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# An Exploration of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender College Student Identity Development: Development Through the Early 21st Century'S Increased Politicization of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights

Tony Ray Smith

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

AN EXPLORATION OF GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND  
TRANSGENDER COLLEGE STUDENT IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT: DEVELOPMENT THROUGH  
THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY'S INCREASED  
POLITICIZATION OF GAY, LESBIAN,  
BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER  
CIVIL RIGHTS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Department of Leadership, Policy and Development:  
Higher Education and P-12 Education  
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

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This Dissertation by: Tony R. Smith

Entitled: An Exploration of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender College Student Identity Development: Development Through The Early 21<sup>ST</sup> Century's Increased Politicization of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Leadership, Policy and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education, Program of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

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Date of Dissertation Defense: May 1, 2015

Accepted by the Graduate School

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## ABSTRACT

Smith, Tony R. *An Exploration of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender College Student Identity Development: Development Through The Early 21<sup>ST</sup> Century's Increased Politicization of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation. University of Northern Colorado, 2015.

Twelve gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender college students participated in this study, which explored the influence of identity politics surrounding gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) civil rights in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Aspects of student participants' personal stories are explored in reference to rhetoric surrounding legislation of various GLBT Civil Rights. This study revisits GLBT history from Ancient Greece through the oppressive turning point of the 1700s and on to the current period in order to explain the long history of oppression of GLBT lives in society.

Using interviews, artifact elicitation, and reflection the students who participated in this study shared their individual narratives. The students expressed how the politicization of same-sex marriage and employment rights influenced their experiences. Interview data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Crystallization to explore themes through various perspectives.

Findings discussed include how students experienced frustration as well as a desire to create change in their communities in relation to political and religious rhetoric surrounding GLBT civil rights legislation. Implications of this study include a need for expanded support for campus GLBT Resource Centers, avoiding gender bias, gender

neutrality and the gender binary, as well as the need for greater understanding of GLBT employment non-discrimination. Potential areas for future research included the need for more research on non-binary sexual identities as well as the need for better understanding the transgender experience. Also addressed is the influence of a lack of full inclusion of transgender rights in GLBT legislation.

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I owe a great deal of thanks to my committee chair/advisor, Dr. Katrina Rodriguez. Katrina, your support, kindness, and encouragement make this possible. To my committee members, Dr. Matthew Birnbaum, Dr. Gabriel Serna, and Dr. Jennifer Murdock Bishop – thank you so much for your commitment, encouragement and support.

I am grateful to have had this opportunity to study what I love. I look forward to more opportunities to express my voice as a researcher in higher education. The fast changing world of social justice as it relates to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students is in need of more work expressing their stories.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout history gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people have experienced oppression (Adut, 2005; Trumbach, 2012). This societal oppression is mirrored in higher education and the impact of political and religious rhetoric on the GLBT population is evident (Dilley, 2002b; Perkin, 1997). GLBT individuals and groups have experienced shaming, sting operations, investigations, prosecution, and violence both in and outside of higher education since well before the late 1700s (Adut, 2005; Dilley, 2002a; Marine, 2011; Trumbach, 2012).

Russell (2000), explored the impact of anti-gay constitutional legislation in Colorado on GLBT adult individuals, and families. While an important study of the overall impact of anti-gay constitutional legislation, Russell (2000) did not venture into the experiences of GLBT college students. There is an opportunity to explore the impact of more recent progress and set backs in the identity politics surrounding GLBT civil rights on today's GLBT college population. The well documented historical oppression of the GLBT community in tandem with several decades of progressive GLBT student identity development research shows the need for further exploration of the politicization of GLBT identity (Adut, 2005; Cass, 1979, 1984; D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995; Dilley, 2002a; Fassinger, 1998; Marine, 2011; Trumbach, 2012).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are barraged with negative and positive rhetoric as a result of the increasing politicization of GLBT issues in today's society. Russell (2000) explored the significance of anti-gay politics on GLBT adults, not specific to the college experience or development, in Colorado after the successful passing of Amendment 2 in November of 1992. Amendment 2's purpose was to rescind and prevent any law prohibiting the discrimination of GLBT individuals (Russell, 2000; Zamansky, 1993). Results of this study show the impact of 53% of Colorado voters passing this measure, which was not limited to definitions of marriage, but also complete denial of GLBT civil rights in any form (Zamansky, 1993).

Russell's (2000) research team determined the emotional impact of the initial passage of Amendment 2 to span anger, loss, isolation, and psychological trauma. However, one of the most poignant findings from this study was the disruption of GLBT identity (Russell, 2000). Respondents of the study expressed feelings of being invalidated after the anti-gay hatred expressed by Amendment 2 and its proponents (Russell, 2000). Although this amendment was found unconstitutional shortly after it was approved by 53% of voters, the damage was already done to the GLBT community in Colorado. Anti-gay rhetoric and its pervasive impact had already been felt by families and individuals (Russell, 2000).

More recently, federal and state level legislation of GLBT civil rights has created change and debate across the United States. The impact of the Federal Supreme Court's rulings on the passage and repeal of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, the passage and repeal of the 1993 Don't Ask Don't Tell, and California's Proposition 8 is not being

studied in terms of the wider GLBT population nor the more specific GLBT college student experience. These more recent successes for the GLBT community in the United States have sparked debate among conservatives and liberals. These debates often echo messages heard in ancient, medieval and Victorian periods. Messages that vilify the GLBT individual and community.

This study explored how gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) college students move through their sexual identity development as a result of day-to-day marginalization and oppression laden rhetoric found in the current politicization of GLBT civil rights issues. This study also worked to recognize the impact of positive and negative rhetoric on today's GLBT student experience.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is a long history of GLBT oppression from ancient Greece to the early 1700s through to the present day, and GLBT research has only recently begun to look at student development from the perspective of the GLBT community (Adut, 2005; Calimach, 2002; Fassinger, 1998; Perkin, 1997; Trumbach, 2012). Student development as a professional field of research and practice describes GLBT student psychosocial development in stages and as a life span experience, however, the impact of legislating social policy on the GLBT student developmental experience is unknown and unstudied (Cass, 1979, 1984; D'Augelli, 1995; Fassinger, 1998; Stevens, 2004). I feel that exploring the impact of social policy on GLBT student identity development in relation to a discovery of individual identity politics is of key significance in expanding the lexicon of GLBT student development research.

I hope to provide a glimpse into the stories of GLBT students' journey through college and how they experience their sexual identity development in concert with this rhetoric. It is important to understand these journeys and stories as to better serve as resources to GLBT students in higher education. However, it is unrealistic to think higher education institutions can be utopian refuges for GLBT students. Campuses and other higher education communities have served as catalysts for education, growth, development, and change in times of difficult identity discovery.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

In my work as a student affairs professional, I have observed and interacted with GLBT students who have tackled the issues of not just their GLBT identity, but the intersections of their other identities as well as how those identities are represented in their communities, politics and on campus. As a gay man, I have looked back on my own journey of identity discovery and development and recognized how difficult this process can be without feeling further marginalized by politicized rhetoric. This study's purpose was to add depth to the research available about the GLBT college student experience.

The central research question for this study was, how do GLBT college students experience their sexual identity development in the context of current positive and negative rhetoric surrounding GLBT marriage, and employment rights issues? The critical transformative research paradigm best suits this type of study in that an exploration of the perceptions of power structures and the oppression linked to them was necessary. The stories of the GLBT college students who participated in this study will reflect the perceptions of power structures. Other research questions to be explored in this study include:

- Q1     How does being a specific member of the gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender group/identity change the degree to which the rhetoric (positive or negative) surrounding GLBT marriage and employment rights are experienced?
- Q2     When presented with the words: power and oppression in relationship to straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, male, female, gender roles, and sexuality in what ways are GLBT students aware of the emotions/reactions present in themselves or others? How is this recognition (or lack thereof) creating change in the students' journey through their GLBT sexual identity development?
- Q3     How do GLBT students explore intersectionality between their sexual identity and their other identities in relation to their experience of rhetoric?

### **Historical Perspective**

#### **Ancient, Medieval, and Victorian Eras**

Since ancient Greece, same sex attraction and love have been documented in myth, art, and culture. While not given the labels familiar to us today, same sex experiences and the politics they evoke are part of the human experience. Judgements and definitions aside, same sex experiences are not new and have caused cultural and political conflict since the beginning of recorded human history (Calimach, 2002).

Recorded history of male same sex relationships in time and locale of Ancient Greece were of two types: Those between noble or high status men and their same status adolescent boys/young men and others between men of a conquering faction over the losing faction or slaves. The differences between the two are vast in that the first between noble/high class men and young men/boys was referred to (often revered) as a mentor-like or apprenticeship type relationship. While sexual contact was part of the experience – there were strict codes of conduct. Once the younger men reached an age

where they could marry, it was frowned upon to continue the sexual portion of the relationship (Calimach, 2002).

The latter of these relationships involving slaves and prisoners was centered on assertion of power and humiliation. The power residing with the male conducting the sexual act as penetrator and the other being the lesser, the slave, the conquered. While these relationships were not limited by age, there were less codifications in place to limit continued sexual relations with those of lesser status as long as the power was maintained by the higher class individual by remaining the one conducting the sexual act. There was no label attached to these relationships as we have today (Calimach, 2002).

In the period of time well before 630 b.c. through to the 1700s, there is representation of homosexuality and pederasty (or pedophilia in modern terms of an erotic relationship between an adult and a minor) in myth, art, pottery, poetry and many other forms of ancient culture (Hubbard, 2009; Lewis, 1983; Makowski, 1996; Percy, 2005). Representations of homosexuality were negative in that they, while not using the label homosexuality, referred to the lesser, weaker, or non-noble defiling of a man through sexual acts (Percy, 2005). Pederasty was incorporated into the educational process of young men as a means of teaching and leading young men to take part in politics and benefit their cities (Percy, 2005). Through pederasty, young men were taught virtue, courage, and excellence as basic tenets through these close and sometimes intimate same sex relationships (Percy, 2005).

As history progressed toward the early 1700s, religious doctrines solidified across Europe and began an evolution of perspectives concerning same-sex relationships which is more negative in connotation (Trumbach, 2012). The European societal presumption

of male desire for women and adolescent boys continued until the early 1700s (Trumbach, 2012). Beginning in this period in Europe, same-sex desire (also referred to as effimacy) was viewed through a Christian paradigm where deviance is brought to the forefront. Those who participated in this form of deviance were labeled sodomities (Trumbach, 2012). The term sodomite is the closest reference to labeling the male homosexual prior to the 1940s. Same sex relationships between women were more difficult to track due to a lack of legal records condemning or prosecuting them. However, Trumbach (2012) shares "...their [women's] relations with women were usually structured by differences in age (p. 833)."

The evolution and application of the Christian paradigm of the 1700s did not change the idea of men having desires for the *passivness* (or more feminine nature) of women and adolescent males. Trumbach (2012) describes the perception of sexual behavior in the period before 1700 as that which the *passivity* of women and adolescent males was still present despite the condemnation of sodomy (p.833). This did however, strengthen the codification of social requirements for these desires. Age became the telling factor for entering into or continuing these male to male relationships. Just as with the ancient greeks, young men who were able to marry or had reached puberty (i.e. growing a beard), were seen as undesirable to continue with these relationships in a same-sex intimacy context (Trumbach, 2012).

While the research referencing same sex relationships during the 1700s does not directly address the issue of power differential between masculinity and feminintity, it is important to recognize the ties between these same sex sexual codes. As mentioned before, same sex or more specifically, male to male relationships between men and

adolescent men of the time were governed by strict rules dictating that upon puberty sexual relations cease (Calimach, 2002). Also, as a common practice of war, to conquer using sex, more specifically, same sex intercourse or anal penetration as a form of domination and power (Calimach, 2002). This exemplification of power is what is assumed as Trumbach's (2012) reference to passivity. Masculine being more powerful and feminine or effeminate as weaker or more passive. Trumbach (2012) also describes the period of the early 1700s as that which a heterosexual majority and the lesbian and sodomite minority are formed.

Throughout this early period it is assumed that women were having similar sexual relationships with similar social regulations as men, however again, there is less mention of them due to the lack of legal records of such relationships (Trumbach, 2012). Given this, it is more difficult to deduce whether a similar power differential (other than age difference) existed between women in same sex relationships as that of their male counterparts of the time. It is also difficult to determine if gender expression or representation of more masculine or more feminine expressions of women determine attraction or to use Trumbach's (2012) term *passivity*.

A more specific perspective of the Christian paradigm of the late 1600s and the early 1700s was that of the Puritans. In the realm of male same sex relationships it was not denied that they existed. However, in reference to the use of transvestism (men playing the part of women) in the theater was seen as an abomination deemed by scripture. This was seen as evidence of sodomy and deviance and the Puritan church closed theaters in London in 1642 (Trumbach, 2012). This creates a hypocrisy for the church in that during this period, Puritan men see themselves as 'Brides of Christ' or

even as ‘Christ’s Ganymedes’ (Trumbach, 2012). Trumbach (2012) also references the teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux on men and soul marriages to God. Yet, there is condemnation of same sex relationships or even the representation of men as passive to other men other than God.

During this same period legal records indicate masculine women were functioning in terms of societal norms as men (often presenting a male gender expression) and legally marrying more feminine women. However, this was not looked upon positively by society. Trumbach (2012) proposes female relationships with other women were primarily based on age rather than masculine or feminine traits. He also mentions, “...few masculine women who remained virgins [sic], were allowed to function economically as men (Trumbach, 2012, p. 838).” The legal records of the time document women being prosecuted for (falsely) marrying other women showing the defendants being treated severely. The most notable is the story of Ann Morrow in 1777 who was nearly put to death and was blinded as a result of severe brutality during her trial (Trumbach, 2012). Trumbach also makes note of other women taking on the traits of men during the late 1700s in reference to their gender expression (Trumbach, 2012).

After the early 1700s, the Church moved away from images of effeminate male passiveness in representation of the soul’s marriage to God (Trumbach, 2012). It was also no longer accepted for males to succumb to the male desires of intimacy with adolescent, effeminate, or passive men (Trumbach, 2012). A homosexual/sodomite minority is created by this change. These sodomites are shamed, persecuted, and humiliated in very public forums. Trumbach (2012) clarifies the concept of being effeminate during this period by sharing the progression of the term referring to a

collective groups characteristics to that of a term referring to the characteristics of individuals.

The progression of effimacy goes further in the mid-1700s through written records by referring to the ‘effeminate sodomite’ (Trumbach, 2012 p.840). Effemacy and male desire were seen by society as threats to other more masculine men (Trumbach, 2012). This threat is sought to be eliminated and organizations such as the “Societies Reformation of Manners” conducted sting investigations on commonly known meeting places of the effeminate sodomite minority (Trumbach, 2012 p. 842).

This persecution continues into the mid and late 19th Century in Victorian England where sodomite behavior was criminalized. The most prominent male figure of this time period to be prosecuted was Oscar Wilde. The conservatism of Victorian society created social constructions defining all forms of sexuality as deviant. Men were more often subject to prosecution than were women. Lesbianism was seen by society as a lesser issue than male homosexuality, however, the publicity of such behavior was seen as opening the door to the option of deviance. Victorian society is another example of conservative (religious or societal) prosecutions of homosexuality (Adut, 2005). Historical examples of same sex attraction and love show an ever-present undercurrent of a gay subculture. While only dichotomously dealing with gays/men or lesbians/women in early history, the evolution of terminology to include bisexual and transgender into GLBT culture as a whole speaks to the uprising from deviance to a push for civil rights as equal participants in society.

### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Experiences in Higher Education**

Prior to the eighteenth century, institutions of higher education of the ancient to early Medieval periods were socially and politically tied to a religious structure of some form (Perkin, 1997). The same can be said for those of the Medieval, Late medieval, Renaissance and Reformation periods (Perkin, 1997). Given the ties to religious institutions and the previously noted societal progress, it can be assumed that higher education closely mirrored society in terms of its views and/or reactions to same-sex relationships.

Around the time of the industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the creation “...of the modern research university, technical college and the research institute,” occurs (Perkin, 1997, p. 15). While mostly consisting of seminaries, this time period brings about a reformation of higher education institutions (Perkin, 1997). During the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the societal mirror plays out further in higher education through the continued use of sting operations, investigations and shaming (Dilley, 2002b; Marine 2011).

Marine (2011) provides an early 1900s example of Harvard University’s Deans taking action against suspected homosexual activity. Five Deans created a secret court to root out suspected deviant behavior. They collected evidence and conducted interviews to eventually expell a group of student suspected of same-sex conduct (Marine, 2011). One of the students, Cyril Wilcox, committed suicide as a result of the shaming (Marine, 2011).

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century through the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, higher education institutions reacted to homosexuality out of concern for their own reputations. Expulsions and covert investigations/stings to uncover suspected homosexuals continued to be common practice. Other sanctions included mental health evaluation for alleged homosexual students and faculty (Dilley, 2002b; Marine, 2011). These reactions further perpetuated the rhetoric of deviance and pushing the homosexual experience further underground.

Dilley (2002a) documents the experience of Walter at the University of Illinois in 1951 who was dismissed from the university after an extensive investigation involving several police agencies due to his linkages to suspected same sex people, actions, and places. He was dismissed for, "...conduct unbecoming a student (Dilley, 2002a, p.59)." During this period, The McCarthy Era, faculty, students, alumni, and administration were all subject to these investigations and decisions of expulsion, and transfer were issued by the governing boards (Dilley, 2002a). Dilley (2002a) also shares the experience of a student participating on the other side of the investigations, Bob. Bob was a member of the Indiana University residential student hall staff in 1962. He was asked to go repeatedly with a group of other students, administrators and staff to find and observe a group of students suspected of starting a gay male social group (Dilley, 2002a). Their objective was to observe and report their actions over a period of a month to administrators (Dilley, 2002a).

Many university administrators viewed homosexuality as a threat to basic functions of the institution (D'Augelli, 1989). The 1970s and 1980s saw a period where gay and lesbian students were categorized as 'taboo,' therefore, continuing to be marginalized and

vilified (D'Augelli, 1989). In 1971, Penn State denies the charter for the, “Homophiles of Penn State [HOPS]” gay and lesbian student organization based on fears of creating, “...substantial conflict with counseling and psychiatric services the University provides to its students (D'Augelli, 1989, p. 124).”

Less overt methods of marginalization of GLBT students are still prevalent today. As late as the early 2000's, GLBT student organizations still face discrimination by institutions withholding funding, and the right to organize. Often institutions use religiously affiliated student groups' fundamental disapproval of GLBT culture as fodder for this discrimination (Dilley, 2002b).

### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights**

Prior to the Stonewall movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) civil rights as a topic was non-existent. Stonewall is seen as the beginning of major change in terms of the GLBT population (Marine, 2011). This is not to dismiss the fact that GLBT subcultures existed well before the Stonewall riots (Marine, 2011). The period of the 1890's to the 1920's was known as the progressive era, however, same sex attraction was deemed socially and culturally deviant. This stark contrast is due to the progression of thought from the scientific and cultural communities colliding with conservative thought. The scientific and cultural communities began to see same sex attraction as more exploration and physiologic fact. Psychologists also toyed with the idea of homosexuality being a possible third sex. Although not fully creating an equal footing, these progressives assisted in the future labeling of the homosexual (Marine, 2011).

American society did not formally label same sex attraction until the early 1940s (Dilley, 2002b). The 1950s brought forth an increase in the focus on sexual deviance in reference to homosexuality. As mentioned in the previous section, The McCarthy era brought the persecution and prosecution of anything perceived as “deviant” (Marine, 2011). Any suspicion of sexual misconduct inclusive of sex outside of marriage and even more dispicable, at that time, sexual conduct with other men was to align yourself with communism, cold war paranoia, and anti-US sentiments (Dilley, 2002a). Professors and students were scrutinized, watched and investigated for any potential actions that violated ‘draconian’ institutional policies (Dilley, 2002a, p. 416).

On June 28, 1969, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) activists or *homophiles*, took to the streets in a riot caused by the raid on the Stonewall Inn (Carter, 2004; Marine, 2011; Poindexter, 1997). Up to this point in history, GLBT people were an invisible background of society. The Stonewall riots gave rise to the undercurrent to be known as the GLBT civil rights movement. Gay men, drag queens (female impersonators/performers) and others considered at the time to be the underbelly of urban culture protested the brutality brought on by the New York City Police Department. The riots evolved into the ‘Homophile Movement’ to end the GLBT population’s marginalization from society (Marine, 2011).

It is also important to note that merely showcasing gays in this momentous event is to gloss over the diverse group leading the revolt. To ignore the transgender and racial aspects by referring to the Stonewall Riots as a gay rights movement alone is given the title “homonormative” (this term will be explored more fully in the next section) (Marine, 2011). Stonewall was pivotal to each population as part of the GLBT rights movment.

This homonormative retelling of the riots took a turn toward the truth in 1993 when the transgender stories were again brought into the mainstream (Marine, 2011).

The Stonewall Movement provided the opportunity for some of the first GLBT civil rights organizations to gain momentum. The Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis and others began to further develop their missions and membership during the period after the riots (Marine 2011). The Mattachine Society is believed to be the first true GLBT civil rights organization and was formed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (founded 1950). The Daughters of Bilitis organization was formed shortly after (1955) and was focused on bringing the lesbian voice to the fight for civil rights at the time (Gallo, 2006; Marine, 2011).

Nationally, in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the HIV/AIDS epidemic (now pandemic) was discovered during a concurrent dramatic increase in other sexually transmitted diseases (STD) among gay men. This provided real fodder for religious right and conservative political groups to dispute the slight rise in political presence of the gay community. Deaming the gay community as deviant, sinful, and propagators of illness and disease allowed for the perfect opportunity to discredit the now more visible gay community (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). The marginalization of the gay community at this time by conservative groups provided the rhetoric of blame which enflames 'victimization' and heteronormativity (this term will be explored more fully in the next section) (D'Augelli, 1989).

D'Augelli (1989) sums up the transitions from the 1970s and 1980s by stating, "Challenging indifference became the route to empowerment in the 1980s, as challenging hostility was in the 1970s (p.128)." The fear reinstituted by conservative groups with the

AIDS epidemic, abruptly shoved the gay community back into the closet (term used to describe a secretive gay person or someone who is not 'out' to others) and the sense of indifference by those in and outside of the community became pervasive. This indifference fueled the false notion that there were only a few members of the gay community on campuses during these transitions (D'Augelli, 1989).

### **Terminology**

In this study, I look at the intersections of identities, society, politics and religion. These intersections present challenges and internal conflicts often best described through the lens of social justice. Rozas and Miller (2009) define social justice in terms of advocacy and activism required in overcoming societal systems of oppression as well as the trauma resulting from these systems. The succeeding paragraphs of this section will outline more clearly terminology involved in the exploration of GLBT identities through a social justice lens in this study.

**Identity politics and identity.** In response to social injustices, discrimination and prejudice, identity politics as an expression was created in the 1970's. The expression was more widely used in the 1980s as a result of increased violence against various minority groups (Diamond, 2012). Diamond (2012) states, identity politics has also been referred to as collective activism and the idea existed well before the twentieth century "based on embodied experiences of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity or nationality." We are reminded by Diamond (2012), "...identity is not a birthright, but rather a set of meanings and positions that are achieved and, by implication, may shift over time (p. 65)."

**Privilege, power, oppression, and marginalization.** Before power and oppression can be discussed in relation to social justice, one must more thoroughly explore the concept of privilege. In the context of race, privilege is rarely seen by those who have it and quite obvious to those who do not (Rozas and Miller, 2009). Privilege can be seen as abilities, rights, responsibilities or actions not questioned by society for those who are seen as having it as part of a particular social construction of reality (Johnson, 2006). Privilege can be earned or unearned and therefore, recognized by the holder or in most cases unseen or unrecognized by them (McIntosh, 2012; Rozas & Miller, 2009).

Johnson (2006) explains privilege as part of a social construction of difference by using the example of an African woman in the context of African society and culture. Using the African American author James Baldwin's expression of societal placement of significance in a culture on difference (i.e. race, gender, etc). He clarifies Baldwin's point by sharing, "A *black woman* in Africa...who has not experienced white racism, does not think of herself as black or experience herself as black, nor do the people around her (Johnson, 2006, p.18)." Furthermore, Johnson (2006), states that it is society that places the label on the person or group and with that label comes difference. The difference creates inequality and privilege (Johnson, 2006).

Johnson cites two types of privilege, *unearned entitlements* and *conferred dominance* (Johnson, 2006). The first type, *unearned entitlements*, are those things that all people should be entitled to in a society like, "...working in a place where they feel they belong and are valued for what they can contribute (Johnson, 2006, p.23)." The second type, *conferred dominance*, essentially gives power to one group over another group (Johnson, 2006). Johnson (2006) provides the example of the social construction

in the United States of “an adolescent boy who appears too willing to defer to his mother risks being called a *mama’s boy*, in the same way a husband who appears in any way subordinate to his wife is often labeled *henpecked*...(Johnson, 2006, p. 23).” His example shows how in the societal construction of the United States the male gender is given power over the female gender through *conferred dominance* and anything that defies it is seen as lesser than or weak.

**Power.** If privilege is, as stated before, ability, rights, responsibilities or actions not questioned by society for those who are seen as having it as part of a particular social construction of reality (Johnson, 2006). Then, one can assume that power is given to those who hold those attributes. In a strictly have and have not dualistic context, those who have privilege hold the power over those who do not (Johnson, 2006). In the realm of GLBT civil rights, a heteronormative societal paradigm creates power structures that are hetero leaning. The rights held by the heterosexually privileged are represented in expression, intimacy, marriage, financial beneficence and other rights (Johnson, 2006). Those with the privilege – heterosexuals and heteronormative society at large, therefore hold the power. Johnson (2006) describes heteronormative society well by stating, “...a powerful gay man is a contradiction in terms, and powerful lesbians are often dismissed as not being real women at all (Johnson, 2006, p. 95).”

Those without privilege or power are not represented. Therefore, inequality is a cycle unbroken and those without power are left at the margins of what is normal (Johnson, 2006). This cycle strengthens stereotypes and further defines, in the context of this study, members of the GLBT population as weak, deviant and lesser than.

***Oppression.*** Oppression consists of inadvertent and blatant expression of power by those with privilege (Johnson, 2006; Quin, 2009). Those who have privilege and therefore power (heterosexual society), conduct oppression through actions of expressing their privilege (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1993; Quin, 2009). Examples can be as small as expressing affection or intimacy in public to those examples as large as the rights and responsibilities associated with marriage. Legislating against GLBT marriage rights at the federal and state levels is an example of heteronormative/heterosexist oppression of the GLBT population. Marriage legislation is representative of heteronormative seizure of power and conferred dominance over the homosexual population.

***Marginalization.*** It is difficult to find a relevant definition of the term marginalization (Messiou, 2011). However, Freire (1993) draws attention to the opposition between marginalization and hegemony by exploring the oppressive relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. If the hegemonic group is dominant, then we can assume that the marginalized group is the Other. The Other being the group pushed to the margins, silenced, oppressed and/or not given voice.

**Rhetoric: political and religious.** The current message sent and upheld by political and religious organizations and/or their pundits is the rhetoric this study will explore to better understand the spectrum of opinion influencing the GLBT Civil Rights Movement. Powell and Neiva (2006) express the long history of influence religious rhetoric and messaging present in American politics. This study will look for this rhetoric in the stories of its participants.

**Heteronormativity and homonormativity.** Heteronormativity can be described as the “...ideology used to promote the normality of the traditional heterosexual [marriage] in the larger U.S. culture through law, policy, and enactment (Eeden-Moorefield, Martell, Williams & Preston, 2011, p. 563).” This heteronormative hegemony as Butler (1993) refers to it, is literally the dominant normal sexual orientation in US culture. Any homosexual relationship is in many ways forced to check in with this norm as part of a process of marginalization.

Homonormativity has two different definitions. One expressly excludes transgender representation from the Stonewall story for a sterilized homosexual version (Marine, 2011). The other is the assimilation of heteronormative ideology (Eeden-Moorefield et al, 2011). This is best exemplified in the evolving definition of the GLBT family. Creating a homonormative version of the GLBT family where one parent plays distinctly male gender roles and the other more distinctly gender female roles.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

As a qualitative researcher I recognize and acknowledge that my voice and the biases forming that voice are a direct result of my privileges. Researcher reflexivity is an exercise meant to acknowledge these privileges, but also to recognize the activities of co-construction and the interactions between my participants and myself (Creswell, 2007). The acknowledgement of these biases, constructions, and interactions will result in a piece of research where I am able to own my voice and perspective (Patton, 2002).

I come from the perspective of a gay, white, man of middle class socio-economic standing. These core identities (all but my socio-economic status) will not change for me. However, they do influence how I view the world, reality, and knowledge creation.

This study focuses on the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) population, therefore, my sexual orientation, gender, and my race will have an influence on the manner in which I interact with and portray this research.

My personal journey in my own development as a gay man has been one of exploration, accountability, and ownership. This journey has informed my passions for breaking free of the labels put forth by those who have heterosexual privilege. This perception of power for me is frustrating, yet inescapable. In order to help break free of the ties that bind the GLBT population, its members must see, understand, and overcome the power structures (Freire, 1993).

I perceive the GLBT community as not a community at all but a fragmented population, with the individual fragments defined by bigoted lines and rhetoric both from the outside and within. By nature, the GLBT population is part of an alphabet soup (i.e. GLBTAIQ...) of marginalized outsiders often shocking and dividing the majority opinion. Further shoved into discourse, this population is politicized as a whole and not considered by its parts. However, I recognize other perspectives on this topic and will use the terms population and community interchangeably as they make most sense to the context of the research.

My observations of the political and religious rhetoric from within the GLBT population as well as from my status of white, male privilege balance on the fence of marginality and I recognize my white male, middle class, educated privilege but truly seek to own my place as a gay man in society. Being white gives me an opportunity to speak without initial judgment or limitation from others. Add to that my educated, middle class standing and I have to own the privileges and opportunities given to me

throughout my life. These privileges have provided for my learning various educational and political systems, which allow better understanding for creating strategies of being heard.

The authority held by white, upper class, straight, and conservative religiously affiliated people is steeped in centuries old ideals of roles to be played by those in underlying classes of the system. This power is wielded over those of different races, classes, genders, sexual orientations and many more. As a researcher my work will hopefully serve as a catalyst for the GLBT population to make a move to be a unified community.

While these privileges and opportunities have gotten me where I am today, I see a lack of urgency in the groups making up the GLBT population. Over the last decade, I found myself feeling angry at the obvious oppression of the GLBT population focusing mainly on marriage and employment equality. Hearing the rhetoric surrounding same-sex marriage from both political and religious voices was and is still infuriating. Most recently discussions of religious freedom and the fine line drawn between GLBT discrimination and religious rights have caused a backlash of hatred from religious conservatives. Those conservatives who are riding the political line tend to speak of defending persecuted religious beliefs while those with less couth lean toward language disparaging the GLBT population.

I find it difficult to not respond to allegations of GLBT people having a terrorist agenda and the goal of abolishing all churches. I do not wish to be made synonymous with pedophiles, or those who practice bestiality based a misconstrued notion of my sexual behavior and/or identity. As a researcher I feel the need to research and publish

on the influence this rhetoric has on college students. This research shares a collection of voices from the GLBT population expressing their experiences and stories. The need to create cohesion, support, and motivate is key to future success in creating change for the GLBT community both on and off campus.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I share the problem statement to be explored in this study as well as the research questions supporting that exploration. In addition, I have provided an reflexive exercise to own my biases development from my background and passions as an educator. I have expressed my identities while also sharing a portion of my journey as a professional as a result of those identities.

This chapter also showcases the contextual history of same sex relationships from the period of ancient Greece through the religious influence and change of the 1700s and into the modern period of today. Detail is provided for the GLBT experience in higher education institutions where it is shown that society is mirrored on campuses in terms of perception, regulation and persecution. Development of the GLBT civil rights movement is explained as is the role of student development research for the GLBT student population in historical context.

Terminology to be used in this study is defined including: identity politics, power, oppression, privilege, marginalization, political and religious rhetoric, as well as homonormativity and heteronormativity. These definitions provide background and context for future discussions in this study while connecting historical perspectives previously discussed. This study will refer to these terms frequently in the context made available here.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The key points of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) civil rights and history center on a fight for equality only recently coming to fruition. Both the history and the fight for equality are politicized due to the increased focus on social policies limited further by identity politics. While identity and politics have an overarching affect on the GLBT community, there are effects felt from these overarching themes, which ripple through society including higher education environments. Modern campuses still struggle with the GLBT experience, but historical perspective shows progress. Since I have previously provided a synopsis of GLBT history and civil rights, I will not delve too deeply into these topics here. However, this section will provide further insight into the GLBT student experience through more recent history as well as the relatively recent progress in GLBT student development research.

#### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Experiences Within Higher Education**

As stated in the previous section, the mirror-like relationships between higher education, the Christian Church, and society provides insight toward the higher education environment prior to the 1800s. Even in the later 1800s, higher education institutions reacted negatively toward homosexuality through to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Expulsions, beatings, arrests, and raids were commonplace occurrences with no regard to location on or off-campus (Dilley, 2002b). In terms of expulsion, Dilley (2002b) found there were three types of transgressions it could be based upon: “...(a) “deviance”, “lewd”, or “homosexual conduct”, (b) suspicion thereof, or (c) simply being suspected of being friendly with persons suspected of deviant behavior (p. 416).” These negative responses were all based on fear and the possible campus reputation as harbingers of homosexuals or their behavior (Dilley, 2002b).

Prior to this, the mention of same sex attraction, mostly female, was well documented especially in women’s colleges (Marine, 2011). Even the Presidents of Bryn Mawr and Mount Holyoke Colleges were suspected of lesbianism (Marine, 2011). There are well documented relationships and personal statements exemplifying their love and adoration (Marine, 2011). Other administrators expressed concern and warnings were made to the public in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that sending women to a Women’s College was subjecting them to the ‘dangers’ of lesbianism (Marine, 2011). However, others (college administrators, and psychologists) saw female same sex relations in the collegiate environment as preparation for future heterosexual relationships with their future husbands (Marine, 2011).

As for men, same sex attraction and relationships, before Stonewall, existed in an underground context or less overtly than women of the time (Marine, 2011). What is known of these male same sex relationships is documented mostly by public figures of the time period (Marine, 2011). Paralleling the female same sex experience in higher education was that of the male fraternity member. Masculinity (an early term for what is now defined as heterosexuality) was of public concern to men and society overall (Syrett,

2009). To appear effeminate was to be a social paryah and the typical experience of a gay man in higher education in the 1940's and prior was one of isolation and emotional stress (Marine, 2011).

The period of the 1950s to the 1970s saw a slight shift in the approach from a 'seek and expel' mentality to a 'seek out and treat' approach. Higher education institutions began to treat homosexuals as they if they harbored a mental illness (Dilley, 2002b). The method of 'control' then shifted to the treatment and observations of the homosexual student to eventually 'straighten' them (Dilley, 2002b). Dilley (2002a) shares the experience of a man whose college experience took place in the 1950's and this focus on deviance led to his perception of his own identity as being "a problem" that 'normal' students didn't have" (Dilley, 2002a, p. 75). Dilley (2002a) goes further with mention of "The concept of 'normal,' both to those who choose that as nomenclature and others who juxtapose their experiences to those considered "normal," is very important to the identity process (p. 37)..." This juxtaposition exemplifies the presence of a gay subculture. Even in the absence of an outward or public sense of community, no matter how subversive or isolating, gay men and women were living and acting on their true nature (Marine, 2011).

Toward the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we see an increase in homosexual student solidarity on campuses along with more challenges to their right to assemble. This is in direct response to increased institutional attempts at bans and regulation during the 1970s. State higher education institutions were highly criticized over homosexual student admittance by their state legislators, but students organized and sued for their rights often winning (Dilley, 2002b). Cases such as Gay Student Organization of the University of New Hampshire v. Bonner (1974) and Gay Alliance of Students v. Matthews (1976) both

document the struggle of GLBT students for campus recognition. Overcoming indifference and working toward integration, recognition and acceptance more than tolerance define the struggle of the GLBT community through the 1990s to today (D'Augelli, 1989; Dilley, 2002b).

After winning in the courts, students were forced to fight for funding for their organizations, which was often met with administrative resistance. There is an increasing effort to legislate homosexual campus experiences into nonexistence during this period. Dilley (2002b) provides the 1992 example of Oregon anti-gay groups proposing a ballot initiative prohibiting institutions of higher education and other state organizations from using state funds to support any initiatives associated with homosexuality. Also, "...in 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court decided state funded institutions could not prohibit the funding of a student organization if those organizations were 'value neutral' in their political viewpoints, in a case stemming from certain student groups at the University of Wisconsin not wanting to fund nonheterosexual student organizations with student fees (Dilley, 2002b; p. 425)."

Along with increased regulation, litigation and legislation comes an increase in the expression of hatred and homophobia. On campuses throughout this period, this expression of "homohatred" (D'Augelli, 1989; p. 132) was the turning point for higher education institutions to begin taking notice and action to protect their GLBT populations. This turning point, stemming from discussions of racial bias, opened the door for other marginalized groups to receive recognition (D'Augelli, 1989).

Institutions of higher education have an interest in ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment for all students. GLBT students in the classroom or those receiving

services of any kind from any department on a campus are in need of benefiting from a safe and *implicitly centralized* or even an *explicitly centralized* class/campus environment (Evans, 2000, p. 85). Implicit environments are a welcoming place for GLBT students where faculty and staff actively confront homophobic or heteronormative issues (Evans, 2000). Explicit environments are those where GLBT content and resources are intentionally inserted into the curriculum and/or services provided (Evans, 2000).

On campus, student affairs professionals who work with GLBT students have a more consistent connection to their identity development needs. Professionals in Admissions/Enrollment, Counseling, Career Development, Student Life and others have an opportunity to assess these needs as well as provide resources. GLBT community marginalization through regular experiences with heteronormativity present in political discourse over GLBT civil rights adds to the pressures on the GLBT experience on campus.

As detailed earlier, after the Stone Wall riots, community organizations serving the GLBT population were able to gain some slight momentum (Marine, 2011). On campuses across the country, as described earlier, suspicion and homophobia were challenges to GLBT students organizing (Dilly, 2002; Marine, 2011). Despite the progress in the realm of student development beginning in the mid 1930s, the efforts to provide opportunities for students to grow, develop and evolve were efforts denied to those who were non-heterosexual on campus (Dilley, 2002b). Dilley (2002b) states, "...the now well-accepted adage of student affairs administrators and programmers to 'first do no harm' did not extend to men who were not heterosexual (or who educators and administrators thought were not) (p. 426). This meant that non-heterosexuals were

not allowed to socialize, organize or have opportunities to explore their sexual identity due to institutional policy (Dilley, 2002b).

Institutional regulation of GLBT students' rights on campus is prevalent through the early, middle and even late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is not until the 1970s that we see GLBT students and organizations taking a legislative approach to their campus visibility and rights (Dilley, 2002b). In 1974 the governor of New Hampshire denounced the University of New Hampshire's decision to allow a gay student dance on campus (Dilley, 2002b). This resulted in "...the university responded [ing] by declaring that it would not allow the gay student organization hosting the dance to host social functions on campus (Dilley, 2002b, p. 424)." This resulted in legal action by the student organization and their rights were upheld in regard to assembly (Dilley, 2002b).

The legislative back and forth continues to intensify into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century for higher education institutions as more GLBT students fought for the right to organize on campus (Dilley, 2002b). While GLBT student organizations are now more common on campus this does not mean attempts to regulate them are over (Dilley, 2002b). Student affairs research into the campus climate for GLBT students does not appear in the literature until the late 1980s (Brown, Clark, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Kelig, 2004).

In 2004, Brown et al (2004) found that most of the GLBT campus climate studies conducted had a majority population of respondents coming from the GLBT student population. Brown et al (2004) also found the lack of comparison between GLBT and heterosexual responses, therefore implications focused only on the populations in each study and have little insight into the true campus climate for GLBT students. Earlier

research detailing campus climate from a strictly GLBT perspective details a *chilly* climate for GLBT students (Brown et al, 2004, p.8).

In Brown et al's (2004) study of GLBT campus climate is conducted involving a true cross section of an institution where GLBT and non-GLBT perspectives are detailed. Students, faculty, student affairs administrators, and even resident assistants in the residence halls are included as participants in the study (Brown et al, 2004). The researchers found GLBT student perceptions differed a great deal from those of the non-GLBT respondents, however, a key factor in their results involves and increased focus of support from student affairs professionals (Brown et al, 2004). Overall conclusions point toward the importance of continued ally development among student affairs professionals (Brown et al, 2004).

Evans (2000) expresses a positive progressive campus environment is necessary for GLBT students to learn effectively. The higher education commitment to providing this environment for creating positive individual well-being must be weighed equally with the need to provide an environment for collective well-being. Ideally, campuses should be places where acceptance of difference and respect of individual values are commonplace. Given the current political environment, GLBT students and community members are on the precipice of full equality both on campus and off.

While legislative battles are being won in support of GLBT students and their organizations, the fact remains that a long history of oppression and constant negative labeling/social construction has limited the development of lesbians and gay men (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). It is the understanding of GLBT student identity development that is of utmost importance to creating an open and supportive learning

environment for GLBT students on campus (Evans, 2000). Evans and Broido (1999) further stress the significant effect campus environment has on "...students' willingness to disclose their sexual orientation and on the reactions they receive when they do disclose (p. 659)." Institutions are now challenged with this understanding and supporting the development of the GLBT student population (Evans, 2000).

### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Identity Development and Research**

During the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers began the development of GLBT identity development theories. The focus was primarily on white males in the creation of stage development theories addressing vague, racially myopic, yet important beginning steps of outlining the sexual identity process for GLBT individuals (Cass, 1979, 1984; D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). Recognizing there was a clear developmental process, while singular in focus, began the refuting of labels such as the American Psychological Association's (APA) pre-1970's definition of homosexuality as a mental disorder.

As these theories gained more of an audience, change began to sweep through the communities of higher education, psychology and sociology. In the 1970s, APA removed the demeaning mental disorder labels placed on homosexuality. Gay and lesbian populations were no longer oppressed and defined by these labels and this small step empowered more student populations to fight to create communities (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995).

GLBT student development research has been conducted for several decades (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). However, theoretical models providing insight into the identity development process, specifically coming out, are demonstrated in more

recent research (Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004). The coming out process for many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students can vary. However, a commonality for those experiencing the coming out process is that it is an inward process that can take a toll on those moving through it.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) student identity development is a complex and personal journey for every student. It is important to recognize the coming out process as a key component turning an individual's focus inward. This focus on the self, in combination with other developmental needs at the college level, can make an already difficult transition much harder. Also Evans (2000) adds, "...resolving the developmental processes involved in establishing one's sexual orientation can interfere with the learning that normally occurs in the classroom" (p. 86).

Given more than three decades of research and theoretical development, the GLBT population grows more complex in its developmental and psychosocial needs (Kahn, 1991; McDonald, 1982; Rhoads, 1997; Sophie, 1986, & Stevens, 2004). Also, the introduction of more prevalent political and religious debate concerning civil rights to the GLBT population paints an uncertain environment for GLBT students. Even with studies directed at the more narrow population of adolescents and college-aged youth, student affairs professionals need multiple developmental models to understand the complexity of GLBT Identity Development (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005a). Student affairs professionals should be expected to use any of the pertinent identity development models to guide students through a safe environment to overcome the negative nature of the world surrounding GLBT students. Bilodeau and Renn (2005a) frame the need to use different stage driven theoretical models due to their slight differences as well as the complexity of

sexual identity development as a psychosocial process. Student affairs professionals can provide informed guidance using theoretical models such as Vivienne Cass' Homosexual Identity Development Model (Cass, 1979) while assisting students in their growth and understanding issues of straight privilege and GLBT activism as a means to discover their identities.

Cass (1979, 1984) developed the first GLBT identity development model, which expresses linear movement through the six stages: 1) identity confusion, 2) identity comparison, 3) identity tolerance, 4) identity acceptance, 5) identity pride, and 6) identity synthesis. Stevens (2004) points out the fact that this linear movement neglects any development from the individual's past experience. Troiden (1989) conducted further research on GLBT student development and based the work on the Cass model. Troiden (1989) describes four stages in the model as: 1) sensitization, 2) identity confusion, 3) identity assumption, and 4) commitment. The interesting aspect of Troiden's (1988) model is that it is not presented as linear, but as a life long flexible model where the various stages can be visited and revisited throughout ones life.

Later GLBT identity development models include the work of D'Augelli (1995) who approached GLBT development across the life span linearly. D'Augelli's (1995) six developmental tasks are: 1) exiting heterosexual identity, 2) developing a personal gay identity status, 3) developing a gay social identity, 4) becoming a gay offspring, 5) developing a gay intimacy status, and 6) entering a gay community. Fassinger and Miller (1997) developed a model that takes a dual perspective of GLBT identity development from both the individual perspective as well as from the perspective of a member of the

GLBT community. Fassinger and Miller's (1997) model describes four potential stages a student may experience either as an individual or as a member of the GLBT community.

The first stage of Fassinger's model is Awareness. This stage for the individual is where questions of being different arise, however, for the individual's group identity these questions center on a realization of existence of gay and lesbian people. This is where seeing oneself as different becomes less of a wondering and more salient.

Stage two is titled Exploration. This stage is where the individual begins to seek out more intentional and possible physical interaction with those of the same sex. In terms of group identity formation at this stage, a person will begin to question ways and means of fitting into a same sex group whether it is gay men or lesbian women.

Next is stage three or Deepening/Commitment. This is where an individual begins to solidify their choices of being connected to others of the same sex both emotionally and physically. The individual in a group membership identity experiences this stage a manner of becoming involved through an awareness of power and oppression on the gay and/or lesbian group.

Finally, stage four is of Internalization/Synthesis where the individual owns their feelings and thoughts of same-sex identity. The group membership identity at this stage is about recognition of being part of a same-sex marginalized/minority group. At this stage, both the individual and individual as part of group define support systems within the gay and lesbian contexts.

Table 1

*Inclusive Model of Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation (Fassinger, 1998)*

Individual Sexual Identity (I)	Group Membership Identity (G)
1. Awareness Of feeling or being different	Awareness Of existence of different sexual orientations
2. Exploration Of strong/erotic feelings for same sex people or a particular person	Exploration Of one's position re: gay people as a group (both attitudes and membership)
3. Deepening/Commitment To self-knowledge, self-fulfillment, and crystallization of choices about sexuality	Deepening/Commitment To personal involvement with a reference group, with awareness of oppression and consequences of choices
4. Internalization/Synthesis Of love for same sex people, sexual choices into overall identity	Internalization/Synthesis Of identity as a member of a minority group, across contexts

Note: Table 1 taken from Fassinger, 1998; Sanlo, 1998

Lev (2004) details the six stage Theory of Transgender Emergence (Table 2) with the understanding that different individuals will experience the stages differently often revisiting various stages multiple times depending on the individual experience. Lev also notes that other components salient to an individual's development such as race, and cultural differences will augment these stages (Lev, 2004). I personally gravitate to the importance Lev (2004) places on avoiding stages as labels. The complexity of sexual identity development of any sort is difficult for anyone to work through without the stress of labels forcing an individual to choose between one thing and another.

The first stage of Lev's model is Awareness. This is where the feelings of being abnormal create distress. Support at this stage should center on normalizing feelings about being transgendered (Lev, 2004).

Stage two is Seeking Information/Reaching Out. A transgender individual at this stage begins to seek out education, resources, and helpful insights. Lev points out this stage's importance for support through providing connections to resources (Lev, 2004).

Stage three; Disclosure to Significant Others is where a transgender person comes out to family, partners, and friends. Lev shares the importance of supporting transgender individuals in this process, as they become part of a new family/support group dynamic (Lev, 2004). This stage can have some significant emotional stressors should the coming out experience be a negative one.

Stage four is Exploration – Identity and Self-labeling. An individual in stage four begins to 'try on' various aspects of their transgender identity. This can vary depending on the gender variation of the individual. It could involve experimentation with gender expression, or thinking more of changes in intimate relationships due to their gender variance (Lev, 2004).

Stage five is also about Exploration, however, the focus at this stage relates to those with gender variances involving the potential of gender reassignment. Lev (2004) share that the fifth stage, "...involves exploring options for transition regarding identity, presentation, and body modification." This stage should be experienced with the support of a therapeutic professional who can assist in advocacy and final decisions. It is possible that gender variant individuals may experience hormone treatments at this stage, but this is not always the case.

Stage six is Integration – Acceptance and post-transition issues. This is where a gender variant individual has undergone transition surgery or is working to accept their non-transition related gender variance. Working toward integration of a gender-variant identity is an individual experience due to the complex nature of gender, gender expression, physiology, and sexual identity.

Table 2

*States of Emergence*

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Stage 1 – Awareness: Realizing difference based on a gender-variant identity.
Stage 2 – Seeking Information/Reaching Out: Looking for resources and education to assist in the discovery of gender-variant identity.
Stage 3 – Disclosure to Significant Others: Coming Out to family, partners, friends, and others in the individual’s support network.
Stage 4 – Exploration: Identity and Self-labeling: Gender expression options explored dependent on gender-variant identity.
Stage 5 – Exploration: Transition Issues/Possible Body Modification: Contemplation of surgery and need for support through a long process of change.
Stage 6 – Integration: Acceptance and Post-transition issues: Individual work on full integration as part of gender-variant identity.

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Note: Table taken from Lev, 2004

The Bisexual Identity Development Theory is used in the analysis of non-binary identities in this study such as pan-sexuality, demi-sexuality, omni-sexuality, pan-romantic, and hetero-flexibility. I provide definitions of these identities in Table 3. There were no participants identifying as bisexual in this study, however, several participants used the bisexual identity as a temporary label as they began to explore their sexual identity further.

This developmental theory is being used as a form of analysis of non-binary identities in that there is little to no academic research available supporting the development of these additional non-binary sexual identities. Participants in this study experienced stages very similar to those listed in this theory. Also, Lev (2004) explains that, “Bisexuals often struggle with finding a label to properly describe their sexuality.” This is also true of the non-binary identities described in this study. Bisexuality is a non-binary sexual identity experiencing many of the emotional, physical, and psychological development issues expressed by participants in this study.

Lev (2004) describes the importance of recognizing non-binary sexual identities inclusive of bisexuality, gay, lesbian and even transgender as experiencing fluid sexual identities throughout the life span. Bisexuality as an identity only exists in the social construction of a gender binary. Once the idea of male or female is removed from the social construct, the non-binary identities of pansexual, omni-sexual, demi-sexual, pan-romantic, and hetero-flexible become more coherent. The reality of non-binary sexual identity is prevalent in the data of this study.

Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1994) provide a four-stage model of development pertaining to bisexual identity formation. The first stage focuses on the initial confusion experienced by a bisexual individual. This can be related to issues of attraction to both male and female genders, or could involve confusion between physical intimacy and emotional connection.

Stage two is Finding and Applying the Label. This stage pertains to bisexuality as well as the other non-binary identities which all must attach a label to sexual behavior, emotional stance, gender, and gender expression. As Table 3 shows, non-binary

identities and/or labels consider the various components of sexual and romantic relationships and even consider the connections of non-romantic/intimate relationships such as those experienced by asexual individuals. For the purposes of this study, the definitions in Table 3 are gathered from the participants of this study. This is because current research rarely depicts or defines variations of non-binary identities outside of those along the accepted scale of heterosexual and homosexual (Callis, 2014; Galupo, Mitchell, Gryniewicz, & Davis, 2014; Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Mitchell, Davis & Galupo, 2014; Rust, 2001). Stage three is Settling Into an Identity, which means an individual has decided on the set of labels which best fit and describe their experience. Stage four is titled, Continued Uncertainty, which describes the inclusion of non-binary identities with that of the bisexual identity.

Table 3

*Definitions of Non-Binary Sexual Identities*

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Pansexual:	Attracted to all genders, including those who ‘fall off’ the gender binary.
Demi-sexual:	Sexual attraction based on advanced comfort level and close familiarity.
Omni-sexual:	Sexual attraction to anyone regardless of gender, emotional connection, or familiarity.
Pan-romantic:	Very similar to pansexual, however, these is a lack of sexual contact or physical intimacy.
Hetero-flexible:	This term is most similar to bisexuality of all the non-binary terms. The preference is given to opposite sex attraction, but the idea of a sexually intimate relationship with a same sex person is still considered possible.

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Note: As defined by participants in this study.

Looking at the spectrum of developmental theories focused of the GLBT population, movement from racially and experientially myopic beginnings can be seen as evident from the summary above. However, Stevens (2004) points out the need for developmental models to look at not only the sexual identity development alone, but also how additional identity dimensions relate to the GLBT identity development process.

An individual's identity is their self-image; therefore, to look at one's identity is to look at oneself. Identity theorists, "...commonly refer to [(1)] a personal aspect of individual function conceived of as self-representations and self-perceptions. The personal aspect is variously called personal identity, self, self-concept, personal self, self-identity, and so forth (Cass, 1984, p. 110)." Cass (1984) also shared "homosexual identity, [then], evolves out of a clustering of self-images which are linked together by the individual's idiosyncratic understanding of what characterizes someone as 'a homosexual' (p. 110)." When looking at homosexual identity one must consider, "...it is necessary to separate the concepts [of] "sexual identity" and "homosexual identity" since the structure and contents of each may refer to different phenomena. Sexual identity thus becomes the individual's overall conception of self as a sexual being...(Cass, 1984, p. 116)." Homosexual identity is referred to as and can include images of the sexual self that can include references to non-sexual areas (Cass, 1984).

The terms gay and lesbian can be connected with identity whereas the term homosexual has a behavioral context. These definitions lend merit to the arguments plaguing the gay civil rights movement still battling against the decades old tenets stating homosexual behavior is deviant and pathological (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While the term heterosexual has the same behavioral leaning, it lacks the negative history of the

label homosexual. Homosexuality has been seen negatively by cultures in the western world for so long, adolescents facing their identities as homosexuals are more than likely to do so with varying degrees of shame.

The inward focus that many GLBT individuals confront is detailed in stage-based GLBT identity development theories available. Most of these theories (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995) detail a beginning stage outlining the use of multiple defensive strategies meant to deter the feelings of homosexuality. Some individuals find coping mechanisms keeping them from recognizing their homosexual identity any further. Other GLBT individuals choose to move forward, leaving behind the emotionally draining process of denial. This is generally referred to as the coming out process and is documented similarly by theories such as Cass (1979) and D'Augelli & Patterson (1995) (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005b).

GLBT identity development cannot be seen through a one dimensional perspective. As this section points out, "...current sexual orientation models do not readily address religious, cultural, ethnic, or racial dimensions (Stevens, 2004, p. 186)." GLBT college students must navigate the college experience and weigh their experiences against multiple dimensions of their identities (Stevens, 2004). The fluidity of identity in the context of the campus environment have significant relation to the GLBT students' development (Evans and Broido, 1999; Stevens, 2004).

### **Multiple Identities**

Identity itself can be viewed as the "...social categories in which and individual claims membership...(Shields, 2008, p. 301)." However, a broader perspective of identity to consider is that of Abes, Jones and McEwen's (2007) work on multiple

identities. An individual's identity has multiple dimensions and sexual orientation is merely one. Their race, religion, age, etc. form an individual's whole identity. Sexual orientation may not be the core identity for every GLBT individual but it can affect their perspective and reactions (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007).

Abes and Jones (2004) conducted a study to examine the "...multiple aspects of identity and domains of development...[and]...provide a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of lesbian identity (Abes & Jones, 2004, p. 612)." They recognized that up to the point of their study, all other research looked at the intersections of race and culture but not other realms of identity such as religion and social class (Abes and Jones, 2004). Without a holistic approach to identity, Abes and Jones (2004) found instances where individuals were simultaneously struggling with privilege and oppression (Abes and Jones, 2004). Different identities hold power and need to be seen in context (Shields, 2008).

This multiple identity approach poses its own challenges depending on the conceptualization used. According to Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007), taking a feminist conceptualization differs a great deal from that of a post-modern conceptualization. The feminist conceptualization uses a 'framework of intersectionality' to explain how identities are experienced 'simultaneously not hierarchically (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007, p. 2).' Whereas the post-modern conceptualization, more specifically queer theory, seeks to break down categories. This removal of categorical perspective creates a paradigm of difference not overall unification (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007). A unified approach to multiple identities is a false perspective in that variance of privilege and oppression among identities creates contradiction (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007).

In relation to GLBT student development, consideration of a student's multiple identities as well as the campus environment are critical to understanding the GLBT student experience (Evans & Broido, 1999; Stevens, 2004). GLBT students must weigh the risk of their exposure in a campus environment before fully exploring and interacting in the campus community (Evans & Broido, 1999). This risk carries over into the student's other identities and their culture dependent on their particular identity structure meaning certain cultural and/or religious *taboos* could serve as limitations or barriers to the student's developmental experience (Stevens, 2004, p. 187).” GLBT students move through sexual identity development in direct connection with their racial, ethnic, religious and cultural doctrines forcing many to deny or hide certain aspects of their identity depending on their given physical or other location (Stevens, 2004). Therefore, GLBT students are consistently made to seek connection between or maneuver around certain aspects of their identity depending on the risk to them (Evans & Broido, 1999; Stevens, 2004).

Stevens (2004) conducted a qualitative study using a grounded theory methodology resulting in a *conceptual model of gay identity development*. Stevens' (2004) model centers on one component, *finding empowerment* which then has *five integrative categories* (p.191). Those five categories: “...(a) self-acceptance; (b) disclosure to others; (c) individual factors; (d) environmental influences; and (e) multiple identities exploration (p.191)” and the central component of *finding empowerment* are revisited by his participants multiple times depending on their situation (Stevens, 2004).

Through Stevens' (2004) study the importance of understanding the relationship between GLBT identity and multiple identity is made clearer. As a result of his research

and resulting conceptual model, multiple identity exploration results in resolution or compartmentalization but never full integration (Stevens, 2004). Stevens' research shows the complex and time consuming process GLBT students go through to move through their identity development. The importance of understanding the individuality of the non-linear GLBT identity development experience and its correlation with identity intersectionality is key for campus professionals (Stevens, 2004).

**Identity intersectionality.** Shields (2008) defines identity intersectionality as "...the mutually constitutive relations among social identities...(p.301)." Identity intersectionality has its roots in feminist theory historically by looking at gender identity and asking about the types of women's experiences present in research (Shields, 2008). It was found that much of women's research present in the 1970s was based solely on female identity not in conjunction with other possible identities such as: race, age, sexual orientation (Shields, 2008). This is very similar to the experiences of GLBT research participants of the time. Again, the GLBT research present in the 70s and 80s was primarily detailing the experiences of white men (Cass, 1979, 1984). Identity intersectionality determines one's reactions to the social world around them. It creates structure through which an individual can interact with perceptions of them and of their perceptions of others (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Shields, 2008).

Self awareness and identity development are ongoing processes. Each identity as part of the whole, yet more marginalized or even more privileged identities develop from a sense of unawareness to that of integration and validation according to Chavez, Guido-DiBrito, & Mallory (2003). The framework of multicultural competence exemplifies the journey an individual may take as each identity comes to be better understood. However,

as Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) explains, the experiences and reactions of an individual are perceived through a filter made up of their various identities and therefore, their privilege, power and marginalization.

### **The Coming Out Process for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students**

Part of an individual's sexual and homosexual identity development is that person's coming out experience. The complex and difficult process of "...coming out involves adopting a non-traditional identity, restructuring one's self-concept, reorganizing one's personal sense of history, and altering one's relations with others and with society (McDonald, 1982, p.47)." This "...process of identifying oneself as lesbian, gay, or bisexual [and transgender] is an important developmental step for many youths (Evans & Broido, 1999, p. 658)." Those students who identify as a different race, gender, and religious group must face those challenges in conjunction with their GLBT identity development (Stevens, 2004).

The culture of fear, being less than, and/or deviant instilled in society is what forces GLBT individuals to live the double life referred to as the closet (Rhoads, 1994). The coming out process is titled as such to represent the figurative coming out of the closet of an individual. Those who are in the closet are hiding their true identity from the outside world. This increased likelihood for suicide is attributed to the intense period of development in adolescents combined with the difficult nature of the coming out process. GLBT youth who explore their identity further can do so in many ways, some more dangerous than others (Rhoads, 1994).

Researchers document the coming out process itself, but overall most describe it as “...unpredictable, with stops, starts, and backtracking (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005a, p.26).” Coming out is a life structure change taking several years to move through and is not a singular event but one repeating throughout a series of life stages and situations (Evans & Broido, 1999). The identity that is the product of this transition can take many forms, as it is dependent on the individual and their experiences. D’Augelli and Patterson (1995) state, coming out is not a developmental event that is anticipated by an individual. Nor is it a developmental event recognized by the larger culture. It is an event an individual often faces alone (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995).

Heteronormative society does not recognize the coming out experience and the experience is so personal, most GLBT individuals are isolated as they move through their journey. It is private and difficult for all who embark upon it. Strong student campus support systems and opportunities to grow through positive experiences are key to a healthy coming out. Campus environment and support systems are key to GLBT students successfully navigating this fluid process (Evans & Broido, 1999; Stevens, 2004).

### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students and Identity Politics**

GLBT students experience the world through their identity whether they are out or not. The only difference being isolation and support networks. The association of sexual orientation as a core identity with power, privilege and oppression can be challenged as the individual experiences political and religious rhetoric. Observing, and often experiencing political or religious discrimination add to the individual’s perception of reality.

The passage of legislative actions such as Don't Ask Don't Tell (1993) and the Defense of Marriage Act (1996) during the Clinton Administration serve as examples of divisive political actions in the realm of identity politics. The Defense of Marriage Act's purpose was to legislatively define marriage as that between one man and one woman. Politically this was to be seen as more conservative for the religious conservative base of American politics. Don't Ask Don't Tell was set in motion in response as a reaction to similar efforts of liberals and moderates to appease the conservatives of the political realm in the mid-1990s. This legislative policy mandated United States military members to not ask of ones' sexual orientation in any context, but also for individuals to not tell of their orientation in any context. Violation of this legislation meant the dishonorable discharge of many military personnel.

Efforts to take the Defense of Marriage Act further by creating an amendment to the United States Constitution formally defining marriage as that between a man and a woman have been thwarted for now. However, the movement toward such mandated discrimination still exists and creates an even more socio-politically divided environment in the United States. The foundations for this fight from conservatives come from ancient religious fundamental philosophies, which when put in modern context seem hypocritical. Just as the medieval Christian church propagated the ideology of men as *Brides of Christ* or made metaphorical connections to the Greek myth of Ganymede, the denunciation of same sex marriage and/or attraction is an example of centuries old hypocrisy (Trumbach, 2012). The other side of this fight for the GLBT community has been shown some liberal support in the so-called 'Blue States' (states considered to be

more liberal – often Democratic Party leaning) in recent years. In 2011, New York State passed a law making gay marriage legal there (Diamond, 2012).

As of December 2013 Gay marriage is now legal in 16 states and six states recognize same-sex relationships in some other manner (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2013a). It is important to remember the right to marry consists of more than one civil right. Marriage is a gateway to 1,138 rights, privileges, and protections the currently heteronormative society is never forced to recognize (HRC, 2013b). Some examples of these rights, privileges and protections include: 1) Family Medical Leave (FML) – Cannot qualify for FML to care for ailing partner or unrecognized dependents, 2) Children and dependents – GLBT adoption is illegal in many states, and 3) COBRA benefits – unrecognized partners and dependents are not able to be covered in an instance of loss of employment (HRC, 2013b). Conservative groups rely on a heteronormative perspective and continually dismiss social policy as a waste of time deeming it (social policy) as tertiary to economics, national debt, and employment. This continued polarization of the United States population creates the potential for apathy and complacency through a sense of being overwhelmed.

Queer theorists have expressed that identity politics refers detrimentally to the same simplistic thinking of conservative oppressors (Diamond, 2012). Moreover, a sense of solidarity is possible from a politics based on identity by instilling the need for survival and resistance to those who persecute particular identities (Diamond, 2012). Politics based on an individual's or a group's identity is seen as both positive and negative. Crenshaw (1991) suggests identity politics for women of color, while a struggle, it

“...has [also] been a source of strength, community, and intellectual development (p. 1242).”

Where identity politics fails is in the area of multiple identities. Identity politics is simplistic and singular by nature in terms of the particular group or individual being represented. Women, gays, lesbians, and Catholics are some examples of singular identity groups and Crenshaw (1991) expresses this is what “...conflates or ignores intragroup differences (p. 1242).” In essence, lesbian women of color or gay men of color must choose how they express one identity or another in a political realm. Therein, another choice must be made if certain identities are found to be in conflict. This “...dimension of intersectional disempowerment [is] seldom confront[ed] (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252).”

GLBT civil rights are an expression of identity politics in that the collective identity of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community are politicized together. However, these politics are common only in the area of rights associated mostly when marriage is denied. If we delve into the other identities of the individuals in the GLBT community we will find many of the aforementioned *intragroup differences* (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1242). The intersection of identities such as gender, religion, age, race, culture, and ethnicity with an individual’s identity as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender can create a situation where *intragroup differences* force alliance, denial or compromise pertaining to the situation surrounding denial of GLBT rights. Denial of such rights is present in conservative/oppositional political rhetoric and this oppressive representation of power is what continues to marginalize members of the GLBT community (Diamond, 2012). This is further exacerbated by the rhetorical subjugation of GLBT civil rights as a

state issue and is an example of social policy being made tertiary to national issues of economics, debt and employment.

### **Political & Religious Rhetorical Perspectives**

Historical records detail the behavioral codification, regulation and eventually persecution of same-sex relationships back to the time of ancient Greece through the medieval period around 1700 A.D. and on to the present day (Adut, 2005; Boswell, 1980; Calimach, 2002; Dilley, 2002a; Marine, 2011; Perkin, 1997; Trumbach, 2012). During this long history, a progression of same-sex relationships is seen through the more revered mentor-like relationships between older noble men and their younger protégés modeled after myths of Gods like Ganymede (Boswell, 1980; Calimach, 2002). There is also what we now consider the darker side to same-sex relationships called pederasty or by our current social constructions – pedophilia (Boswell, 1980; Calimach, 2002). Even darker still is the use of sodomy and rape as a way of conquering enemies and showing power over slaves (Boswell, 1980; Calimach, 2002).

In ancient Greece through to the early medieval period, sodomy and male same sex relationships, in whatever form, begins to take on an exponential socially constructed negative turn (Boswell, 1980; Calimach, 2002; Trumbach, 2012). While Grecian God-Human same sex relationships and their later synonymous medieval soul-marriages with Christ, continue to have positive regard in society, a connotation of deviance and unnaturalness is made congruent with sodomy and merely being effeminate (Boswell, 1980; Calimach, 2002; Trumbach, 2012). During the medieval period the first organization to conduct sting operations in order to confront the issue of effeminate sodomites, The Societies Reformation of Manners, takes shape and further progresses a

socially constructed negative rhetoric toward, at the time, allegedly gay or effeminate men as being unnatural (Trumbach, 2012).

This negative rhetoric during the 1700s is exemplified in graphic media of the time meant to shame the targeted men into isolation, suicide, or even public execution (Trumbach, 2012). Strong messages like this are carried over the centuries in the Victorian era where records show legal proceedings, prosecutions, and essentially persecution of alleged sodomites (Adut, 2005; Trumbach, 2012). However, during this era of *progressiveness*, there is another turn in societal rhetoric that adds to the idea of deviance, but further solidifies the oppression the GLBT people by defining sodomy, same-sex relationships, and effimacy as dysfunction in the growing scientific and religious communities (Adut, 2005).

I remind readers here that this slow progression of a socially constructed negative rhetoric has culminated in what Freire (1993) deems the foundation for oppression. Over time the creation of the GLBT population as outside of that which is normal, but also deviant, bad, and even dysfunctional (Freire, 1993). This negative rhetoric is further perpetuated for societies in the 1940s where we see a label given to same-sex behavior and a divide is created in the terms homosexual and heterosexual (Dilley, 2002a). This is where difference is documented and a category of otherness from normal is solidified (Chavez, Guido-DiBrito, & Mallory, 2003; hooks, 1994).

It is during this period of the 1930s and 1940s, where the atrocities leading to and including World War II. Homosexuals were labeled with pink triangles and interned in Nazi Concentration Camps along with Jews and any other individuals of difference in the holocaust (Jensen, 2002). The anti-homosexual propaganda and rhetoric used by the

Socialist Regime that later turned into the Nazi Party of Germany mirrors the vilification of GLBT people during the early and medieval periods (Jensen, 2002). This is a process repeated throughout history and built upon in current, less overt anti-gay political and religious rhetoric (Boswell, 1980; Jensen, 2002; Marine, 2011). Over this long history, GLBT individuals have been subject to purposeful editing of historical translation, and misleading rhetoric of what is *natural* or normal (Boswell, 1980).

Currently, political leaders play a role in this process as well by creating legislation effecting members of the GLBT population. Both at the state and national levels the current political climate provides a constant barrage of heteronormative rhetoric. These messages consistently inform GLBT community members of their oppression and lack of place in society. The effect of these messages on students remains to be seen, however, marginalization and inequity of members of the GLBT community of any age, race, ethnicity, or status are consistent.

The most commonly publicized rhetoric is that of the conservative Christian population also referred to as political conservative right wing groups. Religious conservatives and political conservatives define marriage in Puritan biblical terms as that between one man and one woman. This definition was made political fact by Bill Clinton's (former President of the United States') Defense of Marriage Act, which was signed into law in 1996 (Defense of Marriage Act, 1996). It was recently been deemed unconstitutional and discriminatory (Section 3 most specifically) by a Connecticut Federal Judge (Vanessa L. Bryant) (10-cv-1750, U.S. District Court, District of Connecticut) and even more recently by the Federal Supreme Court (Dennis Hollingsworth et al., Petitioners v. Kristin M. Perry et al, 2013).

The GLBT community is continually politicized by conservatives' use of marginalizing political rhetoric. Rhoads (2007) provides the example of George W. Bush politicizing gay rights by stating that he opposed gay marriage during the 2004 presidential campaign. This was at a time when the election was causing candidates to polarize the population in order to pit conservatives and liberals against one another even more than they already were. Those with moderate political views and those who had not chosen or identified with a political party were said to be the deciding votes. This is even more so in the current political climate. Heteronormativity is further exacerbated when the leader of the United States makes discriminatory and homophobic statements further ostracizing the GLBT community (Rhoads, 2007).

The GLBT population fought for years after DOMA, to secure the legal rights provided by marriage. Working to delineate the religious definition from the legal rights of marriage, GLBT people are vilified and considered deviant. GLBT people as individuals and as a population are made synonymous with bestiality, pedophilia, and other forms of sexual perversion in order to marginalize their lives and their rights. GLBT people are subject to heteronormative political rhetoric and therefore completing the oppressive process of being deemed deviant.

Currently in the political realm, there has been legislation at the federal level from the Supreme Court overturning DOMA (Dennis Hollingsworth et al., *Petitioners v. Kristin M. Perry et al*, 2013). More states are protecting marriage for same-sex couples and families while others are merely acknowledging the protection of partner benefits through legal statuses like Civil Unions (Colorado Civil Unions Act, 2013). The Federal

Supreme Court also overturned portions of California's Proposition 8, which denied marriage to same sex couples in that state (Hollingsworth et al v. Perry et al, 2013).

Given the centuries long oppression, all sides of the modern GLBT Civil Rights argument have merit rooted in differing values. However, the challenge for politicians, religious communities, and higher education constituents, lies with providing an equitable forum for discussion and development. More specifically for higher education, correcting injustices by stopping silencing behaviors while providing resources for developmental growth.

It is unrealistic to think all religious conservatives or political conservatives will change their deeply rooted value systems to accommodate GLBT civil rights. Even though there has been some progress in overturning oppressive legislation, signs of the deeply rooted moral values and religious rights discussions have surfaced. As more GLBT couples seek to take advantage of their marriage rights, there are businesses that are making decisions based in their religious values to not serve GLBT couples. Most recently in New Mexico, a photographer refused to provide her services to a lesbian couple as it went against her religious values (Colb, 2013). The couple sued the business owner and won (Colb, 2013). This victory for the couple and similar cases across the country has created an outcry from various religious organizations in reference to discrimination based on their right to religious freedom (Colb, 2013). These battles will continue to face both communities until some moral and values based compromise can be reached.

It is also unrealistic to assume the GLBT community will set aside their fight for equality. To deny anyone of difference any type of service is discrimination and creates a

great deal of conflict in that both sides of the fight have merit. However, the role of higher education should be to support the development of GLBT students just as much as students with political and religious identities.

### **Privilege, Power, and Oppression**

Since I have outlined the definitions of these terms previously, I will focus briefly on the significance of each to the GLBT community. Given the heteronormative construction in our society, and the extensive history of same-sex oppression through the centuries it can be easily said that heterosexuals in our society have privilege of conferred dominance over homosexuals. This is exemplified in the lack of full civil rights in all states for GLBT people as well as the more simple inability to freely express oneself outside of a safe GLBT environment (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 2012; Rozas & Miller, 2009).

The GLBT community has been faced with the "...psychiatric labeling and deviance from "normality" – [which] deprived lesbians and gay men of the power to influence their own development (D'Augelli, 1989, p.126)." The process by which a group such as the GLBT community is oppressed involves the dominant heterosexual group "...deeming something [homosexuality] taboo, to reject its essence, and to deny its truthfulness. In doing this, deviance is produced, and can then be rightfully ignored as marginal (D'Augelli, 1989, p. 127)." Paulo Freire (2010) spoke of a similar creation process for marginalization in terms of the oppressors seeing the oppressed as those "...who are disaffected, who are "violent," "barbaric," "wicked," or "ferocious" when they react to the violence [or oppressive acts] of the oppressors (p.56)."

D'Augelli (1989) suggests in order “for change to occur [for those part of the GLBT community], power must be *seen* (p. 127). Paulo Freire (2010) suggests something similar in that oppression must go through two steps. The first step, Freire (2010) explains, is an unveiling of the world of oppression then a step toward a group’s commitment to transforming that world. Our higher education institutions are microcosmic reflections of the greater community’s “intolerance and not-so-veiled intolerance (D’Augelli, 1989, p.136).”

While progress has been made in the area of political legislation and GLBT Civil Rights, the power held by mostly conservative religious communities will continue to express oppressive acts toward GLBT people. Heteronormative hegemony will continue to create a system of norms through which the homonormative assimilation must check in until a time comes that a homonormative perspective is less based on assimilation (Butler, 1993; Duggan, 2003; Eeden-Morefield et al, 2011; Marine, 2011).

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted using the critical transformative research paradigm and employed narrative inquiry as a component of its methodology. In this chapter, I provide insight into the axiology, ontology and epistemology of transformative paradigm. Queer Theory was incorporated as a theoretical framework as part of this study's data analysis method. This chapter also details the methods of data collection.

In order for the problem I identified to be conducted as a critical transformative study, the research question had to reflect the investigation of power inequities and marginalization within our culture (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2009, 2010). The primary research question is, "how do gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) college students experience their sexual identity development in the context of current positive and negative rhetoric surrounding GLBT marriage, and employment rights issues?" Additional research questions, mentioned before, sought to uncover the role power and oppression play in the students' process of identity development.

#### **Transformative Paradigm**

Qualitative methods gave rise to the transformative paradigm through its need to situate the research in social justice. The groups who make up those contributing most to the lens of the transformative paradigm consist of critical theorists, participatory researchers, Marxists, Feminists, and people of color among others (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2009, 2010). Transformative paradigm closely resembles

constructivist paradigm by providing the opportunity for researchers and participants to interact (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2009, 2010). One aspect of difference in the transformative paradigm is the recognition of power structures as well as the need for social justice and transformation (Mertens, 2010). Mertens (2010) indicates power structures such as oppression and the means of the oppressor's dominance as one of four characteristics distinguishing the transformative paradigm from others. Other characteristics are: 1) The analysis of the inequities experienced by marginalized groups that are part of "asymmetric power relationships," 2) Linkages between the "results of social inquiry on inequities" and "political and social action," 3) Usage of "transformative theory to develop the program theory and the research approach" (Mertens, 2010, p. 21).

Crotty (1998) provides a summation of the history leading to the current transformative paradigm beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Rooted in mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Marxist ideology, transformative research describes power inequity and oppression similarly to Marx's work on class inequity due to proletariat power over laborers (Crotty, 1998). However, it was not until 1924 when Felix Weil and Kurt Gerlach led the Frankfurt School, originally The Institute for Social Research, in social research based in a broadened unorthodox version of Marxism that eventually in the 1950s was referred to as "Critical Theory" (Crotty, 1998, p. 130).

Crotty (1998) acknowledges the influential work of Paulo Freire as a major component of Critical Theory and Inquiry. Crotty (1998) also details Freire's work of teaching literacy, but more importantly critical thinking as a means of seeing and overcoming oppression. This process of seeing and overcoming of oppression involves

the identification of power structures while critically questioning that power (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1993).

Crotty (1998) describes this exploration of power and culture as Critical Inquiry. He also expresses this exploration of power structures as suspicion. As a critic of Critical Transformative Research, Crotty (1998) demonstrates why overcoming the status quo is necessary. He posits times of ancient Greece where the dichotomy between the very affluent and the very poor was a period where culture itself was the critic of an imperfect society. This ignores the fact that power structures create oppression that then can become the socially constructed norm used to measure those who are part of the culture (Crotty, 1998).

This study counters what Crotty (1998) describes as mere *praxis* and work to overcome our heteronormative culture. The tools developed from the knowledge discovered in this study will be used to synthesize the personal experiences and stories of participants into action. Exemplifying Paulo Freire's (1993) philosophy of our seamless integration in our world as humans by expressing the roles we play in it (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1993).

**Axiology.** As mentioned before, human rights and social justice drive the forces behind transformative paradigm (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2009, 2010). These forces, combined with the dissatisfaction stemming from research neglecting and misrepresenting marginalized groups, serves as a foundation for the axiological guidelines for this paradigm. Researchers using the transformative paradigm value transparency and reciprocity in the research process as well as the outcomes it produces (Mertens, 2010).

Ethically, researchers in all paradigms must adhere to strict ethical guides; however, in the transformative paradigm the participants and researchers work closely together in every aspect of the research process. This exemplifies the transparency of transformative axiology. Reciprocity is shown most often after a transformative study has been completed in that the researchers share the results of the study, but also make the commitment to show the participants how they can implement the results.

Reciprocity could take the form of representation of data in a manner where the GLBT population is able to represent their experiences and stories. Whether the findings are put together in a usable text or workshops producing education based on those findings, GLBT individuals should be able to take the findings to their community advocating for change. This level of reciprocity and researcher/participant contact creates additional need for trustworthiness and rigor in order to protect participants in a transformative study (Mertens, 2010). Mertens (2009) shares other benefits able to be categorized as reciprocity:

- 1) “Validation of their [participant’s] worth and the importance of their experiences.
- 2) Obtaining needed information about a possible service.
- 3) A sense of relief at unburdening themselves.
- 4) Hope that their story will help others.
- 5) Making sense out of things by talking them through (Mertens, 2009, p. 245).”

**Ontology.** Reality to the transformative researcher is constructed socially as in the constructivist paradigm; however, influences of power, privilege and the damage research can inflict upon the marginalized are considered as well (Mertens, 2010). As a result of oppressive power structures, the construction of reality for marginalized groups should

take into account the cultural history. This is important for the transformative researcher since the perception of the participant must be the central focus (Mertens, 2010).

Ontologically, the GLBT student participants in this study worked with the researcher to discuss power, oppression, marginalization and their perceptions of these terms in their lives. In the heteronormative society we live in, it is possible GLBT individuals have internalized their oppression and might not perceive everyday occurrences as functions of a power structure. It is the transformative researcher's job to describe these structures, but not influence them to form an opinion in one direction or another. However, it is important to recognize that as a result of this research, the participants will likely make self discoveries and form opinions for themselves. This research will work to ensure the GLBT student's experience is the story to be told.

**Epistemology.** Mertens (2009) explains the epistemology of transformative paradigm as being centered on “knowledge as it is defined from a prism of cultural lenses and the power issues involved in the determination of what is considered legitimate knowledge (p.32).” The relationship between the researcher and the participants allows for the research to come from the lens of those it is to benefit. Researchers are involved with the participants in the knowledge creation process and should be working to assist their process of empowerment through the knowledge created.

Transformative methodology is evolving through the ever-changing developments of transformative researchers. Mertens (2010) shares three characteristics of transformative methodological choices:

- 1) Silenced voices must be involved in the research process and the formation of the findings,

- 2) Analysis of power inequities in social relationships involved in all aspects of the research process,
- 3) Social action should be the goal of the research and should be built into the process (p. 33).

Qualitative research performed through the transformative paradigm provides voice to traditionally marginalized groups. Theoretical perspectives such as Queer Theory, Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory are just a few of the perspectives that are products of the viewpoint provided by the transformative paradigm. While the characteristics of the transformative paradigm require an intense focus on rigor through reciprocity and participation on behalf of the researcher, the results are true to the needs and perceptions of the marginalized groups that are at the core of the study (Mertens, 2010).

In order to honor the voices of the marginalized GLBT population, the exploration of how students experience their sexual identity development needs to be done through a transformative lens. While other paradigms would glean pertinent data, the experiences and perceptions of the GLBT student today only scratch the surface if discussion of power and oppression are not a major component. The pervasive nature of heteronormativity exudes the power structures behind the idea of something that is the norm.

The GLBT population is one needing more than generalized data. Power structures need to be exposed and internalized oppression must be recognized through that exposure. In order to tell the story of today's GLBT student, their movement through

sexual identity development, and the connections to political rhetoric surrounding GLBT civil rights, a transformative paradigm is key.

Epistemologically, if the research question is to be answered through a transformative lens, then multiple identities and power structures must be explored (Mertens, 2010). This Transformative (Mertens, 2010) research study was conducted from the critical theory perspective. The research adhered closely to the four characteristics indicative of a transformative paradigm. Mertens (2009) describes a focus on the experiences of the marginalized identities and the interplay with issues of oppression and dominance in structures conscious and otherwise. This study will explore the development and experiences of a GLBT student population; an exploration that will seek to understand the nature of GLBT sexual identity development in relationship with oppressive and dominant social power structures concerning GLBT civil rights.

A second characteristic Mertens (2009, 2010) shares is the analysis of inequities and power relationships for the marginalized group being studied. I used the politicization of GLBT people and oppressive rhetoric surrounding GLBT civil rights as a component to meet this characteristic. The other characteristics brought forth by Mertens (2009, 2010) are met naturally in this study due the linkages made between GLBT issues, rhetoric and the application of Queer Theory. Transformative paradigm looks at inequity through social and political action (Mertens, 2009, 2010). The study closely followed these principles and will provide insight into possible implications for higher education professionals working with GLBT students.

## Theoretical Framework

Queer Theory serves as a theoretical framework in this research study. Queer Theory is a body of literature serving as a theoretical lens to be used in qualitative research focusing on gay, lesbian, or homosexual identity and how it is culturally and historically constituted, linked to discourse, and overlaps gender and sexuality (Watson, 2005). Watson (2005) discusses the importance of recognizing that Queer Theory is not an individual theory but rather an entire *body of work* emerging from Critical Theory that continues to evolve (Watson, 2005, p.68).

Emerging in the academy in the mid 1980s to early 1990s, Queer Theory has since branched out across every discipline (Plummer, 2005; Watson, 2005). Watson (2005) details the history of work making up the beginnings of Queer Theory starting with Foucault's studies in the late 1970s. Foucault's research worked to turn the focus from an individual's behaviors as identity to the individual's identities themselves in terms of homosexuality by studying historical discourse (Watson, 2005). Feminist and gay theorists evolve Foucault's work in the late 1970s and 1980s by examining the homosexual and feminist experience through a constructivist lens (Watson, 2005). Watson (2005) points out the importance of the term Queer as not just subject matter pertaining to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities. The term in the early developments of Queer research was examining the societal constructs and links between gender and sexuality (Watson, 2005). Being queer was meant to evoke an *anti-normal* approach to identity inclusive of sexuality, gender and gender expression (Watson, 2005, p. 73).

Plummer (2005) found that Queer Theory challenges everything, even the structure of research methodology. The use of Queer Theory allows for the use of ideology challenging all traditional thought behind gender roles and all that is entailed in them. This analysis allows for examples of oppression and power to play out while exemplifying challenges to gender ideology (Plummer, 2005). Queer Theory seeks to uncover concerns with gender, heteronormativity, and sexualities (Plummer, 2005).

Queer Theory's intent is to break down the binary of identity and work to engage a multiplistic approach to gender and sexual identity that is constantly evolving and fluid (Watson, 2005). Plummer (2005) refers to Queer Theory as the "...post-modernization of sexual and gender studies (p. 359)." Plummer also points out the almost anarchistic and postmodern activist approach Queer Theory presents to qualitative research. It is Queer Theory's *blurring of boundaries* and commitment to taking apart fixed identities based in heteronormative social construction forming the foundations of oppression that fuels the GLBT movement (Plummer, 2005).

Plummer (2005) describes an issue with Queer Theory as it relates to lesbian and female gender identities. He discusses how some lesbian and feminist critics view breaking down sexual, gender, and gender expression identities using Queer Theory with suspicion. These critics propose that lesbians and feminists get lost in a cacophony of male dominated societal noise (Plummer, 2005). When implementing a "...largely masculinist, queer deconstruction, it becomes impossible to see the roots of women's subordination to men (Plummer, 2005, p. 370)." Other critics of the queer movement accuse Queer Theorists of elitism in that those who contribute to the literature write only for the academy (Plummer, 2005).

More positively, Creswell (2007) highlights Queer Theory's ability to allow for consideration of overlap of other identities such as race and class. Queer Theory also explores how this overlap of identities "performs (p. 29)" in social forums. These performances and constructs are then analyzed from cultural and historical contexts in order to identify where limitations of socially constructed heteronormative binaries exist (Creswell, 2007).

The emergence of Queer Theory in North America is partly in relation to the academy's recognition of GLBT studies (Mertens, 2009). This recognition as well as the increasing political nature of GLBT issues gives rise to the need to deconstruct two-dimensional gender roles and more (Mertens, 2009). Central to Queer Theory is its perspective of working to honor sexuality and gender by refuting the traditional heteronormative tendency to subvert those who are not male, female or heterosexual (Plummer, 2005).

Power and oppression are both fairly covert in our society in terms of how rhetoric is used to portray the plight of the GLBT individual as an attack on all that is seen as conservative traditional values. The covert approach to appease those in power must have an effect on how members of the GLBT population function in terms of motivation and/or challenge. Issues of power and oppression are not clearly visible in more generalized approaches to studying marginalized groups, therefore, it is important to use the 'retrospective meaning making' available through the use of narrative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

## **Methodology**

### **Narrative Inquiry**

In order for this transformative study to address the issues related to the oppression of the GLBT population appropriately, an evolving and pluralistic approach to its methodology has been used (Mertens, 2010). I used narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2007) to acquire knowledge of and stories about the experiences of GLBT students (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Chase (2011) updated the idea of ‘retrospective meaning making’ as it relates to narrative inquiry by saying, “...that narrative is ‘meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 430).” Chase (2011) also shares the important connection between the participant’s story and their identity development.

Narrative inquiry has roots in historical, sociological and anthropological life story and oral history research types from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Chase, 2005). It has been evolved over the decades to meet the needs of social movements such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s by documenting personal narratives of those experiencing it (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Narrative inquiry can consist of any form of story collection, field texts or discourse in qualitative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Creswell, 2007).

Chase (2005) describes narrative inquiry “...as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them (p. 651).” To expand on this, narrative as a form of *retrospective*

*meaning-making* or reflective discourse is a method of understanding an individual's story from their perspective as they experience it (Chase, 2005).

Qualitative researchers often use narrative inquiry in the form of journal records, interviews, field notes, letter writing, story telling, and autobiographical writing as methods of data collection (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The stories collected through narrative inquiry in whatever forms they take are "...arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 8)." It is this humanity, the voice of the participant's experience that narrative inquiry so uniquely provides as data (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Creswell, 2007). In relation to transformative research, narrative inquiry provides opportunity for voices to be heard (Chase, 2011). Chase further expresses that "when survivors of marginalized or oppressed groups tell their collective stories, they demand social change (p. 428)."

This study looks at the links between participants' personal stories and identity development by exploring where stories and development converge while experiencing heteronormative social construction. More specifically, this study will engage the use of narrative inquiry to explore with the participant "...whether people's [their] identity constructions through storytelling reveal the self's unity, multiplicity, or both; how self and society contribute to people's constructions of narrative identity; and how people's [their] stories display stability, growth, or both, in their identities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 422)."

## **Data Collection**

**Setting for study.** I worked with a GLBT campus resource center to seek out and build relationships with a gatekeeper for connection to potential participants. This GLBT campus resource center is located at a mid-sized, urban, public university where students from multiple higher education institutions seek resources. This campus resource center has many ties to community GLBT resources as well as support from many different educational institutional types. The diversity of potential study participants is high in terms of identity. Given the multi-dimensional political, religious and rhetorical aspect of this study, the diversity of potential participants is more dependent on participant self-identity external to a participant's identity based on higher education institutional type.

**Participants and participant selection.** In order to identify potential candidates for this study, a confidential introductory information session was held with the cooperation of the site gatekeeper. Creswell (2007) expresses the necessity for researchers to be willing to be flexible in their design. However, this flexibility must also take into account the need for sampling strategies to include at least one of three levels: 1) Site, 2) Event, or 3) Participant (Creswell, 2007). The information session outlined the study and those participants who agreed were provided with a consent form to move forward. The session also met the first of two of the levels – Site.

Using a criterion sampling strategy, this study sought a minimum of two participants per sexual orientation category (GLBT) and a maximum of four per category. More specifically, participants ideally met the criterion of two to four gay men, two to four lesbian women, two to four bisexual men or women and two to four transgender individuals of any gender expression, or biological sex (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010).

The criterion for the first two categories of gay men and lesbian women was based on the participant numbers. I looked for an equal number of each in these categories and provided this parameter on the basis of managing the amount of potential data to analyze overall. The criteria pertaining to the category of bisexuality was driven by the participants in that I would have accepted all who were interested within given parameters of no more than four participants in the bisexual category. However, no individuals identifying as bisexual could be found in the population despite multiple efforts from the population gatekeeper and myself. Bisexual as a label and its association with a socially constructed gender binary was described as limiting by some non-binary identifying participants who were ultimately chosen to fill this gap.

This limiting perception of bisexuality and the relationship with the gender binary created the possibility to open this portion of the study to non-binary identities. While closely related, there are several differences needing exploration. Ultimately non-binary identifying participants were chosen as they presented an interest in expressing their story as it related to overcoming the limiting label of bisexuality. Identities considered to be non-binary are: pansexual, demi-sexual, omni-sexual, pan-romantic, and hetero-flexible (Table 3).

The criterion for selection of transgender participants was driven purely by numbers of interested participants not to exceed four participants in this category. Since transgender individuals experience their sexual identity development on many levels (biological gender – including intersex, gender expression, and sexual orientation), no parameters will be placed on this category other than participant numbers.

The minimum participant numbers of two in each sexual orientation category was not successful from the initial information sessions. Therefore, I employed a snowball or chain sampling method (Creswell, 2007; Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006; Mertens, 2009, 2010; Patton, 2002). This qualitative study falls in line with the basic intent of working to not provide generalities but focuses on the stories and themes gathered from the participants (Creswell, 2007). Saturation was reached when similar and sometimes-transferrable themes were found in the interview data. Given the personal nature of this study and participants' experiences with oppressive rhetoric, I understand that working with participants who already have an interest and trust with my research and me will be key to the success of this study. I worked closely with participants who expressed interest for referrals to other potential participants.

Ultimately, 12 participants were chosen for this study. There were four participants who identified as gay men, three who identified as lesbian women, three who identified as non-binary identities (Table 3), and two identified as female to male transgender. There were two additional gay male participants who self-selected out of the study prior to attending the first interview. Approximately half of the participants were obtained through two information sessions with the campus GLBT resource center and the remaining participants were obtained from a snowball or chain sampling method (Creswell, 2007; Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006; Mertens, 2009, 2010; Patton, 2002).

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**

Following the approval of my doctoral dissertation committee in Spring 2014 and prior to seeking participants for this study, I sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct my research. I applied for Expedited Review by submitting an IRB

application detailing my study's purpose, methods, summation of my literature review, and a narrative addressing risk and benefits to participants. In addition to the application, I submitted the interview guiding questions, and consent form to be used.

Shortly after submitting the IRB application and materials I received an approval to conduct the research by seeking out participants. Approval was granted for one year from the approval date. The IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix B and a sample consent form can be found in Appendix C.

### **Interviews**

This study employed two individual interviews with each participant. The first interview's objective was for story gathering of the participant's experiences as GLBT college students. The second interview used an artifact elicitation experience with the objective of better understanding the influence of positive and negative rhetoric surrounding GLBT Civil Rights. Reflective questions were incorporated into the second interview to allow space for the participant to express any potential influence the artifact elicitation experience had for them.

The initial semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2009) was conducted with 12 GLBT college student participants. The initial interview consisted of an semi-structured one-hour session using 7 guiding questions to gain insight into the participants' background, approximate stage of development in terms of sexual identity, and knowledge of current political issues faced by the GLBT population on the local, state and national levels (Creswell, 2007). The overall purpose of these semi-structured interviews was two-fold:

- 1) Gain access to information pertaining directly to the research questions while also allowing for the participant's story to unfold.
- 2) Allow for the participant to maintain greater control of what detail is provided by providing unlimited opportunity to express as much or as little information pertaining to their particular experience (Mertens, 2009).

The following shows the supporting research questions for the semi-structured interviews:

- Q1     How does being a specific member of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender identity change the degree to which the rhetoric (positive or negative) surrounding marriage and employment rights are experienced?
- Q2     When presented with the words: power and oppression in relationship to straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, male, female, gender roles, and sexuality are GLBT students aware of the emotions and/or reactions present in themselves or others? How is this recognition (or lack thereof) creating change in the students' journey through their GLBT sexual identity development?
- Q3     How do GLBT students explore intersectionality between their sexual identity and their other identities in relation to their experience of rhetoric?

In order to maintain consistency, the above questions served as a foundation for each initial interview. However, additional follow up questions were incorporated as other elements of the participant's story surfaced. I was intentional in providing ample space for those details to have voice. Also in this study I worked to be multifaceted in my approach to data collection and analysis (Mertens, 2010). In addition to interview transcripts I originally proposed to keep a research log detailing context around the social, emotional, and political/religious components of participant experiences during the interview process. The guiding reflective questions for the research log were:

- How do GLBT students express the emotions brought about by consistent exposure to rhetoric (stereotypes, political debate, etc.)?
- What are those emotions specifically?
- Do they motivate or hinder the student?

However, I found that this information concerning emotional response and motivation as reaction to rhetoric was redundant. I kept notes on participants as they were necessary but abandoned the idea of a formal research log. The questions for the log were explored with the notes adding depth to some of the participants' experiences and aiding in the development of thick descriptions (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). The notes enhanced the depth of the interviews by enhancing the participant's story to better understand how they "...construct meaningful selves, identities, and realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 422)."

A second one-hour interview was scheduled to conduct an experiential exercise. I asked each participant to bring one or more videos, photographs, speeches, or physical artifacts with one central theme – GLBT marriage and employment rights (Mertens, 2009; Prosser, 2011). The artifact(s) must have had sparked an emotional reaction or served as a catalyst for change in their experience and/or opinion of GLBT marriage and/or employment rights (Prosser, 2011). The following questions guided this experiential exercise:

- What impact did this artifact have on you, your experience and/or your opinion of GLBT marriage and employment rights?
- If you could interact with the person or group responsible for what is represented by the artifact(s), what would you say to them?

- How will you incorporate what you learned from this experience?

Follow-up reflective questions were incorporated and I used a semi-structured interview process (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2009) consisting of five questions pertaining to the individual participants' reflections from the prior series of video, and artifact elicitation exercises. The elicitation exercise provided context of political and religious rhetoric containing both positive and/or negative rhetoric concerning GLBT civil rights. These 5 questions were reflective of the current political rhetoric surrounding local, state and national issues pertaining to GLBT civil rights at the time of the interviews. These questions were:

- What was the experiential exercise like for you?
- How did the exercise impact you?
- How, if at all, has your perception of GLBT marriage and employment rights changed through this exercise?
- What change do you feel you can create for people of your similar identity in terms of GLBT marriage and employment rights?
- If you could create change on your campus in terms of GLBT marriage and employment rights, what would that change look like?

***Participatory visual methods: video, and artifact elicitation.*** I used participatory visual methods to better explore participant stories and experiences (Mertens, 2009; Prosser, 2011). More specifically, I used video and artifact (photographs, articles, speeches, or any other tangible items) elicitation in the interview process in a capacity similar to what Prosser (2011) described. In the final interview I facilitated a participant driven video and artifact elicitation. In order to respect the participant's expertise of their

lived experience, I asked each participant to bring digital video and/or physical artifact representations of their experiences with rhetoric surrounding GLBT civil rights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I asked participants to further present their story while reflecting on the paths these videos and artifacts represent their lives taking. Great care was taken and ground rules were set to respect the participants' "...values, beliefs, lifestyle, and culture... (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.484)."

The ground rules proposed for the elicitation exercise consisted of the following:

- Participant elects to bring one or more digital media videos and one or more physical artifacts best connecting to the participant's experience with issues surrounding GLBT marriage and/or employment rights.
- Digital media videos can be from any online digital video service such as YouTube, or Vimeo.
- Physical artifacts can be of any form pertinent to the participant.  
Examples are: news articles, photos, figurines, and political or religious artifacts.

A total of 12 participants were chosen for this study equaling 24 hours of digitally recorded data.

### **Data Analysis**

Participant interviews were digital audio recorded then transcribed (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). I used a member checking process where participants reviewed the transcription of their interviews (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006; Mertens, 2009, 2010). Upon final verification of each transcript, I then reviewed transcripts in

conjunction with my research questions, and research notes for themes relating to GLBT identity development, reactions to and perceptions of rhetoric, power and oppression.

***Crystallization.*** Crystallization is a data analysis method that evolved out of a data analysis method called triangulation and will be used to analyze the interview data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellingson, 2009; Mertens, 2009). As qualitative methods has developed as a field and the increased research in areas making up the critical transformative paradigm, the need to analyze data from many perspectives as were being represented in the participants outgrew many of the methods like triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellingson, 2009; Mertens, 2009). Crystallization allows for data to be analyzed, interpreted and validated from more varied facets than merely the three offered by triangulation in a similar way that a crystal can grow and change (Ellingson, 2009; Mertens, 2009).

Integrated crystallization involves the production of an integrated text representing a multi-genre approach to data collection and analysis (Ellingson, 2009). The genres or facets from which I will approach this research are:

- Scientific genre: GLBT Student Development Theories
  - Fassinger, R. E. (1998). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity student development theory.
  - Lev, A. I. (2004). Transgender emergence: Therapeutic guidelines for working with gender-variant people and their families.
  - Weinberg, Williams, & Perry (1994). Bisexual Identity Development Theory.
- Middle Ground Genre: Political and Religious Rhetoric

- Political
- Religious
- Art/Impressionist Genre: Queer Theory
  - 11 basic tenets of Queer Theory

Typically used to dissect and understand how GLBT issues are expressed in film, video, novels or theater (Creswell, 2007), Queer Theory's foundation consists of eleven basic tenets from which data analysis can be conducted. These eleven tenets are:

- Both the heterosexual/homosexual binary and the sex/gender split are challenged.
- There is de-centering of identity.
- All sexual categories (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, heterosexual) are open, fluid, and non-fixed.
- Mainstream homosexuality is critiqued.
- Power is embodied discursively.
- All normalizing strategies are shunned.
- Academic work may become ironic, and often comic and paradoxical.
- Versions of homosexual subject positions are inscribed everywhere.
- Deviance is abandoned, and interest lies in insider and outsider perspectives and transgressions.
- Common objects of study are films, videos, novels, poetry, and visual images.
- The most frequent interests include the social worlds of the so-called radical sexual fringe (e.g., drag kings and queens, sexual playfulness, etc.).

Creswell (2007) describes Queer Theory as "...less [of] a methodology and more [of] a focus of inquiry...(p.29)," he does express that *queer methods* are often expressed through *rereading of cultural texts* (p.29). The tenets of Queer Theory can be used as a lens to analyze the performance or portrayal of gender and sexuality in mass media representations (Mertens, 2009). The objective of using Queer Theory as a form of analysis is to see data without heteronormative hegemony and challenge all aspects of societies construction of gender, sexuality, and gender expression (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2009, 2010; Plummer 2005).

Integrated crystallization involves taking 'scraps' of text or data and viewing it through the genres chosen to produce different viewpoints pertaining to the research question being explored (Ellingson, 2009, p. 99). Using these three facets to analyze the 'scraps' of data or themes will provide further perspective into the participants' experience, their development and define the power structures in place. All of these facets create a clearer picture for all involved in the journey toward GLBT civil rights in the United States.

Ellingson (2009) states that the process of conducting crystallization provides near infinite possibilities for the researcher, however, even Ellingson recognizes that without a plan this can be overwhelming. In order to meet my own expectations of time provided for data analysis, I worked to narrow the interview data transcripts down to key themes for each participant. These themes or 'scraps' of text were viewed through each of the above genres (Ellingson, 2009). This enabled me to see not only where each participant is coming from in terms of sexual identity development, but also their perspective on the impact of oppressive rhetoric. Finally, each participant's data were

viewed through the lens of Queer Theory's 11 tenets to explore where binary social constructs may be influencing the student's experience. I chose to use this form of analysis not only because of the transformative nature of this study, but also to avoid dichotomies or binaries. As mentioned before, the constructs of our societies' views concerning all aspects of sexual orientation are based on the binary relationships of male and female genders (Ellingson, 2009).

An example of my approach in using crystallization for data analysis began with the first genre of GLBT Student Identity Development Theory. I reviewed the transcript of each participant in its entirety looking for themes pertaining to the appropriate GLBT student identity development theory. Identifying the connections each participant has to either Fassinger's (1998), Lev's (2004), or Weinberg, Perry, and Pryor's (1994) theories, or in some cases all three provided insight into the participant's experience as a member of the GLBT population.

Adding to these identity theory foundations, I reviewed the transcripts, again in their entirety, looking through the lens of current political and religious rhetoric. Any themes that emerge from this second review will add further depth to the previous data analysis. The perspective of each participant's experiences with political and religious rhetoric enhanced the richness of the data by providing the participant's perspective. This rhetoric was most prevalent in the second interview as the first was focused primarily on the participant's individual story.

I then added a third layer of data analysis using the 11 tenets of Queer Theory looking at each full transcript to uncover themes within the participants' experiences. Themes from the first and second genres will also be added to this review. This final data

analysis stage completed the multiple layer approach of this research study showing where the participant exists in terms of their identity development journey, their experiences with current rhetoric, and finally where perspectives of Queer Theory are expressed.

Ellingson (2009) expresses her desire to break down the constraints felt by the researcher while trying to represent their work in a broad yet effective manner. Integrated crystallization allows for this to be achieved without constraint by traditional sometimes-myopic methods of data collection and analysis. In this study, I represent the GLBT individual's experience in today's rhetoric filled world.

***Criteria for rigor, trust, reciprocity.*** In an effort to fulfill requirements for rigor, trust/authenticity, and reciprocity of this research paradigm, I used a face-to-face member checking process and include the participants' suggestions and thoughts gleaned from the interviews (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2009, 2010). The participants who chose to be a part of this study had multiple opportunities to interact with their own data and to reflect on the process (Mertens, 2010). This study meets criteria for rigorous methods outlined by Creswell (2007) in that data collection procedures provided multiple opportunities for detailed data through interviews and visual methods. This study also met Creswell's (2007) data analysis rigor by using integrated crystallization's complex multi-genre approach (Ellingson, 2009).

I worked to develop trust with my participants by providing transparent, fluid, and participant centered methods (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2009). I further developed trust with my participants by working hard to provide reciprocity on multiple levels (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2009, 2010). Mertens (2009) discusses how the interview process and

member checking experience can serve as forms of reciprocity, however, I hope to take that a step further through the data representation of this study. Ultimately, the product of this research results in a character template design based on the participant interactions with power and oppression surrounding GLBT Civil Rights while exploring their own sexual identity.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have detailed the methodology and methods used in this study. As a qualitative, critical transformative study designed to identify the influence of rhetoric surrounding GLBT civil rights on the GLBT student sexual identity exploration experience, the use of narrative inquiry methods such as interviews and video/artifact elicitation were at the core of the data collection process. The research questions and interview questions have been provided to show how the students' experiences were collected.

Details of the site to be used, and participant selection criteria are provided in this chapter. The implementation of criterion sampling and snowball/chain sampling are outlined as well as the importance of flexibility as the research unfolds is explained in this chapter as well. The data collection methods used in this study sought out not only the participant stories, but also where social justice is present in their experiences. Prior to collecting data for this study Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was sought. I briefly discuss the application, modification, and approval process.

This chapter also details the data analysis methods used. Given the complexity of sexual identity combined with oppressive and marginalizing rhetoric surrounding the politicization of GLBT Civil Rights, the use of Integrated Crystallization is described.

Viewing the participants' experiences collected from the interviews through the three genres of GLBT sexual identity development theory, political/religious perspective, and the theoretical framework of Queer Theory, are designed to highlight how the impact of rhetoric unfolds in the student participant experience. Again, the complexity of the topic drove my efforts to incorporate rigor, trust and reciprocity in the methods detailed in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **STUDENT NARRATIVES**

In this chapter, I will share the stories of 12 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) student participants. These students come from all of the identities making up the GLBT community. I describe the students' background and where they are coming from as well as a summary of their coming out experiences. These experiences inherently will describe the support systems of the students as well as some of the challenges they face in their daily lives.

This study's central research question looked to explore how these students experience their sexual identity in the context of political and religious rhetoric surrounding GLBT equality. In order to explore this overarching topic, supporting researching questions delve into issues of social justice and identity intersectionality. This stories shared in this chapter will describe the journey these students have had while experiencing rhetoric and the connections they have to GLBT equality.

Student participants share their experiences in two one-hour interviews. The first was a story-gathering interview with the purpose of understanding student support systems, coming out experience, as well as their understanding of social justice. The second interview was an artifact elicitation where each student was asked to bring an artifact (article, video, physical artifact/item) representing their experience with political and religious rhetoric surrounding GLBT marriage and employment rights. The artifact

elicitation's purpose was to project the student's connection to GLBT Civil Rights discourse for the study.

During the second interview reflection questions were asked to determine the connections participation in the study was creating for the students. Overall, the students shared that having an opportunity to discuss GLBT marriage and employment rights as they pertain to their experience was a positive experience. Throughout these final three chapters I will use the terms students, participants, and student participants variably to refer to the student participants of this study. The following student narratives are shared alphabetically and they express a multitude of experiences as they relate to the students in the context of GLBT marriage and employment rights.

While I did have a previous relationship with three of the student participants, the majority of them were new relationships I needed to develop through this study. The interviews provided an opportunity to understand their experiences with political and religious rhetoric brought about through the discourse of GLBT marriage and employment rights as well as the connections made through rhetoric in the context of GLBT marriage and employment rights. The stories shared here provide some insight into the need for continued advocacy and resilience to support GLBT student populations.

**Bryce:**

*“You have to live with the stigma of being gay but I don’t care anymore. You have to fight.”*

Bryce transferred to Western State College from the northwest and participated in several long-term study abroad programs prior to attending classes here. His family has a long history of cattle ranching. However, coming from a conservative Catholic family with strong Spanish Basque traditions, coming out as gay in high school was not something he was ready to confront at the time. His high school journey consisted of life in a rural town where he was involved in student athletics. He admits to dating girls and upholding a straight persona as a closeted adolescent man.

Bryce’s coming out experience did not occur until after he had completed his first semester of college at the age of 18. He first confided in his younger sister, who supported him in telling his father at a family gathering. Bryce said his other family members were in the kitchen preparing a holiday meal while he and his father were watching television. After coming out to his father, there was not an immediate response. Bryce then looked at his father and asked, “is that okay?” To which his father responded, “I don’t really care. It’s fine and I love you regardless.” Overwhelmed with emotion Bryce began to cry to which his father told him to go clean up in the bathroom before dinner.

He was not very close with his stepmother, so he did not feel it necessary to come out to her. After his sister and his dad, Bryce felt comfortable and described his feelings about coming out as, “...then, from there it’s just like okay...I really don’t care anymore. I came out.” However, he did worry his grandmother was going to have a hard time

understanding who he was as a gay man. When he came out to her she responded, “As long as you say your prayers and go to church I don’t care.”

Bryce is now in a long-term relationship with a man who also identifies as gay and Catholic. He feels this helps his family accept their relationship. However, he mentions there is only one family member who finds accepting him difficult. An aunt who openly shares with him her lack of understanding; she does tell him she loves and supports him – she just disagrees with him being gay.

During our interviews, he shared the importance of his independence by explaining his passion for studying abroad. His first experience abroad being a yearlong trip to France where he lived with a host family and felt his identity became clearer. Living in a foreign place, learning the language, and forced outside his comfort zone, he had time to reflect without the pressures of everyone knowing his every move like in his rural hometown. Bryce explained, “I always knew I liked guys...I still didn’t want them [host family] to know but I had more freedom essentially.” His host family in France knew people he grew up with back at home and he didn’t want to ruin his graduation by coming out and essentially jeopardizing his college plans.

Being out of the rural town he was used to, Bryce was able to feel free to reflect and explore his identity. However, he was concerned that even though he was half way around the world his actions would have consequences. He wasn’t able to openly date or explore his sexual identity, however, he was able to shed the concerns he had about questioning his sexual identity. He knew he needed the support of his family at home and abroad to be able to successfully graduate high school. So, he decided to continue to be closeted until he could establish a way of supporting himself in college.

Again, Bryce shared that he had dated girls in high school but after the first couple of months of his first semester in college, he did not want that anymore. He shared that he, “identified as bisexual” for a couple of months. Then, shortly after he came out to his sister as gay.

After discussing his coming out experience we began to delve into his support systems. While having understanding and supportive family members in both his and his significant other’s families, Bryce was clear to point out that he feels he is extremely independent. He states, “I guess I talk to my sister, but I don’t really go to her. I talk to [his boyfriend] but I don’t go to him. I keep it in and deal with it myself kind of thing.”

As our conversation moved to focus on GLBT marriage rights, Bryce’s independence and pragmatic view of the world became even clearer. He feels there are only positives pertaining to GLBT marriage rights saying, “It should be a right for everyone...it’s the right thing to do. I don’t see a negative side to it.” He shares his frustration with negative religious rhetoric stating, “It’s not really a religious thing, and it’s not a big deal.” In response to rhetoric based on procreation he states, “I’m not looking to procreate.” His frustration is made more evident when he says,

You have to live with the stigma of being gay but I don’t care anymore. You have to fight. You have to pick your battles and I don’t think sitting and dwelling on the negative aspects is really worth it to me.

In terms of employment rights, Bryce shares contrasting experiences of both his work environment and that of his boyfriend’s. His work in marketing and sales began as a promising internship for a large car rental firm. Even from his first day he never hid the fact he was a gay man and in a relationship with his boyfriend. He never feels the need to censor himself or his appearance. The work environment is such that he knew other

coworkers who identified as GLBT. Bryce explains, “There’s no discrimination. There’s no, you know, special rights given to someone.” He goes on to share that he is often asked to take on accounts with groups or organizations that serve the GLBT community. However, he states, “I don’t see it as rude. I don’t see it as condescending. I don’t see it as separating me. He [his boss] knows I’m good at selling the product and that I enjoy it.”

His boyfriend’s work experience at a conservative government contractor is a stark contrast and Bryce shares, “The owners of the company are anti-GLBT. There was a co-worker who had lesbian wife and they denied her insurance. Like, they’re married and everything and they still denied her spouse the company benefits.” He shares that he does not expect to be part of his boyfriend’s work life in any way. His boyfriend, in sheer contrast, has met all of Bryce’s co-workers and his boss. Although, Bryce does clarify, “...and there’s another thing too. We’re not married and it’s not a big deal. We haven’t thought about it.”

Bryce’s experiences in his workplace and the contrast of his boyfriend’s experience are salient for him because he is experiencing both. While the reality of GLBT employment rights has not touched his life, he does see the injustice from afar. As we discuss power and oppression further, he shares, “In my personal life I guess I’m really not oppressed at all. It’s just...I find what I want to do and I make it happen.” His personal experience where he is in a safe work environment does not mean he is not aware of the negative employment rights issues. He states,

It definitely bothers me because I know there’s obviously other people who work in different sectors who this happens to but personally I work in a super liberal environment that I know there’s laws out there but I’m not worried about it affecting me.

I asked if he were to be in a work environment that was not as open to GLBT employees, would work to avoid or escape it? He explains, “To me, if I want the job and if the job is something I want to do, I’m going to follow it...I can make it work if it’s what I want to do for employment.”

Bryce’s identities include gay, male, Catholic, Spanish Basque, and first generation college student. The only time he feels his identities intersect negatively is when his conservative Basque, and Catholic family members discuss the potential of him getting married. In 2014, the Pope of the Catholic Church is providing conflicting messages of GLBT support. As a result, Bryce’s family’s opinions of these conflicting messages have come up. His family does not understand how marriage is possible for him, but they do want him to be happy. Bryce says,

It doesn’t bother me because I’m going to do what I’m going to do...If they don’t like it it’s fine. Of course I want them to be in my life and all these things. But if it really bothers them that much and they decide to like not talk to me, I’m not worried.

In the second interview, I asked Bryce to bring in two artifacts that represent the influence GLBT marriage and employment rights have had on him. The first artifact he chose is an article entitled, “Supreme Court Should Make Gay Marriage a National Right” from the Boston Globe (2014, November 8). This article discusses how the number of state bans of same sex marriage being overturned should lead the Federal Supreme Court to make a blanket ruling to make same sex marriage is legal everywhere.

When I asked him what influenced him most from the article, he stated, “It’s just silly to be an issue in perspective to other things that we should be focusing our attentions on.” He further states, “I feel like we are regressing to the 1960s with the racial laws you

know? It's really silly that this is even an issue right now." Bryce's frustration stems from a statistic in the article. He reiterates,

78% of Americans aged 18 to 29 support [same sex] marriage...And they're [the article author] just kind of bringing all this to light saying, You know what? This is silly why are we still fighting over this it just needs to be done.

He feels that the government has, "...been dodging this for a while and it's getting to a point now they can't do that anymore and it just needs to be done."

Bryce's second artifact is a YouTube video of the artist Hozier's song, *Take Me To Church* (Hozier, 2014, Track 1). I was familiar with the song but had never seen the video. I was surprised, as I had never paid attention to the lyrics and never thought of the song as a GLBT rights related song. The music video shows two young men meeting and kissing in a park. They are seen by a group of other young men and pursued. One of the young men is then seen trying to bury a small box secured with chains. He is caught and beaten by the group of other young men by a large bon fire while his partner is forced to look on from a far.

Given the title of the song, *Take Me To Church*, I was curious to discover Bryce's thoughts on the connection between the Church/Religion and the persecution of GLBT people. I ask, "Do you make a connection between the church and persecution of GLBT people?" Bryce thoughtfully says,

Yes and no. Obviously you always hear like it's whenever you talk about marriage, [they say] it's wrong because [they believe] marriage is between a man and a woman – that whole Adam and Eve – you know...all that. So, like, I don't necessarily link it to persecution but I do link it with oppression. You know the Church is behind it.

Bryce further connects the video to this idea of connecting the Church with persecution by saying, "...you can obviously see that there is no way they are going to be

married or get married, or if they are married it's not going to be acceptable." He goes on to describe the symbolism of the box as something sacred holding a marriage license and the group of young men are trying to destroy it by burning it. He expresses concern about the legality of same sex marriage saying,

Even if it is legal, you can go do it but not everybody will be accepting. There will be groups of people out there that will try to not accept it and maybe go to these lengths to you know show that they don't accept it.

Bryce understands that marriage is not something affecting him right now, but shares, "...I do want to be married so it will affect me but at this point in my life it's not affecting me at all." He feels similarly about employment because he is not faced with the issues playing out in the political/religious rhetoric. This lack of affect concerning GLBT marriage and employment rights is connected for Bryce to the experience of GLBT people not being allowed to give blood. He says, "...People don't know that...it is so surprising to the people who don't know."

As Bryce and I discuss the change he feels he can bring to the community or campus he shares,

Tell people to vote! You know people our age don't vote and that's a huge issue because, the older populations are the ones who vote. It [lack of youth voting] creates these policies that you don't want to live with and everyone wonders why this is happening. It's because you didn't vote!

In terms of campus change he is very clear in stating, "I am not involved on campus. I come here to go to school and then leave." The lack of involvement feeds into his lack of commitment to creating change on the campus. He is aware of the resource offices, but says he does not need to use them. However, he does mention that he will refer those students who inquire of GLBT resources or are in need of campus GLBT resource student services.

### Eric

*“I know like I’m kind of in between that line where even, say, with the GLBT community where it’s positive. I feel stuck between both worlds.”*

Eric is an art student who is involved with the campus GLBT resource office and has many friends who he socializes with there. He identifies as a female to male transgender individual whose sexual identity development journey began during his junior year of high school. He shares his feelings during that time saying, “...freakish for these things [feelings about his female gender being wrong] I thought I was abnormal and it was like a major conflict brewing around in my head.” Eric’s struggle almost prevented his graduation from high school.

His feelings of conflict involved what Eric defines as a, “...hyper feminine thing.” He explains, “I would like, be wearing a skirt, and basically all these dresses and everything. I felt like this is what people wanted me to be.” Since Eric identifies as female to male, before coming to terms with his physiological gender as female and feeling his correct gender is male, his experience was one of overcompensating for his feelings by taking his female gender expression to the extreme in order to better fit with social norms as dictated by his female physiological gender. However, this persona created discomfort for him and it wasn’t until a friend gave him some resources that helped normalize his transgender experience. After a period of time, Eric came to a point where he stopped playing the female role just because it matched his physiological gender. He explains, “I was like well you know what? Well, who cares what they think? So, I slowly started to kind of find out who I was.”

Coming out for Eric wasn’t an option until starting college. He tells a story of a friend who came out to his mother and it created a negative environment where his safety

was at risk. Eric chose to wait until there was more security and starting college provided that for him. The presence of a GLBT resource office provided a great deal of that security. Eric explains first seeing the GLBT resource office,

I was kind of reluctant to go in there for a few weeks because I didn't want to go in and get labeled. I made this excuse to use their microwave. So, I went in there, and like, I recognized a voice of someone I knew...[it was] someone I knew from middle school.

The office, new friends, and support provided a space for Eric to begin discovering more about the resources for transgender individuals. Also, living on his own provided the security necessary if his family didn't wish to support him any further. This allowed Eric to decide to come out to his family. He describes the experience,

I went home and I basically sat them down, and I had to explain it to them a little bit. It kind of hurt a little bit and the first thing they did was laugh at me. Because I guess they were in denial about it I guess like this doesn't make sense. So, the initial coming out was all right because I kind of explained to them a little more and they kind of grasped it.

Eric explains the difficulty in coming out as transgender by stating, "I was like nervous through all of this and I was like I'm transgender. Then, I had to tell them what that meant." He further describes the experience saying, "Basically, yes, I'm female, but I don't agree with the female gender. I'd rather be associated with the male side of things." His family took time to understand what being transgender was and eventually grew to tolerate it. However, Eric expressed frustration concerning the use of appropriate pronouns. When he requested they use male pronouns when referring to him they have thus far refused. Eric expresses his frustration saying,

I can respect that [their refusal]. I can see that he [his father] wouldn't agree with me I guess with half the stuff I'm doing now. Yeah the pronouns thing is tough...I kind of keep it under wraps - I'm kind of going on this journey by myself.

As our discussion moves further to define and clarify Eric's individual transgender

experience, I wanted to know more about his identity as a female to male transgender person acknowledging the wide spectrum of identities within the transgender experience.

Eric explains his identity saying,

Basically, I don't agree with like I guess the gender associated with my body being female. I'm supposed to, I guess, look pretty and wear dresses and stuff. I don't want to be perceived like that and I don't like walking around with people looking at me [referring to being objectified].

Since, this seems to address only gender expression and I inquire further into Eric's feelings about physiological gender change. He responds by stating,

I was going to look into it. I didn't want to go full-blown surgery. My father knew because he lived in San Francisco for several years and he knew people and was like, 'I don't want you to be on pills for the rest of your life.' I can understand that so...there's so many things biologically I want to do and I'm kind of holding off of it as well because I'm dating someone right now. We've been together like seven or eight months and we're pretty serious about our relationship....I don't want to be selfish.

Although the spectrum of transgender identity is vast, Eric expresses disdain for labels stating,

Honestly, the whole labels thing surrounding transgender and like when they have LGBTQIAS...I find it ridiculous. Because I've heard people were reluctant to come out because they didn't want all these labels slapped on them. You come out and people are like, 'you are this, this, and this.' I don't really agree with all that. Like all the labels and stuff - it's just you. You are who you are.

Since starting college, Eric has slowly started to come out to more people. He shares, "My parents know, and my best friend...Now my boyfriend and pretty much anyone I meet especially those in the office [GLBT Resource Office]. Anyone I meet in there I basically say, 'my pronouns are this...'" The most challenging experiences currently center on using the restroom. He shares, "...that gets awkward sometimes. I get weird looks sometimes. I don't want to get in a fist fight with someone because that would just be bad."

Eric is very aware of the complicated nature of the transgender experience and expresses, “There is no simple answer to the things people ask me. It’s really hard.” This complicated nature makes the conversation surrounding marriage and employment rights even more difficult. He shares, “...I heard Trans people are kind of black sheep when it comes to the GLBT family.” His experiences with this are through observations where gay, lesbian, or even bisexual people appear hypocritical saying all identities are welcome. Then, the message seems to shift where those who are part of a less easily defined identity are asked to, ‘pick a side.’

When I asked specifically about marriage rights Eric put his opinion simply by stating, “No labels - that’s how it should be. I want to have the same rights as everyone else...” This macro view of marriage rights comes easy for Eric to express, however, his general opinion is that transgender people are, “...just along for the ride.” Often transgender people and their additional legal needs are neglected in legislation concerning the GLBT population. Same sex marriage legislation is still based on cisgender males or females. There are very few states that support transgender needs after gender reassignment including changing the biological sex of a birth certificate. This issue can create many challenges for transgender people, not just marriage.

As our conversation progresses to include employment rights, Eric’s feelings concerning being out as a transgender person are different. He feels, “In the workplace I have to basically hide all of that [transgender identity] and I have to be secondary so I can keep my job.” Hiding his gender expression is one issue, but again the issue of using the bathroom he identifies with becomes an issue in the workplace as well. Eric admits,

Sometimes I think if I go [to the male bathroom] and sometimes I’ll bite the bullet and basically say fine, I’ll grit my teeth [to force himself to use the female

bathroom]. What I try to do most is to find the gender-neutral bathrooms most of the time...So, I don't get chewed out or punched.

The transgender experience forces an individual to think more of gender than even those members of the gay, lesbian, or bisexual experiences. Eric explains his experience with the gender binary as,

You're either on this side of the line or you are on that side of the line. There is no grey area at all. I know like I'm kind of in between that line where even, say, with the GLBT community where it's positive. I feel stuck between both worlds. These feelings of difference make their way to campus as well for Eric. As an art

student many of his projects take on the themes of his experiences. In an effort to put context to his experiences he writes artist statements explaining his preferred pronouns as he, him, or others relating to the male gender. He shares his experience of trying to communicate his desired pronouns by saying,

My artist statements, like, I told them [his faculty] personally, I sent them emails - I give up. I had one where I gave a presentation I guess was a few months after I came out...I was telling the class about it and then right after I finished my critique, they were like, 'yes, she's this or that [sigh of frustration]. I think some people either don't want to acknowledge it...they basically said, 'No. No. You're not a guy.

This overt denial of professors and students on campus encouraged a sense of defiance. He sometimes wears a rainbow colored furry tail around campus he created for an art project. This defiance came with a sense of fear but Eric shared how defiance overcame fear by saying,

I am aware that I can be hurt wearing this around. I'm being who I am so come at me. I try to show people this is who I am. I get rejected and end up going back inside my shell. If they acknowledge it then, that's what is important.

He goes further expressing the pain he feels from the rejection and denial, "I guess I felt beaten down by all of that, like, granted I still grit my teeth like I want to cry but I don't want to start a problem. I just don't want to get into it."

The constant barrage of social aggression has taken its toll well enough, however, Eric's harshest reminder consistently returns to the use of a public restroom. He shares again,

I feel somewhat uncomfortable going to the restroom. I had this sociology class that I took last year where we touched on the Trans subject and there were a few people who spoke out and were not in agreement with it. I don't want to run into someone like that in an enclosed space like a restroom. So, yeah I do feel oppressed by other people's opinions...I don't feel like we're open minded enough yet to really accept things or be tolerant. You don't have to accept it; just be tolerant.

Eric identifies as female to male transgender, but also is bi-racial. He recognizes similarities between the black civil rights movement of the 1950s and the events of the Japanese Internment Camps. When he makes connections to these movements and the GLBT civil rights movement, he says, "If you don't speak up for it you're going to be oppressed."

As part of our second interview, Eric expresses his intense connection to the music of artist Adam Lambert. He shares that several of his songs and his latest album have helped him accept and better understand himself. For the elicitation exercise, he discusses the song, *Outlaws of Love* (Lambert, Westberg, & Jean, 2014) using the lyrics. The song, he feels, "applies to a wide variety of people in different groups." He makes connections to marriage rights saying, "It shouldn't be a struggle. It should be a simple right given and it's not something that should have to be fought for..." He feels similarly about the issue of employment rights.

Prior to participating in this study, Eric was aware of the issues relating to GLBT marriage and employment rights. However, this study allowed him a space to work through the reality of these issues. He mentions, "...my father and I talked about when I

might have to go in and hide part of it [transgender identity] if I want to succeed in getting somewhere [relating to his future career endeavors].” This reality ‘depressed’ him. He shares,

It’s sad. I think it’s when they [conservative political/religious representatives] had arguments about say gay marriage and they’re like, ‘oh, they’re [supporters and activists of the GLBT movement] going to show the kids and it’s difficult for them [children in terms of understanding sexuality]. It’s ridiculous all these fear tactics that are really all for nothing. Like I can’t understand it. It’s just so stupid. We’re [GLBT community] not going to go like march over and try to convert all your children. We are just people...It [being GLBT] happens in nature too and is not some weird freakish, devilish thing that people should be scared of...You can’t really argue with nature.

In terms of creating change for the GLBT community, Eric has goals involving corporate success as a CEO where he will institute and support policies supporting the GLBT community like large conglomerates such as Apple, Amazon, and Google. Other goals after college include finishing a fiction novel he is currently working on as well as becoming a motivational speaker. The only challenge he feels stands in his way at the moment is his shyness and,

...the negative attention. It [being an open Trans activist] would bring it [negative attention] on me and my family...part of me wants to be on my own first before I really start to do that because I don’t want to endanger them.

He shares, “I guess I just want to spread the message of love. Kind of sharing my experience with them and making them more comfortable.”

As we discuss change for the GLBT community on campus, Eric speaks of his desire to have more gender-neutral bathrooms on campus. At the time of our interviews, he had already begun researching ways to advocate for these changes. A worry came up for him after reading some information about recent laws being passed. He expresses, “I know Arizona passed a law that said it’s a first class misdemeanor if a person’s gender

doesn't match the bathroom sign. Basically, they can be arrested for it..." Eric provides a solution to these issues by suggesting advocacy for individual bathrooms that are gender neutral rather than the communal single gender bathrooms that are common in many campus buildings.

### **Jacob**

*"I can't see myself getting married. I can't see that far into the future. I don't look to question my entire life...for many years I haven't been able to see past Friday."*

Jacob is a film student at Western State College who transferred to the campus only a few semesters ago. He expresses his dissatisfaction with his program of study and that he is planning on transferring again as soon as possible. Jacob's appearance is very creative and you can tell he is passionate about his work as an artist. His brightly colored hair, spiked dog collar and patterned rips in his baggy pants are all accents that make a creative statement. However, his appearance seems to conflict some with his shy manner. I have seen Jacob on campus before but have not had the opportunity to speak with him prior to this study.

Jacob's coming out experience happened in high school. Coming from a highly conservative Catholic background, he admits, "I identified as Omni-sexual just to cast a nice umbrella and pretend that I liked women. I had never told them [his family] initially." It wasn't until the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, "I realized that I was just in fact gay and that I didn't have to use giant umbrella terms." This self-realization created some concern because he came from, "...a church that had a lot of anti-homosexuality, anti-Islam, anti-separation from church and state, and even sometimes racist remarks and beliefs. So, from that I never anticipated telling them." He wanted to wait to come out after he had

graduated high school and was in college. Jacob feared being disowned and kicked out of the house by his family.

Jacob had a friend who identified as transgender and this relationship brought up questions from his family. His mother confronted him and asked him if he was transgender or bisexual. He responded, “no.” She then asked, “...then, what are you?” So he felt he had to come out to her. After telling her he was gay, her response was, “You know you’re going to hell, right? You’re going to get AIDS.” He explains, “Since then, she’s warmed up to things or hasn’t brought them up because I think she’s realized a bit of how ridiculous her church is but at the same time it’s not something that’s completely approachable.”

Identifying as gay was merely the first part of identity that Jacob felt needed to be settled, he now also identifies as Wiccan (religious/spritual practice of nature-worship and witchcraft). This further break from his family foundation is another point of contention. His mother struggles to speak with him about many facets of his life and his father is unapproachable.

When I ask Jacob about GLBT marriage and employment rights, he laughs. He scoffs a bit saying,

With a lot of things one of the strongest things which Colorado, depending on the sites that you look at, will say that we have same-sex partnerships that are similar to marriage. Civil Unions actually cover [only] a 12<sup>th</sup> of the marriage rights.

Jacob is referring to an approximate number near one 12<sup>th</sup> of the 1, 138 total federal benefits provided by legal marriage (HRC.org, 2014 & United States General Accounting Office, 2004). He expresses adamantly, “I can’t see myself getting married. I can’t see that far into the future. I don’t look to question my entire life...for many years I haven’t

been able to see past Friday.” Jacob feels that even though he does not see marriage for himself, “it would be more important for people who are in similar situations than me to have their identity validated with this is an actual thing and this deserves to be equal.”

Employment rights are a more plausible discussion for Jacob. He hopes to be employed in a place where policies concerning appearance are a bit more lenient, but understands he will need to change to fit the work environment. He also wants, “...to discuss [his] daily life and such and I’d want to bring up my boyfriends.” Jacob feels strongly that employment rights are, “...something that I feel needs to happen everywhere.”

Jacob has a high level of awareness concerning social justice as it pertains to his identities. In addition to identifying as a gay man, he has several disabilities that he shares with me. He experiences, “severe clinical depression and a severe sleep disorder.” The combination of these disabilities is the biggest challenge to his finding gainful employment and he is less concerned with the limitations of GLBT employment rights.

For the second interview, Jacob has two YouTube videos for his artifact elicitation exercise. The first is entitled ‘*It’s Time/Marriage Equality/GetUp! Australia*’ (GetUp! Australia, 2011) and depicts a perspective of a young couple where you only see a young man interacting with the camera. We see various life events pass in front of the lens while an intense violin piece plays in the background. Slowly rising in intensity we see this couple where the camera is the partner’s perspective watching the other go through important life moments. At the end, we see the young man present a ring and propose to his partner who then is revealed as another young man. In short, the theme of

this is that gay relationships are the same as any other. Same sex marriages are no different from heterosexual marriages.

Jacob is influenced by this video and now sees presenting the importance of GLBT marriage rights as, “a humanistic experience rather than, ‘well, its equal rights, duh,’ kind of thing.” Even though he does not see himself getting married at this point in his life, Jacob shares that, “It’s always been a strong factor and something that even before I came out to myself seemed like an obvious set of equal rights.” He does not see himself on the front lines of advocacy he says, “I think it’s not about what I can do but what I can do to assist others and what I can do to assist other organizations and such because I’m just a drop in an ocean.”

In terms of the more focused approach to creating change on campus, Jacob feels there are people on staff that address issues like hate speech, and discrimination. However, he does feel that there is a need to assist. He explains, “The one thing I would try to change is with the GLBTQ student services office and trying to reach out to people who maybe don’t have the voice for themselves yet.” He further expresses, “To be able to get their [GLBTQ student services office] posters to stay up because lots of [other offices/organization] posters stay up past their time whereas they’re [GLBT related posters] smashed down almost the day they’re put up by people, by certain organizations.” He is frustrated by merely observing the GLBT student services office spending extra time and work to have their events publicized appropriately.

His second YouTube video is a recording of slam poetry reading entitled, ‘*Denice Frohman - Dear Straight People.*’ (Button Poetry, 2013) In this video, a young lesbian woman expresses her reactions to the way heteronormative society frustrates her and in

many ways the GLBT community. The poet begins slowly and injecting humor here and there. As she continues, the intensity increases with her pace and the volume follows suit. She ends with several poignant statements explaining the frustration felt by GLBT people with current inequality.

Due to the attacking type language and the lack of a humanizing approach, Jacob feels this was powerful but ineffective. He explains the shock value approach exemplified in the video,

has a place in the fight. It's just not as effective. If it were to actually be dialogue towards straight people and whereas if it was within the GLBT community and such, then there is a sort of unification of the experiences that she's felt. Because most people have been in the closet or most people have adapted their behavior to suit their environment but most GLBT people have to as well.

He says,

It's not how I would approach straight people but if it's bringing up the dialog between other GLBTQ then there is the unification of it behind the battle and the fact that we even like the battle of it. It is a fight. It is a struggle towards equality and because of that, there is a place for it. It's just not necessarily on the forefront.

Jacob is clear about the importance of using the right message for the right audience. He is also clear that he feels he can be better in support than as a point person leading the advocacy for change.

### **Jon**

*"I believe most people are inherently good, so when you educate them, they're going to do the right thing."*

I didn't know Jon before this study and he heard about this research through some other connections on campus. His coming out occurred in high school at the age of sixteen. He came out to his friends and he started dating his best friend. His parents found out about his relationship and he was instructed to not see any male friends again.

Then, the relationship was not discussed again. His family is strongly connected to the Church of Latter Day Saints/Mormon religion.

At the age of 17, Jon joined the Army. He explains his experience of being gay in the military initially saying, “After about a year and a half in the Army, I decided that I wanted to come out. This was just like six or seven months before ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT)’ was repealed.” However, prior to the repeal of DADT, Jon was hearing a lot of rumors and he explains his waiting to come out stating,

I came out a few months after it [DADT] got repealed. I didn’t really have a network, or a support system there. I’d been hearing a lot of rumors and I didn’t know what to believe, like hearing that it [DADT] would get reinstated and that if I came out [then] I would be kicked out in a few months.

Jon held a leadership position as part of his role in the Army. He describes, for the most part, people understood and many had already known of his sexual orientation. However, his commanding officers were dealing with other people complaining about him after his coming out. Jon says some people would come to his barracks room and say things like, ‘Hey I think you’re a great leader but just know you’re going to burn in Hell.’ He endured this type of treatment for a short time then felt the need to take it to his commanding officers where they explained he had their full support.

After coming out in the military, Jon came out to his family again. He explains his father’s response, “My dad was just telling me to just keep going to church and pray it away.” His mother knew but “pretended that like she didn’t.” He left the LDS Church shortly thereafter. Jon explains, “The conversations were at first a very patronizing tone. My dad acted like I didn’t understand myself or this was still just a really long phase maybe.” The rest of his family either knew already or, for the most part, have come to terms with his sexuality.

Jon still serves in a reserve branch of the Army and continues to hold a leadership role while attending classes at Western State College. After DADT was repealed, issues and complaints concerning GLBT discrimination are treated as Human Resources processes just as any other form of discrimination. However, education around GLBT issues and needs in the military is still very high. Jon shares that there are no forms of readily available education, literature, or resources. He explains, "...in the military saying, 'That's so gay' or using the word 'fag' is very commonplace.

Jon's support system involves some family members, but he shares with me that he recently married his husband who is an additional support for him. This leads our conversation to GLBT marriage rights. He feels the positive aspects of marriage equality lie in, "...that it's really helped normalize LGBT individuals, which is a good thing and a bad thing I guess. It's like you're pushing for the patriarchy and these oppressive systems by entering in a marriage." However, his reasons for getting married were more about the protections. He explains, "My husband and I, we wanted to get married for us and not for any other reason...So, if anything that was our biggest reason. It afforded just a lot of protections."

Jon is aware that there are members of the GLBT population who do not wish to get married due to its connection to 'oppressive systems.' However, he feels,

...Its super important to have that option because it sets the precedent that everybody is equal in this. Even if you choose not to [get married] for whatever reason, it's important [referring to the importance of the protections, rights and benefits marriage brings].

As marriage relates to his family, he says they believe the closer to a heteronormative idea of marriage the better. His family sees his marriage as an attempt at normalcy. He explains,

My family allows it to put us in a box essentially. Like, 'all right they're not going to do anything we don't approve of. They're going to be monogamous. They're going to have children like we expect them to.

Jon sees this as the negative side of GLBT marriage rights. He states, "It allows straight people to put us into their heteronormative boxes."

As we shift our interview to cover employment rights, Jon shares that he finds it important to remove discrimination based on GLBT identification because, "We say we have a meritocracy, especially working for the government...but it's really not. But if it was then they wouldn't care what your gender was, your sexual orientation anything like that." He explains his thoughts about the negative aspects of GLBT employment rights by stating,

...It makes people spiteful. People don't want to be controlled at all. I know especially the people who I know who own small businesses who are conservatives; they don't want to be told by the government that they can't fire somebody on this basis [sexual orientation or other GLBT identity]...

Jon is experiencing discrimination every day in his role with the military. He shares a story with me about a man sitting him down in his office, closing the door and telling him, "Hey, you can't use the word 'husband.' You have to use gender neutral pronouns." This man is in a higher leadership role than Jon and was refusing to process paperwork if Jon didn't comply with his request. He also went to Jon's peers and instructed them to, "...Not discuss my [Jon's] home life with me [Jon] because it's offensive to hear me [Jon] talk about having a husband." Jon's peers were instructed to change the subject if he brought up his home life or his husband.

When Jon took his complaint to his Equal Opportunity Officer, he was first told, "Well, you know, they're used to the old ways." In reference to the time prior to DADT repeal. Jon stood his ground and said, "It's not appropriate. This is the law. These are

regulations. I don't care how it used to be." The power differential between Jon and the offending officer was pretty high, yet Jon stood up to him and the system.

His experiences with power and oppression empowered him to educate himself in order to defend himself. He more specifically defines this by saying, "They operate within a system, the bureaucracy and so understanding that system is the best way to ensure that you're not oppressed by it." This process of education about himself and the system started well before the repeal of DADT. At the time there was an underground GLBT resource group for military members called, Out Serve. Upon the repeal of DADT, Jon said the organization was key in helping him, "...learn stuff and figure out who I was and how the military regulations work and how they affected me and didn't affect me regardless of what I was hearing."

Jon's artifact elicitation exercise began with him bringing the lyrics to Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's – featuring Mary Lambert, '*Same Love*' (Haggerty, Lewis, and Lambert, 2012, Track 5). This hip-hop/rap/pop song talks about Macklemore's childhood experiences with a gay uncle leading him to wonder if he was gay based on various societal stereotypes. It also talks about the importance normalizing the idea of same-sex marriage.

He told me of the first time he heard the song, '*Same Love*' and the connections he felt when he heard it. Jon said, "I think when I first heard this song a few years ago, I had just left the Mormon Church. I had been seeing a counselor of sorts, he was like a leader in the church, but telling me a lot of stuff like that [referring to the lyrics concerning 'treatment and religion']. You can essentially pray it away, or you can live with it, just be celibate, stuff like that...I was hearing a lot of stuff from my family along

the same exact lines.” Jon also related to the line in the song, ‘we paraphrase a book written 3500 years ago...’ He feels, “People pick and choose, essentially.”

Other than the clear connection with his experience in the LDS church, Jon also felt the song influenced his view of gay rights activism. He explains,

I feel like I wasn’t a gay activist, I didn’t consider myself that at that time, when I first heard this song. That made me start thinking about it. Maybe I have a duty or responsibility to start speaking up about this stuff, especially because it affects me. It really helped expand my view, I guess. It really gave me conviction that there are straight allies who believe that and who are ready to fight for gay rights as far as marriage rights and employment rights.

We talked about change he could bring to the GLBT community as it relates to GLBT marriage and employment rights. Jon’s interests in politics and international studies led him to think he could work to raise, “...awareness and lobby work as far as legislation goes and getting that passed to make sure that it’s implemented to protect people.” He plans to continue to speak out in his military role and has been granted time in briefings to advocate for Equal Opportunity policies and more. He feels that, “having them give me that opportunity has made me realize I can do more.”

As we discussed campus-focused change, Jon expressed interest in expanding current leadership and diversity conferences and workshops. He references ‘*Same Love*’ saying, “To bring people awareness – I really believe what he [Macklemore] says in that song earlier, ‘No law is going to change us, we have to change us.’” He expands on this saying, “I think awareness is the biggest thing. I believe most people are inherently good, so when you educate them, they’re going to do the right thing.”

### Josephine

*“I no longer believe in the gender binary. It’s just ridiculous. I haven’t believed in it for years. That makes it harder to define sexuality...”*

Josephine identifies as a lesbian woman who feels her coming out experience took place in, “...fits and starts over years.” She comes from a very supportive family who play a large part in her life. Her father is from Sweden and her mother is from the east coast of the United States. She says,

Both my parents are pretty liberal. Religion was not important in my household growing up. Religion was very important to my maternal grandmother. My mom would take us to a Catholic church twice a year, Christmas and Easter. Then, my mom did make an effort, out of guilt, to have me go through religious education for Confirmation.

Josephine didn’t complete the process and said she was, “...not interested.”

She is surprised about how her coming out experience panned out over a long period of time. Josephine has clear memories of her mom educating the family about social justice issues including homophobia and sexism. Josephine came out as bisexual before coming out as gay. In her high school years she also discovered she was working through depression. She had already felt unique and different and joked, “How much more special do I really want to be? Am I lesbian? Jeezzz, I am some special snowflake.”

Josephine expresses her desperation saying,

...grasping on to anything that could possibly be construed as attraction to a guy. It’s taken me ages to get a point where I’ve been able to separate the feeling of pride, the feeling like I’ve done something right and a guy appreciates what I look like or has a crush on me or something. Because that’s what you’re supposed to shoot for.

During this period she found herself clinging to the idea of men finding her attractive.

However, she also had a crush on one of her female friends. After some time that same

friend revealed to a crush on Josephine as well. Josephine admits she and her friend secretly started dating. Josephine is matter of fact about the relationship not being serious and ending after a short period of time.

After this relationship, she went through a period of identifying as omni-sexual and pansexual (Table 3). She explains, “Just way, way more interested in women than in men. I just didn’t want to rule anything out.” Lesbian then became a term with which she decided to use frequently as it was the most common answer for her. However, defining herself by physical attraction is somewhat frustrating. She clarifies this saying,

I no longer believe in the gender binary. It’s just ridiculous. I haven’t believed in it for years. That makes it harder to define sexuality...that’s not a conversation I have to have with everybody. I can set the boundary as far as you’re [she gestures to me but is speaking of others she is labeling herself for in conversation] concerned this is who I am.

As we begin to discuss marriage rights, she explains,

I think that any marriage equality has to be so all encompassing that the gender is not a factor because there are some marriage equality amendments that still make it difficult in some states for transgender people to get married.

She feels that the conversation “...isn’t going far enough yet.” Her thoughts are that it will take time for people to change and that change will be slow.

Josephine explains her family’s expectations of marriage for her saying,

[it] isn’t a really huge part of my future plans which my mom is very upset about. She has a rule that if I’m not married in five years then I have to marry my friend Mary because she isn’t planning on getting married either.

Josephine sees marriage rights as important based on the need for partners who have significant others overseas. This comes from direct experience with her father as a permanent resident from Sweden. She recognizes the importance of that benefit and right since it hits so close to home.

In our discussion concerning employment rights, Josephine shares that she has not experienced anything related to employment discrimination based on GLBT identity.

However, Josephine expresses that she did not, "...ever want to feel like I might lose my job because of my identity." She also shares, "I'm more concerned about employment equality, employment protection equality for transgender identities."

Issues associated with power and oppression stemming from the fight for GLBT equality led Josephine to develop an Individualized Degree Program addressing the imbalance of power and oppression. She is hesitant to call herself an advocate. She clarifies by saying,

It's not exactly about going out and teaching people because I don't know what people need. It's about helping them figure out their power, which again is very personal for me because so much time spent to figure out what my power is and what I can actually do...just realizing that I have a lot more power than had ever occurred to me that I do. I can set boundaries. I can use my voice.

In addition to Josephine's lesbian female identity, she shares,

I wasn't Trans and I didn't want to be a guy either. I just distanced myself from the whole thing. I really bought into that internalized misogyny that we're just trained into so well from such a young age. I knew I wasn't going to be able to succeed as a feminine pretty woman that goes out and does everything. Who has an awesome career and a husband and kids and also travels and somehow has time to be fashionable.

Her identity as a feminist "...has become so much more important because overcoming that internalized misogyny it makes it so much easier to be compassionate toward other women."

Josephine also identifies as disabled based on recent diagnoses of ADHD, sleep disorder, depression, anxiety, and Joint Hypermobility Syndrome which causes her a great deal of pain. She shares,

It's got my whole sense of self off-kilter. It's a really weird place that I'm in right now with it. I've always felt very strongly about equality for, or rather, disability equality. That's always been really tied in with my feminism and LGBT rights...

All of these identities come to a head not necessarily in the realm of GLBT marriage and employment rights, but more so in terms of accessibility of GLBT resources. She says,

There are sometimes conflicts like seeing queer spaces that aren't so disability accessible. There are conversations around certain employment equality, marriage equality and other things that really disregard mental illness. That bugs me. I don't feel like supporting this identity in any way changes how I have to support this other identity.

Josephine shares things I had not thought of until I learned of her individual experience. In reference to her identities she says,

They [lesbian and disability identities] fit together very well. I'm lucky that I don't have any strong religious ties being an atheist. That means I get to define everything for myself. In terms of morals – I don't have to worry what my community says in terms of that.

As one of her artifacts in the elicitation exercise Josephine brought in an article entitled, "Are Gay Men Really Rich?" from a podcast publication called Freakonomics (Lechtenberg, 2013, December 12). The article discusses the idea that GLBT people or at least gays and lesbians are wealthier as they have dual incomes with no kids. She chose the article because she hadn't necessarily thought about this perspective. Her experiences and knowledge were based on issues stemming from, "...higher rates of homelessness among LGBT youth..."

She shares concern that the article's references are only, "...choosing a very specific subset and its not comparing specific education levels..." This, in Josephine's opinion, omits the opinion that, "...LGBT individuals are more likely to pursue more higher education and so with having more education then there's going to be higher income levels." The article's data also concerns her because it ignores the fact that

women, and more specifically lesbians, make less than gay men when comparing median incomes. She explains, “I don’t think it’s mentioned here but women typically are paid less than men so when you have a couple that are two women then you’re going to see that play out.”

Josephine is interested in the economic impact of marriage equality, as she had not looked at it from that perspective. She feels marriage is, “...not even something that I [am] particularly interested in for myself.” Yet, she feels that after reading the article, “...this information has really helped resolve a lot of cognitive dissonance over the issue and I have become a lot more passionate about it and more comfortable in being that passionate about it.” Prior to finding this article, she felt that marriage equality stood on its own and was middle to upper class based issue. She now sees connection between marriage equality, employment rights, and other protections needed for the GLBT rights movement. She explains by saying, “I felt justified in wanting it [GLBT equality] so badly and wanting to have that be as much a priority as the other stuff that I care about.”

As the article discusses employment rights, Josephine reads, “For every eight jobs a straight man applied for, he got invited to an interview. But gay men had to apply for eleven jobs to get just an interview.” Her reaction, “This is from a resume and so that’s a huge thing that never ever occurred to me.” She understands that not having to coming out on a resume is a privilege many straight people do not understand. In her own job search she admits,

Luckily, I’ve got other stuff that I can put in there for the most part and like I had kid’s organizations that I volunteered for when I was a kid. Those kinds of points but if I don’t have anything else to put down then it’s a blank spot or I’d have to put in something that’s going to make it very clear...

In a recent class she attended the professor discussed the psychology of group prejudice where she learned that, "...people with minority identities tend to assume [prejudice as] an attribution error." In the case of employment, if someone of a marginalized identity including someone of the GLBT community is not chosen for a position the first thought is not due to their marginalized identity. Josephine feels she relates to this seeing herself differently than she sees others. She describes how she feels when others experience this in comparison to when she experiences the same issue,

As a lesbian, I'm well aware and I care that other lesbians are being discriminated against and they will see examples of it and I would attribute it to prejudice, to discrimination. When things are happening to me, then I attribute it to other factors. If I'm being denied a job it's because I'm not qualified. It's because I don't fit in with what they're looking for. If there's a teacher that doesn't like me, then it's because of this and this and this.

Josephine feels that, "For whatever reason I avoid being like, 'Well, maybe they don't like me because I'm gay.' That attribution error is really common in a lot of different minority identities."

The second article Josephine brought for the elicitation exercise was entitled, "Debunking the Myth of LGBT Affluence" published in Equality Matters (Brinker, 2013, July 12). In summary, the article discusses GLBT affluence as a stereotype affecting people's views on marriage equality. A column is cited in the article, which she refers to here as, "The Witherspoon Institute's Public Discourse Blog." Josephine reads, "It asserted that the LGBT movement is nothing more than the pet project of a comfortable, well-to-do population." As the article points out negative rhetoric, she points out a section,

With the distance and detachment born of time's passage, will historians of this sort note how much the gay marriage movement has been centrally about acquiring government benefits and protecting the wealth of an influential, prosperous, successful, urban elite during a time of deepening national inequality?

Josephine is aware of how this negative rhetoric is a norm from various groups blaming minorities for what she refers to as, "...massive wealth inequality or massive poverty." However, this opened her eyes saying, "This situation [GLBT inequality] is a lot more complex than I was giving it credit for essentially and this one [the article] is really breaking it [inequality] down and justifying my perspective on it." The experience of being able to see marriage equality and employment equality as interrelated made a great connection to her knowledge of social justice. She shares,

...to be able to just sort of say straight out that my sexuality isn't the thing for somebody else to dissect. It's for me to dissect. It's my thing to look through and figure what it means in certain situations. How I identify, and who I identify with, and what I want from life, and what I want in marriage equality, and what I want from employment protections to use that in something where I get to say, 'It's not your issue to look through.

Josephine feels she can bring change to the GLBT community and the campus; she makes note of the resources currently available providing information to and about GLBT needs. Josephine feels the need to create access to GLBT resources but focus them toward minorities and/or marginalized student groups within the GLBT campus population. She expresses this by saying, "It's really important to just create avenues where you start off with isolated incidents, isolated feelings, and people have to feel confident that they can say something..." She uses marriage equality as an example saying, "...Marriage equality is one of those issues that there's so much misunderstanding on either side of it...just a sense of entitlement on either side that's never been challenged..."

### Ko

*“I think I’m gender fluid between demi girl and demi boy, so never truly CIS [cisgender] not transgender female to male, because I don’t feel that much of a connection with male pronouns nor with female pronouns but I also don’t feel like I’m a-gender [without gender].”*

Ko is a first-year music student who identifies as a black, pan-romantic demi-sexual woman. I had not met her prior to our interviews in this study. Ko is one of those students you want to know more about, as her way of interacting with the world is quirky, fun, and outgoing. It was easy to develop a comfortable space in a very short period with her. She is very open to share her experiences and thoughts.

Ko has grown up with her grandmother in a, “really Christian home” that is “very anti-homosexuality.” She shares a story of her biological mother who had come out as lesbian when Ko was born. She was taken from her mother shortly after as her “...grandparents thought that she [her mother] would pass homosexuality onto me [Ko]. So Ko has spent her entire life with her grandparents as guardians.

Ko shares her coming out experience saying, “...I didn’t necessarily start identifying as pan-romantic demi-sexual until recently.” She describes her journey as it began in middle school. As she struggled to understand her emotions and attractions at this time she describes, “...If I’m gay, I’m a sinner and I’ll go to hell...I feel like the whole thing is just so stupid.” It was not until eighth grade that she decided to come out, but she came out at that time as bisexual. She was afraid of her attraction to women and talked about forcing herself to have crushes or connection with men. Ko explains that she was “...always female leading” in terms of her bisexuality and would often describe herself as gay bisexual.

Her friends began to express and experience their sexuality intimately and Ko found she "...did not have [intimate] sexual feelings." This new layer of difference for her was hard to understand explaining it as "I feel like the only word you can describe that is like at the time, I felt broken, so I felt like something was wrong with me." She describes having no sexual desire or physical attraction and noticing the stark contrast to her friends. She expresses a period of searching for terms that made sense to identify with through which she began identifying as bi-romantic asexual. She explains, "I identified as that for a year. I dated someone long distance who also identified as bi-romantic asexual..."

Ko's experience in several relationships eventually uncovered sexual attraction for her partner, however, she noticed this only happened over a long period of time developing strong emotions for that person. She then began to identify with the term demi-sexual, which she explains as "...you can be sexually attracted to someone, only after you get really close to them." After a long period of exploration and confusion, Ko is comfortable with pan-romantic demi-sexual as her identity. However, she explains that she is only out to her friends, mom and dad. Her grandparents are not tolerant of any form of homosexuality and often bring up anti-homosexuality based in a Christian context. Her father identifies as Muslim after converting from Christianity in prison.

Speaking about marriage rights, Ko states,

I feel like marriage rights are just really important, to be validated as a person and not feel like something's wrong with you...it just means a lot to me in general, to make people feel like people and not like they're animals or monsters...

Ko's grandmother is a very important influence in her life, but when Ko inquired about whether her grandmother would come to her wedding, she was told no. She reacts saying, "Obviously I felt terrible. I was just like, wow, so the most important person to me in my entire family...just wouldn't show up to my own wedding. That gives me a weird feeling and a weird fear."

Employment rights are just becoming more of a concern for Ko. While she feels it is wrong to be fired or discriminated based on sexual orientation, she has not been faced with it as of yet. She feels, "...it's not your business what I do. It's not your business who I like unless you ask me..." However, since she is still at the beginning of her college career and her industry of interest is music, employment protections are not concerns salient to her at this time.

It is important to point out that the intersection of her black and pan-romantic demi-sexual identity still presents challenges to her as an artist. She has received comments based on these identities after auditions she shares these comments stating, "You remind me so much of Tracy Chapman." To which she reacts,

Wow. You just thought of the first LGBT black person that come to mind and you just compared me to them...it's just weird because I want to be treated like a person, not really like some sort of special entity...

Images of power and oppression for Ko are very specific, "I just have an image in my head of someone predominantly white, cis [cisgender], and straight telling me what I should be doing because they hold the most governmental power..." The political environment that exists surrounding race, gender, and sexual orientation spark both anxiety and fear for her. She shares,

I genuinely think that our government is a system that's already broken and oppressive, and now that there are more of us [she is referring to liberal thinking young people] than there are of them [she is referring to older generation conservatives here], I feel like eventually, with all these riots happening in Ferguson, with people going missing, with black people being killed on the streets, with gay people not getting their rights...one day, somebody's going to look up and realize, there are more of us than there are of them, and government's going to collapse on itself.

Her perception of the government is that the system is built to oppress and marginalize.

Ko says, "[It is] built to gain money for the white man, take money away from people who need it more and then just oppress everybody. It's not a fair system."

A portion of this unfair system of separation based on innate differences within the GLBT community, she feels, is linked to the "...gay community being separated because it's L.G.B.T., and they're separating gay man culture away from the rest of it. So, it's like they are trying to separate us as much as possible so we can't get together." She discusses how, in her opinion, separation and preventing communities coming together is part of the system creating oppression. She is referring to the inclusion of gay and lesbian needs into most legislation, but not addressing the more complex needs of bisexual, non-binary, and transgender pieces of the GLBT community. Her opinion is that 'the system' is separating gay men from the rest of the GLBT community as a form of oppression. Ko never self-identified as an anarchist, but there was a moment during this portion of the interview where she mentioned going into, "...full anarchy mode..." in reference to her emotions about recent riots across the country.

As Ko's identities intersect between issues of gender, race, sexuality, and expression, she expresses feeling oppressed saying, "...everybody just thinks my sexuality is like, 'Oh, you'll grow out of that...'" However, she does feel safe in her choice of career/industry. She shares, "With my field [music] in particular, it's so much

easier to be homosexual than any field, especially since it's an art field.” Ko is able to express her whole self through her music.

Explaining this expression brings up the idea of labels and how the music industry also forces labels on artists. She explains that in addition to the terms pan-sexual and demi-sexual, gender-queer as an appropriate label if she had to choose another. She states,

I think I'm gender fluid between demi girl and demi boy, so never truly CIS [cisgender] not transgender female to male, because I don't feel that much of a connection with male pronouns nor with female pronouns but I also don't feel like I'm a-gender [without gender].

Trying to explain these complexities to her conservative Christian grandmother or others from a conservative religious tradition is difficult. Ko frames her response perfectly,

I feel like when people are like, 'God makes no mistakes,' it's just like stop...this whole thing is about love and loving other people and loving yourself. So, when its how this is going to affect me in my life, I always try to keep that in mind whenever I do anything. Ignorance is just a rampant thing in our community...

Ko brought a YouTube video of a song by the Gorillaz entitled, '*Empire Ants*' (Gorillaz, 2010, Track 7). She summarizes the song saying, "The whole song is mostly about escapism in our society and the second section is more talking about the working class actually." She explains the influence this song has had on her saying,

...I guess it's like the fact that it's more realistic talking about having a dream [she is referring to a dream as a metaphor for change] that can work for any machine [this is a metaphor for society or culture] you want to. So, despite whatever you're doing or whatever orientation you may be, you can help move forward the machine with those dreams of doing [metaphor for making change happen]. So, those odds are against you, but continue moving forward.

Ko applies GLBT equality to the song's metaphor. The song gives her hope for the future in terms of marriage and employment rights, but she is quick to share, "...since

I'm fresh out of high school, I'm not going to get married anytime soon. That would be insane, but I guess it gives me more hope for the future, to be able to do that stuff."

Resiliently she adds, "Although odds can be against me I will continue doing what I'm doing and being a human being, like you can't ever stop being human. So just continue being human and work for what you want."

Ko refers back to the song discussing its escapism theme saying, "...breaking free of the construct and going against the norm..." This helped her stay motivated to continue pushing forward to, "...do something with my [her] life rather than just sit in my house and hope my parents don't kick me out." She took a moment to reflect on the experience of this study and the connections she has been able to make. Ko now feels she is too passive in expressing her opinions. She explains, "I'll be more aggressive about my opinions and aggressive about how I feel, just because I'm always so passive...I guess...I have a lot more to say than I thought I did."

Ko hopes to use her career as a way to give voice to the issues of GLBT rights as a whole not just marriage and employment equality. She wants to create support through speaking up, and creating work (music/comedy) that provides a sense of commonality. While these are future goals, Ko hopes to create small changes, "...such as having gender neutral bathrooms, or like people on campus who work on campus using preferred pronouns or no [gender specific] pronouns."

## Mo

*“I left the church because I chose to. I made the conscious decision that I am gay and I’m not going to live by their rules. I removed myself from the situation.”*

Mo is a non-traditionally aged student, who identifies as a white cisgender female, lesbian, heterosexually married, former Mormon, and mother of two. She describes her coming out experience,

Okay, so I got married at 28. I was Mormon so I thought I was just this really good Mormon girl; got married. My husband figured it out my second year of marriage, our second year...He introduced me to my first girlfriend then it was like, ‘Oh, that’s what this is supposed to be like.’

Her husband supports her a great deal in the coming out experience and he has also started dating others. They remain married because they get along well and do not wish to split their children across two homes.

She came out to her family and received support overall. However, some of her family members find it difficult to reconcile with the Mormon religion. A common theme of education concerning GLBT people in the Mormon Church is being gay is contagious. Mo explains that one high level church elder by the last name of Parker is, “...very adamant that if you are hanging around somebody that’s gay, you’re going to catch it. Yeah, he’s very homophobic and very anti everything gay.” He has also gone as far as advocating violence against those in the GLBT community according to her. Prior to meeting her husband, Mo was very active in the church temple ceremonies. However, she never completed a mission nor did her husband. Since neither of them completed the expectation of completing a mission, the Church considered them in a poor light. She explains how this stepping outside of what is expected in the Church affected their relationship saying, “I kind of went against the rules by marrying him because he was a

tarnished guy...” As she and her husband worked through her coming out, each of them had to come to terms with leaving the church. She explains, “...I wasn’t going to burn in hell or whatever. All of these ramifications weren’t going to actually happen to me and that I was able to realize that maybe I am gay.”

She and her husband had to trust one another to ensure the act leaving the Church and acknowledging her lesbian identity were not going to split up their children. She acknowledges, “they [the Church or family] could take my kids, who could have left me, and I would have nothing. They [her family and in-laws] would have backed them [the Church] up. It could have gone a lot worse than what it did.” Mo defines her and her husband’s relationship as, “...a weird open relationship.”

The most prominent support systems she includes are her husband and children. She finds a great deal of support from the GLBT resource office on campus as well. Mo sees a counselor to keep her grounded as she moves through the complexities of all of her identities and navigating the issues that come up within them. She has dated infrequently, but her last relationship ended abruptly due to complications of family circumstances. Her previous girlfriend had basically moved in and began to expect certain considerations from her and her current husband making home life a bit difficult. She refers to both her last girlfriend and Mormons as “U-Haulers” or people who soon after meeting a potential mate have their belongings outside in a U-Haul trailer ready to move in and set up a household. She indicates, both groups, lesbians and Mormons, are stereotypically both very quick to move in and set up house.

Mo hopes to get married one day again and she does mention her current marriage will end in divorce. She describes her reflections on the protections heterosexual marriage provides and the different potential scenario for her future stating,

It's weird because I had all the rights and now all the rights that I had are suddenly gone. I think anybody who is in love should be able to get married. I mean, two consenting adults – it's none of my business who gets married. I think we are making progress as separate states. I think it just needs a little bit more work. I would like to get married someday...

She had a revelation about the importance of even the smallest rights given to straight couples when she had to make a call concerning a family matter. Mo says, "I have all the rights to my husband's life. I have all the passwords, I make the phone calls and I just tell them I'm his wife and then they have to tell me." While she was dating her last girlfriend there was a realization she would not be the first one the hospital would call if her girlfriend were hurt or worse.

When asked whether Civil Unions were a good legal compromise or not she replies,

Yeah, I think civil union is good. I just have a problem with them making that line [Civil Union but not full marriage]. I think if religion is going to be involved in it, then it can be a religious thing and it doesn't need to be a federal thing. I think there should be separation of church and state completely. If it's a religious thing then that's fine, it's a religion thing. [It] should not affect my federal rights. The Civil Union thing is a start in the right direction. I just don't see what the point is in calling it Civil Union rather than marriage.

Mo describes being hesitant and feeling insecure when considering issues of employment rights. She expresses, "One phobic person can pretty much screw you over just thinking that you're gay." Mo's experience with covert oppression and discrimination circumvents what she experiences from the church or what may be related to her appearance with tattoos and piercings. She knows that people make judgments

about her sexuality and is well aware of the fact she may never have a chance to confront it due to its covert nature.

Knowing these judgments exist, Mo states, "...I like to buck the system too. I'm a pretty girly and I would dress up girly and stuff and then shave my head occasionally just because it's fun..." Despite all of this, she hopes to not experience conflict between her identities. She shares, "...because I'm a wife and I'm a lesbian, it blows people's minds that I can actually be married, and be happy, and be a lesbian..."

Mo chose to share an article for her artifact elicitation. The article from the New York Times entitled, 'Mormons Say Critical Online Comments Draw Threats from Church' (Goodstein, 2014, June 18). She discusses her work with several people who write a Mormon dissention blog of which she is a moderator. As part of this work she finds it,

...infuriating...because they have the articles of faith for Mormons, basically what we believe. The 11<sup>th</sup> article of faith says we claim the privilege to worship almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where or what they may. Then, they go back on it. They just don't, there's no allowing other people to be who they are and it makes me angry.

She says, "It's blown up just in the last couple of weeks because they [the Mormon Church] are doing a purge basically." Mo's blogger colleagues all received letters from church leadership stating, "...they were all being summoned to disciplinary council..." Whether they were more vocal about supporting women in the role of pastor or elder, GLBT rights, or other issues with the church, the patriarchal church leaders removed vital church rights from them. She herself has been told, "You're just not welcome here..." Through her other roles of online moderation and speaking out, Mo

received a comment stating, “Yeah, the gays are never going to be accepted and women are never going to get the priesthood and you just need to get over it.”

Her frustration becomes clearer when she shares, “They preach inclusiveness and they preach that everybody is welcome then, when it comes right down to it, they’re not and the general membership isn’t.” She reads from the article, “...these members said their bishops had questioned them about specific posts they had made in their blogs, Twitter and Facebook in their comments, streams, or websites, or conversations in chat rooms.” Mo expresses her concerns saying, “That scares me just because I think I’m thinking we’re in 2014 [at the time of the interview this was true], like we shouldn’t be able to have our opinions.” As an outspoken blogger herself, she sees this retaliation by the Church as a real threat.

Her focus shifts back to the church elders and she shares, “The issue I have with that is these leaders are in their 80’s. They’re from a different time and place and not very forward thinking at all. That’s what really got me.” Mo takes a moment to reflect on the previous Presidential election where Mitt Romney, a prominent member of the Mormon Church, was running as a candidate. She mentions, “They started the ‘I’m a Mormon’ campaign to prove that we [Mormons] as a group are not abnormal, that we’re like just normal everyday people.” She recognizes, not only support from the Mormon Church of Mitt Romney’s campaign, but the Church’s plans to be more out front in the public eye. Mo says,

...I think they thought he was going to win. Because they dropped the missionary age and sent, like flooded, there’s like 50,000 extra missionaries from 18 and up, they dropped the age. All these missionaries are out in the field and they have nothing to do because he didn’t win and nobody cares.

The Church bankrolled the Proposition 8 Campaign in California several years back. This legislation, where GLBT marriage rights were nullified. Mo says,

Oh yeah, it was insane. They lost a lot of members over Prop. 8. They would go to people and they would tell them that they had to give this much money. 'You need to do this; this is like the faith of everything.'

She heard stories of the church threatening people with disciplinary hearings if they did not give money to support the legislation.

As Mo reflected further on her feelings about the anti-GLBT actions of the church, she states,

It frustrated me. I was very upset and I was very ashamed of being of my religion that I grew up with. I mean I don't seem to be Mormon anymore, but it's my family. I was pretty ashamed of it, if nothing, it pretty much cemented my ideals that LGBT people should be allowed to get married and that they have no right to tell me what I can and cannot do.

As a result of participating in the process of this study Mo indicates she what she learned, "I'm a lot more proactive about things than I thought I was. I guess I'm an activist; I'm more of an activist than I thought I was about things. I'm very pro-conversation, I didn't realize I was until all this stuff [the Church's purge] started coming down." The support of her family and growing stronger in her confidence as a member of the GLBT community has propelled her to feel empowered. She says, "It's really nice not to hide. It's nice to be yourself and be accepted for it [her identity]. It's great!"

Mo also hopes to continue on her path of education and support of the GLBT community. She recognizes there is,

...a broad spectrum of people that classify as LGBT. I'm more concerned about helping other people feel accepted as well. My focus is to help those, especially the transgender, there's a lot of bad stuff around the transgender stuff. That whole issue there's a lot of negativity and stuff. My goal is to try to help people understand it.

She shares the impact of the Church's recent actions toward GLBT people and their allies by saying,

It makes me concerned for my family. I left the church because I chose to. I made the conscious decision that I am gay and I'm not going to live by their rules. I removed myself from the situation. I don't think that my family should be forced out because of my decisions; it should be their decision if they want to leave.

Mo feels that marriage and employment rights have grown in importance for her from participating in this study. She says, referring to marriage rights, "I think it's absolutely more important that other people have an option if they want it. We're in 2014, we should not be having this argument anymore, this should not be a discussion." She plans to continue to be vocal by posting, sharing, and writing about advocacy for GLBT marriage and employment rights. Mo concludes by sharing, "There's a lot of people who disagree, but I continue to have that conversation [GLBT equality] because then there are other people out there that might feel like I do." She also hopes to get more involved on campus in terms of GLBT activities to be more visible.

### **Paul**

*"I feel like maybe because I don't want a sex change, because I don't want to subscribe to certain ideas of what a Trans individual is, maybe I don't have a right to say who I am."*

Paul was a bit more guarded in terms of sharing information about his major, or other identifying information. He was apprehensive of me and seemed to be not only shy, but also nervous. It took some time to develop the necessary comfort, however, Paul eventually opened up sharing more of his experiences. His appearance was what many may describe as androgynous or of both genders.

Paul started the coming out process as female to male transgender when he turned 21. A class on sexuality provided some context to what he had experienced since he was a small child. He reflects saying, "...I remember having feelings where I wanted to join the Boy Scouts class but I couldn't. I was a girl. I didn't want to join the Girl Scouts because that was for girls." He also shares being fearful of his body changing due to puberty. Paul was fearful of becoming a physically adult woman would mean he could not be a boy if he wanted. He remembers trying to pretend he did not feel that way he says, "...[he] felt like just trying to deny what I was."

Paul is out to his family except for his father, but feels that asking them to respect his desired pronouns is pushing the issue at this point. He states, "She [his mother] calls me her daughter but she knows I don't really mind that. That's what I've been called all my life." A conversation with his father has provided some positive education. Paul told his father about the differences between sex and gender defining them by saying, "...when someone asks you your sex they're asking you, 'do you have boy parts or do you have girl parts?' When they ask your gender they're asking what do you, in your head, identify as?" This conversation provided some level of confidence for Paul, but not quite enough to come out to his father as a transgender person.

Paul feels that he has to 'parcel' out which part of himself he comes out with to people. He explains,

I feel like I have to sort of parcel it out because there's a lot of questions. For one, there is the sexual orientation part. There's also the whole idea of every Trans person automatically wants a sex change. We have been raised in a society thinking that the moment you come out, as trans, you almost immediately want to start shooting up hormones and you want to go under the knife as soon as possible. When in reality for me personally, I don't feel like I need to. I might get top surgery [breast augmentation] after I have kids. For me these [pointing to his breasts] are necessary for feeding babies, nothing more. Once I have kids, I

don't really need them anymore. I don't feel any lack of a penis because to me a penis is not about us [gesturing to me in solidarity] being a man. It's about us [men as a gender] being male.

He describes his response to those inquiring about how he lives as female to male while not pursuing gender reassignment. He shares,

If you ask me, do I live like woman or a man, I will say I live like me. I live how I feel comfortable. Yes, I wear dresses sometimes because I was taught when you dress up, you wear a dress. I have the body that does in a dress. Most suits don't accommodate breasts...

Paul recognizes that he is seen as female by law but says,

I am male in some aspect of my life. That's why obviously I just act like me because I just am trying to live how I want regardless of gender roles, just to live how I feel is right and how I am comfortable.

Paul has dated two other men, but the relationships have only been online. Support systems outside of family consist of friends from high school.

His perspectives on marriage equality center on his opinion that transgender people are overlooked. He explains saying, "The important thing is a lot of laws pertaining to the community as a whole generally don't think or they disregard Trans issues." He more specifically points out that, "There's still a ban on transgender soldiers in the military." He shares that marriage rights become difficult for transgender people if they have to change the sex on their birth certificate. If he and his boyfriend walk down the street he explains,

I pass as straight. I pass as female so, when I walk down the street with my boyfriend, no one can tell I'm in a gay relationship. If I were in transition [undergoing hormones in preparation and after gender reassignment surgery], if I were to go under that pressure and transition then all of a sudden I would have to face the fact I'd no longer pass.

Paul feels strongly that,

The Trans community is completely thrown under the bus when it comes to marriage issues. That's the case with 99.999% of all gay rights laws, is they have to usually make amendments to them to include the Trans community instead of having the Trans community in there from the get go.

This is also apparent to him in terms of employment rights.

“In the case of the Trans community there's a lot to do with that because oppression comes from all sides,” Paul says. He brings up Colorado's Amendment 2 saying, “There's legalized oppression through denial of civil rights, through denial of protections under the law, denial of being able to be open about your identity, open about your sexuality.” There is a feeling of internalized oppression for Paul. He explains saying, “I feel like maybe because I don't want a sex change, because I don't want to subscribe to certain ideas of what a Trans individual is, maybe I don't have a right to say who I am.” This is an example of oppression within the Trans community. The transgender community experiences a lack of solidarity and those who choose to not transition are seen as outsiders. Paul says, “I've been in the closet so long where it's hard that I'm not there anymore [he is referring here to being out but not completely and not transitioning]. I still can hear the criticism of why are you not out of the closet? Why? You're really fucking up how people think of Trans people.”

On campus Paul feels that gender-neutral bathrooms are helpful, however, since he presents a mostly female gender expression, it is often a non-issue for him. He recognizes the small number of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and expresses that more options would be helpful and he would feel, “...so much more comfortable.” He is concerned about someone physically harming him if he, presenting female, enters into a male restroom.

He expresses frustration with the celebration of GLBT rights, again revisiting the issue of Trans soldiers not being included in the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell. Paul says, "So I think it could change where there's more acknowledgement of Trans issues. In a way, I think it's [equality inclusive of Trans people] a ways off because there's so much misunderstanding still." Paul describes the challenge of someone being intersex and facing the socially constructed gender binary. He says, "...there is a gender binary where we are conscious as boy or girl. If you happen to not be one those...or born intersex you better figure out what you want to be as soon as possible." This opinion comes from a formerly common issue at birth where doctors, who notice non-binary gender physiology, would ultimately make a choice forcing the gender of the infant at birth to be either male or female.

Paul shares a YouTube video of a song by the Kinks. The song is entitled, '*Lola*' (Davies, 1970, Track 5). The song is about transgender (male to female) woman meeting a man in a bar and their brief encounter. Paul explains how the song influenced his development saying, "...it was sort of like my gateway into my identity, and that brought me into thinking about things like gay marriage and employment rights."

Paul points out that his perception of issues of marriage and employment rights had been further heightened pointing out that,

We have so many different things [GLBT acronym reference but specific to Transgender] that most people don't want to take the time to learn and figure out what sort of language is necessary to be all-inclusive for my community, because it is so broad. It is a weird community to be part of, but never boring.

Paul feels he cannot create much change for the GLBT community on his own.

Especially when dealing with those who feel that fully including transgender needs in

GLBT equality will somehow hinder the overall GLBT equality movement. He expresses,

There are those who think that way [providing rights to transgender people will hinder the GLBT rights movement] or that they'll not give them [gay, lesbian, or bisexual rights advocates] any extra rights, that it will prevent marriage rights, it will prevent employment rights, but the fact of the matter is my marriage and employment rights are the exact same as a gay man or lesbian or a bi person. I just like to have an identity that goes against the norm, and I have a sex and a sexuality that goes against the norm. So, it's mostly just a need for inclusive language, in my opinion, that is absolutely necessary. We don't really think about the fact that gay marriage rights equally affect the Trans community.

Paul explains how he could create change on campus saying,

...in terms of general quality of life, things like gender neutral bathrooms. We have a few of them on campus, but in my own day-to-day life, I don't go to the areas where they are, so I have to use the women's room. That kills me inside a little bit, every time I have to do that, because I have to actively deny my identity. I have to actively deny who I am every single time...

He suggests that a simple change in signage from *Male* and *Female* to *Urinals* and *Toilets*. He explains, "...It doesn't matter which one you would go into if you are a man or a woman. It just depends on what you need."

Paul wants his story heard. He expressed to me,

...I feel like this is a story that needs to be said, and I don't want there to be another little girl out there that thinks, 'Oh, I'm a freak,' like I did for years, and years, and years until I was 21 years old. I had numerous damaging effects on me to think that for all that time I was somehow a freak.

He also feels that prior to this study he had not thought much about marriage and employment rights, as the GLBT equality story does not usually include him as a transgender person.

### Pierre

*“I’ve always told myself that I’m not getting married. I think that was just because of the notion growing up that you knew that gays and lesbians could not get married.”*

Pierre and I had known each other for several years prior to his participation in this study. He identifies as a gay man of Hispanic family background and culture. His involvement in college has been steadily increasing as his interests in social justice have grown. Pierre’s coming out experience was not as interesting as those of some of his peers. He shares,

My coming out experience wasn’t really an issue. It was more of my family already knowing that I was gay and we never really talked about it. We shared our lives to an extent, but had our privacy...I technically didn’t have to necessarily come out to my parents they already knew that I was gay. From an early age they knew that I was gay, I think everyone knew that I was gay. It was pretty apparent.

As a child he was called, ‘gay’ but didn’t understand the meaning. He explains,

I was a child and didn’t understand sexual orientation and became confused when people assigned me a label. It [questions of being gay] first manifested when I was younger, that kids were calling me gay based upon my mannerism and speech. It wasn’t until I became older I really understood what sexual orientation was and what it meant to be gay.

Despite the teasing, and the development of sexual attraction for the same sex, Pierre says, “...I was never ashamed to be gay. I just felt like I was publicly humiliated for being different.”

Being from a rural farming community Pierre said he internalized a lot of emotions about being gay. His family was, as he put it, “kind of Catholic.” His parents wanted their children to be instilled with the importance of doing good for people in the community. He clarifies, “It was more like the morals, it wasn’t necessarily the religious part.”

Pierre feels that marriage equality is important because it, "...is giving the LGBTQ community empowerment from an oppressive society. It is giving power to a group in which they have had it taken away." However, he shares,

...I've always told myself that I'm not getting married. I think that was just because of the notion growing up that you knew that gays and lesbians could not get married. So, I always had such a strong image in my head that I was never going to get married. Now that I'm establishing myself as an older adult, I see the importance of the marriage issue and how it actually affects people. Now I am able to recognize the oppressive system, and it also shows that these people are still being discriminated against and that rights are being taken away.

Employment rights have never been an issue he has had to face or think about, as it has not impacted him. He expresses, "I don't really know too many people who have been personally impacted by it. But, I have seen news in the media and horror stories that I can relate to but I'm not in that situation." Pierre thinks an open and accepting work environment is important regardless of GLBT status or other marginalized identity.

He clearly states his stance concerning power and oppression sharing, "...power relates to me in that it's still white males that are on the higher class of socioeconomic status. It's heterosexual white males who show domination in the culture as in the mass media." His identification as Hispanic and gay in a small farming town was difficult and he experienced feelings of being oppressed by various people in his community. It was not until later in high school and college that he was able to rise above that oppression by taking part in leadership experiences and being involved in social justice learning opportunities.

Pierre feels that his Hispanic last name, in employment situations, could serve as a point of discrimination, but also when people meet him in person his appearance and tone of voice people associate those signs with being gay. He expresses, "I've noticed

that even if I choose not to identify as gay, they've already created this label that I am gay based upon my body language and stereotypes that I fit within the category of being gay." Even with this experience, Pierre says,

My bigger focus is on marriage rights rather than employment rights just because I haven't really been able to see that inequality within employment rights. I think it's very impactful and strong that people are seeing this in a newer light, that it's actually coming to the news.

Pierre shares an article entitled, 'Ten Reasons Why Homosexual Marriage Is Harmful and Must Be Opposed' written by the TFP Student Action Site (2014) who proclaim to defend moral values on campus (TFP Student Action, 2014). Pierre summarizes,

...ten justifications why you should be opposed to homosexual marriage, saying that it goes against the grain of the better good of society. Two men cannot reproduce, therefore, they should not incorporate a life together or be able to have those legal rights...

The large number of universities supporting this site and its messages concerns him.

The article starts with the religiously based rhetoric concerning procreation. It states that if a couple (same-sex) cannot procreate, then they cannot be married. It also discusses the denial of a mother or father to a child in same-sex marriages as a basis for not supporting them. The article continues to list the moral incorrectness of homosexual marriage being made legal if marriage equality is supported.

Pierre is frustrated by the article, but shares, "I think it's really good to have the different perspectives of people's opinions. I think it's of value that you do feel a certain way and you are entitled to that feeling and that thought process." He values the discourse created by the issue marriage equality and employment rights. Pierre explains,

You have to come to a compromise; you have to be able to be willing to talk things out. I think, now, having more of those discussions, those open discussions

of why people feel this way; why they think this way. What is the difference between what is actually right and what is actually wrong and the differences between morality and getting a better understanding of that will slowly develop these thought processes...where they might be more willing to change rather than trying to force them to change.

He hopes to create more discussion in both the GLBT community at large and also on campus through his leadership roles to facilitate conversations about marriage equality. He shares his plan stating, "For me, I think it best works when you do small group sessions. Having those conversations where you're being open with people. Where it's safe for them to come out with their opinion." Pierre hopes to bring attention to these subjects through his roles as a community engagement student leader on campus, but also in the wider community. He is eager to create a dialogue.

### **Todd**

*"I can look at all the different aspects of like the romantic side, the sexual side as pieces and I'm kind of okay with each piece. But for some reason it throws me off trying to put them together."*

Todd and I had worked together on a previous research project I was conducting at his campus. So, we had some prior knowledge of each other but still had to dig a little deeper in working together on this study. However, Todd is very personable and was interested in how this study was coming together. He comes from a strong religious background in his family but was also not worried about coming out to his mom. He shares the beginnings of his coming out experience saying, "I changed my Facebook orientation to Bi, and I actually forgot about it until my brother one day was like, 'So, what's this about?'" Other than this experience he says, "I never really had like a big, grandiose coming out experience."

His sexual identity was a difficult internal journey. His connection to the bisexual label began to lose its clarity in relation to where he was mentally and emotionally. He began to feel that bisexuality just was not right. He shares, “I don’t have enough equal attraction [to both male and female genders] that I feel I could go with a Bi status. I’m more attracted to women.” As we spoke, he found it difficult to even feel part of the GLBT community in any other way than an Ally. However, he did say the term hetero-flexible seemed to fit best at this point in time.

Todd finds support from the campus GLBT resource center and serves on the campus Gay Straight Alliance. His family supports him, but his sexual identity and the journey of exploration he is experiencing are not topics his family are ready to have with him. Todd also sees a counselor on a regular basis for this and other needs.

As far as marriage equality is concerned Todd states, “On a moral level for me, I think it should be legal anyways.” However, he cannot put any personal connection to marriage, as it just is not a priority for him. It does affect many of his friends and he wants to support them. Todd is also aware of the disparities that exist in terms of employment rights and he hopes to work in a place where diversity is valued highly.

Identifying as hetero-flexible has proven to be a privilege, as he does not feel the need to disclose it. There is nothing about where he is at the moment of this interview that lends itself to his sexual identity disclosure. He feels that he has experienced more oppression due to his disabilities than his sexual identity.

Todd identifies as a white, cisgender male with ADHD who is hetero-flexible and also hetero-romantic. He clarifies, “...I’m passable...if I just dress [male gender expression] and walk in, nobody’s going to question.” This pass-ability in the GLBT

community has concerned him as he worries, “I’m so involved in this [hetero-flexible, non-binary identity], I wonder if I’m going to miss the heterosexual opportunities, because people are usually going to assume I’m gay?” However, what matters most to him is, “...if someone’s going to actually want to be with me, I want them to be comfortable with who I am...”

He hopes to use the privilege he is afforded to allow other voices to be heard in the marriage and employment rights debates. He is studying Human Services and focusing on gender and sexuality. His studies focus on social justice and he is learning how to navigate those difficult conversations.

A few months passed before Todd and I could conduct his second interview. When we were able to meet again, he expressed that he had learned a lot about himself recently and some things had evolved since we last met. Todd said, “I’m in a Queer Theory class right now, so I’ve been exploring the theory aspect, but then like how that would relate to an identity as far as like my hetero-flexibility that I mentioned before. I have actually found someone who’s kind of making it [his sexual identity] more flexible.”

Todd explains this flexibility saying, “...it makes me think more of like the demi-sexual, sexual identity, where you’re attracted more to someone based on who they are versus their body.” As he further separates emotions and sexual feelings Todd describes,

I can look at all the different aspects of like the romantic side, the sexual side as pieces and I’m kind of okay with each piece. But for some reason it throws me off trying to put them together.

He has been looking at how his ADHD diagnosis also plays into his relationships as well. Explaining this reflection, Todd says,

Well, I read an article that I'm kind of using to reflect back on past relationships, about how people with ADHD can hyper focus on someone for a bit. Then, kind of like zone out and that will cause some issues with the other person.

Todd's brought in a movie, and article, and a symbol for the elicitation exercise.

The first was the movie, '*Ma Vie En Rose/My Life In Pink*' (Berliner, 1997). Todd summarizes the movie saying,

It was about this little girl who was assigned male at birth as far as sex...which society tends to put gender identity with that and just kind of watching this little girl struggle with trying to be who she is and having everybody kind of try and frame it to get her to become more of what they expect her to be.

The movie influenced him through his own struggle with identity on many levels.

Todd describes the influence the movie had stating,

I really felt the struggle this little girl was going through, even though I don't identify more on a gender non-conforming side of the spectrum. But at that point I wasn't anywhere near that identity level. So, really being able to connect with me and pull into that type of issue I think is really powerful.

He explains to me how this movie played a role in beginning his journey of sexual identity exploration. He says,

Part of it might even help later on in my journey, because again, it's more about being yourself regardless. Being able to break down the gender stereotypes, so now I'm more on that spectrum to where I'm exploring. Like, I'm even wearing girls' boots.

His second artifact was a copy of an open letter to Emmett C. Burns, Jr. written by Chris Kluwe (2012). Emmett C. Burns, Jr. is a Democratic legislator from Baltimore, Maryland who wrote a letter to the Baltimore Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti telling him to control his players/employees expressions of support for government initiatives legalizing same-sex marriage. Kluwe is a Minnesota Vikings player who wrote the open letter responding to Mr. Burns.

Todd summarizes the situation and letter stating,

Brendon Ayanbadejo, a player for the Baltimore Ravens was donating stuff to organizations that are pro-GLBT rights and marriage equality. Emmett C. Burns, wrote a letter telling them to control their players and telling them to cease and desist. Chris Kluwe, a player for the Minnesota Vikings ended up writing a letter to that politician, basically ripping him a new one in such a creative, highly intelligent, witty, sarcastic way with hints of vulgarity.

The impact this letter had on Todd was made stronger as it came from an ally of the GLBT community, Chris Kluwe, who is straight. Todd explains,

Well first off, I've kind of always been kind of pro equality or pro equity. I was always on that side, but like this letter, coming from an ally, because he's married, identifies as heterosexual, the whole nine yards and be able to stand up and voice that kind of opinion and be that blunt, it's kind of empowering to me.

He feels that Mr. Kluwe coming out in defense of GLBT rights must have taken a lot of courage and Todd recognizes the struggle that comes with that action. Todd was empowered by Mr. Kluwe who was attacked by right wing groups for taking this stance.

Todd's third artifact is the Trans-Feminism Symbol (Appendix A). The symbol incorporates both symbols for male and female with a fist. It is colored with rainbow hues. He had first seen it as a tattoo on someone and was struck by the symbolism it holds for equality.

Todd describes the impact saying,

I understand it's a trans-feminist symbol, but I don't identify as trans. But there's so much like symbolism within it that just speaks so much to the equality side. The black power fist, which can easily be taken on to the people of color aspect of the community, the rainbow being the GLBT side and then the gender symbols being the gender adversity.

While not identifying as transgender, he sees the importance the symbol plays in,

"...fighting for your rights..."

The growth he has experienced recently has helped him reflect on his journey through participation in this study. He explains,

I think I'm starting to get a better aspect of being part of the community, but I still feel I need to respect certain boundaries to where I can educate my friends on some of these issues. But I'm even learning a lot of like not speaking for them.

Todd still does not see himself as fully part of the GLBT community regardless of his hetero-flexible/demi-sexual identification. However, he does recognize the similarities of his struggles to that of bisexual people. He says, "I still think I'm in the border-ish area."

This study provided him some clarity and he shares,

It kind of just reaffirms for me to not just prescribe someone a definition or identity. Like, ask them what it means to them. Or even if they tell you and then they're like, 'What does that mean?' Because one person's homosexuality is different than someone else's, someone's gender queer might be the same as someone's transgender, but they identify differently. But it's more about what's behind those that matters.

Todd feels strongly that, "...you really need to ask them what does the identity mean to them to truly understand what it means."

His feelings about marriage and employment rights evolved a bit during this experience as well. Todd explains a shift from pro-equality to pro-equity as,

...pro-equality is kind of the notion that we're all equal which we're not. I need actual help more than some people with my ADHD so it's not equal. Whereas pro-equity is more of the equal chance. If someone needs a little extra help they get it. If you don't then you're good...

Creating change in the area of marriage and employment rights for the larger community and people of his similar identity is difficult as he finds it difficult to find people similar to his identity. He explains,

To be honest it's hard for me to find people that are super close to my identity, because even kind of trying to adopt like the gender queer aspects, like searching for that it's usually female assigned at birth gender queer, not male assigned at birth. Which I know that sounds kind of counter intuitive when you're not part of

the queer community too. Because they're against those types of labels, but at the same time it is still quite a different experience.

On campus he has worked to create change by helping with state political campaigns on campus to make GLBT issues and those related to them more visible.

Todd hopes to put together a resource fair on campus for local high school Gay Straight Alliances to help, "...break down the barriers to go to college, as well as bringing in an organization in the community to come and talk about how they're supportive of the community whether they are GLBT specific or not." He hopes to request funding from the campus President's Office and to get support from upper administration as a recruitment and retention issue for all.

### **Trevor**

*"For a long time I identified as gay and then I started looking at the different people that I was attracted to, I'm like, 'Maybe I'm more pan.' I know several pan individuals and I just don't know if there's a community, per se."*

I had no prior relationship with Trevor, but had heard of some of his struggles through a connection on campus. I was interested in learning more of his story and experiences as a GLBT person. As we began our first interview I wanted to learn more of his coming out experience and support systems.

Trevor comes from a, "...conservative, religious, Christian household. So, coming out really wasn't much of an option [until later teen period]. It wasn't until 18-ish or so...the signs were there, it just was a lot of denial." He describes coming out at the age of 18, but it was only to himself at first meaning he had to come to terms with being gay internally first. When he came out to his family it was after his same-sex fiancé broke up with him due to the fact that Trevor was not out yet. He describes the process of emailing his mother and father to come out to them, he wrote, "Look, I know

you're not going to like it, but I'm gay, this is me. I know you don't approve of the lifestyle, but at least respect the decision that I made to act upon it." Trevor's father did not take it well. He refused to accept the gay portion of Trevor's experience and would not discuss anything to do with homosexuality. His other family members took the news fairly well.

Trevor and his former same-sex fiancé were together for six months. They had met while they were both in the military and stationed in Connecticut. He describes his military experience as, "torture." He explains, "This was still back when Don't Ask, Don't Tell was still around. I was actually discharged under Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

He tells the story of the experience saying,

Back in 2006 I was 20 years old. I enlisted, I joined the Navy, went through boot camp, went to school. There was one night I was hanging out with my roommate. I wasn't very social; I didn't know how to be friends very much. I only had my roommate; he was pretty much the only person I knew, along with a couple other classmates. We went out, I went drinking and I just could not walk straight. I did not want to uphold that stereotypical, drunken Navy sailor stereotype. So, I put my arm around this guy's shoulder. The next day he told legal, he's like, 'I think the guy's gay, he was hitting on me all night...

The next day Trevor was told he was being kicked out of the Navy and was sent to a "processing unit" for four months. He describes the processing unit;

It's basically a holding unit. A unit where there are other personnel [others being charged with various military crimes or violations] you join. Usually they are on some sort of legal hold. They are in the process of getting transferred out, they are on security hold; something along those lines. I was, at first, on legal hold, and then I was getting processed out.

He had been meeting with his '*JAG Officer/Attorney*' who was putting together a defense for him, but Trevor admittedly gave up after realizing the futility of the fight. After being discharged from the Navy he chose to stay in Connecticut to work. He met a large number of friends who served as a support network for him. His family was not

aware of the reasons for his discharge from the military. However, his mother and sister have become a bit more tolerant. His father remains silent and they have not spoken in a several months.

Trevor identifies as pansexual depending on the circumstances. Outside of a few close friends, he does not feel that here in Colorado there is much support for him through those who are similar to him. Trevor does receive quite a bit of support from social support in the campus GLBT resource office. However, those who are pansexual do not seem to have connections he feels are a good fit for him. He explains,

For a long time I identified as gay and then I started looking at the different people that I was attracted to, I'm like, 'Maybe I'm more pan.' I know several pan individuals and I just don't know if there's a community, per se.

Trevor defines pansexual as,

There's a broad range of genders, gender relationships and gender identities. I tend to go more for the masculine, but I don't want to restrict...I can see myself as pansexual, pansexual because I do find myself attracted to people who fall off the binary, just tend to be more on the masculine side; That's where pansexual comes in for me.

He describes omni-sexual as those who, "...it doesn't matter who, you just like the person." Bisexuality is defined by Trevor as, "...[those who] tend to just limit themselves to the polarization, gender polarizations."

Marriage rights, as they are perceived by Trevor, can be described positively and negatively. He describes the positive by stating,

When I can actually have the government recognize a union, just the recognition. Knowing that in the eyes of the law I'm seen as the same...I'm not. To actually have a commitment ceremony that is actually going to be legal. As opposed to, 'Oh, it's just a commitment ceremony; you're not really married.

The negative aspect he sees from marriage equality is an increase in the divorce rate. He refers to the increase in the total number of divorces straight and gay; however, the percentage in comparison is a statistic yet to be seen.

In terms of employment rights, Trevor feels being able to express oneself in the workplace as gay, bi, pan, or trans, etc. without fear of losing your job is a good thing. He is aware the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) did not pass the Senate and has been refused for nearly 20 years. However, in reference to Colorado, he states, “Colorado does have an Equal Employment Non-Discrimination Act. In the sense of housing, employment, pretty much anything...”

Trevor shared that he had been denied employment because he identified as gay in Tennessee. He describes the time when he was living in a shelter there, “I remember putting out application after application; having interview after interview...the employers knew the address and like, ‘we don’t hire people from this address.’ Yet he discovered that they had hired someone else from that same shelter which led him to believe it was based on his homosexual identity.

He describes his other identities as, “...biologically/cisgender male, white, educated, and fully able-bodied.” He recognizes that these are all positions of privilege. Aside from his identity as pansexual, for which he reminds me, “I was discharged from the military for that, I’ve been denied employment because of it.” He describes the situation where, “I felt uncomfortable and just very anxious because I was around a bunch of people; I wasn’t sure how they were going to take my sexual orientation. You’re always on your guard.”

Trevor has only recently become more comfortable coming out to people in his classes and on campus. He shares, “This is the first semester I think I actually came out in all of my classes; I inadvertently came out by saying, ‘Oh, this is where I work [GLBT Resource Office],’ and I just outed myself...” He feels being honest and coming out leaves one less thing for people to hold against him.

At the time of our interview, Trevor was *couch surfing* at several friends’ houses because he could not afford a place of his own. He is working to have his discharge from the military upgraded to honorable but the legal costs are proving difficult. If he can get that upgrade, then he will be able to use military benefits for school costs. He is focusing on school at the moment and shares, “It was like everything else I just needed to let go. I need to find that balance again.”

Trevor brought an article for his artifact. The article was from October 2014 and was published in the Denver Post entitled, ‘Colorado Supreme Court Suthers Clear Way for Same-Sex Licenses’ (Steffen & Paul, 2014, October 7). This article’s headline alone created a moment of joy for Trevor. He shares his reaction,

I was practically jumping out of my skin. It was the only thing that was keeping me together. I was like, ‘Yes, we finally have it,’ and it’s just awesome. It’s just more physical proof that we actually have validation that we are an actual couple and we can have actual marriages and relationships that are seen as equal.

The article will have a long-term impact on him. He explains, “I eventually do want to be able to get married, raise a family, and now with this article, I can actually see that dream realized.” Trevor found it interesting that the opposition pointed out that, “Eight years ago, Colorado voters approved a ban, and they point out the county clerks who were issuing same-sex marriage licenses in Utah were told to stop, the Court of

Appeals in the Utah case, overturned that.” He is curious about the percentage of people who shared the opposing view.

Trevor found this study to be a good opportunity to reflect on his past experiences. He shares,

I think I’ve learned more about myself than anything else. Rehashing some of these old memories and just things that have happened to me and the events that have transpired since then, I’m like, ‘Oh, that’s where a lot of these things get traced back to and here’s how these events affected me now.’ It’s just interesting doing a lot of the reflection. It was just very insightful.

He hopes to help others who identify as pansexual or omni-sexual stating, “I know some people who identify as either pan or omni. They do have these hang-ups as far as actually being seen as a legitimate couple or even just a legitimate sexuality, sexual orientation.” Trevor hopes to bring more visibility to being pan or omni-sexual. He explains, “We do have GSAs here on campus, we have the GLBT Resource Center. There’s only so much that they do and they’re usually just centralized like, ‘Oh, just come to us if you have any questions,’ as opposed to doing more of the outreach...” He is looking to create more, “...engaging discussion on campus.”

### **Yasmin**

*“I’m not against marriage. I just don’t believe that you have to be married to love someone...But a positive for me, would probably be that you get all those rights as a partner.”*

I had known Yasmin through my connection with the GLBT Resource Center but only through a brief meeting several months prior to this interview. Yasmin shares her family background and support systems. She explains, “I was raised in a really Catholic family.” She explains how she had an uncle come out as gay, “My mom was totally fine with it but my grandma kind of flipped shit. I didn’t want to come out when I initially

knew I liked women.” This was during her high school experience. However, she came out to her mom and received support. She did not feel that coming out to anyone else was necessary after coming out to her mom.

Yasmin eventually came out to the rest of her family including her grandmother. She says, “Of course she, she wasn’t surprisingly as angry as I thought she would be. But it’s one of those things where like we don’t talk about it.” She explains that her grandmother tends to let everyone know the news in the family, so, “...within like a month everybody in my family knew and most of them just were like yeah we don’t care as long as you’re happy.”

Her grandmother made her conservative Catholic beliefs known to Yasmin by telling her, ‘I love you but what you’re doing is wrong.’ Although, that has changed a bit since Yasmin has been out for some time now. Yasmin identifies as a non-practicing Catholic and enjoys studying theology to understand many spiritual beliefs. She tries to incorporate something from each of them. Support systems for Yasmin are family, mostly her sister. Although, she does mention that she has a large community of friends in the GLBT community.

Yasmin shares opinions about marriage equality saying, “I’m not against marriage. I just don’t believe that you have to be married to love someone...But a positive for me, would probably be that you get all those rights as a partner.” Her concern is like some others in this study, she is concerned that with the right to marry and its excitement comes the potential for a rise in the divorce rate. She however does not see marriage for her as, “Up there in my top decisions right now...”

Given her perspective of marriage for herself, she did share an understanding of the importance of the rights provided by marriage equality. She states,

...if my girlfriend were to be in the hospital or something and her parents hate me just because of their [being] strict Catholic. To not have rights to be with her just because of her parents' poor opinion of me. That would kill me. So, I think the rights themselves are very important. The ceremony...not that important.

Yasmin explains her experiences concerning employment rights saying, "...never really had any problems as far as employment rights." She points out, "...Most people think I'm straight." She feels that if you are a good employee your partner should not be part of the conversation. But if it is, she has only had positive experiences. The fact that GLBT people can be fired in many states for being themselves she says,

It just makes me sad. It doesn't make me insecure...I also think on the positive side of that. Why would I want to be somewhere that would fire me for being who I am? So I just move along...

Yasmin has an understanding of power and oppression. However, she feels that, "...oppression is only oppression if you let it affect you that way. Like, because somebody will tell me, 'You can't marry this person because you're gay.' I think oppression is only oppression when you give up. If you keep fighting for it then it's just a struggle." She does not feel that she has ever been oppressed.

Yasmin provides a tweet from television celebrity Raven Simone as her artifact. The tweet was from August 2, 2013 and reads, "I can finally get married! Yay Government! So proud of you... (Simone, 2013, August 2)." Yasmin has always been a fan of Ms. Simone and knows that she identifies as gay. In many ways she has been a role model for her.

Yasmin expresses her feelings about the tweet saying,

It made me feel really proud of her like because there were all these rumors that she was gay and stuff so the fact that she came out this way she has like a life partner. Like all of this together made me view gay marriage differently because I feel when it comes to gay marriage or like employment rights and stuff I feel like everybody has a struggle and that it's not just the LGBT community.

Yasmin chose a YouTube video for her second artifact. The video is of President Obama explaining how his view on same-sex marriage had changed from no support to support, 'President Obama – Gay Marriage: Gay Couples 'Should Be Able to Get Married' (ABC News, 2012). She chose this video because,

...I think that's how it works a lot you don't think about many things until they are affecting you personally. I think that's why I chose this video in particular because like everybody changes...everybody's going to change eventually. And I think that this shows that things are going to change for the better.

The experience of participating in this study provided her with an opportunity to take some of the political and social issues surrounding marriage and employment rights into conversation with her family. In conversation with her father concerning President Obama and his change in support for marriage equality she shared that her conservative father said to her, '...I believe that Obama is right on this...' That comment allowed for a good conversation between her father and her that surprised her.

Yasmin does not feel that she can have an impact on her community on or off campus. However, she does see the need for outreach. She shares, "I don't want to say it would be difficult. It would just be interesting just because they're such a diverse amount of people on campus." She is more comfortable joining in on a community event that has been planned and she understands her role as a catalyst for change.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provide a summary of the participant data collected from 12 GLBT students from Western State College. I give some insight into the unique narrative of each student covering descriptions of the students' backgrounds. Much of the data provides information about each student's families, their coming out experiences, and the support systems assisting them along their journey. All of the students in this study were out their families in varying degrees. Their friends and campus social structures play important roles of support as well. A majority of the students actively participate in the campus GLBT resource office's programs or offerings. Those who do not, are aware and willing refer students they feel will benefit from the GLBT resource office's services.

Each student provided information centered on social justice tenets such as power and oppression. These students show an interesting connection between their sexual identity and their familiarity or use of social justice language. I will detail this more in the next chapter to provide more depth. Interestingly, this chapter shows that the students experienced identity intersectionality not in reference to racial or ethnic identity. However, the more common intersections were found between sexual identity and religious doctrine. The most prevalent intersection being the oppressive actions taken by the Mormon Church against the GLBT community; the other religious intersections were less from the Churches and more from the doctrine dictated by the students' families.

Themes of resilience and advocacy are prominent in all the students' experiences. Whether the students planned to take action themselves or provide support through advocacy organizations, all the students see the importance of GLBT equality. This theme as well as some areas needing further research will be detailed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THEMES**

In the previous chapter I shared the narratives of student participants' experiences as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals within the context of marriage and employment rights. The purpose of pursuing these narratives lies in this study's central research question which is, "how do gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) college students experience their sexual identity development in the context of current positive and negative rhetoric surrounding GLBT marriage, and employments rights issues?" In addition, the supporting research questions explore areas of identity, positive and negative rhetoric, as well as power and oppression. The culmination of these questions resulted in the unique and powerful stories of GLBT students on an urban, mid-size university in the western United States.

In this chapter, I share an overview of each major theme and related subthemes. Next, I revisit the sexual identity models used as a framework for analysis in this study to prepare for later discussion of influences sexual identity has for GLBT student support. Finally, I summarize participant findings from each sexual identity category (GLBT) included in this study. This includes details of participants' intimate relationships, support systems, as well as religious or other identities illuminating the connections to sexual identity development (Stevens, 2004, p. 187).

There were six main themes and five subthemes emerging from the narrative data in this study. The themes and subthemes of the student participant stories are best described in terms of influences on the student experience. These influences describe connections between participants, their relationships, and/or reactions to outside rhetoric. The main themes in this study are: 1) the influence of political and religious rhetoric, 2) the influence of rhetoric as it relates to stage of development, 3) the influence of social justice and the GLBT student experience, 4) identity intersectionality as it relates to GLBT marriage and employment rights, 5) the nature of the bisexual and other non-binary identities, 6) and the complexity of the transgender identity. Participants shared various artifacts with me during the artifact elicitation showcasing the many mediums which rhetoric can be expressed. Through video, music and lyrics, symbols, and media participants shared their experiences with and opinions of rhetoric in the context of GLBT equality.

In the first theme, influence of political and religious rhetoric center on participants' emotional reaction and their frustration as a result of rhetoric. Further, participants described a kind of resilience as a result of rhetoric. Finally, participants shared their reactions of rhetoric's influence including creating change in their communities and on campus, as well as advocacy and resiliency.

The second theme explored the influence of rhetoric as it relates to the participants' stage of sexual identity development. As I began to analyze each student's narrative data through the lens of sexual identity development theory, I found relationships between their stage of development and the level of complexity in their experiences. Subthemes relating to this serve as an example of the relationship of

rhetoric, and sexual identity development as they relate to intimate relationships, as well as work experience and the reality of oppression. I show how the connection of work experience, discrimination, and the complexity of sexual identity emerge. This will be discussed using examples of salient work and relationship experiences of some participants as well as those who lack those experiences.

For the third theme the influence of social justice knowledge and the GLBT student experience. I provide depth to the complexity of student sexual identity stage and reactions to rhetoric. As I worked with participants and their data, I found those who had knowledge and ability to articulate concepts of social justice such as power and oppression were navigating their sexual identity in more complex ways. Those participants who found their identities to be more complex than GLBT labels shared their insights into the importance of non-binary identities.

Fourth, identity intersectionality as it relates to GLBT equality explores how religious identity became a major theme of experience for student participants. For the most part, students experienced rhetoric from religious family members, which challenged their identity development and support systems. However, there were some students from the Mormon religion who experienced a great deal of challenge from both family and the Church itself.

The final themes detail additional findings relating to the complex nature of bisexual, non-binary, and the complexity of transgender identities. The issues related to gender, gender expression, emotional/physical intimacy, and the labels associated with various combinations of all of these concepts will be outlined. Discussing these themes

and findings will provide a foundation for discussion in chapter six of implications for professional practice and future research.

Whether focusing on rhetoric, social justice, or identity intersectionality, most participants expressed a desire to contribute to the advocacy for GLBT equality. Other participants presented a more passive approach and/or opinion of the pursuit of these rights. Since these results were somewhat varied, I address each identity within the acronym G.L.B.T. separately within each theme. This approach better showcases the complexity of the GLBT identities represented in the study. However, there are some items that stand out for bisexual, non-binary, and transgender identities, which I address individually near the conclusion of this chapter.

### **Sexual Identity Models**

Three sexual identity development models/theories were used as lenses in the crystallization analysis process for this study. In order to discuss students' experiences and the importance of stage development, it is important to revisit them from chapter two. The complexities associated with developmental stage and the students' reactions to political/religious rhetoric are important in understanding how higher education can support these student populations.

#### **Fassinger's Inclusive Model of Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation**

Fassinger's Inclusive Model of Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation, as discussed in chapter two, was developed in an effort to better include concepts indicative of culture, demographics, and identity formation as it relates the individual and groups (Fassinger & Miller, 1997; Fassinger, 1998). Previous models and theories such as Cass, and

D'Augelli only discuss sexual identity development from the individual and, as was the case with many earlier developmental theories, from a singular race or gender perspective. This model has four individual stages, which are detailed for both the individual perspective and that of the group membership identity, as shown in Table 1 (Fassinger & Miller, 1997; Fassinger, 1998). The four stages are: 1) awareness, 2) exploration, 3) deepening/commitment, and 4) internalization/synthesis. The Fassinger and Miller (1997) stages may not be experienced in the same way or at the same pace as an individual in comparison to that of the student as a community member.

### **Lev's Theory of Transgender Emergence**

As is detailed in Chapter 2, Lev's Theory of Transgender Emergence (Table 2) consists of six stages or states of emergence (Lev 2004). Those states are: 1) Awareness: Realizing difference based on a gender-variant identity; 2) Seeking Information/Reaching Out: Looking for resources and education to assist in the discovery of gender-variant identity; 3) Disclosure to Significant Others: Coming out to family, partners, friends, and others in the individual's support network; 4) Exploration: Identity and self-labeling: Gender expression options explored dependent on gender-variant identity; 5) Exploration: Transition issues/possible body modification; and 6) Integration: Acceptance and post-transition issues (Lev, 2004). Lev (2004) details the complexity of the transgender identity in the six states of emergence by explaining two different Exploration stages or states.

Transgender individuals, as Eric and Paul exemplify, have very unique thoughts and approaches to their sexual identity. Lev's (2004) stages four and five each detail the differences between gender expression and body modification. Both Eric and Paul

expressed thoughts about body modification and were exploring more of their identity through gender expression in this study. However, body modification was not something they were feeling was necessary for them.

### **Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor's Bisexual Identity Development Theory**

The Bisexual Identity Development Theory is used in the analysis of non-binary identities in this study such as pan-sexuality, demi-sexuality, omni-sexuality, pan-romantic, and hetero-flexibility. I provide definitions of these identities in Table 3. There were no participants identifying as bisexual in this study, however, several participants used the bisexual identity as a temporary label as they began to explore their sexual identity further.

In chapter two, I shared the four-stage model of development pertaining to bisexual identity development. Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor (1994) describe the first stage as the initial confusion experienced by someone beginning to consider their bisexual identity. Stage two is defined by the actions of seeking and applying a label for sexual attraction and identity. This stage can be where individuals who are more comfortable with non-binary identities will seek more information and clarity.

Stage three of the bisexual identity model is where an individual begins to settle into their identity as a bisexual. This comfort can sometimes make interpersonal relationship and intimacy easier to consider an option. Many of the participants in this study share their frustration with being forced to adhere to one particular label. However, they do make choices and move forward accordingly as you will note later in this chapter.

Stage four is titled, Continued Uncertainty, which I feel, best describes the inclusion of non-binary identities with that of the bisexual identity. Again, the issues are different when using a world constructed on the basis of a gender binary compared to that without the binary. I will share more of this idea later in this chapter as it pertains to the participants of this study.

### **Narrative Theme Summary**

#### **Gay Men**

There were four men identifying as gay who participated in this study. All of the men had come out relatively early in their college experience, or in the case of one of the men. Jon entered the military prior to college, and had come out prior to entering college as a non-traditional age student. All four men expressed thoughts, feelings, and actions indicative of Fassinger's (1998) Phase 4: Internalization/Synthesis for both their Individual Sexual Identity as well as their Group Membership Identity.

All four men exemplified a level of self-awareness important to understanding the complexity of being gay as a person, but also as part of a community. An ability to articulate privilege in contrast to oppressed identity comes from a comfort with both the individual and group synthesis obtained from experiences leading up to Phase 4 of this model. If Bryce, Jacob, Jon, or Pierre had been at an earlier stage of development, there would have been noticeable changes in their experiences. For example, GLBT individuals who have yet to come out to friends, family, and community still struggle with identifying labels defining their experiences. Some also struggle with guilt associated with their inner perception of lying to those around them or how their perceived identity conflicts with religious or spiritual beliefs.

Bryce, Jacob, and Jon were in relationships. One was single and one had recently been legally married to his husband. All but Jacob had the support of their family in terms of their sexual orientation, relationship, and life goals. However, all of the men experienced some level of conflict, challenge, and difficulty involving family members or religious affiliation.

### **Lesbian Women**

Three participants, Mo, Yasmin, and Josephine identified as lesbian women. Yasmin and Mo were in relationships, and Mo was legally married in a heterosexual marriage while dating other women. Only Josephine was single at the time of this study. Yasmin and Josephine came out early in their college experience sharing thoughts and experiences indicative of Fassinger's (1998) Phase 4: Internalization/Synthesis from the Inclusive Model of Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation. Their experiences after coming out have allowed self-exploration as well as developing social identities allowing for comfortable membership in communities as lesbian women. Mo, had only come out fairly recently. She was still married to her husband, dating other women and identified as a mother of two. Mo shared thoughts and experiences exemplifying her connection to Fassinger's (1998) Phase 3: Deepening/Commitment on Fassinger's (1998) model which reflect her experiences of self-reflection as her identity as a lesbian woman in a heterosexually structured marriage evolve.

Mo and Yasmin women faced challenges from their families' religious affiliations. Josephine had experienced a home life led by parents with passions stemming from Social Justice and Feminist foundations. All three women found a great

deal of support from their nuclear family members and continue to work through challenges from extended family as they present themselves.

### **Bisexual and Non-Binary Individuals**

Bisexuality has long been seen by the GLBT community, as well the heterosexual community as an in between identity. Many of the participants in this study mentioned saying they were bisexual as a way of easing into the questions and confusion they were experiencing within themselves. Often, bisexuality is seen as an identity where promiscuity, and inability to commit to a relationship are key factors. However, bisexuality's existence is based on the socially constructed gender binary. If we have to choose between one gender or another, then for those who are physically/romantically/emotionally attracted to both male and female genders are truly bisexual.

The participants in this study articulate this is not the case. In fact, no one identified as bisexual. Even though the bisexual identity served as a middle ground for participants like Bryce, Jacob, Yasmin, and Todd, they eventually moved to discover their more complex sexual identities. Bryce and Jacob both came to discover they were only truly attracted to men both sexually and emotionally. Bisexuality was a safe identity for Bryce and Jacob to explore their shifting identity as being bisexuality recognizes neither male nor female genders as a singular sexual orientation. Both men shared in their interviews their reflection on never actually feeling attraction toward women at any point in their lives. Bisexuality merely provided a safe middle ground for them to explore the questions they had had concerning their sexual orientation.

Yasmin had a similar experience to Bryce and Jacob. She expressed never truly being physically attracted to men, but felt safe identifying with the label bisexual while she explored and reflected on what fit best for her. Todd, who identified as hetero-flexible explained how he felt that being bound by bisexuality's duality was limiting. He recognized the multiple areas in between male and female, creating this gray area for him. That gray area is where the non-binary identities, defined in Table 3, become clearer.

Participants validate the idea that sexuality consists of more than just behavior, attraction, emotion, gender, and expression. All of these components make up the complexity of non-binary sexual identities shared in this study. Three participants identified with identities near bisexuality or non-binary identities. Todd, Trevor, and Ko. Todd, identified as hetero-flexible, an identity where he identified as male, was sexually attracted to women, but also did not feel a sexually intimate relationship with a man was out of the question. During the period of this study, Todd entered into a same-sex relationship with another man. He began to explore other non-binary sexual identities closely related to bisexuality such as pan-sexuality and omni-sexuality. This exploration was part of his reasoning for not identifying as bisexual. Todd did not feel he should have to choose male or female. He did not want to be limited or remove opportunity for meeting someone he could connect with physically and emotionally.

Trevor, identified as pansexual however, he frequently used the label gay in referring to himself. Trevor recognized that a relationship with a woman was possible for him, but had not felt drawn to a relationship of that type for some time. He recently met a man, but was hesitant to recognize the acquaintance as a formal intimate relationship.

Both Todd and Trevor expressed thoughts and experiences indicative of the Settling Into An Identity and Continued Uncertainty phases of the Bisexual Identity Development Model (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor, 1994 as in Lev, 2004). Each of them was exploring new aspects of their identity in one-way or other. Both struggle with relationships and the identities they define for them.

The third participant identifying as a non-binary identity, Ko, was female. However, her preferred terms/labels were pan-romantic, demi-sexual. She described these terms/labels (See Table 3) as open to romantic/close emotionally based relationships with individuals who fall anywhere along the gender expression and sexual identity spectrums. However, sexual intimacy could only occur in the instance a strong emotional connection was made. This participant expressed thoughts and experiences indicative of the beginning phases of Initial Confusion/Finding and Applying the Label on The Bisexual Identity Development Model (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor, 1994 as in Lev, 2004).

Todd, Trevor, and Ko had come out to their families and friends. Each of them faced challenges from religiously conservative families. Trevor had experienced a significant challenge in his employment due to his sexual orientation. Each of them expressed strong support from their friends and relied only secondarily on their families for additional support.

### **Transgender Individuals**

Two participants, Eric and Paul, identified as female to male transgender individuals who did not wish to undergo gender reassignment surgery. Both of them were in relationships with men during the course of this study. The impact of their

relationships also involves sexual orientation. They move from what society deems straight relationships to gay. These conversations with their significant others are difficult but they are finding support as they talk with their partners. Eric experienced a fairly supportive coming out with his family; however, he had not felt he had reached a state of comfort yet with either parent. He felt his support network among friends on campus was high.

Paul had come out to only a select few of his family, and was still working through the process of telling others. Neither Eric nor Paul expressed strong family religious affiliation. Both of them expressed thoughts and feeling indicative of State 4: Exploration: Identity and Self-Labeling of Lev's (2004) States of Transgender Emergence. They expressed challenges of incorrect pronouns, gender expression, campus faculty, and campus facilities relating to gender norms.

Both Eric and Paul discussed the challenges of gender reassignment surgery. They mention the difficulty with hormone treatment and the side effects. The surgery is very painful and both Eric and Paul expressed fear over that aspect of it. However, the greater concern for both of them was their desire to have the choice to have children one day.

As physiological women, the surgery would involve what Paul referred to as, "Top and Bottom Surgery." Top surgery is referring to a breast reduce surgery where mammary glands and breast tissue are removed. The purpose is to have the appearance of pectoral muscles of the male gender. Bottom surgery is where the female genitalia are transformed into male genitalia. The surgery is extremely complicated and painful.

The surgical transformation from female to male will make having children impossible. Both Eric and Paul did not want to limit themselves at this point of their lives. They both hope to have options for children. It is important to note here that no one identifying as male to female transgender participated in this study. Therefore, I cannot say the data speaks for those individuals as well.

### **Influence of Political and Religious Rhetoric**

Political and religious rhetoric represented in the artifact elicitation exercise highlighted themes of change, advocacy, and resilience as reactions to participant frustration. Frustration was the most common emotion resulting from the political and religious rhetoric experienced by participants. When the rhetoric was political in nature, it was hard for participants to understand why discrimination was still a factor in the legislative debate. As for religious rhetoric, the experiences of frustration stemmed from being limited by doctrine to the Mormon Church functioning as a ruling force with which to be reckoned.

All participants expressed an interest in creating change either through leading discourse, supporting organizations, or being part of efforts to support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals. However, this expression of interest to create change or advocacy seemed to reflect the degree to which the participants were influenced by rhetoric. If the experience was not tangible for them through a personal experience, then participant reactions seemed to mirror their reality. Participant's GLBT identity made the importance of GLBT equality clear, yet the distance from the affects lessened the urgency.

### **Frustration as a Result Rhetoric**

Bryce expressed frustration with the near constant political and legislative debate of marriage and employment rights. He shared, “No more appealing this or doing that...Just be done. It’s just silly to be an issue in perspective to other things that we should be focusing our attentions on.” He defined his feelings by saying, “I feel like we are regressing to the 1960s with the racial laws you know? It’s really silly that this is even an issue right now.”

Jon’s experience was rather in-depth and personal. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he came out in the military shortly after Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was repealed and recently got married to his husband. Jon also left the Mormon Church due their treatment of the GLBT community. However, in reference to how people treat the GLBT community, Jon said, “I think awareness is the biggest thing. I believe most people are inherently good, so when you educate them, they’re going to do the right thing.”

Trevor, experienced being criminalized for being gay in the military, feeling completely defeated, and having to pick himself up, he worked to obtain housing outside of a shelter and go to college. However, his discharge is still considered a scar on his public record and follows him causing him to miss out on employment opportunities. He is still struggling to get affordable legal council in order to have his discharge changed to a general or honorable status. Trevor hopes to help others navigate these and many more challenges as a resource using his experience as an example. He explained, “I will just be more mindful of myself and try to at least pass on the insights about the things I’ve been through and try to incorporate that somehow into helping other people out.”

As he reflected on the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell Trevor said,

Don't Ask Don't Tell [the repeal], that was great, but it didn't really impact me as much for other reasons. I can't get back in [the military]. It's not like I can safely go back into the military and say, 'Yes, I can take advantage of this.' But with same-sex marriage, that's definitely going to have a bigger impact on me and on a whole bunch of other people...

Trevor identified as pansexual, but also used the term gay to describe himself.

The GLBT equality struggle and the rhetoric surrounding it are real to him even though he does not plan to be married for some time. After being kicked out of the military under Don't Ask Don't Tell and struggling to maintain his ability to support himself, he has focused primarily on school. During the period of this study, he met someone and began to think about marriage equality more than before. In response to more positive rhetoric, Trevor shared,

I can see a long-term effect. I eventually do want to be able to get married, raise a family, and now I can actually see that dream realized. It was just very profound I guess. Oh my God, this is actually real and I actually go ahead and go through with this and actually have my relationship being recognized and valid.

Mo recognized that the Church attempted to welcome the GLBT community but said, "They tried to be all inclusive and stuff and failed miserably." Recent actions by the Church exemplify hypocrisy to Mo in many ways. She explained,

They have the articles of faith for Mormons, basically what we believe. The 11<sup>th</sup> article of faith says we claim the privilege to worship almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience and allow all men the same privilege. Let them worship how, where, or what they may. Then they go back on it. They just don't, there's no allowing other people to be who they are and it makes me angry.

She referred to recent actions by Church elders excommunicating anyone who speaks out or supports GLBT equality as, "a purge."

Mo expressed her frustration with the Church's recent actions saying, "It frustrated me. I was very upset and I was very ashamed of being my religion that I grew up with. I mean I don't seem to be Mormon anymore, but it's still my family." She explained the relationship of her frustration and her GLBT identity by saying,

I was pretty ashamed of it [being Mormon], if nothing, it pretty much cemented my ideals that LGBT people should be allowed to get married and that they have no right to tell me what I can and cannot do.

Those participants who identify as transgender for this study were both female to male, but did not wish to seek sex reassignment surgery. While similar, each of them felt the influence of GLBT equality differently. There were expressions of frustration, but also feelings of hope.

Eric identified as biracial, female to male transgender, and was comfortable on campus expressing a male identity. However, negative rhetoric creates frustration and sadness for him. He specifically reacted to employment discrimination saying,

I'll be graduating in a year and a half and that's what I would be walking into. My father and I talked about when I might have to go in and hide part of it [being transgender] if I want to succeed somewhere. Unless I'm working at someplace like the Center [campus GLBT resource office], unless it's something like that then sure I can be out as much as I want with it. But, if it is somewhere else, like a professional business or corporation that is not really accepting. I might have to go over there and kind of hide that part of myself if I want to work...It just kind of depressed me. It's sad. Because, I think it's when they had arguments about say gay marriage and they're like, 'oh they're going to show the kids and it's difficult for them [children].' It's ridiculous all these fear tactics that are really all for nothing. It's just so stupid. We're not going to go like march over and try to convert all your children. We are just people...

Paul also identified as female to male transgender and does not wish to seek gender reassignment surgery. His gender expression was male, but he also did not work to be seen as male or female specifically. However, he recognized the complexity created within the GLBT community by saying,

I occupy a really strange space for both. The trans experience is a very broad experience, and for the most part, those who refuse to learn about it just say, 'Let's just get it [all aspects of transgender identities] all together, because we have to talk about all different sort of people just to include all of the people that identify as trans.' Because its so broad.

Paul described the reaction of people concerning the complexity of trans experiences saying,

We have so many different things that most people don't want to take the time to learn and figure out what sort of language is necessary to be all-inclusive for my community, because it is so broad. It is a weird community to be part of, but never boring.

The impact of this complexity and the rhetoric surrounding GLBT equality plays out a bit differently for Paul. He sees transgender people being included in the struggle for equality but actually being left out due to misunderstanding of the trans population's needs. He said,

There are those who think they'll not give them [trans people] any extra rights, because it will prevent marriage rights, it will prevent employment rights, but the fact of the matter is, my marriage and employment rights are the exact same as a gay man or a lesbian, or a bi person. Because I just like to have an identity that goes against the norm, and I have a sex and a sexuality that goes against the norm. So, it's mostly just a need for inclusive language, in my opinion that is absolutely necessary.

Paul is tired of the trans community being included in the acronym but excluded from final legislation.

Like Eric, Paul struggles with the lack of gender-neutral bathroom options. He describes these struggles saying,

I know that just in terms of general quality of life, things like gender-neutral bathrooms...we have a few of them on campus, but in my own day-to-day life, I don't go near those areas where they are, so I have to use the women's room and that kills me inside a little bit. Every time I have to do that, because I have to actively deny my identity. I have to actively deny who I am every single time I have to pee. Sometimes, yes, there are times when I need to use the women's restroom, because I have a woman issue that I need to deal with, because I do

have they type of form. But, if it's just for me to go and take a piss, I hate having to lie to everyone, including myself about what I am.

It must be said here that having two transgender participants created some salient points affecting the transgender student community, but there is need of more focused study on the transgender population.

### **Resilience as Result of Rhetoric**

Some participants described experiences of GLBT inequality as an important issue, but not a personal one. While some see their experience through a well-evolved social justice lens, the experience is less tangible for them. However, the resilience and recognition of the importance of GLBT equality is clear as the data here show. Despite feelings of frustration ignited by political and religious rhetoric and a lack of personal connection to the civil rights issues, participants described wanting to contribute to education, change and advocacy.

Pierre was already an involved student on campus leading student groups in discussions and service trips focusing on the GLBT community. His passion for change was moving from debate of right and wrong to discourse about solutions. Pierre expressed a desire to move conversations with conservatives past the dualities of right and wrong to constructive conversations detailing solutions to GLBT equality issues.

Rhetoric pushed Pierre forward to change injustices. He stated,

I definitely feel empowered to step in when I see a social injustice such as marriage inequalities, and rights within LGBT youth for employment. I have more of a voice now, I feel like a I have a stronger identity to be able to step in and facilitate that conversation.

Jacob was a bit more passive than the other men in the study. He was unhappy in school and was planning to transfer while also working to get a definitive diagnosis for a

severe sleep disorder that was hampering his studies. As we discussed his perceptions of the influence of rhetoric surrounding gay marriage and employment rights, Jacob expressed the importance of equal rights by saying, “It’s always been a strong factor and something that even before I came out to myself seemed like an obvious set of equal rights.” However, when asked how he could create change, he stated, “If I were to work towards it then I think that it’s not about what I can do but what I can do to assist others and what I can do to assist other organizations...”

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Josephine had been brought up in a family where discussion of equality, feminism, and social justice were common. However, her own identity proved more challenging for her to work through. Even though she had always been around positive discussion of the GLBT community, Josephine had never actually considered her own sexuality until the latter part of high school and early college. She then began to consider the possibility of a bisexual identity; her lesbian identity took time to explore.

Josephine felt others were judging her identity and sexuality around her. It was not until she could own her identity as a lesbian, and as a woman that she could truly feel comfortable coming out. She shared,

I’ve been thinking about that [her sexuality/coming out] a lot more since then just in terms of feeling like that’s a source of strength to be able to say...straight out that my sexuality isn’t the thing for somebody else to dissect. It’s for me to dissect.

She relates this to marriage equality stating,

It’s my thing to look through and figure out what it means in certain situations...and how I identify, and who I identify with, and what I want from my life, and what I want in marriage equality, and what I want from employment protections to use that in something where I get to say, ‘It’s not your issue to look through.

Josephine's frustration stems from feeling as if she is being told how her identity should emerge for her and others. She owns her identity and is resilient in maintaining control over its emergence as part of the fight for GLBT equality.

Todd, who identified as hetero-flexible when we first met for this study, is a Women and Gender Studies Interdisciplinary major. His studies provide him an opportunity to explore issues of equity and equality inclusive of those relating to the GLBT community, including his own identity. He described this in his own words saying,

...pro equality is kind of the notion that we're all equal, which we're not. I need more help than some people with my ADHD so it's not equal. Whereas, pro equity is more of the equal chance - if someone needs a little extra help, they get it. If you don't, then you're good.

Todd's journey during this study involved a great deal of identity change. When we first met he was identifying as hetero-flexible and was only dating women. However, due to the passing of a few months between the first and second interviews, he had started dating a man. His identifying terms were changing and he expressed he was exploring the labels pansexual, omni-sexual, and demi-sexual.

During the first interview, and still somewhat as part of the second interview, Todd felt like an outsider to the GLBT community. He identified as an ally but from an outside perspective. As he began exploring the changes he was experiencing, he noted,

...It's hard for me to find people that are super close to my identity, because even kind of trying to adopt the gender queer aspects, like searching for that [gender queer label] it's usually female assigned at birth gender queer, not male assigned at birth [gender queer], which I know that sounds kind of counter intuitive when you're not part of the queer community. Because, they're against those types of labels, but at the same time it is still quite a different experience.

Despite his evolving identity, Todd's resilience emerged as self-determination to not allow a singular label to dictate how he perceives himself. He also sought to understand his identities and their place within the GLBT community before haphazardly trying to advocate. Todd's evolution from the perceived outsider status, often tied to being a GLBT ally, to being more comfortable with a non-binary related identity was another sign of his resilience to reflect and grow through frustration.

Ko, who identified as pan-romantic demi-sexual, is still in the beginning stages of her sexual identity development, as was discussed earlier in this section. She is still working through what labels (or the lack thereof) exist for her. Marriage and employment equality are not issues that impact her or her life as of yet. However, she does recognize the importance of GLBT equality for the community and potentially her future.

The rhetoric surrounding GLBT equality has made Ko recognize a need to be more assertive about what she thinks and how she feels. She said, "I'll be more aggressive about my opinions and aggressive about how I feel, just because I'm always so passive." She admitted that until her participation in this study there was an almost denial of potential discrimination based on GLBT status concerning marriage and/or employment. Ko shared,

I think about it more, like now, I'm like, 'Oh, that is something in my life.' Again, with the denial, I'm always like, 'this is not real. I'm going to get hired, it's fine,' but sometimes you have to face the reality and be like, sometimes things don't work out because this is the problem.

Yasmin was friendly, laidback, and often seemed aloof. However, apathy is not a word I would use to describe her perspective of GLBT equality. She was more passive and as she referred to herself, "quirky." Yasmin did not feel she was discriminated

against and she did not feel strongly about marriage for herself. She did however feel equality was important for the GLBT community.

Yasmin clearly explained to me that she does not believe in marriage. She said, “I guess I don’t believe in getting married. I mean maybe one day if there’s a person that I love I might want to get married to them.” However, regarding GLBT marriage equality in general, Yasmin said,

I feel like there are bigger issues...Not to say that ours [GLBT community] don’t count, but I don’t know studying in the field I am studying in I’ve seen some pretty nasty stuff and I think that we need to help starving people and stop hurting people before we focus on just a simple thing like marriage.

As she hears both positive and negative rhetoric around GLBT equality she expresses feelings of hope. Hope for the future where, “We will be able to get married and will be able to have equal stuff like everybody else and then we can move on to the bigger things.” Like some other participants, Yasmin is adamant that there is a “bigger picture.” She says, “There are wars going on, there are innocent children dying and I don’t think that this should be at the forefront of everybody’s beliefs.”

### **Reactions of Rhetoric’s Influence: Creating Change and Advocacy**

The rhetoric presented by political and religious groups created frustration as a common emotional reaction for participants in this study. Rather than stifle participants’ development, their frustration became fuel for growth, evolution, and resilience. As part of this subtheme of participant reactions to rhetoric’s influence, the data show the emergence of participants to create change and advocate for GLBT equality. Each participant expressed both active and passive methods for implementing change or advocacy.

**Creating change.** Jon was already leading discussions in his military role to educate others, but he also said he would like to develop a conference or a workshop to bring people's awareness to the issue of GLBT equality. During the artifact elicitation, he referenced the song '*Same Love*' by Macklemore pointing out he believes there is truth in the lyric, "...no law is going to change us, we have to change us." Jon hoped to bring change on campus in the way he would through his work in the military by leading discussions and discourse. His lived experiences lend themselves to his passion for equality.

Mo, a former Mormon like Jon, has a unique perspective on the GLBT community and her place in it. She showed how they are related to the influence rhetoric has had on her. Her Mormon background, being a mother of two young boys, and exploring her lesbian identity while still being married to her husband, all played a role in how she perceived religious and political rhetoric. She and her husband left the Mormon Church because they disagreed with the stance the church had taken against the GLBT community and women.

The cementing of her opinions brought a sense of positivity to her journey. This positivity has influenced her in the sense that she hoped to help others in the GLBT community who do not have the same positive experiences. She said,

My focus has been to help those, especially the transgender. There's a lot of bad stuff around the transgender stuff. That whole issue...that there's a lot of negativity...My goal is to try to help people understand it and learn more about it so that I can explain it to other people...

However, the influence of negative rhetoric from the Mormon Church brought about some very strong feelings for Mo. She explained her perceptions of the Church's behavior as,

...It's not very Christ-like behavior. I have a lot of opinions about it. I just don't feel like they're leading the Church. I think we're consistently behind the times and I don't think they're behaving the way that Christ would expect them to. For a group of people who are suppose to be so close to God, they sure don't act like it.

This also leads her to fear for her family. Mo worries that her actions leaving the Church will impact her family who still are part of the Mormon Church. She explained,

It makes me concerned for my family. I left the Church because I chose to. I made the conscious decision that I am gay and I'm not going to live by their rules. I removed myself from the situation. I don't think my family should be forced out because of my decisions, it should be their decision if they want to leave.

As a further result of this influence, Mo felt strongly that GLBT equality, specifically marriage, should be available to those who want it regardless of her own situation. She explained,

I don't know if I'm ever going to have the opportunity to get married just with my situation and everything. I think it's absolutely more important that other people have an option if they want it. If nothing else is proven that it's more important than ever to make sure that we get this. We're in, it's 2014 [at the time of her interviews], we should not be having this argument anymore, and this should not be a discussion. The fact that it is, makes it that much more important that we get this done and taken care of.

As a rather well known blogger and online discussion moderator, Mo was active in advocating for change in relation to GLBT people and the Mormon Church. She continued to stand up for what she felt was right. When we talked about creating change on campus, she shared, "I'd like to get more involved in the activities and stuff that they have and just be more prominent and out there. Just be more visible I guess." Mo hoped to bring the positive results for change she supports online to the campus GLBT community. She shared that she has received positive feedback from people online who she supports as they navigate support for GLBT equality and the Mormon faith. Mo also hoped to provide that support for other students on campus.

Negative rhetoric impacted Eric as he hoped to create a caring space to show other transgender students there is safety in exploring your identity. He shared, “I guess I just want to spread the message of love...sharing my experience and making other students feel more comfortable.” He was writing a fiction novel that addressed the issues faced by those of GLBT identities and hoped to show that being transgender or any part of the GLBT community is okay. Eric described what he hoped the novel to accomplish as, “...I would hope, especially nowadays, we’re using a wider audience [social media communication reach] and things [GLBT identities] are being more accepted. Maybe it gets an audience and then, through it, expressing my views.”

Eric faced some difficult challenges concerning bathroom spaces on campus. There are very few gender neutral options and he feels he has to out himself by having to choose a bathroom that does not match his gender expression. This frustration and lack of campus action impacts him daily. He hopes to create change and said, “I think the one thing I could do is maybe work to get more gender-neutral bathrooms on campus.”

However, Eric was a bit fearful of stepping out too much, as he does not wish to bring any sort of backlash on his family. He expressed this fear saying, “I fear the negative attention it would bring on me and my family...Part of me wants to make it on my own first before I really start to do that. I don’t want to endanger them.”

Despite support from family, he was hesitant to do too much more than continue to focus on his own understanding of himself. Eric struggled on campus outside of the gender-neutral bathrooms issue. He was challenged and frustrated by faculty seeming to refuse to use his desired pronouns when referring to him as well as working to understand the complexity of intimate relationships as a transgender individual.

Paul also hoped to overcome negative rhetoric about transgender people by getting his story out through participating in this study. He shared,

...I feel like this is a story that needs to be said, and I don't want there to be another little girl out there that thinks, 'Oh, I'm a freak,' like I did for years, and years...until I was 21 years old. That had numerous damaging effects on me to think that for all that time I was somehow a freak.

As for the influence of rhetoric for Todd, he described how he volunteered for the recent No On 67 Campaign, which was Colorado state constitutional amendment that would outlaw all forms of birth control. It would also make in-vitro fertilization illegal, directly affecting the GLBT community making it impossible to have children via surrogate, etc. His initial perceived outsider status and his more closely identifying as a GLBT ally led him to fight for this type of issue. He explained, "I did help the 'No On 67 Campaign' get on campus. So, I was also assisting allies and that could be useful for the GLBT community as well...and the fact that that type of legislation would affect the GLBT community." He described why this amendment would affect the GLBT community saying, "It also potentially would have outlawed in-vitro fertilization, and so if they wanted to have their own child, or use a surrogate type of situation, it would limit that."

Todd wanted to create resources for GLBT students that increase access to higher education. He shared an idea,

I really want to put together a resource fair for local high school GSAs (Gay Straight Alliances) or GLBT students...where we have stuff from campus as far as like first year success stuff to break down the barriers to go to college, as well as bringing in organizations in the community to come and talk about how they're supportive of the community whether they are GLBT specific or not.

He hoped to take this idea to the campus administration explaining,

...that could potentially be access to better funding from like the President's Office on our campus, because we could also argue that it's recruitment and retention. In the end, it's breaking down barriers, which also could address some class issues as far as access to higher education, showing we are a GLBT friendly campus.

The influence of rhetoric for Ko had become a desire to help others speak out.

She said,

...I just want to provide more voice for people, because even then, young kids are like all the time, 'I don't feel validated, I feel alone in this world.' I think that leads to a lot of self-destructive behavior. People who are suicidal or people who don't understand what's happening [to themselves].

Since Ko felt these things throughout high school and understood more about herself now in college, she hoped to help others.

**Advocacy.** As a reaction to rhetoric, Bryce shared that he values his civic responsibility to vote as an important action and key to creating change. He went to campus authorities to speak out with other students against preachers who came to campus making him and other GLBT students feel unsafe. These preachers not only came to proselytize they came to point out students who did not fit their idea of what was moral. Students were mocked for what they wore, public displays of affection, and for being perceived as GLBT. However, Bryce was clear about what he felt he can do saying, "I'm not super political I guess so that's why I feel like I'm not going to make change." He shared that he would support change and advocate but not by leading efforts.

The pansexual portion of the GLBT community comes with its own rhetoric concerning marriage. Since bisexuality and similarly pan-sexuality exist in a limbo space between binary based and non-binary based sexual identities, Trevor said it could be difficult to find acceptance. He explained,

I know some people who identify as either pan or omni, they do have these hang-ups as far as actually being seen as a legitimate couple or even just a legitimate sexuality, or sexual orientation. That might create a lot of hang-ups with them as far as actually pursuing a relationship. Let alone, getting married or feeling like they fit in at work because they might have a straight [heteronormative] relationship. So, they might feel like straights, but they're not completely...they don't identify as straight.

Trevor hoped to use his role as a student leader and student volunteer in the GLBT resource office as a way to create a dialogue. He hoped for more visibility for pansexual individuals and relationships. He shared, "I think just more visibility, a little bit more education, particularly in the classroom." Trevor also thought this visibility should be focused on outreach rather than just providing a space for resources.

Jacob felt that it was the job of staff and administration to provide opportunities to discuss GLBT equality. However, he did say he had an interest in helping those who have little or no voice on campus. He explained, "The one thing that I would try to change is with the GLBTQ student services office and trying to reach out to people who maybe don't have the voice for themselves yet." Jacob felt that the GLBT student voice on campus is silenced. He had noticed that flyers for speakers or events with a GLBT theme are always torn down needing to be replaced frequently. He felt there is, "...resistance from people as far as getting the word out and keeping it out. When you can't even keep a poster up then people can't see it."

Josephine discussed the many ways rhetoric influenced her as, "...it's like moving through the fog, you know there's so much out there but you can only deal with what is immediately in front of you." She felt the fog is from the immense number of changes happening today in terms of GLBT equality as almost overwhelming. When talking about advocacy and her role, she explained,

It's going to be through that kind of melding of the top down of the grassroots and I want to make sure that whatever change I'm creating is really focused on all the needs of the community and all the needs of the people that...are the most impacted.

Josephine was involved in the GLBT campus resource center; she wanted to provide more opportunities for discourse to take place. She explained this saying,

...Marriage equality is one of those issues that there's so much misunderstanding on either side of it...but, I feel like it's pretty skewed towards misunderstandings or just the sense of entitlement on the other side that's never been challenged like the wanting to protect traditional marriage from something...

Josephine saw discussion happening in classes about social justice and sometimes around campus but felt,

...I don't have a whole lot of conversations that delve deeper on campus because that's not my thing but it has come up more than once and I think continuing to do that can be a way to create change...

Josephine saw a goal for this discourse being the ability for more people to have,

...a dialogue because the more that you just have an actual dialogue the easier it is to create some sense of empathy and easier to look a little deeper into your ideas and at least get to that point where you can say, 'I think that within my religion it's wrong, but in terms of the law, I can let it slip against it.

The influence of rhetoric for Yasmin centered on increasing conversations and discourse about GLBT equality and she felt that many people just walk by the GLBT student services office, but don't come in. She explained, "...You always see people like

walk by...I don't understand it because we actually display what we offer." In reference to doing more Yasmin said,

...Advocating for LGBT rights in the community, I would love to be a part of that if there was something organized for it. I don't know what I would organize personally. I just think that the word needs to be spread a bit more especially on a campus this size and this diverse.

Rhetoric's influence created frustration resulting in reactions of resilience and a desire to create change and advocacy. However, this influence was tempered by each participant's stage of sexual identity development. Each participant's experience was and is shaped by their stage of development as it directly relates to the way in which they experience intimate relationships, work, and the world around them.

### **Influence of Rhetoric as it Relates to Stage of Development**

All of the participants in this study were out to friends and most of their nuclear family. The stages of development across all identities show an exploration of sexual identity and labels as they relate to the individual's journey. It is important to recognize that individuals still struggling with their GLBT identity and not functioning in their day-to-day life as an out member of the GLBT community would mostly likely struggle to articulate the impact of political and religious rhetoric more than the participants in this study. However, since there were no participants identifying as in the closet, it is difficult to tell their story here.

There were three influences consistently present as themes in this study relating to the impact of rhetoric and GLBT marriage and employment equality. Intimate relationships, work experience, and support systems each present themselves as important influences in the participants' lives and seemed to directly relate to the way in which rhetoric impacted them.

## **Intimate Relationships**

Nine of the twelve participants were in relationships at the time of their participation. However, only one of them was already legally married to their same-sex partner. The others mentioned that marriage was not something they were thinking about at the time they were interviewed. This lack of desire to get married did not inhibit them from seeing the importance of GLBT marriage equality. Each participant in one way or other discussed the importance the rights associated with marriage as related to the GLBT community.

Bryce, who mentioned his boyfriend as a major support for him, discussed that he and his partner had not discussed marriage saying, "...It's not a big deal. We haven't thought about it." In reference to the importance of GLBT marriage equality he was adamant in stating, "...It's a right for everyone...It should be a right for everyone...Just it's the right thing to do.... it's just important."

Jacob was clear with me that marriage was not a priority for him. However, he did state that marriage was important. He said, "...it would be more important for people who are in similar situations than me to have their identity validated with this [marriage] as an actual thing and this deserves to be equal."

Jon was the participant who had recently married his partner and was experiencing issues at work in the military. Interestingly, his family is supportive, but for reasons I had not thought of before. He shared that his family in many ways felt his relationship was now validated by society. He shared,

...if we never got married they would think we weren't serious or maybe they would have...because they don't know very much...they would think maybe we have an open relationship or we don't have the intent of having kids...

Mo who is currently still in a legal heterosexual marriage said, “I think we’re making progress as separate states. I think it just needs a little bit more work and I think everybody should have a right to [get married].” She also hopes to marry again in the future with the right woman and feels a bit more freedom to pursue that under current federal law.

I found it interesting that Jon and Yasmin mentioned the heteronormative nature of marriage in their interviews. Jon, who is legally in a same-sex marriage, mentioned how his family recognizes his marriage as valid because it fits their heteronormative view of marriage. Yasmin, who was only dating at the time of the interviews, mentioned the idea of marriage as just a ceremony. Jon expressed,

...I think it’s really helped to normalize LGBT individuals, which is a good thing and a bad thing I guess. It’s like you’re pushing for the patriarchy and these oppressive systems by entering in a marriage but at the same time it’s...My husband and I, we wanted to get married for us and not for any other reason.

Jon described how marriage allows heterosexual society to put GLBT people “in a box’ and deem GLBT relationships as okay by societal norms. He said, “I feel like that’s a bad thing. It allows straight people to put us into their heteronormative boxes...”

Yasmin did not use the same language but shared, “I’m not against marriage. I just don’t believe that you have to be married to love someone...” Her perspective comes from a place of disagreement with the ceremony and ritual of marriage. She does not believe in marriage or the ceremony. Yasmin said, “...A positive for me, would probably be that you get all those rights as a partner.” She recognizes the importance of the rights and benefits marriage provides. The rights she referred to are among approximately 1200 specific legal rights and benefits. They include hospital visitation, power of attorney, and

many more. However, Yasmin was not planning on getting married, as it seemed like a pointless ceremony to her.

### **Work Experience and the Reality of Oppression**

Only five of the participants in this study, Bryce, Jon, Pierre, Josephine, and Todd had work experience outside of campus and/or student employment positions. This led to a majority of the students understanding the importance of GLBT employment rights, but not much in the manner of direct experience. The topic of employment was not real for those students who had only worked on campus. It had not touched them or their lived experience because campus employment for most campuses is based on the federal work study program with limited hours and minimal pay based on financial need. The hiring process for these campus positions does not present the same challenges as many full-time, off-campus positions may present. Those who had experience outside of campus employment had, for the most part, experienced some level of discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender.

The most prevalent of these employment experiences were with the two participants who were in the military. Each of them had different experiences involving Don't Ask Don't Tell. Trevor was the young man who identified as pansexual and still experienced challenges of employment discrimination. He was discharged from the military under the Don't Ask Don't Tell legislation prior to its repeal and continued to have that mark on his record affect his job search experience.

Trevor expressed in his interviews the importance of being able to work somewhere he could be himself. We discussed the disappointment of a lack of federal legislation and the mild comfort of existing state legislation. However, in another state,

Trevor was denied employment because he identified as part of the GLBT community.

He said,

...I was in Tennessee for a little bit...they don't have any kind of non-discrimination laws in place. I remember putting out application after application; having interview after interview...at one point, I was in a shelter and the employers knew the address and said, 'we just don't hire people from this address.

He knew of several people who had been hired from the same shelter and he made the connection that his not being hired was due to his GLBT identity.

Jon's experience with Don't Ask Don't Tell was a bit different in that he decided to wait until the law was repealed before he came out. After the law was repealed, he came out and got married shortly thereafter. The challenges while different for Jon are still difficult. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he experienced attempts at silencing his use of the word husband in relation to his partner among many other experiences needing the support of the military's human resource professionals.

His experiences allowed him to make connections to the larger community. He shared,

I think employment rights are super important because they allow us to get to a meritocracy and allow people to be valued not based on who they know or if they're fitting into dominant systems or the dominant classes...

Jon was worried about the spiteful nature that is created by issues such as employment rights. He explained,

I think one of the negative things and something I've seen is, it makes people spiteful. People don't want to be controlled at all. I know especially the people, who I know who own small businesses, who are conservatives; they don't want to be told by the government that they can't fire somebody on this basis...

The students who had not had much work experience, especially work which takes place outside of a campus environment, were clear about the importance of

employment rights. However, since finding their career or being employed full-time was perceived as a future goal, there was little in their journey that made the possibility of employment discrimination real to them. Therefore, they consider themselves advocates for GLBT employment rights and there was recognition of the need to learn more about them.

### **Influence of Social Justice and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Experience**

Knowledge and use of language pertaining to social justice such as the words, power and oppression, seemed to be key components of self-awareness and healthy sexual identity development. The participants in this study were nearly all at the latter stages sexual identity development given their particular identity. As part of those more advanced stages of development comes the understanding of the self as part of the community. Understanding community and a place in it also involves interpretation of power structures. This also can lead to some understanding of the oppression existing in one's community. There were those participants who understood the words power and oppression at a very basic level and those who expanded on those terms with an extensive knowledge base of issues inclusive of topics like the gender binary, feminist theory, and patriarchy (Butler, 1993; Rozas & Miller, 2009).

My research questions, 'When presented with the words: power and oppression in relationship to straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, male, female, gender roles, and sexuality are GLBT students aware of the emotions and/or reactions present in themselves or others? How is this recognition (or lack thereof) creating change in the students' journeys through their sexual identity development?' had the purpose of delving into the

student participants' experiences with social justice issues surrounding the GLBT community?

I began to see in the data a spectrum of social justice awareness with participants. On one side of the spectrum, there were those students who would define power and oppression in terms of authority figures like supervisors or government officials ordering people around. These students had not experienced discrimination or oppression were those who used the words power and oppression in more authoritarian means. Since the lived experiences of these students had not involved situations where they were forced to experience oppression, the recognition of power structures remains merely a hypothetical to them (Johnson, 2006).

Conversely, participants who had experienced oppression or were majoring in programs like Women and Gender Studies, International Studies, or interdisciplinary programs, explored issues of social oppression with regularity and intention. The students, who seemed more adept at recognizing social justice issues in the world around them, seemed to draw from their own experiences. Those experiences were either lived by they themselves or through their family upbringing.

Bryce expressed a great deal of confidence in his responses, and saw power as an authoritative structure. He also shared that he did not feel he had ever been oppressed due to his GLBT identity. He shared his opinions of power and oppression like this,

Power is a very strong word. I associate it with very high-level people, successful people. Oppression is the people that sit back don't say anything you know the quiet ones in the corner. The sheep that just kind of go along.

He described himself saying,

I've always considered myself super successful. And powerful...I do what I want regardless of who tells me not to do it...There's always going to be people that tell you, 'You can't do that!,' but in my mind it's, 'Yes I can.'

Sharing a similar view of power and oppression, Yasmin described power saying,

When I hear the word power I think of it negatively rather than positively. Because when you most commonly hear the word power you think of like people in charge and the people that are higher up...greedy and selfish kind of people...especially like in businesses like the people in charge.

She described oppression as many would by sharing, "...I would say oppression is like you're getting your rights denied..." However, she expressed, "I think oppression is only oppression if you let it affect you that way."

Josephine and Todd represent examples of the other end of the spectrum. Both were enrolled in interdisciplinary majors based in Women and Gender Studies with specific focus placed on social justice around gender and sexuality. However, Josephine and Todd have different experiences informing their sexual identity journeys.

Josephine was raised in a family, which valued liberal political opinions, and social justice conversations were the norm at the dinner table. She shared with me,

My mom is a feminist. I don't know if it's a generational thing or not...we either have these really long, rumbling discussion about science or really long, rumbling discussions about social justice.

Those discussions seem to have provided her with the tools and resources to work through her own sexual identity. She said,

I no longer believe in the gender binary. It just is ridiculous. I have believed in it for years. That makes it harder to define sexuality. There's this range of gender identity and expression where you've got masculine over here and feminine over here. That's not a conversation that I have to have with everybody. I can set the boundary of as far as you're concerned, this is who I am.

Todd, unlike Josephine, had a less open family environment concerning discussions of social justice. However, this did not limit him from exploring his identity early on. He felt his mother, the primary caretaker, sent the message that he would be accepted no matter his identity. The rest of his family was rather conservative and he explains feeling oppressed in family gatherings as he felt that if he expressed his interests in social justice and gender identities, he would be bullied.

These feelings in family situations and moments where others bullied him served as education for other situations for him. He explained,

I don't want anybody to be there. That's why I use my, at the very least pseudo, Cisgender, white male, heterosexual, like façade, to use that power to bring people up to my level.

Todd described the recognition of his privilege by saying,

If it's done properly...if I use it in a wrong way then some people might just see it as me using white power or white privilege for my own benefit, but it's not, because I do have to take advantage of certain aspects just to try and change policies or to get a hold of the right people. I don't back down. I'll fight until there's no answers left.

While knowledge and use of social justice language and ideas seemed to play a part in deeper understanding of self, I do not feel that its absence is worrisome. The knowledge of social justice seemed to provide a vocabulary for exploration that other participants have yet to gain. It is more about the personal exposure to oppression and/or social justice concepts as part of the GLBT identity that seems to deepen ones understanding of power, oppression, and social justice overall. I think that as those participants who are still evolving through their sexual identity development, their experiences with power and oppression will also evolve.

### **Identity Intersectionality as it Relates to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Marriage and Employment Rights**

As I began thinking about this study's design and the potential findings, I expected there to be more intersection of GLBT identity and racial identity as they pertain to GLBT equality through marriage and employment rights. However, I found that racial identity intersected less with the participants GLBT identity in this particular group of students. I had students who identified as bi-racial (black/white, Asian/black, Hispanic/white) as well as those who closely identified with other cultural identities (Basque). The intersection most prominent in this study's themes was that of religious background. The religions with the most extreme influence were Mormonism, Catholic and conservative Christian (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

Mo and Jon left the Mormon Church as a result of their coming out as GLBT. While their experiences differ, the conflicting intersections of their religious affiliation and GLBT identity are still challenging. Jon, who was not initially accepted by his family, has now married his partner/husband. While the Church still does not accept the GLBT identity, his legal marriage to his husband seems to provide some social structure of acceptance for his family. This is both positive and negative. He appreciates being accepted/tolerated by his family. However, the negative aspect is the requirement of having a heteronormative marriage.

At first, Jon's family insisted he continue to attend church. He described this saying, "My dad was just telling me to just keep going to church and pray it away and all that kind of stuff." After several years of this he reached a breaking point with his family's reaction. He described his decision to leave the church saying,

I essentially told them, I don't want to. That's not for me and I was actually leaving the LDS church for other reasons at that time as well so I just decided to come out all at once. I was done. The conversations at first were a very patronizing tone. My dad acted like I didn't understand myself or this was still just a really long phase maybe.

Mo's experience, as detailed in the previous chapter, involved her being married in a heterosexual marriage and exploring her GLBT identity while still in that relationship. She describes her Mormon life saying, "Okay, so I got married at 28. I was Mormon, so I thought I was just this really good Mormon girl; I got married."

Mo's family was rather supportive although there are some who no longer speak to her now that she identifies as Lesbian and is no longer part of the Church. It is her connections to Pro-GLBT Mormon bloggers and social media writers, which are rather challenging for her. As she sees her friends and fellow moderators being excommunicated from the Church she described her anger saying,

...There's no allowing other people to be who they are and it makes me angry...It's blown up just in the last couple of weeks because they [The Mormon Church Elders] are doing a purge basically.

She worried her family would be held responsible for supporting her coming out and leaving the Church. She described this worry saying,

Most of my worry is because they are, a good lot of them, are LDS, and I don't...I'm very vocal about it, because I don't feel that they [her family] should be penalized for thinking that I'm a grown up and I can make my own decisions.

Mo said that she feels the Church is telling her, 'you're just not welcome here.'

In her role as a social media page moderator, Mo recently received a comment from someone she knew in the Church. She quotes, "Yeah, the gays are never going to be accepted and women are never going to get the priesthood and you just need to get over it." She describes her reaction to this saying, "They preach inclusiveness and they

preach that everybody is welcome...then, when it comes right down to it, they're not and the general membership isn't."

Mo's experience outside the church but supporting pro-GLBT support pages on social media for other Mormons provides her a direct link to what is being covered in the media concerning pro-GLBT excommunications. She shares her fear and concerns stating,

It makes me concerned for my family. I left the church because I chose to. I made the conscious decision that I am gay and I'm not going to live by their rules. I removed myself from the situation. I don't think that my family should be forced out because of my decisions; it should be their decision if they want to leave.

Those participants from the Catholic and Southern Baptist traditions did not express that their churches were taking action against them or their families. They shared stories of mostly family members choosing to disassociate themselves from the participants due to their Church doctrines. Jacob said his family's Catholic Church was, "...a church that had a lot of anti-homosexuality, anti-Islam, anti-separation of church and state, and even sometimes racist remarks and beliefs." However, when he came out to his mom, the Church was not the deciding factor in how the family reacted. His mom was the one, who based on the doctrine of the Church stated, "You know you're going to hell, right?"

Ko explained her family's religious background as Christian. When she asked her grandmother if she would attend her wedding if her partner were of the same sex, her grandmother said, "No...You can love the sinner. Not the sin." This reaction was based in their Church doctrine, but it was not a message sent by or acted on by their Church. This differs a great deal from the experience of Mo and Jon in the Mormon Church, as

was mentioned previously. It is interesting for me to see the active role the Mormon Church is taking in ridding itself of those who are GLBT or those who support them.

### **Nature of the Bisexual and other Non-Binary Identities**

I found in the search for participants in this study that the identifier or label of bisexual is less common than I had expected. Participants identified as pansexual, demi-sexual, heteroflexible, and panromantic, which are, in contrast to bisexuality, gender non-binary sexual identities as defined earlier (Table 3). Bisexuality as a label was used by three of the participants as a temporary label but then was abandoned for gay, lesbian or transgender labels. There were those participants who used a series of these labels to define themselves but also were clear to remind me that they should not have to choose any particular one. Their sexuality was based on context of the individual they were with at the time. The non-binary participants define context as things such as: emotional connection, and non-binary gender/gender expression (Callis, 2014; Galupo, Mitchell, Gryniewicz, & Davis, 2014; Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Mitchell, Davis & Galupo, 2014).

Bisexual as a label did not seem to fit the complex needs of participants to define them and as they each parceled out the various components of attraction the complexity seemed to grow for them as well. Whether they described a need for emotional or physical attraction, or even the lack of need for physical presence at all, many participants of the non-binary sexual identities felt they should always have the choice in the moment of what label or labels best define them.

As I spoke with Todd in his first interview, he was hesitant to commit to the study, as he did not feel he was part of the GLBT community in any way other than as an

ally. He described his heteroflexibility as being, "...attracted to both sexes, but I'm emotionally more attracted to females." He told me why he felt comfortable keeping heteroflexible as a label saying,

I try and keep the heteroflexible title because I don't know what tomorrow will bring and don't want to close doors, but it's not...I don't feel it's open enough to actually claim a bi status...I don't have enough equal attraction that I feel I could go with a bi status.

Several months passed between his first and second interviews with me. It was interesting to see the drastic changes and evolution of his sexuality in that time. He had moved on from some connections he had with the Kink community where he was exploring issues of dominance and submissive sexual behaviors. He had also recently entered into a same-sex dating relationship with another man. He now defines his identity as more demi-sexual than heteroflexible saying, "It makes me think more of like demi-sexual sexual identity, where you're attracted more to someone based on who they are versus their body." He described some confusion saying, "...I can look at all the different aspects of like the romantic side, the sexual side as pieces and I'm kind of okay with each piece, but for some reason it throws me off trying to put them together."

Trevor was interesting for me to learn more about as he used the label pansexual, but would often refer to himself with the label gay. He described this transition to me saying, "...it's also something new to me. For a long time, I identified as gay and then I started looking at different people that I was attracted to, I'm like, 'Maybe I'm more pan.'" He defined pansexual for me explaining,

Pansexuality for me is...Well, there's a broad range of genders, gender relationship, and gender identities. I tend to go more for the masculine, but I don't want to restrict this...I do find myself attracted to people who fall off of the binary, just tend to more on the masculine side; that's where pansexual comes in for me.

Ko, who identified as panromantic demi-sexual, was at an earlier of her sexual identity development in relation to the Bisexual Identity Development Theory. She admittedly felt her sexual identity had been sporadic since coming out as bisexual in eighth grade. She describes her identity primarily as, “I was gay bisexual...although I was always female leading...” This identity evolved into demi-sexual and she explains this as, “...there’s a spectrum, and on the spectrum there’s a thing called demi-sexual, which means that you can be sexually attracted to someone, but only after you get really close to them.”

All three of these participants defining their individual non-binary identities expressed some form of disdain for having to choose a label for society as a whole or individuals to understand them. However, they all understand that the majority of society is more or less ruled by the concept of male or female as they define the gender binary. Since none of these students identified fully as bisexual many of the stigmas associated with bisexuality could not be explored. These stigmas are not as prevalent with the non-binary identities as issues of monogamy, sexual promiscuity, and others become less central to the individual identity discussion once the gender binary is removed from consideration. This could be due to the fluid nature of thought these students have about sexuality, gender, relationships, and identity labels.

### **Complexity of the Transgender Identity**

I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Paul and Eric in this study. Being transgender involves a great deal of courage, strength, and intelligence to make a great deal of hefty decisions concerning their physical, emotional, and psychological lives. Even before our interviews I felt hesitant about truly serving the transgender

community in this study. Paul and Eric have similar experiences as they are experiencing many of the same developmental and educational challenges. They are both female to male transgender individuals with no current desire to move forward with gender reassignment. However this similarity only makes it more clear the vast portion of the transgender population that I did not have a chance to explore and understand.

The complexity of being transgender transcends physiology, psychology, sexual orientation, and gender expression. Given this, having two male to female transgender individuals participate in this study is not nearly enough to be able to speak to other transgender experiences. However, that is not to diminish the individual experiences of Paul or Eric.

Both Paul and Eric expressed a desire to maintain the ability to have children as their primary reason for not seeking reassignment surgery. Secondly to that was the extreme nature of the procedures. Eric mentioned, “Because there are so many things biologically I want to do and I’m kind of holding off of it as well because I am dating someone right now...I wanted to talk with him more about it.”

Paul mentioned similar concerns about a permanent biological change saying,

There’s also this whole idea of every trans person automatically wants a sex change. We have been raised in a society thinking that the moment you come out as trans, you almost immediately want to start shooting up hormones and you want to go under the knife as soon as possible. When in reality for me personally, I don’t feel like I need to. I might get top surgery after I have kids. For me, these [pointing to breasts] are necessary for feeding babies, nothing more.

Paul wanted to be clear with me that he wants to have the option of children in the future, and the notion that transgender people all want to have gender reassignment surgery is false.

Eric discussed the complexity of the transgender identity and that being a marginalizing issue within the GLBT community. He said, “It’s like we’re along for the ride...that lavender, big ole happy family...like, that went out the window [referring to being part of the GLBT Movement].” Paul also felt that the GLBT community as a whole forgets the complexity of the transgender identity. He specifically cited the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell Legislation. He talks about the positive action of the repeal did not actually include the transgender identity. Paul said, “There’s still a ban on openly transgender soldiers in the military. You cannot be a soldier and openly transgendered. You will have a dishonorable discharge.”

This study reveals some of complexities as they pertain to two transgender individuals. However, the complexities of physiological gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation interact in ways that do not go away when simply legislating rights through a sexual orientation lens based on behavior and the gender binary. Issues of rights and benefits as they pertain to gay men and lesbian women cannot be put into the category as those of the transgender population. A significant amount of self-reflection, and self-awareness are necessary for the transgender individual to move through their journey.

Transgender individuals must consider their sexual orientation as well as their physical bodies, gender expression, issues of having children, and how their sexual orientation changes along with their physical bodies. For those who come out as transgender later in life, this could involve a great deal of stress concerning their families and much more. These processes of personal growth require a great deal of support from

strong support systems. Both Paul and Eric are lucky to have those necessary components in their lives. Not all transgender individuals have these supports.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter details main themes and subthemes of influence rhetoric and identity development as well as important findings within non-binary and transgender identities. I discuss the influence of both political and religious rhetoric and the resulting frustration they create for GLBT students. However, this chapter details the reactions of these students being subthemes of creating change and advocacy for equality.

In the discussion of rhetoric's influence, I provide findings showing the students resilience of resisting oppression. Several of the themes presented show students wanting to expand discussion of GLBT equality to populations who have other not found their voice in the community. While other students are taking on oppressors in overt ways hoping to educate and support those in need as they do.

Also, discussed in this chapter is the relationship students' stage of sexual identity development seemed to have on their reactions to rhetoric. In this study I found that participants in later stages of sexual identity development were more likely to understand the need for GLBT equality on a personal level. Those students a bit earlier in their stage of sexual identity development were more likely to not deny the importance but not see a personal connection to GLBT equality's importance in their lives as of yet.

I also discuss the findings concerning non-binary sexual identities and the complexity they bring to the GLBT population. I provide definitions of these identities in an effort to better explain how more than sexual behavior, gender, and gender expression play a role in defining sexual identity. Students identifying as non-binary sexual

identities, were working through defining issues of emotional attraction as it relates to physical attraction, or the lack thereof. The students also considered relationships outside of an intimate context, yet the close companionship as additional labels for themselves as they evolve their identities.

Finally, in this chapter, I share the positives and negatives of the findings involving two female to male transgender individuals. The positives were a greater understanding of needing to change campus support systems for their best success. The negatives were the large number of additional transgender identities not a part of this study that did not have a voice here. In chapter six, I will detail more of the need to expand research pertaining to these student experiences.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

Through this study I have explored the journey of sexual identity development for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) students as they experience political and religious rhetoric surrounding GLBT equality. When I first proposed this study in January of 2014, there were only 16 states supporting GLBT marriage equality. Since that time, more than a year has passed and there have been vast changes in the fight for GLBT rights. There are now 21 more states supporting GLBT marriage equality for a total of 37 (ProCon.Org, 2015; HRC.Org, 2015).

In October 2014, the Supreme Court denied five states' appeal hearings of same sex marriage bans. This forced lower federal circuit courts to recognize same sex marriage in 11 states at one time. This was the largest number of states to recognize same sex marriage in one ruling thus 2014 was a year of progress in terms of GLBT marriage equality.

At the federal government level, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) has yet to be brought to a vote by the United States Senate. As I write this, there are only 18 states with laws specifically protecting GLBT people from discrimination in employment situations (HRC.ORG, 2015; WhiteHouse.gov, 2015). However, with a cadre of legislative changes comes an increase in the rhetoric from both political and religious voices.

As of March 2015, HRC.Org (2015) reported the introduction of “85 anti-GLBT bills in 28 state legislatures.” However, 34 of those bills in nine states have been defeated or have failed (HRC.Org, 2015). The most widely discussed of the bills to be passed has been that of the state of Indiana. The governor of Indiana, Mike Pence, signed the Religious Freedom Bill into law in a private ceremony surrounded by anti-GLBT organization representatives. Shortly thereafter, media coverage and the subsequent backlash of national corporations were tremendous. Corporations such as: Apple, Yelp, and Angie’s List made public statements denouncing the legislative measure calling it bad for business. Many of these companies and other state/city leaders (Connecticut, San Francisco, and Seattle) have refused to do business with Indiana due to the discriminatory Religious Freedom Bill.

While 2014 was filled with GLBT equality progress, 2015 has proven to be challenging due to an increase in politicization of social policy. Social conservatives have begun to rally their base constituents in preparation for the 2016 Presidential Campaigns. This means more overt rhetoric of anti-GLBT platforms becoming leading headlines.

In terms of religious rhetoric, the Catholic Church has made statements supporting GLBT people in the past but in early 2015 shifted back to an anti-GLBT stance. The message from the Catholic Church in recent reports presents an unclear picture of where GLBT people are considered within Catholic doctrine and tradition. The Mormon Church was represented in this study as a harsh anti-GLBT organization. As the narratives of both Mo and Jon depicted, the Mormon Elders have not welcomed GLBT people or the validation of the GLBT community. Recently, The Washington Post

reported (2015) that Utah passed a GLBT non-discrimination bill protecting GLBT people from employment and housing discrimination. However, the bill also shields religious institutions from being forced to serve or recognize GLBT equality (Bever, 2015).

As an openly gay, student affairs professional I have had the opportunity to work with GLBT students in many ways including assisting in their professional development as they experience their academic journey. I have a unique perspective as a career development professional seeing the challenges of GLBT students beginning to understand their career path after college. The inequality expressed through the day-to-day negative rhetoric can equate to frustration and sadness as was indicated by participants in this study.

The frustration these students expressed resulted from issues relating to political legislation, religious discrimination, and even campus gender bias. While my experiences as a professional are different than that of the students in this study, I can certainly empathize with their frustration. I feel this empathy provides me an opportunity to support them in creating change.

I have been fortunate in a higher education career to find a place that is more often than not - supportive of me, and my desire to bring my experiences as a GLBT professional to the mainstream. It is the influence of political and religious rhetoric outside of higher education that has driven my passion for understanding how to better serve students. I have come to recognize students experience rhetoric differently depending on their identity development as they navigate their college experience. This

study serves as a way of exploring the GLBT student experience during a pivotal point in the fight for GLBT equality.

This study explored the experiences of twelve GLBT students at varying stages in their sexual identity development depicting the influence of rhetoric as part of their experiences. Each student's knowledge of social justice as it relates to their stories was also explored adding depth to their experiences. Unexpectedly, information surrounding non-binary sexual identities became a common point of reflection. Participant data from Josephine, among others, showcased the rejection of the gender binary. Josephine made the statement, "I no longer believe in the gender binary. It just is ridiculous. I have believed it for years. That makes it harder to define sexuality."

Todd, Ko, and Trevor shared their stories as non-binary identifying individuals, which challenge the labels placed on sexual identity. Paul and Eric as transgender men also expressed frustration with having to fit into a particular category for others to understand their experiences. However, the categories associated with non-binary and transgender individuals (pansexual, demi-sexual, and female to male) all challenge the societal norm that is the gender binary. The binary forces individuals to choose. This choice of labels is where frustration was evident and the manner in which gender, sexuality, gender expression, and behavior all interrelate is expressed throughout the stories of participants.

The research questions for this study center on the main question which was, "How do GLBT college students move through their sexual identity development while experiencing oppressive rhetoric surrounding GLBT civil rights?" The supporting research questions explore particular association with gay, lesbian, bisexual/non-binary,

and transgender identities' experiences with rhetoric, the implications of social justice knowledge, and the role identity intersectionality plays in the students' journey.

The main themes discussed in the findings of the last chapter focused on the influence of rhetoric, stage of sexual identity development, social justice knowledge, identity intersectionality, and the specific needs of non-binary and transgender identities. These themes influenced participants in several ways. However, two of the more prevalent findings were of participants expressing a desire to create change and advocate for equality.

Participants Jon and Mo both were actively working to create change as a result of negative rhetoric. Jon was presenting and speaking to educate co-workers about inclusivity and GLBT rights in the workplace. Mo was already a prominent online moderator and blogger working to educate those of the Mormon faith about GLBT equality. Both Jon and Mo worked hard to be positive influences for change.

Other participants, Josephine and Trevor, expressed interest in advocating for GLBT equality through the campus GLBT resource office. Trevor hoped to create more visibility for GLBT issues while Josephine wanted to create opportunities for discourse of GLBT rights issues. Both participants were working toward these goals as they took part in this study.

In this chapter, I will discuss implications of my findings as well as provide space for discussion of implications for future research. Further supporting the work of campus GLBT resource centers and the need to expand the resources offered to support students were significant findings in this study. Next, I will discuss the importance of bringing

GLBT student support resources under the same organizational structures as other identity based groups.

Finally, I will discuss access to GLBT student support resources and the importance of discourse to include more marginalized voices. As one participant, Todd, expressed, we should shift the conversation from discussions of equality to those of equity providing space for opportunity to all. GLBT students with intersecting identities experiencing adversity should also feel they have access to support, services, resources, and purposeful discourse.

### **Implications for Student Affairs Practice**

#### **Increased Support for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Centers**

Campus gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) resource centers provide important information to students and allies. These centers also provide a safe space to receive support. On campuses where the GLBT resource center is supported, events and speakers are also common. GLBT resource centers often provide books, printed materials, videos, and minimal staff to guide students along the beginning stages of their identity journey. Topics often include coming out, community resources, and safe sex practices. In addition, workshops, counseling services, and general campus resource information is provided.

Many GLBT resource offices will also offer trainings to faculty, staff, administration, and student groups centering on creating safe spaces for GLBT individuals to be, learn, and grow outside of the GLBT resource center itself. These trainings often create a necessary discourse of education, knowledge exchange, and

overcoming stereotypes. Typically, education resources through GLBT resources offices are not promoted through Human Resource Offices, as there seems to be a divide between administrative offices and those offering front line services to students.

Partnership with GLBT resource centers as well as other advocacy offices could be a great opportunity. In my experiences in higher education across public, private, and proprietary institutions I have never experienced a campus where the institution's Human Resource area uses resource materials from advocacy offices such as GLBT resource centers and this is a missed opportunity. I think the barrier in creating stronger partnerships with campus advocacy resource offices lies in the innate nature of these offices/centers being for student use only. However, campus administration could make some minor operational culture shifts to allow for easier use of internal campus expertise and resources offered by the professionals in GLBT resource centers.

Josephine, Trevor, Todd, Mo, Eric, and Paul are just a few of the students who regularly use the GLBT resource office on campus. They mentioned the importance of the office in their decision, preparation, and comfort to come out. Eric in particular mentioned going in the GLBT resource office after overcoming some anxiety. Once there, he found he knew people from his high school. They assisted by connecting him with resources, which eventually aided him in coming out to his family.

GLBT resource offices on campus play an important role for students looking for resources to understand their sexual identity. Whether they are seeking literature, counseling, housing or legal assistance, the GLBT resource office serves as a safe space for students beginning to develop their sexual identity. Jacob, Todd, and Trevor all mentioned the need to better support the GLBT resource office. Jacob mentioned issues

with campus censorship of GLBT events. He felt too often the marketing flyers of GLBT related events were torn down multiple times before the event whereas other more mainstream event marketing would have to be removed after several months of being left up.

Better support from campus administration might alleviate some of this, however, changing a homophobic campus culture may need a different approach. An example of this might be Todd's resource event idea. Todd mentioned implementing a resource event involving GLBT friendly community resources, high school Gay Straight Alliances and campus resource offices for the GLBT student (high school and college) community. He added that this event might help GLBT students, "...break down the barriers to go to college..." Better support of the campus GLBT resource office could also involve funding from upper administration as well as inclusion in intentional GLBT student recruitment for the campus from the admissions team. Providing this campus collaborative support could expand the availability of the resources offered to GLBT students on campus.

The GLBT resource offices I have had the experience of working with are typically separate organizational departments than other advocacy offices. Whereas, advocacy offices such as the Black Student Union, Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Services, and Native American Student Services offices are listed together departmentally within the organization. This is contrary to a message of inclusivity a campus may be working to portray. Separate is not equal and the marginalization inhibits collaboration across campus. Students will be more likely to feel comfortable entering a

GLBT resource office if they see that an institution supports it in the same way as other equally important offices.

Speaking primarily for GLBT resource offices, it is important to include the staff of these areas in the social justice discourse involved with programs like those working closely with ethnic and racial identity. Transition of GLBT resource centers into the realm of other advocacy support services is important to send a message of equity. I propose this in the spirit of creating solidarity through similarity. Programs helping students feel safe are also working to create space for students of marginalized populations to develop their voices and identities.

Advocacy offices should be seen as resources for the entire campus community and eliminating organizational/departmental division can assist in greater support through solidarity of message and action. The campus where this study's participants are located has a GLBT resource office that serves students from multiple academic campuses while reaching out to community resources. If this office were able to work closely with other social justice education focused departments, the commonalities of educating about the experiences of marginalized groups would foster several opportunities for collaboration. Budgeting, programming, communication, and marketing could all be more streamlined for a campus advocacy offices organized under the same organizational structure.

More resources are needed to provide proper support for students who are experiencing challenges after coming out as GLBT. Services and resources providing information about housing, employment, and legal representation are crucial. Housing often comes up as an issue for GLBT students if their family kicks them out of their homes after coming out, or in some cases when a community becomes unsafe for GLBT

individuals/groups. Employment is a problem if a student is suddenly forced out of their home, or fired from a job based on their sexual orientation. Both housing and employment often create the need for legal representation at a low or no cost for students to be able to fight these issues.

Trevor's experience after he was discharged from the military under Don't Ask Don't Tell is a good example of resources needed. He lived in shelters and struggled to find employment while trying to maintain his good academic standing. Trevor eventually found employment as a student staff member in the GLBT resource center and works to assist others in finding necessary resources. Trevor was also struggling to find inexpensive legal counsel to get his negative military discharge changed to a positive record.

Several study participants mentioned the importance of moving GLBT campus discourse from a majority lens to that of marginalized identities within the GLBT population. An example of this would be providing speakers who discuss facing issues of oppression from not just a GLBT perspective but also the intersections of other marginalized racial, cultural, or socio-economic class groups. Participants shared a desire to create discourse on campus concerning the education of GLBT equality as it relates to other marginalized groups. An example of this is Eric, who also identified as Asian American, Black, and Bi-racial. The cultural stereotypes of both Asian American and Black cultures create multiple challenges for GLBT people in general. However, Eric's identity as a female to male transgender person compound the challenges he faces from both cultural groups as not only boundaries of sexual orientation, but also gender expression and gender are crossed for each cultural identity.

Jon, Josephine, and Pierre were creating workshops, speaking engagements, and other forms of discourse around GLBT equality on campus. The role the GLBT resource center plays supporting students to create discourse is important in their later stages of sexual identity development. Specifically, opportunities for programming led by GLBT students supports their development in Stage 3: Deepening Commitment and Stage 4: Internalization/Synthesis. As students become aware of oppression as GLBT individuals and as members of a group/GLBT community (Stage 3), they may seek support or look to engage in educating others. The support from GLBT resource centers on campus can assist students in the internalization/synthesis (Stage 4) of their identity as members of the GLBT community by providing opportunities to develop their voice and engage in their own developmental process.

### **Avoiding Gender Bias – Dismantling the Gender Binary**

The voices most often heard in the GLBT community are those of gay men and lesbian women. This is seen in the repeal of legislation such as Don't Ask Don't Tell, mentioned in Paul's interviews, where transgender individuals are still unable to serve in the military. The misconception is once the law was repealed; all members of the GLBT community were able to serve freely. There is a need for bisexual, non-binary, and transgender voices to be provided more space for discourse, education, and development in order to create equity within the GLBT community. GLBT resource offices need to increase support for all voices of the GLBT community to be heard on campus and in the community. This can be achieved by enlisting the work of non-binary identifying students to lead discussion groups, programs, workshops, and community sponsored

events. The focus of these events would primarily be the importance of non-binary issues within GLBT equality legislation and social debate.

The gender binary creates an unrealistic expectation for many GLBT students to ultimately fit. While gay and lesbian students by the nature of their identities typically fit the expectations of male or female gender, it is the student who falls off the binary who must seek to define themselves in additional terms such as their relationships, gender expression, behavior, and physiology. Further support of GLBT resource centers' presence through increased budget for staff, support for collaboration with other advocacy offices on campus, and wider reach to local community organizations can assist with expanding important non-binary conversations as part of GLBT equality.

A possible solution for increasing GLBT resource office support would involve the identification of a GLBT student liaison or specialist within a majority of student services offices. An example would be to provide admissions recruiters trained in supporting the needs of GLBT students and their collaboration with equally training/informed financial aid representatives. Together these professionals would work to overcome challenges such as students needing emancipation due to a lack of family financial support. They could also work together to tackle issues of housing, scholarships, and transportation prior to entering the institution as to avoid any retention challenges faced by GLBT students.

Once enrolled in the institution, the GLBT resource center staff could work to also collaborate with GLBT specialists in offices such as academic advising, other advocacy resource offices, career services, residence life, and various faculty committees. They would work together to ensure each GLBT student is able to see developmental resources across the institution supporting their ultimate academic and career success.

GLBT students need to be an intentional focus for institutions from recruitment to graduation and even as alumni. Providing GLBT liaisons and/or specialists in these departmental areas of focus allows for that intentionality. Alumni and institutional development area officers could be included in this focus as well. Reaching out to GLBT alumni can provide a pool of mentors for GLBT students, which could create a stronger connection to the GLBT alumni base and the overall GLBT community. These GLBT alumni could serve as advocates for change on campus by providing external support to upper administration as well as the local business community concerning the experiences of the GLBT student population.

The intentional focus for GLBT students could also include institutional development officers. These officers search for funds from external sources to support programs can be an effective way of bolstering the funding from other agencies. This includes scholarships, building campaigns, and even campus programs. Institutional development officers, depending on institution, may focus on corporate or alumni sources. However, there is the potential of those sources having GLBT leadership who are eager to support GLBT programs and students. GLBT campus liaisons or specialists would provide alumni and development professionals with valuable insight in the campus' GLBT student population and their experiences. Training, workshops, and

assistance in development meetings could all be part of the role of these liaisons or specialists in support of the more intentional efforts of the alumni and development areas to support GLBT students and programs.

Eric expressed the need to confront issues with heteronormativity and gender bias across campus. He tried several times to let his professors know the pronouns he preferred through his artist statements and presentations. This was either ignored or forgotten making Eric feel invalidated. It is important for higher education institutions to provide space for discourse around issues concerning heteronormativity, gender bias creating issues of isolation, and incivility for GLBT students. This can be accomplished through education across campus involving staff, faculty, and student leaders. However, a multifaceted approach is necessary based on a cross campus collaborative effort through the GLBT resource office working to include social justice conversations across curriculum, programming, and training.

The data also show that the bisexual identity fit less for students than expected. This resulted in an exploration of other non-binary identities such as pan-sexuality, and demi-sexuality. The students who identified with these labels dig deep into the roles played by gender, sexual behavior and emotion often taken for granted by others identifying as gay or lesbian. Again, raising campus discourse and providing resources focusing on the differences created by the social construction of the gender binary as well as heteronormative structures are of key importance to educating for GLBT equity and equality.

Examples of this would be an effort to educate faculty, staff, and student groups about the importance of recognizing gender bias. This effort could be organized through the institutional human resources office in collaboration with the GLBT resource office as a part of anti-discrimination, sexual harassment, and Title IX education. In order to reach a larger portion of the campus population these additional trainings could be included in the requirements for search committees to complete prior to conducting a search. Student organizations and student employment offices could incorporate these trainings as requirements as well.

### **Gender Neutrality and Gender Bias: Bathrooms and Pronouns**

All of these ideas and potential implications for campuses are overarching needs. However, this does not remove the issues of ignorance faced by many students in the GLBT campus community. Often oversight of preferred pronouns for transgender students, recognition of a lack of housing or needed employment, or the inability use the bathroom without having to out oneself and risking physical harm are overlooked or even minimized by those who hold unrealized gender privilege. Campuses sometimes offer options on recognition holidays such as National Coming Out Day or Transgender Remembrance Day for gender-neutral bathrooms, but these are only temporary reactions to permanent problems.

Gender bias creates constricting and unavoidable choices for members of the GLBT community. Whether students are forced to choose to out themselves and risk harm due to a lack of gender-neutral bathrooms or students not being recognized by their preferred gender pronouns, gender bias creates an uncomfortable and unwelcoming campus environment. Campuses must move past the idea of temporary change and

recognition of National Coming Out Day or Transgender Remembrance Day to permanent recognition of GLBT student needs. Drastic and permanent change is needed and an example is to create gender neutral, single user bathrooms wherever it is possible on campus. Placing one or two gender-neutral options on campus is not enough to meet this expectation and need for non-binary and transgender students. A shift in the way we think about something as basic as bathrooms on campus needs to be much more inclusive and intentional.

For faculty and staff, as mentioned previously, mandatory workshops about gender bias should be implemented in the same way campuses have instituted mandatory sexual harassment and Title IX training. When a student is denied the ability to be recognized as the gender they express or prefer is harmful and unwelcoming. Claiming ignorance or forgetfulness are no longer acceptable responses to this pervasive issue for the GLBT community. This should also be addressed on legal forms, including changes to admissions and scholarship applications, where a student is only given the binary of choices for their gender. It is rare that education institutions provide more gender identity options. This must be addressed to recognize the wider spectrum of genders present in our students.

It is important to note that changes to gender identity options are more pervasive than merely at the institutional level in higher education. A national conversation is necessary to discuss the importance of gender identity since gender is a demographic used for a great deal of data collection. An example is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which only recently (2014) included transgender identity in the data it collects. While this is a step in the right direction, it is not enough. Students who

identify as non-binary identities need the option to select or input the identity with which they are comfortable.

The experiences Eric, Paul, Trevor, and Ko expressed in their interviews demonstrate how our limited view of gender and sexuality creates frustration and isolation for students. Eric and Paul have been rather successful in navigating campus resources, however, to be made to feel invalid based on something as simple as pronoun usage is unacceptable. Trevor and Ko both should have more resources to learn and participate in their sexual identity development with students who are similar to them. Without more support, resources, and research students will continue to be forced to find it on their own.

### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Career Development and Employment Non-Discrimination**

Regardless of stage of development, students participating in this study all expressed a desire or a need for education and support in the area of career development. Not all career centers are aware or knowledgeable of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) student experience much less the career development needs specific to this student population. In addition to campus training and professional development, I suggest campus career professionals seek GLBT certifications from national organizations to showcase expertise of supporting GLBT students' major/career exploration at any stage of sexual identity development. An example of this type of certification is offered through the Out for Work organization (Out for Work, 2015). This organization provides multiple levels of support from program evaluation to training

and certification with the central goal of supporting GLBT students facing career and workplace challenges (Out for Work, 2015).

Each state has varying legislation regarding GLBT non-discrimination. Some states have nothing in place preventing individuals to be fired based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity while others have rather extensive protections. As mentioned earlier, the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) has yet to be brought to a vote. These state and federal legislations are of extreme importance to students researching companies, industries, and sometimes graduate programs. If the student is looking at their options without understanding the environment they may be entering, their career could be negatively impacted. If campus career professionals are better equipped with training and resources, then GLBT students can be better informed in making career decisions.

Todd and Josephine shared their experiences with higher-level knowledge of social justice language and research. All of the implications for practice could be navigated well in campus environments where institutions seek to make social justice discourse and education a campus value. Campuses make strides to send messages of commitment to career, personal growth, and academic challenge. However, if campuses were to seek out and publicly share the commitment to intentional social justice challenge and support, then the implications discussed here would be starting from a solid foundation.

This could be additionally supported by providing time for professional and student staff to attend any form of social justice campus discourse outside of inherent courses provided by social justice focused programs like ethnic studies or women and gender studies. While this discourse could benefit GLBT students it can also provide an opportunity for professional development for faculty and staff to better serve marginalized groups interacting with campuses today.

### **Areas for Future Research**

#### **Non-binary Identity Development and Borderland Theory**

As I listened to the stories of Todd, Ko, and Trevor, I found the need to develop more research on the non-binary identity development experience of bisexual and non-binary identities. Callis (2014) found this lack of research to be an important research area to develop. She cites studies where participants of non-binary identities who have expressed multiple labels in describing their non-binary status as fluid and ambiguous (Callis, 2014; Rust, 2001; Entrup and Firestein, 2007).

Callis (2014) alluded to Gloria Anzaldua (1987, 2002, and 2009), Renato Rosaldo (1989 and 1994), and Pablo Vila (2000 and 2003) and their Borderland Theory work. Anzaldua, Rosaldo, and Vila discuss non-binary sexual identities as metaphorical borderland identities. Non-binary sexual identities such as pan-sexual, demi-sexual, and omni-sexual occupy this borderland space just as those existing in racial borderlands. More research in the area of non-binary identities as borderland spaces could help build more relevant language for student affairs professionals in working with students of non-binary identities.

As research is developed to create understanding surrounding the non-binary student experience, there is also need for the development of a non-binary sexual identity development model. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities have theoretical models which assist student affairs professionals in understanding the needs of students of those identities. Each of those development models look at stages of development a student progresses through in order to better understand how students are making their experiences salient for themselves. The same is necessary for non-binary identities. For this study, I used the bisexual identity development model as a best fit for analysis. However, the stages provided in the bisexual identity model do not allow for the flexibility and often ambiguous nature of non-binary sexual identities.

I found there were some additional differences in the experiences of students like Todd, Trevor, and Ko. When they look away from the gender binary, and in many ways refute it, other areas of psychosocial needs come up. Examples are intimate relationship development, gender and gender expression (for self and others), connection to one or more identity labels, recognition of social identity, and identity intersectionality. In short, the ambiguity of non-binary identities creates complexity that each individual must navigate repeatedly.

Intimate relationships for students of non-binary identities are complex as was described by Todd and Ko. Each of them shared a separation of sexual intimacy, emotional intimacy, and companionship. They each discussed asexuality as a form of intimate relationship as well. Intimate relationships are complex off the gender binary as they define more than physical behavior. Non-binary students consider connections to

exist in more than merely emotional and physical categories as part of their relationship options.

Todd shared with me in one of his interviews his lack of concern for matching his gender and his gender expression. Even though he presented male in terms of his gender expression during this study, he told me several times how unimportant it was to him. Ko shared similar gender expression ideas for herself and for those she found as potential relationships. Both Todd and Ko also shared the need to connect with several identity labels as they felt that no one term fit all of their identity needs.

Non-binary students, like transgender students are forced to be self aware in more complex ways than many gay and lesbian students. Their experience includes reflection of all the categories listed in the previous paragraphs, but also their social identity and identity intersectionality as they relate to and change as the other labels evolve. More research is needed and a developmental theory is of growing importance to provide tangible tools to work with non-binary students in college.

**Include Exploration of Trans Individuals’  
Experiences as Part of the Gay, Lesbian,  
Bisexual, and Transgender  
Equality Movement**

The complexity of transgender as well as non-binary identities and the current lack of research create a need to focus on very different areas of identity development involved. I am proposing that further in depth study be conducted solely on transgender identities to better understand how marriage and employment rights need to evolve for these populations. Paul expressed frustration over the exclusion of the transgender experience in the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. This slight toward an important part of the GLBT community needs to be rectified as it sends a bad message of exclusion.

Transgender individuals have been part of the GLBT movement, which is well documented since Stone Wall. The GLBT community cannot allow the transgender population to be let down any longer and further research supporting the transgender student experience will be helpful to student affairs professionals providing resources. To expand study of transgender and non-binary identities and student experiences through the evolution of GLBT equality would also provide more breadth to the lexicon of student development theory in need of further evolution.

**Explore Perceptions of Transgender Individuals’  
Lack of Full Inclusion in Gay, Lesbian,  
Bisexual, and Transgender Legislation**

Gay and lesbian student needs often dominate the campus conversation. It has not been until recently that bisexual and transgender student experiences have become more prevalent. This study, I feel, has uncovered the need to provide transgender and non-binary students more focused supports outside of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) labeled experiences. Research on inclusivity of GLBT campus communities could support GLBT communities at large in creating more inclusive environments.

Whatever the reasons provided by legislating bodies, GLBT equality should include all of the GLBT identities. Paul shared his thoughts on reasons why transgender people have been set-aside in current marriage and employment decisions. He felt it was due to the complexity of the transgender identity. Legislators found it easier to pass legislation more quickly for gays and lesbians since their identities were easier to explain to constituents.

Providing more research explaining the complexity of the transgender and non-binary experience will provide foundation for higher education and the wider community to address the complexity of these identities. More understanding will help those who are ignorant to transgender and non-binary experiences to overcome their fear. Also, education of about these identities will assist in dismantling the socially constructed gender binary.

However, despite the need for the additional research noted here, it is important to recognize the possibility that transgender populations may have needs outside of what the GLBT community can provide. I feel questions need to be answered as to whether transgender and non-binary identified communities need or want to be considered separately from GLB(T) rights legislation. Additionally, how GLBT rights can better take into consideration transgender and non-binary needs. Regardless of the answer, this study showcases the need for more research in order to better understand an already complex student population.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the quickly evolving legislative and religious rhetoric surrounding gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) equality during the time this study was conducted. There were times that keeping up with legislative changes felt nearly impossible. However, the positive progress toward total equality was encouraging to me as a researcher. I also discussed the recent wave of negative legislation that seems to be in backlash to GLBT civil rights progress.

I shared implications for practice as they relate to higher education student affairs professionals. Included in those implications for practice was more intentional and increased support for campus GLBT resource centers. I also provided some typical resources provided by GLBT campus resource centers while expanding on what needs to be done for future support. More specifically, examples were provided as possible ways of increasing support for GLBT resource centers and the students: 1) Continuing support for students looking to understand their identity and come out; 2) Expanding resources for students who are more developed in terms of their GLBT identity; 3) Allowing programming to be led by GLBT students as a way of providing leadership opportunities; 4) Intentionally recruiting GLBT students; and 5) Using the GLBT resource office as a way of accomplishing this goal.

This chapter also detailed the need for better education concerning gender bias and heteronormativity on campus. Students should be able to expect their faculty, staff, and peers to respect their preferred gender pronouns. They should also be able to expect that an effort will be made by a majority of campus professionals to overcome heteronormativity and gender bias on campus.

Other campus departments and offices should more intentionally collaborate with GLBT resource centers. Career development offices should be supported in seeking/receiving certification in assisting/advising GLBT students. In this chapter, I discussed the need to include GLBT resource offices in the same area of supervision and support as other advocacy offices. This could provide an environment for support across identities and campus cultures.

I urge for the adoption of social justice discourse as a campus value. In order to support GLBT student development, creating a values based environment of challenge and support in terms of social justice will make the other implications listed in this chapter more feasible depending on campus type (public/private), culture (conservative/liberal), and GLBT student population. Students, faculty, staff, and community coming together in a social justice campus environment could more easily explain social expectations and educational values.

Finally, this chapter describes several areas for future research. Discussed here are the needs to expand research for non-binary student identities including an identity development theory better describing the complex needs of this student population. Other areas of future research include the transgender student needs and the need to address the exclusion of transgender people in current GLBT equality legislation. More work is needed to better serve the GLBT student population and to support their experiences as they endure political and religious rhetoric making their lives a political circus.

### **Conclusion**

In this study I found that students experience a great deal of frustration as a result of political and religious rhetoric. Their frustrations resulted in reactions of the desire to create change and advocate for GLBT equality. Participant resilience was inspiring. Marriage seemed to be the topic that was most prevalent for these students, even if they themselves had no plans or desire to get married. They all saw the importance of having the right to be married and what that means for the GLBT community.

Gay and lesbian students seemed to experience rhetoric similarly. Typically, the gay and lesbian student identity development process involved questioning sexual intimacy and the nature of relationships. Therefore, the rhetoric they experienced was seen through those lenses. Bisexual students were not part of this study because I found that students identifying bisexual are more rare in the population I chose than expected. However, I did find that non-binary identities are less researched yet more prevalent than expected.

Non-binary identifying students experience rhetoric through a more complex lens since they have to consider portions of their identity similar to gay and lesbian students. However, they also must consider intimate relationship development, gender and gender expression (for self and others), connection to one or more identity labels, recognition of social identity, and identity intersectionality.

Transgender-identifying students experience rhetoric through a similarly complex lens as that of non-binary students. However, in terms of gender and gender expression, there are several lenses from which participants see rhetoric. Transgender students experience rhetoric depending on their decisions about surgical transition and many other complex developmental needs. More often than not, transgender people are left out of issues of GLBT equality because their identities seem too complex for legislators to understand.

Also, the conservative religious presence in politics creates a challenging barrier to change by labeling the entire GLBT population as 1) deviant, 2) lacking culture, 3) denying a long history, and 4) repeatedly instituting the cycle of oppression based on religious doctrine. The conservative religious bases that provide funding for election

campaigns define conservative legislators political platforms. Therefore, messaging continues to vilify the GLBT population as a behavior based system of labels. In essence, the foundation for denial of rights of any kind is based in power structure living in religious perceptions of morality.

The words power and oppression and the concepts of social justice as they relate to participant experiences seemed to relate to the students' stage of sexual identity development. Those students, who were at later stages of their sexual identity development, depending on the model pertaining to them, were more comfortable with using social justice language and concepts. Those at earlier stages seemed to define power and oppression in more authoritative terms. They also did not express strong reactions to rhetoric, as the GLBT equality issues were not salient to them at the time.

I did not find that students in this study struggled with intersections of their identities outside of some of their religious identities. Issues of race and culture intersecting with GLBT identity were not discussed with study participants. However, that does not mean it is not an issue for research or concern for students outside of this study.

Mormon and Catholic identities caused the most challenge for some of the students in this study. The Mormon Church was the most virulent, in that two participants left the Church and still fear retribution on their families for their actions. The Catholic Church and its doctrine had more influence through students' family members. These students interacted more with challenges from their Catholic family members than representatives of the Church itself.

This study has provided insight into the need for further support of GLBT student populations as their complexity continues to grow and evolve. Students in this study tackled not just the idea that sexual behavior is different from societal norms, but also how the gender binary and heteronormative structures in society create challenges for full social equity, much less equality. The need for knowledgeable, intentional, and consistent support from student affairs professionals is greater than ever as the politicization of social policy like that of GLBT civil rights increases.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**TRANS-FEMINISM SYMBOL**



**APPENDIX B**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL**



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: April 16, 2014

TO: Tony R Smith, MEd  
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [556938-2] An Exploration of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender College Student Identity Development: Development Through The Early 21st Century's Increased Politicization of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Civil Rights

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: April 16, 2014

EXPIRATION DATE: April 16, 2015

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 16, 2015.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

**APPENDIX C**  
**PARITICPANT CONSENT FORM**

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: An Exploration of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) College Student Identity Development: Development Through The Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century's Increased Politicization of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Marriage and Employment Rights  
 Researcher: Tony R. Smith, M.Ed. – College of Education and Behavioral Sciences: Higher Education Student Affairs Leadership  
 Research Advisor: Katrina Rodriguez, Ph.D. – Vice President for Student Engagement and Dean of Students  
 Phone: 720-271-9778 E-mail: smit1515@bears.unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to explore and understand the impact of oppressive rhetoric concerning GLBT marriage and employment rights on GLBT college student experiences with their identity. You will be expected to participate in 2 one-hour interviews with the Researcher, Tony Smith. These interviews (described in detail below) will ask in depth questions to gain insight into your experiences as a GLBT college student and with GLBT civil rights.

For interview 1, this story gathering interview will be guided by 7 interview questions seeking to better understand your background, your experiences as a GLBT college student and your experiences with current political issues of GLBT marriage and employment rights.

For interview 2, this second one-hour interview will consist of an experiential exercise using artifact elicitation with one central theme – GLBT marriage and employment rights. You will be asked to bring an artifact(s) or item/video/audio/article/or other, which has impacted your experience and/or opinion of GLBT marriage and employment rights. There will be a set 3 guiding interview questions for this experience focused on the impact and learning from this artifact/experience. An additional 5 reflection questions will be part of this interview. The combination of the exercise and the reflection will delve more deeply into the current political and religious rhetoric surrounding both positive and negative contexts of GLBT marriage and employment rights.

Your interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the Researcher, Tony Smith. I (Tony Smith) will take every precaution in order to protect your confidentiality. I will ask that you use a pseudonym (pretend name). Only my research advisor and me as the researcher will know the real name connected with your pseudonym. All data collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Researcher's office, which is only accessible by the researcher. All electronic data (recordings, transcript files) will be kept on a secure cloud data service (Dropbox.com), which is password and firewall protected. Only the researcher will have access to this information. Any back ups of this information will be kept on the researcher's secure (password/firewall protected) laptop.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. However, there is the chance that you will experience intense emotions during any or all of the interviews. These emotions should not be outside what you will have experienced in your day-to-day life as a member of the GLBT community. Should you experience unexpected emotions, reactions, or feel unsettled/uncomfortable, you will have the option to discontinue your participation in this study. The researcher will have counseling options available and is willing to help refer and/or connect you to those resources at any time during your participation in the study.

There is no compensation for participation in this study. Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and again if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result any penalties. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature Date