LEADING FROM THE CLOSET:

TOWARD A NEW THEORY OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

BY

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ABSTRACT

Although progress has been made in the name of queer rights over the past few years, heterosexism and homophobia still pervade public schools. According to a report of the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (2011), in 2010, 81.9% of queer students were verbally harassed, 38.3% were physically harassed and 18.3% were physically assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation.

To address this enduring homophobia, educational leaders must take the initiative to bring about changes that will make the culture of schools more inclusive. Research suggests that queer and other minority leaders are more likely to advocate for these social justice changes due to their heightened sensitivity to issues of advocacy (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007). Yet, educators who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (queer) are often stymied in this kind of social justice work for fear of losing their jobs. Further, despite their potential for enacting social justice, there is a paucity of research on queer leaders and no leadership theory inclusive enough to consider the perspectives of queers.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of queer educational leaders with the aim of developing a queer theory of educational leadership. This qualitative study sought to answer the following questions: What are the experiences of queer leaders? How has their sexuality mediated their leadership practices? and What do their experiences suggest for a queer theory of leadership practice?

Using snowball sampling, I located 15 participants and conducted semi-structured, two-part interviews with each of them. The data gathered from the interviews was analyzed using both narrative analysis and grounded theory approaches (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Narrative analysis provided a window into the diversity of experiences among my participants, while grounded theory led to the development of a model of queer leadership. This model illustrates how queer leaders lead from the closet (Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995), which is both a function of, and subject to, the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). However, while most theorists have written about the closet as a repressive structure (Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995), the experiences of these leaders illustrate that the closet provides the necessary protection in order for them to subvert the cycle of discrimination, fear, isolation and regret produced by dominant discourses (Foucault, 1980). This subversion, or leading for social justice, involved advocating for diverse students, serving as a queer educational resource, passing inclusive policies and programs and representing a queer role model for students.

This study not only gives voice to a marginalized population but also suggests that leadership preparation programs must more explicitly address queer issues. Networks of support for queer leaders that cross district and regional boundaries are also needed if educational leaders are to be able to challenge the heterosexism and homophobia that dominates schools.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The last few years have seen landmark victories for queer people and their rights. Queers are individuals who identify their sexuality as non-heterosexual (Tyson, 1999) such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersexuals, and transgendered people (Lugg, 2008; Tyson, 1999). In 2012, a New York Times article declared that President Obama officially announced his support for marriage equality (Calmes & Baker). The Supreme Court deemed the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional: 17 states now legally recognize same-sex marriages (CNN, 2014). Other countries have also made progress: France, England, New Zealand and Uruguay passed gay marriage laws, while Germany began providing a third gender option for birth certificates (Castillo, 2013; Plank, 2013). Although queer rights in India and Russia have experienced set backs, protestors took to the streets and activists and politicians around the world echoed their support for queers in these countries (Plank, 2013). Professional athletes, actors and politicians began to be more comfortable revealing their sexualities, subverting typical masculine and feminine stereotypes. A song called "Same Love" about acceptance for queers dominated the airwaves and music charts. Even the Catholic Church, seemed to be softening its historically anti-queer message as Pope Francis, according to the New York Times, stated, "If someone is gay…who am I to judge?" (Donadio, 2013).

Yet, homophobia and heterosexism continue to pervade schooling. While educators now address issues of race, ethnicity, class and gender in their classrooms, queer issues tend to be mentioned in hushed tones or ignored completely (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, 2011). The pervasive silence surrounding queer sexuality has seemingly created one of the last havens for bullying. According to the most recent semi-annual report from the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (2011), in 2010, 81.9% of queer students were verbally harassed,

38.3% were physically harassed and 18.3% were physically assaulted at school because of their

sexual orientation. Due to this harassment, queer students' grade point averages and self-esteem

are lower and they are more prone to higher levels of depression and suicide (GLSEN, 2011).

Queer teachers are also subjected to silence and bigotry in their schools. The few studies

conducted on queer teachers have referred to the specter of gay recruitment as being a major

source of fear among the public and parents (DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Graydon, 2011;

Khayatt, 1982). For example, one gay teacher was called into his principal's office after a parent

called the administration to accuse him of recruiting students into the homosexual lifestyle

(DeJean, 2008). Other queer teachers have faced open discrimination from their students in the

form of shouting slurs down hallways and writing homophobic graffiti in bathrooms (DeJean,

2008; Khayatt, 1982).

Despite this discrimination, research suggests that educators can challenge the bias that

pervades schooling (Ellis & High, 2004; GLSEN, 2011; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010; Holmes

& Cahill, 2010; Quinn, 2010). For example, some studies suggest that strong role models for

students and supportive leaders for teachers can help ameliorate homophobia (DeJean, 2008;

Donahue, 2008; Gallagher, 2008; GLSEN, 2011; Gust, 2007). Further, the support of anti-

bullying legislation and the rise of alliance groups in schools have raised awareness of hate and

provided networks of support for queer students (GLSEN, 2011).

Educational leaders play a critical role in this process of challenging homophobia and

leading for social justice or "chang[ing] schools in ways and in manners that are consistent with

an equitable, inclusive vision" (Brown, 2004, p. 88). Leaders are in positions of power to support

initiatives like approving alliance groups and fostering a culture of acceptance. The few existing

qualitative studies indicate that queer leaders are more likely to advocate for these inclusive

changes due to their heighted sensitivity to issues of inequity and advocacy (Denton, 2009;

Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007).

Yet, the field of educational administration has been described as "the final closet" for

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual leaders (Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003).

Although the handful of studies to date illustrates that queer leaders could provide this much-

needed advocacy and support for students, many queer leaders live in constant fear of having

their sexuality revealed (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007). Indeed, the

leaders in these studies shared stories about the personal and professional losses they feared by

being outed, causing them to be reluctant or unwilling to advocate for queer social justice issues

(Denton, 2009; Tooms, 2007). Therefore, while the possibility of improving schools for queer

students exists, the fear that pervades queer leaders professional lives often hinders their social

justice work.

To date the research on queer leaders is limited to a small number of studies that describe

their experiences of discrimination but do little to identify strategies to bridge the gap between

the problem of homophobia in our schools and one potential solution empowering queer leaders

to affect change. Scholars of educational leadership argue that the field must consider leadership

for social justice (Brown, 2004; Lugg, 2003), yet no research exists that presents a

comprehensive model of the intersection between sexuality and leadership. As a queer who is

also an educational administrator, I deeply understand the ways my identity influences the way

in which I lead. Without a leadership theory that includes the perspectives of queer leaders, it

will not be possible to help develop new generations of leaders who can confront educational

inequities, especially the homophobia pervading schools. Moreover, a theory of queer leadership

can help make schools safer places for queer educators and their allies, empowering them to address educational inequities of all kinds.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a theory of queer leadership by drawing on the lived experiences and perspectives of queer leaders. To document these perspectives, I used both grounded theory and narrative analysis, focusing on the following research questions:

➢ What are the experiences of queer leaders?

- How has their sexuality mediated their leadership practices?

- What do their experiences suggest for a queer theory of leadership practice?

Narrative analysis allowed me to deeply explore the stories of several participants, giving voice to their leadership experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Using grounded theory enabled me to look across the stories and experiences of participants to come up with a model of queer leadership. To help me understand the complexity of discourses that construct the subjectivities of these queer leaders, I also used the post-structural work of Michel Foucault (1990) and queer theorist Judith Butler (1980; 1990). By assuming that gender and sexuality are socially constructed through discourses and that society is built on a "repressive heterosexual matrix" that embeds all institutions, even schools, with heterosexual norms (Butler, 1990), I looked at the narratives of queer leaders to identify points of resistance and conformity to differing discourses of sexuality.

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of relevant literatures in multiple fields that situate this inquiry into the experiences of queer leaders. In chapter three, I outline the specific methodology of this study, providing details about design, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four tells the stories of three queer leaders whose experiences begin to highlight some of

the common themes across all 15 participants in this study. In chapter five, I present a model of

queer leadership and then detail the elements of the model and how the participants moved

through it. Finally, in chapter six, I discuss the study's findings and offer implications,

recommendations and suggestions for further research into this oft-ignored and marginalized

group.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURES

As noted, little research has been conducted on queers in educational leadership positions despite the inclination for social justice that queer leaders seem to possess. Therefore, in this section I review different bodies of literature that provide a context for understanding issues surrounding queer educators and their work. I begin with a conceptual framework, focused on queer theory. Next, I outline a brief history of queer rights in education to better understand the still-pervasive fear of queerness in schools. The history of educational leadership and gender patterns is then explored to provide an understanding of the highly gendered and patriarchal construction of both teaching and leadership positions in schools. Studies on queer educators are discussed followed by a review of the paucity of empirical research on queer leaders.

Conceptual Framework

The roots of queer theory first emerged in the early 1970's, although it was not given an official term until the early 1990's. Queer theory seeks to define "…individual sexuality as a fluid, fragmented, dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities…along a continuum of sexualities" (Tyson, 1999, p. 337). This is in direct contrast to heterosexist thinking, which positions gender and sexuality in two polemic extremes: masculine and feminine. Queer theory also suggests that while heterosexuality might be the expected norm, it is not a norm against which homosexuality can be defined or measured (Tyson, 1999). Human sexuality cannot be reduced to a choice of sexual partners. Sexuality, rather, is a far more complicated construct. My study will be grounded in queer theory because of its complicating and disruptive potential. Instead of assuming that heterosexuality is the standard, I will seek to examine leaders' experiences through queer theory in an attempt to add a new perspective to, and perhaps redefine, educational leadership.

Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality

Butler (1990), like other queer theorists, asserts that gender and sexuality cannot be defined by universal rules and assumptions. Rather, gender and sexuality have been socially constructed. This position disrupts both patriarchal and feminist thinking, which suggests that gender can determine and define identity (Butler, 1990). However, Butler (1990) argues, terms like "man" and "woman" are rife with preconceived notions of femininity and masculinity, which is even more complicated by class, race and ethnicity. For example, society has organized the roles of man and woman into specific, gendered roles. In this construct, for example, men are expected to be the protectors and the providers while women are expected to be the nurturers. However, the characteristics that society uses to stereotype males and females are by no means absolute rules. Rather, they are socially constructed ideas of what constitutes appropriate behavior for men and women (Butler, 1990).

Discourse

These ways of thinking and talking about gender and sexuality, which have become engrained norms in society, are socially constructed through discourse (Foucault, 1980; 1990). Like other poststructuralists, Foucault suggests that there is no absolute or essential version of reality. Rather reality is socially constructed through language made up of a variety of discourses (Foucault, 1980). These discourses, or systems of thoughts that include beliefs, ideas and courses of action, embed meaning into everything, thus constructing social reality through language. Thus, by their very nature, discourses are never neutral but reflect diverse values, interests and opinions (Foucault, 1980), shaping what can be said and done by whom. However, social reality is comprised of multiple and competing discourses about gender, sexuality and education, among others. There is a constant power struggle, then, between competing discourses. When a

dominant discourse takes hold, it becomes truth since, "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it" (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). By both what is said and what is silenced and censored, those in power produce knowledge and wield control over the messages about what is deemed appropriate (Foucault, 1980; 1990). The more the hegemony produces knowledge and reifies these messages, the more ingrained they become.

Foucault (1990) indicates that specific dominant discourses around sex and sexuality began to take hold in the seventeenth century. Those in leadership positions realized the power that sex held. The wealth of nations was often measured in population, which was a result of the sexual activity of a populace (Foucault, 1990). To control sex, those in power talked about it in specific ways and made others do so, privileging heterosexual behavior in order to increase population size. Sometimes this took the form of silence: "…repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see and nothing to know" (Foucault, 1990, p. 4). Those controlling the discourse censored some aspects of sex and sexuality completely, like homosexuality.

More often than silence, though, was the systematic and carefully chosen ways to talk about sex. Foucault (1990) states, "There is not one but many silences. And they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie discourses" (p. 27). Those in power chose what was discussed and how it was discussed, effectively placing limitations on what was considered taboo or dangerous. These ways of thinking and talking permeated society, wrapping sexual minorities in a web of heterosexist discourses "which sometimes address them, sometimes speak about them, or impose canonical bits of knowledge on them" (Foucault, 1990, p. 30). These discourses then became lodged in a society's beliefs and norms. By repressing or controlling discourses of sex

and the range of human sexuality, those with the power defined the norms. Since heterosexuality

is the majority, it became the dominant discourse while also defining dualistic gender

performances.

Performance

Although the dominant discourses around gender and sexuality insist that gender is

dualistic, distilling masculinity and femininity into predetermined roles of expected behaviors,

Butler (1990) argues against this essentialist thinking. Rather, since gender is socially

constructed, no rigidly defined gender roles exist. Butler asserts that humans negotiate gender

choice through a subtle and strategic process. This process of "being" or "expressing" a gender

Butler terms "gender performance" (1990). Indeed, Silin (1995) suggests that,

> All heterosexual gender identities are imitations, approximations, for which there are no
> originals. They do not express pre-existing or deep psychic realities, as traditional
> psychoanalyst content. Rather, needing constant repetition for the realization, gendered
> identities are precariously constructed and easily placed at risk by the failure to repeat the
> requisite performance. (p. 170)

In this performance, males and females, often unknowingly, perform gendered acts that society

expects. For example, a woman might wear a dress while a man might cut his hair short to

conform to a community's norms. Yet, since gender is not absolute but a series of performances

depending on the discourses in operation, there is also the potential to disrupt the dominant

discourse (Butler, 1990). Humans have the ability to move in and out of previously prescribed

gender roles and expectations. Yet, to do so would constitute a subversion of norms,

marginalizing the performer since discourses that dictate the "correct" behavior and appearance

of men and women are still firmly rooted in society's expectations (Butler, 1990).

The Heterosexual Matrix

Because gender and sexuality stereotypes are deeply ingrained in our society in various discourses and expected gender performances, those who choose to go against the accepted norm face challenges in combating what Butler (1990) terms the "heterosexual matrix". She defines the matrix as a "…grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (Butler, 1990, p. 151). In this matrix, constructed by multiple discourses, heterosexuality is not only privileged but also expected; therefore, all societal institutions are created with heterosexuality as a defining yet invisible feature. Yet, since the "discourses of heterosexuality" that reproduce social norms are so embedded into our society, like in education or the business world, few realize the matrix exists. However, if heterosexuality is the norm, those engaging in homosexual behavior are considered aberrant and devious, marginalizing queers (Blaise, 2005). This understanding is especially true in education. Yet, while the matrix is limiting to queers, it is not entirely repressive; there also exists the possibility to subvert its control in covert ways.

One seemingly contradictory way to subvert the control of the heterosexual matrix is by operating from the closet. For this study, I define the closet as a discursive act, predicated on silence or misinformation about one's sexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). In the heterosexual matrix, "The closet is a function not of homosexuality but of compulsory heterosexuality" (Silin, 1995, p. 167) and exists as a fundamental feature of queer life, especially in education. It is also "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71). Historically, queer theorists have referred to the closet in these terms, as a dominant and repressive reality of all queers' experiences (Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995).

Foucault's (1980; 1990) and Butler's (1990) theories are pertinent to my study in several ways. First, Butler's theory on gender as socially constructed and performative may help to explain the issues surrounding the gendered role of educational leadership. This theory is supported by the few studies conducted on educational leaders, indicating that they are expected to perform in a masculinist and heterosexist manner (Blount 2003; Denton, 2009; Lugg, 2003; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Second, Foucault's (1980; 1990) notions of discourse help to illuminate how certain dialogues about sexuality become privileged and ingrained in a society. Most importantly, Foucault suggests that dominant discourses reify the expected beliefs of a society. Although the language of power dictates that heteronormativity defines school leadership, disruptive discourses can affect change. It is useful to examine the language that the queer leaders use as they describe their work as educational leaders in order to see dominant or disruptive discourses at work. The heterosexual matrix and the closet (Sedwick, 1990; Silin, 1995) are both useful in understanding the experiences of queer leaders. They serve as defining features of queer leadership, illuminating both the fear of discrimination and the possibilities for social justice solutions that define their professional experiences.

Queer Rights in Education

Throughout history, queers were either ignored or thought to be sinful perversions of nature (Khayatt, 1982). Recent educational history is marked by sad and often sordid crimes against queers, due to the country's long-standing fear of perceived queer influence and recruitment. Lugg (2003, 2008), Blount (2000, 2003) and Khayatt (1982) offer important historical and social perspectives of the queer rights movement in the context of education through their work.

The timeline of the queer rights movement and its relationship to education is crucial to our understanding of sexuality in schools. In her seminal interview study of lesbian teachers, Khayatt (1982) gives a thorough history of the construction of teaching. Educational leaders in the late nineteenth century believed that women were perfectly suited for the classroom because of their "natural" propensity for nurturing behavior. However, those who hired females to teach also realized that they could pay them less, since it was assumed that most women would have a man at home earning a bigger salary. In fact, by the twentieth century, it became policy that women had to resign their teaching posts after marrying (Khayatt, 1982). This policy, though, worked in the favor of lesbian educators. A lesbian could enter the teaching profession, never marry and be independently, financially secure for life. Of course there always existed the "twin sins" of being overly educated and single (Khayatt, 1982), which had the possibility of leading to queer suspicion regarding a female teacher. However, since teaching was still considered a high moral calling, the title of "spinster" was far better than the pariah status of homosexual.

As the teaching profession became somewhat of a haven for both lesbians and gay men, the general public became suspicious of queers' "intentions" towards their children. During the Florida "witch-hunts" in the 1950's, queer educators were targeted and stripped of jobs and professional licenses (Lugg, 2003; Blount, 2000, 2003). Conservatives used newspapers and other media outlets as a pulpit for homophobia, labeling gays and lesbians as sexual deviants, pornographers, pedophiles and even psychopaths. This media campaign effectively fed into public fears, reinforcing the irrational fear that "…homosexual teachers promoted homosexuality and preyed on children" (Graydon, 2011). This perception still persists in the minds of some today as parents continue to question or openly denounce queer educators motives for wanting to teach children (DeJean, 2008).

While queer rights groups sprang up throughout the decade, laying the groundwork for support, it took the summer of 1969 and the Stonewall rebellion to spark large-scale activism. While Stonewall brought attention to the mistreatment of and prejudicial behavior surrounding queers and their rights, little changed in education: queer teachers continued to be shunned and fired. Throughout the 1980's, AIDS was labeled a "gay disease" by various conservatives and the legislature even suggested introducing a bill, indicating that teachers be tested for the HIV virus and fired if found positive (Lugg, 1998, 2003).

In 1990, a Supreme Court decision (*Board of Education v. Mergens*) upheld the Equal Access Act, which mandates that public schools provide space for non-curricular activities to meet during non-instructional time. Although intended to protect bible study clubs, the ruling paved the way for Gay Straight Alliances (Lugg, 2008). Because of this decision, queer students were allowed to assemble in a school-endorsed club on any campus. This was a hallmark moment for the gay rights movement in education as it signaled another step towards understanding and acceptance.

Today, a number of states maintain a variety of laws that dictate a range of civil rights for queer people. However, some states still do not cover sexuality in their job protection laws. The Human Rights Campaign notes, "There is no federal law that consistently protects LGBT individuals from employment discrimination; it remains legal in 29 states to discriminate based on sexual orientation, and in 34 states to do so based on gender identity or expression" (Human Rights Campaign, 2011). As a consequence, queers still face open discrimination at work. Highlighting this issue, Lugg (2008) states,

> Queer public school employees, though unlikely to be beaten or assaulted at work, still face incurring the wrath of their communities and school boards…there is enormous pressure on queer school personnel to remain closeted for fear of igniting a local political backlash. (p. 188)

Although GSAs still exist for students and some progress has been made for teachers, queer

educators continue to exist in the minds of the public as a deeply feared and misunderstood

"menace" to those whom they serve. These historical and current perspectives highlight the

minimal or sometimes backwards movement for queer educators' rights. Indeed, Lugg's (2003)

work reminds us that public schools have much work to do and must:

> …move beyond just protecting students and educators from harassment and bullying
> along the lines of gender and sexual orientation…Nevertheless, protection or
> nonoppression is not the same as social justice or, for that matter, education.
> Furthermore, the roles of teachers and administrators need to be reconceptualized, away
> from the masculinist traditions, which have for too long dominated the culture of public
> school in general and administrative practice in particular. (p. 124)

Gender Studies of Educational Leadership

Studies that examine the intersection of gender, sexuality and leadership indicate that

leadership positions are constructed as both masculinist and heterosexist (Blount 2003; Denton,

2009; Lugg, 2003; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Aside from longitudinal data, which illustrate that

over the last century women represented no more than 11-15% of all superintendents nationwide

(Tallerico & Blount, 2004), the studies also note three distinct gender trends at work: public

versus private work, responsibilities of the heterosexual male leader and gender discrimination.

Public Versus Private Work

Historically, Tallerico and Blount (2004) argue, work takes one of two forms: "One form

reflects a separation into private and public spheres, with women predominating in household

environments and domestic roles, whether paid or unpaid, and men predominating in work

outside the home" (p. 633). Over the last five decades, these spheres have shifted to include the

classroom as a part of the domestic sphere. Thus, women have taken over the classrooms,

outnumbering men in teaching positions (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). The National Center for

Educational Statistics, for example, reported in 2007-2008 that 76% of all teachers nationally were female. While the classroom remains the private domain of women, leadership positions have remained the public domain of men (Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Responsibilities of the Heterosexual Male Leader

Other researchers have gone into more detail, outlining specific gendered qualities of educational leadership. Blount (2003) points to the pervasive fear of homosexuality in education in the construction of administrative roles. She argues that school administration was created as a domain for men, a place where they could extend the sphere of domestic duties in three figurative but too often literal ways: as husbands, as heterosexual men, and as heterosexuality enforcers (Blount, 2003). After World War II, school boards began to actively and heavily recruit men into the leadership positions who would encourage the "correct" socialization of children into "appropriate" gender roles (Blount, 2003; Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

An administrator is also one who must play the role of husband to the female teachers. This includes managing the financial affairs of the school or district, overseeing the grounds, and ensuring that the women "tended their charges properly" (Blount, 2003). Further, since teaching after World War II was still considered predominately women's work, men in the field of education needed to continually repudiate the idea of femininity (Blount, 2003). Men were, thus, encouraged to be married and uphold rigid standards of masculinity. Finally, as outlined in the queer history section, it was the male school and district leaders who were most commonly charged with eradicating homosexuality in their schools. This was their final role: as enforcer of heterosexist behavior (Blount, 2003).

Gender Discrimination

Other researchers have pointed to additional patterns in the educational leadership field, which lead to gender discrimination (Blount, 1996, 1999, 2003; Grady, 1995; Montenegro, 1993; Tallerico & Blount, 2004) These factors include appropriate sex roles and social stereotypes about who looks and acts like a leader. In essence, men appear physically stronger and, thus, portray the idea of a leader more convincingly because they are seen as protectors (Montenegro, 1993). Also, the organization of schools, with the emphasis on competition and authority, continually place women and their leadership styles at a disadvantage (Grady, 1995). For example, women are more likely to lead by inclusion, whereas men are more likely to function in a hierarchical manner (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). This style, however, goes against the expected authoritative practices that men are more likely to demonstrate. Thus, many women are seen as weak and unable to lead a school or district (Grady, 1995; Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Historically, leadership positions in education were created as highly gendered, patriarchal leadership roles, designed to preserve and protect heterosexuality. Indeed, educational leadership became seen as a "…male-centered, warrior, military, or business" position, a belief "that dominates board members' conceptions of the superintendency" much to the disadvantage of queer leaders (Blount, 2000, p. 30.) Although societal ideas about sexuality have become more inclusive of otherness in the last 50 years, this is not the case in education. Indeed, educational leadership roles continue to be enacted in masculinist and heterosexist ways and the belief that no room exists for queer educators aspiring to be leaders has been internalized by much of society.

Research on Minority Leaders

Since queer leaders are marginalized like other minority leaders, such as women and African-Americans, examining the research base on minority leaders provides some insight into additional disempowered experiences in educational leadership. All of the studies were conducted qualitatively, using interviews and case studies as a main source of data collection with samples ranging from 4 to 16 participants. In these studies, researchers found that there is an intersection between race, ethnicity, gender and leadership. The studies also state that minority leaders possess different skill sets and habits of mind, which they employ in their leadership practices (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000; Montenegro, 1993; Tannen, 1995).

African-American and Hispanic leaders also tend to lead in different ways than Caucasian males by drawing on specific sets of leadership skills in order to negotiate across racial and ethnic lines (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000; Montenegro, 1993). Both of these sets of studies state that these leaders possess and use distinct race or gender conscious mindsets, communication strategies, interpersonal relationships, and even their appearance to help mediate a world in which they are the "other". For example, in an interview study conducted on Black and Hispanic leaders, one participant shared that minority leaders are expected to be more aware of and sensitive to context, to be able to know more than their Caucasian counterparts but in a non-threatening way (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000). Racial minority leaders also spoke of a moral imperative to speak up and act when it came to racial, cultural and socioeconomic issues (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000).

Women, for example, have a different style than men, which can affect how they lead and how others perceive their leadership style (Tallerico, 2000; Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Tannen,

1995). Women's leadership styles tend to include "…democratic and participative management styles, focus[ing] on the human side of organizations, and emphasis on teaching, learning, and an ethic of care" (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, p. 648). Women also tend to focus on rapport building rather than the commonly male act of status re-enforcing. Unsurprisingly then, women are more likely to call a female counterpart bossy or a "bitch" if she seems overly confident or superior, while men respect and expect that a leader will emphasize his status over others (Tannen, 1995). Also, women are less likely to take credit for an idea or success, imparting credit on the team; although, this often makes them appear less confident than their male counterparts (Tannen, 1995). Overall, the studies conducted on minorities in leadership point to similar findings: minority leaders tend to possess an awareness and empathy for others around them, which they bring into their workplaces and positions.

Research on Queer Educators

Our past educational climate has impacted the ways schools as organizational entities are run in the present. This means that the combination of professional persecution throughout history and inflexible masculinist and heterosexist roles have created a challenging environment for queer educators. Our educational history also provides reasons why few studies have been conducted about queer leaders. First, many queers in education are afraid of the backlash that might occur if they are "outed". Second, the paucity of diversity in leadership roles has had a silencing effect on the discussion of gender and sexuality. Some studies of queers in education do exist, though. For example, in the last ten years, a great deal of attention has been paid to queer students and their experiences in school (Ellis & High, 2004; GLSEN, 2011; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010; Holmes & Cahill, 2010; Quinn, 2010). These studies suggest that certain aspects of being queer are improving (i.e. the presence of Gay Straight Alliances and anti-

bullying legislation). However, discrimination and anti-queer bullying still exists, suggesting that more work needs to be done (GLSEN, 2011). Research indicates that empathetic and open-minded educators can help address issues of race within the queer community (Ellis & High, 2004; GLSEN, 2011; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010; Holmes & Cahill, 2010; Quinn, 2010). It is imperative that we groom leaders with this inclination. Since research also suggests that queer leaders already possess this disposition towards social justice (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), we must explore how to support queer leaders in their work.

As this dissertation focuses on the experiences of adult educators, I explore the studies that have been conducted on queer educators in this section. Although there is not a dearth of research on these individuals, there are a number of common themes that these studies raise about being queer educator and, by implication a queer leader, in schools. These themes are fear and uncertainty, invisibility and silence, performance and passing and a call for social justice through disclosing one's sexuality and open discourse about queer issues in the classroom. All of the studies were conducted in the qualitative tradition, using interviews as a main source of data collection with observations (DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Graydon, 2011; Khayatt, 1982) as a secondary source of data (Gallagher, 2008; Gust, 2007). Sample sizes ranged from 4 to 17 individuals and the participants included a wide variety of roles from student teachers to classroom teachers to college professors to principals.

Fear and Uncertainty

The subject of homosexuality in education inspires a variety of visceral emotions. One of these feelings is a pervasive fear that exists in both public perception and private spheres when any queer issues arise. DeJean (2008), Donahue (2008), Graydon (2011) and Khayatt (1982), have all referred to the specter of gay recruitment as being a major source of fear among the

public and parents. In some cases, parents have called schools to accuse teachers of recruiting their sons or daughters into a homosexual lifestyle (DeJean, 2008). In other cases, the basic fear of being accused of recruitment has effectively kept teachers in the closet (Donahue, 2008; Khayatt, 1982).

Another type of fear exists around queer issues in education: the fear educators experience regarding "coming out." For example, student teachers in Donahue's (2008) study shared their concerns with disrupting positive student or parent relationships if their sexuality was revealed, being expressly forbidden to come out by their cooperating teacher, or simply not knowing how to reveal their sexuality to students. Khayatt's (1982) participants shared that, if their sexuality was made known, they "…could forfeit their authority in the classroom, their credibility with their peers, their appropriateness with the parents and their legitimacy with the administration" (p. 206).

In an interesting study where the researcher examined her own practices, Gallagher (2008) recounts the internal struggle one of her gay colleagues, Arden, experienced after observing homophobic remarks made in a classroom discussion. Despite being shocked by the overt homophobia, he feared joining the conversation and revealing his sexuality. Some of these fears seemed well founded, too, at least in one of the earliest studies conducted on queer teachers. In 1982, the teachers in Khayatt's study shared that their students defaced textbooks and bathrooms with gay slurs and shouted derogatory words at teachers down hallways. In Fraynd and Capper's (2003) qualitative interview study of four queer leaders, they found that two of their interview subjects felt isolated and alone in their districts due to their inability or unwillingness to come out. Based on these fears and facts, it is understandable that many teachers would want their sexuality to remain secret.

Invisibility and Silence

Research suggests that schools reproduce the social norm by mirroring the dominant practices and beliefs of society in the culture of schooling (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Since heterosexuality is the accepted societal practice, schools exist as heterosexist institutions. Because gays and lesbians do not ascribe to these sexual norms, their experiences are made invisible and their voices silenced. This theme is evident in a number of the studies conducted on queer educators. Arden, the gay male researcher from Gallagher's (2008) article lamented over his internal struggle to speak up and "out" himself or remain silent during a classroom conversation on queer issues. He ultimately remained silent. In the study on queer student teachers, many of them shared their uncertainty with or open rejection of coming out to their students. One individual described her mixed feelings: "I learned that it's hard to be out…[but] it was sad for me to see [my cooperating teacher] having to hide part of herself when students would ask about her life" (Donahue, 2008, p. 83). In these studies, both pre-service teachers and classroom teachers struggled with maintaining or repudiating invisibility and silence.

Even Gust (2007), the openly gay college professor, wondered if remaining silent about his sexuality might have led to more productive curricular outcomes. In his autoethnography, he explains that when he screened *The Laramie Project*, a film about the murder of Matthew Shepard, he was met with resounding silence from his normally talkative class (Gust, 2007). He speculates that his honest self-identification as a gay man created an environment where students believed he was biased about the issue of sexuality. This had the effect of preventing the class from engaging in a debate about queer issues, fearing for their grades (Gust, 2007). Although discussing heterosexuality would never give rise to this type of reaction, this suggests the silencing power that queer issues have in education.

Many of the studies describe ways that educators chose invisibility and silence in order to

avoid questions about their sexuality. Specifically, queer educators, ranging from teachers to

administrators, tend to live far from their schools to avoid being recognized in their hometown

(Denton, 2009; Khayatt, 1982). Some of the queer educators interviewed shared that they live up

to two hours away from the towns in which they work. Many of the interviewees in the studies

also stated that they choose not to participate in social functions through the school for a variety

of reasons. Some shared that, because they did not have a male companion, they would feel

uncomfortable attending a social gathering (Khayatt, 1982). Others stated that they either simply

had nothing in common with their colleagues or that they were unable to talk about their lives

(Denton, 2009; Khayatt, 1982). One teacher shared this anecdote:

> I couldn't talk about my relationship the way they would talk about their husband or their
> wife. Funny things that might have happened in certain contexts, would be perfectly
> normal in a staff room situation, but you couldn't talk about them if they happened with
> another woman…like if I'm walking on the beach…late at night, you know, I couldn't
> say, "Last night I was with so and so on the beach at eleven o'clock and this happened…"
> because they would say, "what were you doing there at eleven o'clock?" (Khayatt, 1982,
> p. 154)

Aside from trying to remain invisible and silent, lesbian teachers would often simply

deflect direct questions from students through either vague responses or with humor.

The educators in all of the studies were keenly aware of the heterosexist structures that

governed their educational experiences. By acknowledging their queer identity, they understood

that they were going against the expected norms. Thus, many of the educators chose to remain

silent about their sexual identity. Donahue (2008) suggests, "On the one hand, 'acting normal'

implies teacher and sexual identities need not be discussed. Yet, not talking about how to

negotiate teacher and sexual identities in schools can create or maintain an environment that is

not normalizing but silencing" (p. 88). This silence serves to perpetuate the heterosexist social

norm and effectively silence their voices, reproducing the status of invisibility that exists in our society.

Performance and Passing

The research base indicates that rather than remaining invisible or avoiding questions, some queer educators have chosen to "pass" as heterosexual due to internal or external pressures (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Lugg & Tooms, 2010; Khayatt, 1982). Specifically, these educators reported performing heterosexuality to make others believe that they were straight. These performances involved a variety of diverse strategies. Khayatt (1982) describes how the lesbian teachers she studied told outright lies and fabricated heterosexual relationships. For example, one subject shared that she told her colleagues that she lived with another woman only to save money (Khayatt, 1982). A few other women in the study were actually married with children. They chose to live out a double life, remaining in a heterosexual marriage while dating women far from their hometown (Khayatt, 1982). Finally, all of the women shared a pervasive fear of "looking like a dyke." The majority of the interviewees took great pains not to look "manly." One subject even shared that, in her effort to dress more feminine, she actually tried too hard and ended up "…dressed really badly" (p. 218).

The attention to dressing "like a woman" in order to pass appears in the Lugg and Tooms (2010) article as well. The authors describe the pressure that Tooms' colleagues exerted on her in reference to her appearance:

> Colleagues advised Autumn [Tooms] on how her hair might look more professional, since a mane of copper red curly hair was just too "wild". In sum, leadership required a particular presentation of self, centered on clothes, hairstyle, weight, race and supposed sexual orientation, to "pass" as a real educational leader. (Lugg & Tooms, 2010, p. 79)

Eventually, she gave in to the pressure, trying to pass with fake nails and a coifed hairstyle.

Fraynd and Capper's (2003) study of four administrators also echo the perceived pressure to pass. One research participant shared, "I knew how it felt not to be [out]…where you change the pronouns and go through all the lies or trying not to lie—you don't say 'we' anymore when talking about the weekend…" (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 93). Although these complex forces and strategies had the effect of taking a mental and emotional toll on many of the participants, the educators found them utterly necessary in order to protect their lives and careers.

Potential Benefits of Coming Out

The limited research reviewed suggests that there are many personal and professional costs to both remaining in the closet and coming out as a queer teacher, principal or other leader (DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Fraynd & Capper, 2003). However, some of these same studies also indicate positive results when queer identities are made visible. These researchers found that openness about sexuality has positive benefits for educators and those they serve (DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Gust, 2007). For example, although Gust's (2007) experiment with showing *The Laramie Project* was initially met with silence, a few of his students shared that the movie and Gust's sexuality had a dramatic impact on their worldview. One of his students wrote:

> You taught me a lot because I was able to go into class on a daily basis and not think of you at all as being a gay speech teacher and just thought of you as being a great speech teacher who also became my friend…a big turning point was when we watched the documentary on Matthew Shepard which I recommend you show to all your classes because that will allow a lot of individuals in your future classes to open up. (Gust, 2007, original errata, p. 54)

This type of response indicates that both Gust's open discussion of his sexuality and his attention to queer issues mattered to his students. It made students question and sometimes change their preconceived notions of sexuality through open and honest discourse.

In a study purposefully designed to match queer student teachers with queer cooperating teachers, Donahue (2008) states specifically that schools with openly gay or lesbian teachers are

better schools by "providing role models for LGBT youth, inspiring commitment to civil and

human rights and…bringing psychic benefits to out teachers" (p. 75). Additionally, seeing queer

cooperating teachers as a model of a successfully "out" educator led to positive reports from

queer student teachers' about their queer identities, helping them feel more secure in their

sexualities (Donahue, 2008). His study further notes that the students of openly gay or lesbian

teachers were more comfortable with queer issues. DeJean (2008) extends this argument,

suggesting that when teachers "come out", they are transforming their classrooms into "a

location of trust", where students who do not fit the norm can feel safe (p. 65). Overall, the

researchers concluded that being "out" makes an educator better and leads to improved social

justice.

The final benefit to being out is the emphasis on social justice that only the visibility of

queer issues can bring. Researchers overwhelmingly indicated that to remain silent was to

perpetuate the repressive societal norms of heterosexism and homophobia (DeJean, 2008;

Denton, 2009; Donahue, 2008; Gallagher, 2008; Gust, 2007). Gallagher (2008) specifically calls

for difficult classroom conversations "…if we hope to challenge hegemonic and culturally

inscribed notions of identity…Otherwise, unchecked assumptions about the gay Other not among

us, but somewhere 'out there' will continue to silence youth in classrooms" (p. 71). Without

these discussions, many will also continue to believe that misconception that queers are sexually

deviant sexual predators (Graydon, 2011). Other scholars suggest that for educators to truly

honor their commitment to social justice, they must be honest with their sexual identities in the

classroom (DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Gust, 2007). Donahue (2008) further argues that self-

actualization is paramount to being a good teacher. Those who hide their sexualities are not

fulfilling their true potential; educators must commit themselves to removing the bonds of silence and invisibility that permeate queer issues in education.

Research on Queer Leaders

Although studies exist on a variety of queer educators, there is a paucity of research on queer leaders in education. In fact, when attempting to research queer leaders, I did a broad search that returned few promising leads. I also narrowed my search to educational journals that specifically focus on leadership issues. These included *Educational Leadership, Principal Leadership*, *Educational Research* and *Academic Leader* among others. When I limited fields for key works like "gay", "lesbian", "LGBT", and "queer", no hits pertaining to studies of queer leaders were returned. However, I was able to find two studies that examine queer leaders, both published in *The Journal of School Leadership* (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007). The third and final study I found is an unpublished dissertation (Denton, 2009).

The first study I will address is the first of its kind. On the second page, Fraynd and Capper (2003) indicate that, to date, there is no empirical research specifically focusing on queer leaders. To address this gap, they conducted a grounded study with interviews as the primary source of data, using four queer administrators as subjects. Two were male and two female, working at all levels of administration. One woman worked as an elementary principal, the other as a middle school principal. One man worked as a high school principal, the other as a superintendent. The study explored the following questions:

> In what ways are these administrators complicit with or do they disrupt sexual politics and power? In what ways are these leaders empowered and constrained in their work? How and to what extent do these administrators and (hetero)sexual-identified educators engage in normalizing strategies with each other? (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 87)

After using constant comparative analysis, the researchers found a number of commonalities in the participants' experiences.

All four participants expressed both their sexual identity and their degree of outness on a continuum (Fraynd & Capper, 2003). More specifically, there was no gay versus straight or out versus closeted labels. The participants also shared that they engaged in a variety of identity management strategies in order to prove they could be just as successful as their straight counterparts. For example, the subjects maintained that working long hours was essential to their success: "These administrators felt a need to work harder and sacrifice more than their straight counterparts in an effort to prove that they could overcome the handicap of being lesbian or gay" (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 103).

The participants also all admitted that their sexuality influenced their leadership practices by providing them with finely tuned surveillance for and a special perspective on issues of bigotry or intolerance. For example, one participant shared, "I know what it feels like to be discriminated against and hated for something I have no control over. And, so I think it makes me, very empathetic–in terms of being willing to listen to other people's struggles and concerns" (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 105). Another participant noted that being queer makes her less judgmental and more sensitive, which prevents her from making hasty decisions (Fraynd & Capper, 2003). Fraynd and Capper (2003) conclude that these queer leaders, despite their degrees of outness or identification on a sexual continuum, used their leadership positions to advocate for safer spaces for everyone in their schools. However, the researchers also note that more research on sexual minority leaders needs to be conducted in order to continue to uncover how sexuality influences leadership.

The second study conducted by Tooms (2007) uses semi-structured interviews of six closeted and semi-closeted queer school administrators, employing grounded theory methods, to explore their remembered experiences and perspectives in conservative districts. The subjects

included five women and one man, serving in roles from principal to director. The researcher

notes, "The purpose of this research was to understand how these historically marginalized

school leaders managed the intersections of their personal and professional identities" (Tooms,

2007, p. 602). The researcher found several commonalities across the interviews in terms of how

the administrators mediate their queer identities.

Similar to the Fraynd and Capper (2003) study, Tooms (2007) found that the six

administrators felt the need to work harder in order to establish a "shield against the perceived

threat of homophobic reactions" (p. 613). The administrators were also keenly aware of their

sexual identities and degrees of outness. Like the studies of queer leaders and educators, these

six administrators expressed an awareness of the myriad ways in which they attempt to misdirect

inquires about or mitigate their sexual identities. A few of the women indicated that they

purposefully wore earrings or perfume to seem more feminine (Tooms, 2007). One lesbian

principal noted this about her workspace:

> I don't have any pictures up in my office of anything that people might think is gay. No
> human rights campaign stickers or rainbows or triangles-none of that. Pictures of my
> spouse and memories of trips we've taken aren't up in my own space because I can't risk
> people wondering why there is not a man in the picture. Or people will ask me about
> who's in the picture and then I'll have to lie or out myself. And I can't do that; I could
> lose my job. (Tooms, 2007, p. 614)

Different, though, from other studies, the six administrators in the Tooms (2007) research shared

encounters with insensitive empathy, where co-workers made surprising comments such as

"You're not going to kiss me, are you?" or "You don't look gay." Tooms (2007) also noted that

her subjects were adamantly opposed to fighting for queer rights in their home districts in order

to keep their personal lives separate. This finding is a distinct difference from the studies of other

queer educators who suggest that being out matters and that fighting for social justice for queers

is a necessity. The trends in Tooms (2007) study, the author notes, suggests that her participants

constantly masked their identities in a variety of ways because of the tenuous nature of their leadership positions.

The final study I found on queer leaders is an unpublished dissertation. Denton (2009) studied seventeen queer educational leaders in an interview study, using face-to-face interviews and "chat rooms" for anonymity in data collection. Similar to the Tooms (2007) study, the research questions that guided Denton's (2009) study focus on examining the past and present experiences of queer leaders in relation to their personal and professional lives. She also gleaned recommendations for providing improved support for queer students, teachers, and administrators in public school settings.

Echoing the findings of other studies on queer leaders, Denton (2009) found that fear dominated the major themes among her participants. Denton's administrators indicated that they experienced self-loss in the form of not being able to fit in or feeling like they were forced to assimilate (Denton, 2009). Interestingly, the participants also noted that they felt the need to overcompensate, which was seen in the other two studies of queer leaders by Fraynd and Capper (2003) and Tooms (2007). Additionally, Denton suggests that there is a "lavender ceiling" in place, which prevents queers from rising to higher levels of administration. This barrier is much like the "glass ceiling", which impedes women from attaining higher levels of leadership. One participant in Denton's (2009) study gave voice to this:

> I felt it's fine to be a gay teacher, but what does that mean for me because I wanted to become a principal…My next thought and fear is what if I wanted to become a superintendent? It would be newsworthy…The fear is – will I be considered as a candidate? Will there be others speaking out against me? (p. 142-143)

The final fear shared by the participants was the fear of a hostile work environment, another common theme in other studies.

Negativity aside, Denton's (2009) administrators did report important personal and social gains. For example, many of the participants spoke about the strength that being queer in a heterosexist world gave them. One leader was very blunt about it: "…if you're going to be in administration and be a 'public queer', which I am, you best be tough as nails because all manner of sh- will come your way" (p. 165). The participants also shared that they gained unique perspectives, heightened sensitivity, a heightened awareness of hetero-privilege and a realization that role models and activism were needed (Denton, 2009). Together, the findings of this study echo the findings of the Fraynd and Capper (2003) and Tooms (2007) studies: there is an intersection between sexual identity and leadership positions. Although all of these studies on queer leaders use grounded theory methods, no distinct theory of queer leadership has been developed.

Conclusion

In general, the research base on queer leaders is limited at best. As indicated, many of the studies conducted in this area have been confined to either students or teachers or have outlined historical frameworks and foundations of queer rights. Indeed, only three empirical studies on queer leaders currently exist. However, the trends across empirical research conducted on queer educators and leaders alike point to commonalities that many queers in education might experience. A significant difference exists, though, between recent studies conducted on queer educators and those conducted on queer leaders. Although queer educators stress the importance of coming out and fighting for social justice in their schools, the majority of the queer leaders studied balk at this stance. Positions of power in education remain rife with fear and the leaders who inhabit those positions remain in the closet. Yet, because these leaders have the power to disrupt the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) by leading for social justice and improving schools

for diverse students, we must empower them to do so. It is worthwhile, then, to explore the experiences of queer leaders.

My research will add to the literature on queer leaders by focusing on those leaders who wield the decision-making power in schools and districts. I plan to use a grounded theory approach to look across the experiences of the participants, similar to the other studies of queer leaders. However, I will also employ narrative analysis in order to highlights and give voice to a few of the participants' stories. Unlike previous studies, however, I intend to develop a theory of queer leadership. My aim in conducting this study is to use the experiences of queer leaders to help educators and districts to see the potential that queers have to offer and to see also how this potential is being limited. In what follows I outline the methodology of my study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Sears (1996) recommends that certain methods be considered when studying queer leaders. He suggests four goals for this kind of research. First, Sears argues that because few understand the experiences of queer leaders, researchers must chronicle their lives. Second, it is important to document institutional experiences so that others understand how institutions perpetuate and marginalize sexualities. Third, he recommends studying homophobia and heterosexism and how they are institutionalized and normalized. By implementing these three strategies in a research design, Sears argues, it might be possible to generate insights on queer educators and leaders that may transform schools (Sears, 1996). These goals lend themselves to qualitative approaches like grounded theory and narrative analysis.

In order to both broadly and deeply explore the experiences of the queer leaders in this study, I purposely designed my research questions around the goals that Sears (1996) recommends and selected two methods to achieve those goals. Asking about queer leaders lives and past experiences in my first interview will help reach the first goal. Focusing on sexual identity and experiences as a superintendent will address goals two and three. My final question about theory will hopefully begin to transform the way the field begins to look at queer leadership.

Since this study sought to explore the experiences of queer leaders and also address the heteronormativity in schools, I drew on a qualitative approach that would allow me to theorize about this little-researched phenomenon: grounded theory. Also, since queer leaders are so rarely studied, I wanted to delve into their lived experiences, using narrative analysis as a second methodological approach. Both of these qualitative approaches consider knowledge as subjective, fluid and ever-changing. This is in line with my use of queer theory, which guided the

interpretation of my findings. Queer theory refutes traditional assumptions of sexuality as dualistic and static; rather, like the construction of knowledge in grounded theory and narrative analysis, sexuality is a "dynamic collectivity of possible sexualities…along a continuum of sexualities" (Tyson, 1999, p. 337). Therefore, a queer theoretical lens, then, is appropriate to study queer educational leaders, who have been largely marginalized and underrepresented in the literature. Both grounded theory and narrative analysis will illuminate this marginalization, while avoiding positivistic assumptions about truth and knowledge.

Grounded theory aims to show connections between data collection, analysis and generated theory by using constant comparative analysis and synthesis of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on the pragmatic or constructivist traditions of Dewey, this theory is based on a few basic assumptions about knowledge and the world. First, knowledge is not objective; rather, humans interpret and give meaning to external events, which creates knowledge. Second, the world is complex, fluid and ever-evolving. Third, because of the first two assumptions, knowledge is constantly in flux. So, since the world is ever-changing, so, too are understandings of it. This is why researchers need to continually adjust theories: to continue to explain and meet the needs of the changing world in order to solve problems and gain new insight (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Since I also sought to deeply tell the lived stories of my participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), narrative analysis was also chosen for the research design. Narrative analysis "is the systematic study and interpretation of stories, life experiences and the reporting of such research" (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2010, p. 373). This approach is used when stories need to be told and heard. Because queer leaders' voices have been silent, the use of narrative analysis helps to tell their stories. Often told chronologically, these narratives can have a collaborative element

between participant and researcher. In essence, the stories are co-constructed, emerging through

dialogue and interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and read much like a good novel with a

beginning, middle and end, including conflicts, characters and a definitive plot (Carter 1993).

Further, in order to illuminate significant events, the narratives often contain turning points,

specific tensions, epiphanies and interruptions (Denzin, 1989).

Unlike grounded theory, where analyzing the data involves a series of specific steps,

there is no lockstep approach to crafting the narratives. Instead, it behooves the researcher to

select a lens through which to view the story. For example, moving beyond chronology, the

researcher can include themes to help bound the meaning of the stories (Huber & Whelan, 1999).

In this sense, the narrative is both the story itself and the themes that emerge from the stories. In

a postmodern approach, Czarniawska (2004) suggests deconstructing the stories to analyze

silences, dichotomies, disruptions and contradictions. I have constructed the narratives of my

participants using both of these lenses: an organization around common themes and an

exploration of the silences and contradictions.

Sample

Identifying a sample of queer leaders presented a predictable challenge, since no database

exists as it does for other types of leaders (i.e. women or Hispanics). Further, since the

heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), which privileges heterosexual norms, is so ingrained in the

fabric of our culture, even assurances of anonymity could not convince some of these queer

leaders to break their silence and step out of the closet. Amidst the arduous process of finding

participants, a number of significant points regarding sampling came to light. My original plan

was to use both personal contacts and professional organizations to find queer leaders. I began in

November by contacting a number of queer educational organizations like the Harvey Milk

School, the Hetrick Martin Institute and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. By focusing on organizations that integrated sexuality and education as a part of their mission, I hoped to find some helpful contacts. Unfortunately, only GLSEN responded, asking for more information about my study. We traded emails back and forth, but their inquiries never led to garnering a participant.

Over the next three months, I contacted at least three representatives each at 12 different superintendent's associations across the country by both phone and email. This, however, led to only one participant. The New York State Council of School Superintendents informed me that, while they do not give out specific information about their members, they could send me, for a fee, labels with every superintendent's school address. When I accepted, I received over 50 pages of labels, 25 per sheet. The School Superintendents Association of New Jersey offered to put information about my study in their newsletter and in an email to their members, after securing the proper IRB approval. Vermont Superintendents Association provided me with a list of every superintendents' email and asked me to blind copy them on my message to them. The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents and The Rhode Island School Superintendents Association directed me to look online for each leader's contact information. An individual from the Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland told me that my topic was "intriguing" and said he would ask a few people to contact me. I never received responses from representatives in the superintendents associations of Delaware, New Hampshire, Maine, California or Washington State. Only one state's superintendent association led to three potential participants; out of those possibilities, only one agreed to be interviewed. I have purposely withheld the state's name in order to protect the anonymity of my participants.

While "cold calling" professional organizations served to be fairly fruitless, my personal contacts proved successful. I used a "snowballing" technique in order to find participants. Using this approach, one participant led to another and so forth (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010; Seidman, 2006). Charmaz (2000) notes that snowball sampling is especially useful in grounded theory research since it attempts to gather samples from various settings. He suggests that this technique maximizes variation in the database to generate a large number of categories that describe the phenomenon under study. Indeed, snowball sampling was the only sampling technique that was truly effective. Further, although the supported methodological term is called "snowballing," I found that the process of securing participants was more like a ripple effect. Instead of proceeding in a linear fashion, one leader leading to another and so on, one contact often led to two or three others around them. Since these contacts tended to be more localized, it reminded me of throwing a rock into the middle of a lake and watching the ripples spread outwards. Within my sample, then, I had four major contacts, which led to nine nine other participants. These four contacts served to represent the initial stone thrown into the water, flowing out to bring in others.

While securing my participants, safety and anonymity was of the utmost importance throughout the sampling process. This is understandable, considering I could have been anyone asking these leaders to essentially out themselves, potentially risking their careers. Therefore, describing my process of finding participants like a ripple effect also serves to highlight another significant point about sampling: the importance of making contact through a safe, trusted intermediary. The four major contacts noted earlier only offered other queer contacts after they felt comfortable with me, which was usually at the end of our first interview. Indeed, approaching people without giving them the name of another queer educator they trusted was almost never successful. Three cases in particular highlight the veracity of this statement.

I first met Callie, a superintendent working in a rural district, while I was attending a professional development workshop. She identified herself as a superintendent when the presenter took a survey of the room and, during a break, I decided to take a chance. I introduced myself, quietly explaining my research and curious to know if she had any contacts, who might be interested in participating. To my surprise, she informed me that she knew a few individuals and provided me with her email address. I contacted her later that day, thanked her and sent the IRB-approved synopsis of my study. A few weeks later, I contacted Callie again. In a very terse email, she informed me that she could not find anyone. Frustrated, I responded with an impassioned plea for help, identifying myself as a queer educator and explaining how important I thought this research could be. She explained that the word "queer" was a "stumbling block" for her. I indicated that the word was used intentionally to be inclusive, and Callie finally agreed to participate. Callie never provided me with additional contacts like a number of my other participants did. Her reticence during the entire process highlights the importance of having a safe intermediary. There was no one to vouch for my good intentions, thus positioning me as a potential threat to her anonymity as a queer superintendent.

The importance of having a safe intermediary also became clear when I contacted an individual in a conservative state's superintendent's association. This individual was willing to talk to me because we shared a mutual contact and he provided me with a list of six possible participants. However, he also did not want me to mention his name when I contacted them, stating, "I don't want them to think that I'm speculating about their sexuality." Therefore, the contacts became dead ends. I could not think of a respectful or tactful way to contact these individuals and ensure them that their anonymity would be protected since I could not mention the name of the safe intermediary.

Another notable case during sampling was that of "Denise," a superintendent working in a suburban district in a conservative state. Two other participants passed along her name to me, and one of those participants promised to make the initial contact. After a month or so, I reached out to Denise myself. At first, she was startled and highly suspicious. "Who gave you my name?" she asked, "What did they say about me?" Although I was worried about placing the blame on my other participants, I mentioned one of their names after he confirmed that he was a close friend of hers. She confirmed that this participant had in fact left her a few messages regarding a dissertation, but never mentioned the topic. With that matter clarified, I fully explained my research.

Denise listened to my pitch and then, to my surprise, asked me if I was queer and out at work. I answered affirmatively to both questions. There was a pause, and then Denise said plainly, "Look, I can be fired if I'm outed." I reassured her of my steps to ensure anonymity and Denise told me that she had been guarding her sexuality very carefully because of *her story* and would have to think about participating. Sadly, she called me a month later to decline, indicating that participating "just wouldn't be possible" because of the unique quality of her situation and stories. "They'll know it was me and I just can't risk it. Not now," she said over the telephone. Although I never could convince Denise to be interviewed, she confirmed that she experienced discrimination because of her sexuality as a superintendent and was certain that making public her singular experiences would confirm the suspicions of those who targeted her. These three stories illustrate the challenge to secure participants because of the fear that permeates schools around issues of sexuality.

In the end, it took six months to find 15 participants. After each individual agreed to participate, I explained the purposes of my research and emailed them the IRB consent forms

(see Appendix B). Every leader identified as either lesbian, gay or bisexual. Aside from

sexuality, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest, I attempted to maximize the range of

participants in order to give the theory more generalizability (see Table 1). The final sample

consisted of ten females and five males, all Caucasian, ranging in age from 44 to 68 years of age.

Out of that range, seven participants were in their 40's, five were in their 50's and three were in

their 60's. Seven held the title of superintendent either at the time of their interview or at one

point in their career, while five were assistant superintendents and three were district wide

directors. Also, despite their wide range in age, 13 of the 15 participants had fewer than ten years

of experience in the superintendency or assistant superintendency. The 15 participants were also

representative of six different states throughout the country, whose districts ranged from 500 to

over 30,000 students. Further, since almost all of the participants held various positions, some of

their district experiences ranged in size from very small to very large. Table 1, however,

represents the positions they currently hold or held when they retired.

Although it was a challenge to recruit 15 participants, it was my goal to purposefully

sample a range of leaders of diverse backgrounds, who represent myriad experiences. These

participants certainly embody a wide range of ages, genders, positions in leadership and district

types. By recruiting a diverse participant pool, I attempt to provide, as Seidman (2006), suggests,

a sample size that is large enough to provide sufficiency without redundancy.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Gender	District Type	District Size – students enrolled	Position	Age	Years of Experience
Katherine	F	Suburban	4,100	Assistant Superintendent	48	6
Dan	M	Urban fringe	3,000	Superintendent	65	8
Peter	M	Urban	6,000	Assistant Superintendent	68	16
Callie	F	Rural	1,700	Superintendent	46	2
Sophie	F	Suburban	6,000	Superintendent	58	9
Melanie	F	Small suburban	500	Superintendent	56	9
Charles	M	Suburban	8,000	Superintendent	60	17
Samuel	M	Rural to urban	30,000+	Director	47	9
Jennifer	F	Rural to urban	30,000+	Director	48	6
Tracy	F	Suburban	8,000	Assistant Superintendent	56	7
Connor	M	Suburban	8,000	Assistant Superintendent	45	1
Bea	F	Urban	30,000+	Assistant Superintendent	58	3
Nicole	F	Suburban	1,600	Superintendent	44	3
Lynn	F	Rural	3,500	Superintendent	50	5
Laura	F	Rural	3,100	Director	46	7

Data Collection

Interviews, using Seidman's (2006) recommendations, were used to generate data for my research questions for several reasons. First, specifically focusing on interviewing allowed me to have a close relationship and a more clear understanding of the participants than if I observed or administered a survey (Seidman, 2006). Patton (1990) also notes that observations are limiting since not everything can be seen. Since this study focused heavily on the experiences of queer leaders, interviews were the best method of gathering data and delving into the stories of others.

Further, at the core of interviewing exists, "…an interest in the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Simply, there is deep value in the stories of others. When interviewing, participants reflect on and make sense of their experiences through storytelling (Seidman, 2006). Through listening, the researcher attempts to enter the other person's perspective and understand their world (Patton, 1990). Because I explored the lived experiences of queer superintendents, their firsthand accounts were crucial.

Using Seidman's (2006) phenomenological model of interviewing, the focus of the first interview was on understanding the leader's life history and past personal experiences in education, which related to my first sub-question: What are the experiences of queer leaders? The interview was guided by 15 questions with appropriate probes for more information or elaboration when necessary (Patton, 1990). My questions were structured around two subcategories. The first subcategory focused on the participants' background and path into education, including significant childhood and educational experiences around sexuality. The second category delved into personal experiences around their queer sexuality.

In order to best represent the experience of the participants, I used a two-part semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). After contacting the leaders and securing consent (see Appendix B), I scheduled interviews at a time, date and location that was convenient for the participant. During the interview, I used a digital recorder and took notes on significant details like participant behavior or the setting of the interview. Each interview lasted between 65 to 90 minutes and aligns with Seidman's (2006) interview recommendations. He notes that 60 minutes is too short to gain true insights into a person's experience; conversely, anything over two hours becomes too lengthy for one sitting. Additionally, before each interview began, I asked the participants to suggest a pseudonym for themselves in order to maintain anonymity. During all transcription and note taking, I only referred to the leaders using these pseudonyms.

After the session, I recorded any additional notes or reflections pertinent to the interview. I then transcribed the interview, sent the transcription to the participant and invited him or her into the process. Through email, I asked each participant to elaborate on questions, clarify an answer, change a statement for clarification or to further protect confidentiality, correct potential errors in transcription or redact a statement. I indicated that this process was a part of ensuring validity in the study. This process of member checks as recommended by Gall, Gall and Borg (2010) helped to ensure that I was representing each participant's voice with fidelity as I analyzed and interpreted the data.

The second interview took place two to three weeks after the first interview. According to Seidman (2006), this was an appropriate interval of time to allow the participant to reflect on the interviewing experience while not allowing too much time to elapse, potentially breaking down the connection forged during the first interview. The second interview and subsequent probes

were guided by 19 core questions that related to my second sub-question: How has their identity

as a queer leader mediated their leadership practices? To address this research question, I used

three subcategories of questions in the interview protocol. First, I asked the participants to

describe their leadership style and qualities. The second subcategory focused on work

experiences as they related to issues of queer sexuality, including barriers and conflicts. This

series of questions followed Seidman's (2006) recommendation to "…concentrate on the

concrete details of the participant's present lived experience…" rather than recounting the past

(p. 18).

Finally, the third category asked the participants to offer their opinions on preparing,

recruiting, mentoring and retaining queer leaders, which addressed my third sub-question: What

do their experiences suggest for a queer leadership theory of practice? During the second

interview, I followed the same data collection procedures as the first. I met the participants in a

location they selected during a time and date convenient to them. I used a digital recorder during

the interviews, also taking notes on the participants' reactions and the interview setting. Each

interview lasted 65 to 90 minutes. Immediate transcription and member checks subsequently

followed.

Data Analysis

By the end of data collection, I had compiled 30 interviews, two per participant. As

noted, each interview was transcribed and then uploaded into Dedoose in order to prepare for the

first step of grounded theory analysis, open coding. Originally, I only planned to use grounded

theory in order to explore the experiences of queer leaders. However, after initial readings of the

interview transcripts, I realized that the stories these leaders told me were rich with experiences

that needed to be shared. Further, since so little is known about queer leaders, I went to the

literature on narrative analysis to learn how to recreate their stories to allow their voices to be

heard. I chose three leaders whose experiences exemplify many of the issues I began to notice in

my grounded theory analysis. I then drew on narrative analysis to help me systematically tell,

interpret and "restory" the experiences of three participants (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2010;

Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

I began with Dan's interviews. I selected him because of his experience in a conservative

state and because he was one of my first participants and provided very thoughtful, reflective

answers to my questions. Dan also represented one of the most closeted leaders in my study. I

then told the stories of Nicole and Charles, selecting them for their diverse experiences. Nicole

represented one of the youngest leaders in my study and also professed to be out at her job in a

progressive state. Charles had a range of experiences in both conservative and progressive areas,

coming out and remaining closeted depending on the context.

In order to tell the stories of these three participants, I began by taking each transcript and

recreating it into a chronological story, beginning with childhood and ending with their most

recent experience in the superintendency (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I also attempted to

weave in plot elements to the chronology in order to help it read like a novella with a definite

beginning, middle and end, including conflicts and antagonists (Carter, 1993). Finally, I went

back through to analyze the stories for silences, dichotomies, disruptions and contradictions

(Czarniawska, 2004). During this level of analysis, I wove in queer theory and research on other

queer leaders when applicable.

What emerged from these stories were holistic pictures of three participants. Although

grounded theory is helpful in understanding broad experience, narrative analysis illuminated the

leaders in a different way by personalizing their stories and lives. Instead of experiences being

connected to codes and themes in grounded theory, these stories are presented as more personal and intimate. Yet, three stories cannot be generalized into theory. It was important, then, for me to use both narrative analysis and grounded theory methods to both deeply and broadly share the experiences of my participants.

Grounded theory aims to break down large sets of data into smaller chunks, which can be examined and reconstructed analytically. By using grounded theory, the researcher intends to discover a "…theory that emerges from systematic comparative data analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed" (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010, p. 345). More specifically, it is a process of data analysis in which the researcher discovers theory in data or lived experience (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Since grounded theory takes a constructivist stance on knowledge, I did not begin by using queer theory to deductively analyze my data. Rather, I employed constant comparison and analysis of the interviews to help me construct a theory that was anchored directly in the data. This process of comparison began even before all of the data was collected and continued throughout the interview process, adding and deepening my understanding of the participants' experiences.

There were a number of steps I took in my grounded theory data analysis. The first step was open coding. Open coding is an interpretive process in which data is broken down analytically (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I began open coding after transcribing each of the interviews by looking at the transcription line-by-line for similarities and differences in the participants' words, using my research questions as a guide. These became my initial codes and were then labeled conceptually in the open-source software program, "Dedoose". I then focused on grouping similar ideas and created conceptual labels about queer leaders' experiences and intersections with identity. Throughout the open coding process, after collecting and transcribing

other interviews, I remained open to new and disconfirming information, which helped test my

coding scheme (Creswell, 2007).

After open coding, I grouped conceptually similar codes together to form broader

categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These categories, which were more abstract and analytical

than codes, were refined and readjusted as new interview transcripts were analyzed. I also

continued to remain open to new and potentially contrary data. During this second step, I

identified patterns that helped me understand the queer leaders' experiences on a more

conceptual level. For example, during open coding, I used the labels "perceived fears" and

"actual fears," with a number of child codes underneath each. After continued analysis, I noticed

that fear was a broader category, which helped group all of the fears more conceptually. After

examining and grouping my codes conceptually, I refined my categories through member checks

and comparison until saturation occurred, or when no new categories seemed to emerge from the

data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Next, I undertook the process of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding

establishes relationships and connections between categories by analyzing "…causal conditions

that influence the central phenomenon, the strategies for addressing the phenomenon, the context

and intervening conditions that shape the strategies, and the consequences of undertaking the

strategies" (Creswell, 2007, p. 151). For example, in initial coding, I noted many instances that I

labeled "discrimination." To distill the dimensions of this category, I examined the stories

through the lens of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). With this new perspective, I noticed

that the stories of discrimination were linked to the participants' experiences in a heterosexist

world. Seeing this connection helped me to see other connections between fear and regret, which

also helped me put the role of the closet into perspective.

Situating both the heterosexual matrix and the closet as the dual cores of theory was the beginning of selective coding. This is the process by which categories are unified around a central or core category that moves towards the generation of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These two core categories represent the major phenomenon of the study; all other categories are in direct relation to the matrix and the closet (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The core of the model was phrased in a relational statement, "leading from the closet," and answers my research questions about queer leader's experiences and the intersections of identity. Selective coding helped me create a conditional matrix, which represents a visual model of the generated theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Throughout this selective coding process, I continued to consider how the categories affected each other. My diagrams progressed from a simple, linear outline to a more relational picture of queer leadership. I employed these diagrams to show the fluidity of leadership and to represent that there is not one way to lead as a queer leader. Although I struggled to show the relationships between all of the complex parts, eventually I tested the model by writing short narratives of the participants as they moved through the elements. Once I could "tell the story" of each participant's journey through the model, I felt that the theory could demonstrate the complicated, myriad experiences of queer leadership.

Validity

As a queer educator, I was especially aware of my own perspective and assumptions about my participants' experiences. Therefore, I took a number of steps to ensure validity throughout the research process. Both Charmaz (2000) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicate that the process of constant comparative analysis through grounded theory ensures validity as researchers are expected to both carefully collect and then analyze the data line-by-line. By

engaging in a spiraling process of analysis, I reduced the possibility of proposing concepts from literature and my own biases and instead grounded the findings solely in the lived experiences of the participants (Charmaz, 2000). By returning again and again to my data, I ensured that the key themes represent the participants' voices and experiences.

Seidman (2006) also notes that multiple interviews, spread out over the course of a few weeks, negate some inconsistencies in responses in a few ways. First, it allowed me to check for internal consistency across the responses. It also allowed the participant time to reflect on the previous interview. During this space between each interview, I asked the participants review their interview transcripts through member checks. This provided time for them to reflect on and refine their responses in preparation for the next interview. Gall, Gall and Borg (2010) define member checking as "…a procedure used by qualitative researchers to check their reconstruction of the field participants' emic perspective by having them review statements in the research report" (p. 556). Asking the leaders to read the transcripts of their interviews was essential. In this manner, I ensured another step towards validity.

Since no codes can exist without multiple sources of confirming evidence, triangulation was necessary (Creswell, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that, "Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (p. 202). Triangulation helps to ensure validity by ensuring that all codes and categories were present in multiple sources or, in the case of this study, multiple interviews. Therefore, all of the categories that I generated during data analysis were triangulated through data from interviews with participants and through constant comparative analysis. Also, since my study included two interviews with fifteen participants, I garnered ample evidence to confirm that the emerging codes and categories related to my data.

Finally, to ensure continued validity throughout my study, it was important to clarify my potential bias as a researcher and take steps to mitigate it. As a queer and an educational leader, I am entering this research with my own lived experiences and preconceived notions of what it means to be queer and in education. Therefore, I took a number of active steps to reduce potential bias on my part. First, I engaged in peer review on a bimonthly basis with both my advisor and dissertation group (Creswell, 2007). During these meetings, I reviewed my coding schemes and writing to ensure that no bias or unfounded interpretation entered my work. Second, I engaged in journaling in order to be self-reflexive, or self-aware, throughout my data collection and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). By maintaining a journal throughout my research, I remained cognizant of any previously held or emerging biases and assumptions. While my position as an "insider" in this research was helpful in gaining the confidence of my participants, it was crucial to take these bias-minimizing and self-reflexive steps to ensure validity.

In summary, these two sets of analyses revealed a deeper picture of my participants' lives through narrative analysis and a broader understanding of their experiences through grounded theory. In the next chapter, I introduce the stories of a few participants that deeply illuminate the lived experiences of three queer leaders. These stories help the reader understand both the diversity and commonality in their experiences. The commonalities also help to establish the emerging themes that provide a foundation for my grounded theory analysis, which is outlined in chapter five.

CHAPTER FOUR: STORIES OF QUEER LEADERSHIP

Through narratives, individuals and groups define themselves and clarify the continuity in their life experience. They also create narratives that express their shared aspirations (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010, p. 375).

I think it is important to talk to straight people about our experiences because I think that would enrich them, too. – Catherine

In this chapter, I use narrative analysis in order to delve into the personal and professional experiences of three queer leaders. Narrative analysis captures detailed stories or life experiences of an individual or small group (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) by describing what it is like to live in a particular context in a particular time. These individual experiences offer insight into the collective experiences of queer leaders, highlighting some common themes like feelings of isolation, experiences of discrimination and hope for a better future for queer students and educators. Therefore, by retelling or "restorying" their experiences, I am both giving voice to a marginalized group while illuminating commonalities in queer leadership.

While these three stories highlight commonalities, they also offer different pictures of life as a queer leader. On the surface, the participants could not be any dissimilar: Dan, a 65-year-old closeted gay man, living in a conservative state; Nicole, a 44-year-old lesbian, living in a progressive state; and Charles, a 60-year-old gay man living in a conservative state, but with experience in progressive districts. These stories serve to give the reader a glimpse into the diversity within an already small community.

Finally, given that many people are reluctant to understand the experiences of individuals who do not fit patterns of heterosexuality, these stories provide an entryway into the complex lives of educational leaders who are also queer. The three stories in this chapter take the reader into their world, providing a glimpse into the lives of these participants. It is also my hope to recreate the feeling of connectedness that I felt while interviewing and coming to understand

these leaders. In short, I want to make you, the reader, care about these participants. All 15 are

unique, highly accomplished professionals with varied histories and experiences as educational

leaders. It is only by going into depth into a few of their lives that we can begin to understand the

richness of their experiences.

Dan's Story

When I enter Dan Wilson's ranch-style home, I am struck by the order and warmth of it.

Although every picture frame and knick-knack has its place, I immediately feel at ease on his

comfortable couch, petting his dog, which is clearly thrilled by the appearance of a visitor. For

our first interview, Dan sits, legs crossed, next to me on the couch. His answers are both

expansive yet on topic, analytical and reflective. He is intelligent yet unafraid to revise past

thinking. And although he has lived his life predominately in the closet, he speaks easily about

being a queer educational leader. Our two-interview conversations, almost three hours together,

pass so quickly that it seems like thirty minutes. This is the story he tells me.

Early Life

Dan has always lived a solitary life. He is currently a single, 65-year-old self-identified

gay man living in a predominately conservative area of a conservative state. Dan grew up in the

suburbs of a progressive city, though, with a farmer-turned-machinist father and a mother who

worked evening odd jobs to make ends meet. As a result of his "latchkey" kid status, Dan was

often alone during his childhood. This solitary existence, though, helped to form his identity. "I

developed a tremendous amount of independence I think early on because I was really on my

own and fiercely independent," Dan reflects, "…I don't think I was antisocial but I had a very,

very small network of friends." He also developed hobbies and interests around his solitary

reality:

> When I got into middle school…when everybody's attention turns to athletics, I was sort of left out a lot. But I was very happy doing my own thing, being this, I hate to say, loner, but just doing my reading. I used to build models. I loved to hike and just enjoyed animals and the outdoors and that kind of thing. So I was sort of focused on those things, things that I could really do alone.

In eighth grade, Dan began to have feelings for men. He remembers one boy in particular: "…there was this guy who was a senior and actually his brother was in my class and for some reason, I was drawn to him. He was really handsome and that kind of thing." Yet, he never entertained further thoughts, noting, "But I still thought I was going to get married." One major reason for Dan's reluctance to consider his sexuality was his parents' commitment to religion: his mother went to church *twice* on Sundays. According to Dan, this enormous religious influence served to suppress, if not the feelings, then certainly his desire to make his burgeoning sexuality known.

During high school, Dan's world began to expand. He joined the track team, developed a small group of friends and even had long-term relationships with two different girls. After high school, uncertain of his future plans, Dan went to a community college before transferring to a large state university where he majored in political science. He was unhappy at first with the sheer size of the large institution but eventually developed friendships and began to consider his sexuality more deeply. The times were against him, though: "I began to try to deal with it at a time when it was certainly not socially acceptable and the idea of wanting to be an educator, the whole idea that unfortunately people had the perspective that you had a prurient interest in children as opposed to trying to help them." Dan's belief that the public would not accept a queer teacher was, unfortunately, true. A number of educational researchers have both historically and qualitatively recounted experiences of queer teachers being targeted, harassed and even fired because of their sexuality (Blount, 2000, 2003; DeJean, 2008; Graydon, 2011; Khayatt, 1982;

Lugg, 2003). This fear of the repercussions of being outed remains consistent throughout Dan's

career. As a result, Dan admits he pushed those "thoughts" away and focused on school and

work.

Early Career

In college, after an experience working with kids, Dan changed majors to become a social

studies teacher. Although he was not fully accepting of his sexuality at the time, Dan reflects that

he might have been drawn to education because he was gay: "Maybe we [queers] are also trying

to let kids know that it's okay to be like we are because, I think, vicariously, many of them

know." So, in order to better help kids navigate discrimination, Dan stayed committed to his new

major.

After graduation, Dan was offered a job teaching social studies in a surprisingly diverse

district given its conservative location. In a predominately rural state known for its conservative

tendencies, here was a district with an almost 50% African American population. It was here that

Dan would remain for his entire career. At first, though, Dan doubted his career path: "At the end

of the first year, I wasn't sure it was for me. I had a very difficult time because being raised in

[white, middle-class area] and working with a very diverse population of students was a very

different experience for me." However, he grew to love the cosmopolitan characteristics of the

district and even had opportunities to bring his passion for politics to students: "I got to teach

Comparative Political Systems…I got to take kids to model United Nations programs…" He

eventually used these interests to pursue a Masters in American Studies.

Yet, he still feared being "outed" at work:

I remember I would be horrified for anybody to even think I might be gay and so you
really suppress that and I did certainly. To tell you the very honest truth, I pretty much
suppressed it through a lot of my career at work… there was always that concern that
somebody would find out and that would impact my career.

He remembers, for example, feeling uncomfortable when male coworkers would tell queer jokes and if he thought his colleagues had suspicions about his sexuality: "I can't describe the feeling I used to get when I thought that people would know, just sort of like a sword right to my gut."

Butler's discussion of the "heterosexual matrix" at work in all social institutions helps to explain Dan's discomfort about being out in his career. This matrix not only benefits those who are heterosexual but also assumes heterosexuality of everyone in society. Thus, if Dan had been open about his sexuality, it would have gone against what society expected of him. Foucault's (1990) discussion of the "discourse of power" also illuminates why Dan remained silent. Foucault suggests that the repression of language around sexuality not only served to repress any discussion of sexuality but also to affirm that the topic itself was nonexistent. Therefore, by not discussing his queerness, Dan was, effectively, not queer. As a result, Dan consciously continued to suppress his sexuality in favor of focusing on advancing in his career.

Into Leadership:

In the early 1980's, a ready-to-retire principal asked Dan if he was interested in being an administrator. Hesitant and still happy teaching social studies, Dan thought that, going into his thirties, he was too old to pursue this track. The principal convinced him, though, so Dan returned for a second Masters in Educational Administration. The first position he interviewed for after obtaining his degree was for an assistant principal in the district. He did not get it, though: "That sort of bothered me a little bit. It did go through my mind, 'I wonder if it's because I'm not married,' and that kind of thing. Then, of course, that leads to another thought, 'Well maybe they think I'm gay.'"

Although Dan did not have words to describe this experience, he was feeling the pressure of fitting into heterosexual discourse of leadership (Foucault, 1980). Dan wondered if the

administration did not see him as a leader because he was unmarried, a heterosexist expectation.

So, he remained in the closet and, despite those doubts, Dan quickly moved into three other

leadership positions over the course of two-and-a-half years in various buildings: acting middle

school principal, assistant high school principal and then high school principal. After this brief

building-level leadership stint, an interesting twist of fate led to Dan becoming the assistant to

the superintendent. Kevin, the man who obtained the principal job Dan had originally applied for

after completing his masters in supervision and administration had been appointed the new

superintendent. He offered Dan the opportunity to be his second in charge.

       While Dan accepted this new role, this position made him even more anxious about his

closeted status. While come of his colleagues began coming out in the 90's, Dan continued to

remain closeted, believing that he would not be effective in his new position:

> …people will judge you by your sexuality and not by your performance… I don't think I
> really thought of it then, but in reflection, I would think, "Well, if they knew I was gay.
> Would I lack credibility?" Now that is something that I dealt with. I don't think that's
> true but at the time…I'm thinking, "Well, I'm focusing on work, on doing this, and
> therefore they're judging me on the work ethic that I have, the quality of the work I'm
> bringing to the table." I didn't want anything to really mess that up.

       Also, due to the diversity in his district, Dan believed that the large African American

population would have serious issues with his sexuality. Whether this perception was accurate or

not, much of Dan's position as assistant to the superintendent relied on making positive

community and cultural connections, especially through churches. Coming out was a risk he

thought he could not afford to take. Therefore, Dan always remained fearful of being outed. In

fact, while serving as the assistant to the superintendent, Dan recalls one of his frequent trips to

Philadelphia when his choice to hide his sexuality could have been in jeopardy:

> I was dating a guy from [prominent state college] in the '90s and we went to [local city].
> We went down there for the weekend. We were down in [area of the city] and we were
> walking around and we were holding hands 'cause we'd actually been dating for about

six months. One of the teachers came around the corner…Interestingly enough, she was with a lady and she was holding her hand. Do you know we saw each other, we said hello, we went on; we never discussed that ever. As long as she was in the district it never came up in conversation.

In the role of assistant to the superintendent, Dan began to take active steps to ensure that suspicions about his sexuality were minimized due to the masculine performative expectations expected of educational leaders (Blount 2003; Denton, 2009; Lugg, 2003; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Since educational leaders are expected to perform their roles in masculinist and heterosexist manners (i.e husband, heterosexual, and heterosexuality enforcer), Dan purposely attempted to pass as heterosexual, a process he describes as having a "beard," or a female companion who others believed to be his girlfriend.

However, since Dan did not fit into any of these roles, he engaged in passing behavior. To avoid being outed, many queer teachers and leaders have gone to great lengths to ensure that their sexuality remained hidden, including moving great distances from their districts changing the way they dress (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Lugg & Tooms, 2010; Khayatt, 1982; Tooms, 2007). In fact, Dan dated a few women off and on for a number of years. One woman in particular took him to her pastor…

> …because she wanted me to get counseling because she thought we should be getting married because we'd been seeing each other for five years. And of course I didn't have the courage to tell the pastor. He said, "So what is going on here?" He said, "You're too proper,"…So I broke up with her shortly after that.

Aside from engaging in passing behavior, Dan also threw himself into his work, not to deflect suspicion but as an insurance policy. Echoing other studies of minority leaders (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), Dan thought that if he worked harder, he could overcompensate for any internalized deficiency for being queer. Or, as the participants of other studies stated, they "…felt a need to work harder and sacrifice more than their straight

counterparts in an effort to prove that they could overcome the handicap of being lesbian or gay"

(Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 103). Dan reflected on this drive to be constantly working:

> I think maybe because of our sexuality we work harder than other people because we have to demonstrate over and over again that we can do it. Maybe it's because it is the focus of our lives because we may not have families or we may not have a large group that we have to deal with outside of the workplace. For whatever reason, I think we're all high achievers…maybe it's because of that inferiority piece…you're a second-class citizen because of your gayness that you really have to work that much harder to prove who you are.

This feeling of inferiority became a conscious "workaholic" mindset for Dan. Working long

hours, though, served to fill a void in him, one left empty by the absence of a partner in his life.

He expands on this:

> I put a tremendous amount of effort in my career as a teacher and as an administrator and probably the rewards I took from that satisfied me, I suppose…because I really didn't have someone in my life…a partner, someone I could really share with. I guess it's whatever you get satisfaction from doing and so if there's one part of your life where you're sort of shut down because you really can't act on those feelings, at least in your own mind you can't, so you divert your energies to the other area…The downside, of course, to that is it's sort of a lonely life. It really is.

It was not only his potential outing, though, that made Dan anxious about being in

administration: Dan was (and is) an intensely private person, nervous about making presentations

to the public and speaking in front of large groups of people. But with positive reinforcement

from Kevin, who quickly became ubiquitously popular, Dan maintained the position with quiet

confidence, even returning to earn a Doctorate and eventually becoming the assistant

superintendent.

Dan and Kevin worked closely for the next fourteen years until Kevin suddenly passed

away from cancer. After the board conducted a search, they approached Dan about taking the

position. He declined, informing the board that he was happy in his current position. Privately,

he worried about the shadow of Kevin's overwhelming popularity and his own sexuality

becoming public. Adding to his decision to stay out of the superintendency was a potentially

prescient event, taking place in a neighboring district. This district was also going through the

process of hiring a superintendent and had just discovered that their frontrunner was queer.

Worse, it made the headlines of a local newspaper and the controversy served to ruin the

candidate's chances for the position.

> As this debacle was playing out next-door and Dan continued to reject the position, the

board president asked to meet with him one day:

> She took me over to the library at the high school and we sat down there and she said, "The board would really like you to be superintendent." And I said, "Well, it's not anything I plan to do in my career." She said, "Well, if there's anything you're worried about…that would keep you from taking the job, what would that be?" Now am I going to be honest? I'm not going to be honest. I said, "Well, I really don't know..." She said, "Dan, if it's your lifestyle, that's not a problem."

After this comment, Dan said he "must have been red as a candle." Yet, this conversation

reinforced something in him, perhaps a realization that his sexuality was not as detrimental to his

career as he thought.

The Superintendency

> Dan eventually accepted the position, but the superintendency was fraught with pitfalls.

He reflects on his first week as the district's leader:

> When I became superintendent…a newspaper reporter asked me what my goals were. The first thing I said was, "Well, I want to make sure that our students are very successful on the assessments." I said, "I'm really concerned about the achievement gap and the fact that our African-American students are not performing as well as the Caucasian kids." Well, that was interpreted in the black community as a fact that black kids can't learn.

After receiving backlash from the African-American community, William, the district's business

administrator, also an African American, explained to Dan that he needed to shift his approach.

Although Dan had good intentions, William suggested that Dan needed to send the message that

all kids can learn. It was also William who provided an important link to the African-American

churches that dominated the cultural heart of the town. In an effort to build links with the African

American community, Dan began setting up monthly meetings with their leaders.

A few years later, though, this burgeoning friendship with the African-American

community was put to the test when a race-related event rocked the town: "I got a call from the

high school principal that somebody had put [up] racist posters in the building. They had taken

8-1/2x11 sheets and [written], "I hate black people. Blacks should be dead," and they put them

up in the hallway during class." After swiftly finding and expelling the students who were

responsible, Dan was targeted by a white supremacist group, who began sending him hate-filled

postcards and even posted a picture of Dan on their website. Instead of backing down, Dan

remained steadfast in his decision to expel the students. It was this decision that finally won over

the African-American community:

> Because I went through that, that was, believe it or not, the one piece that built that trust
> with the African American community because I went forward with that where [the
> Caucasian students] were expelled, and they looked at that as my championing a cause
> for them.

Dan's actions in this race-related case were representative of Dan's belief in advocating

for *all* students, especially those with diverse backgrounds. Dan was concerned about his

sexuality becoming public, yet it did not stop him from defending the rights of queer students.

While serving as superintendent, Dan distinctly remembers a young gay man who was being

verbally taunted and physically bullied on the school bus. The administration took swift action to

protect the student and received strong support from the majority of the community: "…parents

came to the school board meeting. They were furious that this kid was being abused on the bus.

They were supporting the gay kid, which I thought was really, really wonderful." This

unfortunate event even resulted in a progressive motion to pass a district policy, prohibiting

discrimination based on sexual orientation. Yet, while the young man and new policy received

wide support, Dan wished one thing was different: "…the whole time I was at the board meeting

[where the policy was being passed], it was killing me inside not to be able to say something.

You know what I mean? Just to stand up and say I know what it's like because I'm gay."

Not every issue in the superintendency, of course, compelled Dan to confront or consider

his sexuality. When asked about the everyday experience of being a superintendent, he describes

the overall position as being business-like: "I was their CEO, and so I took that very

seriously…of course, on any one given day, a superintendent could be fired for a hundred

reasons because there are so many policies." Aside from enforcing policy, many other issues

would consume Dan's days. He recounts a few, ranging from angry parents bursting into his

office to building and constructing turf fields to major budgeting ("I mean, I ran one of the

largest businesses in the community…our budget at that point was over $40 million."). An

additional pressure of the superintendency was the demand on Dan's time: "It's probably the

most challenging work I've ever done because it never stops." He remembers receiving calls on

Saturday nights from police officers, asking him to respond quickly to issues and set emergency

or contingency plans in motion for Monday morning.

Dealing with board members, however, proved to be one of the most challenging tasks in

the superintendency. In Dan's experience, they always tended to be both irrationally upset and

single-minded in their approach to problems:

> "…an angry board member will call you…and they want something dealt with right
> away. They're unreasonable. I hate to say this, but very often, board members are one-
> issue folks. They very often come to the table because they have an ax to grind. Nine
> times out of 10, it's athletics…"

In one situation, a board member decided that it was her duty to drop by schools unannounced to

conduct her own "walkthroughs." When Dan discovered this inappropriate behavior, he sat her

down and told her, "If you're going to do that, you don't need me. I am the one that does that.

You are a policymaker. You may think you're helping me. You are hurting me."

Yet, there were other situations with board members that were more challenging to

navigate. In these cases, the pervasive nature of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) was

palpable as was Dan's fear of being outed. In situations where queer issues were not involved,

business could be conducted as usual. However, once sexuality came into the picture, Dan's own

queerness came to the foreground. He remembers being approached by an older board member,

who told him that she had heard a certain female principal in the district was gay. Dan calmly

noted that the principal was doing good work and asked the board member if she thought it

affected the principal's job performance in any way. Her response: "Well, no, but I just think it's

terrible." The following month, this same board member brought the issue up in an executive

board session. Both the board president and the attorney responded the same way: "So what?"

Dan felt heartened by this, but still remained cautious.

In one situation during his superintendency, the discrimination was directed at him as a

result of hiring decisions. Coincidentally, a number of new hires to the district also happened to

be queer:

> We did have an ex-board member who's really a negative individual. About a year and a
> half before I retired he called one of the current board members…and he said something
> about…the Gay Mafia is taking over the school district. We had hired a business manager
> who turned out to be gay.

Interestingly, though, the business administrator was not Dan's first choice and Dan was not

aware of his sexual orientation. Even so, this board member accused Dan of bringing in queer

leaders to effectively take control and push a queer agenda on students.

Although Dan received support from other board members, this event gave him pause.

Much like the experiences of other queer educators (Blount, 2000, 2003; DeJean, 2008;

Graydon, 2011; Khayatt, 1982; Lugg, 2003), this experience confirmed Dan's fears that some

members of the community were questioning his sexuality. The event also further solidified

Dan's fear that the staff and the community might lose faith in him if they discovered his

sexuality. Dan reflects:

> I was being discriminated against because of my sexuality. I thought that was really the
> first time. I had to actually stop and think about it, and I realized now I never really
> thought about it before… I just thought it was very unfair. It was really the first time in
> my life I really had to focus on my sexuality, I mean, for an extended period of time, to
> see if it would affect my career.

Close to retirement anyway, Dan seriously considered ending his tenure. He reflects, "I got to

thinking, I wonder if that would impact on my ability to lead, because again it's 'We're not

going to listen to you because you're gay.'" Eventually, after breaking out of his self-described

"analysis paralysis", Dan realized that he did not want a negative experience to decide his future.

Plus, his district had faith in him. Spending over 40 years in the same district was testament to

that fact.

With only a few months left in his role as superintendent, Dan decided to go out with a

bang by passing an amendment to include sexuality in the district's nondiscrimination policy for

staff. Although he was successful in passing a policy for students after the bus-bullying incident,

nothing in the current language existed to protect queer staff members from discrimination.

When Dan presented his idea to add more inclusive language to the board, one board member

reacted strongly:

> I went to the board in executive session and I said, "I would like to make sure that we
> have an antidiscrimination policy for the district." One of the older board
> members…said, "I think that's ridiculous. Why would we need to do that?" I said,
> "Because…we have to be fair to everybody…If we do not protect our teachers from
> sexual harassment, if we deny someone employment because of their sexuality…or for
> whatever reason, their race, sexuality, ethnicity, that's really wrong."

Because this particular policy could have been controversial among the conservative community,

Dan and the board president decided to bring it up for a vote in July…when no one attends board

meetings. It passed unanimously. This was one month before Dan retired; he still had not

publically come out.

Looking Back

Since the superintendency is such a varied role that involves dealing with budgets,

building plans and instructional issues, the only time Dan really considered his sexuality was in

programs and policy in terms of adding inclusive language into the staff nondiscrimination

policy. Although Dan's entire professional life was spent keeping his sexuality closeted, this line

of thinking disrupts heterosexist discourse (Foucault, 1980) by attempting to subvert the

ingrained homophobia and heterosexism in educational policy. As he reflects on why he felt so

strongly about passing more inclusive policies, Dan shares an epiphany:

> If I were honest with myself, at the time I probably would have been thinking about
> myself and my own sexuality and where I was coming from. Did I really think about it
> actively? I said [that my] sexuality, it really didn't impact my work per se as a
> superintendent or impact my decision making or what I did, but I guess probably at the
> back of everybody's mind you bring to the table your personality, what you're made of.

Now at 65, Dan admits that only in the last few years has he truly felt comfortable in his

own skin and the closet has served as a major factor in his professional career (Silin, 1995).

Indeed, his one regret is: "…if I could wish for anything: for being younger and being out

earlier…" However, Dan reflected, "…I've heard it time and time again. We all have to come to

terms with our sexuality at different times in our lives, so that's obviously true." He also jokingly

wishes that he gave this retirement speech:

> I had my speech all ready for when I retired: "I want to thank you for giving me all these
> years in [the district]. It's been a great ride…Just to let you know that I'm gay and that I
> never coveted a single child in the school district. This is to let you know that gay people
> actually can make a difference in the workplace through what they do.

Although Dan never had the opportunity to give this speech, I wonder what would have happened if he had. Perhaps this step out of the closet would have disrupted the heterosexist norms of the matrix in his district. Then again, perhaps it would have resulted in negative professional repercussions. One fact is certain, though: by maintaining his silence, Dan continued to reify both his career in the closet and the heterosexual matrix in his district.

Nicole's Story

I am scheduled to interview Nicole close to the end of my data collection…and I am excited. Nicole, a 44 year-old self-identified lesbian, lives and works in the most progressive state in my sample. As I drive to the interview, I speculate about how her answers might diverge from others. Her context would seem to offer her a measure of security regarding her sexuality. Will she be able to be "more out" than the other leaders I have interviewed? Will this affect her perspectives and responses about being queer in education?

My excitement fades as contradictions emerge. We conduct the interview in her office, which could be anyone's office. No pictures adorn her desk or walls; the decor is "public school system austere." I was secretly hoping to see pictures of her partner. But then, only a few minutes into our time together, Nicole mentions something about her partner and children. She also confirms that she is, in fact, out at work and that she purposely assumed a superintendency in this progressively-minded district. Yet, she believes in keeping everything "workplace appropriate" at the office, consciously avoiding personal conversations and relationships. She also speaks at length about an irksome teacher's assistant who brought too much of her queer sexuality into the classroom. Does Nicole hear the heterosexist discourses at work in her answers? Does she wonder if she is hiding her sexuality, despite her contention that she is out?

Early Life

Nicole was raised in a progressive state in a small town: her high school graduating class topped out at about 140 and there was no direct or expedient public transportation to any major city. When she reflects on her childhood, she labels it as a "pretty standard, white picket fence kind of upbringing." Her parents were high school sweethearts and grew up as neighbors. She laughingly recalls that they love to tell the story of "...when he used to throw crabapples at her from across the street. It's kind of really Normal Rockwell-ish."

The size of Nicole's town had an enormous influence on her early experiences. As expected, it served to make the community very tight-knit: "It was such a small group that...there were not huge cliques within [it]. It was a pretty open group that kind of intermingled." The closeness and remoteness also led to high level of parental supervision. Nicole's upbringing, which she frequently calls to mind, meant that: "...somebody's parents were always not too far away."

The diminutive size of Nicole's town also had the effect of making the school the center of the community. Because social opportunities were limited, school-based activities became the norm. Nicole explains that she was involved in a little bit of everything, both because "that's who I am" and because there was no other choice: "There wasn't anything else to do. Either you were involved in school or there weren't really a whole lot of other activities to be doing." And Nicole *was* involved: she played softball, skied, served as an officer in the student government, worked on the yearbook and was a member of the French Club.

Nicole remembers her parents' continual encouragement. They were the strong and silent type of family, maintaining a strong work ethic and reminding Nicole that, "Good isn't good enough. There's always better. There's always room for improvement." Nicole's father was also,

"...a bit of a work-a-holic. I think I've inherited a little bit of it," although that came later in her life. Instead of following her parents' examples, Nicole's early work ethic was less than optimal. In short, she would often take the path of least resistance in school: "A lot of things have come pretty easy, so effort wasn't always necessary. That was kind of the mantra of Mom, which was 'Imagine what you could do if you tried.'" But the traditional school that Nicole attended disinterested her: "School was very straightforward, was very boring. It was certainly not inquiry based at the time, so it was, 'This is what I'm telling you; this is what you'll tell me back and everything will be good.' I was always the why kid, like, 'Why does it have to be this way? Why do we need to learn this? When will I ever really use algebra?'"

Into Education

It was only when Nicole entered college that she began to truly enjoy her education. Rather than rote memorization and formulaic thinking, "It became more about an intellectual pursuit and asking questions, uncovering answers and challenging thought. And I think that's what engaged me a little bit more." Another topic of interest began to engage Nicole in college: women. She reflects, "I met some interesting women who got the thought process going for me…women who got me really thinking about what I wanted for myself for the long term."

Although Nicole's interest in women was beginning, she still had no interest in education. Rather, Nicole had her mind set on something related to law or political journalism: "I came out of [high] school thinking, 'I'm out of here. I'm never looking back. I'm going into communications and law and [becoming] Barbara Walters. Reporting live from The White House.'" So, instead of going abroad her junior year, Nicole went to Washington, D.C. to pursue her political ambitions. However, a few internships quickly convinced her that politics was not in

the cards: "[I] got a little jaded...I decided that I needed to do something different than pursue

taking a bad system and making it worse." Instead, she decided on teaching:

> …to have a full-functioning democracy you need to have an educated population, and the
> population has no clue how it all works. What better way to try and change things than
> training up people to be better educated about the way the government really works and
> how decisions are really being made.

Even as Nicole began to explore the teaching route, though, she never thought it would be

permanent. Instead, she believed it would be a gateway into academia. So, after finishing her

undergraduate work, Nicole went directly into a Masters program to teach social studies and then

entered her first year in the classroom.

Like many teachers, Nicole found that "once I started, I just fell in love with it." Not only

did she like the teaching but she also found that she loved the human interaction:

> I kind of went in for the [social studies] content, but once I started working with kids, I
> really saw the unique opportunities there and really got into it…And It wasn't until I
> really had that first year experience that just was so positive and seeing the kids kind of
> grow and change and learn to think a little bit that I thought maybe I could be in this for a
> little bit more.

But education was not the only thing Nicole fell in love with. While she was teaching, Nicole

met Kate, who happened to be another teacher in her building. Kate was in her mid-30's with

two daughters and in the middle of a divorce from her husband. Nicole reflects, "[Kate] had

more of the midlife realization. She's older, so she was probably in her late 30's when she was

starting to have that realization that she didn't make a good choice." What started off as a

collegial friendship quickly grew into something more. Although Nicole describes their how-we-

met story as boring, she hints that the beginning of their relationship was "explosive." Indeed,

many factors could have contributed to its incendiary inception: the same workplace, a heated

divorce and the sheer presence of children.

Nicole and Kate's relationship quickly became serious (She describes it in this way: "I

kind of like woke up one day and there it was: Instant relationship, instant family."), which

meant telling other people, including Kate's children and her soon-to-be ex-husband. This

proved to be difficult; Nicole reflects, "I think going through it with the kids is the hardest part

because you don't want to burden them. You want to make sure that their school years are not

tarnished by your choices in life."

While she was teaching and after meeting Kate, Nicole also decided to come out to her

parents. Luckily, it was the late 1980's and being queer was becoming more accepted:

> It's always kind of been available to me. It's never really been a taboo…It was already
> the early Ellen [DeGeneres] years, if you will, and it becoming chic, it becoming an
> option, it becoming not something that you had to struggle in silence with for long
> periods of time.

So, one evening Nicole invited her parents over for dinner. She describes the anticlimactic

process: "It was really quick: rip the band-aid. 'Hey, come on over to our house. By the way, I

live here and this is Kate, and we've been together for six months…' It completely blindsided

them." Nicole's parents responded in a manner typical to their strong, silent approach to life:

there was no crying or yelling and very little discussion. They simply accepted the fact and told

Nicole that they were happy that she was with a good person. Yet, Nicole wonders how her

parents truly felt. She explains:

> I mean, [I] still [have] Catholic parents and it wasn't going to be their first option, but…if
> it's really bothering them, they've kind of kept it under their hat and learned to deal with
> things… I think for them the biggest issue is probably what we all go through: the
> perception of what your life is going to be versus what your life ends up being. They
> don't always quite go together.

This perception of what life "should" be like, which is affected by the underlying

presence and dominance of the heterosexual matrix, skews even our loved ones' ideas of what

relationships and family actually look like (Butler, 1990). Nicole's parents expected her to marry

a man and have children, as she states "in the classic sense." The dominant discourses that

construct heterosexuality as the normal and only right way of being also served to influence

Nicole's perception of her own sexuality and how educators should look and act in the

classroom. When Nicole spoke about her sexuality, it was almost like she was speaking of

something part of her but also separate from her:

> It's a part of who I am. It's not the driving factor of who I am, and I say that only having watched some friends have it really…consume who they are, how they live, where they choose to live. Every choice they make seems to center first around that self-identification [as queer] as opposed to a broader sense of self.

Falling back into this heterosexist discourse, it seems as if Nicole was trying to distance herself

from her sexuality, thus choosing to remain silent (Silin, 1995). Nicole also believes that other

educators should remain silent and not project their sexuality in any way:

> If you're going to be working with elementary kids, I think your need to project and be validated can't be your purpose for being in that classroom… but I think some people need to work on themselves so much that it comes in an external way that can get in the way of the other work that you do.

While remaining silent about issues of sexuality continues to institutionalize homophobia in

schools (Silin, 1995), it also demonstrates Nicole's performance of dual sexualities. By

presenting her queer sexuality at home and a nonsexual or perhaps heterosexual front at work,

Nicole is ascribing to traditional leadership roles through performance (Butler, 1990). In her

view, one's queer identity is to be kept separate from one's leadership role. Therefore, the façade

that Nicole presents is a performance of traditional gender and sexuality norms. Her office,

austere and devoid of personal pictures, presents Nicole as a heterosexual or nonsexual leader.

She very purposely works to separate her sexuality from her work, insisting that she does not

need "validation" for her queer identity. Nicole also believes that other educators should follow

her example.

For example, Nicole told me the story of a teacher's assistant, Amanda, who was also a

lesbian: "The way she looked…she was sporting a very butch look at the time, and I think she

felt that that was impeding her ability to get hired [as a teacher]." When they would spend time

socially, Amanda would frequently lament that she could not get a job because of her sexuality.

Nicole, though, had a different interpretation of Amanda's problem:

> …she was not understanding at all how her presentation to others may not fit with the job
> that she wanted to do… If you present yourself as someone who is really here with a
> political agenda or a personal focus or a religious focus…it makes people wonder
> whether or not you can [put] the kids first…she expected everybody to conform to her
> need to present in a certain way.

As she describes Amanda, Nicole becomes frustrated, believing that Amanda's only concern was

to project her sexuality no matter the cost. Interestingly, Nicole and Amanda never worked in the

same building. In fact, Nicole never saw Amanda interact with students. Nicole's inference about

bringing sexuality into the classroom, then, may be unfounded. However, Nicole's opinion of

Amanda may be a biased one, influenced by society's expectations of how women should

perform their gender (Butler, 1990). Nicole expected that Amanda, if she did not perform or

behave as feminine, would at least remain silent about her sexuality or attempt to pass as straight.

Also, like many queer educators, Nicole was concerned about the repercussions of being

outed and of being seen as sexually deviant and predatory because she is in education (DeJean,

2008; Donahue, 2008; Graydon, 2011; Khayatt, 1982). She reflects:

> I was probably a little bit more worried about [if] would I have parents who didn't want
> their kids to have me in class if they found out…I think then I was probably far more
> preoccupied with the thought that people would think I was trying to indoctrinate their
> kids or would be a negative influence on them in some way.

However, Nicole admits that these fears were unfounded, never having received any negative

messages from parents or students.

Into Leadership

Although Nicole's personal life was busy, she became restless with the mundane routine

of teaching:

> For me, the idea of teaching five classes a day for the rest of my life and being able to do
> the math on what I would be earning 20 years from now…I found it really suffocating. It
> was either do something different within it or get out…I guess I'm one of those people
> who after a while I kind of get bored with the same routine, so about five or six years into
> teaching, I started looking at maybe I want to be a department chair.

She also realized that, if she wanted to move up the administrative ranks, being in a different

building than Kate would probably be to both of their benefit.

Nicole's first administrative position was in the same district in which she was currently

teaching. The position was a "program advisor" for social studies and dealt with the curricular

and instructional aspects of her content. She ended up loving it: "I had a great mentor in the

principal there. It was a fun group. It was a big high school with a lot of interesting political

issues going on and a very strong union, so there was a tight bond that formed I think with the

administrative team." It was the vibrant political life of this administrative role, though, that

really piqued her interest: "It just kind of got me interested in the whole concept of leadership,

and if I were in this seat, how would I do things differently, the principal's role? If I were in the

assistant superintendent's role, how would I do things differently?" So, after seven years, she

made the jump into an assistant principal position.

This new position, though, was quite different. As an assistant principal, she was no

longer responsible for instructional or curricular decisions. Instead, Nicole spent her days

suspending students and keeping a tight reign on the everyday functions of the school. The

district itself was also different: it was an urban and highly diverse area, a vast difference from

the affluence of the district where she had spent her previous twelve years. At first, Nicole was

hoping that the diverse makeup of the population would be an asset. However, she notes, "It tended to be more of a divisive issue, so it was keep the halls quiet and keep the kids out [of trouble]." Although being an assistant principal was not "intellectually stimulating", as Nicole puts it, she did gain valuable experience: "[I] learned a lot about the law...about resources, external resources that are available for kids, the social work component, the inner workings of Special Ed law and discipline issues." She also learned an important lesson about leadership: "If you're not buying into the philosophy of the person that you're the second in command to...it's a very long hard process because you're doing things that you wouldn't normally be doing." So after a few years, Nicole decided to try something new: being the director of curriculum and technology on a district level.

Although she originally planned to be a high school principal next, this new position offered her the opportunity to have the best of what she enjoyed most: developing programs and working directly with teachers. Plus, the makeup of the new district was more familiar: suburban and middle class. Also, she was out to her superintendent, James. Although he was comfortable and accepting of her sexuality, he was also nervous about how others would perceive her: "James was probably always worried that somebody was going to say something…[he] was overprotective and worried because we had a few school committee members who were a little conservative."

Nicole spent seven years, enjoying both the work and the politics of the job: "...having an impact on what's going on in the classroom and…liaising between all of the different players in the district." Although she was happy in this position, Nicole's superintendent had different plans for her: "My superintendent thought I would be good at [being a superintendent] and started putting the idea in my head. I think I spent three years saying, 'Absolutely no. I have no

interest in doing what you're doing. I could do it; I understand how to do it, but I don't want to do it.'"

Yet whether it was her superintendent's influence or some other internal desire, the idea finally started to have some appeal to Nicole. She reflects, "Somehow, eventually, I think you end up realizing that you're either going to have a new boss or you're going to become your own boss, so I took a shot at it." So at 41, Nicole found herself in the most highly political job in public education.

The Superintendency

It was not only the support of her superintendent that prompted Nicole to take up the superintendency: it was also the district itself. Nicole notes that she made a conscious decision to lead a district that was philosophically aligned with her beliefs about education. She states, "I wouldn't go to a place that believed that kids need to be tested from pre-K through 12 under a rote memorization process where all we wanted them to do was regurgitate facts." The demographic and socioeconomic makeup of the district was also appealing. Nicole explains:

> …people had the right level of education and mindset where [my sexuality] would be a non-issue. I guess that was a conscious decision on my part. Don't put yourself in a position where this is going to be a tool or an issue for someone on your board… it was really making sure I chose a place where I felt it would be a comfortable situation.

Although Nicole believed this new district would be more accepting of queers, she preferred instead to remain closeted, despite her claims of being out (Silin, 1995). By keeping her office free of personal pictures and not discussing her personal life at work, Nicole chooses to be more closeted than open, suggesting one of the inherent contradictions about her professional experience.

As she began her tenure, Nicole quickly learned a great deal about leading at the district level. One of the first lessons was that black and white decisions do not exist: "It's not a position

where you're never right or wrong. You're really kind of the person trying to balance

everybody's point of view to come to some consensus that will keep everything moving

forward." Because of this subjectivity and uncertainty, the superintendency reminds Nicole of

being a mother. She refers to her leadership style as almost "political parenting", providing all

constituents with both validation and fair decision-making:

> I feel like I'm a mother more than anything else in this role because what you're doing is
> constantly balancing the needs of three very different groups: the students, the teachers,
> and the community against one another and trying to come up with something that's in
> the middle. It's like you're the arbiter of everybody's needs, and no one decision is going
> to satisfy everyone.

Nicole further reflected that that the superintendency requires "patience, listening,

forgiveness…everybody's going to make mistakes. People are going say things or do things that

really aren't how you would have wanted them to go." And much like a parent, superintendents

need to be ready to deal with negativity:

> You have to have a pretty thick skin. Things need to be able to roll off your back, so if I
> got mad or if I was upset by everybody who disagreed with me, it would be pretty
> miserable. I think some people, gay, straight, it doesn't matter, are very sensitive to how
> other people perceive them, think about them, or opinions that they have of them.

Instead of playing the masculinist role of husband, father and heterosexuality enforcer, roles

upon which educational leadership was built (Blount, 2003), Nicole views her position as more

responsive and maternal. By equating motherhood with qualities like patience and forgiveness,

Nicole is ascribing more feminine qualities to her role as a leader. Indeed, Butler (1990) asserts

that women are socially expected to perform their gender roles in a more nurturing way, much

like how Nicole describes her process of decision-making.

Nicole, like all leaders, had to deal with the day-to-day aspects of the superintendency.

Nicole describes her work as an "all encompassing"

…soup to nuts position…at any given moment you're theorizing about the future of education and how to get the school moving forward, and then the next second you could be dealing with a student discipline issue that has legal implications. Then you can be dealing with a snow removal issue or a leaky roof…you need to be a little bit of a jack-of-all-trades and juggle many things at one time.

As Nicole spoke about her role as a superintendent, contradictions began to emerge between her opinions of being out and how her sexuality mediates her role as a leader, suggesting the continued performance of separating her professional and private sexuality (Butler, 1990). She began by stating that her sexuality does not influence her day-to-day decisions. She then noted that, "I think being an LGBT leader probably lends you to be more open-minded and tolerant and expecting that in others." She pointed to students who have certain differences, who strike a chord in her:

It really frustrates me because we have a few folks on staff, and I've worked with a couple of people of who are gay and have no tolerance for people, other people, who are different or kids who learn differently. That really is a trigger for me. Because I guess I assume that they should be more compassionate.

Nicole's heightened sense of empathy and compassion is also echoed in the research on queer leaders (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003). In these studies, participants shared a belief that their sexuality provided them with a keen insight and a special perspective when it came to dealing with issues of intolerance. Nicole states that her student-centered, empathetic tendencies may have roots in her experiences and her sexuality: "I don't know whether that just is who I am, or if it is a product of the road that I've come down. I would say on a subconscious level [my sexuality] probably is part of [my decisions]." Nicole also suggests, though, that the context of her progressive state might have something to do with her decision-making. She notes, "I think the culture here is pretty supportive of kids who are different in general…"

Although in other, more conservative districts, being a queer superintendent would be considered taboo, Nicole indicates that she does not hide her sexuality. Rather, "If you know me,

you know that I'm gay. If you work in this office, you know who Kate [her partner] is and you know who [my daughters] are." Indeed, Nicole realizes that context is crucial. Both in teaching and in administration, she has had people come before her who were already out. Nicole reflects, "I've never been the only person or the person who has been needing to lead the charge on anything, so I guess I've really benefitted from circumstance and geography."

Yet, despite this reflection, Nicole has not revealed her sexuality to everyone at work nor does she overtly discuss issues of sexuality: "It's not important for me that everybody knows that I'm gay…I don't feel like I have to make grand announcements about it, but it's nothing that I feel like I need to hide." For Nicole, her sexuality cannot be separated from her overall identity; however, her queer identity is something she keeps separate from work as much as possible.

Even when Nicole discusses her family at work, it is done in a "workplace appropriate way" and only with a select group of administrators, which she refers to as "professional friendships". It is this reservation to discuss personal matters or show emotion that, Nicole believes, springs from her parents influence. Yet, theory and research indicate that the silencing of sexuality goes beyond upbringing. Instead, subtle and ingrained beliefs permeate how a society talks about sexuality (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1980; 1990), especially the silencing of aberrant sexualities. Therefore, Nicole's reluctance to discuss her sexuality points to the presence of this discourse of power, despite the influence of her family. So while Nicole professes to be out at work, she also, contradictorily, indicates that sexuality should not be discussed in a professional setting. Although somewhat confusing, Nicole's beliefs highlight the tensions that surround sexuality in a so-called progressive state: while it is theoretically acceptable to be queer in education, the message that queer leaders like Nicole have internalized is one of separation and silence of sexuality.

Nicole also avoids socializing too much with her colleagues, which helps her maintain a separation and silence. For example, she makes sure to only attend school-sanctioned functions to which all of the staff or administrators have been invited. Nicole subscribes to the belief that leaders should maintain a professional distance to avoid favoritism or unintentional alienation, returning to her metaphor of mother as leader: since a mother would not pick a favorite child, Nicole does not want to appear to be playing favorites. Yet as she performs this highly gendered role (Butler, 1990), Nicole also shared that she could never imagine living in the same town in which she worked. Similar to Nicole, other queer educators have maintained a significant distance from their places of work in order to keep their public and private lives separate (Denton, 2009; Khayatt, 1982). Therefore, Nicole's reluctance to socialize and live close to her district may be related to her fear of being too out, disrupting her performative role as nonsexual or heterosexual leader (Butler, 1990).

This reticence to become too friendly does not seem to impact her relationships with her small administrative team. On the contrary, Nicole noted three significant working relationships:

> So a running joke is that we have our admin meetings and we want to keep them to two hours, and we try to put in all of these stops so we don't go too long. They end up being three to four hours just because we'll get rolling on a conversation, and people really enjoy engaging with each other and enjoy being with each other and laughing and just having a cup of coffee.

Nicole admits, though, that this closeness comes not from feelings of friendship but from a common professional goal: "It's tight for the right reasons. It's not like people are protective of one another because of relationships outside of here…there's a common cause and that's the work and it's the kids." Also, she has taken steps to create these professionally appropriate bonds, to ensure that she has, as she explains, "the right people in the seats." Indeed, in her few

years in the superintendency, Nicole replaced a number of administrators, one who was

considered to be a bully by staff members.

Nicole might argue, though, that the separation of her personal and professional lives is

done more out of a need for mental and emotional refuge. She spoke frequently about the need to

balance: "It's a job that takes so much of your time…how do you meet the needs of a 24/7 job

with the needs of your family to also be present, and present of mind when you're there?"

However, Nicole also notes that age plays a part in her decisions and perceptions. Because she is

a young superintendent, it is important to instill confidence in her district by being the

consummate professional. Nicole is even reluctant even to be seen by parents in workout

clothing, exiting her gym, although this might be another strategy to perform a feminine role and

pass as straight. Yet, she reflects, "As you get older, I think they give you credit for being an

older professional just because you've aged. I think that gives you a little bit more freedom to be

who you are." Again, Nicole's reluctance to "be who she truly is" might be a result of the

intersection of age and sexuality. Because of the high visibility and political nature of the

superintendency, being young, coupled with being queer, could be too much uncertainty for

some communities.

Yet, the separation may be due to something completely distinct: her relationship.

Towards the end of our interview, Nicole reflected that her 17-year relationship with Kate may

be providing her with all the social and emotional support she needs, causing her to not seek out

close, personal connections at work:

> I mean, I'm in a 17-year strong relationship…I'm not navigating difficult issues at home,
> I'm not looking for a partner…So when I'm [at work], I'm really all into here and I'm not
> very much preoccupied with [my personal life]…If I was trying to find somebody and be
> out and trying to be social, I would probably be thinking about it a whole heck of a lot
> more than I do now.

This reflection is important to note, due to the highly contextual nature of these queer leaders' experiences. In this case, Nicole clearly sees a distinction between herself and other queer leaders.

Throughout Nicole's story, there exists a tension between the public persona as a leader and the private one of partner to Kate and mother to their children. In many ways, she sees herself as both a queer leader and a leader who separates her personal and professional identities. However, similar to other queer leaders, Nicole referred to herself as a "workaholic" on three separate occasions. It could be argued that to achieve this level of a leadership position that it is necessary to be a tireless worker. However, the literature on queer leaders points to this overachieving trend (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007). In each of these studies, the leaders all shared the belief that they needed to work harder than their heterosexual counterparts to provide a "shield against the perceived threat of homophobic reactions" (Tooms, 2007, p. 613) or "to prove that they could overcome the handicap of being lesbian or gay" (Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 103). Perhaps overachieving is another performance to fulfill the role of heterosexual leader.

Looking Ahead

Nicole is hopeful that the concerns surrounding her sexuality will diminish with age and experience. Yet, for now, the contradictions in her beliefs are clear. Nicole stated again and again that keeping her personal life separate from her work life was paramount, while also referring to the heightened sense of empathy and sensitivity that comes from being a queer leader. Indeed, throughout my reconstruction of Nicole's story, the contradictions between her professional performances as a nonsexual leader and her private beliefs about the importance of her queer sexuality were constant themes.

At the end of our time together, Nicole apologizes for not being able to answer my questions about facing career challenges or feeling professionally limited by her sexuality. As I stand to leave, Nicole shakes my hand, looks around and refers to her open-minded and progressive district when she says, "Let's face it. It's a very different world." I, however, am not convinced.

Charles' Story

As I drive to meet Charles, passing through innumerable suburbs in a conservative state, I begin to think about some of the things he has already shared with me prior to our first interview. At 60 years old, he has been in education for over 30 years and has held more superintendencies than any participant in my study, four in three different states. Although he described all of these districts as "wealthy and suburban," the locations of the districts vary: one district was located in a conservative state, outside of a major urban center; another was set in an affluent community of a progressive state. I begin to wonder, "How does context affect a queer leader? Or does it have no affect at all?" Perhaps Charles can shed some light on this question.

Early Life

Charles was born in a large urban center but moved to the suburbs at the age of 5. He describes his family life as a "typical *Leave it to Beaver* type household… I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth, but things were always good." With his father working and commuting long hours, Charles' mother stayed at home with him and his sister until they left for college. Charles says he was "the stupid one at home" and had to work diligently to earn average grades. In contrast, his sister "never got anything other than an A", while seemingly never studying.

However, he was involved in school, acting in his high school plays, participating in the French club and editing the school newspaper. His small group of friends were involved in these activities, too, which made for a comfortable early schooling experience. Sports, though, were not for Charles: "I couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time without falling over my feet."

Into Education

Charles always enjoyed working with younger children and decided to attend college for elementary education and early childhood education. During this time, the AIDS crisis struck. Although Charles was not yet out, he reflects, "I think I always knew that I was attracted to males," but it was not the time for him to "explore that route in my life." There was another reason, though, that he repressed his sexuality during college: Charles notes, "There was the expectation as the oldest son that I would get married, that I would produce grandchildren." His parents, reproducing the heterosexual discourse (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1980), expected Charles to ascribe to those same norms. So, he did, marrying a woman and having two children with her.

Upon graduating from college, Charles served as a long-term substitute for a year before staying at the same elementary school for the rest of his 8-year teaching career. Although he wanted a primary classroom, Charles was only offered teaching positions in the upper grades. Indeed, Charles stated that "A guy couldn't get a job in the primary grades, it just wasn't going to happen," because, as Tobin (1997) suggests, our society is "burdened with moral panic about sexual abuse" (p. 106). Because these discourses position men as sex-obsessed pedophiles (Tobin, 1997; Silin, 1997), it was impossible and often professionally risky for men to take teaching positions with young children.

So, Charles was relegated to a position in fifth grade. It was in this large district, though, that Charles got his first taste of leadership when he served as the elementary math department

chair only a few years into his teaching career. In this role, he was in charge of the math curriculum for 12 schools. Charles enjoyed it so much that it prompted him to begin to look for other leadership roles.

Into Leadership

Charles' first administrative position was as a middle school assistant principal. After only one year, though, he was offered a principal position in the same district at a special education magnet elementary school. He remained there for 5 years and was then offered a unique position: to be a principal on "special assignment for school construction." In this new role, he was responsible for solely working with architects, engineers and construction crews to build and renovate schools in his district. In just a few short years, Charles helped build four elementary schools and renovate the middle and high schools. Then, he had the chance to become principal of one of the new elementary schools, which was special since Charles "got to hire my own staff [and] put the whole school together from scratch."

However, 3 years later, the district made a major change: they eliminated both the director of human resources and the director of curriculum and instruction. Yet, they still needed the responsibilities of both jobs to be fulfilled…but by one person. So, they called on Charles to take on the role. He reflects on this all-encompassing position, "I remember having a conversation with the superintendent: this job is like having 50 plates on sticks. The two of us are trying to touch every plate to make sure it doesn't drop and fall." Charles' new role was overwhelming. At one point, Charles remembers, he had 3 secretaries to help support him. Yet, even with help, because of the vast responsibilities, Charles was not able to spend much time in the curriculum and instruction position, which was his true passion. So, after 5 years, Charles left for his first superintendency.

The Superintendency

Charles thought his first superintendency would be a good place to start as a district leader. His new district was, "a well-rounded, high-achieving district" whose superintendent had been there for the last 10 years. However, "I wasn't there for six months before I became aware that there had been some embezzling going on in the school district." After dealing with forensic accountants and the business administrator, Charles discovered something else: rampant cheating on standardized tests. Evidently, several members of the math department, including the math department chair, had a tutoring service for the Advanced Placement Exam and the SAT. They were copying students' tests and then using them for practice questions. After another massive round of dismissals, Charles decided it was time to move on. He explains, "…by that time I was the hatchet guy, so after four years I explained to the board, 'This is not going well. You need to bring somebody in here who's clean.' "

In the midst of this turmoil, another storm was raging: Charles had decided to ask for a divorce from his wife. While his marriage was ending, Charles considered whether he wanted to continue to date women: "I became a very marketable male to females. I had a six-figure income, I had a doctorate. I looked at this and I said, 'Is this really what I want?' and the answer was no. It wasn't. I chose to go down the other path." The "other path" was not as dangerous as it was in college when the AIDS crisis was in full swing. Charles explains: "I have a lot of friends now who are gay and who are married to other men. The only reason we are alive is because we were all married [to women] for the end of the '70s and the beginning of the '80s."

The divorce was contentious, but Charles received help from an unexpected source: his oldest daughter: "I think the kids knew that [the marriage] was done with and my older daughter explained that to [my ex-wife]…and she actually listened." After the divorce, Charles came out

to his family and began dating men. Six months later, he met his partner, Steve; they have been together ever since.

While his personal life started to settle down, an educational headhunter approached Charles. This scout had been dispatched to find a superintendent with an early childhood background and construction experience and Charles was a perfect candidate. Also, this new superintendency was located in a very affluent and progressive area of the country that, for the purpose of anonymity, I will call "Waterfield." Over his 8-year career there, Charles completed over 90 million dollars worth of renovations and construction. He notes with a smile, "It was a great run." Charles also passed domestic partner benefits for the "gay and lesbian couples in the school district [who] were being discriminated against by not having domestic partner benefits."

Despite the professional success Charles had in Waterfield, leading this district was also satisfying because he could be out as a gay man. Charles reflects, "There, everybody knew that I was gay…Nobody batted an eyelash. I was out from the very beginning…It was that kind of a community." This progressive area had a large queer population that made Charles feel comfortable revealing his own sexuality. By attending dinner parties with his partner thrown by board members and being able to talk openly about his life at work, Charles was able to avoid the frustration and isolation that often plagues closeted queer educators (Silin, 1999). Instead, he found a network of supportive people that created a welcoming professional environment. Indeed, Charles refers to his time in Waterfield as his "happiest years," for one simple reason: when Charles and Steve were invited to social functions within the district, "the invitations were addressed to Charles and Steve... that goes a long way."

After 8 years, the make up of the school board changed and it "became a bit crazy." Charles felt that it was time to move on. Searching for a new superintendency, though, is a bit

like being typecast into a certain role in movies: "…once you become superintendent of a

wealthy, suburban school district where the achievement is high, other boards of education look

for that kind of background." In fact, while Charles was interviewing for the superintendency he

now holds, he was also interviewing for the same position in one of the wealthiest communities

in the country. Yet, the expense and distance from his daughters and grandchildren were too

much and he chose to move closer to his family.

However, Charles had a number of doubts about taking the superintendency in his current

district, Treetown. First, he noticed that the district's human resource policies did not provide

equal opportunity or protection for gender or sexual orientation. "I almost didn't take the job here

because of that," Charles recounts. Also, the previous superintendent had a very different

leadership style: "Anytime that [the previous superintendent] walked into your office it meant

you were getting your head chopped off. She would summon people to the office and they would

have diarrhea before they got up there. It was horrific." Charles worried that the board was

looking for a similar aggressive personality, which he did not possess. Like the research

conducted on other queer educational leaders who stated that their sexuality helped them lead

with sensitivity and empathy (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003), Charles also reflected that

his sexuality affects his leadership style:

> I think as a gay male I have a different leadership style…I'm more collaborative…we're
> a team; we do everything together. If you have a problem or if you've made a mistake,
> we'll bring the team together…I don't sit here and give ultimatums. I don't sit here and
> dictate…I think that that might be more unique to a gay male administer than to
> somebody who is much more aggressive.

Although Charles stated that his queer identity makes him a more inclusive and

collaborative leader, in his current district, he has not disclosed his sexuality due to Treetown's

conservative location in a conservative state. Instead, he has decided to "fly under the radar",

stating, "I think I pass as straight anyway." For Charles, flying under the radar involves keeping

his personal and professional life separate. Similar to queer educators and leaders in other studies

(Denton, 2009; Donahue, 2008; Gallagher, 2008; Gust, 2007; Khayatt, 1982), Charles used

silence as a passing strategy, choosing never to discuss his personal life at work and avoiding

social interactions with his colleagues. For example, unlike in Waterfield, Charles does not

attend events in Treetown with his partner. Also, when his colleagues make the assumption that

he his straight, Charles states, "I don't correct them." Charles' move to conceal or at least not

reveal his identity suggests that the closet is flexible, allowing Charles to move back into it after

being out in Waterfield.

Choosing to remain closeted in his work as superintendent of Treetown also provides

Charles with an advantage that he fully realizes and embraces, allowing him to covertly and

safely challenge the heterosexist discourse. For example, one of the first tasks Charles undertook

after becoming superintendent was to change the equal opportunity statement to include gender

and sexual orientation. Although it took him an entire year to change it, which included waiting

until a certain Boy Scout supporter was off of the board, he was successful. Charles reflects,

though, that the new policy might not have passed if his district was aware of his sexuality: "I

thought that maybe it would've been more difficult if people thought I was going to benefit from

it and that was the only reason why I was doing it." Perhaps this is because, "…once gays are in

view, the closet door is slightly ajar, we cannot seem to close it properly, despite the best efforts

of all" (Silin, 2005, p. 165). If Charles had come out, he was afraid that once his queer identity

was in view, the public would only know him for this and attribute any social justice decision to

his sexuality. Therefore, Charles believed that his sexuality would become a barrier to, and a

distraction from, doing what was right for his queer staff members. In this sense, remaining in

the closet served as a place of protection to rebel against the heterosexism inherent in the equal opportunity policy. Without the closet to conceal his sexuality, Charles may not have even attempted to fight for this change.

In the end, Charles did illuminate what it means to be a queer leader in a variety of different contexts. Although the same man held four superintendencies in three different states, Charles' approach to his own sexuality varied. In a progressive district, he felt so comfortable coming out that he had board members over for dinner, while in a conservative area Charles prefers to remain silent about his sexuality. This careful and often strategic managing of his identity underscores the balancing act that queer leaders experience with regard to their identities. Before coming out, many queer leaders must take careful stock of the benefits and drawbacks of revealing something that could potentially damage their careers. Yet, although Charles has had to walk this tightrope for over 30 years, he does so in order to lead for social justice, which he believes is an educational leader's moral imperative. Towards the end of our time together, he reflects, "I think that we all need to do it our own way, and if flying under the radar is the way to do it or if being an activist is the way to do it, I think it's important to make it a better world for all those kids." Even something like coming out could help a queer student: "It's important for kids who are having issues with their sexuality in high school to see those role models…when I was coming out in the 70's, who knew that there were business executives, people in all walks of life who had same sex partners?" While Charles may not be able to be that visible role model in his current position, he still takes a firm stand against any injustice and inequality he finds by both hiding and disclosing his sexuality, according to the context in which he is leading.

Conclusion

These stories both provide a glimpse into the lives of three participants and illuminate some common themes among all of the participants. Dan's story highlighted the fear of discrimination that can cause a leader to remain isolated during his educational career. Nicole demonstrated an internalization of heterosexist discourses that prompted her to perform different public and private gendered roles (Butler, 1980; Butler, 1990). Charles' experiences suggest that the closet is a flexible structure, depending on context, so that one can be out as a queer leader in a district that is progressive and closeted when leading in a conservative area.

Although the stories in this chapter are unique, they all share one fundamental connection: their protagonists are leading from the closet. Everyday, these three queer leaders have had to, consciously and unconsciously, manage their sexualities by using a variety of strategies to mediate their queer identity. In the next chapter, the major themes of these three stories will be more fully explored and a model of queer leadership, of leading from the closet, will be articulated.

CHAPTER FIVE: A MODEL OF QUEER LEADERSHIP

In the previous chapter, I used narrative analysis to deeply explore the lives of three superintendents. Their stories illustrated how one's sexuality, like many other aspects of identity, shapes the work of leadership. In this chapter, I introduce a theory of queer leadership based on the experiences of the educational leaders interviewed for this study. The core of this theory centers on the idea that, although the closet is a central theme of all queer leaders' experience, there is not one way to lead as a queer leader. Instead, much like a continuum of gender performances (Butler, 1990), each leader has an individual path. Yet, similar themes underlie the experiences of queer leadership as these participants choose to remain in or step out of the closet.

Silin (1995) suggests that the closet is a central metaphor for understanding our schools; I, therefore, appropriate this metaphor as the basis of this theory. As can be seen in Figure 1, queer leaders lead from the closet; they are mostly unable or unwilling to reveal their sexuality in their places of work. Situating all of the participants in the closet also implies that the closet constantly mediates queer leaders' identities and actions. The closet is represented by a dashed circle to show its permeability, suggesting that while the closet confines some leaders, it is possible to move in and out of it depending on various contexts like generation, location and personal choices. For example, the participants from older generations tended to spend more or all of their professional life closeted as compared to leaders from younger generations. Similarly, queer leaders working in more conservative locations were inclined to remain more closeted than their more liberally located counterparts. Other participants, regardless of context or location, made the decision to remain in or move in and out of the closet for a variety of personal reasons.

While in the closet, queer leaders adopt various strategies to protect themselves from the homophobia and heterosexism that dominate schools. In many districts, this protection is

essential, since queer leaders have been historically seen as sexually deviant and predatory (Johnson, 1997; Silin, 1997) and are still the targets of discrimination. Therefore, while most theorists have written about the closet as a repressive structure (Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995), I suggest that the closet is more complicated, imposing both a repressive element in queer leaders professional lives as well as offering the necessary protection in order for queer leaders to affect positive change. Simply, without the closet, queer leaders would be stymied in their leadership work.

Leading from the closet involves techniques of passing, like strategic silences or words and actions that redirect questions about sexuality, to defensive tactics, like purposeful distancing, to finding emotional support amongst one's colleagues. Each leader adopts one or more of these strategies in the closet, sometimes several at once, depending on context and professional interactions, in order to keep their sexuality hidden or mitigate the perceived effects of coming out. These "closet strategies" are critical: they provide queer leaders with the necessary tools of protection and advocacy.

The presence of the closet is due to the pervasive and homophobic heterosexual matrix that defines the fabric of schools (Butler, 1990). The matrix is depicted as surrounding the closet to suggest that the closet is both a product of, and subject to, the matrix, symbolizing that all leadership practices operate within its sphere of influence. Circular arrows represent the matrix, indicating a constantly reproduced cycle of heterosexual discourses. Within this cycle exist inter-related experiences and reactions: fear and discrimination, isolation, and inaction and regret. Queer leaders may face one or all of these experiences and reactions during their time in leadership. Therefore, depending on context, professional interactions and other factors, there are

multiple ways to be a queer leader within this model and many ways to experience and react to the effects of the heterosexual matrix.

Because the matrix privileges and expects heterosexuality, the two experiences common to all queer leaders are discrimination and fear. For some leaders, they referred to the fear of being discriminated against, while others shared overt stories of discrimination and the fear that resulted from it. This discrimination manifests in threats to their careers and is reinforced by restrictive policies in their workplaces. Two reactions exist to discrimination and fear, which is suggested by the two arrows pointing to isolation and inaction and regret. First, some queer leaders revert to hiding their sexuality through passing or building defenses, retreating into the protection of the closet. Yet, covering up one's queer identity often results in feeling isolated, adversely affecting queer leaders' emotions and work relationships. Second, experiencing fear and discrimination caused some participants to become paralyzed into inaction, after which they expressed regret over not being able to affect positive changes. Throughout these experiences and reactions, many leaders remained in the closet, reifying the cycle of the heterosexual matrix. Yet, even within the confines of the closet, there exists the possibility of undermining heterosexual discourses.

While some leaders became caught in the cycle of reproducing the matrix, others disrupted the pattern to affect change and lead for social justice. This process is represented to the right and on the outside of the model by four smaller circles called "pockets of possibilities." These pockets symbolize the sites of resistance against the heterosexual matrix and the possibility of subverting homophobia by being purposely positioned outside the cycle. Thus, when the queer leaders successfully undermined the repressive mantle of the matrix, they inevitably did so in specific ways: serving as a queer resource, advocating for diverse students

and passing inclusive programs and policies. Although the final pocket, representing a queer role model, was never realized or enacted by the participants, it remains a site of potential social justice action. Therefore, this possibility is shaded to suggest that while queer leaders spoke about the benefits of serving as a role model, no participants served as a one.

Circles of various sizes depict the pockets of possibilities: the largest two at the top represent the most common sites of resistance; the smallest two at the bottom represent the least common. Although the sites of resistance are depicted as a concrete solid line, each leader worked towards them in different ways. These paths to the pockets are represented by the solid and dashed lines coming from the closet. The solid lines suggest intentional and conscious action towards a pocket, while the dashed lines represent actions that are unconscious or unintentional. Finally, while these social justice pockets do exist, they are represented as much smaller than the heterosexual matrix and the closet. This difference in size suggests that the effects of the matrix and the confines of the closet still outweigh the social justice ends that are attempting to be realized.

In what follows, I focus on each piece of the model, using participants' words to illustrate all of the elements and their components. Included in the discussion are the relationships between each part and how each participant moved or did not move through the model. I begin with a discussion of the heterosexual matrix and the closet to provide a broader context to understanding the phenomenon of leading as a queer educator.

Figure 1

A Model of Queer Leadership
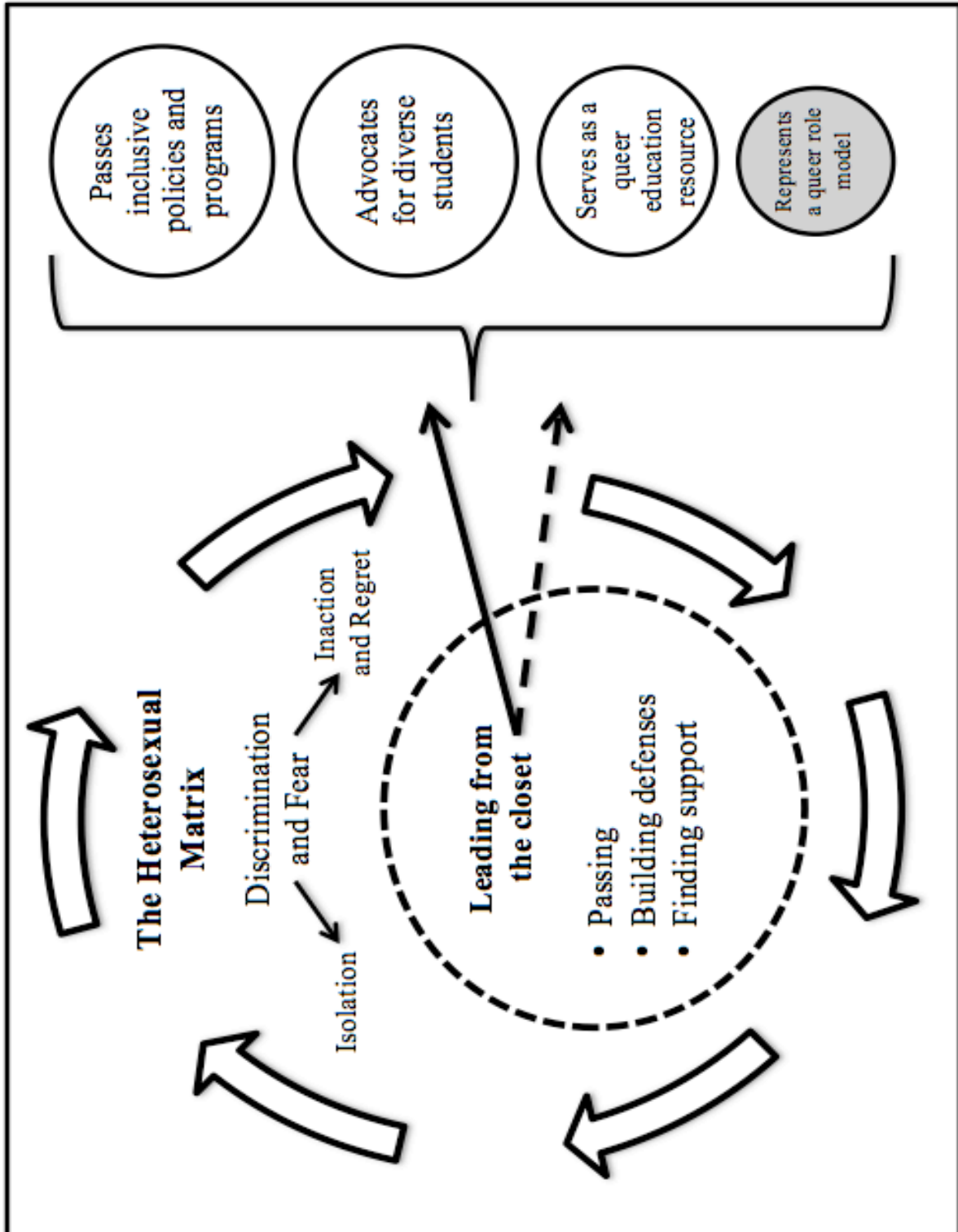
The Heterosexual Matrix and the Closet

"Look across the country. It's still not accepted. It really is not…around here we're in the middle of a battle zone." – Lynn

A battle zone is a fitting metaphor for queer leaders' experiences in schools. Indeed, as evidenced from the quote above, many of the participants in my study used language like this to describe their recollections, indicating the existence of what Butler (1990) calls the heterosexual matrix. Reproduced in and through multiple heterosexual discourses, the matrix is deeply engrained in every social institution, especially schools (Butler, 1990; Silin, 1995). The matrix ensures that heterosexuality is compulsory and enforced by rewarding talk and actions associated with heterosexuality and punishing those considered homosexual, thus maintaining power over queers (Blaise, 2005).

For the majority of the participants in this study, the discrimination perpetuated by the matrix served to keep them "in the closet," or not to reveal their sexuality at work. Like the heterosexual matrix, "The closet is a function not of homosexuality but of compulsory heterosexuality" (Silin, 1995, p. 167). Sadly, though, remaining closeted serves to reproduce and thus reify the heterosexual matrix since, by not coming out, these leaders often maintain their silence on queer issues (Silin, 1995). For queers, the closet is inescapable and exists as a fundamental feature of queer life; it is a "shaping presence" but also "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 68 and 71). The closet is both where queers are forced to hide their sexuality while also finding a measure of protection against discrimination.

However, by living their professional lives in the closet, many queer leaders are living in a constant state of fear. These leaders fear the discriminatory repercussions that inevitably come from working in a heterosexist social institution. The examples of discrimination that the

participants described, then, are complex, stemming from the fear of being labeled a sexual

deviant. All were shared from the confines of the closet.

<div align="center">**Discrimination and Fear: The Sexual Deviant**</div>

"I can't describe the feeling I used to get when I thought that people would know, just sort of like a sword right to my gut." – Dan

"I think the reason anybody would stay closeted is fear. You know what I'm saying? I think people have fear and it creates anxiety, and I think that that's the only reason." – Lynn

The model of queer leadership suggests that discrimination and fear, the two common

experiences among all participants in this study, are direct products of the heterosexual matrix.

As the heterosexual matrix operates in and through every social institution and everyday

common practices, reinforcing the dominant heterosexual discourse that males and females are

supposed to "sexually desire a member of the opposite sex" (Blaise, 2005, p 86), it is no surprise

that the literature on discrimination against the queer community in schools paints a grim picture.

For students, this often takes the form of bullying. In 2011, GLSEN reported that 81.9% of

LGBT students were verbally harassed, 38.3% were physically harassed and 18.3% were

physically assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation. Queer teachers have faced

discrimination from their students in the form of the shouting of slurs down hallways or writing

homophobic graffiti in bathrooms (DeJean, 2008; Khayatt, 1982). Despite being in positions of

educational authority, queer leaders also experience homophobic comments and judgments from

their colleagues (Denton, 2009; Tooms, 2007) by not enacting the heterosexual discourse.

According to previous research on queer teachers and leaders, discrimination in schools

occurs because the matrix positions queers as sexually aberrant or deviant in comparison to the

norm of heterosexual behavior (Butler, 1990; DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Graydon, 2011;

Johnson, 1997; Khayatt, 1982; Silin, 1997). The discourse of queers in the classroom situates

queer educators and leaders as "sex obsessed child molesters" who are "driven to choose a

younger, passive and…innocent victim as the object of his attentions" (Silin, 1997, pp. 219-220).

Since the public perceives queers as pedophiles; they believe that queer educators have, as Dan

suggests, a "prurient interest" in their children, attempting to seduce and recruit them into the

queer lifestyle. Thus, queer leaders are forever positioned as sexual deviants or pedophiles in the

eyes of the public and their colleagues.

If the public perceives queers as predatory, they will inevitably take action, resulting in

negative repercussions to careers as Jennifer suggests: "I think that people think [we have] a gay

agenda and that you're trying to recruit and then that's sex, and then that gets all screwed up with

people." Tracy expands on this line of thinking, linking the public's fear of queer recruitment to

one reason that she remains closeted:

> I'm not out. I've kept my sexuality hidden because if you think, now, over the past 34
> years…people don't and didn't trust people who were lesbians or gay or transgender or
> bisexual because they just equated that with, you shouldn't be around children…I was
> always worried that people would think that because I'm lesbian that I was going to do
> something bad to their kid…

Sophie, however, shared another side of sexuality in the workplace. Instead of parents fearing for

their children, she was concerned that those she worked with would be worried about her:

> It's another one of those things you have to think of as an administrator. You have to be
> careful because you don't want somebody to come back and say, "Oh, she was making
> provocative comments about my dress," and of course if they suspect that you're a
> lesbian or they know that you're a lesbian and if somebody doesn't like you they can try
> to use that against you. You've got to be careful.

Sophie's concern was again rooted in her fear of being seen as predatory, since the perception is

that queers are sex-obsessed and perverted (Silin, 1997). Aside from fear, the belief in queers'

sexual aberration can also have professional consequences.

Discriminatory Career Repercussions

With queers positioned as sexually predatory or perverted, inevitable discrimination will ensue. Indeed, all of the participants in this study spoke about homophobic discrimination, resulting in a variety of personal and career losses (Denton, 2009; Tooms, 2007). Specifically, almost all of the participants referred to their concern regarding the loss of job advancement due to their sexuality. Cally stated, "…I perceived that it could put road blocks in the way for me that I didn't need in my way…I've never felt that it couldn't be factored into advancement..." Tracy noted a similar concern; she chose purposely to remain closeted because of a specific doubt:

> Let's talk about the school board: I think that most would understand that I have a tremendous track record, tremendous reputation…but there would be some that would be influenced by [my sexuality]…there's enough doubt in my mind that one of the board members won't raise their hand to vote my next contract if they knew I was a lesbian.

These doubts were enough to keep Cally and Tracy in the closet. Sophie, too, stated:

> I just really felt like [coming out] would have affected me negatively in my career and I didn't want that to happen... I had gone too far and I didn't want something like that to prevent me from achieving what I wanted to achieve…I thought since it might, I was going to keep my mouth shut.

Yet, maintaining silence does not always deflect discriminatory job repercussions. Sophie recounted a story about her assistant superintendent, a closeted queer man, who took direct aim at her career:

> He was very upset that I was elevated to that position because he was already higher than me in the district…He spent the entire four and a half years that I was there backstabbing me and doing underhanded things to try to sabotage my superintendency. He did it along with one of the board members…For some reason this particular person didn't like me, but she was on the board. They conspired and they sabotaged a lot of things that I tried to do. I still managed to be fairly successful despite their attempts.

I asked Sophie why the board member was engaging in these attacks. She reflects, "I think that since [the board member] knew that I was gay, she just didn't like me and he fueled the fire."

Dan also shared an experience that had career implications: "About a year and a half before I retired, [a retired board member] called one of the current board members, and he said something about…the Gay Mafia is taking over the school district." Although Dan had hired a number of queer individuals for key positions, he had done so inadvertently. Even so, the negative comments from this board member had a major impact on Dan:

> That was probably one of the most hurtful things that happened to me…it made me really reflect on if this would get out into the community, if this person would just continue to say these awful things…I [started to] wonder if that would impact on my ability to lead, because again it's, "We're not going to listen to you because you're gay." It was really the first time in my life I really had to focus on my sexuality for an extended period of time, to see if it would affect my career.

Like Dan and Sophie, Bea also shared a stories of discrimination perpetuated by colleagues: One afternoon her superintendent called her into his office to show her "…an anonymous letter on me, saying that I only hired gay men and women, and all this other kind of stuff." Eventually, Bea discovered who sent it: a jealous, homophobic colleague. She also often considered why she was given certain administrative assignments, wondering if it had anything to do with her sexuality: "Every place that I was always sent, and I often wondered, was it because I was the gay kid? Why wasn't I given the nice place? Was it because I was considered the dyke? Why was I given the toughest middle school in the district to be the principal of?"

Bea also shared the most overt discriminatory attack in my study. After becoming principal, an assistant principal, who did not get the job, was upset. This frustrated individual took it upon herself to seek revenge. Bea describes, "She sent around a picture of two naked women together and cut off the heads, and put a picture of me with a school board member… It was 'photo-shopped', but you clearly saw our faces were put in on these hot bodies." Luckily, the targeted board member thought it was funny, although her superintendent did not: "I think, at that point, frankly, with all my shenanigans with my personal life and whatever, I became too

controversial for [him]. As much as he was wonderful and everything else, I just think he didn't want any more." Bea soon left that position.

Similar to leaders in other studies (Denton, 2009, Tooms, 2007), all of the leaders in this study, whether they faced open discrimination or not, referred to deep-seeded fears associated with discrimination, often in relationship to their careers. Indeed, Peter suggested that "the whole atmosphere of education" led to the "fear of being fired". This connection suggests that discrimination and fear cannot be separated: there always exists the fear that lingers after discrimination occurs or the possibility of discrimination in the future.

Other leaders referred to fears regarding possible community backlash, which was often influenced by religion. Even in a progressive state, Nicole noted that the community's reaction if they learned about the presence of a queer leader would be influenced by religion. She shared that, while serving as a district director, her superintendent was concerned about one of the board members. This particular individual happened to be an active member of an ultra-conservative religious group. Therefore, although her superintendent was accepting of Nicole's sexuality, "There was just a nervousness about him at times…I'm sure he was always worried [this board member] would say something." Dan also shared his fear of backlash from the community in which he worked: "In the African American community, there are definite concerns about gay folks…that may have impacted my ability to be an effective leader in the African-American community had they known that I was gay."

Community aside, Charles had a different example in mind when he career repercussion: self-interest. After he passed a nondiscrimination policy, which protected the employment rights of queer individuals, Charles imagined a community response, "I think that if everybody here knew that I was gay we might have had letters, we would have had editorials…I think people

would say they knew I was doing it to benefit myself." In fact, Charles was so worried about this

perception that it took him years to request health insurance coverage for his partner. He

explains,

> The day it was passed we could have used the domestic partner benefits. I remember telling [my partner], "Sorry, guy, but we got to wait at least three years before applying." because…I'm going to have all kinds of letters that said the only reason why I passed this was because I needed medical benefits for my spouse.

> In general, all of the participants believed that by coming out they would be making

waves in their respective communities, resulting in a career backlash. While not all of the

discrimination by colleagues and supervisors resulted in dramatic consequences to their careers,

the overt homophobia perpetuated by the heterosexual matrix had an impact on the participants.

Yet, this was not the only form of discrimination that queer leaders experienced.

Discriminatory Policies

Homophobic district policies are vivid examples of the institutionalization of the

heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) and, essentially, are physical manifestations of the matrix at

work. A handful of the leaders felt they were directly discriminated against because of policies,

while almost every participant mentioned either a lack of inclusive policies or a desire to change

biased policies. In some states, though, having inclusive policies is a more difficult goal.

Jennifer, who lives and works in a conservative state, said this about their administrative

negotiation meetings:

> They are now asking for Domestic Partner benefits…It's really interesting to sit there and listen to the board members and what their comments are…They will rarely say, "No, we don't want that, because we are opposed to gay relationships." A couple of people have said that, that they have a philosophical problem with it and that they're not going to support that.

Yet, even when those in power do not reveal their homophobia, they still have excuses. Jennifer

explained,

More likely what people say is, "Well, if we say Domestic Partner, then anybody can live with anybody…we're trying to cut benefits, and we're not going to add benefits in." For the most part with most of them, I'm pretty sure it's couched language to say, "No way, no how. I'm not giving benefits to gay people."

Jennifer herself became a victim of one of these restrictive and non-inclusive human resource

policies. Because she is not out, when Jennifer had to take a time off of work to attend the

funeral of her partner's mother,

…people were very confused about why I had a week's bereavement leave and took it to [human resources]. And the director of HR had to call me in and ask me about this…I said, okay, this is who died, this is who she is, this is what it says in the contract. I took a week's bereavement. Do you have a problem with that? Well, no he didn't, but he just had to ask, because other people were asking, and that's the nosy, chatty people at work.

Jennifer never knew exactly what her colleagues were saying behind her back. She assumed,

however, that their curiosity was especially piqued because of their interest in her sexuality.

The most troubling story about the lack of inclusive policies came from Samuel, though.

Two years ago, he requested that his school board approve health benefits for his partner of 25

years. Based on the administrative agreement, which has language to the effect on "... or any

person with which the employee has made their home," Samuel believed that he was within his

rights to make the request. He shared what happened next:

I got a letter from the district's attorney saying, "No, that isn't covered. Domestic partners aren't covered, and in these tough financial times it would not be in our best interests to take that on." (Laughing) "We're looking for ways to reduce costs, not extend them."

I asked Samuel how this made him feel:

25 years ago…I would have never even thought to go to the school district and say, "I want my partner covered." Now, 25 years in and us getting older it does rub me the wrong way. It rubs me the wrong way that after this many years I can see so many other employees come and go. I can hire a person tomorrow, and they're instantly covered with everybody. They may have only been married a month and their spouse is covered. They could go out tomorrow and meet somebody on the street and marry them and if that person had any children, their children would also be covered. For me, after all these

years together with [my partner], that doesn't qualify…It's bothersome to me that my employer is willing to cover everybody else, but they're not willing to cover him."

Like Charles, Samuel actually considered leaving his position because of this, especially since he is consistently told how valuable he is to the district: "Clearly they see the value in me as an employee, but when it comes to my feelings or my personal concerns that was not a consideration for them." As a result, Samuel had adopted somewhat of a negative perspective on his situation:

> …at some point they're not going to have a choice. I hope to be here to go back and tell them, "Isn't it a shame that you didn't do this, because it was the right thing when I came to you…you're going to have to do it now because the law is telling you to do it," when all along I think they all know they should have done it.

The Heterosexual Expectations of Children

In the heterosexual matrix, the rearing of children is highly privileged, since this is an expectation of "normal" adults (Butler, 1990). Indeed, it could be argued that having children is the single most important and defining characteristic of many heterosexual individuals and couples since the presence of children often suggests a "normal" sexual relationship. Adults without children are often seen as, at best, odd. It is important to note that this expectation also applies to straight couples without children and women of a certain age. Yet, bearing or adopting children is more challenging for queers due to restrictive laws in a number of states. Queers are, thus, less likely to have children, positioning them again on the margins of heterosexual expectations and the matrix itself by disrupting the discourse of what it means to be a normal adult.

A number of participants in my study stated that parents in their district have made comments to this effect. For example, Cally shared, "I think one of the most uncomfortable things that comes up for me is when people say things like, 'We all have children here,' or those

kinds of comments. You say to yourself, 'Well, I'm not one of you.' I would say that comes up

fairly often." She also shared a specific story about a parent: "She was very angry and she said

something like, 'Well, if you had children of your own…' I said 'That's a low blow.' She was

very nasty and said, 'If you did' or something like that. It was that kind of an, 'I got you' thing.

> Both Connor and Jennifer described similar experiences. When Connor was a principal,

> I had parents come in and just say things, kibitzing about their kids, and say, "Well, you
> know what it's like. You have kids, right?" "No, I don't," or I don't tell them that I'm
> single, or I don't tell them I'm gay…I don't know how many of them were really
> searching to see if I was gay…They just assume someone my age that's a guy probably is
> married and has kids.

He also recounted a more troubling story. One year, Connor happened to be working with an

assistant principal, who was a single woman without children: "I remember it got back to us that

a parent, who we worked very closely with, for many years, had somehow made a comment,

'Well, they don't get it because they don't have kids, so certainly they wouldn't understand.'"

Again, because the heterosexual matrix is "…that grid of cultural intelligibility through which

bodies, genders and desires are naturalized" (Butler, 1990, p. 151), it seems abnormal for adults

without children to understand children. It is this heterosexual discourse about children,

reproduced by everyone in the school system that reinforces the matrix. Jennifer also spoke

about how those inquiries into her lack of children put her in awkward situations:

> "Do you have kids? Oh no, well then you don't understand." That's constant…it's
> invariably a question that comes up in all of those parent situations…I don't even know
> really how to explain it because what would I say if I was straight?...What I've started
> saying now, is I'm not really a mother type.

The absence of children also leaves room for different expectations. A number of the leaders

noted that the demands on their time and attention were considerably higher than their straight

counterparts. Samuel describes this phenomenon:

> All of my career I've noticed a different set of expectations for people who do not have children as compared to people who do. That employers tend to have higher expectations for leaders in particular who don't have children because people who have children, it's just an expectation that you can't get to work in the morning until your kids are on the bus or if it's 4:00, which might be quitting time, the people who have children it's just expected that they have to go. Their child has a sporting event or they have to do something. Where when they know you don't have children, which in many cases may be people who are gay, there's this expectation that you should be available anytime. Why would you have to leave early? You don't have children. You don't have sporting events. There's that different level of expectation.

Laura, however, sees this almost as a positive: "…maybe [queer leaders] have some more time to give to a school than the average administrator, because I don't have to go home and take care of my children." Yet, these high demands mean nothing without a position or career. Catherine stated that she often wondered if her lack of children and a husband was a hindrance to attaining certain positions. She reflects on what happens in interviews:

> It always struck me how people would come for an interview and they would talk about their wife or their husband or their kids to kind of bring out that they're a family person so they can relate to kids because they're a parent also…I think that some people on interview committees, they try to look for that…

As Cally stated, "It's a threshold question of whether or not you've passed muster." This is because, in general, the dominant discourse of educational leadership indicates that having children is a prerequisite to being a successful educator and leader. Therefore, when parents and colleagues question a leaders' ability, whether queer or female or without children, to make informed decisions about children and make higher demands on their time, it is a subtle form of discrimination.

Although the experiences and reactions discussed in the next sections were shared by many of the participants, only two experiences were common to all: discrimination and fear. As direct products of the heterosexual matrix, these two experiences served to affect the leaders' actions at work and their beliefs of work. The privileging of heterosexual norms in schools

caused these queer leaders to be subject to subtle or overt discrimination, and the fear that results

from it, in some way.

Isolation

"*If I had a break up in a relationship and I was just hurting and hurting and hurting, I closed my door. I think, how awful that was because I didn't have anyone to talk to at work when I maybe needed to just to say something. You get that comfort from another human being to say, "You're going to be okay. Everything's going to be okay."* – Tracy*

After experiencing discrimination and fear, many leaders also experienced isolation. In

many cases, queer leaders choose to keep their sexualities private in order to avoid future

discrimination, thus creating an emotional and sometimes physical distance from their

colleagues. This privacy, though, had a price. More than half of the leaders in my study

described how the lack of social interactions at work had an adverse affect on them, much like

Silin (1999) suggests that, closeted queer educators "…experience frustration, isolation and self-

hatred" (p. 97). As a result, feelings of isolation, both personally and professionally, were a

common theme. Even though the leaders made this separation of their personal and professional

life very intentionally, it served to have an emotional effect on some.

Peter, Dan and Lynn spoke, in general, about this sense of isolation in their leadership

positions. Peter reflected, "I think constantly you feel alone. There is a loneliness at all levels. If

you don't know somebody that is like you, it's like, okay, you're going this path alone and

you're sort of cutting the trees as you go." Dan echoed this sentiment:

> It's sort of a lonely life. It really is…I think sometimes I would inhibit my social
> interaction with board members and I would inhibit my social interaction with
> administrators… the male administrators would always get together every summer and
> they do golfing. That was the end of the year celebration. I didn't golf that much. I wasn't
> really into football. I wasn't really into baseball. It inhibited those discussions that you
> would have, and I always felt like it was just awkward and it was painful for me to do
> that.

Lynn inadvertently used the glass metaphor of Sedgwick's (1990) closet to describe her feelings:

"You live in a glass house, and I wished it could be much more natural for me to just be able to

talk about it more…Sometimes it is a struggle with being the leader of a school district and being

gay." Lynn continued that not being able to talk about her personal life is probably one of her

biggest challenges in leadership: "Not being able to say everything, not being able to share

yourself at 100%. I should say choosing not to share yourself at 100%. There's always going to

be that sense of filter on, rather than that self-expression…"

Sophie also felt this isolation when she told no one at work that her partner's daughter

was gravely ill:

> [My partner's] daughter passed away about two years ago. She was a severe diabetic and
> I don't know what happened, but she had a heart attack and she died. It devastated [my
> partner]. Through the years the kid was in and out of the hospital a lot. She went through
> kidney transplant, really had some bad times. There were times when [my colleagues]
> knew I had a family member who was ill but, they didn't know who the family member
> was. There were times when I really wanted to share that at my most emotional times,
> because I wanted to be able to tell somebody…I wanted to tell them what was really
> happening. There were times when I wish I could just have spoken more freely about it,
> but I didn't.

Yet, because Sophie chose to keep her personal life with her partner private, no one at work

knew about this tragedy. Tracy also shared her struggle with not being able to talk about her

personal life at work:

> It's one of those things that I thought was always unfair because if you're having
> relationship problems, if my secretary is having relationship problems she'll come and
> talk to me. I'm a support system for her. But I never had that support system at work
> because I would never share that with anyone unless it was somebody who was also gay
> or lesbian and I knew that…I always felt cheated in that respect.

It is not only the lack of emotional support in challenging times that can be difficult, though.

Sometimes, the leaders wanted to participate socially or even share good news about their

personal lives. When Tracy first began her relationship with her girlfriend, she noted, "When I

met her, I was so excited about the relationship but…I didn't share with anybody." Catherine

noted that, although she was looking to make connections, she felt uncomfortable doing so, due

to the fact that the majority of social interactions at work had to do with heterosexual norms:

> That was really hard for me to fit in there, because I think some of them knew that I was
> [queer]…that there was something different about me. And just to go to the showers – the
> baby showers and the wedding showers and the wedding parties – they talk about, "Oh,
> my ring." And this and that. I don't know. Socially, it just wasn't an easy fit.

Being forced into these heterosexual norms had the effect of coloring Catherine's interactions at

work. In fact she describes them as "vapid": "Just always feeling like I never really fit in, that

there was always some otherness. I was unique and didn't fit into the comfortable, more run-of-

the-mill type of relationships or structures that people talk about…Marriage. Kids. All that."

Two leaders' sense of isolation was so great, in fact, that a few questioned their decisions

to go into public education. Bea reflects on her lengthy career: "But would I have chosen

education again? I don't know because there are more choices nowadays." Lynn shared the same

line of thinking:

> It can be a struggle internally for me. There are times when I say, "I wish I would have
> chosen another career. I wish I didn't do this. I wish…" which I could, but I won't…It's
> just the way it is. I have resorted to that way of thinking. It's just the way it is for us to
> accept it, and if you don't like it, get out…but internally, when you're not out [in
> education], it seems like forever.

After being subject to discrimination or fearing that they could not talk about their

personal lives in a professional setting, some of the leaders in this study felt isolated from their

colleagues. Although not every leader experienced this aspect in the model of queer leadership,

the isolation experienced by some of the queer leaders affected them on a deeply emotional level.

The ever-present discrimination and fear not only produced isolation, though. These experiences

also served to stymie some leaders in their social justice work.

Inaction and Regret

While experiencing the discrimination and fear produced by the heterosexual matrix

caused many of the queer leaders in this study to feel isolated, other participants become

paralyzed into inaction for fear of being outed. Indeed, a number of my participants saw their

sexuality as a hindrance to affecting positive changes. This perspective caused the leaders to

lapse into inaction with respect to queer issues. Aside from the fear of being outed, many of the

leaders in this study were concerned that their colleagues would see them over-championing

queer causes. Throughout the interviews with my participants, almost all of them mentioned an

aversion to being seen as the "flag waver" for queer rights, as Peter called it. Or, as Catherine

stated, she was concerned that her colleagues might think that she was "shoving [queer issues]

down their throats":

> I was wondering whether the fact that I made sure that my trainings were inclusive if they
> went overboard with being imbalanced or being more pro-gay than more pro-whatever.
> It's like almost assuming that the largely heterosexual population needs to know this,
> needs to understand or that they have an inherent bias.

On the other hand, Cally is so concerned with hiding her sexuality that she is ignorant about

events and programs that relate to queer students: "I don't even know if I have a high school

group with gay agendas…I don't think I do. And if I do, I don't know about it. I'm almost

embarrassed to say that right now. Because I should know about it." Because Cally avoids issues

of sexuality in her role as superintendent, it is easier for her to enact the expected role of

heterosexual or nonsexual leader.

Peter shared a story about not starting a sexually transmitted disease awareness program

that should have been implemented. Instead, he stated,

> What we did do is a whole program for pregnancy, which was abstinence…I think that's
> kind of strange because there were a couple of kids I am sure were gay, but at the time it

wasn't the thing to be talked about. If I look back on it now, we really should have done some of those things.

Lynn, a superintendent from a conservative district, shared a similar story about a program in a neighboring district. This district, which also happens to be her alma mater, refused to start a GSA for their students. Although Lynn knows the board president and has personal ties to the district, she remained uninvolved. She reflected,

There have been times with that district where I wanted to be very outspoken. I decided based on my position here that maybe that wouldn't be a good idea politically. Now, let me tell you internally it was a great idea for me. It's who I am. That's who I want to be as the advocate. I decided against it. First and foremost, I do have to be the superintendent here. It wouldn't be in the best interest of many board members for me to do that.

The fear of taking action for personal or professional reasons, sometimes led to feelings of ruefulness about their leadership. Indeed, almost every leader I interviewed spoke about regrets they had about their leadership, directly connected to remaining inactive and not working for social justice. Silin (1995) describes the tension that these queer educators feel as part of navigating the complicated social structure that is education:

For everyone, schools are places that invite exposure, provoke the desire to hide, and stimulate the development of differentiated social personae. They are complex institutions through which we want to know, want to be known, seek not to be known… (p. 163).

These feelings of regret were especially true when it came to not being able to enact changes or advocate for students. For example, Tracy lamented that being closeted prevented her from being a role model:

When we think about mentoring, the role models, and I think about kids who are LGBT, we have some great role models here, but who would know? I regret that. If there is one thing that I regret, it is that I can't be open enough to be a role model for kids who are out there, because maybe that would have made a difference to a kid.

Peter spoke about "doing it again differently:"

I would probably be more supportive of activities that would openly involve these [queer] kids and make them secure…And I look back and I think there're some kids that probably needed a mentor and they weren't there…I probably could have been more supportive to those kids.

Melanie spoke at length about her regret:

I often thought about that maybe it would be better if kids knew that I had an alternative lifestyle…If I was ever going to make some public statement it would be because of that if I really felt that there was some significant importance in me doing that. That's the only thing I struggle with…the piece about kids needing role models is absolutely the thing I struggle with…I do sometimes though feel that it's a shame that I feel I'm not able to have them understand who I really am. I think that from a role model perspective, that would be important.

Although more than half of the participants spoke about the importance of mentoring and role models for queer students, none of them were able to serve as one. Thus, the cycle of the heterosexual matrix, which perpetuates discrimination and fear, can also produce regret. Leaders who become caught in this pattern are emotionally affected by the fear that discrimination has created in them. In order to avoid discrimination in the future, some separate themselves from their colleagues and experience feelings of isolation. Other participants, fearful of having their sexuality revealed, do nothing to combat the heterosexism and homophobia in their districts. This inaction produces a reflective regret that they wish they had done more, especially for queer students.

Leading from the Closet

While the cycle on the outside of the model, presents a picture of discrimination, queer leaders are not always helpless victims of the heterosexual matrix. This idea complicates previous notions that heterosexist structures like the closet are merely a repressive force in queer life (Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995). Instead, I suggest that the closet is neither a positive or negative construct; it is a necessary one in order to shield queer leaders from homophobia and allow them to do their leadership work. In the next section, I explore three strategies that queer

leaders employ in order to lead from the closet. Some leaders use these strategies simply to keep

their sexuality a secret, while others use them purposefully to affect positive changes. Further,

while the leaders in this study may not have used all of the strategies presented in this section, all

15 of them used at least one in their leadership in some way. Leading from the closet, for these

leaders, involves passing, building defenses and building networks of support.

Passing

"I think most of my life I think I covered it up very successfully. All the way through.
Intentionally." – Peter

Because of the existence of the heterosexual matrix, queer leaders face various forms of

discrimination from a variety of people and policies focused on reproducing heterosexist norms

in schools. In order to avoid or because of this discrimination, "passing" becomes a necessity.

Passing is being able to assume membership within the heterosexual community (Lingel, 2009).

In order to pass, queers employ "mechanisms of concealment", which include "…changing the

gender of friends and lovers in ordinary conversation and a preoccupation with modes of dress

and presentation of self in everyday life" (Silin, 1995, p. 166). Passing is therefore complex, and

represented by a continuum of behaviors all used from within the closet to deflect attention away

from their queer sexuality. The participants in my study used two distinct passing strategies:

passing by silence and passing by words and actions.

Passing by silence. Silence, both active and passive, was one of the most common yet

complex strategies that queer leaders used. Foucault (1990) suggests,

> There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say;
> we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things…There is not one
> but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and
> permeate discourses. (p. 27)

Silence, then, is a discourse itself. By saying nothing, we are in fact communicating. Silin (1995; 2005) adds to this notion. He explains that silence in the queer community becomes internalized at an early age and involves an active and strategic balancing act "…defined by the tension between revealing enough to attract another and concealing enough so as not to be discovered by those who might do me harm…a source of strength as well as constraint" (2005, p. 83). According to Silin, then, silence can be both positive and negative; it can protect careers while repressing the self. In my research, participants shared both the yin and yang of this passing-balancing act.

Some queer leaders participated (or did not participate, really) in passive silence. This more ambivalent approach to passing allowed those with whom they worked to make assumptions about their sexuality; the queer leaders would neither confirm nor deny those assumptions. Peter's statement about passing encapsulates this trend: "I didn't have to hide it, but then on the other hand, I wasn't…out there announcing that I'm gay with a partner." Peter's silence was not a decision, then. Charles referred to his passive silence as flying under the radar, "I think I pass as heterosexual anyway. I don't know how many people here know that I'm gay…I kind of fly under the radar as a gay administrator. Flying under the radar sometimes works." When I asked Charles if he does this consciously, he responded, "I think it just kind of happens and I don't correct people. I think people see what they want to see." Charles, although aware that others potentially perceive him as straight, does nothing to correct this, signifying a passive approach to silence about his sexuality.

Other leaders noted that, because they were out to certain people at work, they did not feel the need to make grand pronouncements. Connor stated, "I am not trying to make my voice lower. I am certainly not wearing a skirt to work, but if they know, they know. I don't care."

Samuel, Nicole and Jennifer shared a similar perspective. Samuel commented, "I've never lied

about it…I've never felt the need to confront people in a confrontational way and say, 'You need

to know that I'm gay, and you need to accept the fact that I'm gay.' People who get to know me

get to know [my partner], and they can either be friends with us or not." Similarly, Nicole said,

> It was never a denial, but it was never a pronunciation…it's not important for me that
> everybody knows that I'm gay. If you know me, you know that I'm gay. If you work in
> this office, you know who [my partner] is and you know who the girls are. I don't feel
> like I have to make grand announcements about it, but it's nothing that I feel like I need
> to hide.

Jennifer also noted,

> I don't really hide it anymore, but I don't really talk a lot about personal stuff. People
> who know me at work know, and if people ask questions I'll say something…I don't
> make it a point of telling people who I don't know or I don't have a relationship with…I
> don't know that I've tried to pass or I just haven't brought attention to it.

Passive silence, then, represents somewhat of an ambivalent approach to coming out. It is the

absence of a decision to speak about sexuality.

In contrast to this passive silence, or not saying anything unless asked, some of the

leaders spoke about deliberate or purposeful attempts to remain silent about their sexuality.

Laura shared, "There are some in this building that have no idea and I'd like to keep it that

way…there are some busybodies…who don't know when to keep their mouths shut." Catherine

shared that her experiences as a teacher affected her decision to remain silent in leadership:

> I don't talk about anything – any of my personal life…I mean I don't have little pictures
> of anything hanging up anywhere at work…I've never gotten over that hurdle of feeling
> comfortable just talking about the dating life with straight and even gay people. That's
> just kind of something I keep close to my chest, really.

Some leaders shared that they purposely remain silent because of where they work. As Bea

explains,

> …when I was in [a conservative district]…I didn't say anything because I didn't feel it
> was a safe environment to say anything…Certainly some people that I was close personal

friends at work, yes then we talked like regular and stuff like that, but other people, no. I just didn't discuss it. And some people that I knew just not to trust, or who I considered to be potentially, professionally dangerous homophobes, and I did not know what their purpose was, I certainly don't discuss anything.

Lynn's perspective on her purposeful silence is also tied to the town in which she works: "I don't walk around [my district] as the administrator talking about these things either because there are many parts of this town that are very discriminatory. I don't think the board would want me to." However, Lynn is accepting of this: "I represent the district right now, and where I've chosen to represent, it's just the way it is." Although Melanie's silence around being married to a gay man was sometimes passive, her overall motives for passing are purposeful. She describes her relationship as "alternative," noting, "I, of course work, with many, many people who don't understand. I'm certainly not announcing that to people." When I asked her why she chooses not to tell anyone about her relationship, Melanie responded with a number of reasons, "Because the whole conversation will become about that now instead of being about what the hell we are supposed do be doing with the school. Really they would be so sucked up into it…that would be my biggest fear." Melanie also notes that being bisexual is even more difficult:

> I think that people either think you're gay, or you're not gay. Explaining that you're bisexual really is out there to people; it's like being transgender or something. It might have been easier if I was just gay. Then I would just be able to say, "I'm a lesbian," and people would understand that.

Melanie, caught into reproducing the norms of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), also believes that coming out now would be counterproductive:

> If I had started out from the get-go being open about it, hopefully at 56, this would just be something not even worth discussing. I never was. It's like, "How do I go back on that now?" It's almost too late to do that, even if I wanted to do that, which I don't. If I did, it would almost seem dishonest; like I had had a whole dishonest trajectory, maybe in some people's minds.

Passing by words and actions. While some participants used silence as a strategy to pass, others engaged in more overt actions and behaviors, including verbal messages that allowed them to be seen as heterosexual. In previous studies on queer leaders, participants cited a variety of behaviors such as wearing "gender appropriate" clothes and hairstyles (Denton, 2009; Silin, 1995; Tooms, 2007). Similarly, some of my participants shared that their appearance helped them pass. For example, Nicole admits that she presents as straight: "I probably think people would think that, yeah. Or could make the assumption…I think there are different points in your day where you look differently, so I don't know if I'm wearing my baseball hat coming out of the gym if I present slightly different than I do here."

The concern of being seen in less than professional attire is significant for Nicole, since athletic apparel might undermine her image as heterosexual or nonsexual leader, which she carefully performs. She mentioned this a number of times in our interviews: "You don't want to run into the parents when you're coming out of the gym and you're in your hat and ponytail because they'll look at you and you'll think … you want that perception to be the professional one." Jennifer shared a different strategy related to appearance, "It's really easy to [pass], because I wear diamonds on my left hand, and so people assume I'm married. If they ask me something and I make reference to Chris [her partner] they assume she's a guy." Laura, among other participants, referred to the appearance of her office as a strategy to pass:

> I have a very sterile office. There are no pictures of anybody except for a yellow lab and a black lab and a niece. I don't have kids. I don't have a picture of my partner. I don't have my family. In that regard, I keep that out of my work. I think I've always been that way as a teacher though. I didn't have things on my desk that identified me and my personal life.

Other leaders partook in romantic behavior with the opposite sex in order to pass. Both Peter and Dan dated women throughout their teaching career and even administrative careers. In fact, Peter

was engaged twice even though, he admits, he was aware of his sexuality all along. Although he

notes, "I think that I assumed that the sexuality attraction to men was going to go away." Dan, on

the other hand, refers to the women who helped him hide his sexuality as beards: "When I was

an administrator, I needed somebody to take to those social events." Sometimes the relationships

were more elaborate, though: "I actually had [a woman] who took me to her pastor and because

she wanted me to get counseling because she thought we should be getting married because we'd

been seeing each other for five years."

Using language to pass, or employing heteronormative phrasing to reproduce

heterosexual discourses, is another strategy that the participants in this study shared. Laura,

among many other participants, comments on her approach to storytelling at the office, sharing

information with some and not others: "Last weekend, I traveled to…a birthday party for my

aunt who is turning 90. To one person, my secretary, I said, 'Well, I'm going to a birthday

party.'" Yet, she told the story differently to some: "To the two other folks in my office who

know, I said, "Well, [my partner] and I are going.'" Cally shared a similar strategy:

> I would refer to my roommate or if I said I took a trip, I'd say, "I took a trip," as opposed
> to saying who[m] I'd go with. Instead of saying, we…I say, "I went to…" and I leave out
> the "we" part of it. I find that's the easiest way to do it. Just say, "I went here, I went
> there." Not say who[m] I go with.

Aside from the vague use of pronouns, certain tensions exist around using language in

purposeful ways. Jennifer describes this:

> If somebody says, 'Are you married?" I would say, "No," because I'm not yet. I don't
> know what I'll say when we get married. That's going to be…oh man…it feels like
> pushing it in somebody's face. Straight people don't define who they are by being
> straight. It's just assumed.

Queer leaders are subject to existing in the heterosexual matrix, where heterosexuality is

compulsory and enforced through a system of rewards and punishments (Blaise, 2005; Butler,

1990). As seen through the stories of my participants, queers who do not conform to the

heterosexist image of a leader are subject to discrimination from colleagues and the community.

In order to survive, then, leaders must remain in the closet and pass as straight. Silence becomes

the major strategy for protection (Silin, 2005). This could be because silence is not outright lying

or because it feels safer to some. Adjustments in appearance, fabricated heterosexual

relationships and the use of vague language were also cited as additional tactics to pass.

Building Defenses

"If you were too good at something, they wanted to find something to put a chink in your armor. [Sexuality] was used as a chink in your armor. You weren't like the majority." – Bea

"We're self-conscious about it. We're conscious about being slighted and discriminated against and stereotyped, and sometimes that sensitivity, in my experience, is something like an armor that I wear into battle every day. And maybe it'll come across like I have a chip on my shoulder about it…"– Catherine

In order to shield themselves against attacks from the community or their colleagues,

some of the queer leaders in this study developed specific defensive tactics in the closet. As

opposed to passing strategies, where the queer leaders took steps to pass as straight, these next

steps were safeguards against being outed and insurance policies in case they were. For example,

the participants shared strategies like overcompensation and distancing as defensive tactics,

guarding against potential homophobia reaction.

In keeping with the literature on queer leaders (Denton, 2009; Fraynd and Capper, 2003;

Tooms; 2007), a number of the participants in my study stated that their work ethic was above

and beyond the norm and used this overcompensation as a defensive strategy. As Tooms (2007)

describes it, queer administrators often feel the need to work harder in order to establish a "shield

against the perceived threat of homophobic reactions" (p. 613). My participants shared that they

overcompensated by working harder at their job, both unconsciously and overtly, in order to

defend against potential or future bias and "to overcome the handicap of being lesbian or gay"

(Fraynd & Capper, 2003, p. 103). Dan described this feeling:

> …maybe it's because of that inferiority piece, you feel that you have…and not everybody feels that…you're a second class citizen because of your gayness that you really have to work that much harder to prove who you are…I think maybe because of our sexuality we work harder than other people because we have to demonstrate over and over again that we can do it. Maybe it's because it is the focus of our lives because we may not have families or we may not have a large group that we have to deal with outside of the workplace. For whatever reason, I think we're all high achievers.

Bea has also felt this pressure to over-perform, noting that she needed to be recognized as

"outstanding" in order

> to help with my own self esteem. To be valued…to really be seen as being very bright and valued in my school district. To be so good at what you do not to let the homophobes get you down or crush your career…To be so good, they look horrible.

Connor agreed, "Make it almost to the point where they admire you so much for who you are or

what you do, that the gay thing isn't that big of a deal," but he also spoke about over-achieving

in a different way: in order to paint queer administrators in a positive light:

> If they hired another gay administrator who was lazy, who was unethical, it could then suddenly make some people think, "Oh, God, that's why we should never have a gay in whatever-that-position-is, because look how they are. I think we all need to be positive role models, that if you are going to be associated with what you do, with being gay, make sure it's a positive connection. Don't ever give them a case to make it a negative.

In addition to overcompensating by working harder, the participants in my study shared

another defensive tactic: distancing. Silin (1995) notes these distancing strategies when

discussing how queers use "mechanisms of concealment" to hide their sexuality: "…social

distancing of faculty and students, geographic distancing from the school setting, and curricular

distancing from potentially controversial issues related to gender and sexual identity" (p. 167). In

the research on queer teachers, this is an especially common strategy with some living up to two

hours away from their schools (Khayatt, 1982). Instead of, and sometimes in addition to,

attempting to pass as straight, the queer leaders who adopted this defensive strategy did so in

order to guard against the possibility of being outed in spaces, where their sexuality would not be

accepted (Butler, 1990). Distancing, then, is the performance of different subjectivities (Butler,

1980), one straight and one queer. By maintaining a distance between the personal and

professional, queer leaders prevent themselves from performing the wrong role in the wrong

space.

Both Dan and Catherine talked, in general, about separating their personal and

professional lives through very purposeful actions. Dan stated, "I think I was so good at silo-

izing my life, and really quite honestly divorcing my personal life from my professional life. I

practiced that for so many years, and I think one of the main reasons that I did that was because I

was in education." Catherine echoed this:

> For me, I've always thought of [sexuality] as something that is apart from me in the
> workplace. In reflection it's probably made things more stressful than they needed to be. I
> think it would be less stressful if I felt like I could just bring the whole package there. So
> it might have been a self-imposed hindrance. It's all been a struggle. Let's put it that way.

A number of the participants pointed to specific distancing strategies. For example, both Cally

and Nicole noted that they do not attend social functions outside of school. Cally shared her

reason, "It's just a very small rural community and everybody knows everybody's business and

in this particular case I don't want them knowing. It's just a personal choice." She also explained

her position on social events:

> I think I've always maintained a professional distance from people probably because of
> that. Some of it is maybe just to try to keep personal and business separate. I don't try to
> mix those two things generally speaking on any level. For example, my stand on
> Christmas parties and things like that. I don't participate in those that are off the property
> or something like that.

Although Peter would attend school functions, he never brought his partner with him: "Pass as

straight? I think that was my total professional career. When I was at the job…[My partner and I]

never went to any school events together. Ever. So I guess we kept it under the radar all the way

through my career. Sophie, however, describes a different kind of distancing:

> I tried to keep my personal life very separate from my professional life. I think a large part of it was because I am gay and I just felt like it was nobody's business. I had a PO box, which was separate from [my partner's] address. All my school mail went to my PO box. Everybody knew we were together, but I think it made me feel better. I had a separate phone line into the house because board members would call…I really worked hard at keeping my personal life my personal life.

In their attempts to defend against being outed, the strategies adopted by these queer leaders

demonstrate the lengths that some would go to in prevent their sexuality from being a factor in

their careers.

Finding Support

> *"I identified one person that seemed to be gay or lesbian and then another one came forward and another one, and I met another one and another one. You know, through word of mouth you kind of build a network…So like we had a little underground cult thing going on. Like a little coffee clique: a support group to talk with each other, to try to dispel some of the worries or the fears, or to help each other out." – Catherine*

Although the heterosexual matrix is firmly engrained in public schools (Butler, 1990;

Silin, 1999), creating a sense of isolation in many leaders, some participants felt comfortable to

come out to colleagues and found support after forming relationships with them. Since closeted

queer educators often "…experience frustration, isolation and self-hatred" (Silin, 1999, p. 97)

these relationships served to bolster many leaders in times of need. Finding support serves as a

final closet strategy that queer leaders employ as they navigate the matrix. A network of

colleagues, both personally and professionally, served as emotional support at work, often

staving off the isolation that other leaders experienced. However, these bonds were forged within

strict parameters and done very intentionally depending on a number of factors.

In general, the leaders who shared this strategy of navigating the matrix made very

deliberate decisions to come out to a few specific colleagues, which is true for both Lynn and

Laura. Laura said, "In the office in which I work, there are two women who…know me because

I chose to totally come out to them." She shares that, without these connections, her work would

be more challenging: "If I didn't have a few people who I could close the office door and say,

'Holy crap! You're never going to believe this,' or 'This is happening in my world,' that would

be tough." Samuel has also made the decision to be out at work, but on a larger scale:

> Everybody here knows [my partner]. When we do have social events, he's always at all
> the social events. So just like I try to get to know all my staff personally, we try to mingle
> outside of work as much as we do in. I don't try to keep the two that separate…Just the
> same as any of my supervisors are telling me about how their kids are doing in school or
> their sporting event. They're always inquiring what's up with [my partner] and how he's
> doing.

Connor is also out at work. He shared, "I am not currently dating anyone, but when I did, I

introduced them to my boyfriend and we would talk about 'What did you do this weekend?' It's

no different than someone would ask about someone else's husband or someone else's wife."

While Samuel and Connor took steps to forge social relationships by being out, Lynn

decided to come out to certain colleagues in order to make her work environment more open and

honest, telling her assistant superintendent as soon as she took the position: "From day one that I

hired her I let her know point blank, 'Listen I'm gay. This is who I live with. This is what she

does…' I was very clear in this position is that's the way it was going to be." Because of this

openness, Lynn stated, they now are as close as family.

The biggest reason for these particular leaders to come out, though, was after they

discovered that their coworkers were also queer. By having a queer colleague, these leaders felt

less alone in a heterosexist world. Jennifer noted that finding a queer colleague was the reason

why she felt comfortable coming out at work: "For the most part, [my colleague] really helped

me with that...I have a very strong, friendly, personal and professional relationship with our

director of curriculum. And it so happens that he is gay as well." Tracy also shared that she has a

close relationship with a queer male colleague at work: "It's been fun to have that

relationship…I have someone that I can talk to that really understands what I'm going through or

what I'm feeling. Just to share some funny things. That's been really nice to have." Similarly,

Bea felt comfortable coming out when she discovered that her superintendent was queer. In fact,

she states that this was where she felt the happiest: "…when I was his assistant, I had no problem

at all being out because he was gay. I mean, that certainly was an advantage." Being out also

benefitted Bea's superintendent: "I think that he felt safe. He could, you know, talk about his life

with [his partner] and he could just totally be just chilled and relaxed with me, knowing that I

was not evaluating his life…"

Connor spoke about being a support person for someone closeted at work: "I would say

the one assistant superintendent who is gay, we are close…when something happens with her

girlfriend over the weekend, I am the only one she can tell at work." Bea shared a different

perspective: "One of the leaders, I didn't know why she kept being so nice to me, and I was

always just nice to her too. Turns out, she was like this vocal lesbian of the neighborhood, and I

had no idea." So while other leaders searched out queer colleagues with whom to form bonds,

they too were being sought.

The participants who successfully formed social networks at work after coming out noted

that there were benefits that they derived from these connections. As Bea and Tracy shared,

trusted colleagues served as an emotional support system, allowing them to feel more

comfortable in their workplaces. Jennifer echoed this, telling a story about a health scare with her

partner: "I was really talking to more people about [her partner]. So, in a weird way, [that]

helped develop more positive social peer interactions at work and helped make me more open at

work."

Laura and Connor spoke about how being out allowed for others to be more supportive and relaxed around them. Even in a conservative area, Laura's assistant superintendent voiced her support: "[My assistant superintendent] is unbelievably supportive about it. She's like in your lifetime. It will be all right. You're going to be able to get married. In your lifetime you will be able to bring [your partner] to a function at school." Aside from general support, though, being out allowed for even greater levels of comfort. Laura shared, "Sometimes [my sexuality is] the joke of the group. We have a new thespian club at the high school and the principal looks at me and says, 'Don't get excited.' It's great. It's nice." Samuel and Peter talked very specifically about how forming relationships helped improve their leadership. Samuel, who is open and out at work, stated, "I like being friends and everyone having a personal relationship. I think it builds that trust. That doesn't mean there aren't times that I have to step up and be their boss, and they know that. But I think it makes it easier to do that."

Although Peter was not as out as Samuel, he opened up his home to his colleagues, purposely forging personal relationships and stating,

> I knew that I worked better with people I knew and trusted rather than people that were telling me well you got to do this and you got to do it this way…Aren't you more honest with somebody that you know than somebody that you look at as "Well, you're the leader so I've got to follow you?"

Some leaders who did not form strong bonds at work had different support networks: their partners. Ten of the fifteen participants were in long-term, committed relationships of over 15 years. Three others were in new relationships of three years or less. Only two participants in my sample identified as single. The importance of a supportive partner came across as a source of strength. Cally speculates, "Maybe it's my own impression, but I get the impression that there's a certain strength…that people get from a wife or husband…there's a certain strength to

that unity that as a single person you don't have that." Nicole, who strongly disagrees with

forming close friendships at work, provides a different insight. She claims that having a long-

term partner helps her stay more focused on her work:

> I'm in a 17-year strong relationship, so that's just a constant…I'm not navigating difficult issues at home; I'm not looking for a partner…So when I'm here, I'm really all into here and I'm not very much preoccupied with that…if my life were trying to find somebody and be out and trying to be social, I would probably be thinking about it a whole heck of a lot more than I do now.

The queer leaders in this study used one or all of the closet strategies of passing, building

defenses and finding support for a variety of reasons. Some leaders employed passing and

defenses to keep their sexuality a secret and defend against the possible repercussions of being

outed. Other leaders fostered connections with supportive colleagues in order to alleviate

isolation and feel more comfortable at work. Although some of these strategies could be seen as

repressive, serving to keep leaders closeted, the leaders in this study employed them for self-

preservation in order to continue to do leadership work. Therefore, the closet is a neither a

positive or negative construct of the heterosexual matrix; rather, it is a complicated yet necessary

reality of queer leadership. Indeed, the leaders who successfully used these strategies were able

to take advantage of another opportunity: working for social justice.

Pockets of Possibilities

"You never know when you're going to have an impact on somebody in any way, shape, or form." – Peter

"If flying under the radar is the way to do it or if being an activist is the way to do it, I think it's important to make it a better world for all those kids." – Charles

Queer leaders must lead from the closet, employing various strategies to defend

themselves against heterosexism and homophobia. Although some leaders chose to enact these

strategies to keep their sexualities a secret, others chose to disrupt the cycle of the matrix and

enact social justice changes. Without the closet, it is possible that the social justice actions described in this section would have never been realized. Thus, while the closet has long been represented as a restrictive metaphor (Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995), it also offers opportunities for improving our schools through the final phase of the model of queer leadership: pockets of possibilities.

Located on the outside of the cycle of the matrix, these pockets represent the potential effects and roles that queer leaders can have and play in schools, including creating inclusive policies and programs, advocating for diverse students and serving as a queer educational resource for their colleagues. The top two pockets are depicted in bigger circles, suggesting that these disruptions were the most common sites of resistance. The leaders in this study also spoke about the positive benefits of the fourth pocket of possibility: representing a queer role model. Yet, no participants shared stories of serving as one.

It is important to restate that some of the leaders who shared stories about the pockets of possibilities did so without ascribing those actions and decisions to their sexuality. Their lack of conscious intention is represented in Figure 1 by dashed arrows; solid arrows represent intentional decisions or actions. Intentions aside, throughout these examples, there exists a common trend: the presence of a heightened sensitivity in their decision-making towards those who are marginalized. In almost every situation where these queer leaders spoke of passing policy or supporting a student, they reflected that their empathy as a minority played a role in their leadership practices. Since educational leadership has been historically (and is currently) dominated by masculinist and heterosexist norms (Blount, 2003; Tallerico & Blount, 2004), the leaders' empathetic drive towards the pockets of possibilities represent social justice outcomes that could begin to subvert the heterosexual matrix in schools.

For the purpose of this study, I define leading for social justice as leaders who "think beyond current behavioral and conceptual boundaries in order to…implement leadership practices" to "change schools in ways and in manners that are consistent with an equitable, inclusive vision" (Brown, 2004, p. 88). Leaders who are committed to social justice recognize and eliminate prejudice and oppression, increase awareness of inequity in schools, facilitate change to address those inequities and create inclusive communities among staff and students (Brown, 2004), similar to the four pockets of possibilities presented here. These themes of social justice and equity pervaded these leaders stories of working for change.

Advocating for Diverse Students

Almost all of the participants in this study spoke about advocating for diverse students. In this pocket of possibility, the conscious connection to sexuality was most prevalent in all of the participants' responses. Similar to other studies conducted on queer leaders, who referred to the finely tuned surveillance of bigotry and intolerance (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003), many of the participants in this study referred to specific ways in which their sexuality made them more empathetic towards any student who did not fit the norm, such as students with disabilities and racial and ethnic minorities. Nicole noted,

> I think being an LGBT leader probably lends you to be more open-minded and tolerant and expecting that in others…I guess the best way to answer that is it's kind of just made me part of who I am. I think it's probably made me more open-minded and receptive to people, tolerant of other people.

The leaders expressed that this empathy helped them feel a connection to diverse students, which led to a desire to support their needs. Although many of the queer leaders in my study chose silence regarding their own sexuality, they chose to give voice to students who are marginalized, thus leading for social justice (Brown, 2004).

For example, Laura referred to a heightened sensitivity regarding diverse student issues

and suggested that her sexuality leads to a different leadership style, stating, "I think I'm just

more sensitive to differences then my heterosexual counterparts are." She expanded on this,

consciously noting that her sexuality "comes into play probably a lot more than I can most likely

articulate":

> I think I am more in tuned to people's differences then the average person. I am a
> passionate advocate for kids, I really am…It doesn't matter what the differences
> are…whether it's homelessness or disability or kids in foster placement, whatever. I am
> a very vocal advocate for those kids. I push for those kids that other people would say
> really? Is it worth that much fight? I go, "Yeah, you know, it is."

> Other leaders who professed a conscious awareness of their advocacy for students also

pointed to a sensitivity or empathy that comes with being queer. Lynn stated that her sexuality

makes her more sensitive to students with special needs and diverse backgrounds:

> It's probably why as a school district administrator I'm a little overly concerned
> sometimes about those that may be harassed or those that may be less fortunate or those
> that may not be like your normal kind of kid or adult. I'm much more compassionate. I
> understand better. I just don't stereotype I accept people's diversity. It makes me a better
> leader when it comes to things that deal with diversity.

Tracy also reflected on her sensitivity to and awareness of students:

> [My sexuality] probably has influenced some decisions I've made in my work from time
> to time. My sensitivity, generally, again, because I see myself as different, I'm sensitive
> to people and kids who are different…I think maybe because I am different may be why I
> champion for that level of diversity. That's my way of using my sexual identity as a
> lesbian; that's how it comes out in an acceptable way perhaps. I'd say, "Hey, I'm fighting
> for that kid who's different because I'm different, but you don't know how I'm different
> because you can't see that I'm different."

Melanie echoed this sentiment, sharing, "With kids who are different, whatever that

is…whether they're gay kids or kids who are different, I definitely feel very obligated and

responsible to make sure that the environments that we create are good, and are conducive for all

kids." She continued that her need to advocate for diverse students comes from personal

experiences: "I've seen people that I know and care about treated terribly because of their

sexuality…and I see it in schools where kids who are quirky or different, they're bullied…I think

that it's all tied together with just not being tolerant of other people being prejudiced."

 So, because of the connection to diverse students' differences, these queer leaders

advocated for them in very specific ways. For example, Tracy recounted a story about deciding

not to bring a student who identified as transgendered back into the district. Since out of district

placements cost the home district money, Tracy reflected that she made this pricey decision

because uprooting a student already experiencing a challenging adolescence could be damaging:

"I don't know if another administrator would have kept that student [in their original school]. I

knew that bringing that kid back here would be so devastating…to pull the supports out…"

Then, thinking about the intersection of her own sexuality on this decision, Tracy noted, "You

can't separate your life experiences, necessarily, when it comes to what's best for the kids."

Melanie spoke passionately about her aversion to bullying because of her sexuality: "It's

the only thing I have absolutely no tolerance for. Even though it happens and we deal with it, I

really have to step back because it's one of those places where my immediate reaction is so

severe that I sometimes have to dial it back." During our second interview, she recounted a story

about a group of students who physically assaulted a student with special needs during lunch;

they also recorded it and put it on YouTube. When Melanie saw the video, she "just went

ballistic…" Later, at a disciplinary hearing, she expelled the bullies for the rest of the year.

Lynn also shared a story about a parent who brought her daughter in for advice when the

student was struggling "with her identity and her sexuality." Lynn recounts the meeting:

> We had a very long conversation about who she is, and what's going on at the high
> school and who was bothering her and why were they bothering her, why they were
> discriminating against her. I actually reached out and helped her get into a [Vocational

Technical School] she wanted to attend. I called the high school administration as well the guidance counselors, just to reach out and be an advocate for this young lady.

Laura told a similar story about advocating for a student who "dropped off somebody's radar and ended up in the juvenile justice system." Because this seventeen-year-old student had earned zero credits towards graduation, she needed to be enrolled in the high school alternate route program. However, the student had no mode of transportation. So, Laura picked her up from the homeless shelter, drove her to take her placement test, and ensured that she had a ride home. Laura recounted the experience: "There are a lot of folks who would have written that kid off and said, 'She's not going to graduate. Why are you even taking the time?' She's an urban kid in a rural school…She's also seventeen and has no high school credits." Yet, Laura did take the time, crediting her compassion for the reason, even though her colleagues questioned it.

Even the leaders who downplayed or repudiated their sexualities shared stories about advocacy for diverse students. For example, Sophie first denied that sexuality had anything to do with her decision-making noting, "I have to be honest with you. I really don't think [my sexuality] played a very big part. I can't really remember any distinguishing story or any anecdote that I could tell you that would fit." Yet, she then recounted a story about allowing a gay, male student to attend the prom with his boyfriend, reflecting, "I guess if I hadn't been gay and had been very close-minded I might have responded to him differently."

Like Sophie, Peter indicated that his sexuality was never used consciously to lead. Yet, he then shared:

> I think in some cases I chose kids as camp counselors to give them a little more self-esteem. I wouldn't say they were drag queens, but they needed some assistance in just becoming good leaders and confident in what they could do and as role models for other kids…so I would choose kids that I really thought, yes, I'm pretty sure this is your lifestyle.

As indicated, almost every participant shared a story about advocating for diverse students both consciously and unconsciously, representing the first pocket of possibility.

Passing Inclusive Programs and Policies

In an effort to institute more systematic change, some queer leaders made decisions to pass or support more inclusive policies and programs. Indeed, more than half of the leaders in this study spoke specifically about a policy that they passed at the board level that would more fully offer rights for queer staff and students. The most common policies related to partner benefits and student or employment nondiscrimination clauses. Yet, all of the leaders who passed these policies remained firmly in the closet about their own sexuality. However, since policy is essentially language, the leaders in my study were attempting to subvert the dominant discourse of heterosexuality by passing queer-friendly policy from a protected place (Foucault, 1990; Silin, 2005).

Charles stated that securing partner benefits was the first thing he did when he started in his district, denoting intentionality behind his actions: "…it took me a year to do it, an entire year, we just passed it now. We changed our equal opportunity statement. I don't think anybody knows that I'm gay, but I pushed and pushed and pushed." When I asked why he felt so strongly about passing the policy, he stated, "…we had a lot of gay and lesbian couples in the school district. They were being discriminated against by not having domestic partner benefits."

Dan, Laura and Catherine also made changes to their nondiscrimination policies. Dan did so after a queer student was bullied on the bus. He shared, "We actually got the board to pass a policy on sexual orientation for our students and a nondiscrimination clause, which we then subsequently passed for staff." When I asked him why he advocated for the policy, he, at first, denied that his sexuality was a conscious influence. However, he then reflected,

> If I were honest with myself, at the time I probably would have been thinking about myself and my own sexuality and where I was coming from…I said sexuality, it really didn't impact my work per se as a superintendent or impact my decision making or what I did, but I guess probably at the back of everybody's mind you bring to the table your personality, what you're made of…Interestingly enough, it could be the fear factor of being gay, that you want to be treated equally…I don't want to be discriminated against and therefore I'm going to make sure that I don't discriminate against anyone or try not to…

Dan's response indicates that his empathy, stemming from his sexuality, affected his decision. However, unlike Charles, Dan's decisions may not have been as conscious.

> Laura also shared a story about working on policy revisions with colleagues:

> …we were working on our equal opportunity statement. Somehow, we were changing it for students to include sexual orientation, that students would not be discriminated based on race, gender, religion. I got them to include sexual orientation…[Then] I said, "If that's the way it is for the kids, it needs to that way for the staff." You know what? Nobody even blinked. They were just like, "Oh, yes. You're probably right." And it passed.

> While some leaders took a policy route towards change, others attempted to start

programs that would support queer students and staff. For example, in her work as an assistant

superintendent, Catherine focused on staff training. She shared that she would "…make sure that

a part of [the training] was devoted to bullying and anti-gay bias that might be happening."

Laura, too, pushed for training, but with students, implementing "positive behavior support"

programs that addressed acceptance for their peers. Melanie also describes her work with

students around the Gay Straight Alliance, a club for all students who are queer or queer

affirming. Melanie states, "[My previous district] actually did not have [a GSA] when I started

there and I insisted that they start one." In her next district, she told a story about students who

wanted to start a GSA. She shared that the students "…came parading in and they wanted to have

a gay-straight alliance. I was like, 'Okay,' and they weren't expecting that…I guess because

prior to my getting there, the previous superintendent had tried to block that from happening."

Ever a staunch advocate for the club, as a principal, Melanie would attend the GSA meetings in

her high school to ensure that they had permission to do the things they wanted to do.

Occasionally, though, the role of every leader involves defending district policies. The

queer leaders in this study were also sometimes called upon to defend the inclusive policies or

programs already in place. Tracy, an assistant superintendent, recounted a situation where a

group of African-American parents became confrontational about the high school's GSA:

> A parent said, "Do you have one of those Gay Straight Alliance groups, here?" I said,
> "Yes, we do." He turned to the superintendent and said, "You know, there've been some
> superintendents who have been fired for supporting and promoting Gay Straight
> Alliances."…I looked at [the parent] and I said, "Excuse me, but we will support that
> group because those are students who are bullied, who have a high rate of suicide and
> depression; and we're here about kids and that's the business we're in."

After Tracy staunchly defended the GSA, though, she then reflected: "After I said those things, I

remember thinking, 'Do they think I'm gay now?'"

While a number of the queer leaders shared how they passed programs and policies, there

were others who did not or could not reach this pocket of possibility. Jennifer, for example, felt

both conflicted and hindered by policy issues. While discussing contract negotiations, she stated

that the only time that she considers her sexuality is during negotiations for her administrative

team. Yet, in the same response, she stated that she should not be thinking about it. While her

negotiations team was asking for domestic partner benefits, she reflected:

> I mean, it's challenging in those negotiation situations, not to say something, but they're
> not asking for my opinion. They don't want my opinion, and it's not about me. So, I'm
> not going to jump in and share something that's unrelated when it's just going to
> make…well it would be inappropriate.

Although Jennifer's intentions are to remain professional, she is unintentionally

reproducing the heterosexism and homophobia that continue to define society and schools

(Butler, 1990; Silin, 1995). Yet, as evidenced from the earlier stories of the leaders, the pockets

of possibilities, or points of resistance against heterosexist discourses, exist and can be enacted.

Points of reproduction also exist, though. These are the places where leaders continue reify

dominant heterosexist discourses. Thus, Jennifer's silence serves as a "…performative speech act

that becomes essential pedagogy" (Silin, 1995, p. 171). This is one example where the pockets of

possibilities are not realized and the heterosexual matrix is reproduced.

Serving as a Queer Educational Resource

Aside from advocating for students or passing inclusive policy, participants also shared

stories about how they served as a queer educational resource for their colleagues, although this

site of resistance was not as common. This resource work took two forms. Sometimes,

colleagues would turn to these leaders for advice on how to handle a matter related to queer

issues in their schools. In other cases, my participants recounted how their sexuality helped them

support or enlighten their colleagues. Although this might be seen as "token-ism," the need for

queer leaders who are willing to discuss their sexuality is critical. The majority of heterosexual

school leaders and educators are not aware of the pervasiveness of heterosexism (Butler, 1990);

thus, they may not understand how their responses to a situation could be biased. Therefore,

having leaders who can speak about their experiences firsthand could go far in challenging the

fact that our schools and society are built on norms that privilege heterosexuality (Blaise, 2005;

Butler, 1990; Silin, 2005).

Laura described how she intentionally shares both professional articles about queer issues

and her own personal stories with some administrators in order to help them understand queer

students: "I met here personally with some of the administrators who know that I'm gay. I have

told them the age at which I knew so that they're aware that in elementary school, that's the

reality for some fourth graders." Connor recounted a story about how his staff all looked to him

for answers in responding to a male first grade student who was wearing nail polish and hair

clips. He reflects: "It was almost like they said, 'Well, you're gay. What should we do?'…

Because it's tied to that issue of sexuality, people get scared…you're not sure what to do, and

you don't want to step on toes. Obviously, you'll ask the gay guy because he knows." The fact

that Connor's colleagues looked to him as the "queer expert", and that he accepted this role,

matters. After the loaded looks from his colleagues, Connor advised the committee how to

proceed with sensitivity and care, something that, Connor notes, may have been lacking without

a queer leader present.

Sophie also recounted a story where she served as a queer resource, but in a slightly

paradoxical way. While she was superintendent, the principal of the high school told her that a

few queer students "started to bully kids when they found out [those students] didn't like gays."

After telling Sophie the story, the principal asked what he should do. Sophie reflected,

> I said, "What is the fact that they're gay have to do with the fact that they're bullying and intimidating kids? What would you do if you had a gang of kids who were bullying and intimidating anybody? It doesn't matter that they're gay." He goes, "Well yeah, I guess you're right." Because he was a little uncomfortable with the whole gay thing; that clouded his ability to actually look to see what the real problem was.

When I asked her why she responded this way, Sophie stated, "I guess if I hadn't been gay and

had been very close-minded I might have responded to him differently, but I think I was trying to

look at the right thing to do. A bully is a bully."

Although Bea initially said, "I tried to not to have [my sexuality] ever be part of the

position, because to me that has nothing to do with the role. Sexuality has nothing to do with

getting the job done or achieving the mission of the school district. It really should not, in my

opinion," she then told me proudly about how she was the "go-to" person when it came to queer

issues in her schools. In one instance, an administrator came to her for advice on why all the

queer students were cutting physical education class. Bea explained that the queer students might feel uneasy changing in front of their peers and proposed a morning class especially for these students. Reflecting on her role as the token lesbian leader, Bea stated, "[The administrators] felt comfortable to talk to me. The parents felt comfortable to talk to me. And I certainly think they would not have felt that way if I was some right-wing straight person. So in that regard, I would say yes. Me being a lesbian was a positive thing."

Other leaders shared stories about serving as a queer resource in a personally supportive way. Laura, for example, had a colleague call her when her son came out: "She really wanted to have an intimate conversation on how to best help her son…I gave her some advice…so I've been able to help her with that experience." She also shared that a conservative religious principal in her district is now hypersensitive to queer issues. She explained, "I think maybe I've helped in that; opened his eyes… I know it doesn't jibe with his religious beliefs, but he stands up and he says 'We can't pick and choose which kids we love. I love them all.'"

Peter also stated that he offered a safe support system, but for colleagues who were struggling with their own sexuality: "I don't know how many men, young men, married men, have come out to me and they are still married. Teachers, principals. That happened frequently." Yet, he shares that this was a good experience: "I think the people coming out. I think that's a really positive. For whatever reason, I think the fact that they felt comfortable talking to me about where they were and asking questions, I think that was positive."

A number of my participants also spoke about being a resource in a more unintentional way. Samuel shared that, although he did not intend to be a resource, he has inadvertently opened his colleagues' minds:

> I have relationships at work with people who, before they got to know [my partner] and I, had very different feelings about gays, homosexuals and whether they should have fair

treatment, equal access to benefits, and things like that. I think it's really easy for people to discriminate against groups of people when they don't have any personal relationships with people within those groups. It really causes them to rethink their standing or their morals when they develop a relationship. Suddenly these things they're reading about in the paper or they're hearing on television about discrimination, which never impacted them before, now they start putting names and faces with it. When they know it's impacting close friends of theirs, they have a different view of it.

Sophie echoed this, noting that simply knowing her helped her colleagues be more understanding:

> Maybe it actually helped [my colleagues] be more accepting of gay people in a very unintentional way because I was who I was. Maybe, because I spent 25 years [in my district], maybe that was what made people feel so comfortable…Because they knew who I was and they felt comfortable with me, they decided that it was something that didn't matter to them either. Because it really didn't matter to me, maybe it wound up not mattering to them over the years because they saw me in all those other ways…It could have been an inadvertently, unintentional positive outcome.

Connor also shared a very specific story about a conservatively religious colleague. One day, a different colleague said to Connor, "It's a real struggle for her to like you…she thinks, 'I really like Connor. I think he is a good person, but my religion tells me that gay people are bad.'" However, because Connor's colleague had the opportunity to develop a good relationship with him, Connor had an unintentional impact on her beliefs. He reflected:

> Some people's religion or their parents have always said, "Gay people are evil" and then they grew up hating gay people, never knowing gay people. But now they meet me, and it's no longer this question mark; it's just a gay person. They have a name; they have a personality; they have experiences. Suddenly, they are no longer willing to say, "All gay people are bad, because I met this guy, and he's not a bad person. He's a nice person. He cares about people."

Leading for social justice means increasing awareness of inequity in schools and then facilitating change to address those inequities (Brown, 2004). Therefore, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the queer leaders in this study address social justice goals by serving as a resource for their colleagues.

Representing a Queer Role Model

Although leading from the closet served to prevent the participants in my study from being role models for queer students, all of the participants identified this pocket as a potentially positive aspect of their leadership. Similar to the studies of queer leaders who urged educators to come out and serve as role models (DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Gust, 2007), Charles noted that having queer education role models would benefit "kids who are having issues with their sexuality in high school." Connor referred to the benefits of role models for students in general:

> Just like I think we need to have good role models for men, for women, for African Americans, for Asians. I think everyone needs to see someone in a respectful, really impressive role to understand that minorities are everywhere, and they need to be respected. But again, it's kind of hard to announce, "Hi, I am your third-grade teacher, and by the way I am gay."

Although Samuel had been reticent to link any leadership decision-making to his sexuality, he did see the benefits of being a role model:

> If there are a group of students who are struggling with their sexuality, and there are teachers that they highly respect, it might help them if they knew that teacher was gay and had gone through a lot of the same things they're going through and had been successful.

Laura recounted a specific example of when being able to be open about her sexuality might have benefitted a student: "I can think of one particular girl, Lindsey, that I had when I was a teacher…I'm pretty sure she gravitated towards me because of [my sexuality]." Yet, Laura was too afraid to share anything persona with her for fear of parental repercussion. In a later story, though, Laura told me about a teacher who pushed her away, Laura speculates, because of her sexuality. She reflected, "I guess I was disappointed in [my teacher], but I don't think I realized that Lindsey may have felt the same way towards me. That just occurred to me."

While Melanie could also not be a queer role model, she did speak to the importance of role models in general, sharing a way in which she had served as a mentor for other students in

the past: "I know that for girls, in any school that I've been in, I've always been a role model; they consider me a role model. As a woman in leadership that sets an example for them, I take [that responsibility] very seriously." Because of this experience, Melanie speculated about the benefits of serving as a queer role model:

> I feel that there are probably young women and boys that are struggling with their sexuality. It would be a big "a-ha" moment for them to know that, "Wow, here's somebody who is the superintendent of the district, and leads this alternative lifestyle."

Although all of the leaders agreed that having queer role models for students in leadership positions would be positive, none of them served as one. Because of the persistent and pervasive fear of being seen as a sexual deviant (DeJean, 2008; Donahue, 2008; Graydon, 2011; Johnson, 1997; Silin, 1997), it is understandable that these leaders would choose to remain silent about their sexuality. While this fourth pocket of possibility was not able to be realized in this study, the participants did share stories of disrupting the heterosexual matrix in other ways by passing inclusive policy, advocating for diverse students and serving as a queer educational resource. The participants' decision-making was also predicated on a heighted sensitivity to others, leading to social justice outcomes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented a model of queer leadership, suggesting that the closet serves as a central metaphor for their experiences. Further, the closet is both a function of and subject to the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), which can produce discrimination, fear, isolation, inaction and regret. In order to lead from the closet, it is necessary to adopt various strategies for hiding one's sexuality. These "closet strategies" include passing, building defenses and finding support. Therefore, I argue that this typically repressive metaphor (Sedgwick, 1990, Silin, 1995)

is more complex, both repressing and protecting identity, creating a place from which queer

leaders can lead for social justice.

       This model of queer leadership should be seen as fluid, suggesting that there are multiple

ways to lead as a queer leader. Throughout their careers, queer leaders will move through this

model in a variety of ways, much like they move in and out of the dominant discourses that

permeate their professional and personal lives. Depending on a variety of factors like context and

comfort with their own sexuality, leaders may be in various stages of the model at various points

in their careers. Indeed, depending on the leader, they may experience a few or many aspects of

the model of queer leadership.

       For example, Tracy experienced many elements of the model, enacting two closet

strategies of building defenses and finding support and also experiencing fear, isolation and

regret. Yet, Tracy still reached towards various pockets of possibilities by advocating for diverse

students and defending inclusive programs. Although Cally did not experience isolation or

regret, she feared her conservative community's reaction if her sexuality were to become public.

Thus, Cally remained in the closet by passing and using the defense of distancing, never

advocating for any social justice outcomes. On the contrary, Connor felt comfortable being

mostly out at work. The strategy of finding support helped him serve as an educational resource,

as his colleagues felt comfortable talking to him, regarding queer issues.

       Again, each of the leaders in this study moved through the model of queer leadership in

various ways. While the model is always fluid, the intentions that lead to the pockets of

possibility may vary. Queer leaders may make social justice decisions consciously while others

do so unconsciously. Despite intention, the closet strategies are always necessary to resist the

dominance of heterosexual discourse.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how queer leaders lead, focusing on these questions: What are the experiences of queer leaders? How has their sexuality mediated their leadership practices? and What do their experiences suggest for a queer theory of leadership practice? By interviewing 15 participants, ranging from superintendents to assistant superintendents to district directors, I explored not only the everyday experiences of these leaders but also how their sexuality mediates their leadership practices. This research supplied a model, presenting the interconnected elements that make up the potential experiences and actions of queer leaders.

A review of the model indicates that queer leadership is complex and influenced by a variety of factors. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study in relation to relevant literature. I then extend the discussion to offer implications for practice. These implications suggest changes to teacher and leadership programs of preparation and call for a queer leadership support network. To provide a context for the implications that emanate from this study, I begin by providing an overview of the research and findings.

I introduced a problem of practice that highlighted the enduring heterosexism and homophobia that dominate our schools. I posited that those who were most able and, perhaps, most interested in disrupting these discourses would be queer leaders (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007). However, by analyzing historical trends in education and the scant research conducted on queer leaders, it became clear that the heterosexism and homophobia that pervade schools also pervade our conceptions of leadership (Blount, 2003; Tallerico & Blount, 2004), preventing queer leaders from working for social justice. My research questions sought to explore how queer leaders lead by examining their general experiences and their leadership

actions and decisions. I employed a queer theory lens to ground the research in a discussion of power and discourse.

I garnered the participation of 15 queer leaders, aged from 44 to 68, whose experience in their highest leadership position ranged from 1 to 17 years. These participants also led in a variety of school districts from rural to suburban to urban, with district sizes from under 2,000 to over 30,000 students. Data collection began in November of 2012, concluding with a final interview in April 2013. Qualitative interview methods were used to help the participants share and make meaning of their experiences.

In order to both deeply and broadly explore their experiences, I employed two methods: narrative analysis and grounded theory. Through narrative analysis, I told the stories of three leaders, selected to demonstrate the wide demographic variability of the participants in my study and to illustrate emerging themes across the participants. Looking across the stories of all 15 participants by using a grounded theory approach led to the development of a theory of queer leadership.

Findings

This grounded theory study showed that although many queer leaders have similar experiences in the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990), they all led from the closet in different ways. The model of queer leadership, outlined in the previous chapter, illustrates the complex and individual ways that each leader moved through this model. Depicted as a continuous cycle, the model represents how the matrix reproduces itself over and over again. As a part of the cycle, the matrix, which is firmly ingrained in the fabric of our schooling, positions heterosexual behavior as the expected norm, creating the discrimination of, and fear among, queer leaders. This discrimination and fear can generate feelings of isolation, as queer leaders believe that they

are alone and powerless. Discrimination and fear can also lead to inaction, which produces

feelings of regret over being unable or unwilling to affect social justice change. When these

leaders experience intense isolation or are paralyzed into inaction, they cannot subvert the

homophobia inherent in the matrix. Thus, the cycle of the matrix, constructed from heterosexist

discourses, begins again.

In the center of the model exists the closet from where all queer leaders inevitably lead.

The closet is positioned as central to the model and surrounded by the matrix (Sedgwick, 1990;

Silin, 1995), suggesting that the closet is both subject to the rules of, and produced by, the matrix

itself. In order to lead from the closet, which involves navigating the heterosexual matrix, queer

leaders employ a variety of strategies. The strategies – passing, building fences and finding

support – are used by queer leaders not only to hide their sexual identities but also to provide

protection against discrimination, suggesting that the closet is not merely a repressive structure

(Sedgwick, 1990; Silin, 1995). Rather, the closet can provide protection against homophobia and

heterosexism in schools. In some cases, queer leaders employed these strategies to affect broader

changes both consciously and unintentionally.

The broader changes, or "pockets of possibilities", are depicted on the outside of the

matrix to suggest that these are subversions of the matrix itself. A common theme among these

pockets is leading for social justice. Specifically, all four of these pockets, implementing

inclusive policies programs, advocating for diverse students, serving as a queer educational

resource and representing a queer role model, all have a goal of fostering the equitable treatment

of minorities (Brown, 2004).

The model of queer leadership illuminates a number of findings. First, the model suggests

that leadership cannot be essentialized, despite some of the previous studies conducted on

minority leaders. Instead of positioning women as more inclusive, for example (Tallerico, 2000; Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Tannen, 1995), my findings suggest that there is not only one way to be a leader, even a queer leader. In the model of queer leadership, leaders move in and out of the closet in different ways, adopting one or many strategies to mediate their queer identity, sometimes remaining inactive and sometimes working towards "pockets of possibilities" to advocate for social justice. Again, this fluidity underscores the various ways to perform leadership. Being queer is just one way.

Second, although some of the participants downplayed or repudiated the role that their sexuality played in their leadership, their later answers contradicted this fact. Indeed, similar to the research on other queer leaders (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), when the leaders in this study spoke about their decision-making and leadership practices, they referred to a heightened sensitivity to issues of diversity due to their own sexuality. This empathy was especially true when it came to advocating for diverse students, even resulting in feelings of regret that they could not do more to help. Echoing previous literature on queer leaders, then, this study also finds that queer leaders are more attuned to and, possibly, more willing to work for social justice in their schools.

Third, the experiences of the participants highlight the complexities of the closet, suggesting both its enabling and constraining nature. Other theorists have only referred to this construct in a repressive way (Sedgwick, 1990, Silin, 1995), yet the reality of the closet, a place of repression – a place of protection, mirrors the complexity of queer life in education, similar to the personal and professional "gains" and "losses" reported in other studies on queer leaders (Denton, 2009). The experiences of the queer leaders in this study suggest that, although the closet does repress sexuality and, in some cases, identity, it is also a space from which to do

social justice work as a queer leader. The closet exists as place where queer leaders can both lead well in traditional ways while also working for equitable changes.

Finally, similar to other queer educators and leaders who engaged in passing and defense mechanisms (Denton, 2009; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Tooms, 2007), the queer leaders in this study sometimes went to great lengths to protect themselves. These passing strategies and defenses, though, have their costs. While queer leaders can operate successfully from closet, they are being limited by the fear and isolation that comes from being subject to the heterosexual matrix. Therefore, if the heterosexual matrix is so dominant, we must think of ways to help disrupt it beyond relying on queer leaders and educators alone.

Implications for Practice

"I think having or knowing gay peers is very, very helpful. I think if I had had that when I was younger, just peers or a network of people who I knew were gay, it just would have been not as daunting." – Jennifer

While conducting this study, a number of people asked me, "Why this topic? What's the need? What's the point?" At first, admittedly, I was not sure what I would find by interviewing these queer leaders. I knew from a qualitative methodological standpoint that their stories needed to be told simply because they have not been told before. I thought that, perhaps, my study would serve the sole purpose of allowing their voices to be heard, which would illuminate the ongoing heterosexism and homophobia that persists in schools even at the administrative level. While this enduring truth shone through in their stories, the experiences of the participants' had more to teach. Their stories illustrated that queer leaders have the potential to affect changes that can positively impact minorities in schools. Yet, the heterosexual matrix remains a hindrance and many of these social justice outcomes are not being realized.

The previous statement is the single most important finding that I hope this study

illuminates. By continuing to instill fear in queer leaders and keep queer issues "in the closet,"

we are doing a disservice to queer students and disempowering queer teachers and leaders in our

schools. Although some of these leaders risk their careers and reach for the "pocket of

possibilities," many more remain silent and inactive, perpetuating heterosexism and

homophobia. Action is needed to subvert the omnipresent control of the matrix. Since this is a

problem of practice study, I present a number of suggestions on how to address this issue.

Throughout my time spent with the participants in this study, they made a number of

suggestions with regard to improving how schools could address queer issues. First, helping

future teachers and leaders learn about the experiences of this marginalized population addresses

my first two findings, regarding queer leaders being aware of their own sexuality in their

leadership practices and not essentializing leadership. Therefore, one of the suggestions included

improving education and diversity training for future and current administrators, which research

supports:

> If current and future educational leaders are to foster successful, equitable, and socially
> responsible learning and accountability practices for all students, then substantive
> changes in educational leadership preparation and professional development programs
> are required (Brown, 2004, pg. 80).

Over half of the participants stated that there was little to no discussion of queer issues in their

leadership preparation program. Dan expanded on this absence: "Unfortunately, the gay

population is largely marginalized and overlooked when it comes to any kind of preparatory

program…higher ed. hasn't changed to meet the changing needs of the world, especially in the

field of education." To address this issue, Sophie suggested that:

> …programs should be presented across the board from being a teacher all the way up to
> being a superintendent because there [are] a lot of issues that come in to play and we
> have to be able to treat them fairly and effectively and we're educators so we have to

make sure that in all of that we're teaching and we're helping people progress along the timeline of acceptance and equality.

Therefore, I recommend that higher education institutions conduct an evaluation of teacher and leadership preparation programs. Auditing courses and course content for queer issues is the first step to determining how and to what extent we are preparing our future educators for a diverse world. Further, incorporating more studies of queer students, teachers and leaders into the curriculum would benefit not only the future students of these leaders but also some of the leaders themselves. Perhaps by presenting future queer teachers and leaders with the notion that their sexuality can benefit their practice, they might be more willing to embrace it and less likely to fall victim to fear and isolation. With these changes, future queer leaders might be able to better see their own leadership identity in alternative and more inclusive models of leadership.

The second idea that all 15 participants agreed upon was increasing networks of support for queer leaders. Although the model of queer leadership presents this idea as finding supportive peers and coworkers in the closet, a more wide-reaching goal would be to expand this pocket both locally and nationally. Having a supportive and understanding network of colleagues, both straight and queer, offers the possibility of accomplishing a number of significant goals. First, simply having a network that can empathize with and understand the everyday problems of leadership provides an outlet for queer leaders, which has the potential to break the cycle of isolation perpetuated by the heterosexual matrix. Tracy explained this perspective: "To have that, to support that…to be able to be out…it would be so liberating. I'd love to see schools and education going that direction." By breaking the cycle, there exists more of a chance that queer leaders will not continue to perpetuate heterosexism and homophobia.

Dan pointed out that networking could also benefit his on-the-job decision-making:

I think it would be very helpful for people of the same sexuality to have the opportunities to get together and to see how their sexuality has impacted their work or how the work has impacted them, or to get ideas about how to deal with something because of who I am. I have this issue in front of me. Do I come out at the board meeting and say, "I understand where this kid is coming from, and that's why you really need to do this?" I'm sure the collective intellect of that group would be such that it would be very, very helpful.

By having a network of support both to alleviate isolation and provide feedback on professional decisions, queer leaders might feel supported enough to take risks and reach towards the pockets of possibilities in order to affect broader social justice changes. For example, Sophie stated, "I've always found getting people together that have the same interest or the same concerns really helps to regenerate a lot of good ideas; gives us people a lot of comfort."

My participants' comments illuminate a common belief among all of the participants in this study: queer leaders want to enact change in their schools and districts; they are driven to help students and colleagues better understand queer issues and, sometimes, themselves. Yet, they are stymied in their work for fear of discrimination and homophobic repercussions. In order to affect change and work for social justice, queer leaders must have a unified front of action and protection. Continuing to remain either inactive or isolated in their work can never lead to broader change since, at most, the changes queer leaders affect will be only on the local level.

Thus, a network for queer leaders could give rise to ideas for how to take action in order to better support students and staff members in their own districts and more broadly, addressing my third finding and helping leaders manage the complexities of the closet. Having a chance to collaborate with other leaders locally and around the country could make for fertile ground in sharing and developing social justice action plans. Finally, Bea pointed out one of the fundamental benefits of a network: "If you have a network, you can do anything." The development of a support network, though, must be done in a systematic way. For too long,

queer leaders have garnered support in secret and worked for social justice through informal channels. While positive, these small, local changes need the support and structure to have broad, national implications. Therefore, the question becomes: how can social justice work be organized and systematized for queers leaders?

An initial step would be to create an anonymous support network online that would have the features and functions of a blog, similar to a multi-user chat room. Queer leaders would be invited to join this network without revealing their names in order to shield their identities and protect their careers. This support blog could offer users the chance to present problems or pose questions to their queer colleagues who in turn could respond from their own experiences or knowledge. Recent articles, research or ideas could also find a home here, providing queer leaders with resources to continue the fight against the heterosexism and homophobia in their schools or districts. Guest "bloggers" like attorneys, researchers, politicians or students could also contribute their perspectives on a range of queer educational issues.

While some leaders might hear about this network through word of mouth, I also suggest advertising through administrative groups on the local, state and national level. Initiating a special interest group or forming alliances with leadership groups like the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) or The School Superintendents Association (AASA) helps to raise the visibility of queer issues in education, especially the fact that heterosexism and homophobia continue to pervade our schools. Finally, after building up a large enough group, I recommend holding a conference where topics from current events, the online network and the lives of the queer leaders can have a real-time forum.

As Bea noted, many heads and hands are better than one. Without a support network, queer leaders not only feel isolated but also disempowered to affect change. Further, since queer leaders often advocate for students, pass inclusive programs and policies, serve as an education resource, and represent a role model, the educational community cannot afford to continue to quash these positive outcomes in this age of continuing bullying and homophobia. Therefore, my major recommendation in this study is to initiate local and national support networks for queer leaders. We must provide them with the avenues of networking and support that they need in order to help our schools subvert the heterosexual matrix.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

The strength of this study is that it is the first of its kind to interview as many educators as possible in order to develop a model of what it means to be a queer leader in education. The aim of this work was not to generalize but to make sense of queer leaders' experiences in a theoretical framework. This framework can help the educational community understand the next steps that need to be taken to address queer issues in schools and create a more socially just system.

As a qualitative study of 15 queer leaders, this inquiry is limited to the experiences of these participants. These leaders also represented a particular demographic: Caucasian. Other studies of minority leadership have referred to the ways in which their racial or ethnic identity mediated their leadership. Without the perspective of queer leaders who also share other minority statuses, I cannot claim universality of experience and must be cautious in advancing my theory. Second, I relied solely on interviews with queer leaders; thus, this study privileges those leaders' perspectives. There may be flaws, miscommunication and inconsistencies in how they perceived others' actions or behaviors when recounting their stories to me.

To address these limitations, future studies should extend this research to determine the applicability of this model to racially and ethnically diverse queer leaders. This would provide a basis for comparison and would help to further test the efficacy of the theory presented. This research, and other studies that focus on the intersections of identity and leadership, do not suggest that specific models for each diverse group of leaders need to exist. Rather, this research attempts to demonstrate that there is variability even among the leadership styles and decisions of a seemingly similar group.

Finally, additional research should explore the phenomenon of passing. While conducting research for this study, I noticed that there was a paucity of research on this topic. Although passing is frequently alluded to in other theoretical works (i.e. Sedgwick, 1990), I could not find any educational studies that examined passing itself or its effects. Further research into these areas would continue to help illuminate the experiences of queer leaders in our schools by exploring the complexities of this already complicated phenomenon.

Conclusion

"I hope if someone reads your dissertation and they find out they are reading about [me], and he is openly gay, if that allows someone else to come out so that they are not worried…I think that is important, and I don't know where else they are going to read that but maybe reading through your interviews and the things that you find - that could be something really important." – Connor

In 1982, Khayatt chronicled the lives of lesbian teachers in Canada. She reported that these individuals faced discrimination and homophobia from their colleagues, community and students. Her participants reported feelings of isolation and shared the extreme lengths they took to pass as heterosexual and defend themselves against being outed. Over 30 years later, the leaders I interviewed for this study told many of the same stories.

Although our society continues to make headway on queer issues, queer individuals in schools still experience a world where they are told everyday not to be themselves. The fact

remains that our schools are still subject to the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) and are institutions dominated by heterosexism and homophobia. The experiences of the leaders in this study give testament to that. Discrimination still runs rampant even in the highest echelons of administration. If the leaders of our schools cannot feel secure in their sexuality, what does this say for our queer teachers and students? What hope do we have to convince them that they are safe and that it does, as the popular movement suggests, "get better?"

Certainly, pockets of possibilities exist as leaders subvert the matrix in subtle ways. Yet, these small resistances are not enough. We need to change higher education to include courses and experiences that prepare teachers and leaders to face queer issues with empathy and sensitivity. We need networks of support to help fortify queer leaders in their fight for social justice. Most of all, we need to take direct aim at heterosexist discourses and encourage school and district leaders to either come out of the closet or provide them with supportive strategies to help lead from it.

While much of the western world continues its march towards equality, schools cannot stay stuck in the past, holding on to the old discourses of gender and sexuality. This need for progress is especially true in educational leadership, where those individuals are expected to be on the front lines of leading for social justice (Brown, 2004; Lugg, 2003). This grounded theory study represents another step towards expanding notions of what it means to be an educational leader. The school and district leaders of today represent a range of identities with a plethora of tools at their disposal to affect positive changes. Yet, we cannot hope to subvert the matrix without the help of queer leaders. And, without their presence and support, our students will never see an inclusive picture of society. If we are to have schools that are truly equitable, that mirror the strides made in queer rights in other parts of social life, the educational community

must be committed to enacting social justice. Although this study is just another attempt to make

schools safer and more inclusive for queer students, teacher and leaders, it is an essential stone

on the path of equality. Each stone represents a step. And each step brings us closer to the vision

of an equitable space, where everyone's voice is valued and everyone's identity is accepted.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. We are speaking today because you have identified as a queer leader. I am purposefully using the word "queer" as an inclusive term to capture all those who do not identify as "straight" or heterosexual. For the first interview, I would like to ascertain some idea of who you are and your path into education.

Interview #1

General Background and Path into Education

- Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- What was your childhood like? What was it like being a teenager?
    - Probe: Where they grew up, parents, schooling, friends and activities.
    - Probe: Significant experiences concerning sexuality?
- Describe your educational background. (i.e. experiences with schooling)
    - Probe: What was school like for you?
- When did you start thinking about getting into education?
    - Probe: What prompted this?
    - Probe: Did you have other jobs before you went into education?
- When did you know you wanted to be an educational leader?
    - Probe: How and why?
- What is the purpose of education?

Personal Experiences

- How do you self-identify? (i.e. lesbian, gay, etc.)
- Tell me the story of when you realized you were queer.
- How much importance do you ascribe to your homosexual identity? (Is sexuality important to you? Is it an important part of your life?)
- Do you feel comfortable with your sexuality? Explain.
- Have you ever tried to "pass" in your personal life?
- In your professional life? (Passing is to make others believe that you are heterosexual.)
    - How did this impact you personally? Professionally?
- Have you ever been a target of discrimination because of your sexuality? Explain.
- Have you found it difficult being a queer in education?
- Why did you choose to enter in a profession that is not accepting of queers?

Interview #2

It was great speaking with you during our first interview. For our second interview, I would like to delve more into leadership and your experiences being queer leader.

Leadership

- What is a leader?
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What are your best leadership qualities?
    - o   Probe: Explain why.
- What would you like to improve?
    - o   Probe: Explain why.
- What is your staff's perception of you? Your leadership style?
    - o   Describe some significant experiences you have had with people you have worked with.

Work Experiences

- Describe your current job.
    - o   Probe: How long have you been here?
    - o   Probe: How did you get here?
- Do you discuss your personal life at work?
    - o   Probe: Why or why not?
- Do you foster personal relationships at work?
    - o   Probe: Why or why not?
- Have you had a job where you were "out"?
    - o   Probe: If so, what made you feel comfortable in coming out?
    - o   Probe: If not, why not?
    - o   Probe: Are you presently out in your current position?
- How does your sexuality affect you at work?
    - o   Probe: In decision-making?
    - o   Probe: In personal interactions?
- What are your relationships like with other superintendents?
- What are your relationships like with your school board?
- Describe an experience in your present position where you felt like your sexuality played a role.
    - o   Probe: Talk about a time you had a sig conflict with someone.
    - o   Probe: Talk about some difficult issues that you have faced in your job.
    - o   Probe: If you don't have an experience, discuss why.
- Do you believe your sexuality affects your leadership practices? If so, how?
- Describe some barriers and challenges you have faced in a leadership position, dealing with or overcoming heterosexual norms.

Moving Forward

- What strategies would help new queer leaders negotiate their positions?
  - What would you say to a novice queer leader?
- What advice would you give to leadership preparation programs in terms of educating leaders about queer issues? In terms of preparing queer leaders?
- What advice would you give to those who hire leaders, regarding recruitment and support of queer leaders?
- What are some support systems that should be put in place for queer leaders?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS

Title of the Study: Superintendent In(queer)y: Towards a New Theory of Leadership

Principal Investigator: Jocelyn Dumaresq, Graduate Student, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Graduate School of Education (973) 738-3836 jocelyn.dumaresq@gse.rutgers.edu

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted Jocelyn Dumaresq, who is a doctoral student in the Graduate Education Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of queer superintendents in order to suggest a queer leadership theory of practice. You have been asked to participate because you have self-identified as a gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender/sexual superintendent. The term "queer" will be used for inclusive purposes.

Approximately 10-15 subjects will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately two hours.

The study procedures include two interviews, which may include digital recording. Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and will occur at a date, time and place convenient for you. These interviews will be conducted between the months of October and December. After each meeting, your interview will be transcribed by the researcher and then sent to you for verification. Electronic communication may occur if clarification is needed during transcription.

This research is anonymous. Anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a random code name that will be used during the transcription process. Your name will appear <u>only</u> on a list of subjects, and will <u>not</u> be linked to the code number that is assigned to you. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept until after completion of the dissertation process.

Subject's Initials: _____

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The only risk to you is a possible breach of confidentiality. All data collected will be secured on a password protected computer file and pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' anonymity. Again, any identifying information about school, work place will be removed and psuedonyms used.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part in this study may be the opportunity to reflect upon your experiences as a superintendent and, by sharing your experiences, potentially help other queer superintendents who may be dealing with similar issues. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study. You will receive no compensation for completing the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself, Jocelyn Dumaresq, at (973) 738-3836 or jocelyn.dumaresq@gse.rutgers.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.
Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Subject's Initials: _____

AUDIO ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Superintendent In(queer)y: Towards a New Theory of Leadership conducted by Jocelyn Dumaresq We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (sound), or digitally record, as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used solely for transcription and analysis by the principal researcher.

The recording(s) will be anonymous and, therefore, will not include any identifying markers such as your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity and will be destroyed after completion of the dissertation process.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____   Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____   Date _____

Subject's Initials: _____