DISSERTATION

THE STRUGGLE FOR AGENCY:

A NARRATIVE LOOK AT THE GAY EXPERIENCE

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY RODRICK S. LUCERO ENTITLED, *THE STRUGGLE FOR AGENCY: A NARRATIVE LOOK AT THE GAY EXPERIENCE* BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING, IN PART, REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE STRUGGLE FOR AGENCY:

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The purpose of this study is to explore the transformation of populations whose histories are defined by marginalization, struggle, and under-representation. A post-modern perspective will guide this qualitative approach as I explore the complexities inherent in the posited questions. The feminist paradigm coupled with the newly articulated concepts of Queer Theory will guide the inquiry as these emancipatory frameworks provide meaning for the emergent nature of the discussion. The focus will be on one of the most invisible and obviously marginalized populations of our day—gay, lesbian, trans-gendered, bisexual, and youth who are questioning their sexual identity. The transformative nature of the study is historically contextualized by parallels drawn from the struggles of other historically marginalized populations, such as Women, African-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans. The history and struggles of these populations provide a backdrop that captures the depth, the emotionality, and the complexity of the current study. This study will focus on the search for identity and meaning for individuals who live in a dominant culture that offers little more than "lip service" in the acknowledgement of their worth and their contributions.

Maslow articulated in his Hierarcy of Human Needs, the need for human beings to feel a sense of belonging (Hackman, Johnson, 1996, p. 76). This belonging comes from the self-awareness of where we are in our journey...a respect for change and growth, and a sense that we are active participants in all of it. How, then, do we feel a sense of belonging if we are living in a society that often times ignores or maligns our existence? ("We", in this case, can be anyone not recognized as valued under the webbing cast by the dominant culture). Furthermore, how do we find meaning for our role in the world? The importance of establishing identity isn't so much that we might establish identity, but much more frightening, the idea that we might *not* establish identity...then what? Are we then left to drift upon the waters of complacency, when all that may be needed is an acknowledgement that how we know of ourselves is valid, regardless of familial, political, social, and/or environmental limitations?

This study will seek to reclaim the silenced history of a LGBTQ population and through that analysis find a place for celebration and meaning. The goal of this study and the hope of this author is that as this population finds their voice, their world, and their reality, they will be valued as contributing members of a diverse community. The insights offered by this rich, storied, narrative analysis, will inform the journey into the world of LGBTQ youth.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

"I remember writing a journal my freshman/sophomore year in high school, and I was so afraid of being gay, but I still needed to deal with it. So in my journal, I never mentioned being gay, I called it Problem No. 1. I would write things like, *'well I have this problem and I have that problem, but none of it really matters because I have problem no. 1, and so my life is just gonna suck anyway and I might as well die.*' This excerpt is taken from Mary Gray's interview with Adam Hardy (1999 p. 26) and frames the emotionality and rejection felt by gay youth. Adam's exclusion to the mainstream underlines the importance of a study and asks our enlightened society what we value. This study seeks to bring voice to the "Adam Hardy's" of the world through story and individual perceptions of the gay experience. High school, as a formative institution, is an area of focus for understanding the foundations of gay experiences.

The experience of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans-gendered/questioning student has evolved parallel to and separate from the experiences of straight students in the landscape of the American High School. The experiences of the LGBTQ student population have been disallowed and continually ignored. It appears that any acceptance of the experience of these "others" is feared because it might cast a shadow of suspicion upon the advocate. An insidious suspicious shadow in the minds of a population soiled by the view of a dominant culture whose short-sided perspectives have defined a mainstream culture, and given rise to the "underground" culture of the "others". The underground

voices and identities have evolved, on the fringe of mainstream short-sidedness--in the periphery. These "other" voices continually push to be heard and demand an audience. It is with this transformative demand that the voices of the downtrodden, the excommunicated, the silenced, can be legitimized.

The experiences to be described in this analysis highlight the pain and anguish created by a closed, dominant culture, whose "rules" are exclusionary, and whose expectations violate common courtesy. Critical theory coupled with feminist methodologies will be used as lenses with which to view these experiences. They will provide the framework needed to deconstruct the dominant world-view that has built a social history rife with inequality and prejudice. Queer theory, a relatively new force in the halls of the academy, will provide another lens for the analysis. Queer theory adds the radical, rebellious voice to the research, which is long overdue and necessary for transformation and true emancipation. Inherent in this inquiry is the acknowledgement that identity definition and transformation is an intensely personal journey, and as such this discourse highlights the complex nature of the human experience and calls for the deconstruction of identity as a cultural construction (Morris, 2000).

The analysis presented here will provide hope through the critical framework necessary for social transformation and the emancipation of those who have too long been "closeted". Further, this narrative study will contribute a genuine discourse about the homosexual experience, specifically related to schooling, and the values of the lives caught in a world of "don't ask, don't tell".

Statement of the Problem

Educational institutions across the country have answered the national call for diversity training, and respect for alternate perspectives within classrooms. Educators are at the forefront of this societal shift, as they often are. However, as the charge has been made and the call answered, do educators have the skills necessary to effectively incorporate the ambiguous definition of diversity into daily routines? Societal expectations have long been laid upon the doorstep of the American schoolhouse, and with few exceptions, those entrusted with the young minds of America have enthusiastically answered the door and picked up the challenge. American educators have responded energetically to the call of diversity training and education and are willing to create meaning for themselves around issues of respect, perspective, and difference. The fairness of providing little to no training for these enthusiastic pioneers undermines the initiatives upon which they are embarking.

The educational issues surrounding diversity becomes much more complex as sexuality is brought into the mix. Throughout the history of our republic sub-groups within America have fought for equality, and have with varying degrees of success, been woven into the rich, American tapestry. LGBQT citizens are currently fighting for those rights afforded much of the populace. Their struggle is marked by court battles, some lost, some won, and all reported by a mass media that has the power to deconstruct and construct a new societal perspective. Certainly the battles facing LGBQT students are not only portrayed in a sometimes kind, sometimes mean-spirited mass media, they are underscored by the AIDS pandemic. The complicated battle becomes even more "fuzzy"

as political parties polarize around important issues to the LGBQT community, including same-sex marriage, and anti-sodomy laws.

The problem is: Do educators understand the difficulty experienced by LGBTQ students who are marginalized daily? Does an understanding of the high school gay experience provide educators with tools needed to adequately and effectively work with this population? How does the high school experience impact further development? This problem will be further illustrated through the investigation of the following research questions:

- What is the high school experience like for a LGBTQ student?
- How did their sense of identity, or denial of identity shape their educational experiences?
- How did the "Coming Out" decision/experience impact the development of LGBTQ students?
- How do LGBTQ students perceive marginalization and emancipation within their community and among other "others" ?
- What role did developmental experiences play in the establishment of an adult LGBTQ identity?

Significance of the Study

Institutions, specifically schools, in America are continually charged with the responsibility of working with the full spectrum of the human experience as manifested in the life of every student. This brings to the schoolhouse door students with an infinite variety of needs that must be met if the institution is to meet their primary charge. It is incumbent upon the schools, therefore, to broaden the horizons of the teaching force and

to equip them with the necessary skills to meet the many challenges presented to them daily. It is my contention that these skills are gained and polished by an exposure to the many sub-cultures that define a school's overall culture. Schools are a microcosm of society, and in many ways a mirror by which to view societal progress, and societal progress is often measured by educational progress. Schools, then, reproduce, and reinforce many of the skewed values held by the dominant culture.

Therefore, it is within the walls of a school, where true hope resides. If educators can successfully incorporate the depth and breadth of the human experience into their teaching and their daily routines then students will learn that the richness of life lies in the diversity by which we are surrounded daily. The respect for individuality and the genuine care and concern for our fellow human beings must be a necessary outcome of our public educational system, if society is to truly move forward...to truly progress.

The very heart of this progress lies within the dynamic tension described by queer theory. Judith Butler illuminates the complex nature of queer theory in her description of the word "queer". Butler writes that "queer" can never be fully owned, but "...only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage. Because this twisting necessarily draws from a history that has constructed queer as an identity, efforts to shift queer's meanings from noun to verb, from identity to practice, from modality of being to modality of doing will be neither linear nor complete but contextual and partial" (Talburt, 2000, p. 4). Talburt goes on to say "...this tension is productive precisely because queer engages the identity discourses that structure the terms of educational policy and practice while at the same time pushing beyond them" (2000, p.5). There have been a variety of curricula that have attempted to address the identity discourses. These discourses have met with

varying degrees of success. However, none of them have been completely embraced by their community. The Rainbow Curriculum and the Project 10 Curriculum are two examples of identity discourses, wrapped into curricula.

These two "successful" models have been introduced into schools to address the concerns of the LGBTQ student community. According to Irvine (2001, p. 258), both curricula have met with controversy, which has diminished the scope of their success. The culture-based model seeks to fit homosexuality into the paradigm of multiculturalism. The Rainbow curriculum adopted in New York City was an example of the cultural model. She states, "When the paradigm of multiculturalism is the only vehicle for addressing social differences, lesbians and gay men must fit themselves, however awkwardly, into that model" (2001, p. 256). The Rainbow curriculum has met with only moderate success as the argument rages on as to whether homosexual lifestyles are considered their own "culture".

The second model that has met with some success is the Public Health model. This model focuses on safety in schools. The success of this model has been in the concern for the high rate of suicide for LGBTQ students. Massachusetts has taken the lead in this area with the adoption of the Project 10 curriculum. This perspective addresses the widely accepted statistic that 30% of LGBTQ students chose to end their own lives. Students became activists as they vocally announced their support for Project 10. Theses students marched on the state capital, met with legislators, and convinced Governor William Weld of the importance of recognizing LGBTQ teens. Massachusetts became the first state to outline discrimination against gay and lesbian students in schools, in 1993. One of the biggest limitations, however, is that this model serves to re-

pathologize LGBTQ students as concerns over suicide, AIDS, and substance abuse requires officials to address the LGBTQ issues (Irvine, 2001).

These mixed-review curricula have also been introduced at a time when two of three high schools have gained media attention for their work exclusively with LGBTQ youth. Harvey Milk High School is located on the fringes of Greenwich Village in New York City. It is housed on the third floor of the Hetrick-Martin Institute. The Institute opened in 1979 by Drs. Emery S. Hetrick and A. Damien Martin after a brutal gang rape of a gay teenager. They provide a variety of services for LGBTQ youth, including laundry facilities, medical consultation, counseling, and anything else that might be needed to "not only survive, but to prosper in the world" (Walker, 2002, p.27). Harvey Milk High School has an average daily enrollment of about 50 students working within two classrooms with 3-4 teachers. They provide a full college preparatory program, including an on-site administration of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (S.A.T.). The Hetrick-Martin Institute has worked with the New York City Public Schools to make this public school a reality for gay students.

The other two schools that predominantly work with LGBTQ students are Walt Whitman High School in Dallas and Eagles Academy in Los Angeles. The Eagles Academy did not experience the same media attention as Harvey Milk and Walt Whitman. Walt Whitman gained some immediate media attention upon opening in 1997, but because they are a private high school, they have been left alone in their relatively conservative locale of Dallas, Texas. One of the founders of Walt Whitman High School, Becky Thompson shares her hope, "I can't wait for Walt Whitman and Harvey Milk to become obsolete." That would mean our public schools have been transformed enough

to welcome back gay and lesbian students. I could put a sign up outside saying *Out of Business, No Longer Needed*, wouldn't that be great" (Walker, 2002, p. 29).

In my experience, it is commonly accepted statistic that 10% of the American population self-identifies as gay or lesbian. It would seem that these students would require role models, counselors, and a safe educational environment, as we require for all of our students in the comprehensive American high school. School districts spend time and money recruiting minority teachers, counselors, and administrators, so that students have appropriate adult role models. As a practicing high school administrator, I have yet to see any advertisement for hiring LGBTQ faculty and staff for the 10% of our student population who needs them.

These limited success stories are hopeful, but clouded as we struggle to find a voice and a place of belonging for LGBTQ students. This study will inform and provide context for understanding of the struggles encountered by LGBTQ youth. It holds to the singular purpose of demystifying the element of sexuality in the negotiation of identity and in the larger definition of cultural diversity. This deconstruction is necessary as we come to terms with the socially constructed meaning of sexuality. Additionally, this deconstruction will be a catalyst for further understanding that will allow for a more inclusive learning environment in the American high school.

The Limits of Language

David Campos (2003, p.p. 5-8) provides an accurate, and "modernized" listing of words used in reference to sexuality and their meanings at this historic juncture, as if there is a static existence for each of these terms. For example, Gray, (1999) problematizes the static definitions proposed by Campos, when she describes "coming-

out". "Coming-out" has so many unspoken, yet understood, meanings to those in or connected to the queer community. 'Coming out' refers not to a single moment or event but rather an ongoing revelation and performance of self that comes into play each time someone, new or perhaps familiar, (re) enters a queer person's life" (p. 21). The discussion around language at this point must be inclusive of the many "meanings" carried by words. This is especially important as this study strives to provide voice to those described by these emotionally charged words. Transformation can only occur when these terms are recognized within their social context, bounded by time, history, and any number of other ways that words acquire multiple meanings. It's an interesting conundrum that language, the very tool we use to communicate, is the most limiting factor in effective communication.

The word 'gay' has a multitude of meanings depending on context. 'Gay' can refer to gay men, all persons who identify as homosexual, or a lifestyle. It has been used as a term of empowerment for the homosexual community and it has been used as a derogatory term in colloquial language, (e.g. that's so gay). Similarly the word 'queer' is currently being used within the homosexual community as a term of empowerment, and ownership. The word itself has been traditionally a derogatory term, and sometimes used to connote "odd" behavior sans any sexual overtones. 'Queer' has been taken back from its formally pejorative meaning, referring to homosexuality. It is in the reclamation of this term that it has become a symbol of empowerment within the homosexual community.

It is with caution that I proceed. The emotionally and sometimes politically charged words that are used when describing sexuality must be clarified in their social

context, in order to cull their true meanings and purposes. I have no way of understanding how this study will be perceived in ten, twenty, or thirty years, because words, terms, and meanings will continue to evolve. Further, I am sensitive to the fact that as each individual reads these pages they will add their own perspectives, experiences, and thoughts. This linguistic conundrum will breathe life into this research and in its ambiguity provide fertile soil for discourse. I can only acknowledge that at this particular historical moment, I am liberated by language, and in that liberation am bound by it.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Recently, I was browsing through the stacks at the local university library, when a colorful book caught my eye. The rich blue of the background surrounded an oddly colored pyramid, with the title transcending both boundaries, with disregard for the symmetry of the cover. The title, *"Through the Prism of Difference, Readings on Sex and Gender"* further generated my interest as I reflected upon the present study, which looks through a post-modern lens at the way in which the experiences of LGBTQ students influence their high school education.

Weick (1995), in his discussion on enactment as related to sense-making notes that "...people create their own environments and these environments then constrain[ed] their actions." Tierney and Dilley, (1998) comment "...until the mid-1970's the literature about homosexuality and its relationship to education was framed in one of two ways, either by absence or by defining the topic as deviant" (p. 50). So, in what environments were "the others" left to thrive, or better said, survive? The investigation upon which I am embarking will look at the experiences and development of LGBTQ persons. The literature explores the extent to which this disenfranchised population has fallen victim to their own perceptions, or if they are victims of stereotypical, imprecise perceptions imposed upon them, or both.

> I remember writing a journal my freshman/sophomore year in high school, and I was so afraid of being gay, but I still needed to deal with it. So in my journal, I never mentioned being gay.

I called it Problem No. 1. I would write things like, 'well, I have this problem and I have that problem, but none of that really matters because I have Problem No. 1, and so my life is just gonna suck anyway and I might as well die" (Gray, 1999, p. 26).

Adam Hardy, quoted above, sets the stage for the angst that surrounds students who are members of the "others". The shame, embarrassment, and hopelessness endured by LGBTQ students are fully encapsulated by Adam's emotional portrayal of his life in an American high school. His comments under-gird the feeling shared by many students as they struggle for an identity in a culture that won't embrace the beauty of difference. It is this critical moment, and more importantly, these individuals who bring urgency to the importance of this research. "Positive self-regard and the plans for a bright future may appear to be lost as a teen recognizes that she or he is a member of a despised minority" (Owens, 1998, p. 12). I contend that society can no longer afford (not that they ever could) to despise this talented minority. The population itself is a microcosm of society at large, and in the strengths, talents, and beauty of every individual lie the strength of us all.

It is the individual, with every struggle, with every characteristic that creates a population. The struggle for identity is imbedded in the larger process of adolescent development. Owens (1998) notes that sexual identification is part of this larger process that is a confusing, sometimes contradictory process in itself (p. 73). He continues to note that the socialization process is implicitly heterosexual. All the models, expectations, supports and rewards are for establishing a heterosexual identity, and they do not apply to lesbian or gay adolescents (p. 54). The contradictory world for the

LGBTQ youth is then defined. They are caught within the sexual identification process that is part of adolescent development, but they are also going through a process that doesn't include them. They have no template with which to understand themselves. One gay student explains, "...growing up gay in my family is like being Jewish in a Nazi home" (Owens, 1998, p. 55). The postmodern perspective will frame this problem and the feminist model coupled with queer theory will contextualize the comments made by participants so as to gain a better understanding of how to best transform the marginalized history of LGBTQ youth into a future of voice and pride. No one should have to feel like a *'Jew in a Nazi home'*.

Transformative Discourses

A look at the feminist model described by Weedon, (1995) frames the discourse and its many facets. In her definition of poststructuralism she sets the stage:

> Poststructuralism questions the givenness of the world, the transparency of language, the nature and status of the individual subject, subject-object relationship and the nature of power and the possibility of accessing truth...Radical appropriations of this [postmodern] space in feminist and postcolonial theory, see it as somewhere where difference can be realized in positive ways and respected (p. 4).

Feminist theory has provided alternative ways with which to frame binary thinking. It is rooted in questioning the social construct of gender and the patriarchal definitions for male and female, as binary explanations of gender. In turn, then, the intellectual pursuit of deconstructing gender has brought about a myriad of other questions that have come to define feminism in the academy.

Feminism began to question the social theories that had been popularized around the dawn of the twentieth century. Feminists called for social justice and battled to find a voice in an oppressive arena. They questioned social theories, which were rooted in a dominant culture that simplified our knowledge systems by defining them as a series of oppositional binaries. The simplicity of these binaries provided an oversimplified view of knowledge, and as such led to a bounded view of the human experience, and more importantly, short-changed human possibilities. First wave feminists brought this short-sided perspective to the academic stage.

The essentialized limits of biological differences were highlighted in Freud's research, as he described the biological superiority of men and that women were left with "penis envy", which "endowed them with the traits of jealousy and a lesser sense of justice" (Weedon, 1999, p. 9). Freud, and others, cemented into the cultural landscape the concept of gender as duality. Gender, became the pivotal issue that ignited the feminist revolution whose goals were that of deconstructing gender and thereby, transforming culture.

The second wave of feminism was left with the daunting task of a politicized process to address the many questions unearthed by feminist inquiry. Weedon (1999) asserts that second wave feminists were critical of the first wave because they "...failed to challenge that normative dualism which defines the essence of humanity solely in terms of rationality" (p. 17). So, it was up to the second wave to continue to rupture the status quo, and beginning in the 1960's they set about their charge. The principle, 'the person as political' was "symptomatic of an opening up to public and political scrutiny of areas previously seen as personal. Second wave feminism challenged the public/private

divide and in the process reinstated the importance of the body in sexual politics" (Weedon, 1999, p. 19). Therefore, not only was gender in question but so too was any binary that allowed for the continued oppression of a marginalized population.

Radical feminists took the movement to another level by claiming, "Gender is seen as an elaborate system of male domination of women's minds and bodies which is at the basis of all social organization" (Weedon, 1999, p. 20). They not only continued to focus on the body in sexual politics, but they overtly called for the cessation of oppression by the traditional subversive means of the dominant culture. The political battle held nothing sacred, and began to force the deconstruction of oppressive treatment.

The feminist movement has created an ontological revolution. In this postmodern moment, the academy is becoming more enlightened as to the dangers of binary definitions, and has called for caution in the use of language. Additionally they have forced a more rigorous analysis in coming to terms with identity and knowledge. This process has also created discourse around issues of power, agency, transformation, and emancipation. The hermeneutic result of this deconstruction has been a dialectic discourse that recognizes the socially constructed, historically situated nature, of the postmodern moment.

The feminist perspective brings a foundation on which to build a scaffold of understanding regarding the struggles fought by LGBTQ persons. An understanding of the experiences of the LGBTQ persons lies in the deconstruction of what has traditionally been "known". We know that emotions exist, yet they are difficult to describe by using current language and "traditional" modalities. Similarly, we know that LGBTQ students roam the halls of our schools and workplaces, yet we have little understanding of their

experiences. Its no surprise that our understanding of their world is limited by "traditional" frameworks and exclusionary patterns of thought.

The "outsider" continues to struggle for a voice in a world wrought with marginalization, in one form or another. A cursory look at the 20th century reveals the systematic, arbitrary persecution of the "others" as the dominant culture works to maintain its dominance. This history is marked by the persecution of women at the turn of the century related to suffrage, among a myriad of other injustices. It is further defined by the prejudice against African-Americans in relation to the social segregation of the 1930's, 40's, and 50's. The bias against Hispanic Americans in their agriculture struggles of the 1950's and 1960's, brought to our collective conscience by Cesar Chavez is a continuation of the story. We can look outside our borders at similar examples, such as the Nazi persecution of Jews, homosexuals, and any one of a number of "outsiders" as defined by the dominant culture of the Third Reich in World War II Germany. Additionally, the "ethnic cleansing" cruelly inflicted by the Bosnian government against ethnic serbs in the 1990's is a poignant reminder of the need to find voice for the "others", across the globe. This historical perspective couches the current discussion as the literature is fueled and made credible by the atrocities committed against the "others".

Currently, the "don't ask, don't tell policy" popularized by the Clinton administration policy toward gays in the military is one way of putting aside a question that is too difficult to answer. The noble gesture of this policy was clouded by the recognition that homosexuals couldn't celebrate their identity, except secretively. In fact, I wonder if the policy stems from our inability, given our patriarchal world, to know what kinds of questions to ask. Further, the fear of the unknown under-girds the entire issue,

as we cannot see a world where traditional epistemologies have been deconstructed. So, we settle for an existence where those who do not "fit the mold" are told to do so, or perish...or more realistically they create their own culture whereby they can be themselves protected by an unintended subculture of silence. Clinton's well-intentioned policy has trickled down to our schools and has given permission for LGBTQ students to exist, but only behind the curtain of silence. Weedon, (1995, p. 5) draws upon a myriad of other poststructuralists such as Derrida, Lacan, Deleueze, Irigary, and Kristeva to support an alternative view of a world where "...difference can be realized in positive ways and respected."

The journey of LGBTQ students is contextualized in the understanding of other marginalized populations and their respective struggles. We empathize with those whose voices have been lost because they cannot find meaning in the language of the dominant culture. How can LGBTQ persons find meaning in a culture whose language does not include them? Judith Butler quotes Jacques Lacan as he frames the historicity of the symbolism that has defined a male/female binary, which excludes LGBTQ people. He states,

> "...sexual difference is not a simple binary that retains the metaphysics of substance as its foundation. The masculine "subject" is a fictive construction produced by the law that prohibits incest and forces an infinite displacement of a heterosexualizing desire. The feminine is never a mark of the subject; the feminine could be an "attribute" of a gender. Rather, the feminine is the signification of lack, signified by the Symbolic, a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference. The masculine linguistic position

undergoes individuation and heterosexism required by the founding prohibitions of the Symbolic law, the law of the father." He continues, "both masculine and feminine positions are thus instituted through prohibitive laws that produce culturally intelligible genders, but only through the production of an unconscious sexuality that reemerges in the domain of the imaginary (Butler, 2001, p. 37).

In light of Lacan's binary description, Dennis Mumby (1996, p.4) quotes Weedon as the positive and negative constructions of language are explained:

> Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. (Weedon, 1987, p. 21).

The dialogue that might create meaning for LGBTQ students as symbolized in language must also include a discussion on the power structures that exist within organizations, as Safarik (2000) states, "...for those who are not in positions of power within institutions, this is a critical realization; marginalized groups are able to transform institutions through enacting culture" (pg. 34). This statement is hopeful in that it provides for validation that reality is, in part, individually constructed, and the individual enjoys the empowerment of this construction. The hope articulated by Safarik is a hope for LGBTQ persons to find their voice. The process has begun for LGBTQ persons, but as the ground swell gains momentum, the academy has a responsibility to acknowledge the momentum and to recognize the worth of this population, not because of their essentialized history, but because they are valued and respected. Celia Kitzinger (1990) speaks to the responsibility of the academy, even as one of the "others". She states,

"Oppressed as a lesbian among the academics, I am privileged as an academic among lesbians" (p. 112). The bridge from feminism, to lesbian feminism, to queer theory has been crossed.

Agency and Power

Finally, all individuals struggle for a sense of agency and power. This is especially difficult when the dominant culture has created puddles of quicksand that mire those who are the "others", the cultural "outsiders", to the point that they fall into learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), and are disillusioned in the process of finding their way. The dominant culture, the cultural "insiders", have a vested interest in maintaining hold of what has traditionally been the root of their power, and thus have created a complex hierarchy which perpetuates the exclusion of the "others" and propagates a world of essentialized populations and subcultures. This is what Carmen Luke describes as the layer of insider-outsider politics, (2000, p.6). On the other hand, is the hopeful concept of 'learned optimism' coined by Martin Seligman (1991), which describes agency as part of the definition of reality we construct for ourselves, and as Weedon (1995, p. 95) describes Kitzinger's writing in her discussion on agency for lesbian feminists, "...liberal feminists are not interested in inclusion within the existing system, but in transforming patriarchy" (Kitzinger, 1987, p.44).

Hindess, (2001), takes the concept of power further as he problematizes it and removes the duality that has come to define power, (i.e. having power or not having power). He refers to Foucault:

> Foucault suggests that power in the total structure of actions
> brought to bear on the actions of others in particular cases, and

of the resistances and evasions encountered by those actions...

for this reason, in Foucault's view, relationship of power will

often be unstable, ambiguous, and reversible (p. 101).

As I consider this discussion I remind myself that I am not looking for a way for LGBTQ persons to "feel" empowered, respected, or in any way comparable to the power structure that defines society. Rather my objective is to deconstruct the rigid power structures that have prevented LGBTQ persons from finding meaning in their own worlds. Tierney writes (1993), "When we speak our memories and document them, we are engaged in an act of construction of our present worlds. Our individual and collective memories help construct the reality of our present" (p. 2). The question remains, why then does a dominant culture negate the constructions we have discovered and created for ourselves? Tierney continues, "...yet essentially, we are arguing that critical research needs to challenge the oppressive structures that create the conditions for silencing" (1993, p. 4).

Feminist research looks at the broad perspectives brought to the academy by feminist researchers. Weedon (1995) discusses "First wave" feminists who set the stage at the turn of the century with their analyses, discussions, and activism, around the "second class" status of women in America. This discourse broadened its scope as the second wave feminists looked at other populations who have been historically ostracized from full societal participation by the power of the dominant regime. This "Second wave" of feminist discourse has "...placed a wide range of previously marginalized issues on the political agenda" (Weedon, 1995).

The literature around LGBTQ students appears to be cautionary and sterile. The sensitive nature of the discourse, along with corresponding, cloaked references to sexuality and the body have created a subculture of intellectuals who present their research in an almost subversive manner in order to have it heard by select audiences. This cautious approach may be appropriate in that it allows the research to be heard by some and hopefully, by more as the discourse continues. Irvine sets the stage for the debate, "Lesbian and gay educational reform has become an important and volatile battleground for two competing, irreconcilable worldviews: a fundamentalist religious belief in universal, moral absolutes: and a secular move to social tolerance, diversity, and openness" (2001, p. 262).

However, with the gaining notoriety of Queer theory, a more radical, vocal minority will be heard, with less polite conversation and more "in your face" demands. Mumby (1996, p. 6) quotes Michel Focault's caution "...that language [and therefore research] combines power and knowledge to create even more docile bodies." Judith Butler (1999) also comments on the concept of language as power and the most significant limitation to expression. Butler's recognition of the power of language coupled with Foucault's caution gives credence to the necessity of a Queer framework that is radical and "loud". Halpern comments from a Foucaultian perspective that indeed "The coming out [process itself], is an act of freedom, not in the sense of liberation but in the sense of resistance" (1995, p. 30). Tierney and Dilley, (1998) note, "...queer theory seeks to disrupt and to assert voice and power...[it is] about questioning what (and why) we know and do not know about things both normal and queer" (p. 57). Queer theory is a new, rebellious, and radical discourse (complicated by language, transformation,

resistance, and power structures) with which to view the issues of LGBTQ persons. The framework brought to the academic table by Queer theory has earned credibility, and continues to bring the body into the academic arena as a valid, necessary, and long overdue area of inquiry.

Homosexuality, as a viable discourse, "came out of the closet", in the mid-1970's as the American Psychological Association removed it from its list of mental disorders. This official act came on the heels of the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City. The riots occurred between police officers and the gay clientele of a bar in Greenwich. The clientele claimed harassment for being themselves. The timing was right for a social movement focused on the gay and lesbian population.

The academic term "queer theory" coined by de Lauretis, (1991) is as an academic answer to the social debate. She intends 'queer' to function as a critically disruptive term (Jagose, 1996). This disruptive force found kinship in the academy with similar struggles endured by feminist scholars. Jagose helps to contextualize the advent of queer thought:

> Indeed, as an intellectual model, queer has not been produced solely by lesbian and gay politics and theory, but rather informed by historically specific knowledge which constitute late twentieth century western thought. Similar shifts can be seen in both feminist and post-colonial theory and practice when, for example, Denise Riley (1988) problematizes feminism's insistence on 'women' as a unified, stable and coherent category, and Henry Louis Gates (1985) denaturalizes 'race'. Such conceptual shifts have had great impact within lesbian and gay scholarship and activism

and are the historical context of any analysis of queer. (p. 77)

Weedon further clarifies the relationship between the feminist school of thought and Queer theory as somewhat symbiotic and hopeful as they understand the historicity of the pathologization of lesbians.

> This pathologization of lesbianism within heterosexual culture was used to discredit independent women with intellectual aspirations and reinforce the ideologies of domesticity and motherhood as the natural spheres for women. (1995, p. 51)

This observation provides an understanding as to why LGBTQ persons have been forced to live under a cloak of silence, which protects them from the judgments brought on by their "pathology". The observation also explains the ability of the dominant culture to arbitrarily define what is "right" and what is "wrong" in deference to any consideration for the value of the differences. Again, Weedon borrows from Celia Kitzinger:

> Since the mid-1970's research on lesbianism has, increasingly, moved away from the earlier pathological models toward conceptualizations which represent lesbianism in terms of individual choices and lifestyles or private quests for self-fulfillment and loving interpersonal relationships: The lesbian and gay man are no longer a species apart, but human beings of equal worth and dignity to heterosexuals, contributing to the rich diversity of humankind. (Kitzinger, 1987, p.44)

Hope

Kitzinger captures the optimism of the movements that have given credibility and worth to those who have been disenfranchised. Weedon continues her comparison between queer theory and feminism as follows:

> ...Queer theory has focused on its implicit endorsement of the normality of heterosexuality...from a queer perspective nothing is natural, nothing is normal. Everything is a social and cultural construct and gender identities are acquired...[therefore] in theoretical terms, queer theory is in many ways postmodern (1995, p.73).

William Pinar quotes James Creech, and reinforces this point "...deconstruction has played an important role in contemporary queer theory by demonstrating that supposedly natural norms of gender, and sexuality are power-effect produced within the institution of compulsory heterosexuality" (1995, p. 136).

Indeed, some may avoid the pangs of marginalization (in a world where normal doesn't exist) by demonstrating membership (real or perceived) in the dominant culture. This may be done to minimize any proximity to the uncomfortable feelings associated with being marginalized. Those who have ignored these pangs may be more or less suited for membership in society at large. I would suggest that in their avoidance of the "uncomfortability" they have significantly decreased the richness of the human experience. This may be the "cost" of leading a more efficient life without rich meaning.

The critical lenses of the feminist perspective and queer theory illustrate the complexity around finding voice for those who are unrecognized as contributing members of society, especially in the American high school. These frameworks are

tightly woven together in a conceptual map that seeks to shed light on the emancipation of LGBTQ students. Tierney, (1993), states, "...gay identity, then, is not simply a discussion about rights, but also about how identity and power intersect, how institutions control and legitimate certain discourses" (p. 62). Indeed, how does the American high school legitimate discourses in their hallways? Adding to this already complicated formula is Rofes observation that the social construction of identity {gay, lesbian, or otherwise} is based on power and appearances rather than innate qualities (1993/1994, p. 37). The construction of an identity is a personal journey, what remains therefore, is a culture willing to accept and even embrace the infinite constructions of individuals. It is in the deconstruction of current practices that a truly transformative change might occur. Rofes, (1993/1994), continues:

> Throughout my primary and secondary school years, the words hurled at non-traditional boys were "sissy", "pansy", and "nancy-boy". Today the words are "gay", "faggot", and "queer". In fact, many students, when challenged by teachers on using the word "gay" as an epithet insist that it has nothing to do with homosexuality. Instead, they are using the word to brand an individual as odd, non-traditional, or "girlish". The links to youthful misogyny are evident. Whether or not sissy boys grow up to be adult gay men, no attempt to prevent violence in our schools will succeed without addressing the attacks on the sissies (p. 38).

Tierney and Dilley (1993), refer to Rofes, "...this highlights the interaction of language and action, self and social identity, power and difference, experience and what is taken for knowledge, and the function of institutions to ensure equity beyond tolerance

or representation. These issues (no matter the level of the discussion) are key to queer theory" (p 64). In his observation, Rofes provides a prescription for acceptance in the hallways of the American high school. This is what needs to take place if transformation is going to occur, and the voices of the marginalized truly valued and heard. Owens (1998) might have the key, "In some ways the very success of the lesbian, gay and bisexual rights movement has made it more difficult for sexual minority teens by stripping them of their invisibility" (p. 12). It is therefore the hope, inherent in our collective stories, to provide teens their visibility *and* their identity in a safe environment.

Gerald Unks (1995) couches the difficulty of this task, "The high school—the center of most adolescent life and culture—stands staunchly aloof and rigidly resistant to even a suggestion that any of its faculty or student body might be homosexual or that homosexuals deserve anything but derision and scorn within its walls. High schools may be the most homophobic institutions in American society" (p. 5). Unks has laid out the challenge for this research, to deconstruct the homophobia of the American high school as foundational for gay liberation within the American tapestry.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The epistemological questions that define emancipatory research require an understanding and reflection at the deepest level for the researcher and those who are being researched. A thorough investigation of this intersubjectivity is essential, primarily, because these empancipatory theories speak to our inner most human soul and spirit. The researcher and the researched co-construct the framework with which to explore the concept and to create and provide a framework for meaning. Talburt quotes Deborah Britzman (2001, p. 9) who writes, "...we have to learn to see knowledge as something that is made in and altered by relationships." These relationships, soul and spirit, reflect the inherent problems in the espousal of binary concepts in a normalized social theory, which reflects what "ought" to be done and by whom. Therefore, the primary challenge for emancipatory processes is problematizing and complicating questions over-simplified by this norm so we can more fully comprehend the multiple possibilities that exist. For example, Irigaray exposes the dialectic of "Same" and "Other" as a false binary, the illusion of a symmetrical difference, which consolidates the metaphysical economy of " ...the same" (Butler, 2001, p.132). This is exactly the problematizing that this emancipatory research requires. It is in these possibilities that transformation might occur. These emancipatory models are ethically bound to redistribute power to those who have traditionally been denied any of the power that comes from being heard.

Purpose Restated

The educational issues surrounding diversity becomes much more complex as sexuality is brought into the mix. Throughout the history of our republic, sub-groups within America have fought for equality, and have with varying degrees of success, been woven into the rich, American tapestry. LGBQT citizens are currently fighting for those rights afforded the rest of the populace. Their struggle is marked by court battles, some lost, some won, and all reported by a mass media that has the power to deconstruct and construct a new societal perspective. Certainly the battles facing LGBQT students are not only portrayed in a sometimes kind, sometimes mean-spirited mass media, but are underscored by the AIDS pandemic. The complicated battle become even more "fuzzy" as political parties polarize around important issues to the homosexual community, including equal rights, same-sex marriage and sodomy laws.

Educators find themselves in the forefront of this debate as societal expectations are laid at the doorstep of the American schoolhouse. Educational institutions across the country have answered the national call for diversity training, and respect for alternate perspectives within classrooms. American educators have responded energetically to the call of diversity training and education and are willing to create meaning for themselves around issues of respect, perspective, and difference. However, sexuality is not talked about as one of these important discursive enterprises. In my nineteen-year career in public education I have seen little to no training for these enthusiastic pioneers, around the issues of sexuality. This simply serves to undermine the initiatives upon which they are embarking. Implicitly, we have listened to a dominant culture that says that sexuality is not appropriate conversation within educational walls. Many claim that conversations

around sexuality should be held within a familial context. However, this answer only reinforces the stance of a dominant culture, in that many parents are not comfortable with or prepared for conversations about sexuality, either heterosexuality or homosexuality. It truly appears that we have buried our collective heads in the sand, so as to eliminate any controversy around the education of our students for fear of lawsuits, or accusations of impropriety. This sterile approach to education, then, excludes those whose differences preclude them from participation. In turn, this segregation builds a wall between those who "fit" and those who don't "fit"...a recipe for prejudice, persecution, and alienation.

Research Questions

The problem is: Do educators understand the difficulty experienced by LGBTQ students who are marginalized daily? Further, do educators understand the developmental importance in working with this marginalized population? Does the understanding of the high school gay experience translate into more effective work with this population? These problematic questions will be further illustrated through the investigation of the following research questions:

1. What is the high school experience like for a LGBTQ student?
2. How did the formative experiences (including school) of LGBTQ students shape their sense of identity?
3. How did the "coming out" decision/process/experience impact the development of LGBTQ youth?
4. How do LGBTQ youth/adults perceive the marginalization and emancipation of other, "others"?

5. What role did developmental experiences play in the establishment of an adult LGBTQ identity?

Theoretical Framework

The arrogance and objectivity of a scientific, positivist approach to knowledge has given rise to the postmodern moment. This moment finds us listening and valuing the multitude of discourses that have established the rich fiber woven into the human tapestry—a complex tapestry whose wonder is rich, fluid and changing. The postmodern framework that contextualizes this study is a social construct that guides the human spirit in the search for meaning. These postmodern discourses include feminism, poststructuralism, queer theory, and critical theory. In these discourses the importance of the relationship that develops between the researcher and the researched is highlighted providing the richness that saturate and inform these stories.

These discourses are fully illuminated in the narrative process. The power and beauty of narratives is noted, "it is precisely because of their subjectivity-their rootedness in time, place and personal experience, in the perspective-ridden character-that we value them (Personal Narratives Group, 1989b, pp. 263-264). Reissman (1993) acknowledges that narrative as a methodology requires problematizing the very idea of representing experience. This includes the representational limitations with which the researcher listens and the perspectives which the respondent speaks. It is clear that narrative requires a description of the humanness of this relationship, the flow of the conversations and the quality of the rapport inherent as the stories begin to unfold. Narrative analysis gives voice to emancipatory discourses by incorporating the richness of the human relationships formed through the process, rather than discounting them as confounds.

The methodology of making meaning, or what Mumby (1996, p. 262) calls sensemaking, is loosely defined by Reissman, (1993). She purposefully leaves each level open to interpretation as she recounts the experience of experiencing. The process begins on a cursory level with the primary experience. The experience is then "attended to", or thought about by the individual. It is then told, transcribed, analyzed, and read. However, as language is used to communicate about an experience it is bordered, laden, and confined by the limitations of the language. This paints the entire experience with the "humanness" imbedded in the experience. This human element is the beauty that saturates the story being told. It is in the telling of the story, couched in a chaos-like environment that humans find their own meaning. "Individuals construct past events and action in personal narratives to claim identities, and construct their lives...the purpose of narrative therefore is to see how respondents impose order of the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Reissman, 1993, p. 8).

The agency of the teller is central to composing narratives from personal experience, but so are the actions of others—listener, transcriber, analyst, and reader. Each performer only takes what is meaningful for them from the whole and in the sharing of the story the original story has been transformed into a new story, a new reality. Reissman continues problematizing the process, "any finding-depiction of culture, psychological process, or social structure-exists in historical time, between subjects in relation to power...[therefore] meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly." (1993). The intersubjectivity of this process requires an acknowledgement of the power

structure that may exist in a relationship and how that structure will permeate every aspect of the research.

Historically, the role of the researcher began to change as traditional methodologies were questioned and dismantled. Yvonna Lincoln, (1993), noted the new role for feminist researchers, "the silenced—as—researcher" (p. 30). She continues,

> ...if social science is to build either policy or theory on the silenced, and thereby balance "grand narratives" with narratives of the ordinary, the description which underpins such theory will be assembled solely or largely from the silenced themselves. At present, we have only a small body of such descriptive research, and it is wholly inadequate for re-designing social or educational policy, or social services, or for re-dressing injustice (Lincoln, 1993, p. 44).

The feminist movements asked many of the difficult questions that were answered and re-conceptualized by new voices in the academy. As second wave feminism was being articulated and was gaining credibility another epistemological approach was gathering momentum. The gay and lesbian movement was building strength, as it quietly learned and gathered strategies in the wake of the feminist movement.

The gay and lesbian movement gained immediate attention, not in its epistemological assertions, but in its newsworthy attempt to develop agency for its marginalized population. Michel Foucault claims that homosexuality as an academic discourse probably began with the publication of Westphal's article in 1870, which addressed 'contrary sexual relations' (Jagose, 1996, p. 10-11). This quiet beginning gave

rise to the radical, critical epistemology that has come to be known as Queer theory (DeLauretis, 1991).

Scattered references to homosexuality became more and more familiar since the publication of Westphal's article. The increased visibility of the sexual politics of the homosexual community made its issues increasingly difficult to ignore. The work of Foucault brought many of the issues to the forefront, and introduced them to the academy as bone fide inquiry. His *History of Sexuality*, published in 1981 is widely recognized as the work that legitimized the struggles of the gay and lesbian community. The gay and lesbian movements and the feminist movement gained strength from one another, as they regarded the transformative nature of their work by using the critical lens with which to view a world that was being awoken from the slumber invoked by the dominant culture. Weedon, quotes Bunch (1987), "I connect gay rights to feminism most closely around the question of the individual's right to control one's own body, including the right to control one's sexuality, and therefore to have self-determination at the most basic human level" (1999, p. 57). The transformation begins to take shape as the transformative questions were asked without apology, and with desire and commitment to rectify the oppression, and to reverse the negation of the marginalized masses in the historical record.

Queer theory as emerging inquiry began to develop questions of the gay and lesbian movement, and, with time, became more inclusive of other sexualities, and other differences. Individual stories of emancipation shared in the dark recesses outside the walls of "normality" created a ground swell too difficult to ignore. Tierney and Dilley (1993, p. 148), comment,

> "...queer studies have mushroomed into multiple disciplines and areas of inquiry. What was once a topic that fell under the rubric of "deviancy" has branched out into numerous intellectual arenas. The feminist movement took on the responsibility of deconstructing gender and, in a seemingly natural flow the queer movement took on the responsibility of deconstructing sexuality. The traditional binary of heterosexual/homosexual was/is much more complicated and involved than traditionally recognized."

In the deconstruction, queer theorists began to ask questions that didn't' fit into the dominant cultural scheme.

Queer theory and its radical ontological inquiry is developing quickly. The voices of the queer academy are writing, researching, arguing and debating. These voices include validation of previous authors and the emergence of new voices such as Michel Focault, Judith Butler, William Tierney, Chris Weedon, David Halperin, Steven Siedman, Jacques Lacan, Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous. They joined with other members of the postmodern intellectual faculty such as Yvonna Lincoln, Egon Guba, bell hooks, Thomas Schwandt, Carmen Luke, Dennis Mumby and many others. This critical mass of representation for exploited populations brought about an intellectual revolution, and a new understanding of knowledge, reality, and meaning. Duggan, (1985), eloquently describes the coalescence of these voices:

> Queer theory located within or in proximity to critical theory and cultural studies, has grown steadily in publication, sophistication, and academic prestige. Queer theorists are engaged in at least three areas of critique. (a) The critique of the humanist narratives that posit

> the progress of the self and of history, and then tell the story of the heroic progress of gay liberationists against forces of repression; (b) the critique of empiricist methods that claim directly to represent the transparent "reality" of "experience" and claim to relate simply and objectively, what happened, when, and why; (c) the critique of identity categories presented as stable, unitary, or "authentic" (p. 185).

Queer theory, is arguably one of the newest emancipatory models. It strives to bring the traditional "pathologization" of gayness into the discourse. The "pathology" has been long held by a dominant culture whose historicity has claimed for itself the recognition as the omnipotent authority on the definition of culture. This was arguably best illustrated by the inclusion of homosexuality in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). The pathologization of LGBTQ persons continues with continued media attention on high suicide rates, alcohol/drug abuse rates, and of course, the AIDS pandemic.

Queer theory and feminist theory are brought together under the umbrella of critical theory in terms of methodology and transformative discourses. Critical theory requires genuine inquiry around personal perspectives related to epistemological foundations. What do we know? How do we know it? What is truth? What is the relationship between the knower and the known? These are the questions that guide emancipatory research. Inherent in these questions are "local" questions that define the series of moments that define a lifetime, a story that provides meaning for the teller, and co-created with the listener. Critical theory gives us the tools to focus on the

epistemological questions that are inevitable when we embark upon the process of deconstructing the "rules" of the dominant culture.

The critical lens also highlights the importance of the relationship between the researcher and researched. It surmises that there is always a relationship (and that the researcher as a human being carries a bias into the research). This point debunks the positivist notion of objectivity in social theory and points to the fact that subjective information, is not only, the best we can hope for, but it provides the rich information needed to work with the human environment, and all environments are human. Guba, further clarifies this point by writing, "...the task of inquiry (relative to critical theory) is to raise people [the oppressed] to a level of true consciousness, and once they appreciate how oppressed they are they can act to transform the world" (1985, p. 24).

Yvonna Lincoln (1993), takes this one step further and defines four roles for the researcher in the journey of critical inquiry:

1. find and utilize alternative methods of study
2. search for stories, which must involve active seeking, active listening, and patient probing
3. create "text"
4. assure "texts" of rigor (validity and persuasiveness) (pp. 32-36).

The radical nature of the "critical lens" coupled with the foundations of first and second wave feminism calls for a new perspective with which to view the "others". Queer theory has evolved from that perspective. It continues, in the critical tradition, to challenge the established structure of power, control, and relationship, by looking at continuum's, not binaries, which are "...positively valued and historically produced"

(Weedon, 1995, p. 23). Talburt, (2001), adds, "...queer seeks to disrupt the discrete, fixed locations of identity by understanding sexuality and its meanings not as a priori or given, but as constructed, contingent, fashioned and refashioned, relational" (p. 3).

Narrative processes reinforce this disruption, but reminds the researcher "...to encourage those we study to attend to and tell about important moments in their lives, it is necessary to provide facilitating context in the research interview, which implicates the interview schedules we develop" (Reissman, 1993, p. 54). It is preferable to ask questions that allow respondents to construct answers, in collaboration with listeners, in ways they find meaningful.

Queer theory then builds on meaning and shares many of the rich traditions of other methods of inquiry.

> "Queer is a continuing movement...consonant with poststructural, postmodern, and feminist theories that challenge binary constructions of identities, the unitary nature of subjectivity, liberal ideas of the autonomous individual, and community as predicated on sameness. Queer depends on identity at this particular historical juncture...with what might be called a return of the repressed" (Talburt, 2001, p. 3).

The deconstruction that results is a fluid, momentary creation of meaning that takes into account multiple realties and experiences. It is this discourse that provides a more thorough and more complicated view of reality and truth. Although the postmodern notions of critical theory, feminism, and queer theory are similar in foundation they differ in scope, audience and application. Each has a place in providing a perspective and a voice to the complex nature of research in the social sciences. If we understand queer

theory through the development of other emancipatory knowledges, then perhaps we can understand those same knowledges through the critical lens of queer theory. Talburt quotes Butler, in a reference mentioned in the literature review, but as important to methodology:

> ...queer can never be fully owned but only deployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage. Because this twisting necessarily draws from a history that has constructed queer as an identity, efforts to shift queer's meanings from noun to verb, from identity to practice, from modality of being to modality of doing will be neither linear nor complete, but contextual and partial (2001, p.4).

The methodology is then forced to answer the ontological challenge. Specifically, the critical realist can only hope to hold onto a fluid sense of reality that is present in the here and now. It is reality that is continually shaped. The critical perspective here is defining the need for the "others" to act by finding their voice, through a dialogic process intent on transformation. The "tool" of the critical perspective is therefore necessary if we are to be entrusted with empowering disenfranchised populations. The challenge of critical inquiry requires engagement of marginalized populations in the process of finding their own meaning, emancipation from oppressive constructs, and transformation from "what was" to "what might be".

Methodology has been plagued with the many limitations placed upon it by the positivist movement. "The history of science has provided strong evidence that the procedures of statistics, interviews, or observation strategies do not stand alone but are part of a matrix of curiosities, questions, and social practices that, in their entirety,

constitute the scientific enterprise" (Popkewitz, p. 51). Popkewitz continues, "The limitations of what science can offer also sets limits on what should be sold to people in positions of power and powerlessness" (p. 52). Therefore, the methodology expected by the scientific community guided by positivist procedures and guidelines provides a narrow view for social scientists, which is only a snapshot, not the entire view of human experience. In the postmodern moment positivist procedures are slowing being discounted, as demonstrated by the postpositivist movement and are being replaced by more localized, authentic processes.

Validation in a positivist approach means something completely different than it does in this postmodern study. Lincoln (1993, pp. 32-36) joins Reissman (1993, pp. 64-68) in discussing the role of validation in qualitative work. Validation in the narrative tradition describes four ways that narrative gains credibility, which is much more important than the traditional definitions of validity. It is important to note that each of the four ways have their own limitations, and therefore are simply guidelines for establishing credibility. The first is persuasiveness, when theoretical claims are supported by informant's accounts, and when many possibilities are considered. The second is correspondence, checking with the respondents throughout the process, so they are truly co-creating the meaning and the direction of the research. Coherence is the third way for narrative to establish credibility. Agar and Hobbes (1982, pp. 1-32) idenitify global, local, and themal kinds of coherence and posit that all must be attended to in order to gain the best perspectives. Finally, pragmatic use lends to credibility. This refers to the ability of the research to be used as supportive and foundational for further investigation.

Schwandt adds several other postulates that shed light on what "methodology" has come to mean. These postulates also illuminate the transition between the scientific methodology and the emerging freedom of more naturalistic methodologies.

1. The scientific method is not only the guide, "...it is being replaced with explanatory schemes and methods drawn from literature, law, theater, and the like."
2. Rational and reasonable arguments are not necessarily rooted in the scientific method.
3. Methodology is historically situated and it evolves.
4. ...to study methodology is not simply to examine the exercise of method, it is to study a way of knowing; in other words, methodology and epistemology are linked.
5. ...we undertake a study of method not because it is likely to improve actual practice but because it will cast some light on our understanding of some practice (1990, p. 259-262).

Schwandt notes, "if by virtue of nothing else than an accident of birth, all of us are participants in a postpositivistic culture of inquiry" (1990, p. 259). This means that a methodological participant in the postpositivist tradition:

> ...emphasizes critical multiplism, imbalances are {redressed} by doing inquiry in more natural settings using more qualitative methods, depending more on grounded theory, and reintroducing discovery into the inquiry process...yet, for many of the questions asked in the postmodern moment, critical

methodologies take the inquiry further, because it is not attached to any positivist notion (Guba,1990, p. 23, 25).

Guba adds that critical methodology (that is dialogic and transformative) works at eliminating false consciousness, and energizes and facilitates transformation, which is the ultimate goal. It is the dialogic approach that lends credibility to this "subjectivist epistemology" (1990, p. 24).

Along with the subjectivist epistemology is the participative methodology that is an important facet of the critical camera, with the inquiry focused in natural contexts rather than in contrived laboratories. These interactive methodologies might include narrative, life story, cultural ethnography or other such methodologies. It is these emancipatory practices that illuminate the moments that make up a lifetime and from this "local" perspective we can begin to grasp the complexities, the nuances, the subjectivity, and the richness of the human tapestry. The narrative, case study approach proposed here, brings one person's experience to bear on the established research questions. It is an attempt to elicit the story of "the other" through their eyes, and experiences. In this naturalistic, subjective inquiry a resistant discourse will emerge, and from this grounded theory, a deeper understanding of LGBQT students might come to fruition. This deeper understanding is necessary if this segment of our world is to be demystified, decriminalized, and nurtured as active participants on the world stage.

Researcher's Perspective

A 'personals' website...and so goes the dance. The boys and the men in their own way deny their desperation. The hurt comes through their voices, contrived words, for sale, anything to fill the void—the nothingness, the dark. They are the humble and the arrogant trying to encapsulate their entire humanity into a marketable phrase, one that is an eye catcher. They...they say it can happen. I'm skeptical. The first steps are always the hardest after all. I guess that's part of the dance, maybe the most important part...its all so sad, so very disheartening, so disappointing in all ways and always. How is one to ride upon the wings of a love when its seed is planted in the sterile soil of cyber space? Wasn't I promised that there is someone for everyone? Wasn't I told that love comes when you're ready?

This sad state of affairs is compounded by the march of time, the cruel heartless click of the clock edging us further away from what was once a probability and leaving us with the reality that it's a distant possibility. I feel like such a negated soul, subtracted from a world whose rules excluded me from the beginning.

I am embittered by this reality, as I tear away each of the layers and feel as if I'm getting to some sort of truth, well then, my eyes well-up, and my vision blurs, and before I know it the goal is lost and I'm looking for something else to peal, as if I thought to do this for the first time. The wheels spin in the mud, doing something and making a lot of noise, but never really getting anywhere.

So, maybe the happiness is letting go of the gas pedal, and turning off the engine, and stopping. And maybe, just maybe happiness is where you are? If only I had the strength to stop and look, O.K., perhaps, I do. But what of the voices who are defining

success, making money, you know...the surreal, idealized, sensationalized, view of the perfect American man. How do I re-shape my definition of success to include my definition of happiness? How do I begin to live congruently with who I am? I am ready to be authentic!

I've always thought I've had my "sh**" together, was it all a very good charade? And if so, where am I left...do those experiences guide my soul now or are they to be discounted as dishonest? Where do I begin completing myself? These among so many other questions ring out of the inconsistency and the confusion of a life lived...why do I pretend to be tough? Why do I hide my sensitivity? Why am I embarrassed and ashamed of myself? Why does any exposure of my vulnerable self, result in a horrible sense of failure and minimalization?

So what of meaning? The nagging question that I hold as the cure for the depression that is the result of living in a mainstream context that places little value on my true self. I really want to feel strong again, inside. I want to feel safe with me again. My world is about second-guessing, and indecision. I have learned to distrust myself. Others around me are enduring much worse crises, divorce, death of a child, caring for elderly parents, yet they seem stronger from their core, their center of being, from their souls. So what do I have to complain about in my visibly together world?

My crisis has been much more insidious and pervasive. It has grown from within for my entire life--it's been continual and chronic. My crisis is that I didn't ever belong, always feeling like I was sitting at the "children's table" of life, never adult enough to be invited to the "adult table", and from this despair there is hope. Presently, my responsibility is about emancipating my heart, and doing so loud enough so that others

hear the voice of the transformed me. I must now learn who I believe myself to be, if only for today. I will deconstruct realities and truth's as I once knew them. This is the only way to battle the fear I have endured every moment of my forty-two years. It is time for my voice to join with the voices of "the others" in celebration of our individuality.

I am a forty two year old male who has enjoyed a successful career as a K-12 teacher and administrator. I am also a Hispanic man and a gay man who witnesses the negation of the groups who do not fit the "mold" superimposed by society at large. I witness this marginalization on a daily basis as students mimic the attitudes they see in our adult world. A school, of course, is simply a microcosm of what is good and what isn't so good in the world, and therefore is the context of my observations to further my understanding of the individuals who make up the vast, complex, and beautiful tapestry of humanity. Unfortunately, the dominant culture has soiled the purity and innocence that children bring to the front doors of their schools, by reinforcing the differences inherent in the human experience, but more alarming and much more damaging, by judging those differences as "right" or "wrong".

I have taken a postmodern approach to this research to deconstruct the need for this damaging philosophy, and as a way of providing *hope* for those students who are different in some way. Of course, we are all different in some way or another. It is in the acceptance and celebration of this realization that we can transform a society that de-values the contributions of some of its members.

The feminist struggle to be heard was experiencing some success at the beginning of the 20th century, to varying degrees. It is in their battle that other populations have been inspired to find their voices. Historically, we see examples in the struggles of

African Americans, and Hispanic Americans. In the present study these historic examples provide a context for the newest minority--Gay/Lesbian Americans.

I wrote this study as part of a very personal journey to find meaning in a world of conflicted messages and hurtful propaganda. I am a participant in this research as much as I am the researcher. Every word is brought to the page with shadows and shades of connotation and denotation. It was my intent to utilize these shadows and shades in a postmodern world that values individuals, highlights the complexities of the human experience, and searches for personal agency for those who have long been without. I was/am a willing participant, as I search for my own meaning, and desperately search for the *hope* needed to provide true personal freedom for every individual-a freedom defined by you and me and lived on our own terms. The "faceless" power brokers who have traditionally divided, de-valued, and minimalized us, "the others" to maintain their own power, will be quieted as we find and use our own voices!

Conceptual Framework

It is within this framework that I talk with participants and look at their stories and the varied meanings they attach to their colorful experiences. The complexity of the fear noted above, combined with the experiences of those of us who are "the others" calls for something to be done. It calls for this discourse to be brought to the halls of the academy as genuine inquiry, and brought into civil conversations as important to the health of society at large. This discursive action must be brought without the shameful whispers, and the societal guilt imposed upon the topic of homosexuality.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide a guide for how I proceed with the research. They lay out the concept of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. The

first dimension they propose is the temporal concept of *interaction*. The questions raised by this dimension require the researcher to look at the inter-subjectivity of the study along with the other personal and social relationships that come to bear in a human environment defined primarily by it's state of flux.

The second dimension is that of *continuity*. This dimension asks the researcher and the participant to look at the memories, to locate themselves in the present, and to reflect upon the future. This timeline provide a historicity that grounds the research and provides rationale and explanations in a contextual framework.

The final dimension is that of *situation*. This has come to mean the place of the research. The simplicity of this explanation can be misleading, however. What is a place? The explanation goes beyond that of locale. One could argue that a place is a compilation and collection of physical, emotional, intellectual, personal, and social elements that help to frame an understanding of a moment of time. It is this situation that is taken into account in researcher observations. Each of these dimensions define and frame human experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, pp. 49-50).

The perspective of these three dimensions, however, isn't complete without a thorough analysis of the direction of the inquiry. Again, Clandinin and Connelly describe the importance of this dynamic. The directions they define are inward, outward, backward, and forward and are explained as follows:

> By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward we refer to temporality-past, present, and future. We

wrote (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994) that to experience an experience-that is to do research into an experience-is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

The participants who were chosen and agreed to participate in this research were asked about their experiences through the fear, the hope, the confusion, and the mundane. These observations are conceptualized using Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional perspective. The gay and lesbian participants who choose to participate were asked to share their memories of homosexual life in an era of "don't ask, don't tell. Their perspectives on the present, in a nation, where personal questions such as same-sex marriage and homosexuality in the clergy are daily news items. Finally, their views of the future, with hopes and fears fully articulated is what will frame the future of this work. My greatest hope is that within this context, participants were able to grasp their own agency and use that power to transform those who are less empowered.

Interview protocols were designed to elicit stories and emotive perspectives within the context of their own lives. These were couched in a developmental schema, so as to see how these participants have ...become adults...become adjusted...become stable...become happy. It is within these stories that we (the researcher and the researched) can come to some understanding of the meaning of our own multiple realities, and see the hope that can occur when stories are articulated and shared in an open, honest, caring dialogue. It is within this conceptual framework that participants shared their lives, and within this framework that I, the researcher, found myself co-creating meaning.

Participants and Site

The selection criteria for participants in this study included men and women who self-identify as gay or lesbian, and at least 18 years old, so as to eliminate any possibilities of harm or discomfort with gaining parent permission for participation (for example, if they were not "out" to their family). Participants were recruited through a variety of means, including recruitment on the Colorado State University campus and in the greater Denver Metropolitan area, including word of mouth, advertisements in local coffee shops/bars, and e-mail advertisements. Interviews were audio taped, transcribed, analyzed, and coded in the established conceptual framework.

The primary gate-keeper for this study will be the director of the LGBTQ Student services office on the Colorado State University campus. A flyer was posted in this office, with his consent, asking students to contact me by telephone or by e-mail if they would like to participate in the study. Secondly, I made personal contact with the director and asked for his help in identifying students who would enjoy and perhaps benefit from participation in this study. I left it up to him to contact possible participants, and ask that they contact me. These methods failed to garner appropriate participants so I then posted flyers at coffee shops, bars and other gay friendly establishments in the Denver Metropolitan area. I was surprised that gathering participants on the C.S.U. campus was difficult so I moved to the Denver Metropolitan area. My role as an administrator in the local school district, and the varied roles I carry at the University may have created a "power" structure in which possible participants were uncomfortable. Therefore, few participants contacted me for participation in this study. Finally, I choose

participants through a purposeful sampling procedure. Which is to say, that participants were selected "because they are [were] believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 65). My goal was to interview three individuals from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and hometowns. Criteria for selection included self-identification as gay or lesbian, diversity within decades of one another, and a mix of male and female. The developmental view established by my conceptual framework will be served by the diversity of ages, and the differences between male experiences and female experiences will serve to enrich the scope of their combined experiences as gay human beings. These three individuals provided the rich context and background for this study, as each was interviewed on separate occasions. Their experiences and stories were shared in a manner consistent with the individual construction that is their story. The Grounded theory /Narrative approach here revealed a rich, vibrant, informative tapestry that invoked voice, created story, and established agency in a local and emancipatory manner. This approach allowed the data to emerge in an inductive manner, allowing the richness of personal stories to emerge.

Once selected for participation, participants signed a consent form, confirming their selection, a more detailed description of the purpose of the study, and a statement indicating confidentiality procedures.

Data Collection and Analysis

Upon approval from the Human Subjects Committee at Colorado State University, every participant was interviewed a minimum of three times, so as to ensure rapport and to gain the most in-depth information. The structure of each interview consisted of open-ended questions designed to allow each participant to tell their story.

Every interview was then audio-recorded, with permission, transcribed and coded in iterative cycles to insure accuracy. This process also allowed for emerging thoughts and ideas and meaning to weave the many stories of each individual. As analysis continued, so to did data collection as emerging concepts come to the fore. This, after all, is the flexible and beautiful process of qualitative research.

The emergent data was compiled as a narrative analysis focusing on each participant, their stories, their meanings, and the various contexts in which they understand themselves. Reissman comments, "Narrative analysis allows for the systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects" (1993, p.70). This rationale provided these stories with credibility and filled each with meaning and hope. As is appropriate for this qualitative framework, emergent processes revealed the true purpose and direction of the research, in light of the primary research participants. Narrative analysis provided a foundation for a grounded theory approach, which seemed most valuable for this conceptual/theoretical framework.

The appropriateness of this research is described by Josselman and Lieblich (1999, pp. 4-5), "...the purpose of this method is to discover, describe, or develop a theoretical basis for social interaction. Interpretation of meaning is seen as a social contract, agreement among the players." They continue, "The interaction and interpretation of these symbols, the identification of shared meanings, and a description of the process of developing these meaning are the foci of inquiry" Josselman & Lieblich (1999, pp.4-5). It was difficult to ascertain early in the research how these analyses connected and related to one another, and is was found by qualitative researcher, they surely did, as was the expectation.

It was important to note the warning issued by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, (1995), "...descriptions, stories, types, and theories, no matter how rich and evocative, provide only a starting point..." (p. 126). It was in the deeper analysis brought about through narrative memos, field notes, and other processes that meaning emerges. The emergent process required the researcher to look at "...when, where, and how terms are used, and how they actually categorize or classify events and objects in specific situations" (Emerson, et al, 1995, p. 126). Reissman adds, "...the meaning of what someone says is not simply its content (ideational); how something is said (textual) in the context of the shifting roles of the speaker and listener (interpersonal) is critical also" (1993, p.21). This was the role of the researcher, as deeper analysis and contextual understanding of personal stories reflected the direction of the research. Emerson, et al, (1995) goes on to talk about the importance of narrative tools in this process, with the use of field notes as an example.

> "Field notes are useful to appreciate members meaning. [They] will be interactionally rather than cognitively focused; they will document not how members talk about various social objects, in general and out of context, but how members *construct meaning* through interaction with other members of the group, how they actually interpret and organize their own and others' actions" (Emerson, et al, 1995, p. 140).

This was where the richness of a participant's story was valuable. It was in the telling that meaning and understanding emerge. At this point, the focus was on a "local", specific view of each participant and how they came to meaning in their lives through their stories, their use of language and their understanding of their historical context. It

was these perspectives that shed light into a world that has been darkened for far too long.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

I just returned for the MLK, Jr. March in Rally in Old Town Square, A beautiful day in Ft. Collins for reflections on peace and civility. As I left the rally, I made a connection that I knew but had not yet articulated. I am thankful for all those who came before me and helped to provide me the privileges I so humbly and gratefully live with today.

As I left, I reflect on an incident over the holiday break of a "mean guy" who so wanted Joseph and I not to be seated near him on the plane. I was wearing my "I'm a Gay-American t-shirt and being discoursively affectionate with Joseph (e.g. Honey will put this bag up there). Yeah I say things like that. In any case, I realize my t-shirt calls a debated issue into the public sphere so we were prepared with both warm and cold receptions.

This man could not have been more disturbed the whole flight. He was sort of "trapped" near the window as Joseph and I sat right next to him. In flight, a woman, Beth, had witnessed this man's visible bad behavior and his grunting and glaring at us we well as our saddened selves, so she stepped in. "You two boys on holiday travel?" She smiled so invitingly. She later kept the conversation and her outward acceptance of us clear and going. The beauty of courage and AILY-ship! For some reason, it is so often acquaintances who are women who step in on this

"gay" identity issue. Through this flight, Joseph told Beth that we were an environmentalist and college professor, respectively. "Mean Guy" didn't have to say it, but his look and non-verbals prompted that bubble that said, "flaming liberal faggots". In any case, we weren't anymore comfortable sitting next to him than he us, I would have engaged him, but I really think he would have not like this at all. I think if prompted he really would have bitten.

So, today, while walking home from the rally, I realized that even this man (and, I should probably stop calling him "mean guy") could not ask us to sit at the back of the plant or to get off the plane. He had to listen to us be gracious and warm and civil with Beth. So, to the people of civility and justice of yesteryear, and those today, Happy MLK, Jr. Day."

This e-mail was sent to me the day after Martin Luther King Day in January of 2005 from Dr. Aaron Jones who was returning from vacation with his partner. What a powerful way to illustrate the need for research that places value on the lives of the disenfranchised! It is within these stories we the, "Others", find courage to continue the battle against a dominant culture that seeks to silence and malign our collective voice, and to ignore our very existence.

The Participants

The participants for this study are referred to by pseudonyms of their choosing. Surprisingly, this became a great rapport builder within the context of the study. The process created some laughter, and some insight into the participant, as they negotiated their complex identities. Every attempt has been made to mask the identity of all participants. However, there is a possibility that they could be identified through experiences. They were told of this risk and all agreed, enthusiastically, to continue their participation. In accordance with the Colorado State University Human Research Committee, the researcher will not release the real names of participants, and all research materials will be kept on file with the P.I. for three years after which they will be destroyed. Below is a brief description of the participants of the study:

Clark Kent is a first year teacher in a metropolitan high school. He recently graduated from a major university in the region, which he found to be supportive. He is new to this metropolitan setting and finds it invigorating, and somewhat overwhelming. He lives alone which he doesn't necessarily enjoy, but he is working quite a bit, so that makes it bearable. Clark has lived his entire life in the Rocky Mountains. He enjoyed a supportive family who has been accepting of his sexuality, for which he feels lucky. Clark has been out of the closet for approximately 4 years. He is a white male in his mid-20's. He would entitle a book about his life, *My Life as a Roller Coaster.*

Lannie is an independent woman who is pursuing a career in a male-dominated profession, which has been difficult for her to break into. There are many factors that stand in her way as she works on her professional goals. Lannie grew up in the mid-west

before moving to the west coast where she finished her high school experience. She then moved to the Rocky Mountains where she currently resides. She does not label her sexuality and describes it as fluid. She came to terms with her sexuality gradually in her late teens and early 20's. She is in her early 30's and is an African-American woman. She would entitle a book about her life as, *Growing Up*.

Dori took great pride in choosing a pseudonym from the movie, "Finding Nemo" because of the energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by the character, Dori, and because the voice behind the animated character was that of Ellen DeGeneres, an out, lesbian Hollywood entertainer. Dori was born and raised in the Midwest in a middle class family and holds true to many of the ideals with which she was raised. She is enjoying the relatively new challenge of living in the Rocky Mountains. She is currently working on her Master's degree at a major university. Dori's describes herself as a "feminist lesbian". She is a white woman in her mid 20's with a tremendous amount of life experience that she is willing to share. She would entitle her book, *My Life: Its Many Twists and Turns*. The sequel would be *My Life as Dori.*

There are also two experts in the gay and lesbian studies arena whose contributions provide insight, provide background, and inform the research. They will be described generally, again, with careful detail being made to mask their identities.

Dr. Aaron Jones is an out professor at a large university in the Rocky Mountain region. He has been teaching for approximately 8 years at this university. He also enjoys painting as his vocation to which he is dedicated. An American Indian friend of his gave him the name *TEXT IN MOTION* for the way he portrays his thoughts in his art. He is from the west coast of the United States where his humble beginnings helped to shape his

passion for social justice and inform his research. He is in his late 30's and is of Japanese and Mexican heritage.

Grady Blair is the Director of the LBGT Office at a large university in the Rocky Mountain region. He has been in his current position for approximately five years and has seen a large increase in the both the need and the services provided by his office. He is from a background of privilege and recognizes the power inherent in that background. He is committed and passionate about his work, and is inspirational in his articulation. He has recently gone through a break up with his long-term partner. He is a white male in his early 30's.

Thematic Analysis

The themes that emerged from the data came after careful analysis using analytic memos, researcher self-reflection and an iterative coding procedure in which I identified an initial, general set of codes, and a more refined set of codes based on relationship between emergent themes in an interplay between data and theory. The complexity of each participant's experiences provides color into the rich tapestry being woven in this research. It is clear that although there are some consistent themes, there are many more convoluted, personal, and complex strands that are inextricably part of their individual experience. It is with this caution stated that I proceed. The themes that were identified through the process include, 1) the difficulty of identity negotiation (including the "coming out" process,) and 2) a need for relationships, (interpersonal, i.e. including a desire for family, political negotiations, need for role models, and intrapersonal, i.e. the difficulty of the "divided self,"). Each theme will be discussed and the research questions will be addressed within the context of these thematic strands.

"I'm still not comfortable with myself...but I'm getting there!"

Identity Negotiation. Dori's internal dissonance with this issue was candidly shared even as she was in the midst of the fray. She talked extensively of the struggles inherent in identity negotiation, and brings to the fore its complexity and fluidity. The concept which is more covert than overt and more about process than product is illuminated by her many "selves".

> O.K., well I'm a lesbian...um, although that defines a lot of who I am and defines my world view in a lot of ways, but it doesn't define everything about who I am...first and foremost, I am a woman, I am a daughter, I am a sister, um I'm a Christian, um and um, I'm a lesbian...and that is part of who I am...I've struggled with that...it's an identity I've struggled with for a long time. And its taken a long time for me to figure out who I was...

Dori's struggle for identity continued after several intimate and intense relationships with boys and girls during high school. One of these significant relationships occurred when Dori was a senior in high school with a boy she truly loved, or at least, believed herself to have loved. The romance resulted in pregnancy which ended the relationship, and made the entire struggle much more difficult. This difficult relationship set the stage for the many questions she was to answer for herself. In spite of this romance and the mixed memories she has of this and other significant heterosexual relationships, Dori has come to the knowledge that she is a lesbian.

This identification came out of an equally intense relationship that was never sexual, but was very loving and very intimate. This relationship was with a woman she met while studying in London. In retrospect, Dori realized she had truly fallen in love with this woman. This love was manifested in jealousy when this woman, Gretel, "hooked up" with her best friend, Brock (more about this realization later).

This realization began her struggle for identity and was illuminated when she came out to a classroom of peers via a letter. The letter was read to a class of peers during their first year in the same cohort in a Master's degree program. The class was asked to share something that few people knew about them, as a way of building community and rapport within the cohort. Dori's decision to "come-out" was based on her desire to build genuine friendships within the cohort. She believed it was safer to "come-out" as part of her ongoing negotiations, rather than maintaining the dangerous secret.

> In my letter I defined myself as a bisexual living as a lesbian,
> Interesting distinctions of course. I felt like, first of all it was
> safer to come out. In addition, I still feel sometimes that I might
> be bisexual. So I don't know for sure what my identity is. I'm still
> negotiating that. It has been a really difficult negotiation.

In a later interview she recalls her rationale for coming out to her colleagues. She talks about the need to be accepted for who she is and the unsafe place in which she finds herself when she isn't accepted. She explains that self-identification is a matter of "safety and acceptance."

> ...[it's] not so safe to say 'hey, I'm bisexual'. I still don't feel safe...

I don't feel comfortable with it because I feel like I am not accepted on either side. All I want is to be accepted. It is all a lot of people want.

The struggle is further illuminated when describing how she might write a personal advertisement for herself. She moves from the obvious identifiers to the ambiguity of her sexuality and provides a complex look at the multiple selves embodied within her.

I would be able to say that I am a woman. As far as well, I can't be divorced, I can't be married, or whatever, but as far as lesbian, dyke, or queer, for lack of a better one [word], I would have to say queer, that would be more my identity. And I think that's so funny because bisexual makes you sound like your 50/50, and I'm not 50/50. As I work through that, queer might work for me. So single, white, queer, female... seeking someone single or non-committed, fun-loving, and wants kids.

Dori's struggle with identifying herself in terms of her sexuality challenges a language that doesn't have a descriptive template for her experiences. Therein, lies her struggle. The questions revolve around defining herself in a way that defies a one word, categorical, simple explanation. It is difficult and messy in her world as she engages in the process of personal identification. The imperative that plagues her struggle for identity is the human need to be accepted and to belong to a community.

Clark's identity negotiation revolved around "coming-out". However, he found this to only be the beginning of a journey, not the culmination of the process. Clark

believed that "coming out" would create a world of acceptance, but the insecurities still plague him as he wrestles with learning to be comfortable with himself.

I still feel insecure about what other people might think about me. I don't think, I don't know if I'll ever get over that...just that is who I am...and that is definitely going to effect relationships, you know. If I'm not comfortable with myself...but I'm getting there, I'm ready...I feel like I'm ready to try...

Lannie also shares the difficulty of negotiating identity, however for her the sexuality piece is less of an issue. Her voice is soft and thoughtful as she articulately states her views. She chooses to minimize her sexuality in her definition of self. Certainly, there is a sense that she has spent some time reflecting on this part of her world. Lannie's identity revolves around race and gender, with her sexuality being less pivotal. Her resistance to a simplified definition of her sexuality is notable. The 'label' is how we communicate our sexuality to others, and it is not something she explains to others. Therefore, there is no need for the 'label'.

I don't really describe it...I don't...I don't describe it...
I don't look at myself sexually, you know...or describe myself sexually...more I identify with being a black person and a woman....um, I just, to me, you know, it doesn't, I don't like hassle, so to me it's like it's not a big deal, you know, and that's why I just don't identify with just one or the other [straight/gay] because mostly, yea, I've had more girlfriends than I've had boyfriends, but it's not...you know, o.k. if I say this,

you know, I like women, but what if I fall in love with this guy,

it's like o.k. explain yourself now...it's like I don't have to explain myself...[if I don't label myself].

Lannie's concern resides in having to be held down to the way she might describe her sexuality. For her, it is much more liberating, and more congruent to dispense with any label, and simply roll with what life offers. The way that she presents her identity is indicative of her genuine resistance to compartmentalizing her world.

The negotiation of identity is difficult and always changing, from day to day, and moment to moment. This constant state of flux is frustrating to those who would do better in a defined, categorized world. However, in the heart of these gay participants, a simple answer cannot encapsulate an identity. It is the questioning and the answering which brings identity into focus, at least for today, at least for this moment in time. Her deconstructive voice is descriptive of Morris' explanation that "Queer politics serves to undermine rigid categories of identity, (2000, p. 15). Similarly, Dori sums up this difficulty by describing the elusive nature of human identity processes and the continual surprises inherent in the process.

Life is difficult (laughs). Identity is really a tough place, a really tough negotiation, and we are always taught that identity is so easy to find. That we are born with our identity and that we know our identity all along, but we don't...and the process of finding your identity whether you are straight, gay, lesbian, queer, bi, any of that, trans, any of that, your identity is not fixed. Your identity is not always known. It is opaque. It's not there in front of your face. Sometimes it is so translucent

> even that you can't see it...that is difficult...sometimes it is in your face and sometimes it is hidden...and sometimes it surprises the crap out of you. You know. It is never constant, I think, Well, it is my opinion of course...it's never constant. It is never constant, but, it is who you are."

Dori's profound statement reflects much of the message put forth in the postmodern moment regarding the charge of Queer theory as related to identity where the interplay between data and theory can be observed.

> Consonant with poststructural, postmodern, and feminist theories that challenge binary constructions of identities, the unitary nature of subjectivity, liberal ideas of the autonomous individual, and community predicated on sameness and consonant with [radical] political practices...Queer has been said not to be a noun, for nouns stabilize in time and space, but an adjective or a verb that cuts across identities, subjectivities, and communities (Talburt, 2000, p. 3).

It is within this theoretical backdrop that the quest for identity is ensconced. Dori's ability to articulate the complexity of sexual identity is the manifestation of the poststructural perspective on identity itself.

Dr. Jones sheds some light on the journey to identity as he describes how our journey is informed by our history and understood in terms of our experiences, past and present. He also provides insight in the reality of "now" and the intersections between the many ways we have come to questions ourselves.

> I have played out as a bisexual man in terms of behaviors, emotionality, attitudes, etc. I am presently more on the gay

male side of the continuum in terms of all of those things then I have ever been in my entire life. So, that's why I think I am able to embrace that and say this is who I am. This is what I am about.

But I don't discount my history and what I have learned about love and relationship in all those things prior. I don't look back on my identity back then and say those were all practices for things I didn't feel I was because when I was living my life they felt genuine to me.

It felt genuine to me. It felt genuinely emotional, genuinely relational, sexual, and physical. It did and I think I have brought that history forward in many ways to make the person I am today. So, there is that. The visible and invisible features of identity have always been sort of the hard thing about living out a life as a gay man I think.

He goes on to describe how hopeful the identity process can be, as it takes a place in a dialogic moment infused with the complexity of the human experience. He realizes that this complexity informs all human interaction and is how we come to define and shape for today, our perspectives of the future.

I see identity as complex. I love the complexity of the intersections with social class, GLBT, race and ethnicity, ability, disabilities that we might have in our lives. All those different things sort of play in...all those needs change how we each play out. We find some common overlap but lots of complexity in terms of like, wow, what does this other feature of your life mean that makes you so different than me.

This realization is the foundation of his teaching. He teaches undergraduate courses which focus on communication. His teaching revolves around the critical intersections of cultures and varied experiences and how these lenses orchestrate our perspectives. His classes become a place where students can outwardly and inwardly wrestle with the nuances of identity and its infinite meanings. His instruction is colored by his experiences as a young boy "hanging out" in the grocery store owned by his parents. The store was a meeting place in his rural, farming town. The complexity and the richness of the human experience played out for him at the grocery store, and fundamentally shaped his desire to learn more about communication patterns, and human interactions. These are the experiences that have provided his historical context, and are the backdrop for his academic pursuits. His one-on-one discussions with students, as well as his classroom discussions are filled with questions that center around identity formation, and the inherent dynamic tension it produces.

Dori also reinforces the value of the classroom as she discusses the importance of education in the negotiation of identity. The context of teacher actions and the transformative influence that effective instructors, using inclusive language can have as teens struggle to define themselves is critical. Schools have the ability to help teens find a common language, and place of belonging, as pathways to easing the pain of identity negotiations. Her inclusive advice reminds us of the primary charge in education, to educate every child.

> [Teachers could begin by] using more inclusive language. That is the first thing. Language is a huge thing...when you start defining things as man and woman, man and wife, husband and wife, all that kind of stuff, you are cutting out so

many students. If you don't use gender inclusive language you are cutting me out...I think that if a high school instructor recognizes how history is lacking in the way it is written and that it is flawed in many ways. When you talk about the changing family throughout history you don't need to always just say there are a lot of single parents now...and that the divorce rate is really high, and all this different stuff...it's not the same thing...We [gays and lesbians] have family around ...because we have gotten to chose family, and we are a family. This isn't about being politically correct, it's about acceptance...I think that 'sensitivity' is not about being politically correct it's being human. It is being caring about the human condition and knowing that people are coming from all areas. Another piece is to highlight the discrimination and the inequity in our world, both historically and present.

The difficulty of negotiating identity is a personal battle, possibly fought in an empathetic classroom or at the very least, in a supportive environment. Dori shares her views and her advice to students who are struggling with their own sexual identity. Her voice loses its usual softness as she articulates her passionate plea for high school students to persevere in their identity negotiations and the challenges of reconfiguring perceptions of "possibility".

Don't give up. Don't give up...it's so easy to feel, like, well, it would be so much easier if I just hide this, or if I just deny this part of myself, or if I just play along. It is okay to blend in sometimes. There are times when you can blend in and there are times when you don't want to. There are times when you can really fight that process and try to be like everyone else. Just

> don't give up and know that there is a point...I have come to a point in my life where I am going to be as out as I want to be. So, don't give up however there is also this other idea, 'don't ever let other people make your identity for you.' Don't let other people name you. That is difficult because there are so many times when people are like, I know who you are or what you are. The biggest piece of advice other then don't give up is don't let others define you. Don't let people make assumptions about you...and really just say this is my life not yours...There is a little bit of "fuck the world" idea, but not especially. It's more like you get to define who you are and that reflects a lot of what I have learned through our conversations is that this is my identity! It is a struggle, absolutely, but it also reminds me that no one else can tell me who I am or who I like, or who I like, or what I want out of my world or out of my life.

She goes on emphatically, as she makes a case for being accepted as an equal, not tolerated as inferior. It is the call from those who live at the margins.

> I think that inclusivity is acceptance. And tolerance is different then that acceptance. Acceptance involves culpability and realizing that yes you are someone who discriminates. We don't want to have that...we don't want to be held accountable for our biases, and our "isms"...I don't want to be tolerated I want to be accepted!

The experiences of these three participants indicate that they are still in the throes of struggling with their identity. This continual negotiation for identity is a process, and one that is different moment to moment and day to day. It is a continual struggle. Dori and Lannie cannot find a term descriptive enough to encompass their perceptions of their

own sexualities, instead they refer to their fluid sexuality. They find themselves sexually, and emotionally involved with people who satisfy their needs, whether male or female. The intensity of their relationships is indicative of their power to form intimate bonds that transcend distance and time and often gender. Dori and Lannie resist the urge to label their sexuality for fear of violating the nature of their sexuality. They are content with their ongoing negotiations and the experimentation around that negotiation.

However, the ambiguity of their negotiations become increasingly more difficult as other "labels" and political realities find their place in the fray. Lannie was most emphatic in that she has felt that her obvious, exterior identities were more defining for others, and therefore more challenging. She reported that she felt more discrimination as a woman and as black person than for dating women (or men). She indicated that this is because her sexuality isn't obvious whereas being a black woman is externally obvious.

> ...it's just more obvious, its just like something that is...you know, lets just say...we both walk in the same place, nobody would ever know you were gay, ever, you know, and then that would be something that you're offering somebody...you could choose who you can be...I cannot...so, it's like you know, I'll always be black and I will always be female...which I'm not ashamed of, but it's just always a blanket and I always have judgment against me.

The political realities shaped was being personally experienced by Dori as we conducted our second interview the day following the November, 2004 Presidential election, which saw the re-election of George W. Bush. Bush is a staunch republican, who offers little support to the gay/lesbian community. In fact, is actively supporting legislation widely opposed within the gay/lesbian community, including an amendment

to the U.S. Constitution that would prohibit same-same marriage. When asked how she felt, she replied,

> ...Dejected. Dejected...I feel the political rhetoric and the religious discourse surrounding our identity and quite frankly, our place in society and our rights as individual people, under the law, mind you, of course. So we have got this difficult intersection of religious discourse, legal discourse, and civil discourse. I am just frustrated. I feel so discriminated against. It is such an unfair moment! Last night at choir rehearsal we sang a song called, *Gentle Angry People*...Honestly I sang it, but how can you support people who support tolerance, tolerance, tolerance (slams her fist down) yet don't practice it. Words don't mean anything if you don't practice them...we are "the Others" with a capital "O"!

Coming-Out

This common experience has bonded each of these participants in different ways, to the gay/lesbian community. Its as if this process is the requisite criteria for membership into the community. Their experiences are diverse, but in this diversity, they gained similar characteristics, including strength, self-acceptance, and self-reliance, as they struggle to find their place in the world. The process or event was not an area of focus, only necessary as part of the process. I was surprised that more of our negotiation discussions did not include the "coming-out" process. It was much more topical when participants discussed their relationships with themselves and their relationships with others.

The "coming out" stories reported by the participants were challenging for each. The idea of "coming-out" tended to be more difficult than the actual discussions around sexual orientation. Participants found themselves embraced in a sphere of support. Clark's "coming out" process started with his sister, who then told his parents. They had "suspected" this all along but were waiting patiently until he was ready to share with them. Lannie's process has been relatively smooth as well, as she has told her circle of friends, and her mother, although other members of her family don't know. They are religiously conservative, and she isn't willing to rock the boat, until she has actually found "the one". She will then be confident in her introduction to the rest of the family. Dori's experience started with her oldest brother, and her mother. She made the "mistake" of asking her mother not to tell her father. He found out by a slip of the tongue later, and was hurt that she hadn't been able to tell him. His reaction was one of anger and retribution when he confronted her about it, saying 'no, you're no fucking dyke'. She recalls how she hated him for a while after that.

The complex nature of the "coming-out" process provides an interesting conundrum for the researcher. Is "coming-out" best described as an identity negotiation (and internal process), or is it coaxed from us through the interpersonal relationships that are developed during a lifetime? Dialogically, it appears that the multi-dimensional facets of this complicated process defies delineation, and is woven into both of these emergent themes, and indeed beyond them. This is why this complex topic manifests itself in the context of these two emergent themes. The deconstruction of the duality that "coming-out" is, hard or easy, sad or joyful, non-issue or defining reflects the reality as

shared by Dori, Clark, and Lannie. It is in this deconstruction that the complexity, beauty, and richness of our human existence are displayed.

The struggle for identity is difficult and multi-faceted. Identities that are chosen, or that are "natural" are subject to the judgments of a culture that often times doesn't want, or can't, see the complexity of human experience. Contrary to positivist notions, the process defies categorization, and even defies definition. It is a complex private journey in which we struggle for understanding and meaning in and of our world. Our negotiations related to sexuality are part of this struggle and the "coming-out" process is descriptive of the developmental way we approach our own identity discourses.

Rofes (Tierney and Dilley, 1993, p. 63) explains that the intersection between education and Queer theory creates a pedagogical ontology that is tranformative. "[it] highlights the interaction of language and action, self and social identity, power and difference, experience and what is taken for knowledge, and the function of institutions to ensure equity beyond tolerance or representation." Equity beyond tolerance indeed, or as Dori forcefully stated her resistive stance, "I don't want to be tolerated, I want to be accepted!" Owens (1998) recognizes this difficulty, as "teens have been stripped of their invisibility" due largely to the success of other who have faced the challenges of living in the margin, or stated another way, at the "kids table". "...Gay identity, then, is not simply a discussion about rights, but also about how identity and power intersect, how institutions control and legitimate discourses" (Tierney, 1993, p. 62). And going one step further, I would add, how some discourses are excluded. The negotiation continues so as to provide teens with their visibility and their identity in a safe environment, perhaps a school environment.

The deconstruction of the "should be" world in favor of the "could be" world is couched by Unks, (1995, p. 12). "The high school [is] the center of most adolescent life and culture [and] stands staunchly aloof and rigidly resistant to even a suggestion that any of its faculty or student body might be homosexual or that homosexuals deserve anything by derision and scorn within its walls." This deconstruction is the pathway to agency for the marginalized LGBT youth, as each individual shares her or his story.

Learning to like "me"

Intrapersonal relationship. There are two types of relationship that participants discussed relative to their identity, the relationship with self and the relationship with others. Often, the relationship with self revolves around the internal dialogue that instructs and begins with the "coming out" process. This process slowly emerges as one explores "coming out" to self by beginning to frame sexual urges and contextualizing these urges in a larger world. Although it is in battling the denial that these urges are brought to cognition only to be repressed again, and the cycle goes on. Clark remembers denying these urges in high school. He remembers his high school experiences as generally happy, free of conflict and confusion, and filled with confidence. The denial allowed for him to de-personalize and repress the "secret" he knew he would eventually face and "put-off" the resulting angst. He describes his high school journey,

> Well, um, I look back at high school and I remember myself in a whole different way, not that, not that I'm different now, and not that my personality is different but just that I felt so much more confident in myself in high school. I think, because, I and in middle school too, just being home and not having to worry about it because I didn't worry about it, really, then, that much...you know, I did

a little bit, when kids would make you know, gay comments, you know, it would cross my mind, like are they talking about me? I don't know it's complicated and then I felt like, when I came to college and I was about nineteen, eighteen, nineteen, I finally had admitted to myself that I was gay...and I had to close that off, really to myself when I was around other people. I felt less confident...I felt like I just shutdown a part of me.

Inherent in the process is the self-loathing that comes from the personal plight of a person who is vilified by sexual urges seen by a mainstream as perverse. As self-loathing becomes denial, behaviors are initiated, which fuel the denial so as to blind a person to the reality of their struggle. This denial can also be manifested in hyper-heterosexualized behaviors (Watling, 2005). The denial fuels the fear that paralyzes a person, and make the bridge between self-loathing and self-acceptance a risky journey wrought with insecurities. Clark addresses how fearful he has become about his own insecurities.

...just fear too, what my parents will think, actually having them meet that person, fear of actually falling in love and getting hurt, it's happened [being hurt]....it hasn't [being in love], but I'm afraid of being hurt again. I'm also afraid of being alone...I don't have any way to...I gotta start finding things that make me happy again, but I don't know what those things are...I do...lots of stuff, but its by myself, and I don't like being by myself...so, I'm really getting into the problem....as long as I am with somebody, and I'm doing something then I'm happy, but I spend a lot of time by myself...it sucks.

There is a generalized fear about identifying yourself as gay or lesbian. As stated earlier, often time others don't know what "being gay" means, except what is portrayed on television, or maligned in the conservative press. So there is often no template for understanding "gay/lesbian". Lannie describes her own strict upbringing, and discovering "gay" but not really understanding what that was all about, especially how the concept might include her. This creates a fear that participants continually worry about, a generalized fear that includes the fear of being alone, fear of rejection, the fear of loss, etc. Often times, the fear and accompanying denial is easier then facing the challenge of identity, although each participant was clear that they knew they would eventually need to face their "secret".

The fears students remember about their past and present are also realized in their expression of the future, Grady Blair hears many of the fears articulated in the lounge area of the GLBT office.

> [Students are fearful] that their lives will be stripped. There is a general fear of what really is going to happen. Are we going to really no longer have the same lives that we have today? Not just are we not going to get married. I think that is a piece of it but I also think there is a bigger fear of what is going to happen. Another big fear is, am I ever going to find a partner and live happily ever after? That's huge. That is a constant conversation in here and 'am I going to get a job' is way down on the list.

Clark seemed disappointed in himself as he let the fear force him to lie about himself. Although he has shared his journey with a few close friends, and family members he has had to do much of the journey alone. He describes having to keep the "secret" from

others while living a life defined by dishonesty and internal dissonance. He felt lonely until he was able to share his "secret" with significant others in his world.

> ...then I was starting to have to lie to the people that didn't know.
>
> Or pretty much, which was everybody about who I was. So, I...I...
>
> there were just like division between myself. Like that like I had two lives, and it just got worse and worse, as I got older and the length of time that went on that I wasn't coming out, you know? I was just kinda, just having to keep those two lives separate, cause I started to meet more people in the gay community, and I wanted to be more involved, but I had to keep it secret...it was, yup, I had to still cut off a lot of emotions and, a feelings that I was having...It was the whole lying thing, being dishonest with my family and who I was hanging out with and my good friends who really cared about me, but I was really lying to them about what I was doing and who I was...and I'm sure...I'm...they had ideas.

Finally, acceptance of his sexuality resulted and his "celebration" is shared with significant others. The internal realization was then externally acted upon as Clark embraced his desires. This action becomes the first step in letting others into this intimate fear. It signifies the 'moment in time' where the process comes to fruition-a moment of graduation. It is a time when maturity and sexual urges combine, typically around "high school" and "early college" (used as a developmental terms here). These become pivotal times for these moments of experimentation.

Um (clears throat), yea, um I think, I was in high school, I don't remember how old I was, but I remember telling myself I wasn't [gay]...and um I finally, I think it was...maybe, I was eighteen or nineteen and I think I finally told myself, its not going to go away and you are...you're gay and you just going to have to deal with it...and then my freshman year of college I finally accepted to myself that...that I was...and I, and I acted on those feelings.

Clark's journey from denial to self-acceptance to the performance of his sexual identity defines the developmental process of accepting his own truth about himself.

Bridging from Self to Others

The growing internal fear was not the only fear that was shared during participant interviews. Participants also discussed the fears that surround interpersonal relationships. The internalized fear of loneliness was pervasive as participants discussed their relationship with self, but that fear expanded when discussing interpersonal relationships. All participants reported the fear that they could not establish relationships and that they might spend the rest of their lives alone. Clark talks about this fear and not feeling content, and fearful of the "hope" that might just lead to disappointment.

RL: What's your biggest hope for the future?

CK: Um, (long pause) that I feel satisfied with living my life with somebody else, like I'm content...I still feel like I'm not content with something, you know...I don't' know what it is...I think it's just meeting somebody who I can spend the rest of my life with...and that's my biggest hope, Yeah, I don't want to be alone the rest of my life.

Hug me, no, don't, yes, maybe?

Interpersonal Relationships. Dori's revelation to herself was less subtle as it didn't occur internally, but required the external intervention of a female confidant. She was discussing a relationship with a female friend. This friend was in an "open relationship" with her husband that included intimate relationships with other women. She became a trusted friend because she was able to accept, without judgment, Dori and her "many faces". She and Dori were discussing her friend, Gretel, who was dating a male friend. Gretel and Dori had been very close as students studying together in London. The relationship was intensely intimate but never sexual. She and Gretel spent most every night in the same bed, shopped for groceries together, cooked together, watched movies, went for walks, laughed, cried, talked a lot, and even stated their "love" for one another. Yet Dori was shocked, when during the discussion, she realized that her "love" for Gretel was much more encompassing than she had ever allowed herself to believe.

> And so I told her the Gretel story and started bursting into tears again. Like a very similar situation to how we are talking now. And I looked up...and we were talking and she is nodding and she is looking at me and I'm like, oh my God, I was in love with that girl, huh? She was like, 'Yeah, I think you were, and I think you are. And I was like, huh? What does that mean?...I was not ready... I was not ready for it. I was like no, no, I am into boys, are you kidding? I was like, what?...and I started thinking...

This was the beginning of a personal journey filled with questions of self-clarification. The personal internal process became a public revelation. Dori then went on and "came-out" to her peers in a letter to her Master's degree colleagues in her cohort. About that letter she commented, that the revelation was surreal for her as she desperately wanted to build friendships with these new colleagues, but she could only do that by being truthful. She had been "out" to various individuals before, but had not been "out" publicly. Dori felt compelled to share her sexuality, at the risk of being rejected. After she spoke the first words out loud, she realized that she could no longer control how people, these people, perceived her. In giving up that control and power, she felt surprisingly empowered to live her life by her own rules and within her own context.

> I know that after this moment I would no longer have any control over how you define me in your world, in your life, and in your hearts. In this case I will never ever have the last word and that's is how "coming out" is. You never have the last word. You only have the first word in saying this is who I am.

The bridge from "coming out" to self and to "coming out" publicly is a leap of faith as Dori describes above. It is in letting go of that 'first word' where power and control morph into empowerment. Empowerment to live congruent within the context you have established for yourself. The exhilaration comes from leaping into the unknown, facing its challenges, and emerging with a more complete sense of self. It's about the courage to jump into that unknown. The unknown, the source of fear that keeps gays and lesbians locked into the metaphorical closets of their own construction. This exhilaration is not only around developing the relationship with self, but also about the

relationship we want to have with others in our world...and the courage to do something about it.

We search for relationships that are congruent with who we are and how we see ourselves in our own world. These relationships revolve around emotional fulfillment, mutual attraction, and physical explorations with like-minded individuals. This begins the rituals around commitment that many resist and that others embrace as developmental benchmarks.

High school was a pivotal experience for these participants as they discussed the developmental importance of their adolescence. Dori believed her interpersonal relationship experiences to be congruent as she enjoyed many relationships with girls who were friends, until they became jealous for one reason or another and terminated the friendship. Similar to Clark's high school experience, she was very confident and successful in high school, and took great pride in being one of two friends who called themselves the "temptress twins" as they found a power in flaunting and flirting with their sexuality in front of the boys. Her success in high school, in any number of areas gave her the confidence to work with the personal challenges of negotiating her identity. But then, her confidence would be shaken when these 'friendships' would fall apart.

Lannie's high school experience was marked by a move from Chicago area schools where she was in a small school, and a small classroom, to a large Los Angeles area high school, known to be "pretty rough". She discusses how her minority status shaped the development of her friendships, and her sense of belonging at school.

> High school in L.A. was weird because I'd never been in a different city before, and so, it was kind of a...it was kinda weird experience,

because now, I'm with more minorities, before I was the only minority, there were three black kids in my school, always...you know, and there was me and my sister and one other black kid...so it was interesting to be around other minorities...and being in the city, which was a little rougher was odd, because...well you look and me and people would say...I think that people just look at me and say oh, she's just fine in the city...oh, but you know it's like, no I'm really not, but you know I became kinda streetwise... the classes were not as difficult as they were [in Chicago]. I felt like I left there behind because I would take extra classes on Saturday so I could, felt like I, you know, getting an education because the classes were so simple...

High school experiences are often defined by the "coming-out" process however Lannie's high school experience was very much separate from her "coming out" process. This process was outside of the school experience, and was privately encountered. This is partially due to the fact that her first lesbian experience didn't happen until age 23. She was beyond the school years. However, she reports about several crushes that she had on teachers of both sexes while growing up. She didn't have a large circle of peer-aged friends and preferred the more mature company of adults. These relationships established her sense of belonging, her sense of self, and her confidence without the complicating factor of sexuality. The adults who were important to her in high school were willing to simply be there, and befriend her. She found that she had much more in common with adults than she did with her peers.

Each participant reports a relatively happy, confident adolescence as they negotiated the challenges of schooling, socialization, and skills acquisition. These

processes were then complicated as physical maturity forced the issue of sexuality to the fore. It is at this critical intersection that participants reflect upon the influences of their relationships. Regardless of the nature of the relationships formed, interpersonal relationships informed each participant's journey in different and profound ways. They are defining for some, ancillary to others, and reflective for all, as relationships with others provided feedback for understanding and templates for establishing meaning.

Same-Sex Marriage

The issue of same sex marriage was part of this discussion about relationships. Lannie discusses the issue of marriage, "I didn't believe in marriage because I didn't believe that I could love so much...you know, just be in love with someone forever...you know...and I've had that feeling." She goes on to describe what a permanent relationship would be for her. She defines it in context of tradition and what that means for her, marriage would be with a man, and a committed relationship with another woman can be defined in many ways, but not as marriage.

> Well, like I said, I'm very traditional...like if I was going to have a male relationship, I would be, I think that I would be a little more like, vulnerable, or inferior to that person, to my husband, because I would think, I would think because if I was going to date a guy...um...I feel like this should be going toward marriage...that's how I feel...and with women I can feel like I do want this to last forever, but I don't believe in marriage, I mean same-sex marriage...you know, I believe you can go do whatever paperwork and do whatever and do everything...but um, the ceremony of marriage should be, for traditions sake, for a man and a woman.

Lannie has defined relationships for herself and what they would look like on a permanent basis. Her revelation regarding marriage further illustrates the complex nature of individual perceptions and personal choices in the journey of life. Dori offers her perspective on the same-sex marriage issue stating that marriage is about a patriarchial construct designed to oppress. She asks that question, within a feminist context, "why is this such a desirable institution for gays and lesbians?"

> I am wondering why are we fighting for marriage because marriage is still so assumed under this larger discourse of patriarchy. I mean patriarchal control of this, right? I keep thinking...and why are we fighting to be part of that? It doesn't make sense? If we really wanted to push against it and push the world to go further and eventually if we do get rights we are going to be assumed under this larger structure, right? Are we going to be co-opted? Probably. And so it is a struggle and I am scared. I am scared because it limits my options as an individual and I feel like I have every right as anyone else does to be in a relationship and to be recognized...It is my decision and not the state's decision, and not my constitution's decision. That's bullshit!

The fear of the future is wrapped up in the political negotiations that are played out on our national stage by the media, such as the same-sex marriage issue. Grady Blair hears many of these fears articulated in the lounge area of the GLBT office as students wrestle with the intersection between same-sex marriage as a political "hot potato" and finding someone else with whom to share life and living.

Dr. Jones draws the distinction between relationships and marriage and how one is not necessarily the outcome of the other. He declares that all human beings should

have the option to engage in societal institutions, or not. It is the ability to have the option that defines freedom because there are many paths from which to choose.

> I am clear that I will fight to the end with my allies and advocates and my community for the privilege and right to be married. Now ask me personally, I have no desire for that institution...it's a very different thing for me. I don't live my life through monogamy and marriage. At the same time that doesn't mean that I don't treat people with respect and dignity. I just don't do well under monogamy and marriage. It is not an institution that works for me, or at least has not worked for me yet. It might happen in the future but it still isn't in the frame now...all I'm saying is I don't think that is the only path that is out there for people to take and I am choosing not to.

The issues that surround relationships, as they are any in the human sphere, are difficult, complex, and multi-dimensional. Participants brought into this discussion their multiple realities, their understanding of the world, their truths, and their experiences and made the discussion much more muddy and unclear, as is expected of the inquiry into human experience. Same-sex marriage is certainly a politically charged topic within the realm of interpersonal relationship and therefore is on the minds of participants. The other issue that was raised during interviewing as related to interpersonal relationships was the influence of role models in GLBT youth.

Role Models

Participants told several stories about their high school memories. These memories may be colored by time but still ring clearly. These memories revolved around their own personal conflict and dialogue around their sexuality, and sharing their very personal journey with others. They agree that role models were important as they were growing up. However, these role models weren't necessarily models for their own gay liberation. These models revealed for them an inner strength and courage to face the intra personal challenges that they were going to face around many issues, including their sexuality.

Clark's didn't have any gay role models perhaps they might have eased the difficulty of building relationships. Clark is comfortable with being a gay man, and living his life as such, although he is in an intricate negotiation of what that means to him. He hasn't had much of a template for deriving meaning about his gayness. He states that there are only four people he can look to as gay role models. I felt a blush of pride, when he identified me as one of those.

> Rosie O'Donnell (laughs), I know it sounds stupid, but no,
> totally Rosie O'Donnell, um and then, the girls I came out
> to in high school...and my best friend, Lon, who is gay, and
> how I have you to look up to...just somebody who is a good positive influence,
> um yea, not many though.

Clark and I developed a close relationship from the beginning. We developed rapport and had a sense of "kindredness" as we discussed the beauty of Colorado (both as Colorado natives) and with our career choices as educators. We both enjoy the

opportunities afforded by the mountains, such as hiking and skiing. Clark is a high school teacher in a large metropolitan area, who is out in his life, with friends and family, but is not at work, another similarity that we share. We have had several discussions about what it means to be a gay educator and how to negotiate that difficult balance between personal and professional lives, especially under the scrutiny of a conservative populace. It is something that we both continually worry about.

As he continues to search for his own role models Clark has realized that he has become one. He understands that students will often place their instructors as role models. He believes that it would be difficult to be effective in the classroom if he were wearing his sexuality - "on his sleeve". Although he believes that he can be and is a good role model for gay students as well as for regular students. He acknowledges that he maintains an open classroom environment where students feel comfortable seeking him out "to talk". He also does everything he can to maintain an inclusive environment free from hateful language. This means that he confronts the use of language that is demeaning and disrespectful, but again, he didn't feel like this was a huge issue for his students

> Well, I make sure that students are comfortable around me and in my classroom, that I am really accepting, you know, willing to help them
> and accepting of who they are...and that's about all that I can do...the
> rest is up to them...and um... and if anything is ever said in my class...I ...I'll acknowledge the student who said whatever was inappropriate and take whatever action I need to, depending on the severity of it.

Lannie's had a different view of role models, especially within an educational context. Her experiences regarding role modeling were different from Clark's in that she did not come from an educational perspective. Lannie's strict upbringing and close relationship with her mother comes into her perception of the role that schools should play when working with LGBT students. Role models for her aren't within the school system by are in the home, where students learn the life lessons.

> I never thought about having a group like that [GSA-Gay/Straight Alliance], and you know, I just think, I think those classes are good, and clubs like that are good, but I think it's up to the parent really that should teach it to their child...you know, teachers already have stuff on their plates, they're educators, and your parents are supposed to be your educators of life...and I just feel that there's just too much put on people outside of their home, you know...and their sexuality should be the parents job. I know people will say there is not time, I don't have time, but they have time to watch television and this and that...but it's like...you know if you don't do it someone else is going to...if you don't want somebody else to do it, well then Lannie really focused on what parents can do, as she feels like the schools are burdened with too many other tasks.

Dr. Jones acknowledges the importance of role modeling with the educational system. He understands the necessity of role models, in the right context and with the appropriate "message". His perspective is relevant to the larger audience of GLBT youth and is certainly relevant to the high school setting. His collegiate teaching career and working with undergraduate students as they transition from high school to the university colors his perspective in an insightful way as he shares his perspectives with those

endeavoring to work in the interpersonal world of the American high school. He notes the importance of role models in this process. Students need to see role models who can become a reflection for them. It is in these reflections that identity can be shaped as a student processes through their own questioning.

> ...student's need someone in their lives who they feel like they can trust. Who they feel is attempting to be genuine with them about struggles and challenges of our lives for personally and culturally. And someone who they believe will not judge them or tell them exactly what they need to be doing. That's what my experience tells me...Mentorship and stories of our lives seem to be really key here.

Grady Blair finds himself a reluctant role model in his work with gay and lesbian students on a university campus who are struggling with any number of issues, including depression, relationships, alcohol use, and drug abuse. His office is open for all who are seeking a safe haven, a respite from intolerance, and advice on any other of a number of personal matters. It's a place where students seek a mentor or role model to assist and advise the difficulties of living. His gay identity is bound by being ridiculed and ostracized as a fifteen year old, out teen. He'd like this place to be identified as a safe place where students can be themselves and not feel guilt, shame, or the loneliness that marked the public acknowledgment of his sexuality. Unlike, many others, his parents knew before his friends, and the family process was quite easy.

However, being disowned by his loyal "friends" was difficult. He brings this history into his work with LGBT students. The inequality of power and privilege among

classes (broadly defined) in America should be brought into the curriculum if sweeping changes are to be permanently and genuinely enabled.

> I'd like to see high schools across the board do a more teaching about power and privilege...because across the board I don't think that our high school students really get it. I don't think anyone in the culture really gets it. [The other thing] is how do we come back to having more control.

He describes a discussion he has had with his sister who is a high school Principal in the same state who indicates that it is time for public schools to invoke the concept of the separation of church and state and quit letting the myriad of special interest groups influence curriculum...it's time that teachers take schools back.

"Men and women are different?!?!"

Lannie describes the drama and difficulty of being involved in a female relationship. She declares that female relationships are so unstable and are very draining. She noted during one of our interviews that the very discussion of female relationships had markedly affected her energy level at that moment. She laughingly notes, that if you hangout with women for too long they start to read something else into the relationship, which may or may not be there, but they don't directly ask the question. They are simply very complicated because women tend to process more about everything in a relationship. "Men, I don't think process...they're just like this is what we're doing and this is, whatever, and they're both fine with that..." Lannie concludes that this is because intimacy effects women on a deeper level, and it gets more complicated because women tend to get jealous of one another as they spend more time together. She also recognizes this as an overgeneralization, but in her experience, she has found it to be true. Finally,

she shared the observation that within the boundaries of a relationship, both men and women tend to stray albeit in different ways. Men cheat physically, and women tend to cheat emotionally. They remove their heart from the relationship and begin to lay the groundwork for the next relationship before the first one has 'officially' ended. This is more hurtful and less honest.

Dori shares similar experiences with female friendships. She talked extensively about the many female friendships that she had that were terminated because of jealousy and competing interests. In our interview Dori describes no less than 16 relationship triangles that ended in the termination of a female friendship. These triangles consisted of Dori, and two others engaged in relationship building. Dori's perception of these relationships revolves around her experience with difficulty in having relationships with other women.

> Um, I struggled with relationships with women...but you know, looking back its always so funny, because you know, hind sight feels 20/20 so often...you know, and um, I had girlfriends all along, like best friends, you know...you know, it was always like my best friend so and so, my best friend so and so, or we're friends, or we're fighting, or this or that or the other things...and the, (clears throat) the inconsistency in my relationship with women were so difficult for me, because I felt that people hated me for no reason, or all of a sudden they would be my best friends and all of a sudden they wouldn't be...and it was either over a boy, or something for something that I did that I didn't realize I did, or um, for no reason at all.

She admits her high school ideal, "I wanted and got the attention from the guys without the criticism from the women... but there is always competition in any relationship with a woman." In our many hours of interviewing, I found that Dori was able to maintain friendships with women when she was honest about her sexuality from the beginning. The friendships that didn't last were based on an inability to be honest with herself, and therefore with others. So, her formative friendships didn't last, whereas, in the last couple of years, she has been able to easily create and maintain a diverse circle of friends, who are clear as to how she views her fluid sexuality. She has done this by understanding that for her, relationships don't need to be "complete", they simply must be understood by both people, as they "travel on a journey together". Dori continues, "Relationships are brand new all the time...it is a constant learning about each other and more and more, I remember things better with you here."

As noted earlier, all individuals struggle for a sense of agency and power in their own lives. It is in relationship formation that agency can be exercised. However, the relationships must be developed in an open, honest manner. Such was the realization that guided Dori to "come-out" to her graduate class. Seligman's term (1991), "learned optimism" gives us hope as we exert an internal locus of control over our worlds and develop our own agency related to the realities we create for ourselves. We can choose to participate in a heteronormative world, or choose to align our experience, desires, bodies, and politics in our own frameworks, our own templates for understanding. Tierney's assertion that "our individual and collective memories help construct the reality of our present" provides for our own interpretation of a world that is uniquely ours. Relationships, past, present, and future, interpersonal and intrapersonal are the constructs

that we strive to contextualize as we negotiate meaning. Relationships reflect who we are, and who we'd like to be, as we search for this elusive objective. Yet, in this freedom, Tierney cautions, "...yet essentially, we are arguing that critical research need to challenge the oppressive structures that create the conditions for silencing (1993, p. 4). This is the caution in which we take heed as move forward on our journey of discovery.

This is the role of Queer theory in this research. De Lauretis intended the use of the word 'queer' in the academy to be critically disruptive (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory and feminism then become critical perspectives to the deconstruction of heteronormative activities, such as marriage, dating, chivalry, etc. These scholarly voices join together with the Clark, Dori, Lannie, Dr. Jones, and Grady Blair in the hope that we can engage in relationship of our own choosing and our own definitions, as they fit into the word as we see it.

We can re-claim our bodies, as our own without the political overtures of a conservative government. These are the 'fruits of the battle', what we stand to win, as we engage in enlightened and emancipatory discourses, around who we are, and with whom we desire to spend our time! Kitzinger captures the hope offered by Queer theory.

> ...Queer theory has focused on its implicit endorsement of the normality of heterosexuality...from a queer perspective nothing is natural, nothing is normal. Everything is a social and cultural construct and gender identities are acquired.

The myth and subsequent deconstruction of gender as a binary contextualizes the emancipation of gays and lesbians, as they define their sexuality along their own continuum free of patriarchal oppression and heteronormative, homophobic expectations. Our relationships will be our own! It is in this discourse, I find hope!

Conclusion

"Its just so hard to be gay."

Dr. Jones strives to shed light on the human condition shared through the stories of these participants...their own stories woven into their own meanings and into their own contexts. His hopeful, playful perspective is a reminder that we are mirrored in our own humanness, as creators and reflections. It is in the "flirting" with this humanness that we better understand our existence, our place. He explains,

> If I were to say that I do anything in this world, I write, I think, and I paint to better understand, talk about, and express the human condition, I love that! I've been told that I flirt with the humanity in everyone.

His insightful perspective illuminates the way that our history informs our world and an internal process that struggles to reconcile with an external culture. He refers to one of many books he is writing.

> I think it speaks to a way of how you bring your history to this one moment of one relationship that you have with someone and it fuses in such a strong way that you can't help but find so many different things to learn from about what living a human condition is about...it's full of complexity, tragedy, loss, challenge, and fear.

The difficulty of the journey is evident, as is the deeply personal nature of finding a place in the world. The participants continue to struggle as they create their own templates for understanding. Clark notes, "its just so hard to be gay". This sentiment threads through each interview as participants wrestle with acceptance in the wider community, and at the same time understanding that sexuality precludes their

membership in that very community. This conundrum defines the world of the gay and lesbian as they work to find meaning.

The participants who elected to participate in this study were brave, inspiring and insightful in so many ways. Their perceptions went above and beyond the limits of the research questions and created an elaborate new framework for understanding the nuances of gay and lesbian membership. It is with this respect that I continue my discussion and try to provide closure to the worlds into which I have been invited. It is in the many stories of these "every day" heroes that perhaps one of us, all of us, or just some of us will find our own meaning.

Dr. Jones gracefully closes this chapter for all participants. I asked if he thought of himself as brave. His eloquent response speaks for the other participants, and the thousands who have been crushed under the weight of a culture that has forgotten to listen. His words enfold the myriad of emotions, the incredible courage, the depth of the sadness and loneliness, and the passion with which Clark, Dori, and Lannie live their lives.

> I think that anyone living out, anyone who continues to put their discourse or their personhood forward on some of these issues that still remain to be quite strongly stigmatized and problems in terms of identity politics. Who we are and why do some people have different levels of privilege and power over others? I think that you are putting yourself out there on that day, everyday. I like to think of myself as someone who is doing that. Bravery has to step into the picture because the other is exhaustion. The other is apathy. The other is indifference. So, I think

that it takes a little bit of bravery to get out there and say this is where we are still not making sense about our levels of hate and our levels of prejudice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Analytic Summary

The body of literature reviewed in Chapter Two sets the stage for this study. The complexity of the human spirit, the struggle for sexual identity, and their manifestations in the halls of the American high school are illuminated in this literature. The perspectives and eloquent stories provided by participants add the richness and depth that empowers this research. It is in these stories that we can find hope and realize transformation. Previous research has talked about what has been done and was hasn't been done to create a learning environment for students who identify as LGBTQ. This area of inquiry only opened up recently. "...until the mid 1970's the literature about homosexuality and its relationship to education was framed in one of two ways, either by absence or by defining the topic as deviant" (Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p.50). It is with this beginning that alternative postmodern methodologies were inspired to change the dim advent of this area of research. Feminist methodologies combined with the radical voices of Queer theory to shake up the establishment, while busting through the walls of tradition. It is this inspiration that was needed to search for hope and true emancipation for the newest minority in public education, gay and lesbian kids. Dori's voice speaks loudly:

> We are not going to stop being around. I don't want to have to go under ground. I don't' think that all said it will have to do with the community that you shoot for. I think that there are a number of people rather

that feel comfortable here in this community. I know that I can find a community that will accept me it is just that I don't know if it is going to be total acceptance. I think it is always going to be qualified. We still live in a world where African Americans are still stigmatized. I still have students who give speeches against Affirmative Action saying that it is racist. That we should change these policies because white people are being persecuted is bullshit.

The Adam Hardy's of the world should not have to refer to being gay as "Problem #1". Public schools need to be places where the Adam Hardy's can be heard, and can be accepted, and can learn. This begins with discourse that is radical in nature and that highlights the limitations of binary thinking, and the exclusionary results of dualism. Can Adam Hardy fit in a world of binary thought, where his identity is not articulated, and therefore not worthy of value.

Safarik (2000 p. 34) notes the critical intersection between power and culture, "for those who are not in positions of power within institutions, this is a critical realization; marginalized groups are able to transform institutions through enacting culture." This is the challenge laid out before the academy and before the public schools. The dialogic moment is at hand and the discourse is poised and ready to give LGBTQ students a language for building their own culture. It's a cultural revolution imbedded in our language and our discourses. "Yet [it] is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (Weedon, 1987, p.21). This is the way that culture is enacted and individuals are empowered to make change as we construct a new way of thinking and living (Tierney, 1993, Kitzinger, 1987, Weedon, 1995, Butler, 1999,). In this construction there must also be a shedding of traditional thought that has placed wedges

between human beings for far too long. Pinar quotes Creech, "...deconstruction has played an important role in contemporary queer theory by demonstrating that supposedly natural norms of gender, and sexuality are power-effect produced within the institution of compulsory heterosexuality..."(1995, p. 136). It is within this institution of compulsory heterosexuality that many LGBTQ students find themselves; a place of little support, loneliness, ridicule, and marginalization. If schools have taken on this indictment of "institutional heterosexuality" then it is within the schools that some change can be made. It is this loud, radical voice where transformation can occur, the intersections where the marginalization of gay and lesbian students ends and full acceptance, (not simply tolerance) begins.

As related to the original purpose of this research, schools were believed to be truly emancipatory as profound change agents in society. However, through the eyes and stories of these participants, schools were locales where development and maturity occurred, but had little to do with the experience of "gayocity". In the American landscape, schools are intricately woven into the very fabric and inextricably connected to the developmental process of most adolescents. This assertion is also true with our participants. They reported many of the same developmental challenges of their contemporaries, including negotiating schooling, socialization, friendships, family issues, etc. but within a heterosexual context that had little meaning for their emerging sexuality.

All participants reported high school to be a time of self-awareness, which included sexuality, but was much more broadly defined. Sexuality emerged as much more "charged" when physical maturity and emotional maturity intersected into the question of body and the manifestation of corporal desire. However, these issues were

not because of school, but contextualized and bound by cultural expectation that all students attend institutions of learning-schools.

Practical Implications

As is true with narrative processes in qualitative research, the stories of the participants took the research in a new, richer direction. The two primary themes that emerged in this research, identity negotiation, and the need for relationship (both internal and external) were much more salient then schooling as reported by these participants. It is within these thematic contexts that the high school environment was seen as a viable point of discussion. Developmental issues, learning issues, and sexuality issues are discussed in their personal contexts, but not in the school context. However, there is still much that can be learned by the American high school through the stories of these participants.

The importance of supportive individuals who are willing to build relationships with students, as they move through their own struggles was seen as critical. Certainly, this implication speaks loudly to teachers, and other school personnel who work with America's students daily. Secondly, schools can learn the value of creating space for students to explore and discover their own nuanced worlds, without the judgment and rhetoric so often placed on youth. Traditionally, it has seemed that the dominant culture has been fearful that students may be able to fully understand themselves if given the proper tools. LGBTQ students are able to struggle with their own negotiations for identity, as supports are put into place to make this process acceptable and encouraged.

Conceptual Framework

Every step of this study was guided by the three-dimensional narrative space articulated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). These dimensions are interaction, continuity, and situation. The interaction between the participants and the researcher was built upon a positive rapport and a genuine care and concern for one another. Interview questions were designed so that participants were able to tell their stories and inform the research with their rich perspectives. The intersubjectivity came into the research and in the final analysis we co-created the implications of this research. The interviews were structured with continuity in mind, with a focus on participant past, their present, and their hopes and dreams for the future. Finally, the interviews were grounded in a place and a time, a moment, vibrant with energy and spark.

These dimensions were then analyzed and transcribed with a focus on the direction of the research inward, outward, backward, and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These directional perspectives are the nature of qualitative research and story telling in the narrative tradition. Conversations that are tied to emotional issues are typically not bound to linear thought. In fact, participants recognize the circular, fluid, and nonlinear nature of their stories. Dori comments on her nonlinear world.

> Of course and we are supposed to fit in the line...color in the lines kids, well, I don't do that. Of course because of my control freak way I technically do color within the lines, but by life doesn't color within the lines...and I don't move in a straight line...I'm not linear, no...We don't technically like people who don't move in a linear fashion. We don't like people who write in circular fashion. We don't want...we want people to fit in with what expect them to be.

Theoretical Implications

There were two primary areas of focus that emerged from the stories shared by participants, the search for identity, the need for relationship. Additionally, I have included some thoughts about one particular question that revolved around giving advice to schools about educating LGBTQ youth.

These apparently discreet areas overlap and flow one into the other, in a complexity that comes to define the gay spirit. These areas are fluid and momentary constructs that will change with new experiences and new perceptions. The ever-changing images, the vibrant colors and the rich texture of these conclusions create the tapestry being woven throughout this research.

Identity Negotiation

Embedded in the stories of each participant was the angst and excitement of coming to terms with their own sense of self. They struggled and continue to struggle with what it means to be them. They struggle because in the binary thought of positivist science there was no place for these individuals. They are not one or the other they are an amalgamation of multiple experiences and realities. Weedon describes why queer theory offers a liberating view, "...from a queer perspective nothing is natural, nothing is normal. Everything is a social and cultural construct and gender identities are acquired." (1995, p. 73).

As we construct our own identities and build our lives around our own constructs there is some learning that can be done. We can learn from each other's sense of self and move forward in a more enlightened manner. It is seldom that we learn of another's

struggles and leave unchanged. Dr. Jones stated in an interview, "...you don't have to agree with an identity to learn and grow from that identity." We can be what we choose to define ourselves as and yet learn and grow from what others have to share with us.

This encapsulates the very essence of the charge put forth by the populace to the American high school. This charge is to create an environment where all students can learn. This learning must take place in an environment pulsing with the energy of diverse opinions, and free of judgment, where all members of that community can live congruently with their identity processes. Rofes (1993/1994, p. 34) states "...what remains therefore, is a culture willing to accept and even embrace the infinite constructions of individuals." If this ideal can be reached than, we can deconstruct what Unks (1995, p. 5) calls the most homophobic institutions in America, the American high school.

Relationship

Participants were also concerned about being alone and being isolated. Certainly, as they were raised in a culture that has no understanding of their identity journey, then, it makes sense that LGBTQ students might feel isolated and lonely in the process. They have no template for understanding themselves. Lannie talked about feeling "different" towards women in her late teens; however, she didn't have a template for understanding these feelings as she had never been engaged about the multiple meanings of gay, whether on a cultural level, or on a personal level.

The fear that surrounds relationships is not surprising. The isolated manner in which these participants came to understand their sexuality causes them to yearn for a

partner with whom to share the burden. The "outsider" who can build a community at some level, becomes less of an "outsider". Dori captures this fear.

> ...how desperate are we as a society to be freaked out that we aren't going to find that one person? ...I am just concerned that I am not going to find someone that I can be honest and true and be myself with...

Uniquely qualified/utterly marginalized

The participants of this study were asked to address their advice to high schools, teachers, and students. This is an empowering question asked of persons around LGBTQ issues. It was surprising that each felt somewhat uncomfortable with providing this advice, as if what they had to say wasn't worthy of consideration. They have been so marginalized for so long, that the very thought that they might have a worthwhile contribution doesn't even cross their minds. However, we need to look at those who have intimate experiences with the struggle for sexual identity, and a memory for their high school experiences. These persons are uniquely qualified to engage the public school system in the discourse around sexuality within its walls.

Earlier in this study, I noted that educators find themselves with the challenge of educating every student that comes through the school-house doors. Teachers, generally, have the capacity to care about the learning of each individual. However, have we taught these teachers how to work with every individual? There is little discussion at the high school level regarding sexuality, and how to work with students who identify outside of the traditional binary. Perhaps it is in listening to the stories of those who have experienced disenfranchisement, those who have wrestled with the pangs of adolescence wrought with the angst of struggling with sexuality, that we can make a difference.

These conversations level out power and privilege and can begin to empower gay and lesbian students as active participants in their own learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

This journey has been all too short. I hope that it has generated questions that other researchers can continue to explore-there are a myriad of possibilities for further research. These points were discussed in the interviews and are certainly worthy of further consideration, but were not directly related to this study. There is much more work to be done! And the responsibility is immense. I can no longer work and live in a world that negates me, nor should this be an expectation for anyone. Students deserve the respect of being valued for what they bring into the classroom, not vilified for who they are. I hope that others see that making the world a better place comes from credibility built in the halls of the academy and shared with those who are most in need; those who have never been heard, and who have never had voice. Here are a few suggestions for further research.

1. Gender related differences as related to gay and lesbian issues. Although this research has addressed many areas of commonality, there are many areas that are specific to gender that need to be explored. Participants noted gender is an important issue to address, not as a binary concept, but as a continuum that impacts the way we look at the world, and therefore, how we choose to negotiate our sexual identity. Gay men and lesbians, by virtue of gender, have very different worlds within which to maneuver. Research in this area could help illuminate and further emancipate.

2. The argument that same-sex marriage is a "left-over" from a patriarchal past is an interesting area of research. Although the term, marriage, connotes many financial, and security benefits, are these not possible without the patriarchal umbrella forcing gays and lesbians to participate in this traditional ceremony which doesn't include them. Heterosexuals and homosexuals alike may not fit into the matrimonial framework, and as we are able to negotiate our personal identities, aren't we free to negotiate our coupled identities, without the limitations placed upon us by white, male, upper class, mentality?
3. How can power and privilege, as historically represented, and institutionalized be represented in the curriculum of our public schools? There has been injustice played out against "the others" for centuries as they face the power and privilege of certain classes of people. It is here that we can create a curriculum that can empower students and teachers to find the voice of their multiple selves, their multiple realities. It is here that transformation can continue. As schools accept this challenge, then perhaps we will learn from the mistakes of our collective history and begin to relish in the richness of a diverse population.
4. A final area of research is in the area of masculinity. Men find themselves at a crossroads where traditional stereotypes and male-typed behavior is no longer what is expected in society. A feminist lens could be used to research the needs of men, and to release them of the hold of history. This, again, would emancipate men who are looking for new answers for living in a new postmodern era.

Researcher Reflections

Dr. Jones sets the tone for these final thoughts:

> ...do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large. I am multitudes. I tell my students I am not using that as an excuse to say I can do whatever the hell I want, with no ethical responsibility or concern for others but that yeah, life is a little nuanced...life is a little complex. The fact that I fit some stereotypes doesn't mean that I am just this because there is so much more feeding me and who I am too. Because of that I am bound to contradict myself or seem like I am contradicting myself in ways that I live my humanity and the ways that I perform my life and do my life.

Inherent in living life is contradiction. We are in a continual negotiation for our identity, a way of establishing our place on this earth. We change, develop, and evolve with the changing landscape of our world. As Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transexuals, and those who question, it is an imperative that we raise our voices above the din, and recognize our place on the national stage. It is in the continual negotiations that we can come to establish our own power to change a system that has disenfranchised us. It is the constant discourse engaged in continually that will enact our culture (Safarik, 2000) and which will allow us to shed the shackles of a dominant culture, and emancipate the hopes and dreams of LGBTQ people everywhere.

Classrooms in the American high school have the potential of becoming the most transformative of places. Classrooms need to be about acceptance, not tolerance. We are not a second class to be "tolerated" as Dori shared. We deserve and have earned the right to eat at the "adult table" with no apologies to learn in every classroom without fear

that who we are isn't o.k. Dori addresses the power of the classroom as a transformative force.

> "...and I mean knowing the transformation that I had gone through, especially as an undergrad, looking back on that really made me question things in the world...noticing power structures, noticing how things were happening and learning how to ask critical questions about things and to be critical...That's where I have found my goal...that's why I have taken affinity to the whole academic track because that is how I feel that I can make some sort of difference and not have to worry about being elected [to public office].

The classrooms across America are really places where hope resides as we open up dialogue and provide terminology and encourage bravery for those willing to engage in this critical discourse. This is where we can break the cycle of "tradition" and institutionalized persecution, and it is from here that we can make the world a better place. A world of a 'rich, blue background surrounded by an oddly colored pyramid, with a title transcending both boundaries, with disregard for the symmetry of the cover'

This narrative process was complex and difficult as was expected from this qualitative approach. It is a research that allows participants to "claim identities and construct lives (Reismann, 1993, p. 2). The participants that chose to work with me on this study are phenomenal people. There were a couple of difficulties, however. I was able to develop immediate friendships and camaraderie with each. This could have been difficult as I was engaged in the writing process, as several invitations were made for further social engagement. I didn't feel that accepting these invitations was appropriate, until after the writing process was completed.

The second difficulty that was surprising for me was the difficulty with which Clark expressed his emotions. He was reluctant to schedule our final interview because he felt that our conversations were growing more philosophical and emotional. He stated, "I don't enjoy talking about my feelings." This created a relatively abrupt end to my research relationship with Clark, although we have subsequently had other conversations. The process was critical and grounded at ever level as the full spectrum of human experience was shared from participants and myself.

This has been the most rewarding professional and personal experience of my life. The research has asked difficult questions of me as I have of these participants. It is a journey I could never have imagined, and one that I will cherish as valuable and worthwhile. I have brought my story to the stories of these brave participants as we co-created this research, as is the experience of narrative inquiry. The qualitative process required that I call into question my own insecurities and my own feelings of worthlessness at the feet of a society that has long told me I was "less" because I identify as gay. It is with anger that I realize that societal expectations kept me in the closet and in denial of my true self. It is with a new, stronger, more passionate voice that I submit this research, with the sincerest hope that the day will come when no one will ever again waste 42 years of their lives in a dark closet, where no one recognizes them, and where they can't even recognize themselves. I can be invisible no longer! It is the intensity of this journey that has given me the courage and the strength to not only to speak out for myself but to encourage others to find their voice so that together we can sing our liberation. It is in the rich tapestry, of which I am part, that I can see hope.

*A 'personals' website...and so goes the dance. The boys and the men in their own way deny their desperation...the hurt comes through their voice, contrived words, for sale, anything to fill the void, the nothingness, the dark...*and so it goes we, the gays, the lesbians, the bisexuals, the transgendered, and the questioning, we search for meaning, not the meaning that has been told to us from birth of an ideal that we are all born to achieve...but the meaning that we choose to define with our own senses, our own voices, and our own experiences. The ideal which we create, which is ours, and to which we hold onto--for there is hope. There is hope in our collective stories, and there is emancipation just around the corner as we construct our own future. We remember the subjugation of the past and I co-create with Clark, Dori, Lannie, Dr. Jones, and Grady Blair a future where together we celebrate the hope that no one will ever have to feel *"like a Jew in a Nazi home"*.

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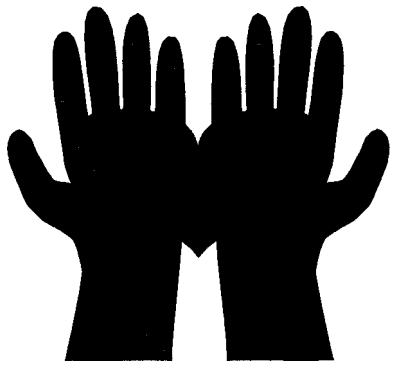
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Participant Recruitment Poster

Tell Your Story!



A Great Research Opportunity

Who:	*Men and Women (self-identified as gay/lesbian), 18years +*
What:	*A Colorado State University research study using a qualitative approach*
Premise:	*How do adolescent experiences impact identity formation in the establishment of a healthy, happy gay life?*
When:	*Each chosen participant will be asked to participate in three one-hour interviews. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience.*
Where:	*To be arranged with interviewee*
Researcher:	*My name is Rod Lucero, a PhD student in the School of Education I am an educator with a MA in Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Colorado, and a BA in Psychology, Political Science, and Education from the University of Denver.*

I'm looking forward to hearing your stories and experiences!

Please contact:	*Rod Lucero*	
Home:	*(970) 377-1069*	*rlucero@holly.colostate.edu*
Cell:	*(970) 218-0099*	*rodrick.lucero@comcast.net*

APPENDIX B: Sample Participant Consent Form

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT: The Struggle for Agency: A Narrative Look at the Gay Experience

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Lynn Safarik, PhD

NAME OF CO-INVESTIGATOR: Rodrick S. Lucero

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:
Rodrick S. Lucero (970) 377-1069

AGE RANGE FOR PARTICIPATION: 18-35yrs.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:
This research study is designed to give gay men and lesbians an opportunity to share their stories with a population that can learn from each other's experiences. The hope that lies in this type of research is in the stories and experiences of individuals who are willing to share.

PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED:
You will be asked to participate in three separate interview sessions. The sessions will be once a week for three weeks and last about an hour. A quiet, public location determined by you and the researcher will be the location for the interviews. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and with your consent. Each session will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. The tapes and transcripts will be maintained in locked storage for three years. Every caution will be taken to protect confidentiality and personal information.

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES:
There are no known risks

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

BENEFITS:
There is no known benefit in participating, but we hope that you will share your story and tell others about what you have learned along your journey.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Every precaution will be taken to insure your privacy and confidentiality. This includes the use of pseudonyms in the final product.

LIABILITY:
The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Questions about participants' rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker at (970) 491-1563.

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

_____
Participant name (printed)

_____ _____
Participant signature Date

_____ _____
Witness to signature (project staff) Date