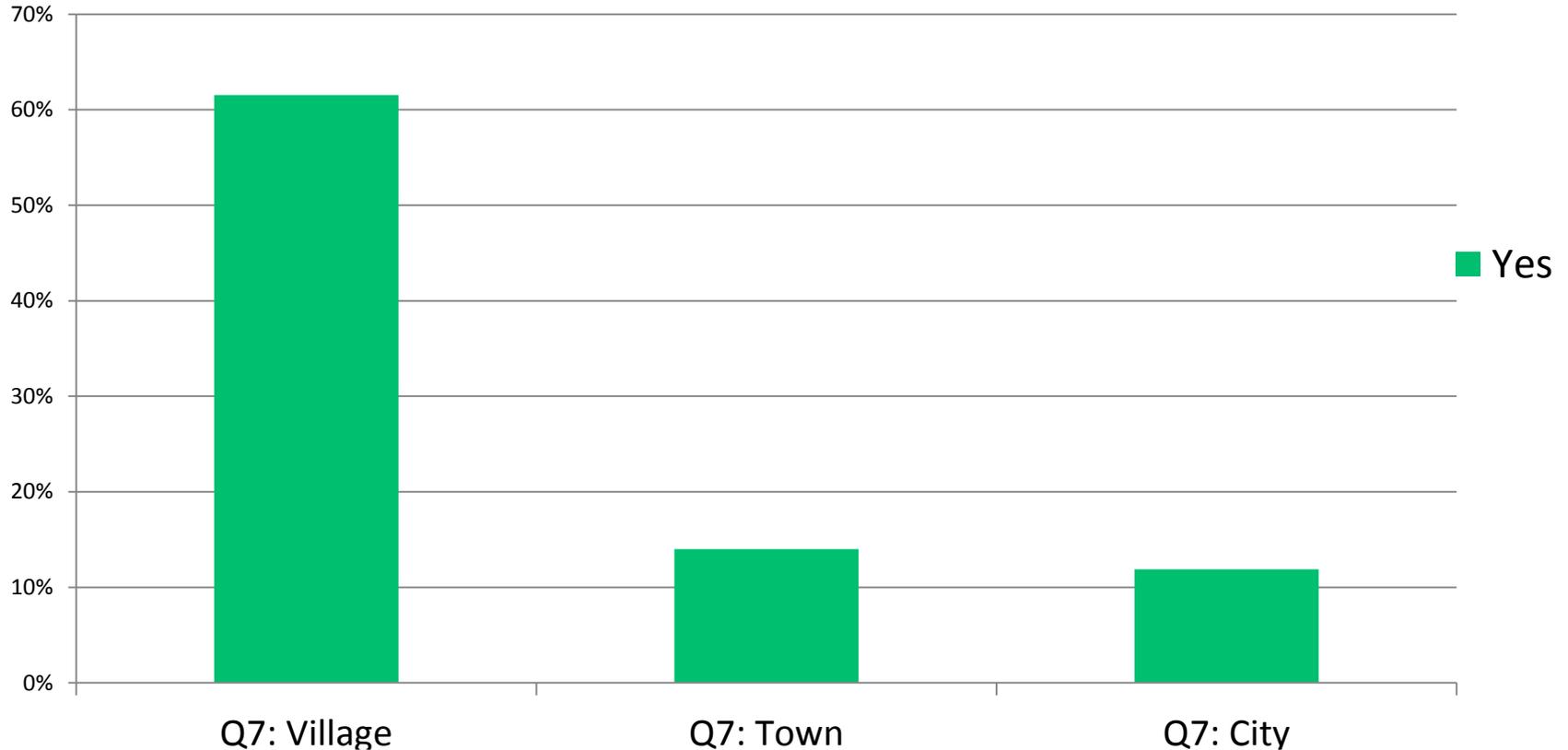
I was always terrified of being identified as a sexual predator because I am gay (gay male teacher town school)

A Mum asked if being gay is compatible with teaching? (gay male teacher town school)

Teacher colleague told my child that being gay was dirty (lesbian teacher town school)



## Have you ever accessed help for anxiety or depression linked to your sexual identity and role as a teacher?





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I have to hide details of my private life and its exhausting (lesbian teacher village school)

Amazing opportunity to highlight equality and issues connected to tolerance and diversity (bisexual teacher city school)

It is vital to be a strong role model despite internal fear. I am a teacher first, but I am also gay and that should be presented as a normal thing (gay male teacher city school)



# Evaluating the Courageous Leaders Project

- The importance of LGBT identity and being your authentic self
- Increasing the diversity and including more transgender people
- Pairs of mentors
- Reaching rural teachers



# Recommendations

- Fully funded regional Courageous Leaders programmes in which LGBT+ aspiring leaders have access to an LGBT+ leader as mentor.
- Create opportunity for LGBT+ teacher identities to be acknowledged and spoken into existence in the staffroom and the classroom.
- Create a welcoming school environment for all LGBT+ members of the school community. Use posters to celebrate LGBT+ diversity and recognise LGBT+ family milestones such as marriage and childbirth in the same way that heterosexual staff milestones are acknowledged.
- Create a culture in which other staff members are encouraged to be allies to LGBT+ teachers
- Encourage and celebrate LGBT+ staff as role models.
- Create LGBT+ inclusion policies that are visited regularly and owned by every member of the school community.
- Commit to zero tolerance of homophobic language and attitudes by students, parents or any other member of the school community.
- Celebrate LGBT+ History month and incorporate LGBT+ issues and themes into the entire school curriculum.



# References

- Lee, C. 2017 Heteronormativity in a Rural School Community. Sense Publications Rotterdam and New York.