

The Lived Experiences of Lesbian/Gay/[Bisexual/Transgender]

Educational Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The Lived Experience of Lesbian/Gay/[Bisexual/Transgender]¹ Educational Leaders

Homophobia has created barriers to the safety and security of LGBT educational leaders. Legalized discrimination, found in the history and current practice of informal actions/attitudes of society, and the formal policies/laws create a context for the lived experiences of LGBT educational leaders. Within the context of formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of society, the purpose of this study is to come to understand the commonalities of the personal and professional lived experiences of LG[BT]¹ educational leaders. The following research questions guided this study are: 1) How have LG[BT] educational leaders' past lived experiences as students and teachers impacted or informed their personal and professional lives?; 2) How have the current lived experiences (related to sexual identity) of LG[BT] educational leaders impacted or informed their personal and professional lives?; 3) What perceptions/experiences do LG[BT] educational leaders report regarding the contextual formal policies/laws and contextual informal actions/attitudes that may or may not have shaped their personal and professional lives?; and 4) Given their cumulative experiences (related to sexual identity), what recommendations do LG[BT] educational leaders have regarding improved support for LG[BT] students, teachers, and administrators in public school settings?

The research design used two structures of data gathering: 1) High-structure – Experiential Simulations[®] (Brunner, 2000), a web-based, virtual-environment technology

¹ When brackets are used (in discussion of this specific study), they indicate that bisexual and transgender educational leaders were invited to participate in this study, however, none of the volunteer participants identified as such.

to insure confidentiality and anonymity, and 2) Low-structure – individual interviews whereby participants chose to reveal their identities to the researcher. Data analysis revealed fear as the overarching theme interwoven throughout the data. From the overarching theme of fear, two major themes, five minor themes, and twenty-one supporting cluster themes were identified. Further analysis of the major, minor, and supporting cluster themes resulted in the Cycles of Fear Model: Losses and Gains.

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PROLOGUE

I have often been asked what spurred the interest of a heterosexual female to study homosexuality, particularly lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) educational leaders and their lived experiences. My immediate response has always been, “I’ve always been interested in social justice issues and the discrimination I have seen my brother and some of my friends experience because of their sexual orientation.” As I ponder this question today and reflect on my own experiences, I have come to realize that my journey to this point has been life-long.

My parents shared the same religion – Catholicism, but they were of mixed ethnicity, my father, Hispanic, and my mother, German. When my parents married in 1950, a union between a man and woman of the same religion was favored. But, a union of such “diverse” ethnicity was frowned upon, and their marriage was no exception. My mother’s father and two brothers, although I loved them dearly, were extremely racist and for the lack of a better term, bigots. My maternal grandmother, initially, was not fond of the idea of her daughter marrying a Spaniard, but she was at least accepting and as supportive as a woman could be in the early 1950s.

My father was the first in his family to marry a non-Hispanic. His parents, although not pleased, were at least a little more accepting. It may be that as immigrants to the United States, my paternal grandparents understood that marrying outside of one’s ethnicity or race would become the norm rather than the exception in generations to come. Hence, I was born into racism and bigotry and the struggle to be accepted as an equal and valuable individual.

Despite, or possibly because of their difficult beginnings, my parents were determined to raise their children as strong Catholics, free of prejudice and discrimination. My brothers and I were not raised as Spanish or German, but as U.S. citizens. Yet, we were also taught to be proud of our Hispanic and German heritage, as well as to practice and cherish the traditions of both. Even though my brothers and I have all of the physical features of our Hispanic heritage, we were taught never to consider ourselves a minority because like everyone else in this country, we were Americans and equal. This, however, did not protect *me* from the prejudice and discrimination of others outside of my immediate and extended family.

The eldest of my siblings, by seven years, I grew up amid the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the discontent of the Viet Nam War. Although the extent of prejudice and discrimination I experienced was minute in comparison to that experienced by the African Americans and other minority groups, it was painful just the same. This was especially true as I reached adolescence and moved to the ever-growing suburbs. I was one of a handful of Hispanic students in my school district and was often referred to as a “spic” or that “fat Mexican girl”, they didn’t even realize I wasn’t Mexican. I remember feeling like an “outsider” or a “misfit” and had almost no friends for the first three years after our move. It was toward the end of 8th grade, I realized that if I was going to “make it” in life, I had to change myself. I had to *assimilate* if I ever wanted to be part of the majority. Thus, my transformation to the majoritarian culture began.

I remember that it was important to be thin, so I lost weight. Long, straight hair was preferred. I grew my hair long and ironed the natural waves out so it would be straight. I began to wear make-up against my mother's wishes, because that's what the popular majority did. Having a popular boyfriend was a status symbol, so I made sure my boyfriends were star athletes, preferably captain of at least one team.

I had to be the best at everything because that was the way to insure respect and acceptance. Ignoring my Hispanic ethnicity (in public), I began to assert my assimilated "majoritarian power" by quietly making fun of or shunning those who were different. My mission was achieved. I had assimilated, and was now officially part of the majority – the majority that had once shunned me. But, more importantly, I had forgotten from where I came, and the fact that it was *this* majority that made me feel like an outcast, a misfit, an undesirable. And now, I was just like them!

The end of my junior year in high school was a turning point for me and the beginning of my journey to find the "real" me. Most of my friends had graduated and would be going on to college or life after high school. I returned to school my senior year a rather lonely person because those who had "made" me what I thought I was were no longer by my side on a daily basis. I was no longer "Miss Popularity" and no longer in the majority. Thinking back, I must have felt much like Charlie in *Flowers For Algernon* (Keyes, 1967), rising from the bottom, to the very top, only to return again to the bottom.

Unlike Charlie, however, I never completely returned to the bottom. By this time, my minority status had become acceptable in my suburban community, and ignoring my Hispanic ethnicity was no longer necessary. In fact, I was proud of it and celebrated it!

And, I finally realized that I was not the best at everything, and didn't have to be. I discovered that being determined to do my best at whatever I attempted was much more important. Finding myself was a slow process, and my greatest revelation did not come until after my high school graduation.

In the summer of 1973, I decided to enter the Miss Elkdon Minnesota pageant. I didn't know what Miss Elkdon Minnesota represented, just that there was a possibility of winning a scholarship for college, so I entered. The night before the pageant, the contestants were required to stay together at the hotel where the pageant would take place the following evening. We spent the night with the chaperones in a large suite, in order to get to know one another and have time for rehearsals the next day. That was the first time any of us met face to face. My very proud parents stood on each side of me as I knocked on the hotel room door. Upon opening the door we were totally shocked. We realized for the first time that I had entered a pageant for African American young women, and *I* was the minority.

My parents wanted to make sure I was okay before they left, and I assured them everything was fine. The wonderful evening was one of getting to know these young women, who had the same aspirations as I did – they were no different. But, the highlight and life change came the following evening during the talent competition. My talent presentation, of course, had been decided upon long before I had any idea who my audience would be. I had decided to make a statement about prejudice and discrimination by presenting Dr. Martin Luther King's speech, "I Have A Dream", to the background music of *Oh Happy Day* in a costume of "ebony and ivory". I was nervous about how my

presentation would be accepted by a nearly all African American audience. To my pleasant surprise, not only was it accepted, it was welcomed.

As one looks back on a mind- or life-changing experience, often, the total experience becomes the focus. Rarely can people pinpoint a single moment that *is* life-changing. As I reflect now, I am able to pinpoint the moment my life and mind changed. My values changed, and the direction of my life changed. When I delivered the words, “will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character”, the entire audience rose to their feet and for the first time, I realized I had made a statement about my beliefs and character that were really important. That was the moment that thrust me into the realm of social justice. That was the moment I realized my true beliefs, and what I needed to do with my life – celebrate diversity. However, not until several years later, when my brother “came out” to the family, did I begin to understand how critical it is to accept others. Not until now have I realized the deep importance of that single event.

My college years exposed me to many individuals of differing backgrounds, interests, ethnicities, values, and lifestyles. I began to understand what a melting pot the United States really was, and what it meant to have the freedom to express yourself. The 1970s brought homosexuality to the forefront of social awareness and social justice. Looking back, I remember struggling with what my religion and social/ethnic upbringing had ingrained in me – homosexuality was a sin! It was a crime against nature! Yet, I was meeting and befriending gay men. I came to understand that these young men were not

predators or sexual deviants. They just wanted to live their lives and be accepted for who they were and *not* judged on their sexuality.

During the mid to late 1970s, life was good. I was moving forward, and so pleased that I was on that social justice bandwagon for equality and equity for all. I began to question even more and move away from my strong Catholic upbringing, because I didn't believe in what it espoused. I still had Euro-heterosexual values pressing on me – to get married, to have a family, to assimilate. And, I did. In 1982, a wonderful man came into my life. We immediately fell in love, married, and began to raise a family. But, Jerry and I had barely celebrated our engagement, and were in the midst of planning a wedding when I got the call that thrust my family into a turmoil that would change our lives forever.

In the fall of 1982, my middle brother, Michael, then in his early twenties, called me clearly upset about something and asked to talk to me. Having been taught that family comes first, I didn't hesitate to run to his side. What I learned that day was not a surprise to me, but it was still difficult to wrap my mind around. Michael had been stopped by the police on an apparent traffic violation and was ultimately arrested and jailed. It wasn't the arrest that sent shock waves through me, but rather the situation surrounding the arrest and the resulting actions of the police officers. My brother's "traffic violation" and eventual arrest was not random – it was intentional. He had become a target of discriminatory action because he had been seen leaving a gay bar. Not only did the police officers arrest my brother, they brutally beat him and then denied him medical attention once in jail. I was appalled by the treatment he had received at the hands of *his* Euro-

heterosexual judges and jury but, more importantly, I was afraid for him knowing the hatred and prejudice and discrimination that he would experience as an “out” gay man. Yet, even more than shock and fear, I was ANGRY that law enforcers stripped my brother of his right to privacy and forced him to come out to his family before he was ready and under the most unpleasant circumstances.

Michael and I talked for a long time, and then we cried together. He didn’t know what to do or how he was going to tell our parents, especially Dad. I think Michael cried out of fear and shame – fear he would be rejected by his parents and siblings and shame about his sexual identity. I cried out of fear and shame, too, but my fear was for his safety in life, and my shame was that I had failed him. He tried to come out to me, and I refused to listen. Michael tried to tell me he was gay on so many occasions, but I denied it, basically insinuating that it was a “phase” he was going through and that he wasn’t *really* gay. There I was, the one person in his family with whom he felt comfortable and safe enough to share his deepest secret, and *I* wasn’t there for him. The realization that my brother was gay and I had denied this fact for so many years was probably the most awakening and humbling experience of my life. I remember telling myself at that point that I would do anything and everything I could to NEVER let him down again, and that I would ALWAYS be in his corner, no matter what.

Michael and I talked about how he should go about coming out to our parents and brothers. We also talked about how he should proceed with the legal charges and impending court proceedings. By the time we finished talking, he knew that finally, I understood and would always be there for him. In that one conversation, that one

evening, I watched my brother – the most sensitive, loving, caring, and gentle individual whom I knew – become a sinner in the eyes of God, and a criminal in the eyes of society.

My brother did come out to our family, likely the most difficult thing that he ever did. He talked to Mom first, then to Dad, and finally our brothers. I don't know the specifics of their conversations, but I do know they were difficult. More importantly, he was not rejected by any of us. He was supported and loved. Charges against the police, however, were never filed. That was settled before it became public. That was Dad's request. He was not upset or embarrassed about his son's sexuality, but he did fear the impact it might have on his small business as a graphic designer. Again, societal values came into play and disrupted justice.

Although Michael may seem to have risen above the discrimination and prejudice that have plagued LGBT persons, his life has not been "happily ever after". Yes, he was accepted by the family and we stepped up to support him, but society has not. Michael had a life partner, David. The two of them bought a house together intending to share their lives together – possibly even adopting children. They would have been wonderful parents. David was taken from us in 1995 – a result of AIDS. This fact was another thing that my brother couldn't tell his family – the fact that he and his life partner were stricken with AIDS. Although we all knew something was wrong, none of us knew that Michael and David both had AIDS until the day David died. That was a devastating day for our family. We had just lost a loved one to this dreaded disease, and Michael was also afflicted.

So, if you ask me today, what brought me to this research, I reply that it has been my life. *My* lived experience created the desire to become an activist for social justice and a queer studies researcher who challenges heteronormativity and pushes for legal, political, and moral change.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Remember, when you wake up in bed with a person of the same sex,
you are now in politics.* (Rivera, 1999, p. 1198)

In the United States, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered (LGBT) individuals live their lives, personal and professional, within the context of historical and current legal discrimination. LGBT administrators, teachers, and students in US public schools are no exception. Over the past several decades, significant research has been conducted on the harassment and discrimination of youth in public schools (Harbeck, 1997). Studies on sexual minority teachers – in public school settings have also been conducted (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Kissen, 1996; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003).

Research, therefore, has focused on the experiences of LGBT youth and teachers, as well as on the policies and laws that purport to protect them from harassment and discrimination (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Kissen, 1996; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). However, until recently, there has been little research done on the lifeworld of LGBT educational leaders (Fraynd & Capper, 2003). Beyond a handful of studies (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Kissen, 1996; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Tooms, 2007), almost no discussion of the personal and professional lives of LGBT educational leaders can be found in the literature.

Legal cases at the state and federal level and law review literature on the rights of LGBT persons focus on students and teachers (Lugg, 2003b), however, virtually no mention of the rights of LGBT educational leaders can be found in legal literature. Indeed, “[a]s a category or area of *legal* [original emphasis] inquiry [LGBT] educational leaders simply do not exist” (Lugg, 2003b, p. 76). The lack of research literature and, at

the very least, the absence of discussions on the impact of legalized discrimination on the personal and professional lives of LGBT educational leaders – in combination with the subordinate position these individuals are placed in by “cultural traditionalism and majoritarian lawmaking” (Valdes, 1998, p. 78) – strongly indicates the need to come to understand the lifeworld of the “last frontier” of LGBT educators. To be clear, the need to come to understand the personal and professional lived experiences of LGBT educational leaders, within the context of formal laws and policies and informal actions and attitudes, is the beginning and ending point of this study.

This chapter provides: 1) background and context for the study, 2) purpose of the study and guiding research questions, 3) significance of the study, 4) research problems created by the topic, 5) a brief definition of terms, and 5) overview of the dissertation.

Background and Context of the Study

Lesbian/gay male/bisexual/transgender (LGBT)² individuals have been classified as “persons on the axis of oppression” (Capper, 1993a, p. 5) and have not only been discriminated against in modern society, but have been forced to remain covert about their sexual orientation. Homosexuality has come to the forefront of social justice issues during the past two decades. Fights for equal rights based on sexual orientation have been long time events, but only recently has sexual orientation been recognized as a “protected group” by the federal government and some states. Despite this recognition, formal contexts (policies/laws) continue to be the exception rather than the norm, and informal

² Most common acronym and most accepted in current usage (*LGBT*, 2006).

contexts (actions/attitudes) prevail. Inequities, based on sexual orientation pervade society including educational institutions.

Homophobia has created barriers to safety and security for LGBT educational leaders, teachers, and youth (Blount, 2003, 2004, 2005; Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b, 2007; Sears, 1993; Tooms, 2007 Valdes, 1998). Homophobia knows no boundaries and disregards the multidimensionality of personal identity. In other words, homophobia and straight supremacy crosses all “race/ethnicity, class, dis/ability, sex/gender, and other axes of social or legal status” (Valdes, 1998, p. 1424). The legalized discrimination, found in the history and current practice of informal actions/attitudes of society and the formal policies/laws create a context for the lived experiences of LGBT educational leaders. The following subsections provide brief background discussions—focused on LGBT youth, teachers, and educational leaders—that illustrates how formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of society have and continue to create particular and unique contexts for the lives of LGBT individuals.

LGBT Youth

Violence against and harassment of actual or perceived LGBT youth in U.S. public schools has been a long-standing concern (Lugg, 2003a; Sears, 1993; Stewart, 2001). Historically, public schools have been the “enforcer of expected norms regarding gender, heteronormativity, and homophobia” (Lugg, 2003a, p. 113), allowing peer-to-peer, teacher-to-student, and administrator-to-student harassment, and discrimination to exist (Lugg, 2003a; Stewart, 2001). Schools are not safe harbors, for it is estimated that

students hear twenty-five anti-gay slurs in school each day, and when hearing these remarks, 97% of teachers make no effort to intervene (Carter, 1997). Public schools maintain a fiercely homophobic culture, even in states with sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws, as in the case of Jamie Nabozny.

Jamie Nabozny, a student in the Ashland, Wisconsin school district, suffered outrageous and repeated verbal and physical abuse at the hands of his homophobic classmates from middle school through his sophomore year in high school (Lugg, 2003a; Stewart, 2001). Nabozny “was spat on, urinated on, bitten, punched, and subjected to a mock rape in which 20 other students looked on and laughed” (Lugg, 2003a, p. 113), all of which occurred during the school day. Nabozny reported each incident to his teachers and school administrators, yet they failed to help or protect him. In his 10th grade year, the abuse escalated to the point that Nabozny required surgery to stop internal bleeding following a severe beating by his peers, and despite attempts by his parents to solicit the help of school officials, nothing was done. During that same year, Nabozny was called a “fag” by a teacher, and told by the high school assistant principal he deserved the mistreatment because of his homosexuality. He also attempted suicide for a second time (Lugg, 2003a).

After numerous unanswered requests for school administrators to intervene on their son’s behalf and protect him against the violent homophobic attacks, Jamie Nobozny’s family left Ashland, Wisconsin. They moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, “where Nobozny graduated with an equivalency degree” (Stewart, 2001, p. 261) and in 1995, sued the Ashland School District in U.S. federal court for gender and sexual

orientation discrimination and the violation of his due process rights. Although the court dismissed his violation of due process claim, it did find that Nabozny had been subjected to gender and sexual orientation discrimination, and the school was liable (Lugg, 2003a; "*Nabozny v. Podlesny*," 1996; Stewart, 2001).

Nabozny v. Podlesny was a landmark case because it was the first successful lawsuit alleging sexual orientation harassment in public schools. In 1997, the U.S. Department of Education clarified that Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 required that public schools provide an environment that is safe and free from sexual harassment – including sexual orientation harassment (Stewart, 2001). Title IX safeguards LGBT students against sexual orientation discrimination in public school settings, however, such discrimination still continues and Title IX does not protect these students against the rising surge of hate crimes that occur outside the “safety” of school walls.

In fact, between 1988 and 1996, anti-gay hate crimes increased nationally by almost 400 percent, and of the reported anti-gay hate crimes, “50 percent of all victims sustained some injury, 25 percent received serious injuries, and 2 percent were killed” (Stewart, 2001, p. 133). Despite these alarming statistics, to date, nearly two-thirds of the states have failed to include sexual orientation as a protected category in their hate crime statutes (see FIGURE 1, p. 54). Like harassment, hate crimes cross all lines of identity, including race/ethnicity, class, gender, age, and sexual orientation (Lugg, 2003a; Valdes, 1998), as exemplified in the 1998 hate-murder of Matthew Shepard, a white, gay male, Wyoming college student. His majoritarian privileges of race, gender, and class did not safeguard him from subordination and his eventual horrific demise at the hands of his

white supremacist, Euro-patriarchial “judges” and “jury”(Valdes, 1998). Valdes (1998) stated:

Though not subjected to hate and bigotry based on race or sex, Matt’s life was robbed by the homophobia of our laws and lawmakers who, in his case, had refused several times to enact state and federal statutes designed to help protect Matt from his eventual fate. Because the majoritarian governing elites of Matt’s state and country declined to include sexual orientation in their hate crime statutes, they not only refused to protect the vulnerable among their people specifically from hateful murder and other bodily harms, they also indirectly signaled approval for the practice of sexual orientation bias in civil society. (p. 1426)

A decade later, middle school student, Lawrence King, was shot to death, after enduring weeks of bullying and homophobic actions by a fellow student (Cathcart, 2008). Without a doubt, the homophobia and violence toward LGBT youth remains the status quo in schools today, even in states with anti-discrimination and hate crime statutes.

Much attention has been given to the ramifications of discrimination against LGBT youth in public schools and the community. Some states and municipalities have attempted to stop the violence by enacting anti-discrimination statutes and ordinances, however, as the 2008 King murder (Cathcart, 2008), and most recently publicized suicide of Massachusetts’ sixth grader, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover (Presgaves, 2009) suggest, state statues have had little impact on societal actions and attitudes. The quest to make public schools a safer environment for LGBT youth, however, appears to have over-

shadowed a greater need – to make public schools a safe place for students *and* teachers, alike. Teachers have been largely ignored and “are not safe from discrimination along lines of gender and sexual orientation” (Lugg, 2003a, p. 114).

LGBT Teachers

Wendy (Weaver) Chandler, an award-winning, veteran teacher, coach, and lesbian in Utah’s Nebo School District did not suffer the same fate as Matthew Shepard or Lawrence King, but her professional career was virtually destroyed by the homophobic actions of the Euro-patriarchial majority that calls itself “democratic”. The parents of the Nebo School District, located in a heavily Mormon part of Utah, demanded that the district dismiss Chandler after she revealed her sexual orientation to a curious student in 1997. Although the school district did not fire her, they barred her from talking about her sexuality and removed her as the volleyball coach. Chandler sued the school district alleging that her free speech and employment rights had been infringed upon (Lugg, 2003b; Stewart, 2001). The federal court agreed with Chandler and ordered the school district to a) pay Chandler the stipend she would have received as volleyball coach, b) remove any disciplinary letters regarding her sexuality from her personnel file, and c) reinstate her as volleyball coach the following year (Lugg, 2003b; “*Miller v. Weaver*,” 2003; Stewart, 2001; *Utah courts rule in favor of Utah teacher*, 2003; “*Weaver v. Nebo School District*,” 1998).

Chandler prevailed in the courtroom, but she remained the focal point of extreme homophobic hostility that threatened her teaching position and ended her coaching career. In 1999, a group of parents, unhappy with the federal court’s decision filed suit to have

Chandler removed from the classroom on the grounds that she was not morally fit to teach children (Lugg, 2003b; "*Miller v. Weaver*," 2003; *Utah courts rule in favor of Utah teacher*, 2003). The case was heard by the Utah Supreme Court, and the court's 2003 decision found in favor of Chandler ("*Miller v. Weaver*," 2003; *Utah courts rule in favor of Utah teacher*, 2003). Chandler spoke of the Court's decision:

What they're going after was not really their right as citizens to do.

I also believe that they're scared to have their kids see someone who is gay but who functions and is happy, and they like. That doesn't go with their perception that gay people are evil or unhealthy. (*Utah courts rule in favor of Utah teacher*, 2003)

Chandler's lived experience illustrates the fact that the stigma of queerness has the potential to destroy careers. Such stigma is felt by LGBT educational leaders as well.

LGBT Administrators

The vast majority of LGBT educational leaders remain "cloaked in secrecy" for their own protection. They are "invisible" to their counterparts and often pass themselves off as "straight" (Blount, 2003; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Pinar, 1998). Lugg (2003b) stated that LGBT school administrators "must be willing to sacrifice a core portion of their identity . . . they must be constantly on guard that they not give any clues to their actual identity" (p. 77) in order to retain their position. In no small measure, LGBT educational leaders are forced to walk a tenuous line of "assimilation and invisibility . . . depending on where one works and resides, coming out may very well be foolhardy" (Lugg, 2003b, p. 79).

A few educational leaders, however, have had the courage to come “out of the closet”. One such leader was the late Dr. Pat McCart, a high school principal in St. Paul, Minnesota (McCart, 1994). McCart wrote about what prompted her to “come out.” In 1988 one of McCart’s advisees wanted to talk about her mother in an address to her senior class at graduation, and suddenly the student faced conflict.

Despite the student’s great pride in her mother who had substantial influence on her, her mother was also a lesbian, and the student did not want to deal with that stigma. As the student was crying in McCart’s office, Pat McCart began to realize her own responsibility to this student and this group of students, because she, herself, was a lesbian. McCart realized that the privatization and secretiveness of her lifestyle only helped to precipitate the “fear, misinformation, prejudice, and homophobia” that was alive in her straight and gay students (McCart, 1994, p. 55). She understood that the only way to help her students and foster acceptance was to “come out” openly to all. In 1989, Pat McCart “came out” publicly during the Gay Pride Rally as she and several of her educator colleagues marched behind the banner reading “Gay and Lesbian Teachers”. They eventually appeared on the stage wearing symbolic brown paper bags over their heads. McCart (1994) wrote of how she borrowed the title of her former student’s senior speech – “It’s a Secret”:

We are probably the most deeply closeted group in the gay community.

You all know THE BIG RULE [original emphases] for Being Out: ‘It’s okay as long as you DON’T FLAUNT IT.’ [original emphasis] For us there is a different rule: ‘It’s not okay. You are not fit to teach children.

You are fired!’ Being so deep in the cloakroom is not healthy for us as individuals, but by far the most damaging effect of the “NO GAY OR LESBIAN TEACHERS ALLOWED” [original emphases] rule is how it perpetuates stereotyping, bigotry, and fear by controlling the perceptions of the young. For the vicious cycle of prejudice and bigotry to be broken, all young people, no matter what their affectional preference – or even if they don’t know what that means – need to know adult lesbians and gays who are whole, healthy, happy, courageous, and respected by their communities! And they need to know this about their teachers who are gay or lesbian. We must have the courage to risk if the system is to change. (p. 55)

McCart was courageous to “out” herself in such a public fashion for the sake of her students, her colleagues, and societal change. Unfortunately, most LGBT educational leaders fear that disclosing their sexual identities will cause irreparable damage to their personal and professional lives, as they are generally not protected by the formal policies and laws. Fear of disclosure was a common theme in Fraynd and Capper’s (2003) study of four lesbian/gay male [LG] administrators.

Jacob, a closeted superintendent, explained that he was not out because he was afraid “it would jeopardize him getting a position in a larger district” (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 103). Along the same lines, a still closeted principal, Melissa, commented, “There’s just that fear of what if. What if people write you off and say you are not capable of doing a job I’ve been doing for 11 years – because of that one thing?” (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 106). Like others, Sharon, considered an open principal in the study,

explained that disclosing her sexuality was “a huge conflict and internal struggle that heterosexuals do not have to deal with . . . I knew I would be an object of hatred” (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 106). Finally, Randy, an openly gay principal, concurred that though he was out, there was still a risk for other administrators in his state coming out:

There’s a lot of fear. It’s not so much fear of discrimination as much as fear of harm, harm to their careers or to themselves I don’t think people fear their colleagues, it’s the community. They don’t want to be embarrassed, harassed, or ridiculed. (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 107)

These LGBT administrators lived in states that have sexual orientation anti-discrimination protection, however, the mere existence of the formal laws did not seem to ease the fear of the informal ramifications of disclosing their sexuality. Fraynd and Capper (2003) stated, “at best, these administrators feared being publicly humiliated and losing the respect of their staff and community because of their sexuality. At worst, they feared being fired from their jobs, even though all lived in states that protected gays and lesbians from job discrimination” (p. 108). Such stories support the contention that LGBT educational leaders are viewed with intense negativity and most often are required to remain closeted (Lipkin, 1999).

The need to remain closeted is especially strong for LGBT educational leaders, whom are generally “at will” hires, with little or no formal legal protection against discrimination (Blount, 2003; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). Educational leaders are required to enforce district policies that, more oft than not, foster the heterosexist and homophobic norms of society, placing LGBT

students, teachers, *and* leaders at risk. Such is the duplicity, complexity, tension, and internal conflict created for LGBT educational leaders by the contexts of their lives.

LGBT educational leaders continue to be individuals along the “axis of oppression” (Capper, 1993a, p. 5) and are subordinate to their white supremacist, male supremacist, and Euro-heteropatriarchial counterparts (Capper, 1993a; Valdes, 1998).

Lugg (2003b) contended:

For an LGBT public school administrator to “come out” in such a harsh legal, political, and social environment is courageous. The expected and enforced norms for LGBT administrators are that of assimilation and invisibility In a profession that claims to be committed to greater tolerance and understanding of human difference, as well as to the promotion of democratic values, the assimilationist imperative is a tragedy. (p. 79)

The legal status of LGBT educational leaders remains “one of absolute invisibility” (Lugg, 2003b, p. 75). The educational leader subset of the LGBT population has little or no protection under current formal anti-discrimination laws/policies, and the political-social climate appears to be hardening rather than improving with regard to informal discriminatory attitudes (Rivera, 1999). Indeed, the invisibility of LGBT educational leaders is a theme that plays out in concrete ways in research literature. That is, while research on LGBT students and teachers exists, research on LGBT educational leaders is almost non-existent.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Within the context of formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of society, the purpose of this study is to come to understand the commonalities of the personal and professional lived experiences of LG[BT] educational leaders. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How have LG[BT] educational leaders' past lived experiences as students and teachers impacted or informed their personal and professional lives?
2. How have the current lived experiences (related to sexual identity) of LG[BT] educational leaders impacted or informed their personal and professional lives?
3. What perceptions/experiences do LG[BT] educational leaders report regarding the contextual formal policies/laws and contextual informal actions/attitudes that may or may not have shaped their personal and professional lives?
4. Given their cumulative experiences (related to sexual identity), what recommendations do LG[BT] educational leaders have regarding improved support for LG[BT] students, teachers, and administrators in public school settings?

Significance of the Study

The United States educational system is highly political, moving with the ebb and flow of societal mores – mores that historically have been fiercely homophobic and heterosexist, particularly with regard to LGBT educational leaders (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2004, 2005; Chauncey, 1994; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Koschoreck, 2003; Lipkin, 1999; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Mazur, 1997; Rossman, 1997; Sears,

1993). For decades, the US legal system has dictated that public schools remain hostile toward LGBT educational leaders. Without a doubt, concerns have been raised regarding 1) this “invisible” minority of educational leaders, and 2) the absence of scholarly research focused on their personal and professional lives (Blount, 1996, 2003; Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). Capper (1999) concluded: “research on this [LG[BT]] population can significantly contribute to the literature. Queer research in administration can open another window on power and oppression in schools, and further expose how heterosexism constrains everyone” (p. 5).

Although several reasons for the lack of research on LGBT educational leaders have been identified (Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Lugg, 2003b), it has become apparent that one major cause for this lack is the difficulty researchers face when trying to access a population that needs total anonymity (Capper, 1999). One major contribution of this study is that it addresses these research difficulties through the use of safe contacts, Experiential Simulations or ES[®] (Brunner, 2002), and low-structure traditional interview methods. Safe contacts served as intermediaries, whose purpose was to post invitations for participation through organizational list serves and maintain participant anonymity throughout the study. ES[®] assured total anonymity for all participants through the use of a secured virtual laboratory within which all high-structure data was collected. Low-structure design provided options for LGBT leaders who could not or preferred not to participate in virtual laboratory experiences to have their voices heard in this study. The use of safe contacts, ES[®], and low-structure design, allowed this

study greater access to a marginalized population, and produced unprecedented results relative to the perceived impact of formal, and informal contexts on the personal and professional lives of LGBT educational leaders.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study, and for the study's purposes are defined as follows:

Sexual Orientation – the way an individual identifies him/herself sexually, most commonly, but not limited to, homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual.

Homosexuality – primary sexual attraction toward members of the same gender.

Heterosexuality – primary sexual attraction toward members of the opposite gender.

Gay – preferred term for homosexual.

Lesbian – same gender female sexual attraction.

Gay Male – same gender male sexual attraction.

Bisexual – sexual attraction to both male and female gender.

Transgender – sexual identification with opposite gender (e.g., biological female identifies with male gender role).

LGBT – an acronym most commonly used for lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender, often referring to the gay community, including intersexed, transvestite, and transsexual individuals. When brackets are used (in discussion of this specific study), they indicate that bisexual and transgender educational

leaders were invited to participate in this study, however, none of the volunteer participants identified as such.

Queer – referring to all individuals who are not heterosexual.

Straight – referring to all individuals who are heterosexual.

Straight Ally – referring to heterosexual individuals who openly support the gay community and homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle.

Assimilation or Covering – referring to an LGBT individual assuming the outward social characteristics of his/her heterosexual counterparts.

Out – revealing one’s sexual orientation to one or more individuals; the degree of “outness” varies among LB[BT] individuals.

Lavender Ceiling – synonymous with the “Glass Ceiling” of the women’s and minorities’ rights movements; an invisible “ceiling” preventing further promotion in the workforce.

Multiplicity – encompasses all aspects of an individual’s life as part of their identity; an embodiment of simultaneous identities composed of multiple features including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation.

Intersectionality – layers of identity are intertwined or intersected as part of each individual and cannot be separated from one another without removing the individual’s identity.

Multidimensionality – used in Queer Legal Theory to define the multidimensional

view of identity created by the interplay between intersectionality and multiplicity.

Formal Context – policies and laws enacted at the federal, state, and/or municipal levels.

Informal Context – actions and attitudes taken by individuals, organizations, and/or government which may or may not be in accordance with formal policy/law.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) – communication which takes place via the internet in a virtual environment (e.g., chat spaces, virtual support groups).

Brunner's Experiential Simulations (ES) – a computer-mediated communication model, a) to study power/identity, and b) to provide comprehensive anonymity for participants, within a secured virtual laboratory.

Safe Contacts – an LGBT or straight “ally” educational leader out to and chosen by the researcher, as an intermediary for the purpose of recruiting participants and maintaining participant anonymity throughout the study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One provides: 1) background and context of the study, 2) purpose of the study and guiding research questions, 3) significance of the study, 4) problems related to research focused on a marginalized group, and 5) definition of terms. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature, which includes: 1) Homosexuality and Educators in Public Schools, 2) History of United States Policy/Law and Homosexuality, and

3) Current Anti-Discrimination Policy/law and Homosexuality. The need for research on LGBT educational leaders, and particularly the perceived impact of formal and informal contexts on their personal and professional lives is also discussed. Chapter Three describes the methods and design of the study and examines the limits of positivism in human science research. The value-ladenness of inquiry and the rationale for the use of qualitative methods are presented. The theoretical perspectives guiding the research and their rationale are highlighted. The use of technology as a research setting is discussed and the study participant selection process described. Finally, the procedures for pre-data and high-structure/low-structure data collection procedures, and analysis are specified. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study within the context of the overarching theme. The overarching theme is presented in two major themes and five minor themes. Minor themes are further divided into twenty-one supporting cluster themes. Chapter Five presents the conclusive discussions of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In their groundbreaking study of open and closeted lesbian and gay (LG) K-12 administrators, Fraynd and Capper (2003) described the harassment and discrimination that is all too often forced upon this subgroup of educational leaders by United States society:

‘Do you have any idea who you just hired?!?!’ shouted the voice at the other end of the superintendent’s phone. Sharon Freeman and her partner moved to Carson just two weeks before the call came to her new employer. That evening, after she returned from her job as principal of Logan Elementary, Sharon and her partner settled in to watch the news. Sharon’s face was plastered around the perimeter of the television screen as the evening’s lead story. Sharon shared how she decided to resign her position as principal: ‘The phrase they kept using which just haunts me to this day was, ‘she touches little girls’ . . . Sharon, like all lesbian and gay administrators, is forced to deal with what most would call an incongruity on a daily basis While the majority [American society] may permit the existence of LG individuals, most do not want them around their children—and certainly LG individuals should not be allowed to run schools.’ (p. 86-87)

Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) persons have long been the victims of harassment and discrimination evolving from a deep-seeded fear of difference and heterosexual oppression (Blount, 2003; Capper, 1993a; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Lugg,

2003a; Sears, 1993; Valdes, 1998). The civil rights movement over the past three decades has identified LG[BT] individuals as a protected non-majority group which “typically hold less political and economic power in society” (Capper, 1993a) and, therefore, can also be classified as “persons on the axis of oppression” (p. 4). Despite movement at the Federal level to protect students, there continues to be no constitutional or statutory protection for LGBT persons, and only 20 states and the District of Columbia claim to provide equal protection against sexual orientation discrimination (*State nondiscrimination laws in the U.S.*, 2008). Since the majority of states do not constitutionally provide protection against harassment and/or discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, LGBT persons often do not enjoy the same economic and political stature as their heterosexual counterparts.

The domination of white supremacy, male supremacy, and Euro-heteropatriarchy runs rampant in our communities (Valdes, 1998). Heterosexist domination is particularly true in education due to the long history of moral uprightness teachers are expected to maintain (Capper, 1993b; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a; Sears, 1993; Valdes, 1998). School districts, unless required by state legislation, often do not have policies forbidding sexual orientation harassment/discrimination or, if they do, these policies are tag-ons to the district’s sexual harassment and equal opportunity policies. These policies do not adequately address issues surrounding sexual orientation/identity of students, staff, and particularly educational leaders (Lugg, 2003a). For this reason, harassment or discrimination of LG[BT] staff or administrators may go undetected allowing inequitable and prejudicial policies to permeate organizations, which may possibly initiate a

downward spiral of decreasing acceptance, support, and promotion, possibly leading to irreparable damage to one's personal integrity and/or career.

For the purpose of this study, the review of the literature provides an overview of homosexuality and U.S. public education, as well as a discussion of the history of United States policy/law as it relates to homosexuality, particularly in public schools. Although formal policy and law is not the focus of this study, they are dictated by societal values and often viewed as one in the same. Policy and law and social mores play in sync with one another, therefore, as they continuously connect, you cannot have one without the other. For this reason, it is critical to present an historical overview of law, as it pertains to homosexuality, in order to begin to understand how the formal policies and laws, and the informal actions and attitudes of society have contextualized the lives of LGBT educational leaders.

Homosexuality and Teachers in Public Schools

Homosexuality in education is not a recent phenomena, in fact "society has been confronted with the issue of the homosexual school teacher since at least 450 B.C., when the most famous homosexual educators, Socrates and Plato, educated Greek youth" (Harbeck, 1997, p. 17). Education in ancient Greek society was the responsibility of teachers and philosophers, and excluding girls, was designed to teach boys the duties of manhood (Buchanan, 2000; Harbeck, 1997). The student was expected to respect and admire his teacher, and the teacher was expected to gain the devotion and affection of his student; therefore, "homosexual conduct between a teacher and student was considered a valuable part of the education process" (Buchanan, 2000, p. 4).

Sexual orientation discrimination, found in education, has an equally long history. For centuries, the Roman empire, heavily influenced by the Greeks, saw nothing illegal or inappropriate about homosexual conduct between males, and fourteen of the first fifteen emperors practiced homosexuality (Buchanan, 2000). Roman values, however, differed from the Greeks when it came to family and education. While Greek society viewed the sole purpose of “family” as a source of procreation and bestowed the education of their young boys to teachers and philosophers, ancient Romans believed the “family” played a more crucial role than merely procreation. In ancient Rome, it was an “extension of the parental responsibility” (Buchanan, 2000, p. 5) for a father to educate his son(s). Because a father would not have sexual relations with his child or child with his father, homosexual conduct with a student was strictly prohibited, and in the sixth century A.D., the Roman Empire outlawed homosexuality (Buchanan, 2000). More than 15 centuries later, sexual orientation discrimination in U.S. education prevails.

The colonists brought British sodomy laws to America and made them part of U.S. law after winning independence from Great Britain. Homosexuality was considered sodomy, and in U.S. law until the mid-nineteenth century, sodomy was a capital crime, punishable by death. Despite the fact that homosexual teachers had educated children for centuries, U.S. law forced LGBT teachers to remain invisible, thus, little is known about homosexual teachers in early U.S. education. Harbeck (1997) explained, “given this legal background, it is not surprising that the early history of homosexual teachers in this country is invisible” (p. 154).

In this larger section, homosexuality in U.S. public education, from the 1850s to the 1970s, is discussed. This section is divided into four major eras: 1) Homosexuality: The 1850s to the Turn of the Century, 2) Homosexuality: Early 20th Century, 3) Homosexuality: The Witch Hunt in Public Education, and 4) Homosexuality: Post World War II to the 1970s. The historical look at homosexuality in U.S. public education begins in the mid-1850s.

Homosexuality: The 1850s to the Turn of the Century

Teachers in U.S. schools were primarily men until the mid-1850s, apparently due to the fact that women were viewed as subordinate and generally not allowed a formal education (Blount, 2003). Although there are few examples of homosexual teachers in the early history of education, it has been posited that the early U.S. educational system fostered homosexual activity between primarily male teachers and male students (Crompton, 1976; Harbeck, 1992, 1997). Harbeck (1997) advanced ideas about homosexual activity in U.S. education:

The public images of English boarding schools and American same-sex colleges were that no homosexual teachers were employed and no homosexuality occurred between the students. The private realities of these institutions is that they supported practices that encouraged homosexual behavior by both faculty and students. (p. 168)

Lesbians and gay males may have been more prevalent in early U.S. education than society has been willing to believe. Several notable literary scholars were educators, as well as practicing homosexuals: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth

Peabody, Amos Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, Henry W. Longfellow, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman (Harbeck, 1992). Early homosexual educators often worked together in the same institutions and socialized in the same circles. The majority of the lesbian and gay male teachers mentioned above, worked at the Alcott School, founded and owned by Amos Bronson Alcott. Although the homosexual practices of this group of early literary scholars has become widely known, their experiences as teachers appear to have been blurred by their literary careers (Harbeck, 1997).

The post-Civil War era heralded rapid growth in public education, and men were no longer willing to work for the low wages paid to teachers. To fill the ever-growing need for teachers, school districts began hiring single women and required they remain unmarried in order to retain their teaching position. Should a female teacher marry, she would be forced to resign or be fired by the school board (Blount, 2003, 2004; Lugg, 2003a). Female teachers were held to high moral standards and continually watched to assure that the imposed regulations were followed (Lugg, 2003a).

Homosexuality: Early 20th Century

By the early 20th century, the teaching profession was dominated by single woman (Blount, 2003, 2004; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003c), and the few men who remained in the classrooms were viewed with suspicion (Lugg, 2003a). Lugg (2003a) described the early 1920s as “an era when social roles and employment were fraught with stringent and highly differentiated gender expectations” (p. 105). The early 20th century opened the door for those men desiring a career in education, but not wanting the sissified stereotype associated with male teachers. Educational administration became the new

career for male teachers. As Lugg (2003a) stated, “educational administration became by definition masculinist, a career for married males with academic credentials” (p. 106). The view of educational administration has not changed since the early 1900s, and the profession itself has evolved into one of fierce conservatism and homophobia (Blount, 1996; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003).

The 1920s also brought the introduction of sexual orientation issues into the political arena of education (Blount, 2003, 2004; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). The sexual orientation debate began as a direct result of the emergence of research in human sexuality and the identification of homosexuality and heterosexuality as the two primary means of human sexual expression (Blount, 2004; Katz, 1992; Lugg, 2003a). Once an identified means of human sexual expression, homosexuality was viewed as devil possession, a sin, a crime, biologically hereditary, a mental disorder, and even a learning disorder (Harbeck, 1997). Indeed, sexuality researchers in the 1920s saw homosexuality as an “unhealthy and poor developmental outcome because such behavior violated supposedly natural gender norms and accepted notions of procreative sexual behavior” (Lugg, 2003a, p. 106). Society was on heightened alert and lawmakers took the opportunity to expand and strengthen sodomy laws.

Homosexuals were viewed as both criminals and predators, and “should not be allowed to influence young children, nor should they be permitted the opportunity for potential sexual activity with children” (Harbeck, 1997, p. 157).

Homosexuality: The 1920s Through World War II

The much publicized sexuality research during the 1920s and 1930s, resulted in a plethora of homophobic fear, and a critical eye was turned toward the schools, in particular toward teachers. Teachers remaining single into their 30s, especially male educators, were viewed as having questionable character, and marriage became the socially acceptable norm (Blount, 2003; Chauncey, 1994; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). In order to remain in the education profession and avoid the stigma of being classified a homosexual, men turned to marriage to prove their heterosexuality, and the gay male was forced into assimilation (Blount, 2003; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Pinar, 1998).

Women teachers were also scrutinized and the traditional “spinster schoolteacher”, once held in high regard, was now in jeopardy (Blount, 2003, 2004; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). Female teachers, however, found themselves in a Catch 22. Since the mid-1800s, school boards required female teachers to remain single so they could devote their attention to the education of children (Blount, 2003, 2004; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). The ban on married women in the teaching profession remained the norm rather than the exception until post-World War II. To retain their careers as teachers, women were forced to remain single while at the same time being subjected to ridicule and suspicion of lesbianism and criminal activity (Blount, 2003, 2004; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). By the late 1920s, society believed the single female teacher posed a moral threat to her female students. However, due to low wages paid to unwed female

teachers, school boards viewed their employment as cost-effective and economically sound (Blount, 2003, 2004; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b).

Homosexuality: Post-World War II to the 1970s

Post-World War II and the rise of McCarthyism once again fueled flames of homophobia, particularly as homosexuality was linked to communism, and the slur “commie, pinko, queer” was coined (Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). The publication of the 1948 Kinsey report on male sexuality and the 1953 report on female sexuality increased public awareness of the high incidence of homosexuality and intensified the hysteria (Blount, 2003, 2004; D'Emilio, 1983; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). Without a doubt, “the interaction between cold war hysteria, Kinsey’s data, rampant homophobia, and lurid and incendiary newspaper reporting proved to be a volatile mix” (Lugg, 2003b, p. 107). The scrutiny of previous decades was at full strength again as society sought to purge all branches of the government, the military, and the educational system of people suspected to be homosexuals (Blount, 2003, 2004; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b).

By the mid-1950s, maintaining a “non-queer educational force had become a matter of national security” (Lugg, 2003a, p. 108). In overwhelming numbers, states began to pass legislation to rid the schools of suspected homosexuals, with Florida leading the way (Blount, 2003, 2004; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). Legislation mandated that educational administrators and school boards were to terminate employees who were suspected to be lesbian or gay. Without a doubt, an educator arrested on a homosexual charge, whether convicted or not, was immediately terminated

from employment with license revocation most likely to follow (Harbeck, 1997). LG[BT] teachers were no longer safe as public pressure forced schools to become vessels of persecution with school administrators at the helm.

During the 1950s and 1960s, lesbian and gay educators faced daunting choices. If they remained in the profession, they risked exposure and humiliating expulsion. To avoid detection, they would need to adopt behaviors and characteristics considered appropriate for their sex.

Alternatively, they could leave schools and work elsewhere.

(Blount, 2004, p. 114)

Public school administrators were charged with “policing” their schools and were viewed as hostile toward LGBT individuals (Kissen, 1996; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003).

The 1969 Stonewall Riot in Greenwich Village became a turning point for LGBT educators. Stonewall was an awakening for many LGBT individuals throughout the country and gave rise to a nationwide grassroots effort to openly claim their sexual identities (Blount, 2004). The 1970s brought heightened public awareness of LGBT teachers as individuals began to exercise their civil rights in the courtroom. LGBT teachers contested the decisions that terminated their employment on the bases of homosexual allegations in ground-breaking and high-profile court cases – cases that would set a precedent for future policy and law (Blount, 2004; Harbeck, 1997).

Civil rights gains for LGBT educators were on the upswing in the 1970s. The movement, however, was not without strong opposition. Anita Bryant’s nationwide *Save*

*Our Children Campaign*³ and California State Senator John Briggs' *Proposition 6*³ were backlash movements to once again rid the schools of homosexuals (Blount, 2003, 2004; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003b; Sears, 1993; Stewart, 2001)⁴. Bryant's campaign was successful in reversing sexual orientation non-discrimination clauses in school policy in Dade County, Florida; Eugene, Oregon; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Wichita, Kansas. Briggs' attempts, however, failed, in part due to the opposition of then former governor Ronald Reagan (Harbeck, 1992, 1997). The backlash movements of Bryant and Briggs, although not completely successful, laid the foundation for several major legal setbacks that would plague the LGBT movement and LGBT educators throughout the remainder of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

History of United States Policy/Law and Homosexuality

Homosexuality has been a part of U. S. policy and law since the colonial era. This section discusses the evolution of U. S. policy/law with regard to homosexuality from the arrival of the first British settlers through the close of the 1970s and is presented as follows: 1) Colonial Law to the 1930s, 2) Post-World War II to the Mid-1970s, and 3) Late 1970s.

Colonial Law to the 1930s

Oppression of LGBT individuals in the United States dates back to the arrival of the first settlers to New England when the law of the time criminalized homosexual activity (D'Emilio, 1983). By incorporating the English sodomy law, punishable by death,

³ For a fuller account of the *Save Our Children Campaign* and *Proposition 6* see pages 30-34.

into legal code, homosexuality became punishable by death in all of the 13 original colonies (Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003b). These laws remained the status quo until 1873, when South Carolina became the last state to drop sodomy from the list of capital offenses (Crompton, 1976; Harbeck, 1997). Capital punishment for the crime of sodomy in U.S. law had a significant impact on the lives of homosexuals for over two centuries.

Although sodomy was no longer a *capital* crime by the late 1800s, it was still a crime in all states and all homosexual activity was considered sodomy until post-World War II (Blount, 2003; Chauncey, 1994; D'Emilio, 1983; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). In addition, “almost every state expanded their vagrancy, disorderly conduct, degeneracy, and prostitution laws in hopes of criminalizing same-sex and gender ‘deviant’ behavior” (Lugg, 2003b, p. 54). In many states, educators convicted of a “crime against nature” would not only lose their jobs, but could have their teaching license revoked (Lipkin, 1999). Such legal acts gave autonomous power to school boards and administrators as they sought to uphold socially appropriate gender norms and regulate sexual behavior by ridding U.S. schools of LGBT educators.

The introduction of the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy in human sexuality research in the 1920s further fueled the flames of oppression. Most states and municipalities seized the opportunity to expand and broaden their sodomy laws in an attempt to include any deviant behavior that fell outside of socially accepted gender expectations (Chauncey, 1994; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). Expansion of the “crimes against nature” laws in the 1920s and 1930s made it illegal to be homosexual

and forced LGBT individuals into a deeper state of secrecy and isolation. As Chauncey (1994) put it, “the state built a closet in the 1930s and forced gay people to hide in it” (p. 9).

Policy and Law: Post-World War II to Mid-1970s

As previously mentioned, stringent “crimes against nature” laws and closeted gays remained the status quo until the post-WWII era when, by 1950, 48 states still considered homosexual activity a felony, with only murder, kidnapping, and rape receiving heavier penalties (D'Emilio, 1983). In addition, the medical model classifying homosexuality as a disease emerged during this era and prevailed through the early 1960s (D'Emilio, 1983; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Sears, 1993). Many states passed “sexual psychopath laws that officially recognized homosexuality as a socially threatening disease” (D'Emilio, 1983, p. 17).

In the 1950s and early 1960s, LGBT individuals were the focus of police entrapment and warrantless arrests on the streets, in bars, and even in private homes. Gay men and lesbians were charged with an array of offenses including disorderly conduct, vagrancy, public lewdness, assault, and solicitation, as well as being subjected to blackmail, surveillance, and postal authority investigations (D'Emilio, 1983; Harbeck, 1992). LGBT individuals often did not challenge the authority of the police and even when there was a lack of sufficient evidence, most would plead guilty to the charge in an attempt to avoid being further ostracized (D'Emilio, 1983).

Despite the continued and overt oppression of LGBT individuals in the early 1950s, there was an undercurrent of change. Society was beginning to slowly alter its

attitude toward sexuality, and a greater sympathy for those accused of victimless crimes was emerging. In 1955, the American Law Institute's Model Penal Code recommendation was to legalize all forms of sexual activity between consenting adults. Although the recommendation was initially rejected by most states, the courts slowly exercised more leniency with those charged with victimless crimes (Harbeck, 1992). The growing leniency of the courts had a direct impact on the U.S. educational system because "for the first time in United States social history the judiciary broke with educational policy concerning immorality, criminal conduct, and the extent to which someone should be punished for consenting sexual activity outside of marriage" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 125). With the trend toward greater leniency, educational leaders began to lose the autonomous power they had for so long possessed. School administrators no longer could rely on the court system as a source of support for information gathering focused on the private lives of teachers (Harbeck, 1992).

Judicial leniency for teachers charged with victimless crimes was quickly met with opposition by California lobbyists wanting to keep their teachers in check. The lobbyists successfully sponsored legislation that would return power to educational leaders and was specifically directed at teachers and their morality. California's Penal Code Section 291 now required police to inform local school boards whenever a teacher was detained or arrested for a criminal offense, and Education Code 12756 allowed for the immediate suspension of a teaching license upon conviction of any of several statutes relating to sex and morality (Harbeck, 1992). As a result of this legislation, school

administrators once again possessed autonomous power to rid their schools of social misfits and sexual psychopaths.

However, the late 1960s both social and legal attitudes were changing, increasingly, from removing a teacher from his/her position solely on actual or perceived sexual orientation became more difficult. In the 1969 landmark decision in *Morrison v. State Board of Education*, the California Supreme Court ruled that a teacher could not be dismissed from his teaching position without taking into account, and analyzing, the individual's behavior with respect to his job responsibilities (Harbeck, 1992; Sears, 1993). The Court further stated "the status of being a homosexual was insufficient grounds for dismissal unless coupled with some related misbehavior" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 126). This court ruling was a major advancement in employment rights for LGBT educators. Finally, by 1973 "*Morrison* was firmly established as one of the strongest statements in favor of an individual's right to retain employment despite a wide variety of personal indiscretions" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 126).

Beginning in the early to mid-1970s, municipalities and school boards were beginning to pass anti-discrimination ordinances to protect homosexuals in the workforce. By 1973, the National Education Association included sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policy and supported domestic partner language as a negotiable contract issue. The American Federation of Teachers followed suit in 1974 and gave their gay and lesbian employees domestic partnership status (Rossman, 1997).

Policy and Law: The Late 1970s

Since 1975, many state legislatures have removed situational descriptions that permitted immediate revocation of a teaching license (Harbeck, 1992). The late 1970s was a period of nationwide change and significant advancement in the civil rights for LGBT individuals. Greater acceptance of homosexuals in society, especially in education, was not without backlash from conservatives. In this section, the three major anti-gay rights movements of the 1970s are discussed, 1) Save Our Children Campaign, 2) California's Proposition 6, and 3) Helm's Bill.

As previously stated, in 1977, Anita Bryant, former Miss America finalist, spearheaded the *Save Our Children* campaign. At that time, Dade County was home to a large gay/lesbian population and was considered to be a politically liberal community (Harbeck, 1997). Dade County was Bryant's starting point, but the ripple effect would reach nationwide proportions for years to come.

Save Our Children Campaign

Prior to 1977, Ruth Shack, wife of Dick Shack, long-time booking agent and friend of Anita Bryant, won the election to the Dade County Metro Commission. Anita Bryant had publicly endorsed Shack in the election, taping several radio endorsements, which were considered to be instrumental in her election. Shack, however, had also been endorsed by the Dade County Coalition for the Humanistic Rights of Gays. Shack, along with 48 other candidates supported by the Coalition, had promised to support LG[BT] rights in return for the homosexual vote. The election brought 45 of the 49 Coalition-supported candidates to office and shortly there after, Shack introduced an anti-

discrimination ordinance supporting LG[BT] rights, and the ordinance passed by a vote of 5 to 3 (Harbeck, 1992, 1997). Bryant, outraged by the passing of the ordinance, immediately began her *Save Our Children* campaign in an attempt to repeal the ordinance. Both Bryant and the supporters of the ordinance received nationwide support, and “Dade County became the setting for the first head-to-head conflict between the fundamentalist religious movement, with Anita Bryant as its nationally-prominent spokesperson, and the as yet rather closeted but increasingly militant [LGBT] population” (Harbeck, 1997, p. 42).

Although Bryant had minimal knowledge of homosexuality and admittedly met only a few homosexuals, she was quick to link homosexuality with child pornography, other forms of depravity, and communism. Bryant characterized the LGBT movement for civil rights as a “homosexual conspiracy” against God and country. Bryant stated:

The word gay totally belies the homosexual lifestyle. I don't even know how the word gay was attached to the homosexual lifestyle. The militant homosexuals took the word and with the power that they have, they programmed it into our modern vocabulary. That in itself is a frightening example of what they can do to a society – how they can brainwash you into using their terminology. It's too early to say, and I don't know what the homosexuals still have up their sleeve. They are very desperate people who will stop at nothing. (as cited in Harbeck, 1997, p. 43)

Bryant's accusations that homosexuals were militant, desperate people who would brainwash the public and stop at nothing to achieve their end was a form of

McCarthyesque tactics that were successful in heightening fear in citizens nationwide. She even went as far as to assert that the Equal Rights Amendment and National Organization of Women were fronts for lesbianism.

Harbeck (1997) pointed out, however, that Bryant's attack "was aimed at the stereotypical, limp-wristed, seductive, crossdressing, male homosexual who was sexually interested in young boys" (p. 44), and homosexual teachers were at the top of her list. Before long, LGBT teachers were viewed as having three main goals: molestation, recruitment, and violence, and rhetoric was advanced that these individuals *should not* be allowed to teach children.

Bryant's five month campaign ended successfully on June 7, 1977, when the voters of Dade County repealed the ordinance supporting LGBT housing and employment rights by a vote of 69 percent to 31 percent. Bryant's campaign against gay rights did not stop in Dade County; by 1978, she had helped to successfully repeal sexual orientation anti-discrimination ordinances in several other municipalities. While the successful battles raged in the states of Florida, Minnesota, Kansas, and Oregon, another was brewing and taking hold in California.

California's Proposition 6

California's conservative State Senator John Briggs was known for his disdain of homosexuals, and in 1977, flew to Dade County to lend his support to Anita Bryant and her *Save Our Children* campaign. Briggs was impressed with the large sums of money Bryant had raised for her cause and felt empowered by her resulting victory (Harbeck, 1992). After returning to California, "Briggs decided to use the issues of homosexual

school teachers and the death penalty as the emotional underpinnings of his campaign for governor” (Harbeck, 1992, p. 129). In June, 1977, Briggs introduced *Proposition 6* as a means of ridding California schools of homosexual teachers. Like Bryant, Briggs equated homosexuality with depravity and considered it a “conspiracy of corruption.” Briggs’ focused on the premise “that gay and lesbian individuals intentionally entered the teaching profession to seduce young students into a homosexual lifestyle. Thus, Proposition 6 was necessary to curb this conspiracy of corruption” (Harbeck, 1997, p. 61).

Supporters of Briggs and *Proposition 6* contended that adoption of *Proposition 6* would not forbid school districts from hiring homosexual teachers, but would, instead, provide them with an option not to (Harbeck, 1997). In reality, however, *Proposition 6* had significantly more far-reaching intents, and its ramifications would have been devastating for homosexual educators and their heterosexual allies. The Initiative defined “homosexual conduct” as “advocating, soliciting, imposing, encouraging, or promoting of private or public homosexual activity directed at, or likely to come to the attention of schoolchildren and/or employees” (Harbeck, 1997, p. 64). Opponents of *Proposition 6* feared that its definition of “homosexual conduct” was too broad and would lead to flagrant misuse of power on the part of school administrators resulting in arbitrary grounds for termination or non-hiring. Under this definition, both homosexuals and heterosexual allies could be scrutinized and considered for termination or non-hiring for merely discussing his/her homosexual lifestyle and presenting it as a positive alternative to students or by expressing tolerance of homosexuality in a private conversation with

friends or colleagues (Harbeck, 1997; Stewart, 2001). For this reason alone, it was argued that *Proposition 6* was unconstitutional.

The broad definition of “homosexual conduct” was not the only criticism brought about by the opposition. Concerns were raised about the review and dismissal process, which increased the power bestowed on school administration to “define standards of conduct and gather information against a school employee” (Harbeck, 1997, p. 65). In essence, *Proposition 6* was viewed as a setback in civil rights and a return to the autonomous power school administrators had wielded in previous decades. This unlimited power was viewed as contrary to federal and state limitations on separation of power and directly violated federal and state privacy protections (Harbeck, 1997).

Ronald Reagan, then former California governor, has been credited as being the most influential opponent of *Proposition 6*. Although Briggs had claimed Reagan initially expressed support of *Proposition 6*, it is surmised that Nancy Reagan’s numerous homosexual friends in Hollywood and Reagan’s campaign for the Presidency influenced him to not speak out in favor of an anti-gay initiative. However, Briggs did not expect Reagan’s vehement opposition of the initiative (Harbeck, 1992, 1997). In addition to Reagan’s claims of the unconstitutionality of *Proposition 6*, he also asserted the insurmountable cost of enforcement and significant governmental involvement. He foresaw a negative backlash against innocent people, particularly LGBT educators, and stated “whatever else it is, homosexuality is not a contagious disease like measles.

Prevailing scientific opinion is that an individual's sexuality is determined at a very early age, and that a child's teachers do not really influence this" (as cited in Harbeck, 1997, p. 73).

Amid charges of voter fraud, failure of the California Supreme Court to rule on the initiative's constitutionality, and an outpouring of parental support for the retention of a gay male teacher, *Proposition 6* went to the voters on November 7, 1978. It was defeated by a margin of 2 to 1 and "for the first time, supporters of homosexual rights had won an election against the conservatives. In fact, they may have won their most important election" (Harbeck, 1997, p. 81).

Helm's Bill

Before the defeat of *Proposition 6* in California, Oklahoma State Senator Mary Helm requested a copy of the legislation from John Briggs. Helm's Bill, a replica of *Proposition 6*, was introduced to the Oklahoma State House and Senate in February 1978. It passed unanimously and began a seven year judicial journey that would end with a United States Supreme Court split decision in 1985 (Harbeck, 1992, 1997). On the heels of the Supreme Court split decision, several other states began to draft and consider laws similar to the Helm's Bill. These states included: North Carolina, Texas, Nevada, and Arkansas (Harbeck, 1997). What began as a small ripple of judicial leniency and relaxing social attitudes, toward homosexuals in the early and mid-1970s, quickly grew to a tidal wave of resurgent discriminatory legislation that began with Anita Bryant's *Save Our Children* campaign and continued into the next millennium.

Current Anti-Discrimination Policy/Law and Homosexuality

In the decade following the successful *Save Our Children* campaign, the future of LGBT civil rights appeared grim. Throughout the U.S., discrimination against LGBT individuals prevailed and “more than two-thirds of the anti-gay ballot measures were lost every year, the vast majority of them repeals of basic nondiscrimination laws like the one targeted by Bryant in Miami-Dade County” (*Anti-LGBT Ballot Measures, 2005-2006*). In this section, anti-discrimination law and policy, from the 1980s to present day, are discussed. The subsections include: 1) Law and Policy: Small Victories in the 1980s, 2) Law and Policy: The 20th Century Comes to a Close, and 3) Law and Policy: The New Millennium.

In the midst of the trend against gay rights, the LGBT community did win some battles in the on-going war. In 1977, the same year Bryant was spewing her anti-gay rhetoric and gaining support for the repeal of nondiscrimination laws, the District of Columbia, with its sodomy law still in place, passed a gay rights law. This law remained the strongest gay rights law in the country through the 1980s (Mohr, 1988).

Law and Policy: Small Victories in the 1980s

The Congressional defeat of the Family Protection Act of 1981 was another similar victory. The bill, supported by conservative Christian groups, would have terminated any state or municipal anti-discrimination laws intended to protect LGBT individuals from employment or housing discrimination and even stipulated the withholding of Federal funds (Blount, 2005). Then Presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, endorsed the bill during his campaign, but once elected opposed it, “claiming

simply that it discriminated against a class of people” (Blount, 2005, p. 160). In 1982, Wisconsin became the first state to pass a nondiscrimination law protecting gays in the workforce and public accommodations. The following year Wisconsin revised its sodomy law to “eliminate consensual adult sex in private as a crime” (Mohr, 1988, p. 54). During the remainder of the 1980s, Massachusetts (1989) was the only other state to pass a nondiscrimination law which included sexual orientation as a protected category (Harbeck, 1997), and by 1989, only 42 cities and counties throughout the United States had passed sexual orientation discrimination laws (*The state of the workplace: For lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans 2002*, 2002).

Law and Policy: The 20th Century Comes to a Close

As the United States moved into the final decade of the 20th century, a shift in social mores became increasingly apparent, and the LGBT community’s quest for civil rights was on the upswing. In 1991, Hawaii and Connecticut passed sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws, with New Jersey, Vermont, and California following suit in 1992, and Minnesota in 1993 (Harbeck, 1997). During this period, concern was raised regarding the safety of LGBT youth in our schools, and the National School Board Association (1993) and the American Association of State Boards of Education mandated the development of curricula and counseling programs for LGBT students (Rossman, 1997). January 1993 brought President Clinton to office, and his administration proved to be a strong advocate for gay rights through the turn of the century. In an attempt to end the military pursuit of homosexuals among their ranks, Clinton promised to rescind the ban on homosexual service members. Under great political pressure, however, Clinton

did not rescind the ban; rather, he agreed to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which was enacted into law in 1994 (Gerstmann, 1999).

In the next year, the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) was co-sponsored by Senators James Jeffords (R-VT) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and introduced to Congress. ENDA would provide basic protection against employment discrimination based solely on sexual orientation, real or perceived. EDNA had unprecedented bipartisan support, including that of President Clinton, however, it was strongly opposed because some believed that it would specifically protect educators and severely restrict districts from dismissing homosexual educators for improprieties (Lipkin, 1999). EDNA failed to pass through Congress, allegedly due to the efforts of the right-wing evangelical and fundamentalist Christians (Harbeck, 1997; Mazur, 1997). ENDA continues to be introduced annually and would be the first federal law protecting individuals from job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. To date, EDNA has failed to pass.

The U. S. Supreme Court issued another victory to the LGBT community in 1996 with its decision on *Romer v. Evans*. In response to Colorado Governor Romer’s executive order prohibiting discrimination against individuals with AIDS, and the Colorado Civil Rights Commission’s recommendation that the state adopt sexual orientation anti-discrimination statutes, a religious activist group known as Colorado for Family Values, introduced *Amendment 2*. The amendment was an attempt to repeal: any existing law or policy that protected persons with ‘homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual orientation’ from discrimination in the state and any of its cities, towns, counties, and

school boards and to prohibit further adoption or enforcement of any such law or policy. (Stewart, 2001, p. 232)

In 1992, Colorado voters passed *Amendment 2*, and a four year judicial battle began ((Harbeck, 1997; Stewart, 2001). The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to review the case and characterized *Amendment 2* as being unprecedented because it identified a group of people by a single trait and denied them all protections by the state (Stewart, 2001). In 1996, the Court issued its decision in *Romer v. Evans* and struck down *Amendment 2* as unconstitutional (Harbeck, 1997; Lipkin, 1999; Stewart, 2001). Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states cannot exclude homosexuals from seeking protections, it did not rule out local exclusionary practices or local/state discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation (Lipkin, 1999).

In 1998, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13087 – the Federal Employment Nondiscrimination Order (Gerstmann, 1999; Stewart, 2001) – which “reaffirmed the executive’s branch’s longstanding internal policy that prohibits discrimination based upon sexual orientation within executive branch civilian employment” (Gerstmann, 1999, p. 124). This marked the first presidential directive prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination, however, it did not open the door to enforcement through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or authorize affirmative action programs (Stewart, 2001).

Law and Policy: The New Millennium

The LGBT struggle for equal rights continues to make advancements in the 21st century. In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court’s historic decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, struck

down all sodomy laws as being unconstitutional. In 2006, Illinois outlawed sexual orientation discrimination, Washington state added sexual orientation to its existing nondiscrimination laws, and Missouri legalized homosexuality between consenting adults. Currently more than 460 of the Fortune 500 companies and more than 1975 private companies, nonprofits, and unions have adopted sexual orientation anti-discrimination policies (*Gay and transgender anti-discrimination*, 2006). As of March, 2009, *only* 20 states and the District of Columbia have enacted anti-discrimination laws that include sexual orientation protection (*Quick Facts*, 2009; *State nondiscrimination laws in the U.S.*, 2008). In addition, approximately “100 municipalities in the 30 states without nondiscrimination laws have local nondiscrimination laws” (*State nondiscrimination laws in the U.S.*, 2006). (See FIGURE 1, p. 54). Despite the apparent progress in the acquisition of civil rights for LGBT individuals and a 2001 survey for the Kaiser Family Foundation finding that 75% of U.S. citizens believe that there should be laws protecting LGBT people in the workplace, 33 states remain without sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws (*Gay and transgender anti-discrimination*, 2006).

FIGURE 1. Anti-Discrimination Laws in the United States

State	<i>Year</i>	<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	<i>Gender Identity</i>	<i>State Employees Only</i>	<i>Public Employment</i>	<i>Private Employment</i>
USA	1998	X			X	
Alabama						
Alaska	2002	X		X		
Arizona	2003	X		X		
Arkansas	2003	X		X		
California	2000	X	X		X	X
Colorado	2007	X		X		
Connecticut	1991	X			X	X
Delaware	2001	X		X		
District of Columbia	1977	X	X		X	X
Florida						
Georgia						
Hawaii	1991	X	X		X	X
Idaho						
Illinois	2005	X	X		X	X
Indiana	2004	X		X		
Iowa (originally repealed)	2007 (2000)	X			X	X
Kansas		X			X	X
Kentucky	2003	X		X		
Louisiana	2004	X		X		
Maine	2005	X	X		X	X
Maryland	2001	X			X	X
Massachusetts	1989	X			X	X
Michigan	2003	X		X		
Minnesota	1993	X	X		X	X
Mississippi						
Missouri						
Montana	?	X			X	
Nebraska						
Nevada	1999	X			X	X
New Hampshire	1997	X			X	X
New Jersey	1992	X			X	X
New Mexico	2004	X	X		X	X
New York	1993	X			X	X
North Carolina						
North Dakota						
Ohio	1999	X			X	
Oklahoma						
Oregon	2007	X			X	X
Pennsylvania	1988	X		X		
Rhode Island	1995	X	X		X	X
South Carolina						
South Dakota						
Tennessee						
Texas						
Utah						
Vermont	1992	X			X	X
Virginia						
Washington	2006	X	X		X	X
West Virginia						
Wisconsin	1982	X			X	X
Wyoming						

Bold – states with anti-discrimination laws; Shaded – states with city/county policies, ordinances, proclamations
 Current as of March 2009

Need for Research on Anti-Discrimination Policy/Law and LGBT Administrators

To date, the legal status of LGBT educational leaders is “one of absolute invisibility As a category or area of *legal* inquiry LGBT school administrators simply do not exist” (Lugg, 2003b, p. 76). Since the late 1970s, some states and municipalities throughout the country have recognized the need for protection of the oppressed sexual minority culture and began passing legislation to prevent discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. In the schools, these policies have focused primarily on creating a safe environment for students. The schools, however, continue to be a predominantly unsafe place for LGBT educators, even in states with anti-discrimination laws (Capper, 1999; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b) and “public school administrators, who are largely at-will hires, have even fewer protections” (Lugg, 2003a, p. 114). LGBT administrators are in a tenuous position, and their sexual orientation make them particularly vulnerable yet, all too often “what few legal rights LGBT administrators retain regarding employment end with the first suspicion” (Lugg, 2003b, p. 77).

In light of the limited legal protection for LGBT educational leaders and the fragility of their position, the impact of formal and informal context on this invisible sect remains unexplored. The mere existence of sexual orientation anti-discrimination policy/law may not be enough to protect LGBT educational leaders, personally or professionally. As one LGBT school administrator explained, “the law is there for the big things, but it does not protect against the small, unsaid, day to day oppression that we face, everyday, when we come to work” (Anonymous, 2006).

The past two decades has brought significant research in the area of LGBT youth and civil rights legal issues. In addition, there has been an increasing interest in employment protection for LGBT educators (Capper, 1999; Harbeck, 1992; Kissen, 1996; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). To date, however, there have been only two studies that has focused solely on the experiences of LGBT school administrators (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007). And this study did not specifically address the impact of policy/law on LGBT school leaders. Lugg and Koschoreck (2003) stated: “educational administration may very be the final unrecognized and unexamined closet for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered (LGBT)” (p. 4).

The lack of scholarly research in the area of LGBT school administrators has become an issue of concern to several researchers and scholars in the area of educational leadership (Blount, 1996, 2003; Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). And questions regarding the lack of and significance of such research has been raised (Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Lugg, 2003b). Capper (1999) discussed two issues that may play a role in the dearth of sexual minority administrator research: 1) the small numbers of LGBT educational administrators, and 2) that education centers around students’ lives.

In her discussion of the potentially small numbers of LGBT school administrators, Capper pointed out that LGBT administrators may comprise up to 10% of the total school administrator. Considering the small numbers of LGBT educational leaders, some may ask if it would be worth the time to research this area. Capper (1999) responded: “research on women administrators and administrators of color suggests, however, that

the low numbers of such administrators could be one reason for conducting related research, bringing the issue into the public arena” (p. 5).

The idea that education centers around students’ lives has brought the argument that research on LGBT educational leaders would not contribute to the quality of student life, and that LGBT administrators do not influence student achievement (Capper, 1999). In addition, LGBT administrators themselves may argue that because our schools continue to be heterosexist and homophobic, research efforts would yield a greater return if the focus was on sexual minority youth and sexual minority parents with school-aged children (Capper, 1999).

Lugg and Korschoreck (2003) suggested the lack of research in the area of LGBT school leadership may be due to a lack of awareness that this population even exists. They wrote: “A colleague’s assertion that ‘there aren’t any’ is indicative of just how invisible LGBT educational leaders have been” (p. 4). The January 2003 special issue of the *Journal of School Leadership*, was “the first scholarly journal to devote an entire issue to exploring the lives and issues facing LGBT leaders” (Lugg & Korschoreck, 2003, pp. 4-5). They not only credited the lack of research to the apparent invisibility and awareness of the existence of LGBT administrators in public schools, but also that “LGBT researchers working in the areas of educational administration and leadership [suffer from the same] lack of visibility and professional safety within higher education” (p. 5) as their counterparts in K-12 public education. The discriminatory practices which plague LGBT public school leaders are the same for those in the professorate (Lugg & Korschoreck, 2003), as such practices are deeply rooted in the history of educational

administration as a fiercely homophobic and heterosexist profession (Blount, 1996, 2003; Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b).

The Euro-heteropatriachial distribution of power within our educational system, has allowed for tolerance of LGBT students and educators, however, they are not treated equally (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2005; Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Mohr, 1988; Sears, 1993; Sears & Williams, 1997). The concept of *tolerance, but unequal* regarding LGBT educators and leaders was furthered by Fraynd and Capper (2003): “while the majority may permit the existence of LG individuals, most do not want them around their children – and certainly LG individuals should not be allowed to run schools” (p. 87). Indeed, the obvious lack of visibility and awareness of LGBT administrators in public school settings clearly suggests the need for further scholarly research in this area. As Pinar (1998) stated:

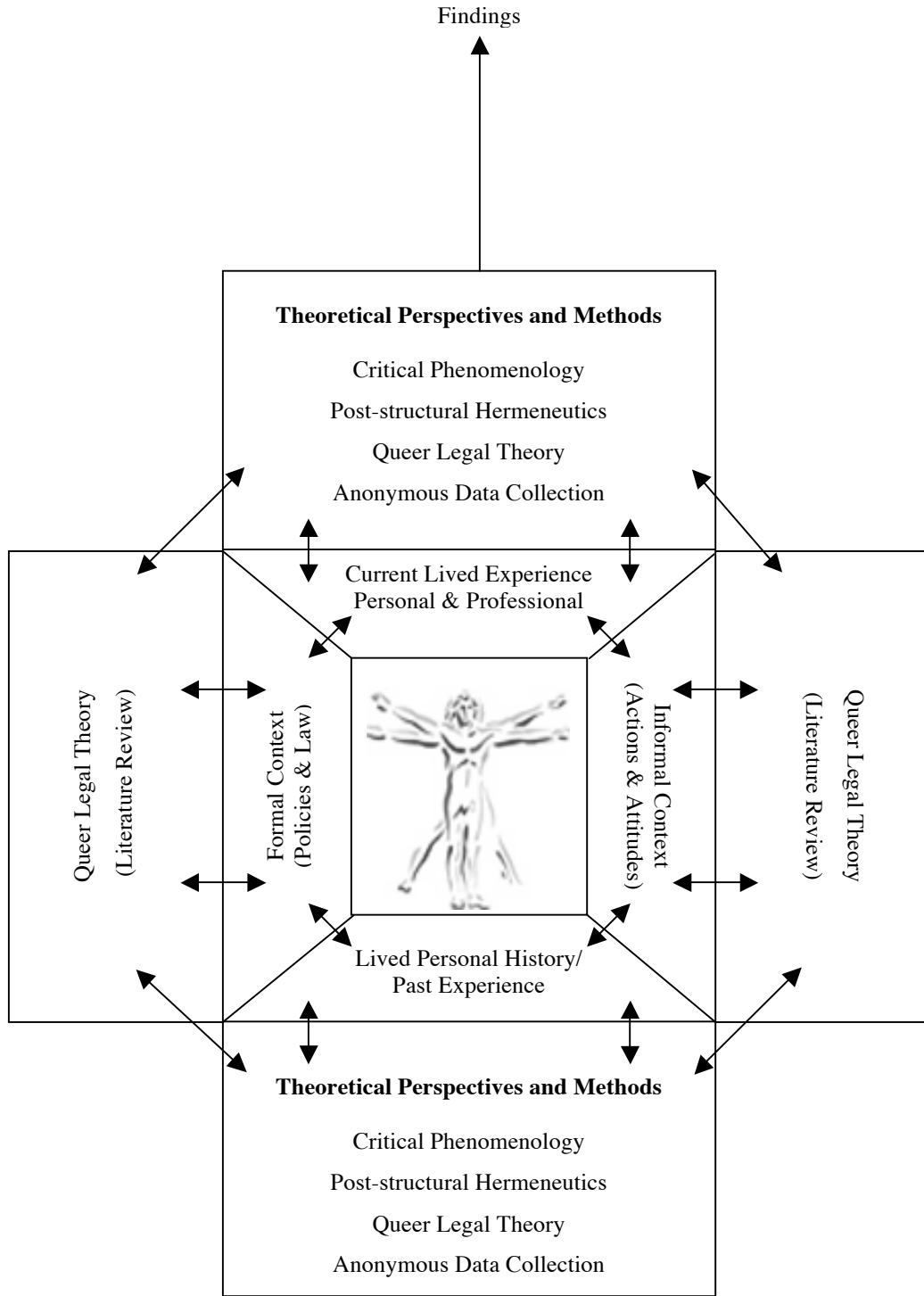
Despite the explosion in scholarship and an apparent and slight clearing in the public space, we remain in a defensive position: trying to teach tolerance, trying to teach the truth, trying to find ways to decenter and destabilize the heterosexual normalization that so constructs . . . the public world we inhabit. (p. 6)

If the U.S. educational system is to shift from the current power structure, which historically fostered Euro-heteropatriarchial dominance, it is critical that knowledge and understanding of the experiences of LGBT educational leaders and the formal

laws/policies, and informal actions/attitudes of society that contextualize their lives is expanded. The participant's in Fraynd and Capper's (2003) study continued to fear the ramifications of sexual identity disclosure on their own and/or other LGBT school administrator's personal and professional lives, despite living in states where sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws exist. Is the fear of ramifications from sexual identity disclosure and overarching phenomena of LGBT educational leaders? Or, is it unique to the participants of Fraynd and Capper's study? (See FIGURE 2, p. 60).

A study that delves into the personal and professional lives of a marginal group, particularly a group that is "on the axis of oppression" (Capper, 1993b, p.5), as LGBT administrators are, is *edgy*, to say the least, and *bold* in the eyes of most. However, if as a democratic nation we truly believe in and uphold equality for all, this research is important for bringing greater equality to education for our children, our teachers, and our administrators. In conclusion, "research on this [LGBT] population can significantly contribute to the literature. Queer research in administration can open another window on power and oppression in schools, and further expose how heterosexism constrains everyone" (Capper, 1999, p. 5).

FIGURE 2. Interrelationship Between Literature, Theoretical Perspectives, and Method



CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

Having established in the review of the literature, the history of harassment, discrimination, and oppression of lesbian/gay/bisexual/ transgender (LGBT) persons, it is clear that current anti-discrimination policies do not adequately address issues surrounding sexual orientation/identity of students, staff, and particularly administrators (Lugg, 2003a, p. 279). Harassment and/or discrimination of staff and administrators may, therefore, go undetected allowing inequitable and prejudicial policies to permeate organizations (See FIGURE 2, p. 60).

Within the context of formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of society, the purpose of this study is to come to understand the commonalities of the personal and professional lived experiences of LG[BT] educational leaders. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How have LG[BT] educational leaders' past lived experiences as students and teachers impacted or informed their personal and professional lives?
2. How have the lived experiences (related to sexual identity) of LG[BT] educational leaders impacted or informed their personal and professional lives?
3. What perceptions/experiences do LG[BT] educational leaders report regarding the contextual formal policies/laws and contextual informal actions/attitudes that may or may not have shaped their personal and professional lives?
4. Given their cumulative experiences (related to sexual identity), what recommendations do LG[BT] educational leaders have regarding improved

support for LG[BT] students, teachers, and administrators in public school settings?

The research methods and design of this study are guided by post-positivist theoretical perspectives that seek to understand the meaning of lived experiences of socially marginalized LG[BT] educational leaders – in other words, the multiple, intersecting factors that combine to form one’s lifeworld (See FIGURE 2, p. 60).

Methods

For centuries, positivism was thought of as *the* way to quantify reality, and discover the *one* absolute truth (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the twentieth century, schools of thought began to change and the premise of *one absolute truth*, and appropriateness of *quantifying reality*, was brought into question. The empirical-analytical nature of positivism seemed too narrow for social science inquiry (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen, 1975), giving rise to post-positivistic methods. The section that follows, discusses the limits of positivism and the need for post-positivistic methods in social science inquiry.

The Limits of Positivism

Positivism has its roots in the political and social views of the ancient Greeks (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) and emphasizes the concrete or absolute nature of reality (Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Positivism took hold in the early nineteenth century and was viewed as a means of reform, not only in areas such as ethics and politics, but philosophy, as well. In the philosophical realm, positivism became most powerful in the twentieth century with the establishment of the Vienna Circle of Logical

Positivists, a group founded by Moritz Schlick and established to promulgate the operationalism advocated by Ernest Mach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The basic beliefs or axioms of positivism suggest one single, universal truth or reality that can be separated into parts and analyzed outside of its own time and/or context constraints (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The analysis of the parts can then be generalized to the whole phenomena, suggesting that the whole is nothing more than the sum of its parts. According to positivism, not only can tangible reality be separated and studied independently, but it can also be quantified in order to discover scientific laws. These scientific laws explain or predict relationships between parts of societal phenomena, thus, shedding light on the phenomena in its entirety (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Joerger, 2005a, 2005b; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of the positivistic movement was to discover and identify universal, scientific laws that would explain and predict social affairs and events. Large research samples, theorists believed, would allow the ultimate laws of nature to prevail (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Joerger, 2005a, 2005b; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In an investigation focused on the lived experiences of LG[BT] educational leaders, within the context of formal laws/policies and informal actions/attitudes of society, the axioms of positivism pose several limitations. Lincoln and Guba (1985), discussed seven challenges to positivistic research. Their seven challenges are:

- 1) Positivism leads to an inadequate conceptualization of what science is.
- 2) Positivism is unable to deal adequately with two crucial and interacting aspects of the theory-fact relationship.

- 3) Positivism is overly dependent on operationalism, which has itself been increasingly judged to be inadequate.
- 4) Positivism has at least two consequences that are both pugnacious and unfounded.
- 5) Positivism has produced research with human respondents that ignore their humanness, a fact that has not only ethical but also validity implications.
- 6) Positivism falls short of being able to deal with emergent conceptual/empirical formulations from a variety of fields.
- 7) Positivism rests on at least five assumptions that are increasingly difficult to maintain. (pp. 25-28)

Although all seven challenges are valid, as a rationale for the selection of methods used in this study, the seventh and final challenge is most compelling. Indeed, the idea that positivism rests on at least five assumptions “that are increasingly difficult to maintain . . . and form the basis for counter proposals” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 28) render positivism an inappropriate approach to inquiry. The five assumptions of positivism, listed below, are discussed to illustrate why, for this study, positivism must be set aside.

Assumption One of Positivism

The first assumption of positivism is that there is a single, tangible reality that can be fragmented and studied independently from the whole. Positivism treats the study of social phenomena like natural phenomena little regard for the subjective nature of the individual (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Positivism does not take into consideration that reality is unique to the lived

experience of each individual – the phenomena that multiple realities (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Capper, 1993b; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; van Manen, 2001). In addition, positivism advances that individuals and their experienced realities can be isolated from the context of the experiences and studied as individual units because the whole is more than the sum of the parts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, a study that focuses on the perceived or real impact of contextual formal laws/policies and contextual informal actions/attitudes of society on LG[BT] educational leaders, cannot uncover the meaning that such administrators attach to their lifeworlds if we isolate the individuals' and their lived experiences from the circumstances and events that form their realities.

Assumption Two of Positivism

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that one epistemological assumption of positivism is that the knower can be separated from the known. In other words, positivistic inquiry asserts that the researcher can separate the individual (knower) from his/her reality (known) in order to test a given hypotheses and discover a universal truth. When attempting to uncover the meaning in the lifeworld of LG[BT] educational leaders, the researcher seeks to reconstruct the reality of the individuals. The underlying meaning in the lived experience, however, is dependent upon the “nature and quality of the interaction between the knower and the known” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 28), and, therefore, cannot be separated from one another as positivist theorists contend (Bahm, 1971; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Capper, 1993b; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen, 2001).

Assumption Three of Positivism

The third assumption of positivism is that temporal and contextual independence of observation exists for “what is true at one time and place may, under appropriate circumstances (such as sampling) [may] also be true at another time and place” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 28). As previously mentioned, the positivist, through random sampling, tests a given hypotheses in order to discover a universal truth or law. Positivism relies on truths that can be generalized to the whole. A study that focuses on the lived experience of marginalized individuals, however, cannot generalize findings to the whole because of the multiple realities or truths that each brings to the table (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; van Manen, 2001). According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), “truth is an evasive concept” (p. 9) because how one individual experiences a situation and describes it may be quite different from another’s experience of the same or similar situation.

Assumption Four of Positivism

Positivism assumes that a cause and effect relationship always exists in both social and natural phenomena – the concept of linear causality (Brown, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Positivist inquiry relies on the assumption that all action is the direct result of a specific cause, and that cause either precedes or develops simultaneously with the result. A study emphasizing the multiplicity and intersectionality⁵ of identity cannot assume there is a cause-effect relationship. Human experience, and its multiple realities tend to diminish the line between cause and effect

⁵ For fuller description of multiplicity and intersectionality see pages 71-72.

because of the numerous factors that intersect with one's identity at any given time (See FIGURE 2, p. 60). Therefore, conclusions that one factor or group of factors directly cause a specific behavior or experience are practically impossible (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

Assumption Five of Positivism

Finally, positivism asserts that inquiry is free from bias (Brown, 1989; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Foster, 1986; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Positivistic research claims that data is obtained through controlled, objective observation, and therefore, eliminates the influence of all extraneous variables and results in value-free inquiry. Some post-positivist philosophers and scholars assert that observation, however, is conducted by human actors, and therefore, must carry with it the values of that actor. In other words, the values and biases of the researcher are inherent throughout the research, and the result is value-bound inquiry (Bahm, 1971; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Brown, 1989; Giorgi, 1997; Joerger, 2005a; Krathwohl, 1980; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen, 2001). A qualitative study focusing on a marginal population, such as LG[BT] educational leaders, carries the values and biases of the researcher (See Prologue for researcher's values), and indeed, is value-laden. In sum, because of the limits of positivism and the purposes of this study, post-positivist methods are employed. The next large section discusses the theoretical perspectives that ground this post-positivistic study.

Value-ladenness of Inquiry

Post-positivist qualitative inquiry is the search for truth or in this case, multiple truths, and truth cannot be adequately examined without taking into account the researcher's personal value system (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that as early as 1971 researchers were beginning to recognize that it is not possible for inquiry to be value-free. Positivists assert that in order to find a single, tangible truth, researchers must be completely objective and ignore any degree of subjectivity. Bahm (1971), however, posited the implausibility of this notion because subjectivity and objectivity are interrelated. He stated, "'subject' and 'object' involve each other. Strictly speaking, there can be no object without a subject, and no subject without an object. That is, no knowledge exists apart from knowers. Knowers are subjects" (p. 393). Bahm furthered his position by pointing out that an individual's attitude is subjective and that "[w]ithout this subjective attitude, objectivity would be impossible" (p. 393).

If one supports Bahm's premise of the interrelationship between objectivity and subjectivity, then the likelihood of value-free inquiry becomes questionable. In fact, it is more plausible for inquiry to become value-laden than value-free. Each individual has a set of unique values influencing his/her interactions within a social context. With the researcher as the driving force of his/her inquiry, it stands to reason that the individual's value system is intricately woven throughout the inquiry process, and that awareness of this interplay is essential (Byrne, 1998; Gadamer, 1975, 1976; Lather, 1991; Moran, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the awareness of one's values and the

impact on his/her judgment cannot be denied. They stated, “Surely it is better to be aware of how one’s values can influence one’s judgment than to deny that such an influence could be occurring at all” (p. 185).

Gadamer referred to values as prejudices, “preconceived notions of things emanating from our past experience and socialization” (Byrne, 1998, p. 3). He advocated the necessity of researcher prejudice, “Rather than being an impediment to knowledge making, it is the researcher’s values that provide contextual meaning to their consumers” (Byrne, 1998, p. 3). (See Prologue). Grondin (1990), in his essay on Gadamer, explained the importance of understanding one’s prejudices: “For whomever pronounces himself or herself free of prejudices is all the more blindly exposed to their power. Prejudices will exercise their underground domination all the more strongly, and potentially distortingly, when denied or repressed” (p. 54).

The theoretical foundation guiding the inquiry process is bound by researcher values because s/he influences the interpretation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The value judgments of the researcher depict the methodological paradigm that is incorporated, including, but not limited to the purposive identification of the population, the questions to be asked, the research objectives, and the methods to be incorporated in data collection and analysis (Bahm, 1971; Krathwohl, 1980; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the cultural and contextual values have a direct impact on the inquiry process and the results obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Therefore, it is critical that the values of the researcher and the culture/context being researched are congruent with one another if actual truth is to be discovered. Heron

(1981) stated, “The idea that the researcher’s underlying value system can exclude, need not consult or consider or cooperate with the value system of the subjects, can only tend to generate alienated pseudo-truths about persons” (p. 33). Lincoln and Guba (1985) supported Heron’s premise when they addressed value resonance, suggesting that if the findings and interpretations are to be agreeable to all perspectives, personal values, the theoretical foundation, methodology, and cultural/contextual values must be consistent with and reinforce one another.

A strong movement toward the acceptance of qualitative and of value-laden inquiry has been prevalent over the past three decades, and a shadow has been cast on the positivistic belief of value-free inquiry in the world of natural and social sciences. Bahm (1971) suggested that it is self-contradictory to assume that an individual can enter into inquiry devoid of their own value system and be objective, without any degree of subjectivity. He concluded, “Science is not value-free. Science is value-full. Science is saturated with values. There is no aspect of science which is totally value-free and from which duties and obligations are completely absent” (p. 396).

As previously stated, the researcher brings his/her personal value system to the table at the onset of the inquiry process, and that value system remains the driving force throughout (Bahm, 1971; Byrne, 1998; Gadamer, 1976, 1975; Krathwohl, 1980; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moran, 2000). Researcher values are immersed in the theoretical foundation guiding the inquiry, and from here the research methods and design emerge.

Theoretical Perspectives Underlying Research Methods and Design

In order to fully understand the lifeworld of LG[BT] administrators, one must move from the philosophy of positivism into interpretivism, and more importantly, critical science. This study is informed by three bodies of literature: queer legal theory, critical phenomenology, and post-structural hermeneutics. This large section includes descriptions of these three literature sets and explanations of how they guide data collection and analysis.

Queer Legal Theory

Queer legal theory, which was borne out of critical theory, critical race theory, and post-modernism (Lugg, 2003a; Valdes, 1998), generates from philosophies and theories that seek “radical change from a subjectivist standpoint” and are “committed to a view of society which emphasizes the importance of overthrowing or transcending the limitations of existing social arrangements” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 32). Queer legal theory addresses the nature of at least two aspects of human identity a) intersectionality, and b) multiplicity. A unique interplay exists between these two aspects. First, layers of identity are intertwined or intersected as part of each individual and cannot be separated from one another without removing the individual’s identity. Valdes (1998) further described intersectionality as complementing multiplicity, in that, intersectionality recognizes “that these multiple features interact, or intersect, in both structural and situational ways to produce multifaceted and multilayered, or multidimensional social hierarchies” (p. 1420). Second, multiplicity encompasses all aspects of people’s lives as part of their identity. Identity is not only who we are, but also what we are, an

embodiment of simultaneous identities composed of multiple features including race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation to mention only a few. Together, intersectionality and multiplicity bring a multidimensional view of identity.

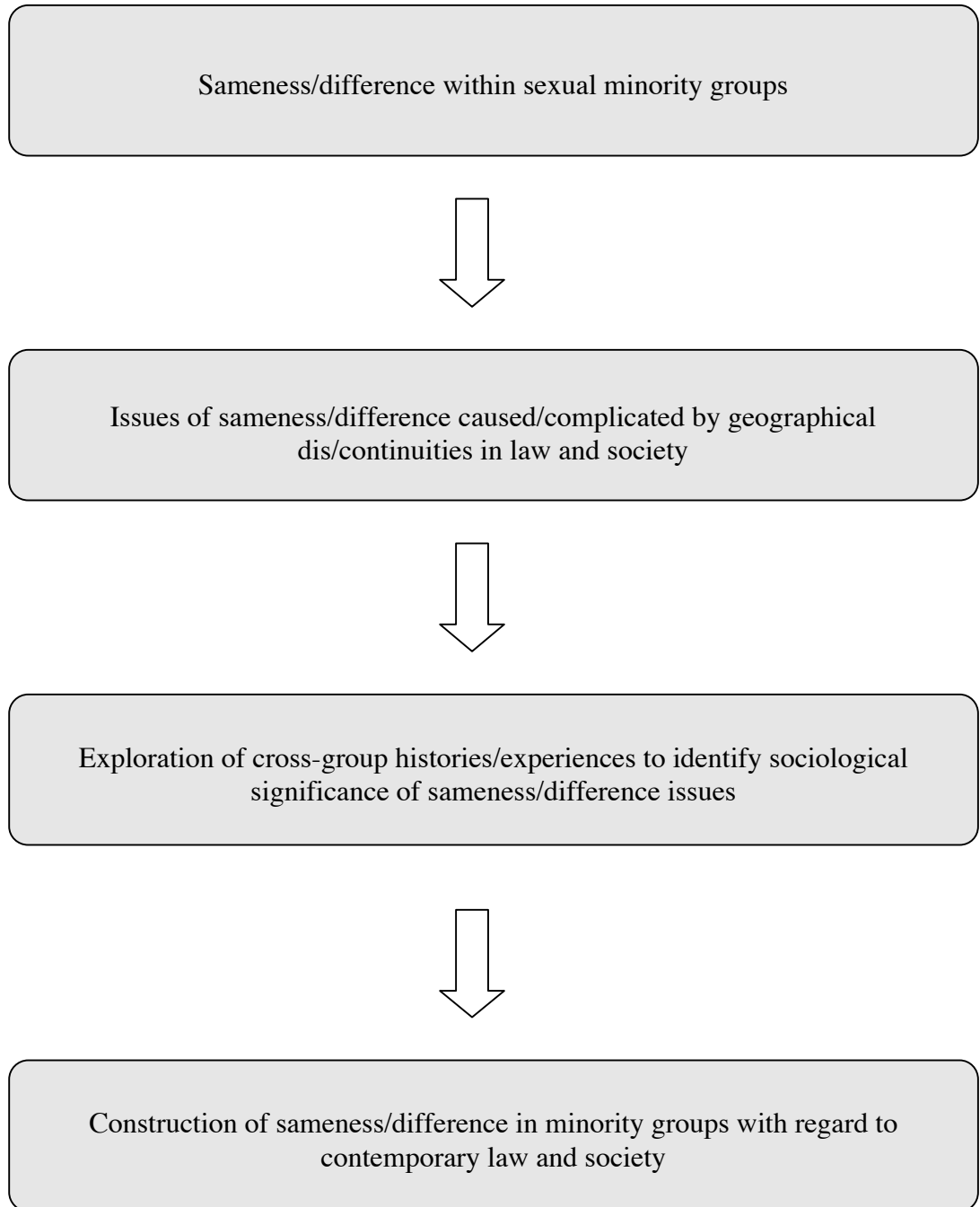
Valdes (1998) explained multidimensionality as being four-fold. First, it attempts to address the sameness and difference between and among sexual minority groups to better understand the social and legal significance with regard to the anti-subordination purpose of the LG[BT] movement. Second, it seeks to understand the implications of geographic regions on dis/continuities in law and society, highlighting the issues of sameness/difference that are caused or complicated by such dis/continuities. The third level connects law and power to all dimensions of sameness and difference. Finally, the fourth level, compares and contrasts similar social justice theories, such as critical race theory and feminist legal theory, to identify characteristics, strengths, and shortcomings that “help to construct [minority] groups in contemporary law and society” (Valdes, 1998).

Thus, multiplicity recognizes the complexity of identities and intersectionality recognizes the concomitant complexity of power relationships based on multiplicitous identities. In tandem, these two concepts bring a postmodern and multidimensional mindset to the analysis of law, power, and justice. (Valdes, 1998, p. 1420)

The multidimensionality and intersectionality of queer legal theory recognizes the uniqueness of each individual and his/her lived experience (See FIGURE 2, p. 60). Queer legal theory is useful for understanding and identifying some of the contextual factors

mentioned by the participants. Therefore, this study, while focused primarily on sameness, was informed by queer legal theory in order to capture the contextualized essence of LG[BT] educational leaders' experiences and the meaning attached to them (See FIGURE 3, p. 74).

FIGURE 3. Guiding Principles of Queer Legal Theory



Critical Phenomenology

Phenomenology, a human science approach to inquiry, is “firmly rooted in the German idealist tradition” of interpretivism and attempts to understand the world from the point of view of the actors directly involved in the social process (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Phenomenological research always begins in the lifeworld, “the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on in . . . a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 2001, p. 9).

In its pure Husserlian or transcendental form, phenomenology, allows one “to come to know with” LG[BT] educational leaders the essence or whatness of their lived experience. Husserlian phenomenology, however, does not bring one to, the *verstehen* (understanding) of the impact of contextual formal policies/laws and contextual informal actions/attitudes of others on the lived experiences of LG[BT] educational leaders. Existential phenomenology, the study of lived experiences as one’s reality (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998; van Manen, 2001), moves away from transcendental consciousness and a step closer, yet still falls short of context.

In order to approach a deeper *verstehen* of the lifeworld of LG[BT] administrators and the perceived impact of the context within which they experience the phenomenon of their lives is moved to a critical level. Welton (1987) explained the need for a critical phenomenology:

The emergence of new fields of empirical research, the concern with the possibility of political theory, and the confrontation of a theory

of intentionality with our contemporary appreciation of the depth of language are some of the factors that have moved phenomenology beyond its first formulations in the early work of Husserl and Heidegger . . . phenomenology becomes critical when it discovers that a simple, reflective apprehension of “the things themselves” is not possible, and that analysis involves “dismantling” of what would otherwise remain buried, an interrogation of what would otherwise not speak. (p. xxi)

Because critical phenomenology involves a “dismantling” of the multiple dimensions of one’s lived experience, it is a valuable method for addressing the complexities of this research (See FIGURE 2, p. 60).

In its critical form, phenomenology seeks not only to understand, but to improve society, as a whole through simultaneous action and reflection (Wals, 1993). Unlike the more traditional phenomenological methods, critical phenomenology allows for the “phenomenal articulations of active life” (Taminiaux, 1987, p.90). The ability to make these “phenomenal articulations” is necessary if we are to understand and attach meaning to one’s lived experience in light of the contextual forces that surround him/her. Cognitive conception alone, cannot make sense of the world, but rather it must be in conjunction with lived meaning and the concepts exhibited through one’s actions and non-actions (Freire, 1994; Taminiaux, 1987; Wals, 1993).

Critical phenomenology incorporates elements of both action research and phenomenology, in that, the researcher assumes the role of both observer/participant and

interpreter (Wals, 1993). The key here is that the researcher is afforded the opportunity to be actively involved in the interactions, thus shedding greater light on the actions and non-actions of the participants. Active participation also facilitates a building of trust between researcher and participants which is “crucial for creating an atmosphere that allows communication to take place in a relatively undistorted fashion”(Wals, 1993, p. 6). This, in turn, adds a degree of “purity” to the text and greater validity to the interpretations.

The purpose of this study is emancipatory in nature and lends itself to critical phenomenology together with queer legal theory and post-structural hermeneutics. Like its counterparts, critical phenomenology “does not reduce people to clusters of interacting variables and does not impede communication”, it does not merely “attempt to learn **about** [original emphasis] people, but to come to know **with** [original emphasis] them the reality which challenges them . . . [it] can help in producing knowledge with emancipatory relevance that can promote autonomy of the individual and the solidarity of the entire community . . .”(Wals, 1993, p. 5).

Post-Structural Hermeneutics

As an inquiry method, hermeneutics has evolved into several diverse hermeneutic systems, from the conservative to the radical (Brown & Heggs, 2005; Demeterio III, 2001a) resulting in the need for a more encompassing definition. Demeterio (2001a) offers one such definition, “hermeneutics can be understood as a theory, methodology, and praxis of interpretation that is geared towards the recapturing of meaning of a text, and text analogues that are distant in time and culture, or that are blanketed by ideology

and false consciousness” (p. 1). Demeterio suggests that hermeneutics is the systematic means by which one sifts through the multiple layers in order to uncover the underlying meaning of language.

The complex analysis required to unmask the underlying meaning in the text and identify common themes in the lived experiences of LG[BT] leaders cannot be accomplished through the use of phenomenological hermeneutics, which focuses purely on capturing the truth of text as it is. Nor will dialectical hermeneutics, emphasizing the existential meaning, or critical hermeneutics, focusing on the truth/meaning of text free from ideological distortions, suffice. To find the meaning of text and capture the lived experience, the multiple layers must be uncovered, the text freed from as many ideological distortions as possible, and its existential meaning exposed. Post-structural hermeneutics has potential to accomplish this complex task.

Post-structural hermeneutics, deeply seated in the philosophies of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, adheres to and combines the ideas of both critical and dialectical hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics is emancipatory because it is designed to overcome the oppressive nature of the social construction of knowledge and recognizes the conditions of freedom (Brown & Heggs, 2005; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Demeterio III, 2001b; Foster, 1986; Habermas, 1971). Like critical hermeneutics, post-structural hermeneutics is also emancipatory because it “aims to diagnose the hidden pathology of texts and free them from their ideological distortions” (Demeterio III, 2001a). Post-structural and dialectical hermeneutics share the common purpose of capturing the

meaning of the here and now rather than a “single and unified meaning” (Demeterio III, 2001a, p. 5).

In post-structural hermeneutics, the individual is viewed as decentered, in that, we are merely intersection points of the various socio-economic and cultural forces that shape us (Demeterio III, 2001a). This viewpoint is consistent with the concepts of multidimensionality and intersectionality posited in queer legal theory. In other words, the individual is an intersection of inherent qualities such as race, gender, and ethnicity, as well as, at the intersections of external forces of culture, socio-economics, societal values, and politics (Demeterio III, 2001a, 2001b; Valdes, 1998). (See FIGURE 2, p. 60). Post-structural hermeneutics in combination with critical phenomenology, allows for the un-layering of the multiple dimensions of an individual and the participants’ text thereby captures the existential meaning of the lifeworld of LG[BT] educational leaders as it occurs within the context of formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes.

Theoretical Perspectives Driving Data Collection and Analysis

FIGURE 4 (p. 82), illustrates the elements of critical phenomenology and post-structural hermeneutics, as well as the aspects that are drawn from both for use in data collection and analysis. The four aspects utilized are: 1) researcher as observer/participant, 2) elements of identity, 3) identify emergent themes of commonality, and 4) emancipation of participants. The researcher as participant/observer aspect is important to both data collection and analysis. The three remaining “shared” aspects of critical phenomenology and post-structural hermeneutics, although important to data collection, are critical for data analysis.

Researcher as observer/participant.

During data collection, the researcher observed the interactions between the participants, as well as interacted with the participants, in the chat room and individual interviews. Decisions regarding the extent of researcher participation in chat room discussions were driven by participant interaction at the time of immersion in the setting. Conversational (van Manen, 2001) and dialogical (Lather, 1991) interviewing techniques were incorporated during the individual interviews to develop conversational relationships and encourage reciprocity.

The freedom afforded the researcher to move between observer and participant during both chat room sessions and individual interviews allowed for deeper understandings of the texts and added trustworthiness to the interpretations during data analysis. Therefore, flexibility within the design was crucial, for design modifications evolved as relevant themes emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Elements of identity.

The elements of identity were viewed as challenges to the *verstehen* of lived experience. In other words, both the multiplicity of one's identity – race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, and the interplay of the external forces – culture, societal views, and politics, were taken into account, and un-layered, in order to come to understand the lifeworld of LG[BT] educational leaders.

Identify emergent themes of commonality.

Identifying emergent themes was not as relevant to data collection as it was to data analysis, however, design modifications occurred as relevant themes began to emerge (see discussions of High-Structure Data Collection and Low-Structure Data Collection, pp. 98-104). During data analysis, as identity was un-layered and external forces identified, true themes of commonality within this marginalized population emerged.

Emancipation of participants.

The final aspect – emancipation of participants, is important because it further exposes the oppressive nature of the social construction of knowledge around LG[BT] educational leaders (Brown & Heggs, 2005; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Demeterio III, 2001a; Foster, 1986; Habermas, 1971). The use of a secure virtual laboratory for data collection is, in itself, emancipatory because it has the potential to empower participants, enabling them to speak openly about their lived experiences while remaining anonymous. Furthermore, as emergent themes were identified in participant text and documents, during data analysis, the researcher came to know with this marginalized group, the reality that challenges them. This additional knowledge has the potential to “promote autonomy of the [LG(BT)] individual and solidarity of the entire community” (Wals, 1993, p. 5).

FIGURE 4. Theoretical Perspectives Driving Data Collection and Analysis

Critical Phenomenology	Aspects Drawn From Both For This Study	Post-structural Hermeneutics
Researcher as observer/ participant	Researcher as observer/ participant	Researcher as observer/ participant
Identification of challenges	Identify the interplay of external forces on identity (Cycles of Fear)	Identification of multiplicity/intersectionality of identity Un-layering of the multiple dimensions of identity
“Purity” of the text	Not Applicable	“Purification” of the text
Identify themes of commonality and difference	Identify emergent themes of commonality	Identify themes of commonality and difference Capturing the essence of the here and now
Emancipatory	Emancipatory	Emancipatory

Research Design

Max van Manen, in his 1975 article “An Exploration of Alternative Research Orientations in Social Education”, expressed his concern about the narrowness of positivistic research methods with regard to social science inquiry:

The theoretical base of empirical-analytical science is too narrow, not taking into account a more complete concept of social science inquiry,

and it is inappropriate simply for the reasons that it is essentially not critical in a more emancipatory sense. Emancipatory awareness leads to the possibility of self-determination with some degree of freedom from blind psychological, political or economic compulsions . . . It involves inquiry into social origins, consequences, and functions of knowledge. (p.17)

Because within the context of formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of society, the purpose of this study was to come to understand the commonalities of the personal and professional lived experiences of LG[BT] educational leaders, qualitative research methods were used (See FIGURE 2, p. 60). The use of qualitative methods allows one to bypass restrictions imposed by the empirical-analytical tradition of positivism. Bypassing these restrictions opens the door to a critical inquiry that embraces the emancipatory awareness necessary to come to understand the lived experience of LG[BT] educational leaders and the implications for social and political change that may emerge from their conversations.

In phenomenological-hermeneutic research, the lived experience, or lifeworld, is the source of all data, the “heart” of the research. Van Manen (2001) explains:

The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in context of the whole human experience. (p. 62)

The question may then be asked – *How do we “borrow” other people’s experiences?*

Qualitative research methods have traditionally used such vehicles as, the personal interview, written responses, participant observations, and case studies, to name a few (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen, 2001).

Phenomenological research often follows along these same lines, however, has a deeper purpose and “remains oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon . . . as an essentially human experience”(van Manen, 2001, p. 67). This study will follow a phenomenological-hermeneutic path by incorporating written responses, participant observation, conversational interviews – “a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience” (van Manen, 2001, p. 66), and dialogic interviews – “an interactive, dialogic [interview] that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher [to] encourage reciprocity” (Lather, 1991, p. 60). Once the experiences have been gathered, the text will undergo deep phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis to uncover themes of commonality in the spoken and unspoken text.

The overall research design is structured around the identified problem and incorporates Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) qualitative genres of individual lived experience and language and communication. This large section describes the design of this study in three sub-sections: 1) research setting, 2) study participant selection, and 3) data collection and analysis.

Research Setting: The Potential for Technology

Society has forced the LG[BT] community to live in the “closet” for centuries and hostility toward this marginalized group has never been more prevalent than in 20th century United States history (Chauncey, 1994). Even now, despite recent victories in the LG[BT] civil rights movement, the “harsh legal, political, and social environmentp remains (Lugg, 2003b, p. 79). The ramifications of “outing” one’s self, particularly as an educational leader, continues to be a great fear even for those living in states with sexual orientation anti-discrimination statutes (Fraynd & Capper, 2003). Not surprisingly, there is a dearth of research in the area of LG[BT] educational leaders.

Maintaining anonymity for LG[BT] leaders is more often than not, critical, in order to protect their careers and personal well being. Therefore, participating in a study of LG[BT] educational leaders poses a major threat and could be viewed as professional and even personal suicide. Given these concerns, technology, and more specifically, computer mediated communication (CMC), comes into play. Because of the prejudices that exist toward differing sexual orientation, CMC, as a tool for exploration and research of sexual identities may be invaluable. A “positive aspect of virtuality and the presence of online communities is that people can now present themselves without fear of persecution The internet is arguably the most powerful tool that . . . people with alternative sexualities have ever had” (*Online Identity*, 2006, p. 4). Through the use of CMC, and in this study, Brunner’s Experiential Simulations (Brunner et al., 2003; Brunner et al., 2002; Brunner, Opsal, & Oliva 2006), it was possible to maintain total anonymity of

participants, while at the same time allowing for the robustness and flavor of the discussion (Burnett & Buerkle, 2004).

CMC expands the means and opportunity for individuals to interact by connecting them across space and time (Ye, 2006). In her research of online communities, Ye (2006) identified anonymity and self-representation as two characteristics of CMC, she stated: “characteristics of online communities, such as anonymity and self-representation, make these social groups a welcome alternative” (p. 3). The anonymity of CMC may actually enhance interaction and participation because of the low-threat nature of the virtual environment (Flanagin, Tityaamornwong, O'Connor, & Seibold, 2002). Flanagin, et al. (2002) reported that CMC enables full and equal interaction between individuals because they “escape traditional social constraints that occur in face-to-face interaction” (p. 67). The anonymity supported by CMC provides a safety net for individuals, allowing them to interact without fear (*Online Identity*, 2006).

This *research* included the continental United States and used two structures of data gathering: 1) High-structure – Experiential Simulations or ES[®] (Brunner, 2000), a web-based, virtual-environment technology to insure confidentiality and anonymity, and 2) Low-structure – individual interviews whereby participants chose to reveal their identities to the researcher. ES[®] is an innovative research process designed, a) to study power/identity, and b) to provide comprehensive anonymity for participants. ES[®] – a technologically delivered experience allowed participants to interact anonymously with each other and the researcher in virtual environments through the use of chat, quiz, and private/public messaging tools. Some participants, however, required a smorgasbord of

options, hence, low-structure design. This design provided participants the option of choosing traditional interview methods – in-person, telephone, or written response.

Study Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was used to select the study's participants. Purposive sampling has the potential to be representative of a given population. Eisner (1991), as cited in Wals (1993) explained, "every particular is also a sample of a larger class. In this sense, what has been learned about a particular can have relevance for the class to which it belongs. The theme embedded in the particular situation, extends beyond the situation itself" (p. 8). Due to the nature of this study and the unique characteristics of the target population, purposive sampling had potential, although did not guarantee, to result in a representative sample of a marginalized population. A national call for participants was posted on appropriate posting sites and list serves identified by "safe" contacts, associates, and open LG[BT] educational leaders. Names and email addresses of safe contacts were included in the postings. Interested participants emailed safe contacts. In this section, the two layers of study participants, 1) safe contacts, and 2) volunteer participants, are described. The actual sample population was 17 LG[BT] participants.

Description of Safe Contact/Participants

LG[BT] educational leaders are the identified population for the study. Due to the heterosexist and homophobic nature of education, LG[BT] school leaders are virtually invisible (Blount, 1996, 2003; Capper, 1999; Chauncey, 1994; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Pinar, 1998), making access to this invisible group extremely difficult. For this

reason, it was critical that a select group of individuals with whom LG[BT] leaders would feel safe, be identified – hence, safe contacts.

Safe contacts are LG[BT] (who are out to the researcher) educational leaders chosen by the researcher as intermediaries for the sole purpose of maintaining participant anonymity throughout this study. Nine safe contacts were selected throughout the continental United States prior to the posted call for participants. Safe contacts also had the option to be anonymous participants in the study and could assign themselves an ID code and password if they identified as LG[BT] educational leaders (the researcher then remained unaware of what IDs and passwords were given to participants). If a safe contact participated, he/she informed the researcher of the intent to participate through email correspondence (see *invitations to participate*, p. 96). Safe contacts were the only individuals to know the actual identity of the study participants choosing to participate strictly in the secure website.

Description of Volunteer Participants

The second layer of volunteer participants are individuals whom identified themselves as out or closeted LG[BT] educational leaders. They responded to an invitation to participate in the study by emailing the safe contact listed on the posted invitation. These participants were next contacted by individual safe contacts with an informed consent form, and an assigned secure ID code and password to enter the locked website. Only safe contacts knew which participants were connected to IDs and passwords.

Before topical data gathering, each of the study participants were asked several demographic questions. The 17 participants were White (non-Hispanic) of which ten identified as gay males and seven identified as lesbian females. None of the participants identified themselves as bisexual, transgender, or other. Participants indicated that they were in the following education positions: assistant superintendent, elementary principal, middle school principal, assistant high school principal, high school principal, program coordinator, and university professor of education leadership. One participant has been both a public school administrator and university professor.

As a group, three had 6-10 years of experience in education, two had 11-15 years, seven had 16 to 20 years, and five had over 20 years. Further, in terms of the number of years in administrative roles, four had 1-5 years, seven had 6-10 years, five had 11-15 years, and one had 16-20 years. Of the participants identifying as public school administrators, seven worked in urban districts and eight in suburban districts in the Northeast, Midwest, and Southwest. Participants identifying as professors worked for universities located in metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this section, four primary subsections will be described: 1) pre-data collection, 2) high-structure data collection, 3) low-structure data collection, and 4) data analysis and interpretation.

Pre-Data Collection

This section includes two subsections: 1) initial procedural steps, and 2) initial work with participants.

Initial procedural steps.

Several simultaneous procedural steps were taken prior to beginning the data collection, 1) work with LG[BT] consultants, 2) identification of safe contacts, 3) website development, 4) safe contact manual and technical orientation manual development, and 5) LG[BT] educational leader pre-study interview. Each step is described in turn.

Work with LG[BT] consultants. Two LG[BT] individuals, a public school administrator and a non-educator, were chosen by the researcher to serve as consultants throughout the study. These individuals advised the researcher regarding language used in all communications with the safe contacts and study participants, including, but not limited to the website, manuals, demographic survey, and discussion reflection/interview questions. The LG[BT] school administrator also assisted in the search for volunteers for the pre-study interview, safe contacts, and potential participants. These consultants had the option to be a safe contact and/or study participant.

Identification of safe contacts. As previously mentioned, nine safe contacts, were selected by the researcher, based on their status as LG[BT] educational leaders, prior to the posted call for participants. The researcher relied on LG[BT] school leaders (who are out to the researcher) as safe contacts. The researcher personally discussed the purpose of this study with this select group and asked that they serve in the capacity of safe contact. In turn, this select group of individuals posted an invitation on appropriate list serves and posting areas. Safe contacts were sent consent forms and upon indicating their informed consent (via email), were added to the safe contact list. The researcher kept identifying information for each safe contact in a locked file drawer.

Website development – High-structure design. A secured website was developed using Brunner’s Experiential Simulations (ES[®]) and the University of Minnesota WebCT Vista system. Study participants were given a private ID code and password so they could access the secure website and remain anonymous. They needed a computer with internet connection and a web browser to access the study website. The Technical Orientation Manual provided specific system and browser requirements. The home page included contact information for the researcher (private messaging only), the researcher’s advisor, and technical assistance, the technology requirements, and navigation buttons. Study participants could move from the home page to the various sections of the website. The study site was divided into three main sections comprised of both public and private messaging spaces, a) general information, b) scheduled assignments, and c) communications.

The first section of the website, *General Information*, is comprised of three sub-sections, 1) information, 2) resources, and 3) initial interview. Both the information and resources sub-sections are public messaging tools available to all study participants. The Information sub-section includes the contact information that appears on the home page, the study abstract, chat and message instructions, and schedules for the live discussions and reflections. Chat instructions outline the protocol followed during live discussions in order to maintain anonymity and the integrity of the study, while the message instructions detail the procedure to follow when posting documents and sending/receiving private messages. The Resources sub-section, contains all study documents, as well as links to

the University of Minnesota and WebVista resources. Finally, the Initial Interview provides a direct link to the online interview.

Second, *Scheduled Assignments* section of the website is divided into 1) sessions/sets of questions, 2) individual interview, and 3) discussion transcripts. Sessions/Sets of Questions, a public messaging tool, is comprised of date and time-released instructions for each live discussion and the guiding questions for the discussion. In addition, this sub-section includes the reflection questions, also date and time-released, that correspond with each live discussion and the instructions to post the reflection responses to the private message board. Second, Individual Interview includes instructions on scheduling an online interview with the researcher, procedures to follow during the interview, and a separate link to the interview calendar. It also includes instructions on scheduling an in-person, telephone, or written response interview, a link added later in the study to be used in the low-structure design (to be discussed later in this chapter). The final sub-section of *Scheduled Assignments*, Discussion Transcripts, is a private message tool used to post discussion and online interview transcripts. As a private message tool, transcripts posted by the researcher are member-released and can be viewed only by the participants involved in a given discussion or interview.

The third section of the website, *Communications*, includes the following sub-sections: 1) documents of interest, 2) private messages, and 3) live discussions. Documents of Interest is a public message board and the only place in the website where participants could post documents for all participants access. Both Private Messages and Live Discussions are private message tools. The Private Messages sub-section functions

as an inter-website email which allows participants to post responses to reflection questions or contact the researcher. Private messaging is ID code and password sensitive, therefore only the participant and the researcher are able to access the information in a private message space. Finally, Live Discussions comprises the chat rooms for real time online discussions. The chat rooms are ID code sensitive allowing participants to only enter the chat room their ID code is assigned to.

Safe contact manual and technical orientation manual development. Two manuals were developed for use during this study, a) safe contact manual, and b) technical orientation manual. The Safe Contact Manual described the purpose of the study and outlined the pre-study responsibilities of the safe contact, as well as their on-going responsibilities to the participants. The manual provided a step-by-step guide and detailed description of each task performed by the safe contact, as well as the message to be emailed to each participant with their ID code and password. In addition, the manual included descriptions of all electronic documents, including the ID codes/passwords and safe contact/participant timelines.

The Technical Orientation Manual was used by both the safe contacts and participants to guide them through the website and answer “frequently asked” questions. The manual included: a) introduction to the site, b) initial survey, c) study information, d) communications, and e) final preparations for online discussions. Introduction to the Site described the basic hardware and specific software necessary to access the website. Web addresses for recommended system and browser configurations and the University of Minnesota myU portal, as well as telephone numbers for the University of Minnesota

Help Line were provided. In addition, detailed instructions for accessing and navigating within the WebCT Vista study website were provided. The Initial Survey section provided a description of and instructions for completing the survey. Study Information included an overview of the study, its purpose, and instructions for touring the *Resources* section of the website. The Communications section described the website's *Documents of Interest, Private Messages, Live Discussions, and Discussion Transcripts*. Instructions for touring and practicing within these areas were also provided. Finally, instructions on preparing for the first online discussion, including posting of documents, technical training with the safe contact, and a Summary Checklist, were detailed in the Final Preparations for Online Discussions section.

LG[BT]school administrator pre-study interview. Two LG[BT]public school administrators (out to the researcher) participated in a pre-study interview with the researcher. Each pre-study interview participant was provided with background information for the study, purpose of the study and the research questions. The researcher conducted an individual, face-to-face, open-ended interview with each participant at a location of his/her choosing. The pre-study interviews focused on the four research questions, with the intent of gathering information and ideas for the development an initial set of potential questions for the final study participant interviews.

Initial work with participants.

Upon completion of these initial procedural steps, the following occurred: 1) safe contact training/material disbursement, 2) invitations to participate posted and volunteers email safe contacts, 3) technical manual disbursement and website tour, 4) initial survey,

and 5) chat room assignments. This section provides a detailed description of each step in sequential order.

Safe contact training/material disbursement. Training of safe contacts was done by the researcher, either in person or via telephone conversations. Prior to the training, safe contacts received electronic copies, in portable document format (PDF) of the Safe Contact and Technical Orientation Manuals and asked to familiarize themselves with the content of each. The training session took the safe contact step-by-step through each task s/he performed. Particular attention was given to training these individuals on

- a) explanation of and answering questions regarding the study participant consent form,
- b) assigning ID codes and passwords, and
- c) maintaining all identifying information in a secured location.

Technical training was also provided, to familiarize the safe contact with each section of the study website, including a practice chat room session with the researcher. Safe contact training was necessary to ensure the regulations governing human subject research was followed at all times, and the rights and anonymity of participants were protected.

Following successful completion of the training session, individuals were provided with the materials necessary in their roles as safe contacts. The materials included: a) letter of introduction for participants, b) participant consent form, c) consent form explanation, and d) timelines for safe contacts and participants. Safe contacts received all materials electronically as Microsoft Word and PDF documents.

Invitations to participate posted and volunteers email safe contacts. Safe contacts posted invitations on appropriate posting sites and appropriate list serves from their

personal and professional circles. Potential participants responded to a safe contact via email. Safe contacts provided the potential participants with a letter of introduction from the researcher, consent form, and consent form explanation. The safe contact responded then followed-up via email, telephone call, or personal meeting with each potential participant to answer any questions they had regarding the study, consent form, and precautions taken to assure anonymity, including “informed” consent. Informed consent was explained as an additional means to insure participant anonymity, which did not require participants to sign or return the actual consent form, only to respond to the safe contact via email or personal contact stating they agree to participate in the study. Upon receipt of informed consent, the safe contact assigned each participant, including themselves, if they chose to be a participant, an ID code and password which allowed access to the secured website and maintained participant anonymity throughout the study. ID codes were the only identification of those participating in the high-structure study design. Safe contacts kept all informed consent notifications with corresponding ID codes and passwords in a locked drawer throughout the duration of the study.

Technical orientation manual disbursement and website tour. Study participants received an electronic copy of the technical orientation manual from their safe contact. Participants were instructed to read the manual thoroughly and direct any questions to their safe contacts. Safe contacts sent, via email or telephone call to the researcher any questions they were unable to answer. The high-structure study participants toured the website and familiarized themselves with each section. Once familiar with the website, participants completed the initial survey.

Initial survey. The purpose of the initial survey was to gather demographic information for later data analysis. All participants, whether participating in the high or low-structure design, completed the initial survey. The survey gathered the following demographics: 1) gender, 2) sexual orientation, 3) race/ethnicity, 4) administrative position, 5) years experience in education, 6) years experiences as an educational leader, 7) general geographic region of residence, 8) educational institution classification (i.e., urban, suburban, rural), and 9) existence of sexual orientation non-discrimination statutes/policies in participant's state and district of work and/or residence.

The study participants in the high-structure design accessed the initial survey on the study website and their answers were be posted on the private message board. The use of *Private Messages* for this high-structure survey ensured an additional layer of anonymity because the only individuals who were be able to access information from the survey *and* associate it with an ID code (but no other identifiers) was the researcher and the individual study participant. The low-structure initial interview was conducted between the researcher and participant before or during the study interview.

Chat room assignments. The researcher compiled and reviewed data from demographic surveys for the initial purpose of making chat room assignments. Demographic information was important to chat room assignments in order to ensure diversity within each chat room and facilitate "experience-rich" discussions. When assigning study participants to a chat room, all identity elements were taken into consideration in an attempt to equalize the "conversation field" and enhance participation. Once assigned to a chat room, study participants were only able to enter the

chat room to which they had been assigned. Prior to chat room assignments, the study participants were able to view a chat room, but not interact in one.

High-Structure Data Collection

Traditional data collection techniques, such as focus groups, interviews, and participant reciprocity, were employed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lather, 1991). Because of the nature of this unique study population, it was necessary to develop two levels of design – high-structure and low-structure. High-structure design maintained the highest level of anonymity for participants in that their identities remained anonymous to all (except safe contacts), including the researcher. The low-structure design was born from participant needs and required a layer of anonymity to be removed. The low-structure design and data collection is discussed in a later section. A total of ten participants were part of the high-structure design. Two of these participants also contributed data within the low-structure design.

Participant data for the high-structure design was collected in the secure/locked website through 1) chat room discussions and reflections, and 2) individual online interviews. All data gathered during the high-structure study design was stored in a secure website, and the researcher was the only individual to have access to the website and complete data set.

Chat room discussions.

Participants in the high-structure design interacted with one another during 2-hour chat room discussions. A total of three discussions in two separate chat rooms occurred. One chat room group had only one discussion, and the second group had two chat room

discussions. All discussions were guided by research questions one, two, and three. Study participants were reminded to avoid statements, during the chats that could jeopardize their anonymity. In keeping with phenomenological techniques, conversations began with a researcher-posed question and were further guided by participant response (van Manen, 2001). The researcher facilitated each chat room discussion, encouraging participation by all, and maintaining the focus of conversations on lived experiences of the participants without guiding the conversation in a predetermined direction.

Reflection on the chat room discussions. Following each chat room discussion, study participants were asked to post answers to discussion reflection questions to the online private message board. The reflection questions elicited information related to the comfort level of the study participants while in the chat room, as well as their reflections on the chat room experience and the discussion itself. Only one study participant posted answers to the reflection questions.

After chat session one, the participant answered these questions related to his current experience in the private message space:

1. What was your experience of the chat? How did anonymity affect your participation?
2. How are your own experiences alike or different than others in Session 1?
3. Related to the Session 1 topic, describe any moments when you thought: “I could have...”, “I would have...”, and/or “I should have...”.
4. Please make additional comments, clarifications, or suggestions, contribute ideas, or pose questions.

After chat session two, the participant answered these questions related to formal/informal context and his chat room experience in the private message space:

1. Describe anything during Session 2 that resonated with you and that you feel is particularly important.
2. During Session 2, what did you learn about yourself that surprised you? What did you learn about others that surprised you?
3. As you reflect on the discussion during Session 2, what is your perception of the impact of formal context (policy/law) and informal context (actions and attitudes) on the personal and professional lives of LG[BT]educational leaders, as a whole?
4. Please make additional comments, clarifications, or suggestions, contribute ideas, or pose questions.

Individual interviews.

Following the phenomenological hermeneutic method, the individual interview served a dual purpose: 1) to gather additional experiential narrative which may lead to a richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon, and 2) to develop a conversational relationship with the participant about the meaning of the experience (van Manen, 2001). A dialogic or conversational interview technique was used because it had the potential to create a level of comfort between the interviewer and the interviewee leading to a deeper sharing of the meaning attached to experiences (Lather, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; van Manen, 2001).

Marshall & Rossman (2006) explained this method of interviewing not only helps to uncover participants' views, but also respects how they frame and structure their

responses. Conversational interviews allow for the participant's perspective to "unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective)" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). In addition, dialogic or conversational interviews encourage reciprocity, a give and take, or sharing of meaning between the interviewer and the interviewee (Lather, 1991).

Upon completion of the chat room sessions, the researcher conducted individual interviews with each of the high-structure study participants via the chat room. After the first chat room discussion, participants were asked to schedule a time for the individual interview with the researcher. Dates and times for interviews were posted on the calendar section of the website. Study participants went to the website calendar and entered their ID code for the date and time they chose for their individual interview. The study participant interviews began two weeks following the final chat room discussion and continued until all high-structure participants were interviewed.

Interviews occurred in the participants' chat room at their designated time with the study participant and researcher being the only individuals in the chat room throughout the duration of the interview. The chat room was a secure site for the interviews because the participant was able to maintain their anonymity and should other individuals inadvertently enter the chat room during an interview, their presence could be immediately detected (note: previously existing chat text is not visible when a person first enters the chat space). No other individuals entered the chat room during the interview sessions.

Individual interviews were about two hours in length. Four guiding interview questions/probes were developed from the chat room discussions, as well as the pre-study interviews discussed earlier. The guiding questions/probes asked of each participant were:

1. Please tell me about your experience and the factors that encouraged or discouraged your “coming out” – personally and professionally.
2. Others have talked about strength, power, and hetero-privilege. What are your thoughts and experiences regarding these topics, as they relate to your sexual identity, as a student, teacher, and leader?
3. A friend once told me that the laws protect LG[BT] individuals from the “big” things, but they do not protect against the discriminatory actions and attitudes encountered on a daily basis. Please share your thoughts on that statement.
4. In one of the chat room conversations, someone said, “I was a gay child in the system. Why wouldn’t I have gay teachers and administrators?” Please share your thoughts on this.

As the researcher, I ensured the research questions and further questions/ probes, not the technique, guided the interview (van Manen, 2001). Participants were encouraged to tell their personal life stories. I encouraged participants to stay as close to the experience as lived by allowing time for their responses, remaining very concrete, and asking for specific examples or situations. Appropriate probes were used as needed, and varied according to participant response.

Low-Structure Data Collection

Data collection procedures included low-structure data collection for those who either could not or did not wish to participate in the high-structure data collection design. It was immediately apparent some individuals could not commit to a designated date/time for a discussion, and others were unwilling to risk identity exposure, even in a secure/locked site. However, these individuals were willing to risk identifying themselves to the researcher in order to participate in this study. The participants' choice not to participate in the high-structure design, and their willingness to reveal their identity to the researcher was the foundation for the low-structure plan, an individual interview process by which participants chose in-person, telephone, or written response interviews only. Participants were informed that should they chose one of these options, a layer of anonymity would be removed, as direct contact with the researcher would disclose their identity to the researcher. They were also assured that the researcher, like the safe contact, would hold their identity in strictest confidence, forever.

Seven participants chose the low-structure design and two, whom had already participated in the high-structure plan, wished to continue their participation, in low-structure, to complete their original interview or add to their discussion/interview in a much more informal setting. The remaining seven participants chose the low-structure plan with four choosing telephone interviews and three in-person interviews. For these participants, the research questions were interwoven in the guiding interview questions and personal interviews commenced.

Three primary open-ended guiding questions were used for low-structure design interviews. In addition, the four guiding questions from the high-structure design (p. 102) were also incorporated. Appropriate probes were used when needed, for clarification or to encourage the participants to share about particular experiences. The guiding questions used for low-structure interviews were:

1. How have your past experiences as an LG[BT] student and teacher, and your current experiences, related to your sexual identity, impacted or informed your personal, and professional life?
2. What are your experiences and perceptions regarding the influence of formal laws and policies, and informal actions and attitudes of others on your personal, and professional life?
3. Given your experiences, related to your sexual identity, how could support for LG[BT] students, teachers, and administrators in public schools be improved?

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data set, in accordance with critical phenomenology and post-structural hermeneutics, was dissected to isolate the elements of identity (Demeterio III, 2001; Taminioux, 1987; Valdes, 1998). A critical analysis of the transcripts from each chat room discussion, reflection question responses, and individual interviews were conducted and emergent themes of commonality identified. Queer legal theory, critical phenomenology, and post-structural hermeneutics informed the data collection, while critical phenomenology and post-structural hermeneutics informed data analysis. The

data analysis is discussed in three subsections: 1) narrative texts, 2) emergent themes, and 3) data coding.

Narrative Texts

Text from the chat room discussions, reflection question responses, and individual interview transcripts were analyzed using the aspects drawn from critical phenomenology and post-structural hermeneutics (see FIGURE 4, p. 82). Data from the initial interviews assisted with un-layering the multiplicities of identity, and this, in combination with the text, itself, identified the external forces in play for each participant. Upon completion of this complex task, emergent themes of commonality were identified.

Emergent Themes

The essence or meaning of a phenomenon, like the identity of an individual, is multi-dimensional and multi-layered (Lather, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Valdes, 1998; van Manen, 2001). To uncover the essence of a phenomenon described in text, the researcher must visualize the text in terms of structures of meaning or themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; van Manen, 2001). Van Manen (2001) stated “phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (p. 79). Therefore, in phenomenological hermeneutic research, it is essential to identify the various themes that emerge from narrative text.

Van Manen (2001) described three possible approaches to isolating phenomenological themes in narrative text: 1) wholistic, 2) selective, and 3) detailed. The wholistic approach attends to the text in its entirety and attempts to identify the

fundamental meaning of the text as a whole. In the selective approach, the researcher reads the text several times and identifies statements or elements that are essential to the phenomenon. Finally, in a detailed approach, the researcher examines every sentence or sentence cluster to identify what is revealed about the experience or phenomenon being studied.

For analysis of this narrative data set, I used a combination of detailed and selective approaches to uncover the phenomenological themes. In the first layer of analysis I chose the detailed approach. Carefully reading the discussion and interview transcripts, I examined each sentence and sentence cluster to identify potential emergent themes. As potential themes emerged, they were coded in accordance with the data coding procedures described in the following section. Once this process was completed, I used a selective approach to conduct another analysis of the data to further identify themes that were essential to the lived experiences of the participants. Deeper analysis through the selective approach resulted in development of the Cycles of Fear Model (see Chapter 5 – The Cycles of Fear: A Model of LG[BT] Lived Experiences, p. 212).

As the researcher immerses herself in the text of lived experience, themes, patterns, or categories begin to emerge (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 2001). Marshall & Rossman (2006) described these themes as “buckets or baskets into which segments of text are placed” (p. 159) for further analysis. The patterns of meaning that emerge are generated by the expressed experiences of participants. As the researcher categorizes these experiences, themes of commonality begin to emerge.

Fear was identified as the overarching theme interwoven throughout the data. From the overarching theme of fear, two major themes, five minor themes, and twenty-one supporting cluster themes were identified. The themes and specific abbreviations are shown in FIGURE 6 (p. 114).

Data Coding

For the purpose of this study, all data was coded by the key words of emergent themes and supporting cluster themes. As major, minor, and supporting cluster themes were identified in the text, key words were abbreviated and the abbreviation served as the code for that specific theme. All sentences or sentence clusters within the narrative text that exemplify a given theme were coded with the abbreviation for that theme. The text was then dissected and grouped according to the corresponding codes for further analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: FEAR – THE FINDINGS

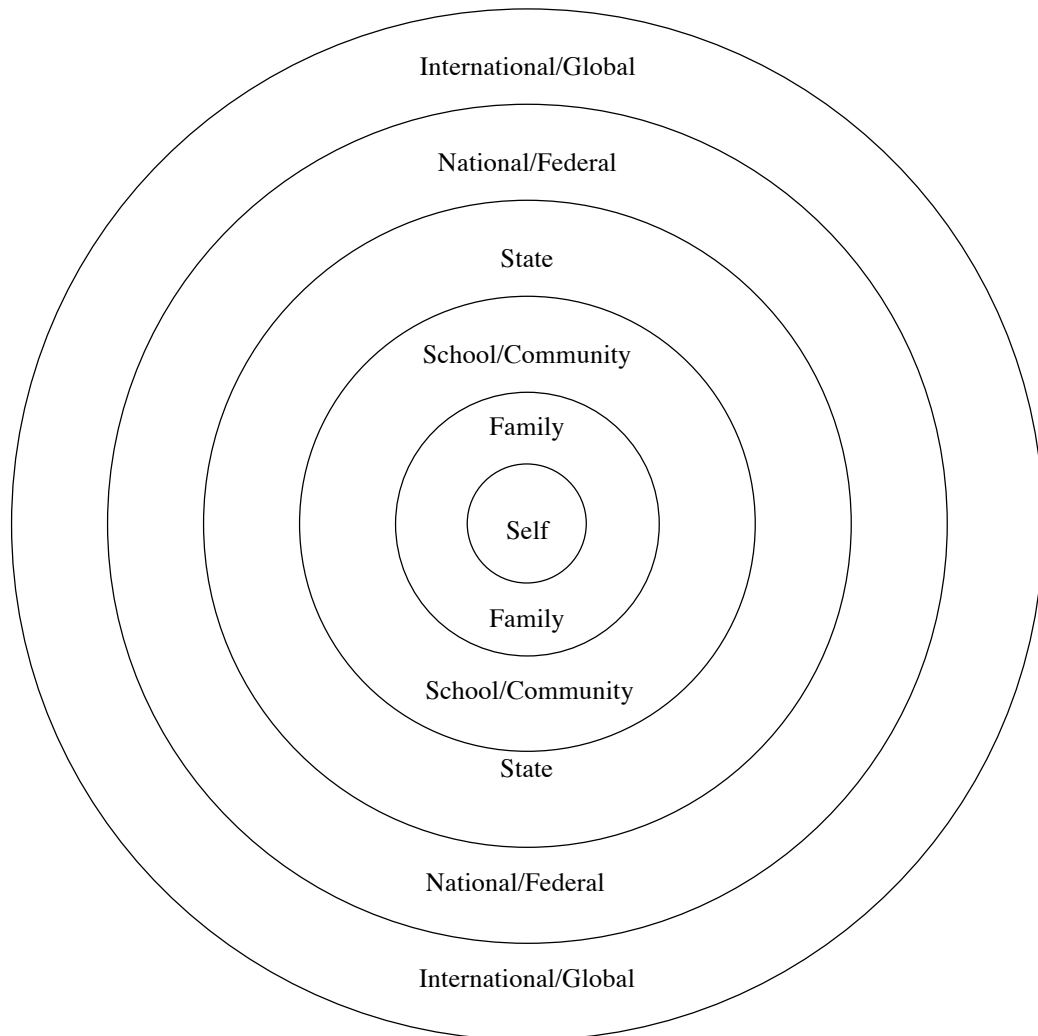
Fear is “the quintessential human emotion. Some people live lives devoid of joy, happiness, and pleasure but no one escapes the experience of fear and fear’s companion, pain. We are born in fear and pain. We live our lives profoundly shaped by them, as well as our efforts to avoid them.”

(Dozier, 1998, p. 3)

Several themes related to how these LG[BT]leaders navigate their identity within the education profession were identified. Fear, however, appeared to be the over-arching theme that intricately wove itself throughout. One of the most powerful human emotions, fear, frequently evokes negative connotations and has “pervasive effects on individuals and societies” (Dozier, 1998, p. 4). Dozier (1998) explains that fear is a “primal emotion” (p. 5) that has the potential to envelop one’s being and “profoundly effects our belief systems and perceptions of good and evil” (p. 129).

Without a doubt, fear is an intense human emotion, felt internally, and for most is limited to specific events or things. Individuals living in a state of relentless fear, however, feel the physiological and/or psychological effects, constantly. For these individuals, fear is insurmountable and comprehensive, surrounding every level of their existence, internal to global. I found there are concentric circles of fear, circles that surround an individual at incrementally higher levels, increasing the impact of fear from internal through family, community/school, state, federal, and global (see FIGURE 5, p. 109).

FIGURE 5. Concentric Circles of Fear



The participants in this study felt the concentric circles of comprehensive fear. Living in fear as youths shaped the perceptions of these LG[BT] educational leaders. Eric explains, “I tend to make the presumption that all environments are hostile.” Sharing stories of early internal fear, Jordan recalled the intense messages he received, “By the time I was six I knew I was different. I just didn’t know why. So, I had very strong messages . . . kind of violent, kind of shaming, kind of not so good. I was fearful.”

Even at this early age, Jordan's fear moved beyond internal to include fear of family. He described his father as being the stereotypical homophobic and recalled his parent's reactions, "I was punished many times for stepping outside that [gender] role. It was clear to me that it wasn't really very popular with my dad, and I think my mom felt the same." Likewise, Carol's family punished her for "being different". Although hers was emotional rather than physical, the pain was the same, "Being marginalized from my family . . . hurt the most just because when it comes from your own kind of flesh and blood it just hurts a lot more . . . My mother, til her dying day actually didn't accept my sexual orientation." Rick's fear manifested in not wanting to disappoint his family so he felt the need to maintain a certain image, "and being gay was not part of that picture." Fear of family, whether warranted or not, was very real for the majority of the participants.

Fear of school/community is the third circle surrounding these leaders and its impact is more intense because the level of hostility, violence, and marginalization increase significantly. Reflecting on the impact of community hostility and the fear LG[BT] individual's face, Eric said, "I think difficulty in being able to discuss your life because you often have the fear of hostility . . . I don't like you because you're gay." Jake talked of his earlier fears and worries founded in community hostility toward homosexuals in education, "What if they [school/community] find out? Will I lose my job? Will I be able to be an administrator?" Similarly, recalling her career as a teacher and administrator, Ellen said, "I was fearful I would lose my job. I was fearful that people

would think I was a pirate.” Unquestionably, fear of community retaliation based on sexual orientation was common among all but one of the participants.

The outermost circles, state, national/federal, and international/global, though unique to themselves, clearly interweave and form the final layers of fear. Although glad to live in a state that affords protection based on sexuality, Mary’s fear is not lessened, “I am glad we have the formal policies in this state. [But], formal policy doesn’t help me feel less isolated or on alert.” Acknowledging the disparity between gay and hetero existence, at a state and national level, Ron said, “I think that there is the governmental part of existence that gays don’t really fit into.” Although Carol feels protection in her state, she fears the lack of federal protection, “I have a family to protect, and my family, under the federal constitution, is not protected in any way.” Carol’s fear, however, is beyond federal protection, her fear is at an international/global level:

[My] family have been going to Jamaica the past few years for Christmas and Jamaica is not a safe place to go if you’re gay We’re going into a country, and my partner and I purposely split up, and I took one kid, and she took one kid, and we didn’t walk through customs together.

David also experienced fear at an international/global level. He did not feel fear for his family, but fear for himself and at nineteen years old, studying abroad, he recalled, “I got arrested for being in a gay bar and threatened with possible deportation.” Sexual orientation protection exists in only 20 states and the District of Columbia, and is absent in U.S. federal law. Globally, less than one-third of the countries protect against sexual orientation discrimination and violence.

The Concentric Circles of Fear Model resembles the life of a star. Gravity is at the core of a star, and energy, in the form of neutrons, surrounds it, pushing outward to prevent self-implosion. The larger a star grows, the greater the pressure on its core. For a giant star, when internal energy runs out, its own gravity is so intense that it causes an irrevocable collapse. As the star implodes, darkness forms at the heart and moves relentlessly outward, sucking in the brilliance and creating a black hole (*Death of a star*, 2006). The circles of fear are like a giant star, as each circle forms and envelops the individual, greater energy is spent keeping fear at bay and pushing it outward, thus, the more intense the cumulative impact and creating the possibility of implosion (whatever that might be for any given individual).

Indeed, the omnipresence of fear has shaped the lives of these participants. But, unlike a giant star, they found the energy to resist implosion. The participants realized that fear may follow the *pendulum principle* and swing from devastating physiological and/or psychological effects to strong, positive manifestations. In her poem, “This Too Will Pass Away”, Helen Steiner Rice describes how the pendulum of fear has the potential to bring one from darkness to light:

If I can endure for this minute
 Whatever is happening to me,
 No matter how heavy my heart is
 Or how “dark” the moment may be

If I can keep on believing
 What I know in my heart to be true,
 That “darkness will fade with the morning”
 And that this will pass away, too.

Then nothing can ever disturb me
Or fill me with uncertain fear,
For as sure as the night brings the dawning
“My morning” is bound to appear.
(Baumgardner, 1997, p. 76)

Rice’s words not only exemplify the pendulum swing of fear, but also the lived experiences of the LG[BT]education leaders in this study. Thus, the discussion of data is organized in two large major themes. The first major theme, “Fear: Experiences of Loss”, identifies participants’ emergent themes created by fear and subsequent losses. The second major theme, “Fear: Experiences of Gain”, highlights participants’ emergent themes related to how fear shaped their lives as educational leaders. The major and minor themes, as well supporting cluster themes are shown in FIGURE 6 (p. 114)

FIGURE 6. Themes of Fear

Overarching Theme = Fear				
Major Theme	Minor Themes	Abbreviation	Supporting Cluster Themes	Abbreviation
Fear - Loss	Self Losses	LSe	Fitting In/Assimilation Silence Life Without Emotion Feeling “Less Than” Overcompensation	FI/A S LE L O
	Opportunity Losses	LO	Hetero-privilege Power Lavender Ceiling	HPL LC
	Safety Losses	LSa	Hostile Environment Personal Protection Increased Caution	HE PP IC
Fear – Gains	Personal Gains	LG	Strength Personal Power Comradeship/Connections Acceptance/Self-Awareness Integrated Identity	SR SP C ASA II
	Social Gains	SG	Unique Perspective Heightened Sensitivity Heightened Awareness Role Models Giving Voice Courageous Trail-blazing	UP HS HA RM GV T

Fear: Experiences of Loss

Navigating one’s identity in a society that values heterosexual norms and oppresses those who deviate evokes feelings of fear – a fear engrained from a very young age. Fear, according to the study participants, created experiences of loss – personally and professionally. This larger section is divided into three minor theme sub-sections: 1) self losses, 2) opportunity losses, and 3) safety losses.

Self Losses

Loss of self creates inner turmoil and an on-going desire to be accepted in a society intolerant of difference. Inner turmoil – described by the minor theme – shaped how the participants navigated their world and is fleshed out in five supporting cluster themes: 1) fitting in and assimilation, 2) silence, 3) life without emotion, 4) feeling “less than”, and 5) overcompensation. All names used below are pseudonyms and take the place of participant IDs.⁶

Fitting In and Assimilation

While *being accepted* is a common need for all humans, for the study participants’ this theme was grounded in contextual informal actions and attitudes, and their fear created a tremendously strong need to fit into and be safe in their environments, often through assimilation. Recalling her desire to be accepted as a young woman, Gina stated, “I think that all humans still have that innate desire to feel accepted, and the uncertainty of acceptance for who you are is scary.” Drawing on his early experiences of the need to belong, Eric said, “I liken it more to children who grow up living in fear and understanding that they have a different approach to interacting with systems and people with whom they do not feel a sense of belonging.”

Indeed, the feeling of being different, not belonging, being ostracized for who you are is scary for anyone, especially for youth learning to navigate the waters of a

⁶ See Chapter Three: Research Methods and Design

heteronormative society. Ellen described a specific childhood experience, which exemplifies this message:

I can remember as a child in the fourth grade, and a girl wrestling with me and sitting on top of me, and saying ‘You turn me on’. . . . I remember thinking *wow* [original emphasis] . . . she’s interesting . . . I remember thinking that’s wrong. This is wrong, and I can’t do this . . . the rest of the years were don’t go there, that’s not right, that will make people angry.

Participants told stories of reflection on their early circumstances, and how others fit into their worlds. Their fears made them strong observers. Recalling her school years, Mary explained, “I was very observant, and I noticed who was in positions of power. I was surrounded by it. . . I didn’t invite questions. As a kid you want to fit in. That pressure is huge and essentially you fight off feelings as there wasn’t any support to do otherwise.” The power of heteronormativity coupled with fear can be so strong that merely fighting the feelings regarding one’s sexuality is not enough, and the oppressed can become the oppressor. Carol remembered, “I was pretty homophobic in high school. I just knew I was afraid,” and Gina said, “I felt different enough that I could relate [to gay students], even though I would publicly participate in anti-gay comments.”

For other participants, however, the power of heteronormativity and their own fear created an overwhelming need to conform. Eric explained, “I spent much of my youth placing incredible energy into learning and projecting the dominant culture. I did everything I could to be seen as a heterosexual. Anything that would lead me toward a

‘gay’ identity, I stayed away from.” Jane remembered knowing her sexuality from a young age, but society would not accept it:

I’ve ‘known’ about myself since age 4, but I was raised in a very conservative and aggressively protestant environment. I was in junior/senior high in the mid-to late 1970s, and was intrigued by the rising gay rights movement, which was dealt a horrible blow with the assassination of Harvey Milk. I realized I would have to FORCE [original emphasis] myself to be straight. And so I did, sort of.

Being forced to assume an identity that is not your own was an experience shared by the majority of participants as they grappled with their identity and how to fit into society. Jake shared, “It’s like sometimes when I was younger I felt like I had to be like everyone else – date girls, play sports, don’t stick out at all. Even in my 20s I had a relationship with a woman thinking that old thought – if I could just find the right woman.” And, Jake described assimilation as a young teacher, “[I] had to play games – go to games with someone from the opposite sex, lie about what I did on weekends, live as far away from school as possible.” Shame and fear drove Ellen’s need to assimilate, “I felt shame and fear. I knew I was gay, and I chose to deal with it by suppressing it as far as I possibly could, to the point where I married a man.” Similarly, shame and fear of losing everything forced David to assimilate and cover:

With regard to assimilation and covering, as a married man it was just all part of the deal, wasn’t it? Nobody could know the part of myself that

was attracted to men. I would have to give it all up, wouldn't I? Home, family, wife, daughters, friends, professional relationships – everything.

Silence

Seeking silence is part of being human – silence to reflect, silence to center, silence to inspire. But, *forced* silence⁷ can be devastating. When participants feared being outside the accepted norm, the seeds of fear planted in their brains took hold, and these LG[BT] leaders sought refuge from both formal and informal contexts. Rick recalled his need to remain silent in his youth, “My dad was Archie Bunker. I was the first child and the responsible one. I had an image to maintain for me and my family and being gay was not part of that picture.” And, Ellen spoke of “an incredible pressure not to embarrass my family.” Growing up in a small town and not knowing “anybody else who was out,” Jordan believed, “Silence was protecting myself.”

Indeed, silence was and, for some participants, remains a form of protection, both personally and professionally. Michael explained his silence as a young teacher, “I would have to say that sometimes I just didn't mention it [sexual orientation] . . . I really didn't mention it out of fear or shyness.” Fear also dictated Ellen's professional silence:

I also know that as an administrator, I was fearful to start a GSA. At that time, in the early 90s, we were calling them LG[BT] clubs. So, I was fearful to do that in that I thought people would assume I was gay. I just stayed silent.

⁷ Silence imposed on an individual by external forces (contextual formal laws/policies or informal actions/attitudes of society).

And, fear continues to silence Mary, professionally, “I can envision a parent or employee rationalizing my orientation as a reason for something that I have had to do, be it reprimand or assigning specific duties or offering a leadership role to. Actually, that has happened.”

Unknown to them, Rick and Jake were members of the same LG[BT] educators’ support group as young teachers. Each spoke of the need for silence about their sexuality, even with the support of other LG[BT] educators. Rick said, “I joined a group called ‘Teacher Empowerment’ about 15-20 years ago. We met in back rooms and wore masks when we walked in Gay Pride.” And, Jake recollected that Gay Pride Parade, “I wasn’t even comfortable marching wearing a paper bag mask.”

Silence, however, does not come without personal or professional ramifications. Carol felt her silence created judgment dilemmas, “I know that when I was trying to hide who I was, I sacrificed doing the right thing at times because I was so afraid that if I acted then someone would tell everyone that I was gay.” Nate described himself as being a very “social and personable” individual, and believed that silence interfered with his professional relationships:

I feed off of people and have a very friendly relationship with most everyone in my world. Because of that, it started to wear on me that I was not being completely honest with them. We were building relationships of trust, and I was running from them in regard to my sexuality.

Jordan not only felt the emotional distress of silence, but physical as well, “When I

was first teaching, that was incredibly draining because I wasn't out, and there was a constant fear...that consumed a lot of energy and it was exhausting." For Mary, silence was difficult and isolating, "It wasn't until I started dealing with my own emotions that things became more difficult . . . Before kids I kept to myself. I didn't share much of anything about my personal life with people at school. That was isolating and difficult at times."

Unquestionably, silence ruled these LG[BT]leaders' lives. Each of the participants, whether out at a young age, later in their career, or still closeted, felt the pain of silence. These are difficult, often painful, and even disheartening moments in their lives. Reflecting on being anonymous in the chat room, Rick poignantly captured the collective feeling on silence, "Being anonymous in this study has taken me back to the days when I kept my orientation/identity a secret. Those are difficult memories, my only bad feelings about being gay."

Life Without Emotion

The impact of forced silence and assimilation can be far-reaching, and a *life without emotion*, born from contextual informal actions/attitudes of society is the result. In a particularly articulate fashion, Nate spoke of the loss he felt when he created a "vanilla life" to cope with his internal turmoil and fear, "But it was all sterile. I was living the life that I perceived everyone else to want. But I was simply going through the motions. It was a life without emotion. I just named it 'vanilla'."

The experience of a "vanilla life" was not unique to Nate. Others described their earlier lives as empty, secretive, compartmentalized. Jake remembered living two lives,

“I had to change pronouns when talking about my weekend or not share all of the gay activities I participated in during the weekend. I was living two lives – one person during the week and another on weekends.” For Rick, life was a balancing act, “It was getting harder and harder to hide my life from my work I tried to live my life trying to balance honesty and secrecy – an impossible task. But, I thought that was the only choice I had.” During his early career, David had to maintain an image, “I compartmentalized my life to such an extent that there were same-sex sexual activities and the rest of my life I was maintaining a consistent image throughout all aspects.”

Life without emotion drove Ellen to immerse herself in work and eventually betray her marriage:

I felt very empowered over my life in my work and felt that compensated for being married to someone I shouldn't be married to I just reached a point where my work was so all consuming, and my home life was so empty. I was not happy So, basically, I had a marriage and affairs – with men, not women, couldn't do that. In my mind, it was easier to be a whore and betray my marriage than it was to be a lesbian.

And, Carol's orientation caused her to lower her expectations for life:

I figured I would have to give up on the idea of ever having kids, ever being married, ever having a public position I kind of readjusted my sites and kind of lowered my expectations because I really thought that I would never be able to accomplish all of that.

For these LG[BT] leaders, a “vanilla life” was a life of emptiness, loneliness, and longing. Nate recalled, “Before I came out to myself I commented that I would rather have one minute of happiness than a lifetime of vanilla.”

Feeling “Less Than”

Lowering personal expectations, demeaning oneself, living a life of secrecy – create feelings of being “less than” your heterosexual counterparts for the study’s participants. Yet, feeling accepted and valued is innate to the human experience, regardless of one’s sexual identity. Heterosexist society, however, largely does not readily accept or value individuals who do not conform to societal norms, and contextualizes their lives – informally and formally.

Several participants recalled their religious upbringing as having an impact on feelings of shame and inadequacy. Jordan said, “I grew up in a Catholic church where I had those messages very strong – what was right and wrong. And, GLBT issues, it was very wrong to be gay and very right to be straight.” David remembered the guilt imposed by his Catholic upbringing preventing him “from even thinking about the possibility of a different [gay] life.” Jane spoke of the anti-gay influences of being raised in “an aggressively protestant community.” And, Carol as a “Born-again Fundamentalist Christian” recalled the negative stereotypes and knew being lesbian was not an acceptable lifestyle.

Religion wasn’t the only factor creating the feeling of “less than” for these LG[BT] leaders. All participants shared lived experiences of societal degradation. Mary said, “It really wasn’t other kids, I think it was society as a whole that had more of an

impact on how I felt about myself.” Fear of physical or emotional attacks shaped Eric’s self-perceptions, “Growing up wondering where the next physical or emotional jab was coming from certainly influences how you interact with people and create self-perceptions about who you are and what you can accomplish.” David shared his recollection of how his father and a teacher diminished significance:

I grew up a sissy. Never fit in with the other boys. Typical story – father being ashamed of his sissy son and trying to get him involved in manly activities. I remember one time when my dad brought one of his very husky, trucker-like friends to teach me to ‘fight like a man’. When he insisted, I hit him. Then he laughed and said, ‘Is that all you have? No wonder you always get beat up.’ Later, in high school, I recall a Spanish teacher pulling me aside after school time. He told me I was a brilliant student, but that socially I was going to have a lot of problems . . . He criticized the way I walked, the way I moved my hands, the way I gestured . . . Well, THAT [original emphasis] wasn’t especially helpful. All he accomplished was for me to feel more and more shame about myself.

Reflecting on her inner struggles with her sexuality and the need to feel valued, Mary said, “I have been trying to feel validation with being gay since I was in my early 20s. It has been treated and viewed as not equal to hetero relationships. We all want to feel like we have value . . . I have felt inadequate many a time in regards to my lifestyle.” And, marginalization played a significant role in feeling “less than” for Carol:

Being marginalized, all the way back to before I came out, being the tomboy . . . never being accepted in with the kind of girly-girls of the world. That's kind of formational in terms of your development. Being marginalized from my family. Not allowed to visit my family, not allowed to stay in my family's home . . . my family refusing to sleep in my house.

For these LG[BT] individuals, feelings of "less than" have crossed all boundaries, personal and professional. Eric remembered how micro-aggressions or the actions/attitudes of society diminished his feelings of self-worth, "I could identify – walking into the lounge and seeing people happy that 'Mothers in Touch With the Lord' brought cookies for the teachers. Always challenging for me because I knew that they were definitely not baked for me." Although Carol, an openly gay administrator, no longer allows others to de-value her sexuality, she is aware of the attempts, "Even as recently as being hired for this job and having people claim the only reason I got this job was because I was gay, and that I can't do this job because I am gay. People saying things about me or putting me in a box because of my sexual orientation, and a box that frankly says I am gay."

Being devalued personally is an experience that many participants endured, regardless of their orientation. But, as parents, those knives cut even deeper for the LG[BT] school leaders, particularly when the devaluing impacted their children. All of the participants in this study who had children, biological, adopted, or blended, spoke of their love and need to protect their children from feelings of shame and devaluation.

Talking about assimilating and covering in her earlier years, Carol brought it to present and her children, “Once you have kids, you don’t want your kids to believe there is any shame in their family, and when you start passing, you are teaching them shame.” Robert shared stories of the “phenomenal essays” his daughter wrote on having two dads. He remembered a particular moment, after their daughter had presented one of her essays during a scholarship interview, Robert said to her, “We’re so proud that you did this, but I want you to know that we never wanted this to be a burden that you would have to carry and to defend your existence.” Mary spoke of her children and how they “pushed” her to come out more, “If I was going to truly have them live in the world, they needed to know and feel from their parents that we weren’t any less valuable because we were gay parents.”

Feeling “less than” is a reality for the oppressed, and our heteronormative society has ensured that. Heteronormativity continues to reign supreme refusing to grant basic rights to groups viewed as “less than”. When asked about his feelings of being “less than”, Rick immediately brought the conversation to current law, “Partner benefits – it really ticks me off that we can’t get past this hurdle. It is like the last chord of bias that the state is hanging on to, to remind us that we [LG[BT] individuals] are ‘less than’ citizens.”

Overcompensation

Fear impacts individuals’ lives in different ways and on different levels. Some study participants choose to retreat and hide, others choose to mask their fears by overcompensating and being the “best” in all they do. Several leaders in this study chose

the latter path and spoke of their need to “prove” themselves because of a genuine feeling of being “less than” their heterosexual counterparts. The supporting cluster theme of overcompensation emerged within the context of both informal actions and attitudes of society and formal policies and laws.

Eric recalled his need to “prove” himself, “I think I tended to overachieve. [If] I could be perfect in other areas of my life, maybe this part of my life [sexuality] wouldn’t be as bad or as difficult.” As Ellen described, “I was also a perfectionist, and all of it in an effort to be the best person I could be, and it was probably to overcompensate for being less than in terms of my sexual identity”. Nate recalled his need to be “the best” as a young man:

Looking back on it, it was a control and fear issue. I did not want anyone to be ‘onto’ me so I was out in front running like heck. I would be everyone’s best friend, best son, best grandson, best student. This way they would love me. Maybe in hindsight, I was greasing the slide to make it harder for them not to like me if I decided to come out I wanted to be normal, and that was my vehicle to accomplish that. Almost trying to be more than normal.

Most participants specifically expressed a need to overcompensate, and all spoke of doing their best in all aspects of their lives. Carol recalled her own experiences of overcompensation and generalized those experiences to the LG[BT] community, when she stated, “[I was] always overcompensating for my own fears as a student . . . I think this is a common experience of gay folk”. Like Carol, Gina felt overcompensation is

common among LG[BT] educators, “I believe that many LG[BT] educators and administrators feel that way . . . needing to be the ‘super teacher’ or ‘super administrator’ so that someone doesn’t find any fault with them and can’t fire them.” Jordan continues to have fears of “not being perfect in situations.” On being a parent, Robert said, “It became kind of a challenge because the assumption was we were incompetent on the merit that we were men . . . So, there was such an expectation of perfection.”

Reflecting on a time when Ellen viewed her sexuality as a flaw, she stated, “Any sense of not being perfect came out in overachievement . . . I’m an overachieving, perfectionist freak . . . I will overcompensate for this flaw by being better and working harder.” Several participants echoed Ellen’s thoughts on overcompensation and an increased need to succeed. Jake felt that his need to be better than others was a “pressure I put on myself.” Finally, Carol stated, “I feel the pressure to be a great principal, not just for myself, but for all gay (present and future) principals. I have to be better than others.”

Clearly, the feeling of being “less than” and the need to be the “best” is typical of the majority of LG[BT]educational leaders in this study. As Nate suggested, overachievement and overcompensation appeared to be the common *vehicle* LG[BT] participants used to achieve a sense of normalcy.

Opportunity Losses

Indeed, living a life of relentless fear resulted in *loss of self* for these participants. Forced silence and assimilation lead to lives without emotion, feelings of being “less than” hetero-counterparts, and a need to over-compensate to make up for a perceived

flaw. But, relentless fear reached beyond a loss of self and created another minor theme, *opportunity losses*, to be discussed in two supporting clusters: 1) hetero-privilege power, and 2) lavender ceiling.

Hetero-privilege Power

Hetero-privilege clearly created feelings of loss for LG[BT] individuals in this study, and it manifested itself within the contexts of formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of society. Reflecting on her adolescent years and the hetero-privilege power, Carol, when thinking about her loss of freedom, stated:

I didn't really operate in a world that understood there was anything different than the heterosexual paradigm . . . I did know a few gay people and there was a lot of shame and hiding. I think that with hetero-privilege, there was a lot of freedom that heteros have that homosexuals in my adolescence didn't have. But, I didn't really understand the power of hetero-privilege until I started to grapple with my sexual orientation.

Rick agreed, the hetero-privilege power "became obvious in high school – proms, dating, friendships." And, Nate remembered, "Everyone wanted me to date their daughters." When thinking of the hetero-privilege power, Eric reflected on the cruelty it brings forth, "Growing up LG[BT] exposes you to a deeper understanding of how cruel individuals can be with their privilege. You become a victim if you make wrong decisions about disclosing your identity."

For some LG[BT] individuals, even their families were not immune to the cruelty associated with hetero-privilege. After coming out to his family, Doug recalled, "I was no

longer included in the manly activities like going fishing or hunting with my dad and brothers.” Rick also spoke of growing up in a family where hunting was a right of passage, “When I refused to hunt, I gave up some of the privilege of going up north, being with the guys.” The cruelty of hetero-privilege was particularly intense after Carol came out to her family. Carol remembered painful feelings of marginalization, “I think those are the marginalizations that have hurt the most just because it comes from your own kind of flesh and blood. It just hurts a lot more My mother, ‘til her dying day actually didn’t accept my sexual orientation.”

Indeed, being excluded and marginalized by your own flesh and blood is painful. These LG[BT]educational leaders, however, have felt the power and pain of hetero-privilege on a broader scale. Upon entering his doctoral program and having acknowledged his sexual identity, David described himself as, “a very excited, out gay male student . . . drawn to queer theory and post-modernism as modes of inquiry.” David spoke of his first dissertation and the power of hetero-privilege on his career path, “My first dissertation was a queer-based study. I had written three chapters, had full support of my chair and committee members, had collected data and was in the midst of analyzing when I realized I was not going to get any job interviews.” The realization that society’s heterosexist paradigm would prevent him from access to the professorate had an overwhelming impact, David shared:

It was one of the most devastating moments of my life. I really didn’t know what I was going to do. I wanted with all of my heart to do what was necessary to get a faculty position, but I didn’t want to “sell out”

by giving up my passion for queer research. It felt like so much closeting all over again. I decided to take some time away from all of it.

David's fear of hetero-privilege preventing access to the field of education was experienced by all participants in this study. Remembering his college years and the desire to become a teacher Eric recalled, "Specifically, I think about the thoughts I had about entering the field of education and the possible loss of my job." Early in his career, Rick was keenly aware of the hetero-privilege that surrounded him, "The first thing that came to me is that I work in a world of heterosexual privilege, and I navigate that everyday." Learning a colleague was speculating about his sexuality, Rick was concerned and confronted the teacher, "I told him I had heard rumors about his gossip. I asked him to stop talking about my private life with others I never denied I was gay. I never led him to believe otherwise. I did make sure he was quiet because I was concerned about being uncovered and losing my job."

After being hired for his first administrative position, Eric, recalled his principal's concern and forewarning that others in the building may feel, "you're not good enough because you don't have the privilege I do, because you're not heterosexual, like me." Although living in a state that affords sexual orientation protections, these do not help Mary feel "less isolated or on alert." The informal context of hetero-privilege dictates Mary's life, "We still have to decide for ourselves how we will proceed with our orientation. The day-to-day interactions and how the formal policies play out is one thing.

The informal is what guides our day-to-day operations.” And, Eric acknowledged the emotional and physical toll of hetero-privilege:

I think any time you have to put forth more energy into items that others don't, it takes more out of you. Any time you have to evaluate answers or responses . . . different from what you see others have as part of a privilege, it just gets to be emotionally and physically draining.

Having experienced the hetero-privilege power, as a former administrator, Ellen addressed the impact of formal and informal distinction on one's career:

We [LG[BT] administrators] don't count. We're invisible. You have this sort of double ended sword, if no one is there to interrupt the homophobia and fight it because they're afraid they will put their job at risk, then the homophobia stays pervasive And that just sucks When you [administrators] start controversy, you piss off your Superintendent, and you put your job at risk. That is not what principals want to do.

Carol had not experienced the threat of job loss, but she knows it happens, “I've seen people and know people, especially in education administration who are petrified to be out because they would immediately lose their job. That's reality.” Later, Carol spoke of the importance of formal contexts in her life, “I'm not moving my family to a place where I am not supported by policies that enable me to have a family and to work without concern about being fired for who I am.”

Potential loss of one's career is a reality for most LG[BT] educational leaders, and society's heterosexist paradigm maintains this status quo. Commenting on the interplay of power, privilege, and educational administration, Eric said, "I look at how much power and privilege is given by position. And, how much of that is dependent on personal privileges that one brings to the position because of race, class, heterosexual, and other classifications."

The LG[BT] administrators and educational leaders in the study experienced the ramifications of contradicting the espoused values of the heterosexual majority. They have felt fear of overt and/or covert retaliation because in the eyes of society, a gay lifestyle is not simply alternative, it is unacceptable. Ellen feared such retaliation as a teacher and administrator, "I was fearful I would lose my job. I was fearful that people would think I was some sort of pervert." David spoke of the resistance to accept LG[BT] persons in K-12 institutions as "a product of the stereotypical homosexual predator." Similarly, Carol, reflecting on the intolerance of gays in education said:

There are a lot of people who hold educators to a standard to which they don't hold a lot of other professions. For some people that includes teaching morals in a way they believe morals and ethics and values should be taught, which many people feel are counter to the gay lifestyle. I think there is less tolerance for gays in education nationwide because people don't want gay people indoctrinating their kids.

Eric, while reflecting on his experiences and observations working within the power of hetero-privilege, said, "Watching the power play itself out in negative results is

disheartening. It is also difficult to maintain the desire to remain in a system that you know would ultimately dismiss you if there weren't safeguards in place to protect you."

Clearly, the formal and informal contexts of a heterosexist society impact the lives of LG[BT] individuals on a multitude of levels. As many participants stated, the hetero-privilege power and the formal/informal contexts that they create are far-reaching and touch both their professional and personal lives. Ron stated, "It's not the same for other people because of the active discrimination and homophobia, persecution, whatever it happens to be. It's [hetero-privilege] there and there are people who are not able to live their lives the way they want because of it." Mary again spoke of how informal contexts play out in her daily interactions:

The informal piece effects your day-to-day interactions. I have to introduce Sarah as the other half. And you never know how that all is going to go over. There is anxiety in that, and I get ticked I have to worry about whether or not someone else is going to have a problem. Like why should they care?

And, even people who do not consider themselves homophobic often promote heterosexist norms as Robert pointed out:

Oh my God, yes. It's so existent. Everyone is getting married, everyone. It's the language. Everyone is having a baby. Everyone has a wife at home. There have been cases in our department where there's all this bru-ha-ha over a woman that's getting married to a man. And another woman was doing it [marrying] a woman. She wasn't getting the same

attention as the other [hetero] woman. I don't think people were really aware of it because these were people who wouldn't consider themselves homophobic. But, they are certainly heterosexist.

Undoubtedly, for most, marriage is for heterosexual couples, and with it comes social and financial privilege. Reflecting on his early years of assimilation, David, while thinking about his marriage spoke of the privilege it brought:

I met a woman. A couple of years later we were married. It would be too cruel to say that I 'used' that hetero-relationship to join the ranks of the privileged, life is far more complicated than that. I was actually in love. But the reality is also that by marrying a woman, I was able to access so many more social privileges at the time.

Although unhappily married, both Ellen and Doug recalled not only feelings of "love" while in their hetero-relationships, but also the privilege that marriage afforded them at the time.

Marriage is but one of the many privileges society reserves for the hetero-majority. Hetero-privilege power plays out dramatically in the basic civil rights afforded individuals – rights from which the LG[BT] community is more often than not, excluded. Echoing the feelings of all participants with regard to power and formal contexts, Michael said:

Those policies and the implementation and formation of those policies are all about power. The power to grant the privilege to a disenfranchised group or the power to block it It's almost like they're granting you

some big favor you should be eternally thankful for, instead of because it's a civil right and should be a basic human right.

David spoke of the overt discrimination in the laws of his state and questioned the ramifications on the entertainment business if same laws applied to the hetero-majority:

In my state, offering to engage in sex with a person of the same gender, without mention of money is illegal. Can you imagine if there were such a law on the books about hetero-sex? What would happen to the clubs? Heck, the hets are always offering to engage in sex without mention of money. More privilege.

The LG[BT] community's struggle for human rights, however, has not gone unnoticed. Despite the overt oppression of eight years of Republican anti-gay legislation and the derogatory rhetoric of politicians like Oklahoma's Sally Kern (Kern, 2008), a few have heard the cry. On February 28, 2008, then candidate for the Democratic nomination for President, Barack Obama, released his *Open Letter from Barack Obama to the LG[BT] Community*. In this letter Obama (2008) asserted the right of LG[BT] individuals to enjoy the same rights and privileges as their heterosexual counterparts, "It's wrong to have millions of Americans living as second-class citizens in this nation . . . Equality is a moral imperative." Obama assured his administration would fully support "the enactment of the Matthew Shepard Act to outlaw hate crimes, and a fully inclusive Employment Non-Discrimination Act to outlaw work discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity." He also addressed the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and seeks make the language of the Uniting American Families Act more inclusive,

“so we can afford same-sex couples the same rights and obligations as married couples in our immigration system.”

Addressing these high profile issues of equality, Obama reaffirmed his support of basic human rights for all citizens, including LG[BT] individuals. Possibly the most important issue he addressed, however, equality for same-sex couples. Obama (2008) said:

As your President, I will use the bully pulpit to urge states to treat same-sex couples with full equality in their family and adoption laws. I personally believe that civil unions represent the best way to secure equal treatment. But I also believe that the federal government should not stand in the way of states that want to decide on their own how best to pursue equality for gay and lesbian couples – whether that means a domestic partnership, a civil union, or a civil marriage I support the complete repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) Federal law should not discriminate in any way against gay and lesbian couples, which is precisely what DOMA does.

Formal regulations imposed by federal and state government magnify the hetero-privilege power and further marginalizes the LG[BT] community. Each of the participants expressed powerful feelings regarding the overt discrimination they experienced because in the eyes of the law, they are not equal to their hetero counterparts. In her state, Carol is legally married with equal rights and protections under the law,

however, these protections do not cross state boundaries. When talking about her marriage, family, and federal law, Carol said:

I guess I feel stronger about that because I have a family to protect, and my family, under the federal constitution, is not protected in any way I still worry if we go to another state and something happened to my non-biological child, they might tell me I have no right to make decisions for her I'm greatly impacted by federal law, and there's no doubt about it Once we have to worry about federal tax returns and federal death issues, then we are discriminated against.

Carol's sentiments regarding legal discrimination at the hands of the federal government were reverberated by each of these LG[BT] individuals. Reflecting on a time when his institution did not include sexual orientation language in their policies and then after domestic partner benefits were granted, David spoke of the inequities and financial burden:

That lack of access to major medical insurance, dental insurance, tuition remission for spouse, and other benefits of that nature put me at a personal disadvantage of thousands of dollars when compared to other professors of similar rank, experience, and discipline who are married to opposite-sex individuals Even with full parity of domestic partner benefits, there's still the financial inequities as a result of non-recognition of our partner status by the federal government. You might or might not know that the value of the benefits paid by the

university that I receive for my partner must be included in my taxable income for federal purposes.

Likewise, Gina spoke of financial discrimination, federal law, and non-recognition of partner status, “We are really frustrated. We can’t get my partner medical benefits through my work Plus, we can’t claim each other on taxes The financial impact of my partner and I not being married This crap really burns me.”

Without a doubt, refusal to recognize same-sex marriage by the federal government imposes a financial burden on LG[BT] couples and further promotes hetero-privilege. Acutely aware of how government marginalizes him, Ron said:

It would be nice to get a bigger tax break, and, sure, it would be nice to manage my partners’ dying wishes, but the issues that are out there are marriage, taxes, and the whole end of life thing, that married couples have as they age. My partner and I don’t have that, and that bugs me. There is the governmental part of existence that gays don’t really fit into, and the benefits of being straight are definitely there.

David voiced his thoughts on what he referred to as “the big one”, hetero-privilege and marriage, “I can’t marry my partner. I can’t claim entitlement to the same kinds of benefits I would have if he were a woman and we were married.” Echoing David’s words, Pat said, “I don’t think it’s right that I don’t get partner benefits, or that we can’t be considered a couple.” And, Jordan commented, “I’m treated differently, and I’m not included in the same things because the law is different for people who are straight and married.”

The federal entitlements of marriage are undoubtedly absent for same-sex couples. Recalling his life in the state he grew up in, Michael spoke of the “legal and financial roadblocks” LG[BT] couples face:

The laws were very discriminatory for most everything we tried to do legally. Like trying to make out a will, we had to have special stipulations in wills for each other because we weren't married. When we closed on our houses, we were always two single men because they didn't recognize our partnership legally. So, we had to have special legal addendums to the purchase of our house. And bank accounts and that sort of thing. Everything was set up to make it uncomfortable for gay couples.

Both Jordan and Mary reflected on the formal legal and financial roadblocks they faced. Jordan talked specifically about the lack of legal protections, “The legal things about partnering, like living wills and all that kind of stuff What would happen to my retirement We're doing that and wanting to protect ourselves because the laws don't protect us I just don't have the same benefits as a hetero person.” And, Mary said:

We have spent money on drafting the necessary paperwork regarding our property. I have had to take out extra money to invest in a life insurance policy, because if I die Sarah [pseudonym] is not recognized as a spouse and would not receive my pension We need to recognize civil unions. Who cares if you call us a marriage. Call us a civil union so that Sarah can receive all that heteros receive from a spouse's death.

But, a civil union may not be the answer Mary is seeking. Jane, in a recognized civil union, continues to feel marginalized because her civil union is not a marriage, “It [civil union] is supposed to be legally equivalent to marriage, but of course it’s not. I had to do a big song and dance because of a snafu with the state health benefits plan (she’s on my plan). If we were married, I would not have had to do the benefit dance.” As he spoke of the legal issues that face LG[BT] couples, Nate suggested a possible answer, “I really believe that having legal marriage would answer most of these issues.”

Certainly, Nate is not alone. Every participant in this study agreed, the legalization of same-sex marriage at the federal level would bring them closer to social and legal equality. Having moved to a state where same-sex marriage is legal, Michael eloquently illustrated the power of marriage:

I really underestimated the power of being married. I’m legally married, and it is amazing what that means socially and legally. Having a full marriage license and the full ceremony, it was so incredible. It was so powerful. We feel that acknowledgement and that acceptance that my marriage is accepted just like everyone else. It makes me feel so complete I was so empowered by the words of the Justice of the Peace. I couldn’t believe that such a privilege was finally being granted to me.

Federal legalization of same-sex marriage would bring greater equality to the LG[BT] community as a whole, however, it would not eliminate covert oppression that is rampant in the education profession.

Lavender Ceiling

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal for employers to discriminate against an individual based on their gender. For women in the workforce, this appeared to open the door to professional advancement. As history has shown, however, barriers to advancement exist for women and minorities. For decades, what became commonly known as the “glass ceiling”, or the invisible limitation founded in unwritten, white male dominant policy, blocked professional advancement for these marginalized groups. Today, the glass ceiling has been shattered as significantly more women and minorities move into top leadership positions in the corporate and education worlds. Yet, despite this progress, there remains another “invisible” ceiling blocking the upward movement of LG[BT] individuals – the “lavender ceiling”. In his article, *Breaking the Lavender Ceiling*, David Unger (2008) acknowledged the existence of a lavender ceiling in corporate America:

There is a lot of talk about women and minorities breaking the glass ceiling in corporate America. But by the same token (no pun intended), I contend that there is a “Lavender Ceiling” which has been—and continues to be—even more unbreakable for corporate GLBT professionals. (para. 1)

Corporate America is viewed as being more accepting of sexual differences than the American education system, more likely than not because the fear of indoctrinating youth to the gay lifestyle is prevalent in education. If, as Unger (2008) contends, the lavender ceiling continues to be even more unbreakable than the glass ceiling was in the corporate world, then surely it is more so in the education world. In her keynote address

to the Plenary Panel on “Strategies for Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling”, Francis White (2007), Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs at New York University, spoke of the limitations she believes are there for her as an educator, “In my own case there is a kind of lavender ceiling that I know I face. As far as I am aware, there are no out, Black, lesbian college or university presidents, and I am unlikely to be the first” (para. 1).

As they spoke of career advancement, several of the LG[BT] educational leaders in this study inadvertently referred to the *lavender ceiling*, which manifested within both formal and informal contexts. Jake, an openly gay principal, still feels it is difficult to be gay and advance in the field of education, “When it comes down to it, connecting with kids and having some passion for the work you do is more important than sexual orientation. It is tougher though, to move up in the organization, have a higher visibility in the organization and community.” Eric believes that the *lavender ceiling* is founded in fear, “It’s more of the fear that there is a person in power that’s GLBT.” As a teacher, Nate, knew he was respected within his district, but this knowledge did not squelch his fears of promotion, “I knew that I had enough respect and social capital in my district that being gay was not going to be an issue. I did worry about the possibilities of not being promoted.” Remembering his feelings on promotion as a teacher, Jake said, “I felt it’s fine to be a gay teacher, but what does that mean for me because I wanted to become a principal.” And Rick recalled his elation after learning of a lesbian principal, “I remember the first time I heard about a lesbian principal in an urban private school. It was door opening for me. I didn’t think it was possible.”

There were, however, two LG[BT] administrators who did not feel the limitations imposed by the *lavender ceiling*, Michael and Carol. Both openly out principals, they spoke of their desire to some day move into the superintendency. Michael and Carol, however, were the exception to the norm. Reflecting on his first thoughts of moving to the superintendency, Jake said, “My next thought and fear is what if I wanted to become a superintendent? It would be newsworthy The fear is – will I be considered as a candidate? Will there be others speaking out against me?” At the time of his interview, Jake applied for at least one superintendent position and made the final interview, he remained uncertain on the impact of his sexuality and promotion to the superintendency. Another participant, Eric, who was respected in his district, has been encouraged by his own superintendent, to pursue the superintendency, but this prospect does not interest Eric:

The reality for me is there’s no way I will put my life out on a public pedestal and take the hostile vibes that will come my way. There’s no way. I mean no job is worth it for me to have to endure that type of heightened scrutiny, hostility, just to do a job that I’m as qualified as anybody else to do. There is a huge risk.

Safety Losses

Clearly, fear resulted in a *self losses* for these LG[BT] individuals, however, personal and professional *safety losses*, the third minor theme, occurred concomitantly. Likewise, certain needs associated with loss of self, intertwined with loss of safety – fitting in and assimilation, silence, and hetero-privilege power, were discussed in the

previous section. Needs related specifically to safety losses are discussed below in three supporting cluster themes: 1) hostile environments, 2) personal protection, and 3) increased caution.

Hostile Environments

As participants reminisced on their experiences of personal loss, the need for silence and assimilation was a common reaction to the irrational theories and hostile environment of a heterosexist society. Irrational theories are spawned from fear. Such theory building, as a reaction to non-conformity, prevailed throughout history, was firmly embedded in American society during the colonial period, and is a modern day reality. The supporting cluster theme – *hostile environments* – is part of both informal and formal contexts for LB[BT] leaders.

Mary spoke of this irrationality and its impact on her life, “Some people are just so simple in their thought process. They go to the top of their inference ladder. They feel threatened somehow, and their heads dream up these irrational theories. This is what makes me on alert at all times.” When reflecting on the irrational fears of society, Jake thought about fear of recruitment, “I don’t know what the fear is – I wasn’t recruited. There is that irrational fear that gays are out to recruit others.” And confirming society’s heterosexist attitude, David said, “I think one of the most maddening things that happens continually is the social attitude that seems to give people permission to say the stupidest things – things they would never allow themselves to say about other social groups.”

Indeed, hostility toward difference has engrained fear in these LG[BT] individuals and placed them heightened alert, even in their youth. Jordan explained:

I was very young, in kindergarten or second grade, I had very strong messages, very violent messages that nothing outside of your gender boundary is *ok* [original emphasis] I was punished many times for stepping outside of that role It was not OK [original emphasis] to play with girls and play with dolls. It was not OK [original emphasis] to do anything but figure out what this boy role was.

The message, *anything outside the heterosexual norm of society*, was not unique to Jordan, and in fact, was echoed by over 85 percent of the participants in this study.

Recalling her youth and the messages she received, Gina said, “Gay was gross. That was the message I received from my peers I grew up with all this homophobia.” Mary spoke of messages of hate and anger that she heard, and that youth continue to hear today, “What an awful thing to hear – the hate that exists. The anger that exists for anyone that is deemed different.” Likewise, Jordan saw children receiving the same strong messages he once received, “And the messages when boys step out of gender roles or girls step out of gender roles That just comes through all the time. The kids are very strong in their belief about what’s okay and what’s not okay when kids step out of their gender roles.” Carol also sees adolescents today reacting to hostile environments in the same way she did, “I was afraid and my fear manifested itself in homophobia – something I see in many kids.”

Being an adolescent surrounded by homophobia, and knowing *that* hostility was their fate was often overwhelming for these LG[BT] educational leaders, driving them deeper into the closet. Remembering his high school years, Eric said, “I recall how

students would treat other students who they perceived to be ‘gay’ or ‘queer’. Ridicule, physical assault, badgering. I recall clear experiences where the harassment of students indicated to me that this would be my experience if I were to come out.” The persecution of his gay peers stood out in Rick’s mind, but he feared his family even more, “I saw the mistreatment of gay peers growing up as something that shaped my fears. [But] I feared my family reaction more than my peers.” Watching the persecution of others, Jake was happy that he had assimilated, “I distinctly remember how two other GLBT individuals in my high school were teased and tormented, and I was happy that I was able to blend in and not receive that treatment.”

Certainly not all participants were as fortunate as Jake with assimilation or as Michael having the strong, supportive family he spoke of earlier. Jordan described his hostile high school experience as filled with fear, shame, and violence:

I ran into the same thing with peers in that if they perceived I was not fitting into my role in high school they would let me know. I had some bad experiences around that, kind of violent, kind of shaming, kind of not so good. I was very fearful. I didn’t use the bathroom in my high school. I needed to travel in my high school and find safe places because I was feeling danger about my high school.

Eric remembered seeing other students being harassed and knew that he would experience the same if he didn’t remain silent about his sexuality:

I also learned that I could be the target of much anger and hate, just by being seen as ‘other’. I grew up in the 80s when AIDS was very clearly

the 'gay' disease, and I kept wondering when it was going to happen to me, even if I tried to pretend I was straight. I remember the 'God hates Fags!' signs and thinking that I wouldn't live much past my 20s because of the fear and misinformation that was rampant.

Hostile environments enveloped the lives of these LG[BT] individuals throughout their early school years, and it did not subside. Even as they entered adulthood and college, they knew they were still the target of a modern day hostile environment. As a young college student studying abroad, David felt a false sense of freedom, only to be enslaved again by heteronormativity:

Nineteen years old, a student in Europe, discovering the fullness of my sexuality. It was a pretty heady time! That is, until I got arrested for being in a gay bar and threatened with deportation. I was mortified, and the shame of discovery and maybe the end of my study abroad were too much.

Even the process of "coming out" to their closest friends resulted in social loss for many. Despite long-term friendships, disclosure of their sexual identity ignited underlying hostility and again gave rise to an unsafe, hostile environment. Gina remembered loss of an old friend as she disclosed her sexuality to some close high school friends, "I was starting to tell some high school friends with whom I still talked. One told me that due to what the bible said about my sins, she was worried about my soul, and that she really couldn't deal with me until I saw the error of my ways." Similarly, Carol spoke of feeling marginalized in college and losing friends as she "outed" herself, "I came out

[and] immediately this group of friends I had kind of pushed me aside and just could not have a gay friend and kind of losing friends because of that [coming out].”

Not all participants spoke of losing friendships, but rather of the overt hostility that kept them somewhat silent in college and convinced them that public school education would not be a safe path. Reflecting on her undergraduate years and her decision that K-12 public education was not for her, Jane said:

By then it was the 1980s, AIDS was hitting, and the music ed. program went after suspected queers with a vengeance. A friend was outed in the midst of student teaching, failed student teaching and was expelled. It was a horrible situation made worse by the official silences. By the time I hit student teaching, I knew I couldn't be a classroom teacher – so I ran away to graduate school.

And, graduate school was not an improvement:

It was at a fairly conservative state university, and it was not safe. There were a series of ugly gay bashings on campus, and the university administration just sat on their hands. There were a few profs who were homophobic, but most were just clueless. Not mean, just blind to what was before their eyes.

Jane continued to fight against the inequities she saw at her university and eventually joined the academy giving a strong voice for social justice. The majority of participants, however, did enter K-12 public education and found a predominantly hostile

environment for LG[BT] educators because of the high standards teachers are held to.

Nate said:

I think it goes back to the beginning of teachers not being allowed to marry. There is a cross to carry in this profession, and I take it seriously.

I think parents hold teachers to a higher standard than their insurance agent. My growing years in a small, rural community did not give me any indication that parents would be okay with their children having a gay teacher – especially as a male. I think people perceive gay males to be more deviant by nature.

Gay male educators are not alone in being perceived as deviant. Ellen shared her fear as a teacher and administrator:

I was very fearful. I was fearful that I would be cast as a pedophile. I was fearful that I would be looked at as the quintessential dyke science teacher, and if you looked at me I read as straight As a principal, we had sister schools, and one of them had a volleyball assistant coach who was young and decided to sponsor an LG[BT] club for students. She was vilified by the principal and the district backed him on that and, she was run out of town. And I remember that drove me further back in the closet.

The stories of these educational leaders, exemplify the irrational and unwarranted fears of society. People fear the unknown. Agreeing with this notion, Rick went a step further, “I feel sorry for them [parents] – concerns about things they know so little about. Their fears

are so unwarranted and harmful to their children. I worry about them as role models for their kids.”

Rick’s concern is certainly warranted. More often than not, prejudicial and discriminatory feelings toward oppressed groups are passed from generation to generation until someone steps forward to break the cycle. Unwarranted hostility toward homosexuals in the U.S. educational system has prevailed since the early 1900s, making education a difficult profession for most LG[BT] individuals (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2004, 2005; Capper, 1999; Chauncey, 1994; D’Emilio, 1983; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Korshoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Korshoreck, 2003; Pinar, 1998; Sears, 1993; Tooms, 2007). Eric explains:

The hostility comes in many respects from the community. I think difficulty in being able to discuss your life because you often have the fear of hostility . . . in education, with those perceptions and concepts of indoctrination or you’re educating my child, and I don’t like you because you’re gay.

An overwhelming majority of the participants affirmed the irrational perceptions of indoctrination. Some spoke of being “caste as a pedophile”, people “moving to the top of their inference ladder”, or the “irrational fear that gays are out to recruit.”

Affirming this perception, Robert said, “There is still the assumption that gay men in particular are predators. That’s why, I think it’s scary for many people.” Speaking specifically of society’s covert fear of gay recruitment and living under a microscope, Rick said:

While you don't hear that charge [recruitment] you know it's still an underlying fear. It's an odd thing to be a member of a group based on sexuality and working with young children. People can't separate the two as easily as we can. We've had practice while living under a microscope. You are always aware of your actions and your students. Always.

Jake also acknowledged the irrational fear of recruitment, and how it has forced him to closely monitor his actions, wondering if he would self-monitor as closely if he were heterosexual:

In education we are working with children, and there still is a stereotypical fear about that. And there's the 'recruitment' charge, and that isn't appropriate with children. What people mix up is sexual orientation with sexual behavior. Unfortunately, I have had to be aware of some of my actions with young children. I wonder if I would feel the same if I were straight.

Clearly, hostility rooted in fear of recruitment is the lived experience of these LG[BT]educational leaders. But, their sexuality also places these leaders at the center of covert hostility on a daily basis. Reflecting on when she and a gay male were hired as administrators in the same community, Carol invited me to go online and read some of the articles that were written about them:

You could go online to the Vernon Tab [pseudonym] and read a piece that this guy wrote, and he said a lot of stuff about us that was untrue.

And even the Sparling Globe [pseudonym] article, it was not about who we are, but it was about us being gay. That's frustrating to me. Yes, I am gay. I do not run from that, I have no shame in that, but I am also a lot of other things It's not like the sole defining aspect. But, I do think that for some people, no matter what I do, even if I'm principal of the year in America, I'll still be the gay administrator.

When Jake came out to his school community, the majority of parents were very accepting and supportive. Jake recalled one parent's comment, "This parent stated that when her daughter learned that I was gay, she ran home crying. I said – What have you told your child about gay people that would make her cry?" And Rick shared his experience with covert "gay bashing" by a teacher:

I did get involved with a teacher who wanted to start a religious club for students. When we denied her involvement, she went after the GLBT group claiming that we were giving them rights that she didn't have. Notice she didn't go after the Chess club. I'm not sure she knew I was gay. Not that I was worried. I felt safe, the law was on my side, but I also felt attacked. It's still okay to gay bash in the press, in schools. She is just following the media who think its okay to report that a percent of the world supports or doesn't support gays.

Although covert "gay bashing" appears to occur more frequently in K-12 education, the academy is certainly not exempt. David teaches an education leadership course on social justice, he spoke of his students' course evaluations:

In some course evaluations, it's fairly common to read statements like 'The professor has a definite agenda to push homosexuality.' or 'The only thing the professor seems to talk about is his sexual agenda.' The class, of course, deals with all sorts of issues relating to social justice: class, ability, race, etc. But, the objectionable intrusion of the topic of sexuality into the curriculum seems to be heard the loudest...In face-to-face situations, however, I am ALWAYS [original emphasis] out in my classes. It becomes much more difficult not to take those kinds of comments as a personal attack. Even when the comments are not meant in an attacking sort of way, they're a clear rejection of who I am and the values I espouse.

When she initially filed for tenure at her institution, Jane was a victim of covert gay bashing:

When I crafted my tenure statement, I mentioned that my research was moving into GLBT issues. I had a piece published in [year] and was slated to co-edit a special edition of Journal of Education [pseudonym] Well, one of my external reviewers keyed in on that and wrote a very snarky evaluation of my research. It was later ruled homophobic, but it meant I went down on tenure in [year] A two-year long tenure fight ensued, complete with an internal report which stated I had been 'black-balled' because of my orientation. So, I won the grievance fight in [year], but that just means you get to re-file on tenure.

Indeed, hostility toward the gay community is not unique to the educational system – it is widespread and knows no boundaries. It ranges from extreme acts violence, such as the murders of college student Matthew Shepard in 1998 (Valdes, 1998) and middle school student Lawrence King a decade later (Cathcart, 2008), to the covert political gay bashing as that of Oklahoma’s Sally Kern (Kern, 2008). Ellen described one such covert action, words by a gubernatorial candidate talking about the recent ban on gay marriage:

I remember his comment specifically because he compared sexual identity to barnyard animals. He said it was just barnyard logic. A rooster needs a hen and a hen needs a rooster in order to be together and make chickens. So, what you had was the assumption that everybody needs to procreate in order to truly love each other and be free to do so, and that really niffed me off, and it sent a message. I think it compared, well just the use of barnyard logic in a rooster and a hen, I felt insulting on many levels. And you know, it made the papers all over the place and in a community like Greensfeld [pseudonym], which is a gay community, they were ticked off at him about it. And places like where I live, it was no big deal I find that incredibly oppressive.

With such strong messages of fear and hate engrained from a young age, no wonder so many LG[BT] educational leaders have remained “cloaked in secrecy”. These individuals live and work within contexts that are pervasively hostile toward their lifestyle and their identity.

Personal Protection

When individuals find themselves outside the accepted norm and fear for their personal safety on a daily basis, they cope by finding a means of protection – these LG[BT] educational leaders are no exception. The supporting cluster theme – personal protection – manifested primarily within informal contexts, however, some participants indicated formal contexts also created the need for protection. Reminiscing on fears of his youth, Eric developed personal shields, “I think you develop ways to protect yourself. You develop personal shields that keep the pain at bay and allow you to continue living with the hope that tomorrow it might get better or things may be different.” The need for a personal shield reverberated within each participant and was generalized to the LG[BT] community as a whole. What sets this unique study group apart from the LG[BT] norm, however, is their career choice.

Unquestionably, history has proven the U. S. educational system and the mores educators are held to is incongruent with alternative lifestyles, particularly the gay lifestyle. Therefore, in most states, LG[BT] educators, in order to protect themselves, would surely be on heightened alert. Previously, Mary spoke of silence as a form of protection in her youth. Upon becoming an educator, she was acutely aware that education does not tolerate homosexuality, and Mary’s silence turned to withdrawal, “I exited. I avoided. Shut down.” Recalling his early years as an educator, Rick also avoided, “I withheld information because I thought I would lose my job, which I loved, and thought I would never work again I refused to eat in the community with my partner or hold hands in public. I was afraid of being discovered.”

Clearly, LG[BT] educators are not free to talk about their personal lives for fear of being labeled, ostracized, or even fired. Many LG[BT] leaders created a shield of selective silence⁸ as a means of protection, however, selective silence often comes with a price. As a young teacher, Jordan's price for selective silence was physical and emotional exhaustion:

When I was first teaching, that was incredibly draining because I wasn't out, and there was a constant fear. I believe there is a stigma about being male and working with young children and the stereotypes that are associated with that. That would have totally bummed me out if people viewed me that way and thought their children were in danger.

That [fear] consumed a lot of energy, and it was exhausting.

Comparing her silence as a teacher to being an administrator, Mary said:

I retreated when the environment was unsafe, especially as a teacher.

As an administrator, I agree the position is more public, yet, all the work I have done to this point has a voice, that is your service and professionalism has merit, carries weight, has earned you respect

[But] I have been very careful as to the people I come out to.

When developing relationships with colleagues, Eric extended his shield of protection in order that others see him as a person and not his sexuality, "I tend to walk a very fine line You try to build safety measures like conversations that do not focus on topics that cross into personal life." For Pat, selective silence is her shield, "As far as

⁸ An individual selectively chooses to remain silent about an aspect of their life as a means of protection.

telling anybody now, it depends on who they are and how close I am to somebody or how close I know I can get with them or how I figure they accept gays or don't I don't go around talking about it really." Similarly, Jordan practices selective silence while weighing every situation, "I question all of the time, when is it appropriate. When does it matter to say things, when doesn't it matter. So, there's a whole other dialogue going on in my head when I'm in a new situation, I guess not just new situations."

Selective silence is the chosen shield that envelops these LG[BT] leaders and protects them, personally and professionally. More often than not, LG[BT] educators willingly succumb to education's form of the 1994 "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. Although Eric was expressing his personal reasons for taking this path, he encompassed the feelings of the majority:

If they don't ask, I don't tell them I think if anything, it has just been a protection. Why give up a protection if you know it is going to make it worse? Any time there is anything that puts you in a different light in the community, you are always a target for whatever criticism will follow. In essence, the power of privacy allows you to do your job in a much more neutral environment because otherwise you enter into or know that the result will be a hostile environment.

Indeed, selective silence shields these LG[BT] leaders from unwanted scrutiny and criticism that could potentially impede their effectiveness and success as educational leaders.

Increased Caution

For LG[BT] leaders protecting one's position, and in more cases than not their jobs, requires caution. The experience of life within the context of informal actions/attitudes of others, has been described as emotionally and physically draining – a state of constant alert resulting in increased caution. Most participants shared stories of their increased caution from adolescence onward. While in high school, Pat was cautious about people with whom she associated, “I hung around mostly with other gay people and we knew we were, but not many other people did. I guess that’s how I associated with other people.” Mary’s caution as a student had both emotional and social impacts, “I spent a lot more time thinking about what others thought or felt about me.” And for Eric, “It was easier to let people assume they knew what I was thinking and feeling rather than take the time to educate or inform them of what was really going on. This was easier and didn’t involve risk.”

Not wanting his dream shattered, David was cautious about the his language when referring to his research interests, “My dream was always to become a university professor, and I didn’t want to risk losing that possibility. So I couched my interests in the safe language of ‘social justice,’ ‘diversity as broadly defined,’ and things of that sort.” Remembering his first years as a teacher, Robert said:

I was about 23, and pretty much knew I was having same sex attraction, and I didn’t know what that meant, and I didn’t feel completely comfortable to talk about it. I was just very conscious of how I was all

the time. I don't think I tried to butch it up or anything like that, but at the same time I became more neutral in many of my responses.

Speaking of increased caution during their early careers, Jake said, "At the start of my career I was more careful and cautious about who I came out to." And Rick reflected, "I was much more cautious of my relationship with children as a teacher – from touch to being in the room alone with a student. I was always aware. I made sure everything was visible." As a teacher, Michael too exercised caution, "I was more vigilant about my behavior and my relationships with kids, and much more cautious and careful." Jordan was equally cautious with colleagues:

It was even weighing what you are saying when you come back the next day, if you had been somewhere, if the place you were at had anything to do with being gay or lesbian. Do people know about that, and if someone from school saw me would they protect my privacy.

Transitioning from teacher to administrator, brought less direct contact with students, however, it did not decrease the need for caution in the participants. Carol explained:

When you become an administrator, kind of the magnifying glass on you increases When you become an administrator there's no such thing as a casual moment. That's a tough transition . . . when you're kind of put into that fish bowl, it's hard to adjust because everyone is looking at everything you do. It's harder to hide, it's harder to be kind of private about who you are.

Jake spoke of being in the fish bowl and increased caution with his school community:

Some folks might feel that you will bring your ‘agenda’ to the school environment – acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle, valuing same-sex families, letting kids know that homosexuality is an accepted lifestyle. I also believe that some may feel it will include conversations and discussion about sex.

And, when dealing with students, Jake continues to worry about the same issues that plague most LG[BT] educators, “I still worry about some of the same things in my dealings with students. I do believe that I am being looked at as a gay administrator. But, I think most of the time I am showing that I am simply a good administrator rather than a GLBT administrator.”

Each LG[BT] administrator acknowledged the pressure of being under a “magnifying glass” and the need for increased caution. Continuously aware of the possible ramifications of homosexuals in education, Ron exercises caution:

I don’t think they can, but there’s always that fear that people can say ‘Oh, we can’t have homosexuals working in schools’ and making a big deal about it. But, I conduct myself in a way that is professional at all times. I don’t know how it would be an issue, but it always can be.

There’s always that in the back of my head.

When dealing with parents, Gina is hyper-cautious, “with relationships we must build with parents, and the controversy that it [sexuality] can bring. It can be very difficult. I have to say, I am really careful about what I discuss with parents.”

Increased caution for Mary has certainly had its price, “Part of what you do is weigh the cost/benefit of opening yourself up to someone. I have a lot to lose. Having to be on alert doesn’t afford me to have the deep connections that I normally would if I didn’t have to be so cautious.” Finally, looking through his “gay lens”, Jordan equated his increased caution in uncertain situations with a type of assimilation:

There’s a spectrum of how you use your hands, and some are more flamboyant. I am certainly more conscious when I’m in a room with all men, and I’m assuming they are mostly straight men. I watch my body language, and I may not talk as much. I may not reveal as much. So, in those situations where I’m concerned about how I might be perceived because of my body language or my voice, yeah, it’s a type of assimilation. I don’t want other people to think I’m leading a straight life, but I have this kind of internalized homophobia. So, it’s working through that, and that comes out in situations that I feel insecure because I may not be accepted, or it may not be assuring. That is when I’m careful and conscious about how I’m being perceived – that gay lens.

Without a doubt, the LG[BT] educational leaders in this study, have experienced *self losses*, *opportunity losses*, and *safety losses* through contextual formal policies/laws and contextual informal actions/attitudes of society.

Fear: Experiences of Gain

The major theme of gain is complex in that personal and professional gains were intertwined in ways that made them difficult to separate. As a result, the emergent themes found in the personal and professional lives of the participants were divided into two minor themes: Personal Gains and Social Gains.

Personal Gains

For some individuals, the losses of self, opportunity, and safety force them into deeper seclusion, but for these LG[BT] leaders these losses resulted in personal gains that strengthened their character. The experiences of personal gain are discussed below in five supportive cluster themes: 1) strength, 2) personal power, 3) comradeship/connections, 4) acceptance/self-awareness, and 5) integrated identity.

Strength

The LG[BT] educational leaders in this study described strength as a positive character trait born of fear, and for the participants, appeared in the contexts of informal actions and attitudes of others. Recalling years of feeling terrified, Jane spoke of her experience as a doctoral student, and the strength she gained from her battle with hostility:

I guess the homophobic [actions] was supposed to make me feel powerless, but I wasn't going to let that happen. After spending nearly thirty years being terrified, I just wasn't going to put up with that nonsense. And, I was surrounded by wonderfully fierce queer activists. Gay men, lesbians, bi's, trannies. In such a hostile environment, we

HAD [original emphasis] to work together. Otherwise, things would be even worse You have to at least try to take control over a volatile situation. No matter what.

Although she also faced hostility in her early years, Holly credited her strength to a) support of her family and gay peers, and b) her personality. Equating strength of character to power and innate self-confidence, Holly said, “I am a powerful person, I mean being in sports and everything. I’ve always had the kind of confidence behind me . . . that’s just me.” On being an administrator, Holly stated, “I guess it all depends on what kind of person you are. You deal with yourself. If you’re confident with yourself it doesn’t really matter about your sexuality.” Reminiscing on his life, Michael considered himself an outlier, in that his lifeworld did not include the fear experienced by other participants in this study. Albeit, Michael’s sexuality and strength of character are intricately interwoven. Michael recalled the acceptance and support from his nuclear family as instrumental for his sense of confidence, resiliency, and strength:

I interact with people with a great deal of confidence. A great sense of confidence and resiliency . . . My family, my father, my brothers, and sisters from when I was very young on, I was always encouraged to be myself. To be open and honest and to be judged on who I am. To be judged on my work ethic, to be judged on my knowledge, my skills, my experience. I would say having that nuclear family support through my entire life has given me the confidence to attack my professional life or friendships in the community with complete confidence.

Unquestionably, Michael and Holly were the exception to the norm for these LG[BT] leaders, the majority of participants, after living lived experiences of fear, stated that their experiences contributed to their strength of character. Participating in a conversation on strength and resiliency, Mary and Eric spoke of *stubbornness*. Eric stated, “The stubborn behavior was more around why I wouldn’t let others define who I was or what I could do with my professional aspirations.” And, both suggested that being stubborn “is a prerequisite” and “an essential job qualification” for LG[BT] school administrators. Reflecting on his own strength and fear, Rick said:

If I spent as much time learning to be a leader as I did masquerading, I would have become stronger and more daring earlier in my career . . . I spent so much of my youth and young adult years trying not to be gay that I forgot that being fearful in itself adds to ones character.

Ron believes LBGT individuals are stronger and more impenetrable as a result of their lived experiences and wonders about his hetero-counterparts:

I think LG[BT] people learn how to be stronger in who they are because you deal with, whether it is conscious or unconscious, just negative stereotypes and that kind of stuff . . . I think it makes you stronger in a way, but it also makes you harder. You’re kind of just more impenetrable If my premise that being a gay made me a stronger person, maybe being straight and not having to through those challenges makes people less strong, and kind of shelters people from things, too.

Reflecting on her own experiences with fear, hostility, and marginalization, Carol said:

I think my sexual orientation has given me strength because it has made the road a little harder for me, and I've had to deal with family not accepting me, I've had to deal with homophobic incidents in my life where people have said or done things that make me feel marginalized. On the flip side, my sexual orientation is just part of where my strength comes from. So, it's not just my sexual orientation that has given me strength, but anything makes it harder or is an adversity – it builds strength of character.

Emphasizing the need for school administrators to be strong and impenetrable, Jane said, “Yeah – if you're going to be in administration and be a “public queer”, which I am, you best be tough as nails because all manner of sh- will come your way. There are a few hateful folks out there who will f- with your life if they get a chance.” Affirming Jane's thoughts on the need for queer administrators to be strong, Rick shared his belief, “Strong for me is first knowing who you are as a person. Next, it's about knowing what you believe in and value and what you are willing to do when those beliefs are challenged.”

Finally, Eric posited that strength of character means rising above the heterosexist paradigm, “When the dominant culture tells you that you shouldn't be an openly gay person in a position of [educational] leadership, you have to rise above those messages and develop a personal identity that is in conflict with the norm.”

Personal Power

Indeed, strength of character is required to navigate the waters of the education profession as out or closeted LG[BT] leaders. The educational system moves in sync with the ebb and flow of social values that influence the legal and political arenas, and the current heteronormative values do not foster inclusion of this marginalized group. Recent hate crimes, such as the murders of middle school students Joseph Walker-Hoover (Presgaves, 2009) and Lawrence King (Cathcart, 2008), and anti-gay rhetoric, like that of Oklahoma state representative, Sally Kern (Kern, 2008), only serve to foster the hate and oppression. So, how and where do LG[BT] educational leaders find the strength to continue their journey?

One source of strength, or power, for these participants was through the experience of “coming out”. The majority of participants voiced a feeling of personal power in “coming out” that was contextualized by the informal actions and attitudes of others. By coming out, these leaders gave voice to their life and regained power over their own story. Although the stories of outing themselves covered a broad spectrum from a non-issue to exclusion from family activities, feeling empowered was the overarching theme. Sharing his own personal power through coming out, Robert said, “[personal power] goes all the way back to coming out in the sense that I am going to come out in this way. I’m taking charge and I’m going to do this and I realize this is going to be the result.” Reflecting on the importance of maintaining power over his own story, Nate said:

I do not ‘come out when I come into a room’ and that has probably played in my favor over the years. I was able to build a solid reputation for myself first, and then let the truth trickle out You need to do a good job first and sprinkle bits of your personal life as you see fit.

For Mary, the “power of privacy” is her source of personal power, “There is a part of me that enjoys the power of privacy. Coming out at work is such a hugely personal decision. It is not that I am not out where and when I want to be out. It is that I can choose. That is the ticket for me.”

Upon becoming a tenured professor, Ellen began to come out in her department. She recalled an empowering moment as she came out to her program coordinator and assigned mentor,

[A]nd his answer to me was ‘I can’t believe you lied to me’ and I said . . . I don’t think about it as lying, I think about it as navigating my identity . . . He said to me, ‘So, what kind of women are you into? Like Pamela Anderson types?’ and he put his hands up to like play with two women’s breasts. And I was so f- angry and mad And this guy’s not only homophobic, he’s sexist And so that moment was a great gift because it pushed me forward in my work, it pushed me forward in my commitment to continue to study this, and it pushed me forward in my own sense of empowerment.

The personal power Ellen felt at that moment gave her the strength and resiliency to stop cowering in the face of her peers, but it did not end her fear of student reaction. Ellen shared her story of regaining power over her story and overcoming her final fear:

It was very easy for me to go forward nationally, but in my own classroom, for some reason that was scary. But, that all ended . . . I came out to my class, and I feel a sense of completeness because I finally found the words to say ‘As someone misread as a straight person, I know what it’s like to be essentialized and judged, and I’m willing to talk about that.

For most participants, coming out empowered them because they let go of the feelings of guilt and insecurity, and began to live an authentic life. Jordan explained, “I wanted to be a courageous and honest person I wasn’t being congruent with the dreams I think ‘coming out’ is empowering. I much less worry about those things.”

Gina’s experiences led her to personal power and an authentic life:

Those experiences have led to my understanding that if I talk about my life as if it’s a normal thing, most people will respond that way and will understand that my life and worries are no different than those of others who have significant others in their lives. I think that’s the most vital way to be out – not declaring it every day.

Recalling the feeling of personal power, David said, “Once I did come out tough, I made a decision not to allow myself to cower in the face of heteronormativity.” And, Carol stated, “I’m publicly out. I think in some respects it’s extremely liberating.” Likewise,

Jane shared similar feelings, “The kicker about being OUT [original emphasis] all of the time, is life gets much easier. I really don’t give a rip about what people think. That’s their head stuff, not mine.” As she reflected on personal power, Kathy said, “For me coming out was not ‘an event’, it was more a natural act For me it is about claiming equal space.” Nate spoke of the personal power necessary to free himself and how his new found freedom rejuvenated his life:

I probably don’t give myself enough credit for having the strength to set myself free. It does take a lot of it and I was glad that I had it in me. To a degree, I think I’m more excited about my work than before. I felt like I was carrying around extra baggage that was weighing on me. I’m now free to be all that I can be. I do feel like I am a much better person and that reflects in my life all around.

Without a doubt, owning their stories is powerful for these LG[BT] educational leaders. Gina explained, “I think that anyone’s story is a powerful tool he or she needs to own.” Echoing Gina’s sentiments, Carol said, “I would think it would be particularly draining, challenging, difficult to be a closeted administrator. I always talk about the coming out as not allowing others to have power. When you come out, you kind of take that power back from others.” And, reflecting on taking power over his coming out and his life, Robert said:

There is a need to have control over your own story and I don’t think That heterosexual people can ever understand that because the assumption is you’re straight, and that’s all I need to know about you. But, with a gay

person, that's not the case because we are in a position to have to come out all the time and confront stereotypes either overtly or subtly by how we are. So, to maintain control over your life is to maintain control of your story, and the language that surrounds it.

Indeed, maintaining control over one's life and story through coming out is an empowering experience for LG[BT] individuals. In light of current heteronormative values that permeate society, coming out is courageous and an act of personal power.

Comradeship/Connections

To navigate the treacherous waters heteronormativity, these LG[BT] leaders have found strength in making connections with allies. Such connections provide the safety net of support and strength to move forward and manifest within the contexts of informal actions and attitudes of others. After college, Jordan entered the Peace Corps and made the connections he needed to discover his *self-identity*:

[I] went to the Peace Corps and met other gay people that are out, and I said WOW [original emphasis]. It was like, 'You know you're gay and you're ok with it, and you don't mind telling people. It was just a normal thing for you.' And, that led me to self-identity – oh, that's what I call myself, it's ok to call myself that, I wonder how they did that with their families and friends. And so, I still had that fear tape along with the desire to be out.

David found strength in the connections he made during the Men's Movement:

What finally encouraged me to begin to take baby steps towards coming out was my involvement in the late 1980s Men's Movement. It was a way for me to finally connect with other men in ways I had never done before The Men's Movement provided me an opportunity to explore and discover a whole new sense of masculinity. In fact, I would say a whole new sense of masculinities, since there were straight men, gay men, macho men, effeminate men – the whole gamut.

The first time she found herself surrounded by gay and straight allies, Ellen received a powerful message:

I remember having conversations with some very powerful writers in our field who said, 'You don't have to always tell everybody you're gay. You don't have to always come out. You are allowed to negotiate your identity in different ways at different times', and that was the first lesson in not punishing myself, and that was the first time I met my own people.

For many participants, the connections they made with other gay educators was critical in their early careers. The connections Jake made with other gay educators was "life changing":

I was fortunate that in my first teaching assignment I met three other gay men in my school who showed me the sights and gay community. Having these friends who taught me about the community and educated me was great – sort of like role models. It was life changing for me. Just

that there were other educators who were gay, struggling like I was, who were willing to be open and share their community – people to talk to who had similar experiences.

And, remembering his fear of coming out and the support of two “great friends” who changed his life, Nate shared:

I worried about the relationships changing, but had faith in the end that it would be okay. I have two great friends, both lesbians, that created a world for me that sent a very strong message that it was okay for me to come out when I was ready. They never said a word, but I just knew it would be okay when I was ready. To me, they indirectly said, ‘Cross your arms over your chest and fall back. We promise we will catch you.’

I will always be grateful to them for that. It helped me tremendously, And I take great pride in paying that forward now.

Rick recalled the impact of joining a gay educators group, “My experience with the group Teacher Empowerment was impactful in getting connected to other LG[BT] educators My participation felt part clandestine, part revolutionary, part social – all important in my growth as a soon to be gay school administrator.” While with the Teacher Empowerment group, Eric realized his dreams were attainable. He spoke of meeting and befriending Dr. Pat McCart, “[My] memories of Pat McCart – I admired the fact that she could have a position [principal] I thought was impossible to get as a LG[BT] person. The door of possibility opened up a crack for me.”

In addition to connections with gay friends and straight allies, these LG[BT] leaders found a safety net of support in family, as well as gay and straight friends and colleagues. Eric spoke of the important role of his support system, “supportive colleagues and mentors. People who were allies and provided a respite from the struggles You can easily turn anger into something positive.” Reminiscing on coming out, the support he received and his continued strength, Jake said:

It took me a long time to move from being a closeted, behind the scenes supporter to being more visible and open. It took a lot of risks, many mentors and supporters, and a series of positive reactions. I believe my strength to continue to be more open and visible has to with the support from my family, support from my partner, support from my teaching colleagues, and support from a former principal who became a good friend and mentor – he was straight.

Mary reflected on finding gay connections as a teacher and administrator:

There is a bond when teachers who are gay can connect, and I think if that happens and support can be given to each other, great Knowing another gay administrator is key. We find each other, believe me. If we are out living our life we do connect and find each other. But, we are friends first and gay second.

Finally, Ron spoke of the importance of making connections with other gay administrators:

You get to know, at least of the circle, the secondary administrators, I think I have a pretty good handle on who the gay ones are. And there's a group, and it's not a really small group. There's enough of us out there and we just kind of look at ourselves and say, 'Oh, this is alright.'

Clearly, the strength found in supportive connections has been important, even life changing for these LG[BT] educational leaders. The participants agreed that the support of family, friends, and gay and straight allies was instrumental as they navigated their identities and careers.

Acceptance/Self-Awareness

In previous sections, participants spoke of the need to be accepted by family, friends, colleagues, and society, as well as the pain that accompanies the denial of acceptance. For these LG[BT] educational leaders, acceptance of their sexuality was empowering and shaped who they are. Ron explains:

Before I came out, I felt I was comfortable enough to do it, but just because I was comfortable with it didn't mean that everybody else was comfortable to accept it right away. In my case, my family became completely accepting, and they are a good part of my backbone, of who I am.

And, Jake credits his family's acceptance for his courage to be openly gay:

When I meet new people (staff members, families, colleagues) I have to come out and let them know who I am. Personally, I came out to

my family when I was 21 and in college. I initially came out to my father, or rather, he asked me if I was gay. We had a great conversation, and I figured if my dad is so great with my being gay, then I'm telling all of my family members, and I did! [original emphasis] Their support encouraged me to be more open about being gay.

While reflecting on acceptance and the experience of coming out, Mary said, "I think people told me in their own quiet way that they accepted me for who I was. Maybe they saw the struggle." She later spoke specifically about gay and straight colleagues, "I know that the people I have met through work, with whom I have allowed to be a part of my personal life, have only brought me great joy." Similarly, acceptance of his sexuality brought closure to Nate's vanilla life:

I did not come out, to myself, until I was into my second year of administration. Long story short, I completely lost my grip and knew it was now or never. I think it has improved the quality of my personal life greatly. People comment that I'm back to my old self again. Go figure. I'm much happier and feel as though I'm actually playing in this game of life for a change instead of simply watching from the sidelines. I think my personal happiness has impacted my professional life greatly. Being happy within can only impact your work in a positive way.

As previously discussed, the need to feel accepted is an innate human desire, not bound by the constraints of heteronormativity. The power of acceptance has heightened self-awareness for these LG[BT] individuals and given them the courage to rise above

heteronormativity. Recognizing comfort in one's identity crosses all boundaries, Ron stated, "I think being able to be comfortable and be who you are and able to move yourself forward. Everybody needs to have that, and that goes beyond sexuality, that goes beyond race, that goes beyond gender."

Indeed, self-awareness is empowering. Robert's mindset is, "[You must] be comfortable with who you are, and be it. That means be in charge of your life. Let them know that this is who you are and this is how I am." For David, self-awareness has been liberating, "Today I'm aware that the empowerment of self-awareness lets me move through the world in ways I could not have imagined in a prior time." And, after reflecting on his chat room conversation, Rick's self-awareness was brought to a higher level – an uplifting experience:

I have not thought a lot about the positive connection between my work and my gayness. I have only thought in terms of how being gay got in the way of work in the early years as I feared discovery and loss of my job. It was uplifting to think about how my success as an administrator can be tied to my qualities and experiences in being gay.

Without a doubt, acceptance by members of surrounding concentric circles was an empowering experience for the participants. Acceptance by others heightened participants' self-awareness and allowed them to navigate their world with greater confidence in who they are. Acceptance and self-awareness has given the participants strength to move forward in the midst of adversity, and challenge heteronormativity.

Integrated Identity

When I asked the school administrators, “What does it mean to be a gay administrator?” each paused before answering. This was a particularly difficult question for these participants, as they struggled with separating their personal and professional identities. Their responses clearly reflected their integrated identities, a supportive cluster theme rising from informal contexts. Jordan said:

As for an administrator who is gay, I always bring that to my job. So, maybe there are more people that think that [and] I don't know they are thinking that. It always takes me off guard, like ‘Oh yeah, that's right, they think of me as a gay person.’ I just really don't think of myself in that way a whole lot.

Jordan's words reverberated with each administrator, they see themselves as gay administrators, simply administrators who happened to be gay. As in all aspects of their lives, sexuality was a part of who these individuals are, but does not define them. In response to the question, Gina said, “But, I'm not a ‘gay administrator’, just an administrator who happens to be gay . . . I'm just another person doing this job.” Echoing Gina's thoughts, Rick stated, “I'm not sure I think of myself as a gay administrator. I think about me as being an administrator who is gay.” Unable to put her sexuality before her profession, Pat said, “Gay administrator . . . I don't see my sexuality before being an administrator. I don't see it as being a gay or straight administrator. I just see it as being an administrator and being good at the job I do. I am who I am. I'm just an

administrator.” Finally, Carol recognized her sexuality initially set her apart from her hetero-counterparts, but in reality, there is no difference:

I was the gay principal, and people kind of pigeon-holed me in that regard because that was the thing that was different about me than others. Over time, that has become increasingly less important in the school community. When you first get a job, you kind of get identified, and then in the end they want a principal who knows their kids and is moving the school forward and advocating for the school. It’s much more important that I’m an effective principal than I’m a gay principal.

Unquestionably, fear resulted in significant losses for the majority of participants, but fear was also the catalyst that thrust them forward to take back their stories and their lives – personal gains that emanated social gains.

Social Gains

Social gains set these LG[BT] educational leaders apart. The minor emergent theme of social gains included six supporting cluster themes: 1) unique perspectives, 2) heightened sensitivity, 3) heightened awareness, 4) role models, 5) giving voice, and 6) courageous trail-blazing.

Unique Perspectives

Educational leaders, whether gay or straight, must possess strength of character in order to successfully carry out the responsibilities of their position. So, what made these LG[BT] leaders unusual? According to Jake, “gay educators have a unique perspective to share [because they] know about name calling, harassment, being picked on . . . what it is

like to be ridiculed, hated irrationally, not feeling the same as others.” These experiences, their past footprints, was what this group of LG[BT] leaders credit for their unique perspectives and a strength of character that guided them to success. Unique perspectives rose from lives contextualized by both formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of society.

To begin, the participants themselves tied their current lives as educational leaders to their own early experiences. As Carol commented:

I think that everything that happens to you shapes you as an administrator. My job is about reacting in the moment. I rarely have time to think, so I have to go from my gut, my experiences. Some of those experiences are a result of my sexual orientation, others are not Do I think I am a better administrator because I am gay?

Absolutely . . . I think I am a more sensitive, thoughtful person/principal because of all of this . . . the fabric of my life has made me who I am.

Jake echoed Carol’s sentiments, “One thing I believe that has shaped my work as an administrator is my experience as a GLBT student and teacher. I was keenly aware as a student, on how teachers treated students, whether they were fair, open-minded, discriminatory.” And Rick said, “Being gay students and teachers shaped us as administrators.”

On being an administrator who is also gay, Ron stated, “I think I have a greater tolerance factor for people who are outside the norm . . . that makes me a better administrator.” Gina acknowledged that her “special perspective helps.” Agreeing her

sexuality has made her a better principal, Carol said, “I get what it feels like to be marginalized. That helps me deal with my Black students, my poor students. I am a better principal for them because I am gay.” Mary also believed her unique perspective was a product of her sexuality, “We know something about being marginalized. We know how important it is to feel welcome and accepted. We hopefully are people that offer support and give you a voice.” And, Jordan viewed the world differently because of his “GLBT lens”:

There’s always a constant battle in my head about filtering the world through this GLBT lens that I think I carry with me. I think I see the world differently I think having had the experiences I’ve had as a gay person, I’m more drawn to look at things from social justice and things that are happening in the world, not only for GLBT people. Issues of gender and race and economics and all those types of things, and where can I fit in, and where can I be more of an ally, and where can I learn more about something.

In addition to acquiring a unique level of understanding, the experiences of these LG[BT] educational leaders afforded them unique perspectives regarding the necessary ingredients for accepting and inclusive learning environments. Eric stated that there is more involved in such settings than simply creating inclusive environments, they require, “the belief of individuals that it is the inclusive environment that makes the difference.” For Rick, “Students need to see themselves in books, in teachers, in every part of their

life.” Nate’s unique perspective allowed him to reflect on school improvement that fosters inclusiveness:

As administrators we need to be extremely accepting of all walks of life and understand the importance of providing teachers all across the board for our students to benefit from. We currently ask ourselves how many black teachers we have in the building when hiring. How awesome it will be to get to a place when we ask how many gay teachers we have when hiring!

Likewise, Michael shared his perspective on administrators and equal opportunity employers for the 21st century:

I think the superintendent and human resources department need to openly acknowledge and recruit. You know when they say they are an equal opportunity employer it would be nice if they would specify, an equal opportunity employer for race, religions, sexual orientation. Those words would be so powerful to applicants. To feel welcome and to feel that they were going to be supported once they were there. I think when we put it right out there people will say they’ve never felt so included before.

Most participants recognized that experiences of marginalization and living with fear led to their unique perspectives. Unique perspectives, however, were not the sole factors for success as leaders, rather, they are merely stepping stones.

Heightened Sensitivity

In previous sections, participants spoke of the hostile environments they faced as educators, and the shields of protection they created as a result. Some indicated that they would have exited the profession if not for their protective shields. Michael shared his views on the unique traits and perspectives that draw LG[BT] individuals to education:

I think it is very natural for gays and lesbians to pursue the educational profession because in general we're caring, compassionate, nurturing, sensitive people. We really enjoy working with kids and expanding their viewpoints and building a democratic spirit in children and that appeals to us. The whole nature of the experience of nature and equality draws us to this profession. It's quite natural.

The participants unanimously agreed that being empathetic to the struggles of your staff, students, and families is critical for the acceptance of all and the creation of inclusive learning environments. Given the past experiences of these LG[BT] educational leaders, it was no surprise that heightened sensitivity, grounded in formal and informal contexts, strengthened their characters and shaped their work.

Reflecting on his "gay traits" and sensitivity, Rick said, "I talked about 'gay traits'. While I don't really know if I believe in that generalization, I do think that my sensitivity and caring approach came partially from my experiences being gay." Later, Rick spoke of a possible reason for his heightened sensitivity, "You never will know the gay community until you live in it." Supporting Rick's premise, Carol spoke of her sensitivity:

I think that it [being gay] has given me a better understanding of what it is like to be ‘other’, and how it feels to be marginalized. If I didn’t have that experience, I don’t think that I would be that understanding because you can claim to understand, but until you have lived in a situation where you have felt discriminated against or an institution is not going to support you, you really can’t truly understand how difficult it can be to feel safe and supported in a place.

Noy Chou, a Cambodian born, U.S. raised, ninth grade suburban Boston high school student, certainly understood the feeling of discrimination. In her 1984 poem, “You Have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand”, Chou asks:

What is it like to be an outsider...
What is it like to be an opposite...
What is it like when you are always a loser?
(Chou, 1984)

Chou eloquently wrote of her lived experience of marginalization and discrimination, concluding her poem with the following stanza:

What is it like when you walk in the street
and everybody turns to look at you
and you don’t know why they are looking at you.
Then, when you find out,
you want to hide your face
but you don’t know where to hide
because they are everywhere.
You have to live in somebody else’s country to feel it.
(Chou, 1984)

Ms. Chou wrote of her experience as an immigrant, but her words resonate with all who have felt the pain of ostracism, marginalization, and discrimination. Indeed, one cannot fully understand what it is like to be “different” unless it has been personally

experienced. Marginalization led to a deeper understanding for these participants. Eric explains:

You develop an understanding of what it is like to have to fit into a set of expectations that don't include you. You can more easily understand experiences of those who are not meeting the projected expectations of the majority.

And Carol stated, "I get what it feels like to be marginalized. That helps me deal with my Black students, my poor students, I am a better principal for them because I am gay."

Without a doubt, past footprints afforded the participants a deeper understanding of marginalization. When reflecting on the understanding gleaned from past experiences of marginalization, Mary stated, "The deeper understanding has made me more empathetic – pure and simple." Nate believed that his *gay* experiences heightened his attentiveness and sensitivity:

It seems to me that being gay gives me equally healthy doses of sensitivity and firmness It is easier to pay attention to those things because you know the impact. I find myself being able to extend to all situations with children and families because of my experiences. I can be stronger and step in when I see something.

For Carol, understanding was a combination of past and current experiences, "I understand their [students] marginalization. I get what it means to be 'other'. I have felt that, still do sometimes."

Because of their gay experiences, these leaders reported being better able to relate to, empathize with, and advocate for students who do not fit the hetero-normative values of society. Reflecting on the “drama of high school” and her sensitivity, Gina said, “I think I always carry a special place in my heart for those students who don’t feel like they fit in with all the rumors and drama of high school and what someone is ‘supposed’ to be like according to society.” Her sexual orientation has afforded Carol a unique “window” through which she saw the struggles of all her students. When thinking specifically of her LG[BT] students, Carol stated, “I get those kids – their rigidity, their fear.” Ron spoke of a necessary independence, and the impact his sexuality has had on his career:

[Y]ou’ve learned that you have to be independent of everything else because if you let people in you’ll get hurt. So, it [sexuality] has as an administrator and educator, it makes you a stronger administrator. It makes you more empathetic to kids and to kids struggles. I think you can be more of an advocate for kids.

As the participants reflected on their experiences as gay students and young adults, all spoke of their unique sensitivity toward oppressed individuals and the necessity to create safe and welcoming environments. On gay administrators, Rick said, “We are more aware of student feelings, needs, and deal with harassment with more intensity.” Gina referred to her heightened awareness, “I am extremely aware of gender norms and looking out for students who don’t quite match that.” Reflecting on his sensitivity toward non-inclusiveness, Jake stated:

As a teacher and administrator, I was/am careful to use inclusive language, address harassment, and be open You have some of the experiences of knowing what it is like to be picked on, called names, ostracized, so I don't want students to feel that.

Acknowledging his sexuality shaped his current practice, Eric shared:

I think for me it has resulted in my need to make certain that we provide welcoming, safe environments for our students and families. I continually analyze, react, and respond to practices and policies that indicate to me that we are creating hostile environments.

Crediting her sensitivity toward creating a safe environment to her *gayness*, Carol said:

You need to understand that everyone comes to your school with a different story/perspective. Your job is to meet them where they are and do whatever you can to create a space where kids can learn and teachers can teach. I do a better job of that because I am gay.

Agreeing with other participants, Jordan stated, "I think hopefully that as a gay administrator, part of my responsibility is to make sure there is a safe place for GLBT youth, for GLBT staff." Finally, like others, Kathy spoke of how her lived experience has heightened her sensitivity on a broader level, "It [sexuality] has heightened my sensitivity to multiple issues of discrimination, and I use my lived experience to gain insight and take actions to benefit all oppressed groups."

Because of the shared experience of being *on the outside looking in*, understanding marginalization is a common thread uniting minority groups. The lived experience of relentless fear, however, led these participants to a deeper understanding of marginalization and discrimination. A deeper understanding resulted in heightened sensitivity toward others traveling a similar path.

Heightened Awareness of Hetero-privilege

As a young teen-ager, Noy Chou clearly understood, as she stated in her poem, “You Have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand”, what it felt like to be viewed as different in a society of white hetero-privilege – a society where anything outside the valued norm is cast aside and shunned:

What is it like when somebody bothers you
when you do nothing to them?
You tell them to stop
but they say they didn’t do anything to you.
Then, when they keep doing it until you can’t stand it any longer,
you go up to the teacher and tell him or her
to tell them to stop bothering you.
They say that they didn’t do anything to bother you.
Then the teacher asks the person sitting next to you.
He says, “Yes, she didn’t do anything to her”
and you have no witness to turn to.
So the teacher thinks you’re a liar.
You have to live in somebody else’s country to understand.
(Chou, 1984)

The poignant words of Chou exemplify the pain of discrimination felt by marginalized populations. This group of LG[BT] leaders agreed that the experience of being marginalized makes one keenly aware of hetero-privilege. Martha Minow (1990), law professor stated, “We are dividing the world. We use our language, to exclude, to distinguish, to discriminate” (p. 3).

Indeed, language is used to exclude and discriminate against marginalized groups, but actions and attitudes go beyond language – an experience of which all participants have had, and manifests in both formal and informal contexts. Reflecting on lived experiences, these educational leaders agreed that past footprints have heightened their awareness of hetero-privilege and how it plays out in their everyday lives.

Comparing his hetero-counterparts to himself, Jordan commented, “There’s a lot of things that they [heterosexuals] can do or say without having the gay tape go through their head.” Nate thought of the ease at which heterosexuals navigate life, “I just think the hetero-privilege is one of ‘ease’. I wouldn’t have near the worries about my career, etc. if I was married with little kids running around.” Similar to Nate, Michael immediately thought of the privilege of marriage, “Not only the fact that they can be married, but they think nothing of it. If they want to go get a marriage license and get married, it’s such a privilege. They don’t realize it.” Later, Michael spoke of his first principal experience and comments his colleagues made:

When I first became a principal in the school I previously taught, obviously everybody knew I was gay, and people would say to me, ‘Look I understand, I got a cousin who is gay’, as if I’m going to go, ‘Oh, thank you, you understand. I’m so thrilled that you are ok with me.’ Oh please, it’s nice that they’re making this gesture, but they don’t understand how silly that really is.

Hetero colleagues who did not realize the nature of their words or actions was a common observation among these participants. Reminiscing on experiences of coming

out, Carol recalled having to rarely out herself professionally because more oft than not her straight allies inappropriately took control. Feeling others' control over her story had been belittling, Carol said, "I think one of the things I have realized is that hetero people have no real understanding what it is means to be gay I don't think they get it."

Kathy reflected on how openly her hetero colleagues talk about their lives, "They [heteros] talk about their weekend, and think it is being conversational, but many perceive my talking about my weekend as 'putting it in their face' They don't know they're doing it, when chatting about their families, they honestly believe we don't talk about sexual orientation here." And Pat said, "They [heteros] can be more open about themselves. They can be more open around other people, and they can display affection and do other things and talk about their lives, where I don't do that in front of people."

Clearly, there is a discrepancy between the privilege afforded gay administrators and their hetero counterparts. Several participants spoke of the presumptions made by a heterosexist society. Although openly out, David's conflict with the "notion of covering and assimilating" continues:

It never really stops, does it? Because the power of heteronormativity is entirely pervasive, there's always a new situation where someone doesn't know about me, always another time when the work of coming out has to occur. There are people who enter my life and ask about my wife or something like that. They just presume.

Michael laughed about an experience he had as a new principal hire, “That was so fun when the superintendent said he had to take me and my wife around to look for a house. I thought your world is so small. I have to work here just to help you out.”

The LG[BT] leaders in this study agreed that hetero-privilege is not only rampant in society, but also vivid in our schools. Keenly aware of education’s unbridled hetero-privilege, Michael chose to take a leadership role and was firm in his conviction:

I went into it [administration] because I wanted to make sure I was in power to create a safe environment for everybody – for diversity in races, religion, and sexuality. And, so I actually chose to take a power position so I could bring equity to an environment I was going to work for.

Similarly, Jake spoke of his awareness of hetero-privileges, and the need to create a safe environment as a teacher and administrator, “I kind of believed that I didn’t want other students to experience the kind of harassment that I experienced and saw. So, I was able to influence things from my perspective as a teacher, and I have carried it forward as an administrator.”

All participants agreed that an acute awareness of hetero-privilege drives them to assure equitable and safe environments for students, staff, and families. However, the participants also recognized the impact of hetero-privilege on their own professional lives. Reflecting on the effect of hetero-privilege his professional life, Eric said:

It [gay administrator] also becomes a highly political activity to be ‘out’ in a broader context. Navigating this can be incredibly challenging. It can also be highly draining on the emotional and

physical levels. Why does one have to fight this fight when all you are doing is what any other professional would do in the course of their job?

Rick described navigating hetero-privilege in his professional life, “As an administrator, I am more aware of my words, my actions, as a model for the organization. I am really aware of walking the talk every minute of every day.” Thinking of how hetero-privilege “plays out” in the everyday working of her job, Mary said, “The toughest part of my job is seeing how the white/hetero-privilege plays out in a diverse setting.”

Hetero-privilege “plays out” through formal context of laws and policies, as well as the informal context of actions and attitudes of society. With their foundation in hetero-normative traits, informal context seem to have the greatest impact on those viewed as “different”. How society values particular traits, such as gender, determines the opportunities available to individuals and the informal contexts that envelop them.

Minow (1990) supports this premise:

Of course there are “real differences” in the world; each person differs in countless ways from each other person. But when we simplify and sort, we focus on some traits rather than others, and we assign consequences to the presence and absence of the traits we make significant. We ask, “What’s the new baby?” – and we expect as an answer, boy or girl. That answer, for most of history, has spelled the consequences for the roles and opportunities available to that individual. (p. 3)

Society's hetero-normative mindset encourages a heterosexual paradigm. Several participants experienced the consequences of "stepping outside" gender boundaries and, therefore, are keenly aware of gender roles and the heterosexual paradigm in schools. Addressing gender issues, Gina said, "Our society is so gender conformist. Look at the clothes we buy for a baby shower if we know the gender. Look at the television commercials, shows, MTV, and all the gender messages children receive at a young age." Eric recalled his frustration with the heterosexism he sees in his district on a regular basis, "The parts for me that just get frustrating are the little things that I don't necessarily call people on, but sit and watch. The 'Oh, the boys are interested in the girls' . . . Those conversations where they [heteros] just assume that the world is this way."

This heterosexist paradigm is reinforced on a daily basis, in much of our curriculum, as well as in the expectations of students, families, staff, and community. For Jordan, this paradigm is particularly apparent at the elementary level:

I think there is a norm that is HUGE [original emphasis] in elementary schools, that families have a mom and a dad, and that their children will grow up to be heterosexual. And that is the norm, and that is the right way. That is being enforced all throughout a child's day through books we read, math problems, language.

Reflecting on hetero-privilege and heterosexist assumptions, Jake recalled stories of his students and families, "Some stories are compelling and emotional . . . simple stories of families not being represented, a child who had to make a family tree with a mother and a father, students who hear disparaging names about their parents." Echoing Jake's

sentiments, Jordan said, “And kids are getting this message all over the place – that’s what a family should be, and that’s how things should be. That’s the right way.” Robert also spoke of the heterosexual assumptions in education, “I mean educationally, it’s so dispiriting that everything is boy/girl in assumption for students.”

Whether out or closeted, these participants feel the discriminatory force of formal laws and policies, however, the informal actions and attitudes encountered on a daily basis are pivotal to their heightened awareness and actions toward equity.

Acknowledging the long road ahead to equity, Rick said:

There is some work to do on hetero-privilege – those hidden and not so hidden privileges built into our culture that are hard to see, but maintain a sense of superiority for heteros. I’m not anti-hetero, but I do think there are so many things that happen every day that reinforce their privilege.

Agreeing with Rick’s premise on the formal and informal contexts that maintain hetero superiority in our culture, David stated, “It’s true about the law in general – you can legislate against certain actions, but you can’t legislate morality. Changing morality, beliefs, discriminatory attitudes requires huge cultural shifts that will take a very long time.”

Clearly, hetero-privilege has significantly impacted the personal and professional lives of these educational leaders, heightening their awareness and moving them forward to challenge the heterosexist paradigm for an equitable future.

Role Models

Distinguished sociologist, Robert K. Merton, introduced the term “role model” while a professor at Columbia University. Merton contended that individuals compare themselves to a “reference group” – a social group that the individual does not belong to, but aspires to be like (Holton, 2004). Since Merton’s original definition, the term “role model” has taken on a more general connotation to mean someone another individual desires to emulate. Role models are essential to every individual, something to aspire to and someone to emulate. For marginalized individuals, role models are more critical because a role model helps them realize their potential as human beings. The LG[BT] administrators in this study understood the need for gay role models, particularly for our LG[BT] youth.

During an early conversation, Eric stated, “I was a gay child in the system. Why shouldn’t I have gay teachers and administrators?” Eric’s words reverberated throughout participant conversations, and all acknowledged the absence of visible role models in their youth. Jake spoke of the importance and strength of role models, “There were no GLBT models for me to look to as a child.”

All participants agreed, gay role models in education are essential to breaking the downward spiral of discrimination and isolation, for students and colleagues. Being a gay role model takes courage, Rick explains, “It takes role models and leaders for teachers and students to see what life can be like if we are open and honest with ourselves and others. And, it takes courage for these leaders to emerge.” Reflecting on his decision to be a role model for others, Jake said:

I recognized early on that I could blend in – not be open or obviously GLBT. That worked for a while until I figured out that, as an educational professional, there were not many role models for me or the other GLBT educators. So, I was sort of determined that I was going to try and be a role model for others.

Although Michael's experiences were quite different than others in this study and the majority of the gay community, his life makes him a strong role model, "I'm kind of the outlier. People are interested in my experiences, and gay and lesbians feel comfortable hearing my stories because they go, 'Wow, we can have that kind of life.'" Proud of being a role model and breaking stereotypes, Rick said, "I am proud to be a role model who is gay. I think I make people think about their stereotypes." Robert spoke of the freedom of being out and a role model, "It's just so great when you finally come out. You can just be who you are and become a role model without having to make a big deal of it." Being a strong advocate for gay educator role models, Kathy poignantly stated, "I am all for teacher and administrators being out. As Harvey Milk advocated – we are here!"

Some participants, although agreeing with Kathy's words, do not feel they need to out themselves to be role models for students. Pat said, "I think you can be a role model for gay kids, but you don't have to necessarily be out." Understanding the "call" to be visible, Mary finds that being a silent role model is most effective for her, "Some might say that it would help if more adult teachers and administrators would come out and be visible role models. I, on the other hand, feel that being a caring, supportive person is what is best for me." Jordan not only sees himself as a "bridge" for others to understand

the GLBT lifestyle, but also a role model for the silent majority, “I feel like I could be a bridge to help people that aren’t comfortable with that [GLBT] to be comfortable. And also to be a model that you don’t have to hide, and you don’t have to be that bold.”

For many young individuals, school is the only place they feel a sense of safety, security, and support – minimal as it may be. Clearly, positive role models, whether bold or silent, are critical for LG[BT] youth to understand that the cycle of shame and isolation can be broken and that their dreams can be achieved. On being a role model for her students, Carol shared:

I just take them where they are, support them, challenge them to be open to others’ way of life, and show them through my actions that gay people can be good role models. I think they see me as a regular person They see that a lesbian can be successful. They see that I am just like everyone else. I think that is important for kids as they grapple with what it means to be gay – for both gay and straight kids.

Gina spoke specifically about the need for role models to help break the cycle of shame that engulfs gay youth:

Students deserve to see role models so that the cycle of shame doesn’t continue. Our LG[BT] students pay the price for this in substance abuse, harassment, poor attendance, suicidal ideations – just like all students who feel ashamed and isolated for whatever reason.

As I sat with Ron and talked about role models and youth, he sat back in his chair and shared a touching story of a recent experience with one of his students. Ron is not openly out to his learning community, but does not fear outing himself when he feels the need, in this case, to support a student and be a role model:

There's a student . . . I was talking to him about a teacher...and he told me that why he liked this teacher was because when he came out to him, he was so supportive. So, I used that to say 'OK, we're talking about this now, but at some time I want to talk with you about what it's like to be gay at [our] school.' I did, a couple of months later. I talked to him about I, and I ended up telling him I had a partner, because I think it's important that kids know the world is not necessarily the way he thinks it is, because he viewed [our] school as this huge straight village where he was the only gay in the village . . . He couldn't see that there's more people here, and that there are people who are going to be a part of his village

It was really powerful to me to feel that kind of isolation piece that being young and gay, even in this perfect utopian village of St. Marco [pseudonym], he still feels that.

After sharing her experiences of coming out to a predominantly heterosexual department, Ellen [former public school administrator] then spoke of the strength she gleaned and becoming a role model for her students:

I started to realize that as a professor in education leadership, I was a role model. Students never confronted me, but I knew the word got out. But, for every five people who said they were inspired, who said they were gay and closeted in the south and were fearful and thankful to talk to me and seek my mentorship, there maybe one person who was pretty homophobic. And so with the ratio of 5:1, then I'm doing the right thing, and it gets easier to keep going with that.

Without question, these educational leaders have shown that it takes strength to live lives of marginalization and still remain courageous enough to be role models. Carol commented, "I think it is very important for students to have positive adult role models in their academic world . . . I have served as that role model for many students." Ron stated, "It is important for students to have those role models and know that they can be strong and do whatever they would like to do with their lives." And, Gina stated, "They [students] need to see that sexuality is just one characteristic that make up a complex being, and that we can be just as healthy or messed up as the other hetero adults in their lives." Nate commented on his struggle, wanting his students to know they are okay, "If anything, I struggle in that I can't hang a sign outside of my office. I wish/hope that students do know that I'm gay and see that having a normal life is well within their grasp." Rick eloquently summarized the thoughts of all participants, "I've never wanted to be a gay leader, but a leader who has justice for all. But, I guess I do want to be seen as a GLBT role model also, so I can give back what others have given to me the courage to be true to myself."

These educational leaders understood the importance of being role models for students and colleagues. These leaders provided light in the darkness.

Giving Voice

Oppression silences the oppressed. Silence renders the oppressed helpless at the hands of their oppressors. Elie Wiesel (1986), Holocaust survivor, author, and Nobel Laureate spoke of such silence, “I swore never to be silent whenever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the oppressed. Silence encourages the tormenting, never the tormented” (para. 6).

All participants agreed that silence only encourages the tormenting and marginalization, and expressed the importance of giving voice to those who feel they have no voice. Like the previous supporting cluster themes of social gains, the supportive cluster theme – giving voice – rises from living lives contextualized by formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of others. However, informal contexts appear to have the strongest influence in this supporting cluster theme.

The LG[BT] educational leaders in this study were passionate about giving voice to the most fragile population – the marginalized youth – through strong advocacy.

Fervently voicing his conviction to advocacy, Michael warns us:

I think there’s a danger to getting too confident in our own lives that we stop sticking up for other people. I feel we’ve come a long way, but it’s easy to become complacent and stop challenging authority to include and accept everybody in society.

For these LG[BT] educational leaders, being complacent was not an option. The only way to give voice, in their view was to be vocal. Supporting this notion, Kathy said, “More significantly, I think vocal advocates are important. More people need to speak up. There are so many, many silent allies. Silent!! [original emphasis]”

Several participants credited the regaining of their voices and their advocacy for others to their experiences of coming out. Reflecting on his current practice and finding voice, Jordan commented, “I think the whole experience of coming out has led to where do you find your voice? How do you help others find their voice? How do you create safe environments for children? Because I work with children.” Being out has freed Rick to advocate for equity, “I spent too many hours in my early career worrying about losing my job. Now that I don’t worry about that, I am willing to get fired for defending rights.”

Recognizing his position of power, Ron continues to grapple with his role as a gay leader and advocate, “It’s one of those things, trying to figure out what’s my role as a leader who happens to be gay. What’s my role to kind of stand up for people who don’t have the power in situations.” Also acknowledging the significance of power and advocacy, Jordan stated:

There are different perspectives, and we need to learn to think not only about those perspectives that are in the room, but those that are not in the room and going out to get those. It’s very hard to have power when you live in a hierarchy that revolves around power.

And Michael espoused the importance of those in power being advocates of the protection of all, “someone in a power position advocating for people with a strong voice,

willing to speak up. We have to continue to push the envelope, we have to continue to challenge and make sure everyone is protected.”

Without a doubt, a position with external power combined with their own self-power allowed these leaders to be vocal advocates for all oppressed groups – especially their LG[BT] students. Reflecting on his position and giving voice, Jake spoke of the power behind reality – putting real faces with real stories:

I think that because I am so open, it makes others recognize that we need to serve all students, families, and staff I think when there are real faces and stories makes a huge difference. When I share my stories with others, they see a face with the need. When students and families share their experiences and stories, it makes it real to others.

Mary did not talk about making the stories “real”, because for her, they are. She spoke of the horrific consequences of LG[BT] youths’ isolation and pain, and firmly believes that everyone must be an advocate, “Kids are committing suicide, and I think whatever we can do to give kids a voice in the pain and isolation they are feeling . . . that is good, whether or not you are LG[BT].” Gina insisted that teachers and staff members, particularly if they are LG[BT], must speak out and advocate:

I think when students are hearing homophobic comments in the hallways that aren’t addressed by teachers, and any staff members that they [students] may suspect are LG[BT], seems dishonest about their sexuality. It just reinforces their [students] internalized shame about being this way.

Rick said, “It’s not rocket science. A space where all voices are heard and valued – where every kid has a chance to find his passion.”

Advocating for LG[BT] students, according to the study participants, goes beyond addressing homophobic comments or working to give LG[BT] students voice. Advocacy is about letting oppressed youth know they are not alone and that they *will* live a normal life. Feelings of isolation and loneliness can be devastating for anyone, but especially for children who have not yet realized that their circle of support is much larger than they may think. Again, speaking of power and advocating for others, Michael recognized that giving voice to the few, gives voice to a mass:

When society, and particularly a person in power, supports somebody who is unable to stand up and support themselves, it strengthens the feeling of everybody. So, the more we do to benefit a single minority, the more we benefit everyone.

Participants believed that making stories “real to others” provides powerful voice where once was silence. Furthermore, powerful voice combined with vocal advocacy increases awareness of the devastating isolation, loneliness, and pain felt by oppressed individuals.

Courageous Trail-blazing

Whether open or closeted, each study participant voiced an opinion about setting a standard or “blazing the trail”. This supporting cluster theme, like others of social gains, is grounded in the contexts of formal policies/laws and informal actions/attitudes of others. Some participants recalled brave individuals from their pasts who made their own

journeys easier. Reminiscing about his past experiences, Jake said, “As an education professional, those role models, trailblazers, are what made me stronger.” And, Jake recalled one trailblazer, the lesbian who gave him hope:

I remember meeting Pat [McCart] and when I found out that she was a principal and a lesbian She was so brave, so willing to put herself out there. The rest of us [teachers] were willing to stand on stage with bags over our heads as teachers, but I thought she was taking a bigger risk.

Indeed, Dr. Pat McCart⁹ set a standard for LG[BT] school leaders to follow, and she was most certainly an inspiration for many of the participants. Rick said, “Not unlike other administrators representing other ‘groups’, I feel I represent the GLBT community. I like being different. It gives me energy.” But, sometimes, trailblazers are not “out” there – they are the quiet individuals who do their jobs and blaze trails daily. Each of my participants are trailblazers – they do it in their own way. As Carol said:

People who have gone before me make it a lot easier for me to do what I do. I truly hope for those of us that are blazing the trail a little bit, for now, will make it easier for the next generation, because our nation needs talented and thoughtful educators, gay and straight alike.

We shouldn’t make it difficult for anyone to be there.

Without a doubt, these LG[BT]educational leaders were blazing the trail for others to follow.

⁹ Dr. Pat McCart, principal of an all girls private high school, outed herself during a 1989 Gay Pride parade in Minneapolis, MN (see Chapter 1, pp. 17-19)

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the Concentric Circles of Fear Model (see FIGURE 5, p. 109), that exert extraordinary pressure on individuals living in relentless fear. Drawing the analogy of the life cycle of a star to marginalized persons living in the omnipresence of fear, I suggested that if individuals lose the energy to push outward against the concentric circles that envelop them, implosion can occur. However, the participants in this study found the strength to counter the pressures of the concentric circles and proceeded in their journeys.

For these leaders, living with relentless fear resulted in *self losses*, *opportunity losses*, and *safety losses*. Yet, gains were born from loss, as these individuals uncovered *personal* and *social gains*, gains that allowed them to navigate the turbulent waters of educational leadership. These LG[BT] educational leaders have shared a glimpse of their marginalized lives, the losses they felt, and the gains they gleaned. Ellen's words captured the voices of all participants:

It is critical that we continue to find ways to give a voice to those who do not have a voice, who feel they don't have a voice. Because, there is a looming sense of fear among many of our family. And a sense of accepted defeat in terms of saying, 'Well, I'm marginalized and there's not much I can do about it in my day to day activity. And my understanding of my own sense of normalcy is that I just don't really have to talk about my private life. And that, I think is heart wrenching.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIVE DISCUSSIONS

This final chapter of the dissertation is given over to conclusive discussions of the study's findings. However, when reading the discussion and the posing of conclusions, it is important to remember that they are representative only of this moment in time, this group of participants, and my limited understandings of the lived experiences of the participants. To facilitate this broad discussion, the largest portion of the chapter is organized into two major sections. In the first major section, "Revisiting the Guiding Research Questions", each of the guiding research questions are revisited and conclusions posed. In the second major section, the overarching *Cycles of Fear* model—one built from the study's findings—is presented and explained. The chapter ends in two smaller sections: "Suggestions for Leadership Preparation Programs", and "Implications for Further Research".

Revisiting the Guiding Research Questions

This first large section includes conclusive discussions of each of the four guiding questions. The section ends with three additional findings that were *not* generated by the research questions but by other aspects of the study.

Research Question One

Guiding research question one asked: How have LG[BT] educational leaders' past lived experiences as students and teachers impacted or informed their personal and professional lives? Clearly, the early experiences of the LG[BT] educational leaders in this study shaped their personal and professional lives. The overt hostility, lack of acceptance, and the stigma surrounding *queerness* engrained fear in most participants

from an early age. The study participants learned to navigate their identities by remaining silent in the face of hetero-privilege, overcompensating for what several viewed as their “flaws”, and striving to validate their lives in a hetero-normative society.

All LG[BT] leaders in the study identified several unique perspectives and strengths of character that resulted from their early gay experiences and “gay traits”. Understanding the feelings of marginalization made them stronger and more resilient. Living a lifestyle incongruent with societal norms heightened their sensitivity for other marginalized individuals, as well as their awareness of hetero-privilege. Strengths of character and unique perspectives are characteristics that the LG[BT] educational leaders bring to their professional practices. Because they experienced discrimination and exclusion these leaders made it their mission to create safe environments for *all*, and felt a stronger need to advocate for those who do not have a voice. The participants understood that *they* need to be role models so their gay and straight students and teachers realize healthy, safe, and fulfilled lives.

Research Question Two

Guiding research question two asked: How have current lived experiences (related to sexual identity) of LG[BT] educational leaders impacted or informed their personal and professional lives? Several LG[BT] leaders continue to feel sub-ordinate to their hetero-counterparts – personally and professionally. A hostile environment remains the norm for the study participants, even in states where LG[BT] individuals enjoy full civil rights. According to the participants, society’s irrational fear that gays are out to recruit others to their lifestyles, created forced silence for many participants, often requiring

them to keep their personal lives a secret. One participant moved from the community in which he worked for protection and secrecy. Several participants spoke of a common need to validate partner relationships because same-sex partners are not viewed as equal to hetero-relationships. Some participants expressed concerns regarding their own children, not wanting their children to feel shame or less valued because their parents are gay.

Because the majority of leaders in this study had journeyed at least once through the *Cycles of Fear* (see next large section), current experiences impacted their professional lives to a greater extent. Overt and/or covert hostility created the context in which these LG[BT] leaders navigated the education profession. They walked with caution, keenly aware of how they presented themselves and were perceived by others. Fear of “not being perfect” created the pressure to set a standard and be the “super” leader. Several participants expressed doubts regarding the possibility of promotion to a more visible position based on their sexual identity.

However, current experiences also reinforced integrated identity, allowing the participants to live lives without fear of who they are. The leaders in this study, do *not* separate their personal and professional identities, and draw positive connections between their “gayness”, and success as educational leaders. A key component to success – making connections with other LG[BT] educators, leaders, and researchers. Current experiences sharpen the participants’ heightened sensitivity and awareness of hetero-privilege, broaden their unique perspectives, allow them to be successful leaders, and

blaze the trail for a future generation of gay *and* straight educational leaders for social justice.

Research Question Three

Guiding research question three asked: What perceptions/experiences do LG[BT] educational leaders report regarding the contextual formal policies/laws and contextual informal actions/attitudes that may or may not have shaped their personal and professional lives? Hetero-privilege continues to have a major impact on the personal and professional lives of LG[BT] educational leaders and the gay community as a whole. Hetero-privilege power contextualizes the lives of LG[BT] educational leaders through formal laws/policies *and* informal actions/attitudes. Within the formal context, the mere existence of sexual orientation anti-discrimination policy/law does not offer adequate protection for LG[BT] individuals, personally or professionally. Regarding their profession, most study participants, feared job loss in their early careers, whether or not sexual orientation laws/policies existed. Although most no longer feared job loss at the time of the study, all spoke vehemently of the lack of state and/or federal protection. The ban on same-sex marriage in 46 states, lack of partner benefits, death benefits, non-biological child rights, and state/federal tax laws have the greatest impact on their personal lives.

Certainly, contextual informal actions and attitudes of society impacted the personal lives of the participants through covert and, at time, overt discrimination – perceived or real. Many leaders talked of the need to a) validate their lives, b) feel equal to their hetero-counterparts, and c) stop discrimination's impact on their personal lives.

However, all the participants in this study agreed that the informal actions and attitudes of others continued to significantly affect their daily lives. The covert and overt actions and attitudes of society marginalize LG[BT] leaders, educators, and students, and keep them silent.

Research Question Four

Guiding research question four asked: Given their cumulative experiences (related to sexual identity), what recommendations do LG[BT] educational leaders have regarding improved support for LG[BT] students, teachers, and administrators in public school settings? All participants' initial response to this question was: to improve support, the laws and policies at the local, state, and federal level *must* change to include sexual orientation. Participants agreed that teacher and educational leadership preparation programs must become all-inclusive, not simply of gender and race or ethnicity, but all differences, including sexuality. LG[BT] leaders in this study also agreed that diversity *must* be celebrated throughout the learning community. School board members and superintendents should visibly and publicly voice support for LG[BT] individuals. One suggestion for superintendents and Human Resources was that they should openly acknowledge and recruit LG[BT] staff. Further it was suggested that districts must provide training and staff development regarding LG[BT] issues – removing the focus from sexuality to the broader view of LG[BT] as a minority – for staff and students.

Other suggestions included: 1) In our schools, curriculum needs to be inclusive and portray current and historical LG[BT] figures. 2) The LG[BT] websites should be unblocked and resources for LG[BT] students made available in the Media Centers.

3) All staff *must* address homophobic comments, and a local, intentional movement for equity and equality commence. 4) It is essential that Gay/Straight/Ally groups, and support groups for staff and families be formed, and embraced by schools and their communities. 5) Teachers and educational leaders, gay and straight, are needed as role models in attitudinal and active openness around LG[BT] issues. 6) Finally, gay and straight allies – students, teachers, and leaders – *must* speak out against the oppression, discrimination, and hatred that drive so many gay youth to suicide.

Additional Findings

Three additional findings that were *not* generated by the research questions but by other aspects of the study are important. As was clear from the beginning, for the purposes of this study, the guiding research questions focused on themes of commonality across the LG[BT] participants. However, there are two findings related to differences across the participants that are worthy of note: 1) degree of “outness” and 2) location of residence. In addition, the process of data collection itself yielded an additional key finding related to research methods, a discussion that can be found below under the heading “Designs for Data Collection”.

Degree of Outness

The degree of outness, as defined in this study, is determined by where in the Concentric Circles of Fear Model (p. 109) that LG[BT] educational leaders place themselves. Previous studies (Capper & Fraynd, 2003; Griffin, 1992) have defined “outness” along a continuum from “passing” (leading others to believe one is heterosexual) to “publicly out” (disclosing one’s sexual identity to the school community).

Likewise, this study also defines “outness” on a continuum, beginning with “self” – Griffin’s (1992) “passing” – to being “publicly out” (Griffin, 1992). Unlike previous definitions of outness (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Griffin, 1992), however, within the context of this study, the degree of “public outness” is defined according to where the individual places his/herself within the Concentric Circles of Fear Model. As highlighted in the Cycles of Fear discussion (pp. 212-217), there was a wide range in degree of outness among participants. The leaders’ degree of outness dictated how they lived their lives, both personally and professionally. Those remaining closer to the center of the concentric circles walked with greater caution, that is, they were more conscious of how they presented themselves in public and in the roles they played as vocal advocates. The confidence with which the participants navigated the Cycles of Fear and their location within that cycle appeared to directly correlate to their degree of outness (the particular concentric circle that illustrated their current layer of outness).

Location of Residence

Although I did not know the states in which the participants lived or worked, I did find participants’ location of residence seemed to make some difference in some of their responses, particularly with regard to their degree of outness. LG[BT] leaders indicating they lived in states that afforded full civil rights protection were more apt to place themselves in the outermost concentric circles, however, this was not a defining factor in participants’ degree of outness. Three participants indicated they lived in states providing fewer protections based on sexual orientation and/or identity, were out at the federal/national and global/international levels. Moreover, location of residence appeared to

make a difference in how participants' navigated their personal and professional lives within the Cycles of Fear.

Designs for Data Collection

Beyond the findings that were generated to answer the research questions, the process of conducting the research also produced an informative finding. Because the study was designed to address the extreme anonymity needs of the participants, as the data collection occurred, it was clear that the participants needed the opportunity to choose their own data collection methods from a smorgasbord of data collection processes. Much attention was given to the design of high- and low-structured data collection designs. Thus, one of the strongest findings was that research, with LG[BT] participants, requires study designs that allow the participants to choose how they interact with researchers during data collection—including data collection methods that allow participants to remain anonymous even to the researcher[s].

The Cycles of Fear: A Model of LG[BT] Lived Experiences

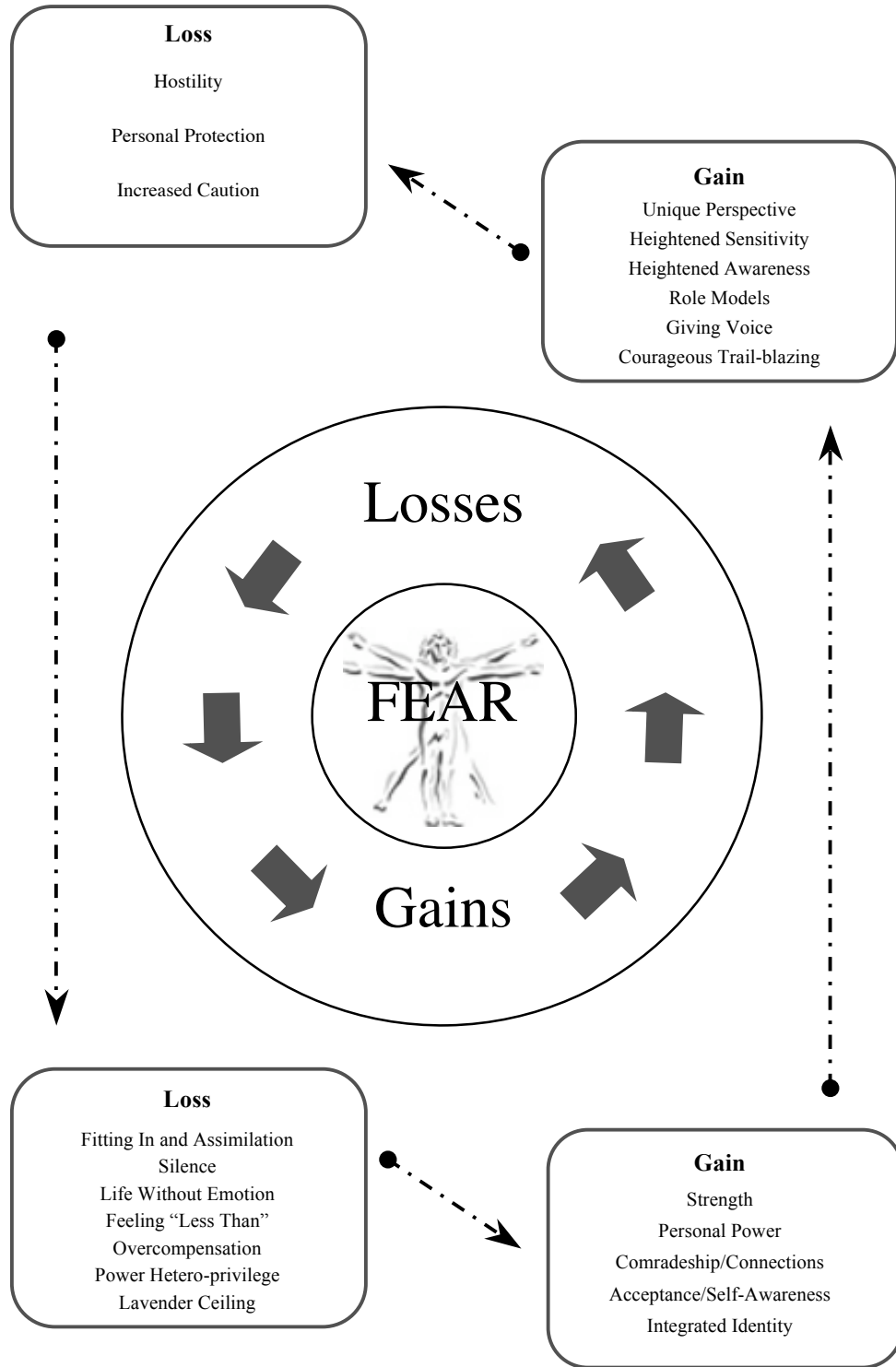
Our attitude toward fear dictates how societies are structured.
(Dozier, 1998, p. 3)

In this second major section, the overarching *Cycles of Fear Model* – one built from the study's findings – is presented and explained. Without a doubt, fear, whether real or perceived shapes a society, and as Dozier (1998) posits, dictates the social structure based on majoritarian values. The accepted values of a society are the norm, the “right way to be”, and anything that falls outside the norm more oft than not is viewed as a threat to the integrity of a given society. Fear, like all intangibles – concepts, ideas, principles – move with the ebb and flow of societal attitude. Previously, I spoke of fear as

moving along a continuum, equating it to the pendulum principle. However, I now contend that the pendulum principle does not adequately describe fear experienced by the study participants because fear does not merely swing along a continuum from one extreme to another, but moves gradually in a repetitious cyclic nature, hence, the illustrative Cycles of Fear Model: Losses and Gains (see FIGURE 7, p. 214) was constructed.

Given the study's data, it appears that the Cycles of Fear moved the study participants from silence to voice to silence again, but at varying degrees of intensity. As participants were surrounded with fear, human nature took over and the participants worked to *fit into* society. For these LG[BT] educational leaders, fear and societal oppression silenced their voices and increased their need to over-compensate for their feelings of being "less than" their hetero-counterparts. Hetero-privilege power often forced the participants to live lives without emotion. Surely, these individuals could have succumbed to the hopelessness of all-encompassing fear, but instead found the strength to rise above oppression.

FIGURE 7. The Cycles of Fear Model: Losses and Gains



Rising above oppression and marginalization, however, is no easy task. It requires great inner strength and courage to push against the forces that threaten implosion. Dozier (1998) suggested, that “by facing and overcoming our fears, we mature and fulfill our deepest human potential” (p. 3). Without a doubt, these LG[BT] leaders overcame fear and oppression, and thus, creating gains – personal and social. Personal gain found in strength, power, connections, acceptance/self-awareness, and integrated identity afforded participants the opportunity to live authentically and to begin to bring these personal acquisitions, albeit slowly, into their professional careers. In addition, the participants gleaned social gains in the form of unique perspective, heightened sensitivity and awareness of hetero-privilege – characteristics that allowed them to be strong role models, give voice, and blaze a trail for those to follow.

For these leaders, the personal and social gains gleaned from experiences of fear were integrated into their very being – their identity. The valuable attributes this unique group brings to society have subsequently been overlooked and undervalued because their sexuality is in conflict with societal norms. As these LG[BT] leaders’ strength and visibility increase, society’s unwarranted homophobic fears lead to increased intolerance and hostility. To push against the pressure of increased hostility, the participants erect shields of personal protection and walk with increased caution. Society’s intolerance for difference, particularly toward sexual orientation, begins the Cycles of Fear once more. Each time a new fear cycle begins, however, these leaders are stronger and more resilient when facing fear, and they rise above the oppression and progress in their lives. Again, they emerge with greater strength, visibility, and voice.

Reflecting on the participants' strength to rise above oppression, I am reminded of the complex myth of the illusive phoenix. The legend of the phoenix has existed for centuries and spans from China to Phoenicia, India, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and finally, to Native America. According to legend, when the phoenix grows old and weak, it bursts into flame, and rises again from its ashes, young and powerful, to live anew. The legend of the phoenix "is one of those rare, transnational, transcultural, transreligious tales Given the tales' immense popularity, there is a measure of truth to it, in being reborn after being destroyed" (Jane, personal communication, April 18, 2009). Although I do not profess to equate the lives of these LG[BT] leaders to the illusive phoenix (However, participants approved the analogy.), the participants' ability to continuously rise from the *ashes of oppression* and assume the courageous burden of blazing a trail amidst increased intolerance and hostility could be viewed as synonymous to the mythical phoenix¹⁰.

The discussion in the following subsections illustrates the nexus between the history of homosexuality in education, the participants' lived experiences, and how they intersect within the Cycles of Fear Model. This large section is divided into four subsections, that coincide with, but are not parallel to, the earlier discussion of losses and gains in Chapter Four. The Cycles of Fear, as shown in FIGURE 7 (p. 214), progresses along a slightly different path and are discussed as follows: 1) safety losses, 2) self/opportunity losses, 3) personal gains, and 4) social gains.

¹⁰ "I like what you have done, particularly in light of the fact that I have considered the phoenix my personal symbol or totem ALL OF MY ADULT LIFE FOR THE EXACT REASONS YOU CLOSE YOUR ARGUMENT with! [original emphasis] How's that for irony? (Ellen, personal communication, April 18, 2009)

Safety Losses

The literature clearly states homosexuality was widely practiced and accepted in ancient Greece and Rome, however, the rise of Christianity and influences from other cultures resulted in the Roman Empire outlawing homosexuality in the sixth century A.D. (Buchanan, 2001). Thus began the Cycles of Fear that shaped the context in which the study's LG[BT] educational leaders live their lives. The three supporting cluster themes (under the minor theme "Safety Losses" and examined in Chapter Four) are combined and discussed in two sub-sections – "Hostile Environments" and "Personal Protection/Increased Caution". Personal protection and increased caution are combined and discussed together because of the close similarities found in both history and lived experience.

Hostile Environments

Heteronormativity and intolerance of difference in the U.S. has forced homosexuals, particularly educators, *into the closet* since colonial times, and firmly established homophobia in our society (Karlslake, 2007). Homophobia, an irrational hatred and fear of homosexuality, allows evil to raise its ugly head, and "[t]hat evil is cruelty and the fear it inspires, and the very fear of fear itself (Shklar, 1989 as cited in Levy, 2000, p. 23). Clearly, society's heterosexual mores and attitudes have made overt and covert cruelty toward homosexuals permissible acts, specifically targeting LG[BT] educators, and setting in motion an endless Cycles of Fear.

Because of overt cruelty and the fear it instills, an accurate history of homosexuality in education is absent prior to the early 20th century. Therefore, a

discussion of the role of hostility in the lived experiences of LG[BT] educators must begin with the highly publicized sexuality research of the 1920s and 1930s. According to Lugg (2003a), sexuality researchers of the time saw homosexuality as a “poor developmental outcome” (p. 106) because homosexuality is incongruent with accepted gender norms and sexual behavior. These findings, certainly a product of the era and culture, created a plethora of homophobic fear focusing on education and teachers. Males were forced out of the classroom for fear of improprieties¹¹ and females were remanded to a “spinster’s” life if they were to retain their positions, all the while being suspected of lesbianism. Although stigma surrounding female teachers began to subside when the ban on marriage was lifted following World War II, the release of the 1948 and 1953 Kinsey Reports once again fueled attitudes of homophobia, and efforts to cleanse the educational system of all suspected homosexuals were in full force (Blount, 2003, 2004; D’Emilio, 1983; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a 2003b). Without a doubt, the extreme hostile attitudes and actions that began in the 1920s and raged through the 1950s, although depreciated in intensity, still exist today.

The literature revealed a wave of judicial and social leniency during the second half of the 20th century, and at the time there was a ray of hope that the hatred would subside. The 1969 Stonewall Riots and landmark decision in *Morrison v. State Board of Education* began the gay rights movement, equaled only by that of the African-Americans’ march for civil rights 15 years prior. For the first time in U.S. history, LG[BT] individuals felt the hope of acceptance and the end of centuries of oppression.

¹¹ Further discussion in *Self/Opportunity Losses*.

Their journey, however, would parallel the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and remain fraught with setbacks and increased hostility. Changing social mores were met head-on by right-wing activists claiming to act in the name of God and country, with Anita Bryant leading the charge.

Bryant accused homosexuals as being militant, desperate people who would brainwash society and stop at nothing to achieve their end (Harbeck, 1997). Although Bryant admittedly had little knowledge of homosexuality, she was quick to label it as a “homosexual conspiracy” linked to child pornography and communism, successfully heightening the nationwide fear. At the same time Bryant was spewing her anti-gay rhetoric on the east coast, the rhetoric that would consume society, Harvey Milk battled Briggs’ Proposition 6 in California. Milk advocated for gay rights as no one had done before – he was visible, he was vocal, and he would not cower in the face of hostility.

But, despite his strong advocacy, hostility toward the gay community prevailed and Milk was assassinated on November 27, 1978. Jane recalled the impact of Milk’s assassination on her early life, “I remember his [Harvey Milk] and Mayor Mascone’s murders. I realized I would have to FORCE [original emphasis] myself to be straight.”

The turbulence of the 1970s spilled into the 1980s, and it was clear to this study’s participants that it was not safe to be gay – not as a student and especially not as an educator. These LG[BT] educational leaders, like those in Toom’s (2007), Fraynd and Capper’s (2003), and Kissen’s (1996) studies, were forced to hide their identities in fear of repercussions from a hostile society. Fear of hostile environments shaped the participants’ lives, then and now.

Personal Protection/Increased Caution

Indeed, the 1970s ushered in an era of increased visibility and militancy for the LG[BT] community as they fought to reclaim basic civil rights. However, this upsurge of newfound freedom was not met lightly as it “pushed the issue of personal freedom to the very edge of American social tolerance” (Harbeck, 1997, p. 20). Undoubtedly, the final decades of the 20th century hailed a shift from relaxing social mores to traditional heterosexist values and the restriction of personal freedoms for the good of society (Harbeck, 1997). Maintaining traditional family values and status quo, required suppression of this militant sub-culture by means of hatred and violence. The emergence of AIDS, the *gay man’s disease*, in the early 1980s, only fueled the flames and deepened the oppression. Growing up as a gay youth during that era, Rick reminds us of the fear that engulfed him and of the hatred he described as “something that shaped my fears.”

Given the hostility that surrounded her life, it is not surprising that Jane chose not to become a classroom teacher. Clearly, schools were not safe, for as the literature revealed, social pressures forced schools to be vessels of persecution for LG[BT] educators. Although brief respites of somewhat relaxed social mores offered hope for civil rights advancement, schools remained a sanctuary of heteronormativity. Homosexuals had been viewed as both criminals and predators, which forced gay educators to erect shields of protection and walk with increased caution. The participants in this study provided evidence that history repeats itself and/or that despite the appearance of increased acceptance, innate fear prevails.

All participants shared experiences of fear because they were targets of criticism and discrimination. Their experiences created the need to erect personal shields of protection, such as being vigilant about a) how they present themselves, b) what they talk about, and c) retreating when personal or professional safety is at risk. These experiences are not unique to this study's participants, but rather echo experiences of participants in previous studies (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Kissan, 1996; Koschoreck, 2003; Tooms, 2007).

In sum, these educational leaders walked and continue to navigate their identity with caution in the tumultuous waters of education. The seed planted in colonial America was reinforced in the early 1900s and again by the anti-gay rhetoric of Anita Bryant and subsequent campaigns aimed at ridding our schools of all homosexuals. The accusations of molestation, recruitment, and violence are as alive today as they were 30 years ago, "While you don't hear the charge [recruitment], you know it's still an underlying fear" (Rick), "There's that irrational fear that gays are out to recruit others" (Jake), and "that fear of indoctrination" (Eric). In an interview on homosexuality Desmond Tutu stated, "I equate homophobia to the injustice of apartheid" (Karslake, 2007). Without a doubt, the gay community, particularly gay educators, became the "new" U.S. apartheid and overt social discrimination is evident in the Cycles of Fear.

Self/Opportunity Losses

The LG[BT] leaders in the study provided evidence that continuous overt hostility and marginalization engrains fear at an early age. As they pressed outward against the concentric circles surrounding them, the participants were forced to navigate their lives

with increased caution as a means of protection. Historically, gay school leaders have remained “cloaked in secrecy” for their own protection (Blount, 2003; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Pinar, 1998). Continuing their journey through the Cycles of Fear, these individuals experienced loss of self and opportunity. In this second sub-section, the two minor themes of *Self Losses* and *Opportunity Losses* are combined and their supporting cluster themes are discussed as follows: 1) fitting in/assimilation and silence, 2) feeling “less than”/over-compensation, 3) life without emotion, 4) hetero-privilege power, and 5) lavender ceiling.

Fitting In/Assimilation and Silence

Societal fear of a marginalized group has devastating consequences for members of that group, and the gay community is no exception (Karlsruhe, 2007). Centuries of unwarranted fear and violence toward gays shaped the context in which gay individuals live their lives. Humans have an innate desire to be accepted and acceptance for gay educators has historically translated into assimilation and forced silence.

Although little is known about LGBT educators prior to the 20th century, literature does allow a glimpse at the lives of a few 19th century gay educational leaders. Educators such as Alcott, Emerson, Longfellow, Peabody, Fuller, Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman, better known as literary scholars and activists, provided the first record of homosexual teachers in U.S. history (Harbeck, 1992). Despite their notoriety, society’s hetero-normative values forced these educators into assimilation and silence. To mask their sexuality, all but Thoreau and Whitman chose to marry and have children, the accepted practice of the time.

Marriage continued to be the means by which gay male educators proved their heterosexuality through the 20th century. By the early 1900s, single male teachers were viewed with suspicion, forcing gay men into marriage and assimilation (Blount, 2003; Harbeck, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Pinar, 1998). Female educators (heterosexual and homosexual) who were not allowed to teach unless they were single, therefore, assimilation for lesbians through marriage was not an option from the mid-1800s through World War II (Blount, 2003, 2004; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). Marriage and children, even in an age of increasing tolerance of homosexuality, remains the ultimate form of assimilation for LG[BT] educators. Feelings of shame and fear about their homosexuality, placed 4 of the 17 participants on a roller coaster ride of navigating a hetero relationship, choosing to suppress their same-sex feelings, they turned to the accepted heterosexual marriage. And, three of these participants had children with hetero spouses.

Although marriage was not the answer for the majority of participants, various forms of assimilation and forced silence resonated with all participants. Engrained fear from youth required over 80 percent of the LG[BT] leaders to *force* themselves to be straight, ignoring their true identity for societal acceptance. Participants felt as though they had to “be like everyone else” and project the dominant heterosexual culture. Fear and a yearning for acceptance as youth, pushed some to participants to join their peers and engage in homophobic rhetoric.

Undoubtedly, increased tolerance and acceptance has not afforded these leaders a life free of fear. They silenced their own voices out of fear, shame, and the hostility that

surrounds homosexual educators. But, assimilation and silence does not free one from fear or come without a price. Ellen believed her silence as an administrator perpetuated “the homophobia”, and Mary remembered her silence as being very “isolating and difficult.” The anonymity of this study brought Rick back to his most difficult memories, “the days when I kept my orientation/identity a secret.”

With little or no legal protections against discrimination, LGBT educational leaders are forced to remain “cloaked in secrecy” (Blount, 2003; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Tooms, 2007). Like the participants in previous studies of educational leaders (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), the fear of hostility and violence forced this study’s participants to keep their authentic lives a secret and promoted feelings of being “less than” their hetero-counterparts.

Feeling “Less Than”/Over-Compensation

Prior to the 20th century, historical accounts of “average” homosexual educators are absent in the literature (Harbeck, 1992), allowing only inference regarding the supporting cluster themes of feelings of being “less than” their hetero-counterparts or a possible need for over-compensation. Clearly, oppression and violence toward homosexuals is the norm throughout modern history. Accusations such as sexual perversion, recruitment, criminal activity, and weak psychological development (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2004; Crompton, 1976; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b) make it reasonable to assume that early homosexual educators experienced feelings of inferiority.

Today, LG[BT] educational leaders continue to feel subordinate to their white supremacist, male supremacist, Euro-hetero-patriarchial counterparts (Capper, 1993a; Valdes, 1998), and the participants in this study provide the evidence. Mary shared that she has tried to gain validation of her gayness since her early 20s, and Rick spoke specifically of legalized discrimination as society's way to remind gay individuals that they are "less than citizens."

For the participants, fear, shame, and ostracism engrained their feelings of being "less than" at an early age. Growing up fearful of physical and emotional pain created feelings of inferiority with regard to how participants perceived themselves and what they could accomplish. All, but one of the participants spoke of feeling "less than" in their personal and/or professional lives. The leaders recalled that society as a whole had an impact on their self-perceptions, and Carol went as far as lowering her personal and professional expectations based on her perception of societal values.

Three of the leaders spoke specifically of feeling "less than" and worried about the impact that their own feelings would have on their children. They did not want their feelings of inferiority, past or present, to be felt by their children. They recognized the need to be valued. These participants spoke vehemently about *not* allowing their stories to be "burdensome" for their children and/or about *not* having their children feel the need to defend their existence or be less valued because their parents are gay. This particular finding is unique to this study because previous studies of educational leaders (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Koschoreck, 2003; Tooms, 2007) have not discussed the impact of sexual

identity on the nuclear family. Most certainly, this study's participants revealed that their feelings impact their children, and they made it clear that the cycle must be broken.

In addition, the majority of leaders in this study viewed their same-sex attraction as a "flaw" and sought to over-compensate, to be better than everyone else, in an attempt to feel equal to their hetero-counterparts. Surely, these leaders felt the pains of subordination and turned to over-compensation as a vehicle to validate and be *normal* (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Kissen, 1996; Korschorek, 2003; Tooms, 2007). The need to be like everyone else, to be *normal*, to "fit in", and to be heard are innate human characteristics that when denied have the potential to produce devastating results. One such result was a life without emotion.

Life Without Emotion

A life without emotion is not unique to these participants or the gay community. One can argue that anytime an individual lives a life contrary to their convictions and in direct opposition to their innermost desires and feelings, they are living lives with stifled and/or without emotions. Within the context of this research and its unique population, a life without emotion impacts every aspect of the participants' being.

The literature illustrated that society's prevailing heterosexist paradigm forced LG[BT] educators/leaders to assimilation and a life without emotion. Even today, life without emotion is a reality for many in the gay individuals. In 2004, Chrissy Gephardt publicly outed herself during her father's presidential campaign. Chrissy had followed the socially accepted path – fell in love and married a man, only to realize her life was not authentic. Like the study participants, Gephardt knew her sexuality was in opposition to

societal norms and felt her only option was to continue the façade, “If something’s not an option, you don’t consider it. I just said I’m going to make this go away It got to the point I was so unhappy” (Karslake, 2008). Indeed, society forced Gephardt into a life without emotion, or as Nate eloquently labeled it, “a vanilla life”.

All participants shared experiences of emptiness, loss, and a vanilla life. Most lived lives they perceived others wanted for them rather than being true to their identities. Some participants lowered their own expectations for their lives, and four of the participants, like Gephardt, concealed their sexuality, turning to marriage and the life others expected of them. What they experienced, however, was a life of duplicity and emptiness, compartmentalizing their lives to conform to society’s expectations. In her attempt to conform to societal norms, Ellen suppressed her attraction so deeply she turned to heterosexual affairs believing “I could f- the gayness out of me.” In reality, Ellen’s life was without emotion, “I reached a point where . . . my home life was so empty.” To live safely in society, this marginalized group was required to assimilate to the heterosexist norms, suppressing their sexuality and feelings of subordination, thereby accepting a life without emotion.

Hetero-Privilege Power

LGBT individuals have been classified as “persons on the axis of oppression” (Capper, 1993a, p. 5), discriminated against and forced to remain covert about their sexual orientation. This has been the case throughout U.S. history as the majoritarian culture selectively denies minority groups full access to the freedoms of citizenship. Levy (2000) posited, “To be excluded from full membership . . . is to serve as a constant

reminder of the ranking of power” (p. 29). Clearly, hetero-privilege power reigns supreme throughout U.S. history (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2004, 2005; Chauncey, 1994; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Koschoreck, 2003; Lipkin, 1999; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Mazur, 1997; Rossman, 1997; Sears, 1993; Shilts, 2008; Tooms, 2007; Valdes, 1998), but it was not until the 1900s that the cumulative impact on the gay community as a whole began to emerge. Sexuality research of the 1920s and 1930s fueled the flames of oppression, allowing society to build a *closet*, “the defining structure of gay oppression in this century” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71), and LGBT individuals were forced into hiding. With schools being viewed as “public extensions of the heteronormative family” (Blount, 2003, p. 23), intense fear forced gay educators to hide deep in the closet and gay educational leaders, even deeper. The closet, although a place to hide, is not necessarily a place of safety. During an interview with filmmaker, Daniel Karlake, the Reverend Mel White, co-founder of Soulforce, explained, “Closets are a place of death. So many gay people are forced to live in two different realities – the world where they’re pretending and the closet world where they have all these fears and feelings of guilt and anger and shame” (Karlake, 2007).

Without a doubt, the hetero-privilege power instilled fear, guilt, shame, and anger in the lives of LGBT individuals as evidenced by virtual invisibility through the late 1960s, the 1969 Stonewall Riots, the gay rights movement, and the resulting anti-gay rhetoric/movement that once again silenced the oppressed until the mid-1990s. However, throughout this era, with few exceptions, LGBT educators remained deeply closeted, only to begin a slow emergence as the new millennium approached and hope was in sight.

I talked with each of the participants about the hetero-privilege power, whether or not they had experienced it, and asked if it is still prevalent. Their answer – a resounding YES – on all counts. All spoke to some degree of the cruelty, injustice, fear, and *power* that they associate with hetero-privilege. All remembered the obvious privilege of friendships, dating, and the hetero experiences of adolescence and young adulthood. Growing up in a world based on the heterosexist paradigm, the study participants shared experiences of shame and hiding as they realized, “there was a lot of freedom that heteros had that homosexuals didn’t have” (Carol).

Hetero-privilege power continues to impact the lives of these LG[BT] leaders on a daily basis. Such privilege shows itself in: comments that are made, lack of freedom to share one’s personal life, and suspicions about discriminatory treatment. These are the “small things”, the informal context that laws and policies, when they exist, do not protect against. The small acts of discrimination encountered on a daily basis continue to marginalize LG[BT] leaders and reinforce hetero-privilege power, a common finding between this study and previous studies of gay educational leaders (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007).

Lavender Ceiling

The “glass ceiling”, an unwritten white male dominance policy, blocked women and minorities from professional advancement for decades. Discrimination based on gender became illegal in 1964, but the glass ceiling remained virtually un-shattered until recent years. The “lavender ceiling”, an unwritten heterosexual dominance policy, blocks the upward movement of LGBT professionals in the corporate and educational worlds.

Unlike the glass ceiling, the lavender ceiling “has been – and continues to be – even more unbreakable” (Unger, 2008).

The concept of the “lavender ceiling” emerged in the early 1990s. With no name for the limitations of professional upward mobility for gay individuals prior to the 1990s, there is no real history from which to draw. Comprehensive searches of the literature revealed that LGBT individuals are rarely mentioned in conjunction with educational leadership (Blount, 2003; Lugg, 2003b). With the exception of Amos Alcott and his colleagues, there is no definitive record of gay educational leaders prior to the 20th century, and of that group, Alcott is the only one known to be a school administrator. The dearth of literature might lead one to believe the fiction that LG[BT] school leaders do not exist. More than likely, fear and rampant homophobia around homosexuals in education have kept these leaders *invisible*, and the lavender ceiling has prevented other gay educators from promotion.

The concept of the “lavender ceiling” was never mentioned during conversations with the participants, however, several spoke of a real or perceived fear of promotion based on sexuality, particularly in their early careers. Although two participants, high school principals and the outliers to the lavender ceiling concept, spoke with confidence on the potential of upward mobility, at least three leaders expressed concerns about the possibility of promotion to the superintendency. Jacob, a closeted superintendent in the Fraynd and Capper (2003) study, voiced a similar concern. Jacob feared outing himself would potentially jeopardize his efforts to seek the superintendency in a larger district.

And, one participant in this study, refused to seek a superintendent position because of the risk of heightened scrutiny and hostility involved in such a public position.

The lavender ceiling is not exclusive to K-12 educational leadership, Lugg and Koschoreck (2003) stated:

[T]he professorate can be a frosty place for LGBT researchers working in the areas of educational administration and leadership colleges and schools of education have been slow to acknowledge – much less celebrate – the ‘queer’ scholars in their midst. (p. 5)

Two of the three educational leadership professors in this study shared their experiences with the lavender ceiling. Although both broke through the ceiling achieving tenure, it was not without fear or effort. Ellen feared the homophobic culture that permeated her institution, and particularly her department was a direct threat to her achieving tenure. Jane’s journey to tenure was fraught with institutional discrimination, as she was initially denied tenure ultimately based on her sexual orientation.

Without question, many of these leaders have feared not being promoted as a result of their sexual orientation. Because the literature on homosexual school leaders is essentially non-existent, we are unable to draw historical parallels to these participants’ fear of promotion and confirm the early existence of a *lavender ceiling*. We can infer, however, a history fraught with homophobic fear and violence, in combination with the dearth of literature on gay educational leaders, the *lavender ceiling* has been – and continues to be a reality in the U.S. educational system.

The *Cycles of Fear* begins with the loss of safety. The hostility one endures based on society's fear of real or perceived difference forces the individual to erect a shield of protection and navigate the world with increased caution. As society's intolerance heightens the individual's fear intensifies as s/he experiences loss of self/opportunity. With the concentric circles of fear increasing their inward thrust, implosion appears inevitable. However, those who find the inner strength to withstand the mounting pressure, discover the manifestations of their loss, and continue to progress through the cycle to personal gain.

Personal Gains

Courageous homosexual school leaders who have risen from the ashes of oppression with a deeper understanding of self and acquired gains may have always existed, but this group remains invisible in the literature. As Harbeck (1992) stated:

In terms of an individual's experience, we do know that since colonial times the most common scenario is one of a person living an exemplary life in fear of discovery. In that rare instance when his or her homosexual orientation became known, the teacher quietly resigned or quickly left, since the potential consequences of challenging the system alone were extreme. (pp. 123-124)

As stated previously, the only reliable accounts of American homosexual educators prior to the 20th century are the notable transcendentalists such as Amos Alcott and his colleagues. These accounts, however, not only fall short of reporting the "life experience of 'average' individuals who comprise the vast number of homosexual men and women

in the teaching profession” (Harbeck, 1992, p. 124), but also fail to mention educational leaders. Since there is minimal history to be drawn from, this paper’s discussion of gains focuses primarily on current findings and draws occasional inferences from the history that is available.

When the cumulative pressure of fear is created from multiple levels of outness, it takes great strength to counter the pressure and find personal gain through loss. But, how does one fight the desire to fall deeper into seclusion and find gain in a journey that has been shaped by fear? Dozier (1998) contends, “Through understanding fear we understand ourselves” (p. 6). The discussion that follows, first, illustrates how LG[BT] leaders gained a deeper understanding of themselves through a life of fear, and second, further reiterates the absence of LG[BT] school leaders in the history of U.S. education. This third component (minor theme – Personal Gains) in/of the Cycles of Fear highlights the supporting cluster themes under personal gains in the following sub-sections: 1) strength and personal power, 2) acceptance/self-awareness and integrated identity, and 3) comradeship/connections.

Strength and Personal Power

As individuals live in and come to understand fear, they discover power “can and does emerge from loss, depression, failure, and shame” (Hammel, 2008, p. 184). Furthermore, they find an inner strength that develops from “living close to the heart – not at odds with it” (Moore, 1992 as cited in Hammel, 2008, p. 184). In my review of the literature, the earliest account of a gay school leader demonstrating strength and personal power was Dr. Pat McCart, who freely outed herself during the 1989 Gay Pride parade in

Minneapolis, MN¹². Realizing her silence only perpetuated fear and homophobia, McCart discovered personal gain was the manifestation of a life of fear and loss, thrusting her forward in the Cycles of Fear.

Like McCart, the participants rose from the ashes of oppression to find that invaluable personal traits had developed from fear and loss. Rising above the dominant culture's messages of hate, allowed these leaders to develop a personal identity that Eric reminded us "is in conflict with the norm", and to proceed with strength and power. The participants agreed that years of living in fear and terror built strength and character. Several leaders reflected that the experience of being gay led to their sense of strength and personal power. Michael, the outlier of the study, who was out from a very early age, believes his gay experience has given him the strength and power to "interact with people with great confidence" and expects others to accept him for who he is. Michael took control of his life and story early on, but all other participants gleaned strength and self-power at different points in their lives by taking control over their lives and stories. This in itself gave them the strength and power to progress in the Cycles of Fear.

LG[BT] persons who have found the strength and power to rise above oppression and hostility, indeed live close to the heart and their convictions. Andrew Sullivan, Time columnist, exemplified the strength of those who live close to the heart. Appearing on CNN's Larry King Live to discuss homosexuality and the church, Sullivan, in a crosstalk with the Reverend Albert Mohler, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, stated:

¹² See Chapter 1, pp. 17-19.

We're opening them [souls] up to tell the world who we are, and if we're rejected, then so be it, but God won't reject us, and we have a duty to tell the truth. There is no commandment that says thou shalt not be gay, but there is a commandment that says thou shalt not bear false witness, and I will not bear false witness to who I am. (Whitworth, 2006, p. 9)

Similarly, the participants also exemplified the strength and conviction of those who live close to the heart. Ron said, "I don't know who I would have been, but it doesn't matter, I am who I am."

All participants shared stories of personal strength and power upon accepting "who they are". Personal strength and power was not a common finding among participants in previous studies of gay leaders (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), and the idea of personal power was not discussed. Albeit, strength and personal power was clearly a gain gleaned from loss for the participants in this study. Without a doubt, these leaders are true to themselves and refuse to bear false witness against who they are.

Acceptance/Self-Awareness and Integrated Identity

Not bearing false witness against who you are not only demonstrates strength and personal power, it is the essence of courage and bravery, characteristics found in Brunner's (2000) "warrior of the heart" (p. 18). A warrior of the heart combines the traditional values of warriorship such as strength and bravery with virtues of the heart like courage, conviction, and empathy (Brunner, 2000; *Warrior of the heart*, 2008). As with all warriors, a warrior of the heart needs weapons to combat his/her foe. Brunner (2000) asserted that weapons of a warrior of the heart are courage, awareness, and gentleness.

Furthermore, Fields (1994, as cited in Brunner, 2000) described the instrumental element of warriorship by quoting Chogyam Trungpa, “The key to warriorship is not being afraid of who you are. Ultimately, that is the definition of bravery: not being afraid of yourself” (p. 19). Most certainly, rising from the ashes of oppression, the participants have proven they are not afraid of who they are.

Self-awareness afforded these warriors the freedom to live their lives without being afraid of who they are. Living years in relentless fear, participants “quit worrying” about others’ perceptions and discovered self-awareness was empowering in and of itself. Awareness of who they are as individuals allowed the participants to navigate their world on their own terms and venture beyond the internal circle of self to seek acceptance in the surrounding concentric circles.

As participants’ fears related to their sexuality decreased, they found the strength to open their lives – first to family. All participants in this study are out to their families, and the majority shared experiences of family acceptance. Most experienced immediate acceptance and credit their families’ acceptance as something that shaped who they are today. Family acceptance encouraged Jake “to be more open about being gay.” Ron’s family is “a good part of my backbone of who I am” and Michael’s gave him the “confidence to be who he is.” Although not all participants experienced immediate acceptance, they remained strong in their convictions to themselves, eventually gaining the acceptance they sought and the courage to begin to open their lives to friends, school, and community.

Certainly, stepping into the next concentric circle (see FIGURE 6, p. 114) was not without personal risk and fear. As discussed previously, participants shared fear of possible job loss, hostility, and heightened scrutiny should they out themselves. These fears created the need to walk with increased caution. Participants spoke of maintaining professionalism at all times and adhering to gender-appropriate norms. In fact, all participants spoke directly or indirectly about the typical lesbian/gay stereotype and the need to avoid presenting themselves as such. The participants in Fryand and Capper's (2003) and Tooms' (2007) studies also presented themselves with professionalism and gender appropriateness, and distanced themselves from the lesbian/gay stereotype. Fryand and Capper (2003) labeled this dichotomy as "the 'normal' gay and lesbian versus the 'extreme' gay and lesbian" (p. 97), with "normal" thought of as a healthy lifestyle and "extreme" understood to be a sickness or social deviant. The participants in this study reflect participants in both previous studies, in that all have chosen to present themselves as "normal" or in Tooms' terms, the "queer fit" individuals (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007).

Delving further into self-awareness and acceptance, I asked the participants, "In your eyes, what does it mean to be a gay administrator?" Two of the participants, Jane and David, are professors and have not been school administrators. They could only surmise what it must be like based on their interactions with students and observations of the public school system. Ellen, former principal and current professor, was completely closeted as a principal and recalled the fear and constant hiding as she worked in a state that had no legal protection for LG[BT] educators. Doug, a principal in a state that does

provide legal protection based on sexual orientation, remains closeted and in fear. The other participants stated they did not see themselves as gay administrators, but rather administrators who happen to be gay, unable to separate one identity from the other.

Fraynd and Capper (2003) and Tooms (2007) had similar findings, however, they described their participants as having the ability to separate personal and professional identity. Fraynd and Capper (2003) stated, “all four [participants] positioned themselves to be viewed as effective and respected by their staff, and at the same time, drew clear distinctions between their sexual identity and effective administration” (p. 103). Similarly, the LG[BT] leaders in Tooms’ (2007) study, “often engaged in separation strategies to keep their identity and personal life away from their work life” (p. 27), so as not to “put their ability to lead at risk” (p. 30).

In their discussions of identity management strategies, Fryand and Capper (2003) incorporated two of four strategies Griffin (1992) identified as means by which LG[BT] educators conceal their identity – reputation and separation – to describe how their participants navigated their identity and career. As previously discussed, LG[BT] educators and leaders, are highly conscious of public perception, tend to over-compensate for feeling “less than” their hetero counterparts, and strive to maintain a reputation that is above reproach. Separation occurs when LG[BT] educators maintain a boundary or separation between their personal and professional identity (Fraynd and Capper, 2003; Griffin, 1992). Griffin (1992) described these strategies as identity protection strategies, and Fraynd and Capper (2003) found reputation to be “integrally tied” (p. 103) to separation, agreeing these are indeed protective strategies for LG[BT] educators.

Like the participants in this study, Fraynd and Capper's (2003) administrators "were adamant that their sexual identity was only a part of who they were" (p. 103) and had nothing to do with their effectiveness as administrators (Fraynd and Capper reversed this notion in later conversations with their participants). Agreeing with Fraynd and Capper's (2007) participants, Tooms' (2007) educational leaders felt that being gay was "a part of who we are, but not the sum of who we" (p. 19), and viewed their personal identities as a potential risk to their effectiveness as leaders. Tooms' (2007) participants also "were able to acknowledge that in many ways these two identities [personal and professional] are at times intertwined" (p. 27).

Although the findings of this study support the notion that reputation and separation may be protective strategies, the study goes further and notes that sexual identity does impact one's effectiveness as a leader (see discussion on *Social Gains*). Furthermore, the participants in the two previous studies (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), like the participants in this study may have separated their personal identity from the necessary skill set of effective leadership, but did not separate personal identity from professional identity. Rather, the LG[BT] leaders have integrated their personal and professional identity as one.

Each participant, in this study, commented on an inability to separate who they are personally from who they are professionally. Like Fraynd and Capper's (2003) and Tooms' (2007) LG[BT] leaders, sexual identity is just one small part of who they are as a whole. Integrated identity allowed most participants to be comfortable with who they are,

and draw positive connections between their qualities and experiences of being gay, and their success as educational leaders

Indeed, these leaders have integrated their sexual identity into who they are as a total person, seeing themselves as “normal LG[BT]” individuals. And, these participants, like Fryand and Capper’s (2003), have found that projecting themselves with professionalism and gender appropriateness, being the “normal lesbian/gay” is the key to acceptance on a broader scale. Of the 17 participants in this study, only one has not fully integrated his sexuality and professional identity and has ventured least beyond the circle of family. The other 16 participants have or are moving, at times with great caution, into the concentric circle of school/ community, outing themselves as they deem appropriate, and living authentic, integrated lives. Half of the leaders opened themselves at the state level and feel accepted. Six participants moved with ease to national/federal acceptance, and three found acceptance in the international/global circle.

Most certainly, these educational leaders displayed strength, bravery, and conviction, all values and virtues of warriorship. Through their convictions, these leaders armed themselves with two of the three weapons of a *warrior of the heart*—courage and acceptance—and were searching for comrades with whom to connect during their journeys through the Cycles of Fear.

Comradeship/Connections

Humans seek comradeship among those who share similarities, particularly when those similarities are in discord with the norm. The literature revealed that Socrates and Plato, the earliest known and most famous homosexual educators (Buchanan, 2000;

Harbeck, 1997), developed close connections, first as teacher/student and then as fellow philosophers and educators (van Dolen, 2009). Harbeck (1992, 1997) suggested comradely associations between early 19th century homosexual educators in that they often worked together and socialized in the same circles. This common practice was again evidenced in the early 1900s as single female educators and that, albeit rare, female administrators socialized together and frequently “lived together in ‘Boston Marriages’, or long-term romantic relationships between two women” (Blount, 1996, p. 326).

Without a doubt, it was comradely love that united LGBT individuals during the 1969 Stonewall Riots and the subsequent grassroots movements that sought gay civil rights nationwide (Blount, 2004). Even Dr. Pat McCart acknowledged the importance of comradeship as she marched with her educator colleagues in the 1989 Gay Pride Rally (McCart, 1994).

Comradely love, another virtue of warriorship (Hillman, 1994, as cited in Brunner, 2000), was critical to the LG[BT] leaders in this study. Their need to find and maintain connections with other gay educators and leaders was unequivocal. Two of the participants, then teachers, marched alongside Pat McCart in that 1989 Gay Pride Rally. Both spoke of the empowerment they felt when connected with other LGBT educators. Rick recalled connections he made in the Teacher Empowerment group and the comradely love was “all important in my growth as a soon to be gay school administrator.”

Several participants remembered the importance of connecting with other LGBT individuals as they struggled with coming out. Amidst 1980s campus violence and the

AIDS scare, gay comrades were critical for Jane. Some participants found connections through participation in various organizations and consciousness-raising movements, while others found comradely love through connections with LGBT friends and professionals. Mary explained the support of comradely love as a teacher, “There is a bond when teachers who are gay can connect . . . and support can be given to each other” and as an administrator, “Knowing another gay administrator is key. We find each other, believe me If we are out their living our life we do connect and find each other.”

No doubt making connections with other homosexual individuals was critical for these participants during their identity negotiations, and such connections strengthened their convictions. Although the existence of comradeship has been eluded to in the literature (Blount, 1996, 2004; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; McCart, 1994; van Dolen, 2009), its importance to the lived experience of gay educators has not been specifically identified in recent research. The virtue of comradely love appears to be essential for these *warriors of the heart* as they journey the Cycles of Fear to social gain and continue the battle for equality and justice for all.

Social Gains

Social gains are generally thought of as the sum gains that benefit all participants. For example, the sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws are considered social gains for the LGBT community in the 20 states and District of Columbia where such laws exist. And, more recently the April 3, 2009 Iowa Supreme Court decision that outlawed the ban on same-sex marriage as unconstitutional, allowing Iowa to become the third state to legalize same-sex marriage is a social gain. The findings of this study, however, suggest a

different definition of social gains – that is, social gains are a set of human traits and/or behaviors an individual possesses when allowed to flourish and thus develop the potential to benefit society as a whole. This definition guides the following discussion of social gains. The supporting cluster themes (under the minor theme “Social Gains”) are discussed as follows: 1) unique perspective, 2) heightened sensitivity, 3) heightened awareness, 4) giving voice/role model, and 5) courageous trail-blazing.

Unique Perspective

The participants in this study firmly believe that they possess unique perspectives that are grounded in their past experiences as LG[BT] youth and educators. In later conversations, Fryand and Capper’s (2003) participants agreed that their sexuality had an impact on their careers as educational leaders, and that the possession of unique perspectives was one manifestation. One participant in the Fryand and Capper (2003) study acknowledged that her past experiences helped her to realize that all children must be served. In her study of thirteen homosexual educators, Griffin (1992) also found her participants acknowledged having a unique perspective that was grounded in their gay experiences.

The findings of this study concur with Fryand and Capper (2003) and Griffin’s (1992), indeed this study’s participants found unique perspectives deeply rooted in their pasts. Directly reflecting comments made by one of Fryand and Capper’s (2003) participants, Carol commented:

I am a white human being, and I think that my minority status as a lesbian has enabled me to better understand, by no means completely understand,

but better understand the challenges that my students of color, my non-native English speaking students, that level of understanding is something that I wouldn't have if I was a straight white female.

Heightened Sensitivity

Having empathy for others means to identify with and understand the feelings and experiences of others. Participants in previous studies (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Griffin, 1992) all spoke of the heightened sensitivity or empathy that they bring to their jobs because of their experiences of marginalization. Concurring with Griffin (1992) and Fraynd and Capper (2003), the participants in this study also spoke of a heightened sensitivity, toward the struggles of their staff, students, and families that was born of their gay experiences as youth and teachers. Several K-12 administrator participants shared thoughts on the need to be more inclusive in curriculum, and one spoke of the curriculum he has written and implemented in his district. The same participants acknowledged that their sexuality shaped their current practice with regard to inclusiveness and creating safe environments for all staff, students, and families.

Heightened Awareness

Heightened sensitivity toward marginalized groups makes one keenly aware of the discriminatory words, actions, and attitudes of the majoritarian culture – in other words, heightened awareness of hetero-privilege. Hetero-privilege power and its impact on the lives of LG[BT] individuals, particularly educators, was clearly revealed throughout the literature (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2004, 2005; Capper, 1999; Carter, 1997; Chauncey, 1994; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Koschoreck, 2003;

Lipkin, 1999; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; Mazur, 1997; McCart, 1994; "*Miller v. Weaver*", 2003; "*Nabozny v. Podlesny*", 1996; Rivera, 1999; Rossman, 1997; Sears, 1993; Stewart, 2001; Valdes, 1998). Although there has been no discussion in the literature with regard to a heightened awareness of hetero-privilege, one can infer that a life of marginalization enveloped in relentless fear heightens one's awareness of majoritarian privilege. Fraynd and Capper (2003) did not specifically discuss hetero-privilege or their participants' heightened awareness of hetero-privilege, however, when talking about fear, at least one of their participants eluded to heightened awareness. As this participant policed disclosure of her sexuality she felt a "huge conflict and an internal struggle that heterosexuals do not have to deal with" (p. 106).

The findings of this study coincide with Fraynd and Capper's (2003) "isolated inference" and further expand the notion of heightened awareness of hetero-privilege. Participants in this study unanimously agreed past footprints have heightened their awareness of the hetero-privilege that surrounds their everyday lives. All participants spoke of hetero-privilege as one of ease in that heterosexuals are free to openly talk about their lives, display affection, enjoy the benefits of marriage (thinking "nothing of it" as Michael pointed out), and navigate their careers without fear of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Without a doubt, maintaining hetero superiority was a topic that all participants addressed. David indicated the "power of heteronormativity is so pervasive They [heterosexuals] just presume." The pervasiveness of heteronormativity permeates every aspect of society fostering maintenance of the heterosexist paradigm. Several participants

commented on a gender conformist society where everything is assumed to be boy/girl, especially marriages and families. Jordan stated:

And kids are getting this message all over the place – that’s what a family should be and that’s how things should be. That’s the right way. . . my experience right now is that the GLBT issue is often dismissed in the idea of equity that is not inclusive of GLBT people or issues or ideas on heteronormativity.

Finally, her heightened awareness of hetero-privilege allowed Carol to see how the assumptions of a heterosexual paradigm prevents LG[BT] educators and leaders from living authentic lives:

What I face is much less homophobia and much more heterosexism by people just assuming. They make assumptions that the world operates on a heterosexual paradigm. I think we’re far from a place where educators, principals, and administrators can be true to who they are in most of this country.

Indeed, hetero-privilege plays out in the laws of society as well as the informal actions and attitudes toward anyone deemed outside the norm. In chapter 4 these participants spoke at length on how the existence or non-existence of formal laws and policies affected their lives, but the informal context, or actions and attitudes of society had the greatest impact on their personal and professional lives. Participants’ heightened awareness of hetero-privilege allowed them to recognize the injustices of a heterosexual paradigm. As these leaders proceed along the Cycles of Fear they challenge the injustices

of hetero-privilege by giving voice to those who have none and serving as role models for an equitable future.

Giving Voice/Role Model

The history of homosexuality in U.S. education has demonstrated that silence renders the oppressed helpless, at the hands of their oppressors (Blount, 1996, 2003, 2004; Capper, 1993a, 1999; Chauncey, 1994; D’Emilio, 1983; Fryand and Capper, 2003; Harbeck, 1992, 1997; Lugg 2003a, 2003b, 2007; Sears, 1993; Tooms, 2007; Valdes, 1998). The dearth of literature on LGBT educational leaders further exemplifies the oppressive nature of silence on a marginalized group. The literature is silent on LGBT activists prior to the Stonewall Riots of 1969 and the first mention of a gay educational leader activist was Dr. Pat McCart in 1989. McCart spoke of the need for gay educators to step forward, break the cycle of prejudice and become role models for straight and gay youth, alike, “We must have the courage to risk if the system is to change” (McCart, 1994, p. 55).

McCart’s (1994) “call to arms” has been slow to materialize. Capper (1999, as cited in Lugg, 2007) suggested that anti-gay stigma continues to silence LGBT educators and straight allies. Lugg (2007) posits this silence removes the possibility for “queer” role models in education, “Furthermore, the silenced and invisible queer public school workers erase possible queer adult role models for both queer and non-queer students. Many children, regardless of identities, are desperate for positive adult role models” (p. 20-21). Indeed, anti-gay stigma and the Cycles of Fear have made it difficult for LG[BT] educational leaders to emerge as role models and give voice to those silenced.

All participants recognized a dire need for strong role models for their staff and students. All participants, with the exception of one¹³, were passionate about giving voice to marginalized youth and educators through their strong advocacy. Giving voice to those who have none is only part of their mission, these leaders are equally committed to be role models for marginalized students and colleagues. Being a role model for his high school students, Michael regularly speaks on gay and lesbian issues in his schools' Sexuality and Health class, making certain students see him, and all gay individuals as living normal and healthy lives. Michael also addressed the absence of role models at an institutional level, "The absence who are gay or people of color, the absence speaks volumes about the institution. That is why it is the institutions' responsibility to recruit people who will represent their students. We can't just ignore."

Courageous Trail-blazing

Similar to the previous section, the literature on LGBT trail-blazers is virtually silent until the gay rights activists and prominent gay education legal cases of the 1970s, and most certainly Dr. McCart in 1989. Likewise, the few studies on homosexual educators/school leaders (Fryand & Capper, 2003; Griffin, 1992; Kissen, 1996; Tooms, 2007) do not address gay school leaders as trail-blazers. Perhaps, the absence of visible "queer" role models and trail-blazers is due to the anti-gay stigma posed by Capper (1999) and Lugg (2007). The anti-gay tensions in this country have grown substantially during the George W. Bush administration and contributed significantly to the invisibility of role models and trail-blazers for the LGBT community (Sklar, 2004).

¹³ This participant is passionate about advocacy and giving voice, however, is not at a point where he feels safe to be an open advocate.

Each study participant voiced an opinion about setting a standard or “blazing the trail.” For Michael, people in positions of power need to set a standard of safety and support. Jake and Nate feel like lone rangers in their districts, but continue to push for a future of equity and safety for all oppressed individuals. The participants realize blazing the trail is often done one person at a time, much like the *Mayor of Castro Street*, Harvey Milk, who turned the ripples of a gay rights movement in San Francisco into a national tidal wave for equality.

Milk began to blaze the trail in the 1970s, for future generations of LG[BT] individuals to follow. True to his convictions and passionate the myths surrounding homosexuals be cast aside, and justice for all prevail, Milk spoke strongly and passionately against the hostility, injustice, and lies that enveloped the gay community, and made it clear, “here we are” (Shilts, 2008, p. 190). The LG[BT] leaders in this study echo Milk’s words, silently or openly – “here we are”, we are blazing a trail, and we are making a difference. Their participation in this study blazes the trail for others to follow. These *warriors of the heart* risked great personal loss to participate in a virtual experience study that has never been attempted before. Like Harvey Milk, true to their convictions, these warriors displayed the courage to risk in order that their voices and the voices of their silent colleagues be heard. Without a doubt these *warriors of the heart* are trail-blazers and will make it easier for the next generation of LG[BT] educational leaders.

Without a doubt, the discussions and conclusions that were drawn from this study’s findings are not only interesting, but also, they are instructive for a future

leadership preparation programs and b) further research. In the two final sections of the dissertation below, both topics are addressed.

Suggestions for Leadership Preparation Programs

As mentioned in previous chapters, education moves in sync with the ebb and flow of social mores. Despite the vast majority of states continuing legalized discrimination, the fact that Iowa and Vermont have recently passed laws recognizing same-sex marriage, suggests relaxing social mores and the beginning of a cultural shift. If the culture of education is to be in harmony with society, we must attempt to “hit the cultural shift at every point” (Ellen). Participants agreed that change must begin in our teacher and leadership preparation programs. Indeed, aspiring teachers and leaders need to be trained on issues of social justice, including sexuality.

Participants who identified as professors in educational leadership, pointed out that institutional change is a combination of grassroots and top-down efforts. Recognizing their charge to prepare future educational leaders, the professors in the study felt responsible for the promotion of a cultural shift by ensuring that the courses they teach have a social justice focus that includes sexuality. They are, however, disheartened with the knowledge that a social justice focus is not the common practice across teacher/leadership preparation programs. David summarized the collective suggestion offered by the professor participants, “We can make certain that our curricula are focused on issues of social justice, as broadly defined, and to make sure that this includes issues of sexuality We can do the same thing for teachers in our teacher education programs.” Without a doubt, a social justice focus including sexual orientation, in our

teacher and leadership preparation programs a) would be welcomed by all the participants in this study, and b) has the potential to begin the necessary cultural shifts toward equity and equality specifically for LG[BT] educators and children in our schools.

Implications for Further Research

Chaos Theory, commonly associated with quantum physics, suggests that small vibrations or ripples occurring in one location continue to multiply as they move across time and space, eventually creating a tidal wave of change. This study adds a small, but important ripple to the growing body of research conducted on the lived experiences of LG[BT] educational leaders. However, the findings suggest that there is much work to be done. First, as previously mentioned, the findings on differences between participants warrant further investigation. The degree of outness, within the concentric circles of fear, played a role in how LG[BT] leaders in this study navigated their worlds. It is not clear, however, what impact degree of outness has on the journey through the *Cycles of Fear*. Additional research is needed to determine if LG[BT] educational leaders who are further out in the concentric circles (i.e., state, federal/national, global/universal) move through the Cycles of Fear differently than those choosing greater restriction in their degree of outness.

Second, the location of participants' residence appeared to make some difference for them with regard to degree of outness, as well as how they lived their lives – personally and professionally. Although this study included participants in three of the five geographical regions of the continental United States, it was limited in that 16 participants indicated they lived in states with sexual orientation anti-discrimination

protection. The experiences of LG[BT] leaders in the south and northwestern United States remain unexplored, and it is uncertain if location played a role in who chose to participate in this study. Research is needed to better understand the impact of location on experiences within the Cycles of Fear for LG[BT] educational leaders who reside in states and geographical regions that are not represented in this study.

To be sure, research on LG[BT] educational leaders is more absent than present in academic and professional literature sets. In order to address this dearth, I suggest the security provided by technology be explored further. High-structure designs, like that of virtual laboratories, allow participants to interact anonymously, in a secured/locked website, through the use of chat, quiz, and private/public messaging tools are a promising way to come to understand and build knowledge of LG[BT] educators. Moreover, a key finding of this study indicated that participants *need* to have the opportunity to choose the way in which they interface with the researcher. Without a doubt, in a study where anonymity of participants is critical, the comprehensive anonymity of the high-structure design, when combined with options for low-structure designs, including direct interaction with the researcher, yielded unprecedented participation and results. Therefore, continued use of high-structure/low-structure combination designs in research on marginalized populations warrants further exploration.

Finally, the concentric circles of fear create the constant risk of implosion and the Cycles of Fear is relentless, pervasive, and never-ending. The participants in this study have provided a glimpse of the lived experiences of relentless fear, however, questions regarding the Concentric Circles of Fear Model and the Cycles of Fear Model remain

unanswered. For example: What are the experiences, within the Cycles of Fear, of LG[BT] educational leaders with differing layers of identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality (bisexual, transgender), and disability? And, what are the experiences, within the concentric circles of fear and the Cycles of Fear, of other marginalized populations? Clearly, to gain deeper understandings of the experience of living with relentless fear, research should be expanded and these two models of fear further explored. In the vast sea of social science research, queer studies began as small ripples. But ultimately, this work has potential to grow into a tidal wave of knowledge that creates acceptance and cultural changes at all levels.

EPILOGUE

Although I began my journey of social justice on the day I was born (see Prologue, p. 1), this particular part of my journey began eight years ago. On May 5, 2001, I sat, for the first time, with my fellow cohort members in room 250 of Wulling Hall. I remember the feelings of excitement, anticipation, pride, and *fear* as I was sure I was “out of my league” and could never live up to the rigorous expectations of being a doctoral student. There were about twenty-five of us then, we have since dwindled down, and I am one of the last to complete this journey. As I now reminisce, I distinctly recall our first two classes together and the words of our professors. One told us that our research would add a “small brick” to the wall of educational research, and the other said, “you are now doctoral students at a flagship university.” As a cohort, we have not forgotten those words, for even now, as we periodically re-convene, we remember them with fondness.

The memory that remains strongest, and most important to my journey into the realms of educational research, however, was the evening the concept of this study took shape. I remember struggling to find a research topic that not only interested me, but one that I could “marry”, for I knew I would be living with it for many years. During our second research seminar, we sat around the table sharing our chosen research topics. When my turn came, I said that I had chosen a topic, but it really was not something I was passionate about, and what I really wanted to research I had no idea how to tie to leadership. Our professor asked me what was it I really *wanted* to study and I explained I wanted to research LGBT issues. My revelation began a phenomenal brainstorm session with my cohort, and on that chilly, Thursday evening in March 2002, this study was born.

I have received nothing but support from my family and friends throughout my research journey, as they saw how passionate I was about my work. I knew this research had meaning to my brother, Michael, and to my gay and straight ally friends/colleagues. But, I had no idea the extent to which my work would touch other family members. Several weeks ago, the oldest of my brothers, Joe, stopped to visit and seeing a copy of the paper I was to present at AERA lying amidst the numerous books, papers and note cards sprawled around my computer, asked if he could take it home and read it. A couple of days later Joe called me to share his feelings on the paper he had read. Joe said:

I know our brother inspired your research. I know you did this for Michael.

But, Sis, I want you to know that you have inspired me. I am so proud of you. When I read your paper, your words grabbed me and I couldn't put it down. I thought I knew what our brother had gone through, but after reading this, I never realized the pain and the fear. You've given me a new understanding of what it is like to be discriminated against. It's something we never have and never will experience. Thank you for sharing this with me.

Sis, you have to publish your research. You have to get the word out there.

You need to talk about this and make a difference.

I could not believe that my "manly man" brother was so touched by my words.

On the day of my graduation ceremony I was surrounded by my children, my Uncle Vince, my brothers, and my dearest friend, and I felt their pride in me. My youngest brother, Paul, told me he was glad that he chose to attend the ceremony, and how proud he was of me. As I looked at Paul I saw the glint in his eyes and in his eyes, I

saw my parents' pride. At that point I knew that my work had touched the very foundation of my family – from the patriarch of our family, my Uncle Vince, to my brothers and my children. I was honored and encouraged to continue my social justice work.

As I now reflect on my journey and the words of encouragement from my family and friends, I am reminded of Harvey Milk and his address at San Francisco's Gay Freedom Day Rally, on June 25, 1978, five months before his assassination. Milk spoke out against the hostility of the time, and beckoned his "gay sisters and brothers" to pick up the torch and join him:

My name is Harvey Milk – and I want to recruit you. I want to recruit you for the fight to preserve your democracy from the John Briggs and Anita Bryants who are trying to constitutionalize bigotry. We are not going to allow that to happen. We are not going to sit back in silence as 300,000 of our gay brothers and sisters did in Nazi Germany. We are not going to allow our rights to be taken away and then march with bowed heads into the gas chambers. On this anniversary of Stonewall, I ask my gay sisters and brothers to make a commitment to fight. For themselves, for their freedom, for their country We will not win our rights by staying in our closets We are coming out to fight the lies, the myths, the distortions. We are coming out to tell the truths about gays, for I am tired of the conspiracy of silence, so I am going to talk about it. And I want you to talk about it. (Shilts, 2008, pp. 364-365)

Milk's words inspired me, and I do want to continue to "talk about it". However, I am a straight ally. I have NOT lived my brother's life. I have NOT lived the lives of the participants in this study. I do not know the depth of their stories – living in relentless fear. But, I do know this experience, hearing the participants' stories, has changed my life forever. My journey along the path of social justice is far from over. I only hope that as I continue the journey, I am able to honor the stories of my brother and these courageous LG[BT] educational leaders, and with every "little brick" I add to the wall of education research, hopefully, it will move us one step closer to equality and justice for all.

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