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BEING A LEADER IN HIGHER EDUCATION WITH CONCEALABLE  
DIFFERENCES:  
EMPATHETIC EXECUTIVES WITH A CALL TO ACTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Dennis H. Mathes

December 2007

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Dennis H. Mathes

2007

***DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY***  
***SCHOOL OF EDUCATION***  
***INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAM FOR***  
***EDUCATIONAL LEADERS***

***Dissertation***

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

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**December 14, 2007**

BEING A LEADER IN HIGHER EDUCATION WITH CONCEALABLE  
DIFFERENCES: EMPATHETIC EXECUTIVES WITH A CALL TO ACTION

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## ABSTRACT

# BEING A LEADER IN HIGHER EDUCATION WITH CONCEALABLE DIFFERENCES: EMPATHETIC EXECUTIVES WITH A CALL TO ACTION

By

Dennis H. Mathes

December 2007

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. James E. Henderson

This study tells the story of thirteen executive leaders in higher education from across the nation who identified themselves as having a concealable difference. These differences included being gay or lesbian, experiencing an auditory or visual disability, or being from a poor socio-economic background.

Grounded in a constructivist epistemology, a phenomenological systematic approach was used to understand and illuminate the nuances of the lived experiences of these individuals. Together the terms ontology, epistemology, and methodology describe the foundation for this study. Ontology is the study of *Being*; epistemology is how we know what we know; and methodology is the approach to new or acquired understanding. The transcripts of our interactions, plus my field notes and journals became the basis for the hermeneutical analysis of the experience of living with a concealable difference.

Having differences which define them was a theme which emerged from this process. These leaders felt that living with these differences included understanding the limitations imposed upon them by society. They experienced the impacts of oppression by being set apart by their difference. These executives continued to work hard to ensure what they added to the academy was more important than their differences. They moved beyond merely feeling compassion and responded instead to an empathetic call to action. This empathy propelled them to go beyond simply using the buzzwords *inclusive*, *tolerance*, and *diversity*. They were engaged with partners, children, and family members. Each leader had developed a hope that was not expressed without thoughtful consideration of the harsh realities of the world they live in, nor with pessimism which would stand in the way of true progress.

These leaders were comfortable with who they were. They experienced life with their very *Being* impacted by being cast as *different*. Each individual had their own unique story. Combined, these stories presented a fuller insight into *Being Different*.

The findings of this study have application to policy makers who serve in higher education. It is vital that individuals with differences be included in leadership positions because of the broader outlook they provide to academia.

## DEDICATION

To my Dad

William Ray Mathes, Sr.

1940 – 2002

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many individuals who contributed to my doctoral endeavor. First of all, Robert Bartos, Dean of Education and Human Services at Shippensburg University provided me the encouragement to start this journey. This encouragement proved invaluable as I proceeded from the initial stages to completion of this process. The words of Peggy Hockersmith resound in my mind, who upon learning of my participation in this program, proclaimed with a certain vindictive joy in her voice, “Good, we can get back at you for all the technological challenges we have had to face.” This lighthearted spirit of “payback” was a direct reference to my advocacy of technology campus-wide, even to fields of study not traditionally oriented to technology.

This program was in great contrast to my computer science undergraduate and graduate academic training. During the course of this program I was promoted to the position of Assistant Vice President of Information Technology and Services for Computing Services. This role has given me the wonderful opportunity to combine my technical background with this leadership program. This program and my technology training were indeed different scholarly experiences, but, that was the point after all.

Many warm wishes go out to Denise Anderson, who brought to our cohort our first taste of qualitative inquiry. She ignited in me the desire to delve beyond the “numbers” of an occurrence, and to examine more specifically the possibilities of uncovering the deep meaning of a phenomenon. Kurt Kraus was included in the course, and as an avid proponent of phenomenological study he provided the necessary grounding for me to pursue an examination of the life experiences of these leaders.



I want to acknowledge my youngest daughter, Rebekah, who I am sure was the only student in her 6<sup>th</sup> grade class who could say “phenomenology” and knew what “heuristic” meant. She assisted me by reading some book and article texts out loud when I had grown weary. It still makes me smile to remember her saying how she didn’t mind helping me sort through the hundreds of articles spread across my den – because it gave her the chance to “say big words.” I cannot forget to thank my other two daughters, Stephanie and Sarah, who at one time or another got “roped into” helping me with some aspect of this pursuit. Of course even their mother, Cindy, carried an extra burden when I was unable to help take care of some the details of childrearing due to being busy with some portion of this process. Interestingly enough, she said one of the most encouraging things during this process. Upon picking up an early draft of my Proposal, she said: “You wrote this?” The sound of surprise in her voice encouraged me; she had seen the maturity which had occurred in my writing. She knew where I started, and was a witness to my progress. I am sure I still have far to go, but it was a good feeling that someone noticed what I was able to accomplish.

James Ryland provided me a tremendous amount of encouragement as early on I grappled with my possible research topic. He seemed to “get” the importance of the area of interest I had, and helped guide me to understand how a study in this area could add incrementally to the body of knowledge. His words, “this is an important topic and needs to be pursued” indeed helped energize me to pursue the topic, especially when doubt and frustration formed in my mind. The day he agreed to serve on my dissertation committee was indeed a highlight, in particular because I knew he was preparing to retire and was not taking on any more committee work.

I have had so many scholarly discussions with a variety of individuals. Dave Topper and I in particular discussed a number of the projects during the program's coursework, the practica in detail, and the formation of this research study. His insights as an IDPEL graduate were invaluable for the processes throughout the entire program. Jan Armino was instrumental in pointing me in the right direction as I endeavored to learn more about the richness of qualitative study and how to apply it to this research. As a proponent of phenomenological research she attempted – hopefully I have been cooperative and she was successful – to steer me in the right direction in order to produce a product of high quality and credibility.

I acknowledge Doug Cook – proofreader extraordinaire – for last minute reviews, thorough APA checks and a friend just to discuss my writing, even someone to listen to me grouse about my lack of progress. (By the way, don't blame him if there are any errors or omissions left – when you start with as many issues as I had, I am fortunate if only a few were left undiscovered.) Lawrence Burden is due a special thank you; he reminded me to “have fun” with this process. As I would get lost in the details or the work, he was quick to remind me why I started this program – to improve myself – and would encourage me to enjoy the process.

Jim Henderson consistently encouraged me throughout this entire process. From the beginning of this experience he listened to my concerns about my abilities, providing a calming voice throughout. As program director and chair of my dissertation committee, he continually served as a guiding force to propel me forward on this journey. Steve Ganzell helped by adding an outside perspective. As someone who has previously completed most of his research endeavors in the quantitative paradigm, he provided me

the opportunity and challenge to make this study understandable to those unfamiliar with qualitative methodologies. His involvement in this process also provided me with feedback from a clinician's perspective that I would otherwise not have had.

Lastly, and not in any way the least, is my friend and mentor – Rick Ruth. He encouraged me to continue on, even when the end seemed so very far away. His support, insight, and help in navigating politics, whether within the context of the university, my doctoral program, or life in general, gave me an understanding no class could have ever conveyed. And, in the final analysis, the simple fact that he was there for personal support has been far more valuable than I could even begin to extol.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract .....	iv
Dedication .....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Turning to the Question .....	2
Framework for Gathering Their Story .....	4
An Untold Story .....	7
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .....	8
Introducing the Writings, Studies, and Research.....	8
Identity Development.....	10
Erik H. Erikson: Human Development.....	10
Arthur W. Chickering’s Seven Vectors. ....	10
Identity Development Models Addressing Specific Differences.....	13
Race-Related Identity Models. ....	13
Disability Specific Identity Development.....	15
Gay Men Identity Development. ....	15
Identity Development of Lesbians.....	18
Bisexual Identities.....	20
Themes Influencing Identity Development .....	21
Revealing of Differences. ....	22
Oppression: Racism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ageism, Ableism, Classism..	24

Privilege .....	24
Minimalization.....	25
Multiple Oppressions.....	27
Multiple Identity Development.....	28
Marginality and Mattering .....	30
Authenticity, Development and Desirable Characteristic in Leaders.....	30
Studies of Individuals with Concealable Differences .....	32
Leadership Development .....	33
Managing Identity .....	35
Glass Ceiling.....	37
Stigma .....	38
Implications of These Studies.....	39
Summary of Literature .....	41
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	42
Laying the Groundwork.....	42
Worldview.....	44
Epistemology .....	44
Methodology .....	46
Social Theories.....	47
Bricoleur .....	48
Post-Modern Theory .....	48
Feminist Theory.....	49
Queer Theory .....	49

Critical Race Theory .....	50
Methods.....	50
Participants.....	51
Dialogues .....	52
Member Checking.....	54
Rapport, Trust, and Neutrality .....	54
Bracketing, Reflexivity, and Self-Dialogue.....	55
Analysis.....	56
Transcription.....	56
Hermeneutic Circle .....	57
Identifying Themes .....	57
Finding Nothing.....	59
Interpreting.....	59
Writing and Re-writing.....	60
Construction of Their Story .....	61
Procedure for the Protection of Human Subjects.....	61
Goodness.....	63
Looking Ahead.....	64
Chapter Four: Report of the Findings .....	66
Being Leaders in Higher Education with Concealable Differences .....	66
My Fellow Explorers .....	67
The Pool of Lived Experiences.....	69
Broadening the Pool: My Own Exploration .....	70

EmergEd Themes of Understanding.....	73
Being Defined by Difference .....	74
The Experience of Being Disabled .....	75
The Experience of Being from a Poor Socio-Economic Background.....	77
The Experience of Being of Minority Sexual Orientation.....	80
Being Set Apart.....	82
Being Oppressed .....	84
Being Separated by Privilege.....	87
Being Outside the Norm .....	89
Being of Value .....	91
Being the Best.....	91
Being Understanding of Difference .....	94
Being on the Outside.....	95
Being Compassionate and Empathetic .....	97
Being an Impact.....	99
Being Active .....	100
Revealing of Difference.....	100
Revealing of Difference: Remaining Concealed .....	108
Being Called to Action .....	110
Being an Advocate.....	112
Being an Advocate: Self-Advocacy.....	115
Being an Advocate: Building Bridges .....	117
Being a Mentor and Role Model.....	120

Being Engaged .....	122
Being Engaged With Partners.....	122
Being Engaged With Family and Children.....	125
Being Engaged With Themselves.....	126
Being Without Voice .....	127
Voices Not Heard.....	127
A Silent Voice.....	130
Being Hopeful.....	136
Being Affirmed.....	136
Being Supported by Advocates.....	140
Being Inspired by Mentors and Role Models .....	147
Just Being.....	151
Just Being Ourselves.....	150
Being Okay with Being Different.....	151
Chapter Five: Learnings and Beyond .....	155
Intra-Actions: Impact of Study .....	155
Impact on the Participants.....	156
Impact on Myself.....	158
Impact on My Understanding of Parenting.....	158
Impact on My Understanding of the Systems of Privilege.....	159
Pro-Actions: Implications for Application.....	164
Positively Affecting our Institutions.....	164
Creating Affirming Environments: Non-Discrimination Policies .....	166



Broadening the Views of Search Committees and Governing Bodies .....	169
Follow Their Example .....	172
Post-Actions: Future Study .....	173
Inter-Actions: The Bottom Line.....	175
References .....	176

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Your doctoral program will show details that I think will prompt some additional sensitivity on the parts of those leaders in Higher Education who may or may not have contemplated how concealable differences have impacted women and men who want to succeed professionally, but worry that such concealable differences have a negative, or deleterious effect on what we attempt to do as professionals.*

(“Mark,” 2007)

This document provides the report on my phenomenological study (van Manen, 1990; Cresswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) into the essence of the experience of leaders in higher education with concealable differences. This phenomenological approach allowed for the *Being* – that which determines entities as entities – to be extensively explored with these leaders (Heidegger, 1962). Concealable differences are those aspects of lifestyle, physical condition, or personality which are not readily apparent and yet may carry certain social stigmas (Goffman, 1963). Gay men and lesbians who are leaders, leaders with non-visible disabilities such as diminished optical or auditory skills, and those leaders who come from working class or poor backgrounds are examined in this study.

The term “College President” or even “University Chancellor,” brings what images to mind? Is it a graying White male, in a proper business suit and tie? Or in this era is it even a person of color or a woman? This research study seeks to explore differences even more subtle than these external differences. In my experience, presidents and chancellors are typically White males. Yet, today there are an increasing number of persons of color and/or women (if only incrementally so) serving as senior administrators

in higher educational institutions across the country. Are there other leaders in higher education today who possess other differences – differences that are not so apparent?

These leaders were chosen because they represent individuals who have the ability to conceal their differences, individuals who have had to manage the impact of these differences on their personal and professional lives. What can we learn from them? What challenges have they faced as they aspired for success in their lives? What is their story (Koch, 1998)?

Little research has been conducted on leaders with concealable differences. Such leaders have been serving our institutions of higher education for years; what has their experience been? Perhaps as their lives are explored, answers to such questions as these can be discovered: What have been their struggles? What costs did they pay for their differences? What can we learn from them?

#### Turning to the Question

This topic was selected because of my passion to understand this phenomenon more fully and to share that understanding with others (Glesne, 1999; Jones, 2002). Leaders in higher education with concealable differences have unique obstacles; these individuals are assumed to be heterosexual, able-bodied, and from a middle to upper socio-economic background. My relationship to the phenomenon is an intimate and personal one, as I am a leader in higher education with a concealable difference. I am gay and come from a poor socio-economic background. As such, I have the experience of living with such differences. It is not clear whether my deficiencies in speaking, writing, and communicating well are a result of the frequent relocations during my formative educational years or are a result of an actual physical or intellectual shortcoming.

However, it is clear that my sexuality and my childhood circumstances – frequent relocations and poor quality schools – are realities which have made me what I am today.

Each of these differences – my sexuality, my communications skills, and my socio-economic background – with enough effort can be concealed, if only partially. Presently, I am comfortable with my sexuality, still struggle with my communications skills – writing a research study emphasized that struggle – and I continue to negotiate the ongoing influence of my poor socio-economic background. Having been employed at the same institution for over 20 years, my co-workers had become acquainted with me as a heterosexual, many meeting my wife and children over the years. A few colleagues understood when that relationship ended it was because of my sexuality, while others made whatever assumptions were convenient to them. Although at first I attempted to conceal my sexuality and the true nature of my divorce, over time I have become comfortable with myself; and although it is not something I have forced upon people, many of my colleagues know I am a gay man. Throughout this process I have used various identity management techniques, learned about the influences of oppression on my life, and grown as a leader.

As a leader with concealable differences in an institution of higher education, I wanted to learn from the experiences of other leaders with concealable differences. I wanted to share in their experience, to be able to learn from these leaders' stories. Perhaps we can all learn from the lived experiences of these leaders, who in spite of and because of their differences had a great impact on their institutions and the students they served. My hope is that this research indeed provides insight which as Mark said will “prompt some additional sensitivity” for those who have concealable differences. For the

greater good, this story should be told so those with similar differences can learn and be encouraged to follow through on their own plans and dreams for their lives. Finally, those who do not have these particular differences should have an opportunity to see into the lives of these leaders and learn from them how to overcome other types of challenges. As a qualitative researcher, I intended to collect stories of experience that could illustrate coping skills and survival strategies. However, while there may be lessons to be learned from the process, it is my desire to explore the essence of these leaders' experience and to tell their story – this remains paramount to this study. This document is a result of that endeavor.

The outcome of this study was to peer into the lives of these leaders – with their permission – and to learn what influenced their success. To let them tell about that success, and to tell the rest of the story – perhaps parts difficult to hear about – parts hard for them to tell. Previously their story was left untold (Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Coon, 2001). Through the telling of their story, an understanding of this phenomenon of leaders with concealable differences can be illuminated. The meanings these leaders have placed on their experience are examined including such areas as how their differences changed their career choices, their professional lives, and even their personal lives.

#### Framework for Gathering Their Story

This research was grounded in a constructivist epistemology. This epistemology – how we know what we know – allowed me to espouse a worldview in which I could interpret my dialogue with the participants in order to construct the story of their collective experience. In this attempt to capture the essence of their experience, my goal was to illuminate that essence. This study does not purport to generalize to all leaders, not

even all leaders with a concealable difference. It, however, is an account of those participants in the study, a story acquired in a credible method, with care and concern, with the original context “described adequately so that a judgment of transferability can be made” (Koch, 1998, p. 1188). As a qualitative researcher, I understand my responsibility to do no harm. My goal for the study is for it to be sound and to exemplify goodness (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2006).

A qualitative paradigm was chosen to explore this topic. However, the value of both quantitative and qualitative inquiry cannot be understated. This study demanded a qualitative paradigm, due to the depth of understanding necessary to bring this story to light. Studies cited in this proposal are from the perspective of both paradigms. Each perspective adds to the understanding of the phenomenon being examined.

Erikson’s (1980; 1968a; 1968b) definition of identity development; Chickering’s (1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1980) seven vectors of identity development; Cross’ (1971; 1995) Black identity model; Helm’s (1995) White and people of color racial identity model; Gill’s (1997) disability identity development; Atkinson, Morten, and Sue’s (1983) model of minority identity development; Cass’ (1979) gay identity development model; McCarn and Fassinger’s (1996) identity development for lesbians; and Pope and Reynold’s (1991) bisexual identity model served to inform the research questions examined. Concepts such as “coming out” were explored for both gay men and lesbians (Sedwick, 1990; D’Augelli, 1991), and “coming out” for the disabled (Kleege, 2002; Gill, 1997). Common themes occurring in the literature related to the many – and possibly multiple – forms of oppression that leaders are confronted with. Other theoretical concepts explored include Schlossberg’s (1989) work on marginality and

matter – the need to feel we matter, the development of authenticity (Morgaine, 1994), and the value of authenticity as a desirable trait in leaders (Sartre, 1948; Halpin, 1966; Rinder & Campbell, 1952). The examination of these themes served to form the approach to uncover the story of the essence of the experience of these leaders.

The following terms will be used in telling their story:

1. Essence “is what makes a thing what it is” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). If adequately described in language, this description reawakens or shows the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller and deeper way.
2. A concealable difference is a difference which is not readily apparent, thereby allowing the individual the option of revealing the difference. This difference may have inherent social stigma attached (Goffman, 1963; Button, 2004). This difference may potentially serve to separate the individual from the mainstream.
3. The term non-heterosexual is used for those individuals of gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation. Although a definition of what an individual is *not* is used infrequently, this convention was chosen to underscore the heterosexism which assumes heterosexuality as the standard for individuals in our society (Lugg, 2003).
4. Coming out is publicly acknowledging a difference with a stigma attached to it (Sedgwick, 1990).
5. A story is the collection of the “voices” heard during data collection, assembled in a fashion which expresses the essence of the experiences of the participants for us all to gain by the listening (Koch, 1998).

## An Untold Story

Studies directly related to this research area are sparse. This provides both an opportunity and a challenge. An opportunity presents itself because of the clear need for further research in the area, as called for in the few existing studies cited in these summaries.

As this study explored the life experiences of a diverse group of leaders, it brings an understanding of the great impact these leaders have on our institutions. Only a few other researchers have examined these experiences. As an example, Fraynd and Capper (2003) looked at a set of leaders in secondary education. These researchers examined the impact each leader had on bringing forth an understanding of diversity at their institutions. Leadership has been shown to be critical in the implementation of diversity initiatives for a campus (Topper, 2002). This current research sought to tell the story which brings an understanding of that experience and in turn assists in the strengthening of each of our institutions' diversity initiatives.

This study, filling a void in the literature, provides a valuable insight into the lived experiences of leaders of higher education with concealable differences. It is my objective to highlight for you the victories, as well as the struggles, that these leaders experienced in educational institutions. My goal was to discover insights from the experiences of these leaders with concealable differences. These insights included factors that impacted participants' success, pitfalls which hampered their success, and strategies they used to become who they are in their institutions.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*The experience of difference for many of ... [her study's] participants exposed dimensions of identity that otherwise might have gone unexamined. Differences were described as visible ... and invisible ... however, both visible and invisible experiences of difference influenced identity.*

(Jones, 1997, p. 379)

#### Introducing the Writings, Studies, and Research

A survey of the literature revealed a variety of related themes. While only a few studies have been conducted that are closely related to the theme of this study, literature from a wide inter-disciplinary set of sources serves to inform this research. This literature defines models of human development, specifically identity development, that serve to provide a foundation for asking questions about the essence of the experience of a leader in higher education with a concealable difference. Complementary to universal identity development models, other models that examine identity development specific to race, disability, and non-heterosexuality will be presented.

These models serve as a framework for the analysis of the human interaction conducted in this study; however they did not dictate the results. Jones, et al. (2006) encouraged the researcher to “use previous research to enhance, but not constrain, emerging findings” (p. 92). Identity models are examined not as a lens used to view the essence of the leaders studied, but rather to provide background in order to inform the study’s creation and provide a framework for examining what emerges from the meanings that these individuals place on these topics. Butler (1991) offered her caution

about the over-reliance of identity research, “I’m permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble” (p. 14). So, these topics are included – with caution – in order to frame and inform the study, but not to dictate the results.

Additionally, the focus of this research study is on leaders with concealable difference(s), therefore literature addressing someone who has the ability to conceal is also included. The process and implications of making these concealable differences known to others is also found in the literature, as well as the hidden individual costs of continuing to “pass” and not reveal the differences. The review uncovered a vast array of references to various oppressions, which may be at work for the subjects of this study. Class, race, gender, sexuality, ableness – each can have associated oppression leading to marginalization. Even the effect of ignoring or minimizing these differences has been studied and expounded upon in the literature. In fact, many individuals – some of which appear in this study – have multiple oppressions at work in their lives. This complexity leaves little question as to why individuals struggle with feelings of being in the margin – of not mattering (Schlossberg, 1989). Individuals also are faced with living their professional and personal lives authentically, matching their behaviors with their core values and beliefs (Harvey, Martinko, & Gardner, 2006).

With these themes as a foundation, a review of the literature revealed several studies that served to inform this research. The studies are reviewed with successes and limitations highlighted, recognizing the insights that helped guide the research question.

## Identity Development

### *Erik H. Erikson's Human Development*

Erikson (1968a; 1980) described human development, and specifically the development of identity, within the context of a social reality. His foundational work provided the basis for psychosocial theorists' subsequent study on identity development (Wall & Evans, 1991). Erikson (1968a) defined a series of psychosocial crises leading an individual through the formation of their identity; each stage coming with a crisis that results in further growth and awareness. This growth includes the building of self-esteem, which is "confirmed at the end of each major crisis" (Erikson, 1968b, p. 197). Beyond specific stages, Erikson (1968b) viewed identity formation as a lifelong developmental process. Erikson provided the basis for the study of psychosocial identity development that recognizes the significance of both psychological and social factors.

### *Arthur W. Chickering's Seven Vectors*

Chickering's (1969) seven vectors of development and the later refinements developed with Reisser (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) provided a model that described the process of identity development. The seven vectors are: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity. The seven vectors of Chickering's identity development model provide a direction and a magnitude that can be used "as maps" helping to determine the direction in which individuals "are heading" in the formation of their identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 34).

The first vector, developing competence, is described as being like a three-tined pitchfork. The tines can be seen as intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and social and interpersonal competence. Tying these concepts together is confidence that serves as the handle of the pitchfork in the metaphor. This competence begins in an individual's early childhood and is important into the college years (Chickering, 1969).

The second vector, managing emotions, is developed as the individual acquires awareness and learns to acknowledge and accept the presence and power of emotions in his or her life. He or she begins to discover and understand these various emotions – not just negative ones, but positive ones as well – and learn how to self-regulate rather than repress them (Chickering & Reisser, 1980). “Before emotional control can become effective, emotions have to be experienced, to be felt and perceived for what they are” (Chickering, 1969, p. 10).

The third vector, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, hinges upon the development of emotional and instrumental independence. “Emotional independence means freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval” (Chickering & Reisser, 1980, p. 47). Instrumental independence “is the ability to carry on activities and solve problems in a self-directed manner” and grow into the ability to be mobile (Reisser, p. 509). Focused action results from thinking critically and independently. The healthier focus of interdependence can emerge as autonomy is developed.

The fourth vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships, is the vector that describes the individual moving toward the ability to respond to people as who they are, rather than as an object, basing expectations upon existing stereotypes. Additionally the

capacity of the individual for intimacy increases. Movement is away from a narcissistic stance toward forming honest, responsive, and lasting commitments without conditional regard (Chickering & Reisser, 1980).

The fifth vector, establishing identity, is a vector of discovery. Building upon the other vectors, this vector describes the individual's development toward (Chickering & Reisser, 1980):

(a) comfort with body and appearance, (b) comfort with gender and sexual orientation, (c) a sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context, (d) clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, (e) a sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, (f) self-acceptance and self-esteem, (g) and a personal stability and integration. (Adapted from p. 49)

Chickering and Reisser (1980) noted that "identity hinges on finding out what it means to be a man or a woman and coming to terms with one's sexuality" (p. 49).

The sixth vector, developing purpose, "entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans, and to persist despite obstacles" (Chickering & Reisser, 1980, p. 50).

The seventh and last vector, developing integrity, depends on the emergence of congruency between humanizing values and personal values. The vector is characterized by a process of moving away from automatic and uncompromising application of beliefs toward "balancing one's self-interest with the interest of one's fellow human beings" (Chickering & Reisser, 1980, p. 51). Respecting other points of view, while consciously affirming one's own core values and beliefs, personalizes one's values. In this vector,

connections emerge between rules and the purposes that they were created to serve (Chickering & Reissner, 1980).

#### Identity Development Models Addressing Specific Differences

The models presented by Erikson (1968a; 1980) and Chickering and Reissner (1980) serve as a basis for examining identity development in general; however, specific models have been developed to address specific differences such as race, disability, and sexuality. Reisser (1995) stated in an interview:

In the second edition [of Chickering's identity model, we] also added references to research on identity formation based on ethnic background and sexual orientation .... Theories such as these seem to describe the movement from [a] lack of consciousness about self as a member of a minority group, or [a lack of awareness] about the systems that marginalize or disempower people, to the awareness of self as "other," to experiencing conflict with the dominant majority's values versus "my values" or "my group's values". (p. 509)

The following is an examination of these identity formations which helped inform the topic being researched.

#### *Race-Related Identity Models*

William E. Cross, Jr. (1971; 1995) designed an identity development model for the creation of a positive Black self-image. The Cross model (1995) consists of five stages:

1. Starting with the Pre-Encounter stage, which depicts the old identity or the identity to be changed,

2. The Encounter stage, which defines the events and experiences that cause a person to feel the need for change,
3. The Immersion-Emersion stage, which captures the point of transition between the old and emergent identities,
4. Internalization and,
5. Internalization-Commitment, which outline behaviors, attitudes, and mental health propensities that accompany habituation to the new identity. (p. 97-121)

This model, originally published in 1971, has been used widely in understanding the development of positive identities in Blacks, other racial groups, and beyond. Two models created from Cross's work include Atkinson, Morten, and Sue's (1983) *Minority Identity Development Model* and Helm's (1984; 1989; 1995) *White and People of Color Racial Identity Models*.

Helm's (1984; 1989; 1995) work addressed the void in this area of the study of White racial development. Her theory "describes the racial identity development process of White people" (1995, p. 188). Her development process describes the information-processing strategies for a White person to respond to racial stimuli through contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion-emersion, and autonomous statuses.

Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1983) addressed the identity development of "oppressed people" (p. 35). They observed parallels between the Black experience and that of women and gays. "Women, 'gays,' the aged, the handicapped, and other oppressed groups ... [are] increasingly conscious of themselves as objects of oppression"

(p. 34). Their model addressed the development of those oppressed groups in minority cultures outside the dominate culture. Their model included: (a) conformity stage, (b) dissonance stage, (c) resistance and immersion stage, (d) introspection stage, and (e) synergetic articulation and awareness stage (p. 39).

This model can be applied to the identity development of a broad range of oppressed individuals. More specific development models for individual oppressed groups have also been created.

#### *Disability Specific Identity Development*

Beyond the broad identity development models for the dominant culture and broadly defined oppressed groups, Gill (1997) defined the types of integration a disabled individual works through during identity development. She described the following types of integration: (a) coming to feel we belong (integrating into society), (b) coming home (integrating with the disability community), (c) coming together (internally integrating our sameness and differentness), and (d) coming out (integrating how we feel with how we present ourselves) (p. 42-45).

#### *Gay Men Identity Development*

Other researchers have identified stages in the identity development of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. Westfall (1998) pointed out that the development of the gay college man, for example, “creates developmental tasks/dilemmas not faced by non-gay students” (p. 1). While similarities exist between sexual minority development models and other models, the early stages differ. The sexual minority’s difference is invisible and the individual must acknowledge their membership in an “oppressed minority group” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 509).



Cass is “widely cited” (Fassinger, 1991, p. 167) for her model of Homosexual Identity Formation (HIF). Cass’ (1979) gay identity development model provided a theoretical foundation to approach the delicate subjects being examined. She recognized the significance of both psychological and social factors in the formation of homosexual identity. Cass proposed six stages of “homosexual” identity development. The overall concept of self becomes fully integrated. This identity is formed through the interaction of stability and change as a result of the “congruency or incongruency” of the individual’s interpersonal environment (Cass, 1979, p. 220). The stages Cass defined are as follows:

1. Identity Confusion. In pre-stage 1 the individual identifies as being heterosexual. The individual’s intrapersonal system strongly supports the notion that he or she is heterosexual and part of the sexual majority. During stage 1, he or she has a conscious awareness that homosexuality has relevance to themselves – not externally, but internally.
2. Identity Comparison. In pre-stage 2 the individual begins to understand he or she “may be” homosexual and begins to accept the possibility of being homosexual. During stage 2, the individual contemplates making contact with, and makes comparisons to, homosexuals. He or she begins dealing with the social alienation that arises.
3. Identity Tolerance. In pre-stage 3 the individual understands he or she is “probably” homosexual and the self-image is turned further from “heterosexual” and more toward a “homosexual” identity. During stage 3, isolation and alienation from others is dealt with by the “necessary rather than

desirable” contact with other homosexuals (Cass, 1984, p. 151). The extent of the effect of these contacts is impacted by the emotional quality of that contact.

4. Identity Acceptance. In pre-stage 4 the individual comes to confirm his or her identity as a homosexual and forms a commitment to creating a homosexual self-image. During stage 4, there are “continued and increasing contacts with other homosexuals ... [which helps] ... validate and ‘normalize’ homosexuality as an identity and [a] way of life” (Cass, 1979, p. 231). “Passing” can become a routine strategy for compartmentalizing a homosexual way of life when the individual does not experience full legitimization of homosexuality identity.
5. Identity Pride. In pre-stage 5 the individual experiences incongruence between homosexual identity and acceptance of that identity. He or she has an awareness of the differences between self-concept as a homosexual and society’s rejection of that concept. During stage 5, the individual dichotomizes the world into creditable and significant homosexuals, and discredited and insignificant heterosexuals. A combination of “devaluation of heterosexual others” and “feelings of anger” rising from frustration and experiences of alienation occur (Cass, 1979, p. 233).
6. Identity Synthesis. Pre-stage 6 finds the individual realizing the “them versus us” perspective is too simplistic. During stage 6, the individual accepts the possibility of considerable similarity between self and heterosexuals, while accepting the dissimilarity between self and heterosexuals. His or her public

and personal identities become synthesized into one integrated image. It should be noted, at any stage in the above process, an individual may choose not to proceed further in the development process.

This model has been tested (Cass, 1984) for “accuracy or generality” (p. 143). The results indicated a validation of Cass’s stage model. However, small sample size limited the ability to draw conclusions between the gay men and lesbians tested. Cass and other researchers called for supplemental studies. In one such study, Halpin and Allen (2004) proposed the examination of the psychosocial wellness of an individual at the various stages of identity development – using Cass’s model. Other similar models also consider the identity development of gay men as a “social construction” (D’Augelli, 1994, p. 312). D’Augelli’s model of lesbian-gay-bisexual development consists of the following processes: (a) exiting heterosexual identity, (b) developing a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status, (c) developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual social identity, (d) becoming a lesbian-gay-bisexual offspring, (e) developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual intimacy status, and (f) entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community (p. 319).

#### *Identity Development of Lesbians*

Another call for additional study was in researching the identity development of lesbians. McCarn and Fassinger (1996) proposed a model of sexual identity formation for lesbians. They attempted to address the multiple oppressions associated with being both non-heterosexual and female. The model they constructed examines four phases from both an individual identity and a group membership identity perspective. Phases for their inclusive model of sexual minority identity formation are:

1. During the “awareness” phase, the individual has an awareness of her feeling of being different and an awareness of existence of different sexual orientations in people.
2. During the “exploration” phase, the individual begins an exploration of strong/erotic feelings for her same-sex partner(s) and an exploration of attitudes and membership of gay people as a group.
3. During the “deepening/commitment” phase, the individual forms a commitment to understanding herself and a crystallization of life choices concerning sexuality. She also develops a personal commitment to gay people as a group, understanding the oppression and consequences of such.
4. During the “internalization/synthesis” phase, the individual begins a synthesis of same-sex love and choices into overall identity and a synthesis of her identity as a member of a minority group. (Adapted from McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 521)

This model was also tested (Fassinger & Miller, 1996) on a sample of gay men for validity. “Results indicated support for the model, in terms of both individual and group processes as well as phases, and suggested that the model is applicable to gay men” (p. 53). This model gave a foundation to examining the identity development of both gay men and lesbians.

Complementary to the development of gay men and lesbians is the aspect of personal identity versus social identity. McCarn and Fassinger’s (1996) model addressed this distinction; however Cox and Gallois (1996) and Deaux (1993) clarified the importance of the distinction. Unlike stage models, social identity perspectives examine

the societal forces at work during identity development (Cox & Gallious, 1996). Deaux (1993) stated:

*Social identities* [italics original] are those roles or membership categories that a person claims as representative.... *Personal identity* [italics original] refers to those traits and behaviors that the person finds self-descriptive, characteristics that are typically linked to one or more of the identity categories. (p. 6)

Models such as McCarn and Fassinger's provide a foundation for addressing these distinctions.

### *Bisexual Identities*

With the exception of D'Augelli's (1994) model, these models have not addressed bisexuality. Bisexuality is often overlooked, misunderstood, or lumped into the category of gay men and lesbians (Robin & Hamner, 2000). This group has suffered oppression from both the heterosexual and homosexual communities. The heterosexual community includes bisexuals with gay men and lesbians, affording them the same oppressions allocated to gay men and lesbians. Often, even if the homosexual community adds "B" to their organization's title, no real programming exists for bisexuals (Robin & Hamner, 2000).

Pope and Reynolds (1991) after surveying the available literature on bisexuality came to the conclusion that "this lack of information and clear definition has led to myths, misinformation, and exclusion of bisexuality in both literature and the lesbian, gay, and heterosexual communities" (p. 206). Further, these conditions make it difficult for bisexuals to find a supportive community. The establishment of a clear definition of bisexuality begins this process of providing clear information. "Bisexuality is romantic

and sexual interest in or attraction to both men and women” (Robin & Hamner, 2000, p. 247). This definition – simple as it is – merely lays the foundation for examining this oppressed group. Gay men and lesbians are suspicious of individuals reporting to be bisexual, avoiding social interaction and even romantic attractions (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Robin & Hamner, 2000).

Four consistent beliefs regarding bisexuality are (MacDonald, 1982): (a) bisexuality is a real or natural sexuality, (b) bisexuality is transitory, (c) bisexuality is transitional, and (d) bisexuality is a form of denial of one’s homosexuality. The conflicting views and information about bisexuality has lead to the above current state of beliefs prevalent regarding bisexuality. As consideration is given to bisexual individuals as an oppressed group, the complexities of how others view them – and how they view themselves – needs to be understood and taken into account.

Identity development has been shown to progress through stages, phases, or even statuses. It has both social and individual components to its developmental processes. Identity development can be complicated by membership in an oppressed group and even oppression from one oppressed group onto another. With all these factors it is not surprising to find that some individuals choose to conceal their identity or “pass,” while still others reveal that difference. This transitional process is important to explore because of the potential it has to produce delays in the identity developmental processes (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1984).

#### Themes Influencing Identity Development

Identity development can be influenced by many factors – as some have been elaborated on previously – sexual orientation, ableness, etc. There are additional

influences such as when – or if – an individual chooses to reveal their difference and even the effects – and affects – of specific oppressions related to their differences.

### *Revealing of Differences*

A common expression has found its way into our society – “Coming out of the closet.” This expression finds its origin within the gay community (Sedgwick, 1990). “Coming out” is the process of disclosure of an individual’s affectional orientation. This disclosure process facilitates the “shedding of heterosexual identity and its social expectations” (D’Augelli, 1991, p. 140). Individuals in education are particularly faced with possible negative consequences of “coming out.” Sedgwick (1990) described the situation one teacher faced as he lost his position because he had failed to disclose his sexual orientation during the appointment process. However, if the teacher would have disclosed, he would have never been given the assignment. This is a circumstance where he was required to make “a disclosure [which was] at once compulsory and forbidden” (p. 70).

“Coming out” consists of two distinct – but related – tasks of coming out to self and coming out to others (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996; Westfall, 1988). Cohen and Savin-Williams (1996) pointed out that this “coming out” may require the individual to give up a place in dominant society. Sedgwick (1990) explained: “‘The closet’ and ‘coming out,’ now verging on all-purpose phrases for the potent crossing and recrossing of almost any politically charged lines of representation .... The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (p. 71). This “coming out” concept extends beyond gay men. For example, comparisons have been made between gay men “coming out” and the Black liberation movement in the sixties as being their “coming out”

process. “Coming out” can be experienced by individuals other than gay men and lesbians; however, the use of the concept makes more sense with some oppressed groups than others. And it must be pointed out it is never essentially the same, only similar (Sedgwick, 1990).

Those faced with invisible disabilities are confronted with similar challenges as are gay men and lesbians. These individuals must decide whether or not to disclose their concealable differences. This “coming out” separates the individual from the presumed ableness, just as “coming out” separates the gay man or lesbian from presumed heterosexuality (Samuels, 2003). Coming out for a disabled individual can become part of their integration process of how they present themselves (Gill, 1997). Publicly acknowledging a disability has been seen as a declaration that there is nothing “wrong” – as in not being less – with the individual (Kleege, 2002, p. 311).

Although the use of “coming out of the closet” has been extended well beyond its gay origins, it still remains indelibly marked with its concealed homosexual epistemology (Sedgwick, 1990). Westfall (1988) indicated that those who choose not to come out to others, either actively or passively, accept the heterosexual assumption that they are themselves heterosexual. Perhaps it is the safety of these assumptions that encourages individuals to continue to conceal rather than to publicly identify with an oppressed group. Sedgwick (1990) observed that individuals are “coming out” of the closet – the closet which is the very definite definition of gay oppression. Even though other oppressed groups relate and borrow the term “coming out,” it is distinctly and definitively a term which holds significant meaning to gay men. “Oppressed peoples may maintain



hidden consciousness and may not reveal their true selves for reasons of self-protection” (Collins, 1986, p. S23).

### *Oppression*

There are many forms of oppression – racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, classism – not all of which will be elaborated on in this review of the literature. Integral to the concept of all oppression is the objectification of those being oppressed. Rather than perceiving and acting on the ontological nature of all individuals, dominant culture allows the viewing of “certain” individuals ontically – not as beings but as simple objects. This objectification implies continuous attempts by some individuals to dominate and control others (Brittan & Maynard, 1984; Tiryakian, 1968). “Oppression relies on the ability to subdue diversity,” stated Reinharz (1994, p. 181). Brittan and Maynard (1984) observed domination as always involving “the objectification of the dominated ... all forms of oppression imply the devaluation of the subjectivity of the oppressed” (p. 199).

*Privilege.* Understanding oppression includes understanding where the oppression originated. McIntosh (2003) endeavored on a journey to understand privilege:

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege ... I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. (p. 147-148)

She came to the realization, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’

to remain oblivious” (McIntosh, 2003, p. 148). Special provisions, tools, and blank checks were among the invisible forces she found maintaining the systems of White privilege (McIntosh, 2003). These systems of privilege provided the foundation for oppressing those without privilege.

*Minimalization.* One reaction to oppression found in the literature is the practice of trying to minimize the differences of an individual. This minimalization of differences could apply to any oppression; however, a straightforward example is that of race. The term “color-blindness” appears in the literature to describe this situation. Although upon first glance ignoring the color of another individual might sound like a positive act, Applebaum (2005) explained:

First, colour-blindness obscures the positive cultural contributions of race to individual identity and .... Second, colour-blindness not only ignores the positive contributions of racialized groups, but also ignores or denies the systemic harms that people of colour experience. In a world where race still matters, refusing to take race into consideration results in the dismissal of systemic oppression. (p. 283)

Further, not seeing the “color” of an individual – particularly by a White person – is seen as a mechanism for not recognizing the implications of race. It is not seen as the leveling of the playing field, but rather a means to ignore and trivialize differences (Thompson, 1998).

It cannot be assumed that even the enlightened halls of our institutions of higher education are immune from the stereotypes of oppression (Roskelly, 1993). These assumptions include middle class and privileged heterosexual status as the standard

(Langston, 1993). Conversely, the role of higher education is viewed by some classes as a mechanism for converting people from productive lives into “parasitic occupations” (Sumser, 1995). bell hooks (1993) wrote of her experience at Stanford, “Class differences were boundaries no one wanted to face or talk about. It was easier to downplay them...” (p. 101). Her peers even went so far to believe that the lower class people “had no beliefs and values” (hooks, 1993, p. 102).

One poignant group, in the area of differentness by class oppression, is a category of individuals referred to as “white trash.” Newitz and Wray (1997) introduce their book *White Trash: Race and Class in America* with the statement: “Americans love to hate the poor. Lately, it seems there is no group of poor folks they like to hate more than White trash” (p. 1). hooks (2000) observed that poor White people look down upon this even lower class of “White trash,” in some cases more so than upon non-Whites. She described these poor which live in trailer park homes – the territory of the White poor – as the hidden face of poverty. Heilman (2004) found in her study of pre-services teachers, “The lowest status Whites are still typically those who were unable to overcome the inter-generational effects of inferior education, housing, and employment based at least in part on racialized class and cultural prejudices” (p. 69).

Disabled individuals face oppression. They are measured against the standard of able-bodiedness (McReur, 2002). Griscom (2001) examined the case of Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson, a lesbian couple hit by tragedy. Sharon Kowalski was struck in a head-on collision with a drunk driver, leaving her with a severe brain-stem injury. In Griscom’s account she defined ableism as discrimination against disabled persons. While addressing the complexities of the case, Griscom (2001) stated, “It is

sometimes impossible to separate the modes of oppression even for the purpose of analysis. This case makes clear that all the issues work simultaneously and cannot be isolated from each other” (p. 418). Like many oppressions, disability separates the individual from the “normal” and the expected. Similarly, this case involved lesbians, who faced complications because of being separated from expected “normal” heterosexuality.

Studies have been conducted on the influences heterosexism has on gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals (Ragins, Cornwell & Miller, 2003; Smith & Ingram, 2004; Waldo, 1999). These studies have found that tolerance for heterosexism in an organization contributes to “undesirable job-related, health-related, and psychological sequelae” (Waldo, 1999, p. 230). Ragins, Cornwell, and Miller’s (2003) study on heterosexism in the workplace further examined the added influences of racism and sexism, exploring the interplay of multiple oppressions.

*Multiple oppressions.* Surveying the landscape of society, it is readily apparent that there are multiple forms of oppression that can be operational in any one individual at any one time. This study does not propose to trivialize or homogenize these differences. Although similarities exist between the different oppressions experienced amongst the many victims of “isms” – racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, classism – they should not and will not be generalized in this study in such a way to take away from how they are experienced. The similarities among and between some of these oppressions serve as a basis for the approach to this study, but does not imply that any of these similarities in fact are a statement of sameness. hooks (2000) pointed out the

neglect in studying class while looking at race and gender. McEwen (2003a)

summarized:

To examine race without considering gender differences may be dismissive of women's experiences. And, examining issues of social class without considering differences by and intersections with race, gender, and sexual orientation may ignore the unique experiences of People of Color, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons. (p. 224)

The literature clearly points to the complexity of the make up of an individual, encouraging that differences not be minimalized and that one difference should not be highlighted at the expense of another.

As a closing note on oppression, Reinharz (1994) warned of the use of the label "oppressed" for those individuals who may not label themselves as such. She suggested they would be better served by the recognition of their lack of voice. "Voice means having the ability, the means, and the right to express oneself, one's mind, and one's will" (p. 180). Without those abilities, the individual's story is silenced. "Disregard for individual differences is a fundamental ingredient in the dynamics of oppression. Oppression relies on the ability to subdue diversity (p. 181). While many of the people in groups being studied would consider themselves in an "oppressed" category, it was my position to allow for the individual to give voice to how they make meaning of their experience.

#### *Multiple Identity Development*

Reynolds and Pope (1991) explored the complexities of individuals living with multiple oppressions. They found that a biracial individual must face the reality of living

with his or her multiple identities. This reality includes being viewed as a marginal person and dealing with the ambiguity of his or her ethnic identity. These individuals may simply accept the identity assigned to them – identity with both racial groups – or even choose to identify only with a single racial group. Those identifying with a single racial group “may or may not deny the other aspects of her or his racial identity” (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 176). Rejection from either of their races was seen as a possibility for those who chose to integrate their multiple identities.

Jones (1997) found the women in her study “shared a sense that their identities consisted of multiple layers” (p. 380). Her exploration of the multiple dimensions of identity development provided ten key categories of findings:

(a) relative salience of identity dimensions in relations to difference; (b) the multiple ways in which race matters; (c) multiple layers of identity; (d) the braiding of gender with other dimensions; (e) the importance of cultural identifications and cultural values; (f) the influence of family and background experiences; (g) current experiences and situational factors; (h) relational, inclusive values and guiding personal beliefs; (i) career decisions and future planning; and (j) the search for identity. (Jones, 1997, p. 379)

These categories were found to influence one another. Additionally, identity was found to be influenced by both visible and invisible differences. The women in this study resisted what they perceived as “overly simplistic identity labels” (Jones, 1997, p. 384). This resistance was manifested in the pressure one participant felt to be “just one thing” (1997, p. 380). Not surprisingly, the greater number of dimensions of identity the participants perceived in themselves the more complex the process of defining themselves became.

These multiple dimensions result in an ongoing “journey of self discovery” (1997, p. 383).

Like Deaux’s (1993) work, previously discussed, Jones (2000) found the conceptualizations of identity to be defined both internally by self and externally by others. This personal identity is set into the context of an individual’s social identity. Core personal identity, personal attributes, and personal characteristics are developed in the context of: (a) family background, (b) socio-cultural conditions, (c) current experiences, and (d) career decisions and life planning (Jones, 2000, p. 409). Jones (1997; 2000) provided a complementary view of multiple identity development to the general and specific constituent group identity development, the discussion on the public disclosure of any differences, and the specific oppressions being examined by this study.

#### *Marginality and Mattering*

Recognition is one of our basic human needs (Etzioni, 1968). Understanding what it means to matter provides the opportunity to examine questions of feeling as “objects of interest,” “important,” and therefore “wanted” (Rosenburg & McCullough, 1981, p. 166). Schlossberg’s (1989) work on marginality and mattering expressed the need of each person to feel that he or she matters. Thus, examining experiences of mattering provided a means to explore differences.

#### *Authenticity, Development and Desirable Characteristic in Leaders*

Morgaine (1994) detailed the development of authenticity in an individual. She cautioned us that “excessive conformity may encourage the uncritical acceptance of values, beliefs, and assumptions, or *false consciousness* [italics original]” (p. 332) rather than actually facilitating the development of authenticity. Oppression is a challenge to the

development of authenticity, as “oppression nullifies and contradicts all that is genuine and real” (Morgaine, 1994, p. 332). Furthermore Morgaine (1994) stated that oppression is the “antithesis” of authenticity (p. 332).

Being genuine and true to one’s inner self is at the core of authenticity (Rinder & Campbell, 1952; Sartre, 1948) and authenticity is a desirable trait in leaders (Halpin, 1966; Henderson & Hoy, 1983). Authentic leaders stand up to various forces regarding their identity. A constant comparison between their own actions and their “core, internalized values and beliefs” validates this authenticity (Harvey, Martinko & Gardner, 2006, p. 2). When a leader is authentic – true to himself or herself – their leadership can lead to open climates at institutions (Henderson & Hoy, 1983; Novicvic, Harvey, Buckley, Brown & Evans, 2006; Rinder & Campbell, 1952). Leaders in higher education with differences – differences that often come with social stigma – manage those differences in various ways. In fact, many are not “visibly distinguishable” as being different (Button, 2004, p. 470; Goffman, 1963).

Inauthenticity occurs in an individual when they deny or are unable to integrate some facet of life or even the membership in a sub-culture that is or has become part of the whole (Rinder & Champbell, 1952). Noticeably absent from the authenticity literature is any mention of the balance between the risks to one’s basic needs while being authentic. For many individuals there are conflicts between expressing who they are with losing their ability to earn a living if they truly express their differences.

This research was approached with an understanding of identity development – in varied forms – and the challenges an individual may face because of the differences in their life. As mentioned previously these themes were examined to help guide the



research question, not predetermine the outcome or results of this research. Additionally, the following are previously conducted studies in related topic areas that add a better understanding to the questions examined.

#### Studies of Individuals with Concealable Differences

Studies have been conducted of leaders with concealable differences and on individuals – although not specifically leaders – with concealable differences. As the purpose of this study is to explore the essence of the experience of leaders with concealable differences, the following studies were chosen from the literature to help inform that exploration.

Senior administrative leadership studies, although not specifically ones in higher education, include those by Coon (2001), Bringaze and White (2001), Arwood (2006), and Fraynd and Capper (2003). Also, there have been studies of individuals in higher education with concealable differences including those by Dilley (2002), Ben-Ari (2001), Andreas (2004), and Renn and Bilodeau (2003). Most of these studies – although valuable – do not concentrate on senior leaders in higher education with concealable differences. Only Andreas' (2004) study focused on leaders in higher education; she examined five lesbian leaders serving in community colleges within Washington State.

The issue of diversity is highly valued in the education academy, thus it is important to understand the contribution of leaders with concealable differences to the vitality of the university. This research study makes an important contribution toward understanding a group of leaders – leaders in higher education with concealable differences – who have previously been largely ignored.

These studies of individuals with concealable differences explore leadership development, managing identity, the glass ceiling, and stigma. Additionally, these studies have specific implications for this research.

### *Leadership Development*

A mixed methodology dissertation study of gay and lesbian leaders was conducted by Coon (2001) on 50 high-profile, openly gay men and lesbians. These individuals were leaders of large, nationally known, profit and non-profit corporations and organizations. His study was primarily quantitative in nature, using a leadership inventory survey instrument to measure the leadership characteristics of a set of leaders. These leaders were geographically distributed from Seattle to New York City with a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds in a cross-section of occupations. The purpose of his study was to identify the leadership characteristics and values common to openly gay men and lesbians who are high profile leaders. His study examined how being gay or lesbian impacts leadership and explored those influences in the development of the leaders.

The findings of Coon's (2001) study included how: (a) coming out significantly impacted the leadership experience, (b) sexual orientation was perceived to positively impact leadership, (c) a high degree of competence existed, and (d) inclusiveness and diversity were highly valued and limitations were perceived to exist for gay and lesbian leaders. He further stated, that despite the progress, "heterosexism and homophobia are still prevalent" (p. 135). Gay men and lesbians can indeed possess potential leadership gifts and strengths even though that idea is not generally accepted.

Renn and Bilodeau's (2003) qualitative study explored the coming out process for student leaders in higher education. Seven students identified as having held a position of leadership in the campus community participated in this study. Leadership identity development was examined as it related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identity development. Their study found that overall "involvement in leadership and activism specific to LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender] identity promoted the development of leadership identity" (p. 21).

A study (Bringaze & White, 2001) of 262 leaders and role models from the lesbian community, examining the factors contributing to the healthy development of identity in lesbian leaders was conducted using participants who were selected from those with affiliations with national gay/lesbian/bisexual organizations and/or listed in *The Gay and Lesbian Address Book* (1995). The study consisted of a 47 item questionnaire created to provide measures of psychosocial development and psychological adjustment. The instrument was reported to have a high reliability factor.

Bringaze and White's (2001) study found that the process of coming out was assisted by associating with or seeking other gay men and lesbians, using self-help resources, and participating in counseling. Also of significant importance in the coming out process was the influence of family, religion, and spirituality. Their study was limited by its focus on leaders and role models, although that limitation is helpful to informing this research study.

Leadership development was seen in these studies to be significantly influenced by the "coming out" process. This process was found to contribute favorably to the

development of leaders in spite of the risks involved in exposing the individual's differentness.

### *Managing Identity*

The experiences of two gay men and two lesbians who served as K-12 administrators were studied by Fraynd and Capper (2003). They selected participants where one of each gender was "passing" and the other of the same gender was still in the closet. Each of the four participants was interviewed for two hours. The research questions for this study were:

1. In what ways are these administrators complicit with or do they disrupt sexual politics and power, and in so doing, how is (hetero)sexuality produced, disrupted, or reproduced by them?
2. In what ways are these leaders empowered and constrained in their work?
3. How and to what extent do these administrators and (hetero) sexual-identified educators engage in normalizing strategies with each other? (p. 87-88)

This qualitative study found that identity is experienced along a continuum; that the participants managed this identity by their degree of public disclosure; and that there was a relationship between sexual identity and public disclosure. One cautionary note was that the methods employed to manage identity could influence how heteronormality – the assumption that everyone is heterosexual – was either reproduced or disrupted. Fraynd and Capper (2003) went as far as to say that even the act of remaining closeted – concealing of homosexuality – because of "the fear of disclosure resulted in reproducing of heteronormative power" (p. 86).

Griffin's (1991) Identity Management strategies were discussed in Fraynd and Capper's (2003) study, indicating that identity management occurs across a continuum of (a) passing, (b) covering, (c) being implicitly out, and (d) being explicitly out. Fraynd and Capper found that:

the ability to exert sovereign power over the community and harness the sexual agenda was not dependent on the degree to which the leader was open about his/her sexuality to him- or herself or to others, but rather was dependent on the leader's self-perception of his/her own effectiveness and confidence in his/her staff and community's perception of the leader's effectiveness. (p. 116-117)

*Queer Man on Campus* (Dilley, 2002) is a study of the history of non-heterosexual college men, 1945-2000. Dilley collected data through interviews with non-heterosexual college men who attended college between 1945 and 2000, studying memoirs, studying historical documents from selected postsecondary institutions, studying journalistic accounts of non-heterosexuals, and studying other histories of the lives of non-heterosexual college men.

This examination of identity formation for non-heterosexual college students highlighted the following identity types: Homosexual, Gay, Closeted, Queer, "Normal," Parallel, and Denying (Dilley, 2002, p. 200-201). He observed these identity types of non-heterosexuals in the context in higher education from the perspective of campus environments, gay student organizations, fraternity life, sexual activity, goals of being "normal," emotional attractions, and media influences. This examination of individuals with concealable differences provides a frame of reference for looking at varied

experiences of identity and the influences that living with a concealable difference can make.

Further, Andreas' (2004) phenomenological dissertation study conducted with five lesbian community and technical college administrators explored leadership experiences, values, priorities, practices, and identity negotiation among these leaders. She found major influences in their experiences included supportive versus non-supportive environments, the role of mentorship, the commitment to multicultural equity and fairness in their institutions, the participants' own educating of other lesbians on issues and lifestyles, whether the leader chose to disclose or not, and how each chose to build relationships.

A theme of these studies was the active participation of each individual in the management of his or her identity. This management occurred along a continuum and was influenced by the amount of public disclosure that occurred. Each participant negotiated his or her identity disclosure based on environment.

### *The Glass Ceiling*

The "glass ceiling" for gay men and lesbians is seen as a loss of benefit to both the employee and the employers. Coon (2001) explained that many gay and lesbian leaders who have come out have "found the fear associated with coming out worse than the reality" (p. 33-34) in spite of the reluctance of major company chief executive officers to place a homosexual on management committees.

Arwood's (2006) quantitative dissertation study of 111 leaders reported on demographic and work experience data, career information, future plans, and general observations. He examined literature which had a general relationship to data from the

glass ceiling survey he had modified to explore potential barriers to the career growth of gay men and lesbians. His results suggested that gay men and lesbians do face a “pink” ceiling – a barrier to career growth specific to gay men and lesbians – in the workplace. He suggested further study with a change of paradigm; such a study could include a qualitative study which would yield more rich and in-depth data.

“Glass ceilings” are both a fear and a reality. Individuals face both the fear of a barrier and the real barriers themselves. These realities or perceptions of a barrier create limitations affecting the individual and their contribution to an organization.

### *Stigma*

Stigma serves to limit the potential of those toward whom it is directed. A stigma can be used to hold back an individual from reaching his or her potential. This leads to the examination of the attitudes toward individuals with differences and the perceptions of those attitudes by people with differences.

Heterosexism is an attitude that espouses the view that non-heterosexuality is flawed and “at the core of heterosexism is the same kind of prejudice and intolerance that kept women from voting until the 1920s; and African Americans from having equal access to buses, restaurants, and drinking fountains until the 1960s” (Coon, 2001, p. 26). Coon posed a broad question: “Assuming all other position criteria were met, what would prevent an openly lesbian woman from serving as the president of a public university or prevent an openly gay man from being appointed to a federal judgeship?” (p. 2). He went on to state: “For those marginalized it is the perception of being on the outside, looking in; the sense of differentness, of not fitting commonly accepted social norms; the reality

of being excluded, whether from social acceptance or economic opportunity” (Coon, 2001, p. 46).

Attitudes toward homosexuality – using the “Index of Homophobia” (IHP) – were measured in a study of 235 higher education faculty in social work, psychology, and education departments (Ben-Ari, 2001). He found “low-grade homophobic” attitudes with statistically significant differences among the three departments. This finding was significant as the very academic departments whose charge was to train helping professionals were found to have negative attitudes toward some of those seeking assistance. Hence, heterosexism and homophobia serve as examples of stigma.

#### *Implications of These Studies*

Coon’s (2001) study has several implications on this research study as it noted a general sparseness of leadership studies on gay men and lesbians in leadership. Coon examined in great detail the value that gay men and lesbians bring to leadership roles. He helped lay the foundation for study in other largely ignored areas such as those related to my exploration into leaders with concealable differences, the concept of marginality, the persistence of glass ceilings, and the normalizing which affects gay men and lesbians in leadership roles.

The examination of the “coming out” process by Bringaze and White (2001) provided insights into how that process was experienced among a number of lesbian leaders. As the participants in this research study actively manage their identity, some concealed their differences while others experienced varying degrees of “outness.” “Coming out” was underscored as a major influence of the leaders studied.



The implications of Arwood's (2006) work on this research study include the recognition and acknowledgement of the limitations faced by individuals with concealable differences. As just mentioned, he expressed the need for further exploration into those limitations through an alternative paradigm, such as the approach of this qualitative study. Given his recognition of the limitations that his chosen paradigm had on his study, it is important to note that my research has the advantage of being constructed in such a way to illuminate the nuances of the experiences of leaders in higher education with concealable differences.

The differences of the four leaders studied by Fraynd and Capper (2003) highlighted the research questions for my study, allowing them to be viewed from multiple perspectives, thus yielding a thorough description of the experiences in terms of participants' similarities and also of their uniqueness. Fraynd and Capper's study was used as an aide to this approach of learning the lived experiences of leaders with concealable differences.

The issues and concerns highlighted by Dilley's (2002) study of individuals with differences in a higher educational setting yielded identity types that served to inform my research on the possible identity types that occurred. These identity types also lay groundwork for looking at other concealable differences. An individual with other differences could well be closeting, denying, or appearing normal.

Set in higher education, Ben-Ari's (2001) study provided insight into the possible views of individuals with concealable differences within that context. As questions were grounded in my research study, Ben-Ari's study was utilized to understand some of the issues faced by leaders in higher educational institutions. Likewise, Andreas' (2004)

study informed this research study by providing insight into the issues faced by leaders in higher education with concealable differences by successfully highlighting the lived experience of these leaders. And, finally, Renn and Bilodeau's (2003) study brings to the forefront the importance of leadership development in college age individuals.

### Summary of Literature

These developmental models and studies served to inform my research study. Each model and study presented previously adds insight into exploring the nuances to the approach and implementation of the study in the life experiences of leaders in higher education with concealable differences. Learning from their findings, successes, and limitations enabled my study to further their work and address related areas.

Absent from the literature is any specific exploration into the lived experiences – and the meanings attached to those experiences – of leaders in higher education with a range of concealable differences. The models presented illustrated the commonality among individuals with concealable differences – “coming out,” oppression, management of identity, etc. – however, the existing studies have only examined gay men and lesbians. My study examined leaders with concealable differences including gay men and lesbians, poor socio-economic background, and disability. The numerous challenges and insights provided by the models and studies presented provided a framework for this study into leaders in higher education with concealable differences.

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

*Dialogue is nothing but the mutual stimulation of thought.*

*Conversation a process of coming to an understanding.*

*Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says.*

(Gadamar, 1992. p. 188, 385)

Laying the Groundwork

This phenomenological study explored the essence of the experiences of leaders in higher education with concealable differences. “Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research methodology to study the nature of lived experience” (Arminio, 2001, p. 241). This systematic approach was used to uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of the lived experience of these leaders (van Manen, 1990). This research strives to understand and illuminate the nuances of the lived experiences of these individuals. van Manen (1990) explained:

Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

Thus, this research gathered an understanding of the meanings ascribed to the experiences of leaders with concealable differences who serve in academies. This understanding is not impractical; it is hoped that this study contributed to the understanding of leaders with concealable differences in academia for the advancement of the students served.

The gathering of this understanding began by engaging in dialogue with the participants. These conversations were designed to produce an understanding of their experience and to allow the reader to “become more experienced ourselves” (van Manen, 1990, p. 62). Using the interaction that occurred during these dialogues, I explored the nuances in the meanings of the essence of these leaders’ lived experiences (Giddings & Wood, 2001; Kvale, 1996;). van Manen (1990) explained essence: “A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way” (p. 36). It is the intent of phenomenology to interpret conversations of the lived experiences.

Before the details of methodology can be established, I need to clearly define the worldview used to approach the research questions. Guba and Lincoln (1994) wrote, “Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontological and epistemologically fundamental ways” (p. 105). Research design begins with the phenomenon wanting to be explored. The worldview from which the research emerges must be firmly in place before questions of methodology can be addressed.

## Worldview

Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined paradigm as a set of basic beliefs that represent our worldview. These beliefs define for an individual the nature of the “world” and the individual’s place in it. Further, these beliefs define the relationship of that world and its parts to that individual. These beliefs include the nature of reality, the relationship between the inquirer and the known, and the manner in which people gain or have knowledge of the world – and know the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The terms for these concepts are: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology is the study of *Being*; epistemology is “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3); and methodology is the approach to new or acquired understanding. Together these concepts form the beliefs that create a view of the world and our relationship to it. The epistemology has to be consistent with the research question being explored (Crotty, 1998). Each of these concepts must be compatible with the others. For this study, I decided upon an epistemology that will be consistent with learning the essence of the lived experiences of individuals.

## Epistemology

There are several applicable major perspectives on how individuals gain new knowledge. Most notable in mainstream research are: positivism and constructionism. Put simply, these two perspectives exemplify divergent approaches to understanding the world. “Positivism is objectivist through and through. From the positivist viewpoint, objects in the world have meaning prior to, and independently of, any consciousness of them” (Crotty, 1998, p. 26-27). Objectivism is the nature of reality – the ontology – of positivist thought. While examining social phenomena, positivist thought seeks the reality

– the facts or causes – of those phenomena in a detached objective fashion (Patton, 2002; Glesne, 1999). Rather than verify facts, through a process called “falsification,” post-positivism takes a hypothesis and then rigorously tries to prove it wrong (Crotty, 1998). For example, a million or even a billion white swans would not prove that all swans are white, but the existence of only one black swan would prove that not all are white (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In contrast, constructivist theorists feel strongly that positivist theorists do not account for the meaning that humans have constructed around an object. “Human behavior, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106). Crotty (1998) viewed positivism as not addressing the everyday world we experience as the “uncertain, ambiguous, idiosyncratic, changing world we know at first hand” (p. 28). Positivism and post-positivism address realities that exist outside, without dependence upon, the interpretations of the mind. The realities constructed by our understandings that depend solely on interpretations are not addressed by this epistemology.

Understanding, from a constructionist point of view, is created by humans as we interact with the world we are interpreting. These interactions do not produce true or valid “facts,” but instead produce useful interpretations and understandings (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ontology of constructionism is interpretivist – that reality is socially constructed (Glesne, 1999). Constructivism looks at the unique experience individuals have while “engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them” (Crotty, 1998, p. 79). Glesne (1999) underscored the opportunity for the interpretivist

researcher to have personal involvement and to express an “empathic understanding” of individuals (p. 6).

Positivism and post-positivism are well suited for testing hypotheses; however, reality constantly changes within individuals. The meanings associated with experiences are constantly being interpreted and re-interpreted. The interpretive framework of the constructivist perspective gave this study the foundation to explore the meaning of these leaders’ lived experiences.

### Methodology

Just as epistemology and ontology have been chosen in congruence with the research being conducted, likewise the methodology is aligned with the research purpose. The qualitative research process requires that the researcher understands his or her place in history and tradition, that the researcher understands self and other, and the researcher understands the ethics and politics of research. Theoretical paradigms and perspectives, research strategies, methods of collection and analysis, and understanding the art, practices, and politics of interpretation and presentation have to be defined and understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research is not simply interviewing; the researcher must also interpret the beliefs and experiences of the participants (Janesick, 2000; Jones, 2002). A methodology is more encompassing than the methods it may use to accomplish data gathering; it is a strategy on how to approach the entire study. Phenomenology, the chosen methodology, is a qualitative methodology oriented in a constructivist and interpretive paradigm. The worldview it espouses allows for the exploration of the lived experiences and the meanings individuals attach to those experiences. The phenomenological approach was the methodology used to gain a deeper

understanding of social phenomena and the nature and meaning of the experiences of leaders in higher education with concealable differences (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology explores the “very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is – and without which it could not be what it is” and calling the often overlooked into question (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Phenomenology can be combined with hermeneutics, which is etymologically derived from a Greek word meaning “to interpret” or “to understand” (Crotty, 1998, p. 88). Hermeneutic phenomenology can be used to interpret the meaning of a lived experience. This is accomplished through an examination of transcripts or other written descriptions of the experience under study. Hermeneutic phenomenological research consists of the interplay of the following six research activities (van Manen, 1990):

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintain a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30)

#### Social Theories

As a phenomenological study, an *a priori* decision was made to have a strong philosophical theoretical perspective established – but to not have “distinct social science theory” – to frame the study (Cresswell, 1998, p. 86; Jones, et al., 2006). Summaries of



social theory which will help inform the study are included, but were not used to frame the research questions or the strategies for determining the analytic approach. These theories will assist in relating the results of this research with previous understandings of the topics discovered.

### *Bricoleur*

As I considered all the different approaches and aspects on my approach to this study, I was struck by the concept of a “bricoleur.” A bricoleur was described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 4) as a “Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person.” They continued on to describe different aspects of a bricoleur which resonated with the goal to identify a set of representations of this experience using a number of diverse approaches. The approaches used included conversations and introspective self-reflections in the context of understanding different social theories.

### *Post-Modern Theory*

Social theory provides grounding for our view of social life within our world (Crotty, 1998). Theory can take the complex and make it simple, find connections with the random, and bring order to the chaotic (McEwen, 2003b). Perhaps extreme, Ashworth (1999) described a study of which the researchers were so concerned about the possibility of previous research distorting their study that they did not perform a literature review until after the analysis was complete. The inclusion of identity development models in this study is not done without a cautionary note. Their inclusion was to inform the research question, not to dictate the analysis of this study.

Descriptions of post-modern theory, including feminist, queer, and critical race theory are included to help inform the methodological approach of this study and also to

bring understanding to the subjects of the study. Broido and Manning (2002) wrote “reality is made rather than existing *a priori* [italics added]” (p. 438). This concept is consistent with the qualitative approach being taken by this study – wanting to discover the reality of the lived experiences of the participants. Broido and Manning stated that post-modern theories focus on identity, power, and oppression. These topics were covered in the literature review in order to help inform this study. As more than one theory can help inform a particular research question, I present these here to not only inform the topic, but also the methodological approach to this study.

### *Feminist Theory*

Feminist theory presumes “that gender is [a] socially constructed, historically changing reality” (Jones, 1989, p. 139). This history includes gender domination within a patriarchal society (Cresswell, 2007). “Qualitative feminist research first raises questions about bias and perspective” and then raises concern over the “presentation of participants’ voices in the research findings” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 442). Reflexivity, discussed later in this chapter, provides the researcher with a means of addressing bias and perspective, while the interpretive nature of a phenomenological study enables the voices of the participants to be heard.

### *Queer Theory*

Queer theory proposes a “focus not so much on specific populations as much as on sexual categorization processes and their deconstruction” (Gamson 2000. p. 349). McEwen (2003b) saw this destruction as an undoing, not a destroying. Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) is seen as the “founding text of Queer Theory” (Gamson, 2000, p. 354). She argued “that an understanding of virtually any aspect of

modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 1).

### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory examines the social situation of individuals, but more than that, it endeavors to bring about change. Practitioners of Critical Race Theory assert that racism permeates “all aspects of human interactions, [and the] ideologies constructed about race influence individuals, institutions, and society” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 440). Ignoring racial differences – being “colorblind” – as discussed in the Literature Review of this paper, is seen as a minimalization of the differences in power between races. Critical Race Theory informs this study by raising my sensitivity to the influences these existing constructions about race – or other differences – may have on my interpretations of the participant’s meaning of their experiences.

Each of these theories served as a lens through which I looked at the experiences of this group of leaders. These lenses provided me a perspective on these leaders’ experience of being different. The power relationships, the impacts of dominant culture, and the cost of oppression all influenced individual’s lives and helped shape their experiences.

### Methods

It may appear that I have made the mistake of committing “methodolarty” which is defined by Janesick (2000, p. 390) as the “preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told.” Significant effort was spent to define epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies that provided

the platform to gather and tell the leaders' story. Now that the methodological approach to learning the essence of the experiences of leaders in higher education with concealable differences has been defined, the specific methods used to gather their story can be established. This necessary foundation allows for the discussion of the actual methods of data collection. The chosen qualitative paradigm, the epistemology, the associated ontology, and methodology serve to create the groundwork required for the successful use of dialogues with the participants to capture their lived experiences. The texts created from these conversations formed the transcripts used in the hermeneutic analysis.

### *Participants*

In order to explore the essence of the experience of leaders with concealable differences, thirteen participants were chosen from higher educational institutions of various sizes, geographic locations, and academic missions. Ryan and Bernard (2000) suggested a minimum of six participants when a researcher is trying to understand the essence of an experience. This purposeful selection targeted information-rich individuals, who are senior level administrators with concealable differences. Some of the participants were identified using social networking – as some portion of the participants had not chosen to reveal his or her difference publicly. Snowball or chain sampling and opportunistic or emergent sampling allowed for the inclusion of potential participants suggested by academic leaders who knew other individuals that made good candidates for participation. Throughout the selection process I remained open to the inclusion of participants that were not considered during the design of the study (Patton, 2002; Cresswell, 2007; Glesne, 1999). For example, the inclusion of HIV positive status was

not considered as a concealable disability, but one potential participant self-selected that category for himself during the recruitment process.

### *Dialogues*

Human interaction, in the form of dialogues, was used to gather the information needed to understand the participant's reality (Jourard, 1968). The word "interview" was purposefully not used. "Interview" conjures up images of a sterile room, where someone with a pen asks questions, jotting down notes, recording the response to the stimuli given to their subject. In contrast, the intent of this study was to create a situation in which the participants were able to express the meanings of their lived experience. This required a comfortable setting and an environment where they felt safe to express themselves. This is not to say I am proposing mere talk, as dialogue "differs from talk or conversation in several important ways....talk often is not important to the participants.... A precondition for dialogue, therefore, is that all participants see the discourse as important" (Gitlin, 2000, p. 98-99).

Gitlin (2000) stated, "dialogue does not pit one actor against another but rather enables participants to work together to understand the subject being discussed (p. 99). The goal was not to use a method such as interviewing – or even dialoguing – to generate 1,000 pages of transcripts to analyze. The goal was to employ a method to gather relevant knowledge, co-authored – rather than collected – in order to allow for the creation of a narrative describing the essence of the experience of these leaders (Kvale, 1996). Engaging in dialogues with the participants is in alignment with the goals of this research, established in the paradigm and continuing throughout the design and execution of the study (Moustakas, 1990).

The introductory dialogue took place in-person at a location convenient and comfortable to the participant. Sufficient time was set aside for an extensive dialogue to occur. The invitation to the participant outlined the time required for participation in the study. These initial dialogues lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The initial conversation concentrated on experiences – “Please tell me about your experiences” – and as comfort level grew turned to the meanings ascribed to those experiences – “What did those experiences mean to you?” I strove to encourage this comfort by developing rapport, engendering trust, and establishing a setting of neutrality. Questions such as (a) “Please tell me more about...,” (b) “What does that mean to you?,” and (c) “Is it possible to give me an example?” were used to elicit deeper responses to the experiences discussed. The following day a brief contact – via e-mail – was made to allow for any additional insights, thoughts, or clarifications the participant may have had to offer me.

After the first dialogue, each participant was asked to respond at their convenience to the question: “Tell me about a time when your difference(s) impacted your professional life.” The response to this question was gathered over the phone, or in person. The participants were asked to tell how this experience changed them, how they dealt with the issue, and their thoughts about the experience.

A follow-up dialogue was conducted that allowed for clarifications and continued discussion. These follow-up conversations occurred in-person when possible or over the phone. This interaction provided the opportunity to ask all participants questions about topics that came up in some conversations but not all during the first dialogue with the participants. Issues discussed by some participants but not by others were addressed at that time.

### *Member Checking*

On-going dialogue with the participants occurred as needed for clarifications. Member checks of findings were accomplished via e-mail, phone, or in-person. Member checks are “one of the ways in which researchers can check their own subjectivity and ensure the trustworthiness” or goodness of the study (Jones, 2002, p. 469). Member checking included the sharing of interpretations and findings to ensure their accuracy (Cresswell, 2007; Glesne, 1998). In phenomenological studies “the participants’ ability to authenticate the findings is the primary means for assuring that the researcher understood and deepened the meaning of the experiences that represented the participants” (Jones, et al, 2006, p. 99). It is imperative that “the participants recognize themselves in a story being written that includes their own view as well as the views of all those others involved in the research” (Jones, 2002, p. 469).

### *Rapport, Trust, and Neutrality*

Glesne (1999) spoke of rapport as “a distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism that primarily serves the interest of the researcher” (p. 96). I would add that rapport serves to facilitate deep, meaningful dialogue. Self-disclosure elicits disclosure (Jourard, 1959). In the dialogue process where I, as the primary investigator, share an experience, it is hoped that disclosure would “inspire and evoke richer, fuller, more comprehensive depictions” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47). Care was taken to ensure that the focus of the dialogue did not center on the researcher’s disclosures, but remained focused on the participant’s experiences, and the meanings of those experiences (J. L. Arminio, personal communication, January 22, 2007). Neutrality was maintained to allow

the participant to say anything and not result in the evoking of either favor or disfavor; what a participant said did not alter what I thought about the individual (Patton, 2002).

### *Bracketing, Reflexivity, and Self-Dialogue*

Bracketing (which can be defined as distancing oneself from what is being studied) was practiced, however, as a phenomenological investigator no attempt was made to create an absolute absence of presuppositions, but an awareness of them (Kvale, 1996). Ashworth (1999) explained the purpose of bracketing as “facilitating entry to the life-world, not as a requirement that *nothing* be presupposed [italic original]” (p. 720). Reflexive examination during the study helped me understand my relationship to the phenomenon under investigation. Patton stated “being reflexive involves self-questioning and self-understanding ... an ongoing examination of *what I know* and *how I know it* [italics original]” (p. 64).

My own experiences and the meaning of those experiences were reflexively accounted for – not unlike the heuristic methods outlined by Moustakas and Douglass through self-dialogue journaling (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990). I sought to discover the essential meanings of my own experiences in relation to the phenomena under study. Through self-dialogue, I explored my own experiences as a leader with concealable differences (Janesick, 2000; McEwen, 2003b). These journals assisted me in recognizing the meanings associated with my lived experiences and managing the influence they had on the meanings which emerged – or not – from the participant’s experiences.



## Analysis

Analysis began during the dialogues with the participants. Kvale (1996) encouraged researchers to push the interpretation forward into the sessions with the participants. So, this interpretation began even during the dialogues. For example making a statement like: “I understand that the meaning of what you just said is ...” to a participant during a dialogue allowed me to receive immediate feedback on whether the meaning understood was the meaning the participant intended. Kvale (1996) went as far as to say, “It is often overlooked that leading questions are also necessary parts of many questioning procedures.... Deliberately leading questions are today probably applied too little in qualitative research interviews” (p. 158). Being sure to ask singular questions and questions with presuppositions helped the participant to provide simple and direct answers (Patton, 2002). These questions were formed with integrity and honesty, formed to encourage the participant to share their story – the meaning of their experiences.

### *Transcription*

Just as dialogue with the participants is part of the analysis process, so was the transcription process. The production of textual transcripts from repeated listening and reading of the transcripts is a vital part of the research process (Mishler, 2000; Silverman, 2000). Glesne (1999) suggested that not everything on the recording needs transcribed – prudent judgment should be exercised. However, I preferred to err on the side of transcribing too much, rather than too little, and transcribed all interactions except for such tangential portions of conversations dealing with future scheduling, travel, and other non-study related personal exchanges.

### *Hermeneutic Circle*

Simply having a dialogue with the participants does “not ensure that the research is qualitative; the qualitative researcher must also interpret the beliefs and behaviors of participants” (Janesick, 2000, p. 387). Jones, et al. (2006) described the process of analyzing the text, as more than a simple recounting of what was said, it needs to move beyond simple rephrasing into a broadening of “our understanding of what was said, what it means, and its implications” (p. 129). Further, they explained that analysis needs to expand “beyond reporting on what was said. Rather the text is interpreted, linking points, examining the relationships, illuminating beyond simplistic understanding” (p. 88).

The first step of the hermeneutic circle was the identification of “basic units of analysis” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780). As the researcher, I then begin the process of discovering “parallel trajectories” (Mishler, 2000, p. 129) from these “unloosened” (Jones, et al., 2006, p. 87) bits of data. These trajectories became themes. Arminio (2001) continued reading the transcripts for her study, even after being familiar with them in order to find examples of themes, describing the themes as being woven into the fabric of the phenomenon. This process is “an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding ... relating parts to wholes, and wholes to parts” (Patton, 2002, p. 497). This process continued as “understanding the whole through grasping its parts, and comprehending the meaning of parts through divining the whole” (Crotty, 1998, p. 92).

### *Identifying Themes*

The following is an adaptation of Kvale (1996) and Raditzky’s (1970) seven “Hermeneutical Cannons of Interpretation”:

1. First, is a continuous back and forth process between the parts and the whole, spiraling into the deepness of the meaning (Kvale, 1996).
2. The interpretation of meaning ends when one has reached a “good Gestalt.” This results in an inner unity of text free of contradictions and an interpretation that is maximally good (Kvale, 1996; Raditzky, 1970).
3. A testing of interpretation of the part against the global meaning of the text must be undertaken (Kvale, 1996).
4. The text must be understood from within itself, establishing meaning autonomously (Kvale, 1996; Raditzky, 1970).
5. The researcher must be sensitive to the nuances of meaning expressed, finding knowledge from the themes of the text (Kvale, 1996).
6. Interpretation is not without presuppositions. The researcher must be aware of personal presuppositions and modes of influence (Kvale, 1996).
7. Interpretation involves innovation and creativity (Kvale, 1996).

These canons helped to inform the hermeneutical analysis of the text. Specifically the first speaks to what Ryan and Bernard (2000) described as “concentric circles, each level corresponding to a different unit of influence” (p. 783). Raditzky (1970) described this process as “tacking between the global meaning and that of the parts” (p. 26). The tacking – as the term used for a sailboat moving to and fro against the wind – moved the interpretation deeper into the meaning of the text. This process continued until the themes were fully identified. Once themes were identified, carefully chosen verbatim segments of text – were set aside as “exemplars” of the understandings found of the meaning of the

lived experience of a leader in higher education with concealable differences (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 784).

### *Finding Nothing*

During the initial stages of designing this study, the thought occurred to me: What if I find nothing? What if all the preparing, all the dialogues, all the transcribing, all the analyzing yields nothing? It seems that I am not the only person who has ever asked that question. Patton (2002) addressed this by saying it is not possible to find “nothing” during a qualitative phenomenological research study. The very process includes gathering an individual’s reflective thoughts, recording them, and reporting them. “That is much more than nothing” (Patton, 2002, p. 500).

### Interpreting

Beyond gathering themes, the deeper meaning of those themes must be interpreted. It should be noted that this interpretation is a result of the story being told through the researcher. I, as the researcher, selected the themes, and ascribed the deeper meanings to those themes. The resulting story is the participants’ story, but their story told through me. Interpretation creates an explanation that “mediates between interpreted meanings and the thing toward which the interpretations point” (van Manen, 1990, p. 26). This mediation is supported by inclusion of examples from the participants and by clearly identifying the thought processes behind not only the selection of the themes, but the meanings attached to those themes. The interpretation “broadens and deepens our understanding of what is said, what it means, and its implications” (Jones, et al., 2006, p. 129). The experiences being interpreted through writing involve a complex process of

writing and rewriting – “re-thinking, re-flecting, [and] re-cognizing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 131).

### *Writing and Re-writing*

Writing and re-writing play a role beyond the creation of the text for the final story. It is part of the process of interpreting the meanings of the experiences of the leaders under study. “Writing does not merely enter the research process at a final step or stage,” said van Manen (1990, p. 120). The entire process is permeated by writing (van Manen, 1990):

1. Writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know.
2. Writing distances us from the lifeworld, yet it also draws us more closely to the lifeworld.
3. Writing decontextualizes thought from practice and yet it returns thought to praxis.
4. Writing abstracts our experiences of the world, yet it also concretizes our understanding of the world.
5. Writing objectifies thought into print and yet it subjectifies our understanding of something that truly engages us. (Adapted from p. 127-129)

This process of writing and rewriting was integral to the process of discovery. It is the discovery of the subject and discovery of the self (Lincoln & Guba 2000; Richardson, 2000).

### *Construction of Their Story*

The lived experiences of these leaders from higher educational institutions were constructed into a story through the examination of the meaning of the themes discovered. External reflection on the themes identified and the meanings attached to those themes was accomplished through ongoing review by peers and dialogue with colleagues (Glesne, 1998). As this story was crafted, understandings emerged and were written with “thick descriptions” that allowed the associations and contexts to be included (Hodder, 2000, p. 711). Their story includes enough description for the reader to understand context, but not so much as to lose the point (Wolcott, 2001). I endeavored to avoid producing a set of rhetorical, “boring collections of interview quotes” (Kvale, 1996, p. 292) – rather I strove to produce a convincing story of the essence of these leader’s experiences. Denzin (1996) wrote that facts can be “reconstituted in the telling, in the experience of reading” (p. 236).

### Procedure for the Protection of Human Subjects

My proposed research was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Duquesne University for approval. An expedited review was granted, however, only after it was clarified that the study was not aimed at participants with cognitive disabilities who might be incapable of understanding the implications of participating. The IRB requested details of the specific procedures to be used for the recruitment of participants. Postal and e-mail mailings were employed to solicit potential participants to self identify for the study. Only those potential participants who had publically acknowledged their concealable differences were directly contacted. All other participants had to self identify as being interested in participation in the study. A “request for referral” was sent in

limited hard copy letter form. I also sent a mass e-mail to College and University Presidents and CEOs of four year schools and university system's offices nationally. These communications requested potential participants to complete a simple web-based questionnaire in which they identified their interest level, demographic information, concealable difference, whether they were currently concealing, partially concealing, not concealing at all, their institution type, years of service, and their current position. The potential participants were evaluated for inclusion in the study based on their position level, years of service, type of institution and mission, geographic location, and type or types of concealable differences.

The IRB submission outlined that each participant would be informed of the purpose of the study, the expected number of participants to be included, and the time requirements for both the in-person dialogue and the follow-up communications. The expected impact of the results – learning from the meaning of these experiences – would also be shared with them. Participants were informed that the dialogues were to be recorded and transcribed. After the participant acknowledged interest and comfort with the requirements who asked to sign a consent form.

The consent form outlined the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, informed the participant of his or her right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and provided assurance that all information gathered was treated in a confidential, non-identifiable fashion. A pseudonym was used to identify each participant on any recordings and transcripts. Only the researcher had access to the master list that linked their names with the pseudonym; this list has been placed in a secured location available only to the

researcher. Both the participant and I, as the researcher, signed each consent form and each kept a copy for our records.

For those transcription services employed, a confidentiality form outlining the obligations to be adhered to in the handling of confidential material was obtained and kept on file. The creation of the transcripts was performed exclusively by the researcher. Although the use of transcription services was outlined in the Consent Form signed by each participant, the only transcription services employed was a review of the transcripts produced. All data acquired in this study were kept in a secure location, with access limited to only the research. Data will be maintained until the study is complete, all manuscripts written, and presentations performed. There will be no identifying information – including names, or even partial names – included in any electronic or written documents. Each participant was asked to assign themselves a pseudonym, if they did not have one they prefer, one was assigned.

#### Goodness

Even though this topic is near the end of this chapter, its placement is not a statement of unimportance – rather its placement is strategic. “Most readers are probably familiar with terms such as *trustworthiness* and *validity* [italic original] in determining the quality of a study. Several researchers have advocated for the use of the term goodness to indicate the quality criteria in a qualitative inquiry” (Jones, et al., 2006, p. 119). Arminio and Hultgren (2002), Lincoln and Guba (2000), and Marshal (1990) agree. This study was situated to affirm goodness.



Arminio and Hultgren (2002) recommended a lens of goodness through which interpretive studies “embody, discuss, and illuminate each of the following” (p. 450) elements:

(a) epistemology and theory: the foundation, (b) methodology: the approach, (c) method: collection of data, (d) researcher and participants as multicultural subjects: the representation of voice, (e) interpretation of presentation: the art of meaning making, and (f) recommendations: the implications for professional practice. (Adapted from p. 450)

This chapter defines how this study satisfies and achieves elements of goodness. My worldview has been defined as well as my methods for collecting data. I have discussed the lenses through which I view concealment issues. And I have described my analytic methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology. The plan to make specific professional practice recommendations will be described in the following sections.

### Looking Ahead

It is the goal of this study to capture and present the lived experiences of thirteen leaders of higher education with concealable differences. To make sense of our lives our experience must be “storied” and this storying determines the meaning ascribed to those experiences (White & Epston, 1990). It was my goal to present a story – perhaps not with earth-shaking revelations, but rather with critical nuances which emerged from unloosening and uncovering (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Davis, 2002) of these leaders’ lived experience.

Following is the story of these individuals’ lived experience as leaders in higher education with a concealable difference. A report on how this study impacted the

participants, how the conversations impacted my life personally, recommendations on how their story can impact professional practice (Arminio & Hultgen, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2000), a discussion on the limitations of this study, and suggestions for future study also follow.

## CHAPTER 4

### REPORT OF THE FINDINGS

*In contrast to how we as humans often behave,  
the strength of humanity is in our difference.*

(“Ron,” 2007)

#### Being Leaders in Higher Education with Concealable Differences

This study used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of a group of senior level administrators whom I renamed Ethan, Frank, Gary, Helen, Ike, Lee, Maria, Mark, Robert, Ron, Ross, Thomas, and Tim. “Phenomenology means *apophainesthai ta phainomena* [italics original] – to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself to itself” (Moran, 2000, p. 127). This phenomenological approach allows the *Being* – that which determines entities as entities – to be explored extensively (Heidegger, 1962). Csikszentmihalyi said, “To live means to experience” (1997, p. 8). This study explored the life experiences of these leaders. Through one-on-one dialogues the participants and I explored our experiences by engaging in conversation. Conversation, according to Gadamar can be “a process of coming to an understanding” (1992, p. 385). As the participants and I explored being different, we looked at the meaning of living being different, not simply the experiences. This exploration of their *Being* included examining the “very nature or meaning” of living with a concealable difference (Arminio, 1992, p. 2). Morin (2000) saw the “essential disclosure of things takes place through Dasein's concerned dealing with things in the environment, it takes place essentially in expression. Relating to things, disclosing them, always to our concerns in advance, our relation is primarily interpretive,

or hermeneutical” (p. 234). Dasein is a term Heidegger used to describe the “entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its *Being* [italics added]” (1962, p. 27). This *Being* is always the “*Being* of an entity [italics added]” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 29). The hermeneutics employed in this exploration of senior leader’s experiences enabled the understanding of their lived experiences. The following text tells their story as a reconstruction of those conversations (Gadamer, 1992). This rigorous approach to exploring of what it means to Be a leader with a concealable difference was undertaken because “our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas” (Lorde, 1984, p. 36).

### My Fellow Explorers

This study was initially proposed to include six to ten participants. It was expanded to include thirteen participants who had rich backgrounds and experiences. These leaders with concealable differences served in various higher educational institutions throughout the nation. Thirteen individuals were willing to take time from their busy executive schedules to meet with me, to talk with me, to describe their experiences, and to delve into the meanings of those experiences because they felt it was an important exploration. It was important to them that others understood what these differences meant and the impacts of these differences. This chapter discusses those experiences that have shaped their lives, both professional and personal.

Whether they chose to conceal or not conceal their differences, these individuals have had an impact on academia. The differences that they experienced helped form them into the leaders they later became. Those individuals with multiple differences may have

concealed one difference but perhaps not another. As I met with them, some left the nature of our meeting non-determinate to their staff while others introduced me as a student working on his dissertation study. Some even indicated to them the subject of the study. A few participants felt it more comfortable and convenient to meet in their homes. One participant, who was concerned about my extensive travel schedule, was even gracious enough to meet me at an airport where we spoke at great length in a private conference room.

This chapter tells the story of thirteen executive leaders in higher education, each with very different stories - some were activists, others just wanted to set an example by devotedly being the best administrator he or she could. Because of the sensitivity of some of these executives' institutional environments, it was necessary to leave some ambiguity about each participant's specific details including their academic assignment. Therefore no specific description of the participants' backgrounds or the detailing of specific differences is included. Although some participants publically acknowledged their differences, many chose to conceal the differences to protect themselves from the possible negative impacts they would incur from the communities they served. These leaders understood the impact "difference" had upon their lives and leadership. Each was committed to having an impact on academia, especially the students they served. This wonderful dedicated group of men and women have learned and taken into their very *Being* the meaning of their differences and let those differences – each unique – motivate them to positively impact their own careers and the lives of students.

Their concealable differences included being gay or lesbian (both actively concealing and "out"), auditory and visual disabilities (both actively concealing and non-

concealing), and poor socio-economic backgrounds. Though the participants were predominately male, I was grateful to the two women who were able to participate in this study.

I had the honor to explore these differences with seven presidents and chancellors of colleges, universities, specialized schools, or community colleges and six senior officers from colleges, universities, or university system offices. The individual institutions and university systems represented by these administrators include academies from across the nation – eight states, including those on the east coast, and in the north-central, south-east, deep-south, and south-west regions. These institutions were of various sizes and academic missions, private, public, advanced degree, community college, and system offices. The enrollment of these institutions or university systems varied from the hundreds to the tens of thousands.

### *The Pool of Lived Experiences*

The interaction with the participants in this study included over 25 hours of conversation, the majority of which took place in-person. Our encounters covered a vast array of their experiences in short amounts of time. These senior leaders were executives accustomed to making significant decisions in limited time periods. The highly concentrated conversations led to extremely rich interactions, that covered topics from their childhood to their present day-to-day experiences, all with great intensity. These conversations focused on the meanings these leaders associated with these varied experiences and with few exceptions did not stray into the theoretical, but stayed centered on the real and direct impact on their own lives.

As I continued to review the written records of our interactions – the 500 plus pages of transcripts, my field notes, my own heuristic journal reflections – I felt as if each time I began to read that I was diving into a pool of water. As I did I was never quite sure what was going to engulf me. Would it be the deep southern gentleman’s voice, empathetic about helping his students understand and appreciate the differences of others around them? Or the soothing chime made by the ethnically diverse administrator’s jewelry as she passionately told of her deep concern for providing a better opportunity for those within her sphere of influence? Perhaps it would be the soft spoken consummate professional’s, the enthusiastic advocate’s, the analytic administrator’s, or the academic’s voice I would hear. No matter what theme, experience, or category of meaning I sought to understand, each time I found myself surrounded by a variety of voices. These voices were filled with the desire to impact a world greater than their own. They wanted to make the world a better place for those who followed.

So as I swam in this water of their experiences – our explorations – I would remember what each had said, but more than that, the passion behind what was said. Extending beyond the words to the depth of the commitment, they had to have a positive impact. I read on and listened to how they had taken these desires and individually touched lives through the implementation of programs and services. They in fact created the world they envisioned.

#### *Broadening the Pool: My Own Exploration*

As previously mentioned, my own heuristic journaling played a large role in this study. Many of the understandings I made of their experiences – our explorations –

occurred during my time of journaling. Early in the process I took to heart what Moustakas (1990) said:

From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration. When I consider an issue, problem, or question, I enter into it fully. I focus on it with unwavering attention and interest. I search introspectively, meditatively, and reflectively into its nature and meaning. My primary task is to recognize whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness, to receive and accept it, and then to dwell on its nature and possible meanings. With full and unqualified interest, I am determined to extend my understanding and knowledge of an experience. I begin the heuristic investigation with my own self-awareness and explicate that awareness with reference to a questioner problem until an essential insight is achieved, one that will throw a beginning light onto a critical human experience. (p. 11)

The journaling process allowed me to explore my own experiences, and how I viewed the experiences of the participants. For example, I examined my own perspective on “coming out” as I did not expect to find leaders serving at high levels of responsibility in the academy to be currently concealing their sexual orientation. The heuristic process facilitated my gaining of critical insight into how I could absorb the understanding of their experiences into my own and be able to present this story.



I continued my conversations beyond direct interaction with the participants, beyond my own self-reflection by *writing in the margins* of all of those texts, doing so I proceeded to carry on the dialogue. Kvale (1996) explained:

Hermeneutics is then doubly relevant to interview research, first by elucidating the dialogue producing the interview texts to be interpreted, and then by clarifying the subsequent process of interpreting the interview texts produced, which may again be conceived as a dialogue or a conversation with the text. (p. 46)

Each exploration led me to understand their experiences more fully. At times this engulfment would leave me confused, overwhelmed, and would propel me to take time away to think about something else – anything else – for awhile. But, yet, it was always with me, it always “brewed” in the background: What was it about these experiences – theirs and mine – which are important to tell? The result of all of these activities was the identification of a number of themes, many related to one another, some more closely than others. Each was unique, while they still fit into the larger pool of their experiences.

The following are the findings of these explorations. I approached this study “explicitly and transparently” so I could “give a proper explication of an entity (Dasein) with regard to its *Being* [italics added]” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 27). In this case the lived experiences of these leaders with a concealable difference. Even though each had their own unique experience, a set of common themes emerged from the interactions with these leaders. van Manen (1990) spoke of themes as “threads around which the phenomenological description is facilitated” (p. 91). During my examination of this pool of experiences, the interrelated nature of the themes that emerged was evident. These

intersections of their experiences served to form connections or “knots” of understanding (van Manen, 1990, p. 90).

### *Emerged Themes of Understanding*

These themes served as identifiers of those knots of understanding: Being defined by difference, being set apart, being of value, being understanding of difference, being active, being engaged, being without voice, and being hopeful. Each serves to illuminate the themes discovered during my investigation.

Having difference define who we are was a common theme that appeared consistently across the interactions. Living with these differences included understanding the definitions and the limitations imposed by society which sets the different apart. These individuals wanted to be recognized for what they added to the academy, for what they contributed and accomplished. Many of these leaders took to heart the lessons they learned by being different and leveraged their understanding by creating ways to bring about positive impacts. These leaders expressed the importance of being engaged in the lives of others and themselves. Many of the participants were involved in relationships with partners, children, and with family members. This engagement included a personal peace and harmony.

Unfortunately, some leaders felt they could not participate even with the confidential nature of this study and I acknowledge their concerns. However, out of the experiences of the group who participated, hope had sprung up for the future. This hope was not expressed without thoughtful consideration of the harsh realities of the world we live in, nor with pessimism which stood in the way of true progress. Truly these leaders

saw a better future and worked to make it a reality. The following sections detail the experience of these themes in the lives of the participants.

### Being Defined by Difference

This is a description of these individuals' experience of being a leader with a concealable difference. The exploration of "Being Different" was multifaceted. The value and strength of their differences was evident in their experiences. Having difference defined was a common theme that appeared across the interactions. One of the participants, whom I renamed Maria, went as far as to say her difference was not an issue to her, but the issue was for "them." Others were found to be defining us, setting us apart. Mark "knew the sting early on in grade school, of the carefully chosen barb, of the ... invective, loosely flung around, of slurs and comments about women, and men, and weight, and sissies, and acne." Mark continued, "... and disability, and absence of athletic talent, or not being religious, or being of a certain ethnicity ... as humans we can find a way to put negative spin in just about everything."

Early in his childhood Ethan quickly learned what was acceptable and not. This included his distinct southern accent evident to others as his family moved to various areas around the country. Some would suggest he projected effeminate characteristics. Ethan said, "A lot of my experiences were about fitting in, and fitting in with other people, and being able to be adaptable." He was very interested in "fitting in" and quickly learned what was acceptable and what was unacceptable. His differences were defined by others for him as unacceptable; however he wanted to "blend in."

Gary described an incident that occurred in the third or fourth grade when he expressed his desire to play the flute. He was ordered by the band director to play the

trombone instead. Later in life, he doubted the director's need for trombones, rather believed it "could have been an attempt ... trying to save a sissy boy from being a flute player." Both Ethan and Gary were faced with what was acceptable by their communities. "My difference only emerges from a set of norms that are culturally bound," Gary said during our conversation about the impact of difference in his life. It was not the difference itself, but how others reacted to that difference. This perspective was echoed by him and other participants.

### *The Experience of Being Disabled*

Several of the participants had non-readily apparent disabilities including auditory or visual disabilities. During my interactions with these participants, it was pointed out to me that disability occurs along a continuum. Lee's experience was:

Most people believe that if you don't have 20/20 vision, all that requires is a visit to the eye doctor, optometrist. And then, with some aide you have perfect vision. But there, there are folks in the world, like myself, who even corrected as much as possible don't have perfect vision and mine is such that most individuals ... wouldn't necessarily notice the difference, but it's a condition that's been limiting to me as long as I can remember.

Although it seemed understandable that disabilities occurred naturally along a continuum, it is easier to stereotype a disability, simplifying it to an all-or-nothing condition. Davis and Palladino (2000) explained:

Stereotypes are negative or positive sets of beliefs about members of particular groups. They reduce the amount of information that must be processed and are

very resistant to change because we tend selectively to notice behaviors that confirm our stereotypes. (p. 682)

During my visit with Helen, this continuum became very real to me, when she reacted to an alarm which emitted from my cell phone across the room from us. She stopped the conversation and to my surprise asked, “What is that?” My internal reaction was, “Hey, you are not supposed to hear that; you are hearing disabled.” For me, that was not how a hearing impaired individual should act. Carling (1962) wrote about how those of us who are different must play the roles society expects:

The cripple must be careful not to act differently from what people expect him [sic] to do. Above all they expect the cripple to be crippled; to be disabled and helpless: to be inferior to themselves, and they will become suspicious and insecure if the cripple falls short of these expectations. It is rather strange, but the cripple has to play the part of the cripple. (p. 55)

He continued, “Just as many women have to be what the men expect them to be, just women, and the Negroes [sic] often have to act like clowns in front of the ‘superior’ white race, so that the white man shall not be frightened by his black brother” (Carling, 1962, p. 55). How someone with a difference was expected to “act” occurred in a number of the participants’ experiences and will be discussed throughout the rest of this report.

One participant, Robert, self-identified as a person with a non-readily apparent disability: HIV. The Supreme Court on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1998 ruled that HIV status is classified as a disability (Bierbauer, 1998). I had not considered HIV status as a concealable disability prior to the design of this study. Robert told me:

It hasn't been a handicap for me, because I've never, first of all, I've never gone through to the stage of AIDS ... Do I think it has stigmatized me in some people's eyes? Yes, I've no doubt about that ... Quite honestly it has also served me, I get sympathy, do I deserve it, hell no ... people want to be nice.

And:

In some traditional sense of disability where I've had some limitations, physically limitations, I haven't ... Haven't I been stigmatized? Yes I have. Has it been a part of my definition to myself? Yes. Is it an overwhelming part of my definition of myself? Less so every day.

I thought it was noteworthy that he saw his HIV status as an overwhelming part of his definition of himself. Perhaps this was influenced by others' definition of him. He confirmed the stigma attached by society to his HIV status.

Living with disabilities included not only living with the limitations of the disability itself, but living with the limitations that are put upon us externally. Helen reminded me, "We all grew up being afraid of people with disabilities." While visiting a hospital, Helen admitted she felt very uncomfortable when she saw the severely handicapped individuals – quadriplegics and paraplegics. She said, "We are [all] only a heartbeat away from being in a wheelchair" due to a stroke, etc. There is a certain discomfort which is experienced when we are near those who are disabled.

#### *The Experience of Being from a Poor Socio-Economic Background*

Among the differences that the participants experienced was being raised in a poor socio-economic setting. This background had a number of impacts on these individuals. Interestingly, some participants who did not self-identify as being in this

category experienced similar impacts as those being from poor socio-economic backgrounds. For example, because they were from blue collar or working class backgrounds, their families were unprepared to help facilitate making academic life choices as compared to those with academically experienced parents (Magnet, 2006).

Heilman's (2004) comments resonated with my own experience, "Many of the issues facing marginalized ethnic white students, such as class stigma, discrimination due to language and dialect use, low educational attainment, under-representation in the curriculum, and negative stereotypes are shared by other marginalized groups" (p. 70). Those who participated in this study had overcome these challenges, but the lingering impact was perhaps evident in some participants' career choices, their attitudes toward helping others from similar backgrounds, and their understanding of differences in general.

Frank and others served in non-academic areas of the academy. He, like some other participants felt their contribution was not always valued. Frank said, "I was never attracted to any of the disciplines." He described how his childhood family had enough resources for basic clothing, for larger items – such as coats – they were held and given as gifts for special holidays. He went on to say, "Nobody respected my family because we had money and belonged to the country club." In a self-reflective moment Frank said:

Maybe my choice of student affairs as a profession also was a part of the way I was raised, and in my background, sort of that modest background. I mean, the truth was my friends, many of them that became doctors or lawyers or dentists or whatever came from families whose parents had gone to college ... they were

encouraged to have high aspirations for themselves, and a career. I mean, just going to college was a high aspiration in my family.

His background was one where there “wasn’t any knowledge about higher education.” Frank selected his school based on its distance from home and the fact that a relative’s spouse had attended. For myself, although I was familiar with the Computer Science program at my undergraduate school, I chose my school for similar distance and familiarity via relatives.

Lee described his experience:

Probably for me, it would not be so much the meager in terms of economic background ... it would have more to do with the, social aspects in the coming from ... a non-well educated family. I was the first one, including my parents, to graduate from high school. I certainly was the first to graduate with a four year degree, master’s degree, and doctorate. And in fact I’m still in the first and only one to graduate from higher education.

Many of the participants and myself were from similar backgrounds. My own parents never graduated from high school. Lee continued talking about “class”:

There’s the perception that it’s a class-less society ... I would refer to a wide [middle class] ... because the lower middle class is ... relatively meager, economic, situation, and the upper middle class in this country has a very strong, economic situation, it’s just how Americans tend to think of themselves ... hardly anyone refers to themselves as poor in the lower class of this country ... and few people will identify themselves as the rich or super wealthy.



Some of those participants from this lower-middle class background experienced a long lasting impact. For instance, it still influenced Ike's ability to come out as a gay man, "it's the background that plays a role into some of my hypersensitivity, insecurity, [and] lack of being open and out."

The word "style" was suggested as an alternative to this category of poor socio-economic background. Gary suggested the concept of style included those attributes, too numerous to boil down to one simple item, that impact how individuals are received by others. His reference to style helped underscore the comments made by Frank and Lee that the experience of being from a poor socio-economic background is more than the background itself.

#### *The Experience of Being of Minority Sexual Orientation*

The majority of the participants lived with the experience of being of a non-majority sexual orientation. Although none of them self-identified as being bisexual, some expressed interest in and experience with emotional and physical relationships with members of the opposite sex. Their experience varied from self-identification as gay or lesbian at a young age, to those who came out later in life only after establishing a family – in some cases including children. The southern gentleman from the Deep South underscored some of the attitudes directed toward those of minority sexual orientation:

I learned that just about everything involving gay and lesbian persons was steeped in stereotype, almost bordered on caricature, all the ... descriptors and definitions were negative, in fact most of them could even be described as criminal, or mentally deviant, and those [descriptors and definitions] shaped my upbringing.

His experiences clearly painted a picture that being different, especially in this way, was not an acceptable way of *Being*. Another participant, reflected on the prejudices he experienced growing up in the South, “To say it more strongly, it was probably better to be Black, than it was to be – as my dad was inclined to say – queer, because at least if you are Black you couldn’t help yourself.” Many opponents of gay rights view homosexuality as a choice, while they say Blacks are born that way (Boykin, 1996).

Ike described his budding sexual identity:

I grew up in a blue collar family in ... from a steel family ... the youngest of three, born to an ethnic Polish family ... the first one to go to a private Catholic high school ... where I became familiar with my sexuality, and then left and went to a monastery to study to become a Roman Catholic priest. And stayed in there for ten years, a year before ordination to the priesthood is when I left with my current partner twenty-four years ago.

He described how many individuals at the monastery were there to deal with – or as the case for many – to avoid dealing with their sexuality. It was more acceptable for his family to say he was in the monastery studying to be a priest than for them to face his sexuality.

Ron, Gary, and Robert self-identified as gay at an early age. Gary and Robert both had supportive families. Although not entirely happy about his sexuality, Robert’s family did not turn their backs on him. His parents always wanted him to marry a “good Jewish girl.” Interestingly enough when he was “experimenting” with a woman, his parents were ecstatic, even though he was not married, nor was the woman he was involved with

Jewish. I found it interesting that Robert's parents' desire for him to marry a good Jewish girl faded in light of their concern for him living as a homosexual.

The participants experienced expectations set by family, society, and the work place. These imposed limitations served to challenge those living as a gay man or lesbian. Gary knew, as a gay man, he could not attain the highest offices in a large number of colleges and universities; they would not consider him for the job because he was an out gay man, "and with a partner to boot." Living with this kind of difference included understanding the limitations placed on you by society.

### Being Set Apart

These leaders lived with at least one – if not more than one – concealable difference that set them apart. Living with a concealable difference meant experiencing the impacts of oppression, the systems of privilege, and the repercussions of being outside the norm. One of the participants, Ron, questioned my grouping for the study. His concern centered on the inclusion of both gays and the disabled in one study:

I think it is interesting that you've put, sexual identity, physical ability, and socio-economic status into the same category, on the one hand ... I kinda bristle at the thought of putting sexual identity and physical disability into the same category ... there is nothing wrong or problematic about being gay ... it is not the same thing as not having your vision, or not having a limb, or not having ... as many economic resources.

Ron continued:

On the other hand ... I talked with other presidents who fall into this sort of broad category, and we talk about how the way that we lead has come out of our

experiences of being an outsider ... makes us a different kind of leader because we have to work particularly hard to understand what the insiders are up to, and have to work particularly hard to influence the insiders ... anybody who is marginalized, develops all kinds of interesting perspective taking abilities, and empathic abilities, that are different than what the majority culture has been able to, and that leads ... to be effective in understanding problems influencing people. And often times ... they're looking for some solutions outside of the box solutions ... and if you are like grow up outside the box, like a, like a queer person does ... that outsider perspective has led me to being an outside of the box person my whole life.

Ron concluded, "So that's how I do think of these categories do go together, there are different ways to help people be outside the box and develop special skills to act from the margin." His experience as a leader with a concealable difference had prepared him to understand the experiences of others with other differences.

Gary had formed a group that examined the concept of "glass ceilings," he described:

I had actually myself, organized a panel on "glass ceilings" at a conference of, of deans, not only about, oddly, not only about being gay, but we didn't have as good a phrase, but some of the less obvious ... not just race and gender, but some of the other issues.

I asked him which other categories he included in those conversations, "I think we had disability and I think we had class, we didn't focus as precisely as you have on 'concealable' difference." He wanted those conversations to extend the thinking beyond

the standard differences which came to mind when people considered the concept of a “glass ceiling.”

The question of living with concealable differences is a question that looks at an oppression that is experienced from within, even without the individual choosing to expose their differences. Gary went on to say, my categories were “interesting because there might be differences that, even how we, what we perceive as a difference and are aware of it as a different parameter, is, changes with time and also the ‘option’ of concealing, unconcealing, varies.” Whether one chooses to conceal or not, in both cases oppression has an impact on our lived experiences.

### *Being Oppressed*

Frye (1983) used the metaphor of a “press” to illustrate for us the impact of oppression on our lives:

Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gasses or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce. (p. 2)

The definitions assigned to those who are different had helped shape how they accomplished their goals. Maria experienced life with these pressures from multiple points of views. She had an ethnically diverse and poor socio-economic background, and was lesbian. “Because of all of the things that I am, I have to learn how to manage it all, and not judge it, kind of like a self-acceptance.” She said, “I know gender, I know race, I know poverty, and then I know sexual orientation.” Maria addressed frustration

concerning the acceptance of her sexual orientation, “And all of the crap that people put on us, just because we love people of the same sex.”

Another participant, who had dealt with a physical disability since birth, came out later in life. The disability had already shaped this person’s experience, and then yet had another difference to live with later in life. “See the disability, I was born with, the orientation came later in life ... it’s still very new for me ... so I connect myself more with this over here [disability] ... although very closeted over here [orientation].”

Both of these participants struggled with the addition of yet another difference to their existing difference. That compounding of difference also occurred in adulthood for Maria, “I was not supposed to be a lesbian too.” Her ethnic community – in which she was actively involved – was very homophobic. She had to ask herself the question, “Wow this is great, now what do I do?” It was very difficult for her, and it kept her in the closet for a long time. Maria described her experience with her ethnic community further:

Tremendous prejudice, I just ... why do you bother being prejudiced ... it’s a politics of pain ... oppressed groups unfortunately got to stop judging each other. In the [her ethnic] community, early on, we had, we had to confront our prejudices ... Are you brown enough? Are you biracial? If you’re biracial, are you really [her ethnic group]? So, bi-raciality, language learning, all of those become issues in the ethnic community.

When my conversation with Maria turned to religion, she said, “I think I was married to a man simply because I was raised Catholic.”

Mark described the impact of hearing the message over and over again that the only good form of sex is not just heterosexual sex, but sex only demonstrated in the

bonds of traditional church approved matrimony. “Then one begins to quickly realize, well, there is no then life allowed for me as a self-described good Christian.” This message became ingrained, “I just thought the best thing for me was to live a monk-like existence and to be so celibate as to be almost antiseptic, which is, what a terrible way to feel you have to live life.” Ike’s own blue collar and religious background also played a role in his “hypersensitivity” and “insecurity.”

Robert felt it important to bring up the fact that he was denied communion while visiting his family. He, like many of the participants, spoke of their non-affirming experiences with religion. Ike, you may recall, had trained to become a Roman Catholic priest. I also struggled in my own experience with what it meant to my faith to come out, as a leader of a small charismatic church up until shortly before coming out. Like the experience of these participants I struggled to bring cohesiveness to my life. Religion was the most difficult transition for me to make during that time. My own experience was similar to Mark’s. Religion had painted the most horrid images of gay men and lesbians, as less than human, people who would be incapable of conducting a professional career, caring for a family, having any respectable life. Religion played the role of keeping me “in line.”

The oppression worked in these lives to set them apart – to set us apart – from others in society. No wonder Helen expressed she did not “want to appear differently than anybody else.” During my interactions with the participants it was evident that each of us had the experience of being set apart by society because of our sexuality, or our able-bodiedness, or our family background. Weber (1998) described the social constructs by which people are set apart:

Race, class, gender, and sexuality are social constructs whose meaning develops out of group struggles over socially valued resources. The dominant culture defines the categories within race, gender, and sexuality as polar opposites – White and Black (or non-White), men and women, heterosexual and homosexual – to create social ranking: good and bad, worthy and unworthy, right and wrong.

(p. 18)

This dominant culture has created a system of privileges, difficult to be easily perceived or seen (McIntosh, 2003).

*Being Separated by Privilege*

Ross' experience was as a straight White male for his early life, then “crossed over” to a lived experience where he lost privileges. This resulted in him taking on a different perspective. After our conversation, I wrote in my journal about his transition, “This really underscores someone who *had* privilege and then could compare what it is like to live with a difference, all-be-it concealable, and how it changed his perspectives.” Ross said, “Up until the time I was forty, [I] functioned as a straight White male in this society, like many straight White males do, just ignorant of privilege.”

Ross described himself as a sensitive person who had studied civil rights. Though he did not have the depth of understanding, as he said, “on a personal gut level” until he was discriminated against himself. He reflected:

If you are in the dominant group, you don't spend a whole lot of time thinking about, “I'm in the dominant group” ... and if you were like me, you were like, “Get over yourself ... What are you [non-dominant group members] complaining



about, you've got all these opportunities, get with the program, and quit whining about it."

Is it possible this is what the perspective is of those who are still in the dominant group? I, with a host of others, would contend – absolutely "yes" (Weber, 1998; Collins, 1986; McIntosh, 2003). Ross did not fully understand how he benefitted from being in the "dominant group" until he was in a minority group who experienced discrimination.

After Mark described his previous privileged status, White male heterosexual, he concluded by saying:

Those factors allowed me a great sense of privilege and in some ways made my development as a gay man slower, because I didn't want to give up what privileges I knew I had, fearing that I would not be able to regain alternative privileges by coming out of the closet.

Mark described his sense of regret about his privilege inducing stunted development, "I felt a sense of regret, but the real word is *resentment*. That my ability to develop into a ... fully adult multifaceted person was delayed by heterosexual privilege."

Society's privileging of heterosexuality prevented Mark from fully developing his sexual identity until later in his life. The power of privilege to create outcasts is tremendous and the impacts of privilege are far reaching. "The greatest thing that needs to be studied and understood is privilege," said Maria as she spoke about those of us who lived in the "out groups." Ron described insiders as those "people who have power and the people who are the majority culture."

### *Being Outside the Norm*

Helen was aware of what the norms were, and similar to Ethan, tried to “fit in.” Helen described the norm as the “familiar,” the “tradition,” and she even described them as the “safe”:

I think in spite of ADA, in spite of [the] Civil Rights Movement, in spite of the Feminist Movement, in spite of [the Gay] Pride Movement ... the world is still more comfortable, it's still more comfortable, because they understand it better, with those, I'm going to say “White males”, and I don't mean to tie it to gender, I'm tying it to ... the “norm,” the familiar, and tying it to the tradition, I'm tying it to the safe. I know, almost every institution has [a] diversity plan tied to all those ... differences, all of them, but even then it's ... situational ... I don't want to say “token,” token situational, it's still not natural, not as natural.

“In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin [fit and/or able], male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society,” described Lorde (1984, p. 116). The participants in this study lived their existence outside of these social norms, some, but not all, possessed a few of the privileges.

Gary understood the advantage of his privileged upbringing. He possessed the “academic credentials and pedigree that also gave ... [him] privilege.” But, he also noted the straight men around him could “go around pretty much doing and saying whatever” they wanted. However, his experience was, “If you're not straight, you are aware of, in a particular setting, on the street, depending on what kind of neighborhood, what behavior

is permissible and what is not.” Gary further explained, “Any group that’s not a part of the majority culture, you, your sensitivity of how you are being perceived is heightened.”

Frank’s experience was different, his family was not affluent. At an early age, it was clear to him certain privileges would not be there just because of respect for his family. It would be for his “intellect” and/or his “achievements” that he would attain them. These privileges gained by accomplishment were characterized by Ethan as “positional privilege.” He was consciously aware of this and his other non-earned privileges. When he discussed his White male privilege, he said, “Do you earn it? Have we earned it? No, individually no.”

What if all the right things were done and we still do not earn the privilege? Two of the participants experienced situations where they were qualified to serve in the “top positions” of their organizations, but denied the opportunity. Ross described that even though he was called upon frequently for advice by his organization’s governing body, at no time during the filling of the vacancies was he sought out to serve in the role. In fact, the governing body went to great lengths to look for other candidates to hold that position. Ross said, “I don’t know whether this community would be comfortable with ... [the leader] being a gay person, even at this time.”

Thomas’ experience was similar. He served in an organization for a great number of years and was in all the appropriate positions to gain the experience he needed to become the leader of his organization. Thomas explained, “There was an explicit discussion in the board room, about my being gay.” The governing body did not offer him the position, even after the only other finalist was offered the position and declined. “I know what the glass ceiling feels like ... I thought, I’ve reached the glass ceiling, in

my current position, doesn't matter that I've been successful, doesn't matter that everything I've done, was done while I was a gay man." Thomas was resolved in his opinion that we can, should, and must change the situation. He underscored his point of view, "The fact [is] that people will discriminate against you because they can ... and it's legal."

The experience of being set apart by living with a concealable difference can be a painful one. This was illustrated by the experiences of the participants of this study. Lee made a significant statement about being different and set apart, "Nobody, none of us wants to be treated differently."

#### Being of Value

Many of the participants struggled with wanting to be the best. They wanted to be valued beyond the limits artificially placed upon them by society because of their differences. Most compensated by diligently dedicating themselves to their work.

#### *Being the Best*

Ross said, "I continued to do the best that I can in every way that I can, in part realizing that ... demonstrates to others that, that in fact one's sexuality has absolutely nothing to do with, not in a negative way, their ability to perform." Overcompensating was seen in Ross' experience as:

I think this experience, which happens I do believe to, maybe disproportionately to ... people of difference, you become an overachiever and you want to demonstrate that no matter what you think about me, you will not nail me on my performance. And ... I think that overcoming those kinds of, of adversities, that is

“a” response that some people give, and so you just throw yourself into everything that you do.

Mark took advantage of his work ethic to “cover” his sexuality:

I just wasn’t going to do anything that tipped them off ... can’t have a love life ... he’s always at work. Obviously he can’t develop a family life ... when you’re in the office at 9:00 in the morning and you don’t leave until 2:00 in the morning. Great, that was my cover.

He also felt his need to perform every day in a way to make “more perfect, more detailed, more scholarly” impacts was directly or indirectly connected to his orientation.

Helen offered that her personal work ethic was twice as demanding on herself so that her disability did not make her seem out of the ordinary. She did not want people to have to “fill those gaps” for her. She filled the gaps in by conducting her own research at night and doing whatever was required to excel. Helen did not hide her difference. However, she worked hard to make it a “non-issue.” Her goal was to be value-added, to ensure her difference did not matter. She said, “I secretly hope is that my job skills and, my performances are so good that it doesn’t matter.” Ethan tried to be the best he could be because “perhaps [it] will compensate for my being different.” Even Maria acknowledged she still felt a pressure to perform, “Until this day I still do,” even after the many successful assignments over her significant career.

Robert had difficulty “teasing” out the impact of his work ethic from his possible need to overcompensate for his gayness. He explained, “Do I have to be the perfect boy, because I’m gay, probably an element of it, but my brother has to be the perfect boy too,

and he isn't gay." While Tim and I discussed his sexual orientation and the impacts on his professional life, he told me:

I have always wanted to be seen as a professional, and not as someone identified primarily by sexual orientation. I see very little intersection between sexual orientation and what I do on a day-to-day basis. It does not come up at all in my present work as a senior administrator at a large private university. It is not at all, in that position. It has not come up at all in any of my previous positions.

Tim's entire career was conducted with the separation of his sexual identity from his professional life. He saw no connection, nor did he express a desire for one. Ike also wanted to be judged on what he was able to accomplish, and the accomplishments of those he was able to help achieve their goals, not on some label.

Ike felt as long as we continue to "create positive achievements and accomplishments that right now that is what they hired me for, and that is what is most important. My personal life and my sexuality is not important to them, nor should it be." Ike continued on to say, "[It] is just the idea that I didn't want to be found out about, and worked hard to gain credibility, and to make a difference."

Thomas described the impact Andrew Tobias' book, *The Best Little Boy in the World* (Reid, 1998) had on him:

It is a really good book. I recommend it to all gay men ... he's a gay man ... but he didn't want anyone to know. So he's the best little boy in the world ... he does all this stuff, and he does everything right, and he is smart, and he is athletic, and he gets everything right, and yet there are things ... they won't let him do because he's a gay man – or worse he's so afraid they will find out that he denies himself

... even the ability to try it. It's a great book.... Now why do I tell you this story? I tell you this story because that was the way the world was ... you just don't expect it and you adjust. On the other hand, you all your life are trained – taught – if you just do really good work, people will take care of you, you get your promotions ... and then you do all that, and then in the end, they don't because you have a partner you that live with, that's part of you. Even if they don't talk about it publicly, they have other reasons; you know that they talked about it privately.

Thomas learned that even though he was the “best little boy in the world,” he did not always get what he desired and worked hard to attain, in this case the “top” job.

These individuals wanted recognition for what they added to the academy, for what they contributed and accomplished, not to be limited by their differences. Thus their differences – whatever they were – should not matter. These leaders continued to work hard to ensure that their accomplishments were more important than their differences.

#### Being Understanding of Difference

Because Ross came out later in life, he helped me comprehend the impact of difference on his life experience. Ross provided an insight into the experiences of those without these differences at work in their lives. He reflected, “I do think that had I in fact been a straight White guy all my life, I would probably not be the sensitive human being I am right now.” He understood difference, because he became *different*. Before he came out he was “not very sympathetic with people who couldn't get their act together.” However, after his radical life change and encountering what it was like to not be accepted, he had a sense of what the experience of being different really was.

Lee recognized his disability as “part of” him and said his differences had “made him and what makes me who and what I am.” The experience of being different created in him positive characteristics and values that he felt many others do not have. Maria’s choice to work in communities with a lot of poor people was because, as she said, “That’s what I know, I’m one of them.” Frank similarly expressed an understanding of being the “underdog.” This understanding had grown from his socially and economically challenged background as “one of the underdogs growing up.” Gary suffered the “crude humor at the hands of straight men,” which he felt led to his ability and depth to work with women. These experiences laid the foundation for their understanding of what it meant for them to be different and the impacts of those differences on their and other people’s lives.

Ron’s reaction to understanding his difference was to maintain the position that it is not the stigma itself, but what people do with those potential stigmas. Lee explained, “I think it is a choice. You can choose to take your lemons and create a sour experience in life ... or you can, take the same things, add a little extra ingredients and have something very satisfying.” The participants in this study chose to use the understanding of being different they acquired to create something significant, for them and for others around them.

### *Being on the Outside*

An important understanding Ron developed emerged from his experience of growing up outside the box. Growing up gay, he knew he was different from the time he was a small child:



Everybody else was in this camp that I wasn't a part of; I knew it has something to do with sexuality, even ... early for me, and that outsider perspective has led me to being an outside-of-the-box person my whole life.

This experience led him to “develop special skills to act from the margin.” Gary described how his experience growing up gay put him in “a different place.” Because of his difference he developed a “sensitivity” that was “born of the fact that you had to negotiate your own place often in highly ambiguous and fraught situations.”

The experience of living on the outside led to the development of particular insights, perspectives, and ways of relating to others in their lives. These leaders chose to learn how to apply these lessons to positively impact those around them. Living on the outside, Lee gained insight into the value of seeing the “Big Picture.” He explained, “I do think I can stand back and empathize either with others, individually, or other parts of the organization. I can see the bigger picture, not be so self-centered.” Lee described how he gained this ability to see the bigger picture:

When you've come from an experience where ... first of all you have something to eat, then you have shelter ... a place to live ... those are big things ... whereas I think folks who grow up with, in better circumstances, let's be quite frank, because I've seen it in my own children ... it's not ... the food generally ... it's what kind of food “I” like. It's not about shelter generally, but it's “I” want my own room ... Okay. So that's what I mean by bigger picture ... versus self-centered.

He described the impact of his large family:

Because another aspect of being in a big family ... and one of the older ones is: You immediately take on responsibilities for younger members of the family. Because I also come from a broken home, unfortunately my parents were divorced, and so, as I said, we, we tend to take on responsibilities and being responsible for others as opposed to only having to worry about yourself. So, you do put others first, you do learn to put others first.

These experiences led him to the understanding of the “things in the world beyond your own, little world.” As an outsider, Ron found:

As a leader, just because I can, I can zoom in and zoom out, I can zoom out and I observe a situation and can think about it from outside the situation about how something can happen and in order to change a situation you make the leadership context more effective.

This “perspective taking” ability became an asset for Ron to be a more effective leader.

#### *Being Compassionate and Empathetic*

Living with these differences led many of the participants to find that their understanding of difference allowed them to be empathetic to others with differences. Mark said, “I believe they’re ultimately impressed with my desire to get know ‘them’ as individuals, and to hear ‘their’ stories.” Similarly, Robert found his experience led to him having a sincerity about himself that helped him talk with others going through similar experiences.

Ross found his difference made him a “better listener.” When Ross reflected on his differences as compared to other people, “I don’t pretend that my adversity is identical to anybody else’s.” As someone with a concealable difference he acknowledged

he had certain issues to deal with, “whereas people of color it’s just out there.” He again emphasized they are not the same, but he would never say one was “more severe than the other.”

Ethan felt his sexuality provided him with the “collateral” to be trusted and placed him in a position to make a positive impact for those people he served. This included when their differences were not the same as his. He understood how it “didn’t feel very good” to be marginalized. Another thing that allowed him to put those with differences at ease was that he did not try to compare his experiences with theirs. Rather, he would say, “I certainly don’t know, I haven’t lived the experience that you’ve lived. I can appreciate the experiences that you’ve had.” This gave him the opportunity to express his understanding, but not try to equate his experience to theirs. “Everybody experiences things differently individually, and certainly by group, but it’s certainly gives me an understanding of where they might be coming from,” explained Ethan.

Maria expressed how her “mixed experience in having to understand all of that [differences in her life], I think makes me a better person, more compassionate person.” Her compassion did not stop there however, she explained she has “compassion and understand[s] how to do something about it, compassion and I understand what to do. I understand the action piece.” Frank’s background enabled him to “empathize with less powerful, less influential people who come up against the system, and a lot of times for the wrong reasons.” The experience of being an outsider allowed participants including Ron to make it a goal that people on the outside were included.

### *Being an Impact*

These leaders wanted to have an impact on their students' lives and on the institutions they served. Ron, who wanted to act as a change agent, took on assignments with broader and broader impact. "The really surprising thing was ... I loved having a larger impact on the community ... I got to do all kinds of things that I didn't really realize that I would be able to do professionally," he explained. For Ron it was not him being gay, but how he "did" his gayness. Gary also took on roles that had a progressively greater impact. He moved from a large institution to a smaller one where he felt he had more impact. He explained, "I would have actually more leadership opportunity and freedom in a much smaller ... institution than I do in a large state system."

Ron, Gary, Lee, and Ike used the skills they developed negotiating their own world to positively impact those around them. Ron understood what it meant to be an outsider and was able to apply those skills as he worked with individuals. "I stand at an unusual point, it's just a little bit off the normal pattern, out of the grooves," commented Gary. Being from this unusual point, he felt he had empathy for those he sought to serve. The ability to navigate within groups, a skill Ethan had to learn early on to "fit in" came to his advantage as well.

Lee described how his background influenced his approach toward making an impact:

I don't think of myself as the, the boss, but merely another member of the team ... just like on any team somebody has to play the leadership role ... I suppose it would go back to my humbleness or my feelings of being not egotistical ... not feeling normal, average in certain respects, in relationship to these differences ...

carries over and causes one to both understand, that one, at least at times is no better than anyone else in the group.

Similar to Ron, Ike enjoyed being a “change agent,” however he expressed concern about his ability to have future impact. He had a “sense of insecurity” because of his sexual orientation. He concluded, “I’m too young not to have an opportunity at one or two more opportunities being a president.” Maria felt her impact on education was successful because of “all that I am.” She had the view of “how beautiful, good reflective quality education can be.”

Many of these leaders took to heart the lessons they had learned being different. Compassion had developed in them for those which were different. But, well beyond compassion was an empathy with a call to action, for them to apply what they experienced for the good of those around them. These leaders leveraged their backgrounds to make positive impacts.

### Being Active

The understanding of difference that these leaders possessed combined with their empathy for others resulted in a drive to make a difference for those they served. For many of these participants, this experience resulted in them becoming active in their communities. The first step for many was to make the decision to expose their differences.

### *Revealing of Difference*

The experience of the revelation of a concealed difference had deep and significant meaning wrought with many implications for the participants. The decision to “come out” was not taken lightly, as this revelation was non-revocable. At the same time,

it was also a continual process, due to the non-visible nature of the differences. “Coming out,” as discussed in the Literature Review, has its roots in the revelation of a gay man’s sexuality. However, there are similarities between the experience of gay men and lesbians and those with other concealable differences. Once again, I am not stating they are the same, only similar. Whether to come out, who to come out to, when to come out have all served to impact the lived experiences of these leaders, shaping their lives.

Many of the leaders, like Maria, felt being out was a first step toward more rights, more recognition, and of helping make people aware of the diverse nature of the population, the diverse nature of those around them. Ron agreed, he said, “I think being out is a political action advocacy that helps everybody be who they are.” However, for Tim it was not seen as important, everybody just seemed to “assume” his orientation, and so coming out to him did not make a difference:

I avoided bringing up any sexual orientation issues in the workplace. And, I have done that consistently, I’d say from the earlier stages of my career, through the present. I first started working in this field I think there was less acceptability associated with being gay or being lesbian. I think now that it’s, it is perfectly acceptable in most academic settings. It does not come up at all in my present work as a senior administrator at a large private university ... it has not come up at all in any of my previous positions.

Tim added, “I think that they just assume that I am, because I’m 43 and not married and I think when you reach a certain age and you are male and you’re not married that it is a reasonable hypothesis.”

Since high school Ron had been “out.” It meant to him:

I have been open about who I am, in terms of my identity, and that's very important to me. It's important to me, just because I think being genuine in the world and anything other than that is a waste of time.

While Robert and I discussed leaders who could not come out, he said, "I would just lose a lot if ... if I couldn't be who I was." Gary felt since he came out, "I would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that whatever prejudice I run into is real, is the real thing." By being closeted he felt, "I might avoid certain types of discrimination, I would in fact be ... guaranteeing that I would be subjected to all sorts of self-imposed restrictions." Not coming out for Maria meant keeping a secret, and "to the extent that you keep [an] aspect of yourself secret, you lose power." The turning point for Thomas was when he fell in love:

Is it worthwhile to deny who you are as a person in the end in order to get the job that you can't get by just being yourself? It changed for me when I fell in love with this guy I thought, "Wow, I never thought I would have a man that I loved so much" ... and I certainly never thought that I'd have a man who would stay with me, who would love me back, and who would live his life with me. At some point I thought, "Wow, you know, what's important to me?" Well, I can't deny him.

He ended by asking, "To do what? To get a better job?"

When Ron took a new position, it was meaningful to him that just his presence inspired faculty members who were in the closet, "Who didn't feel like they could come out and all of a sudden they came out ... gay and lesbian students that weren't talking about that." Ethan's life was impacted by a similar experience at his new assignment, "I had all these people seeking me out, just to introduce themselves, just to get to know me,

and of course they, they subtly let me know that they were gay or lesbian.” Later he realized the people coming to see him did not know about each other. There was no network in place. He reacted with, “I’ve committed this coming fall to actually having a gay and lesbian round table at the college.”

Ike had come out to some of his straight colleagues:

They became more involved in the “cause” and more supportive and possibly it had to do with me being the only gay person that they knew in a professional setting ... she kind of got into a lobbying effort with a variety of people that up until that point she didn’t really have any issue to concern herself with.

Being out inspired advocates, another part of these leaders’ story that I explore later in this document.

One significant understanding that many of the leaders expressed concerned gay men and lesbians who could not come out due to their geographic location. Ike was one such individual, his experience was:

Now, in an institution in a community like this, with gun shops all over, and more churches than you can count. There is no way that I plan on coming out while I’m here, formally or publicly. I’ve received money [for his institution] from the elected officials who are ultra-right conservatives – Republican – and others in this community, who are conservative individuals ... [who would] probably, have issues with me that would hurt the institution.

Thomas addressed the challenges of living in these circumstances by saying, “They can’t be out because of a very conservative rural community. And they really can’t be out, it is dangerous. So there, they live this very courageous life, from my perspective.” After my



visit to Ike's conservative rural community, I have to wholeheartedly agree, yes, they do live a "courageous life."

Many participants had chosen to reveal their difference. Maria explained her experience with coming out as a continual process:

And the interesting thing about being out is ... once you're out, you never stop coming out, you think you're out, but you go through a coming out experience every time you move, every time you change jobs, every time ....

Maria, like others, experienced coming out as a continual process. Thomas said, "You come out to me I come out to you. Now we walk down the street, and what happens, you gotta do it again. Or of course I could choose not to come out." This process happens "over and over and over ... so you never come out." Thomas contrasted coming out with a concealable difference, in his case sexual orientation, with someone who is visibly different. When they walk in a room, it is generally obvious who is a woman, or Black, or Latino, or tall, or has blue eyes. For those with a concealable difference, he said, "People might suspect, but they don't know." Well, not until we tell them.

Not everyone in authority connected with Thomas' institution knew he is gay. He recounted a meeting where budgeting was discussed and a member of the group said, "I presume this budget doesn't have anything in it for your girlfriends." The person grinned at Thomas, who replied, "and not for my boyfriends either." The person replied back, "Don't go there." At that point Thomas realized he had not come out to this new person as of yet ... a continual process. When Mark had come out in a public setting, "I thought initially that to come out would be to kiss my career goodbye, but I found over time as I've progressed I realize that it actually makes me a better leader." He explained, "Here I

am now, the first openly gay vice president of a college or university in [region of the country omitted] higher education history, and there will be a time we'll be able brag about that, just not yet.”

Ethan's experience with his dissertation cohort reminded me of my experience in this doctoral program:

Throughout that first year where you, okay, present a couple potential topics that ... your dissertation might focus on. I wasn't really sure where that was going to go, and finally, I just kinda put it out there in the presentation, how I presented it was ... as an individual myself was openly gay, in a high profile position of leadership ... that's kinda how I outed myself to the group.

This reminded me of my own experience testing my research study interests out, first on my advisory group, a six person subdivision of our 23 person cohort, then on a larger scale to the whole cohort during topic interest presentations.

For many of these leaders the timing of the revealing of their differences was an important issue. Some viewed the interview process as the time to “come out.” Ron, Gary, Maria, Thomas, and Ethan each came out during the interview process for their current assignments. Ron explained, “I didn't say: Yo, I'm a homo ... I just simply used the male pronoun for my partner ... and I watched very carefully what their reaction was to it.” Even when the headhunters, colleges, or universities would contact Gary about a possible position he would “lay out the gay issue, right out front.” He, like Ron would just use the masculine pronoun during interviews to signify his sexual orientation. Maria explained the importance to her of coming out during the interview process:

When I got a job offer as a vice president there, the chancellor called me and I didn't know her, she was from [state name omitted], working down there, she goes, "Is there anything more we need talk about before?" ... She was making a job offer. I said ... "I want you to know I'm a lesbian." And it's kind of weird that that becomes a topic ... when you are an administrator it's like ... you need to know this, because if it's an issue for you ... we got to deal with ... just to get it out on the table, and I think people need to know ... I think you got to let people know. Because you don't want to deal with it, and you know what, you don't want them to have to deal with it. And you know what, if it's an issue, I don't want to work for you. You got a problem; I don't want to work for you. I don't want to deal with it. I don't want to be outed, I don't want to have come to work every day wondering if some day, someone's going to say something. Today in my job, I don't want it to be an issue ... if they are going to have a problem with me being lesbian; I need to know that before I took the job.

She concluded, "So I don't want to walk into it, and I'm free, I feel very liberated here and my job has become ... I'm a 100% where I am at work."

After Thomas experienced sexual orientation discrimination at the institution he had served for many years, he would make it clear early in any search process his sexual orientation. He included the fact he had a partner. He wanted them to understand, so if it was problematic, "Then let's talk about it now, or let me get out of this now and save both you and me the trouble of having you go through this very cumbersome and time consuming process."

“Well, talk about a time in your life when you’ve been discriminated against and how that impacted you,” was the question the search committee posed to Ethan. He had gone into the interview thinking, “If the opportunity comes up, I’m going to come out in the interview process.” He responded to the richly diverse group of search committee members:

I’m thinking to myself, here are this room full of people of color, from multiple ethnic backgrounds, I will have absolutely no credibility with these people if I don’t just be true to myself, and be true to them, and out myself. My response was basically: Well ... as a gay, gay male, I spent my entire life on the margin, and have experienced discrimination both from a ... societal perspective as well an individual perspective.

He also acknowledged his privileges and said, “I [am] also was [as a] White male with privilege, and I take those two experiences and tried to make a difference for students.”

As I indicated previously, coming out is not limited to gay men and lesbians. Lee faced his own hindrances to coming out, he recalled:

Adults, and certainly other children, can be quite cruel. Things that they say, when people have differences, so if you don’t want to endure that insensitivity then you begin to try to find ways for folks not to notice ... there would be an analogy between kids taunting other kids, for wearing glasses, calling them four-eyes ... what’s wrong with you, “are you blind as a bat?”

Because of his environment then, and even now, he developed “strategies” to hide his physical disability. Even when we spoke he said, “I don’t think adults are necessarily any better. The fact as they get older, they may revert to them, that sort of snipping.”

For those who were not out and participated in this study, it seemed for some they might have been on the precipice of making the decision to come out. One participant intimated this by beginning, “If I was ever to be secure in the work environment.” Ike spoke of taking an assignment in an affirming, accepting community and after he established “some successes after a period of time, would probably ... [be] willing to be out.” Some of the leaders appeared to have begun to see a point when they could come out – their next assignment, their next supervisor, or some other event in their lives.

*Revealing of Differences: Remaining Concealed.* Maria recognized what I wanted to accomplish with this study:

It’s a real interesting thing, how we “look,” and make assumptions ... I think the topic of your dissertation [is] interesting, that, what’s not evident, it’s what beneath ... because people tend to make first impressions based on what is evident, I’m aware that race is a big issue for me ... a big part of my life, it’s become ... a big part of my career.

Unlike race, it was the goal of this study to look at differences not necessarily evident. Some of those participating chose to make evident their difference or differences, while others did not. After Lee described his concealable differences to me, he said:

And in terms of concealing, all of the things that I’ve just talked about, one can “cover” to a certain, to a certain extent ... “cover” to me ... in this context means you can conceal ... those differences.... Whether it has to do with what you can see, what you can’t see, how you were brought up and the environment you were brought up in or whether or not you know anything at all about a particular sport that their talking about.

He continued:

I think it is a goal ... because it is very intentional ... that I do the things that I do.

Of the differences that we talked about, interestingly enough ... the vision, the lack of knowledge or interest in sports, probably more so than the upbringing, background, social and economic background.

For him, being from “meager” beginnings could be worn as a badge. The “cover” for his background would have more to do with the “social aspects in the coming from ... a non-well educated family.”

A negative impact of Lee’s concealing was he often did not recognized people due to his visual disability. “My strategies for covering actually reinforce those perceptions that other people have.” He tended to not look around himself, because if he was not looking, “then there is no expectation of him to, either recognize you or to respond to, to some initiation they might take.” He pointed out the danger was because those who looked at him “get this perception of someone who’s aloof, and/or ... someone who is being snobby, because you look at them, you waived at them and they seem to have seen you, but just turned away.”

A different kind of cost is experienced when our differences are not being revealed. Robert felt gay men and lesbians have lost by being invisible, by remaining hidden it kept the broader community from gaining rights. “I have been as guilty anyone,” he said. “One, I believe it is allowed ... some of us to move forward. Two, I believe our invisibility has impeded us from getting our due rights, because we’ve been able to hide.” Gary rhetorically asked, “Well, if it’s concealable, why wouldn’t you

conceal it?” He felt the need for “confession” and “openness” was “connected to honesty and integrity.” For himself, he wanted to be “open to present the whole person.”

Because Ross presented as a “straight White male and an able-bodied male,” others had felt “betrayed” when they found out he was gay. Ross said, as if “you have withheld something very important about you.” Some participants, like Thomas, presented themselves no differently than people would expect an administrator in a higher educational institution to appear – straight, White, able-bodied male. “Sexual identity can be a concealable difference, but I don’t know if that is true about me, because you kinda look at me and it’s kinda hard not to read me as gay,” explained Ron. Robert’s experience was, “I think we delude ourselves at times in terms of thinking how invisible we can be, for some of us, some of us certainly can.”

The fact remained, some individuals found it necessary to remain concealed. “I continue to protect myself because of the fear at least of that negative discrimination.” Lee asked, “Should it be that way, should there [be] the necessity to hide?”

### *Being Called to Action*

Maria described the changes over her career toward people with differences, “It’s changing, but it’s far from changed, all throughout the United States of America. But it’s only happening, not out of the graciousness of anybody, we’re making it happen.” Her compassion motivated her to become active, to have an impact, “Compassion and understand how to do something about it. Compassion and I understand what to do. I understand the action piece. I understand what is going on. I understand what healthy responses are.” Maria spoke of her background:

I learned English in school, which was really what kind of catapulted me into wanting to go into education, was that I had a very harsh difficult adaptation in education, and learning as a child ... who was an English language learner. It was a very punitive, very difficult ... I also found throughout my education that one thing that I found missing was that I didn't see role models nor cultural, I did not see my culture valued. If anything I felt my culture and history of my family demeaned during the time that I was growing up. ... I was placed into special education. Because they didn't know what to do with us, as language learners ... misplaced and going through all sorts of interesting experiences which I didn't think kids should have to experience anymore. As I got older and it motivated me to want to go into schools to change that.

Ethan felt it was important for him and for more people in all fields who are gay, to:

Step up and be gay, I mean, open about it in their positions ... I think there is a lot more people out there that are gay that, that are not recognized ... what good that will do for young people ... that they're role models to, in an organization, what good that would be for all gay peoples, just as far as being accepted in society.

His concern was echoed by Ike. Ike felt gay men and lesbians need to "help people understand that their doctors, ministers, dentists, their teachers and all the rest of them that are gay." He felt it was important to make good things happen, "I feel that it is important that my ... achievements and the achievements of those I'm able to help achieve goals, is a thing that is celebrated more than who I am."



Ross, Thomas, and Gary also expressed the need for us all to be out. Not necessarily “in your face” out, but active, and “be visible” doing our jobs well. “Thank goodness there are lighting rod people out there, we all benefit from that ... but they benefit from those of us who go about our jobs daily doing normal things,” Ross observed. In this way “straight people will recognize and say, ‘Oh wow, they’re not all these, like, perverts.’” Ross made meaning of this aspect of his experience; he felt this way of being active was for him a more authentic way to contribute.

### *Being an Advocate*

The call to action expressed by the participants included advocating for others, themselves, and building bridges between those with differences. It was seen as important to use their understanding of differences to impact the majority culture. The very nature of just being a leader put Ron in the position of being an advocate. He found because he was the “guy in charge” that “people were about to come out, talk about working with gay people.”

Robert had two early experiences that impacted his life. The first was a teacher who took time to “listen” to him:

He’d have me come over and grade his papers and he’d take me to dinner, and just listen to my things, and I would talk about my issues, okay. He never raised anything about his own, but he listened, I don’t think he even really gave me advice, he was just there.

The second experience occurred while Robert taught in a middle school, a student he knew to be gay:

He's in the hall ... in between bells shouldn't be out in the hall ... and he's clutching some sort of paper bag, and I stopped and said, "What's in the bag?" I mean, he looks guilty, at which point, the assistant principal, or vice principal, whatever they called him steps into the hall, and sees the interchange, and says, "What's in the bag?" ... Well it's gay porn.

He continued, "The kid has a price to pay for having this, I don't even know what the price is, I didn't intercede for the kid, I'm the trigger that caused this event." These two experiences – gratefulness to the teacher and guilt over not interceding for the student – had a profound impact on his life:

Now, fast forward, one of the things I've tried to do, as a professor, as an administrator, and so forth, is to ... have an open door, and so forth, for gay students ... there is no sign that says, "Please, all gay students come in." But to be available for students and to let people on campus know that if there's a student that has an issue and you think I can help, great ... I'm available ... I'm not a counselor, I'm not into doing therapy ... but I am an openly gay person ... I've talked to students about what is this going to mean in terms of my professional career as a teacher ... at various points [the] faculty sponsor for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender student club, things like that, so just finding ways, one, to thank ... the teacher who took me in, two, to apologize ... [to the] kid who I feel his guilt over, and three, just because I think it's who I should be.

These experiences served to galvanize Robert's drive to be an advocate.

Frank was compelled to advocate for students because he had the experience growing up as one of the "underdogs" which was discussed earlier. He felt the "student is

clearly viewed as the weak player in most academic interactions.” Because of the students’ weaker position, he would advocate for them in terms of space use and discipline issues. He felt his role was not to simply discipline students but to clarify the facts of the claims, wanted to assure that the claim had “substance and accuracy behind it.” He said of these claims, “Truth is sometimes it doesn’t.” He took on the role of an advocate for the little guy, in this case students.

Like Frank, Ike advocated for his students, but in a different way:

Three and a half years ago I was approached by the gay and straight alliance that wanted a forum here ... the former president would not approve their charter ... I signed the gay and straight alliance charter on a Friday. Monday morning I had 21 Baptist ... and Assembly of God ministers standing right outside my door ... they wondered why I was trying to turn this college and the [region omitted] into a gay Mecca ... I had indicated to them that you’re a public institution, and one of our values is to honor diversity ... we had spent six months putting together our values, and as you can see on chart there [he pointed to chart of values on the wall].

Ike had the chart of values proudly hung on his office wall. He facilitated the creation of the chart of values, he said the process was “driven by me, for the reason we are talking about today.” He had prepared the way for his conservative institution to honor diverse students.

Both Ross and Robert were involved in the establishment of a non-discrimination clause for sexual orientation at their institutions. Although both were strong advocates for just such a measure, each did not want to appear to be self-serving in their support of the

initiative. This experience served to underscore Ross' concern that any action he took regarding sexuality issues would be seen as self-serving. He had enjoyed the objective position as a heterosexual man, but after he came out he felt he lost the appearance of objectivity. When asked by a group of students and faculty, "Why don't we have something like this?" Ross told them, "Well, it requires a board policy ... anybody can propose a policy, and students are a powerful voice, so if you think that needs to be done, do it." Although he felt he could not personally propose the non-discrimination clause, he helped guide others regarding how to initiate its establishment.

Those who are different have to be concerned beyond non-discrimination clauses. Gary knew he needed to plan his estate differently than do heterosexual couples. He was struck with the fact that for years he would receive information about his retirement plan, and the literature would never address the retirement planning complexities for same-sex couples. The retirement plan representatives paid his institution a courtesy call. After they completed the campus business he raised this issue with them. "About two or three months later I received the proofs of their new literature on this," he told me. Perhaps he was not the only one who raised the issue, yet it was important to him, "I feel that I've been able to make a difference." Because of Gary's advocacy, in whatever measure, the retirement counselors were prepared to talk about the complexities of retirement planning for same-sex couples.

*Being an Advocate: Self-Advocacy.* "I don't necessarily expect or demand the rest of the world to accommodate me," Lee said. Helen grew up not making her hearing disability obvious to others. She described her experience growing up:

It was my responsibility to do the extra work. I sat up front. I lip read. I asked my classmates for notes. I would go to the public library or the school library even when I was “yeah high” [indicating the height of a small child] and take out extra books. Just to keep learning, to make up something I might miss by the teachers that didn’t turn around. So, my nature is to always go above and beyond ... it is my responsibility to make up any differences.

Helen was a self-advocate; she had to protect her life as she had known it:

My parents and I always lived with the threat that I would [be] sent away, because at that time ... you were sent away to ... [name omitted] school for the deaf and you lived there. So, there was always that fear. If I didn’t do it that I would be sent away ... inherently [I] probably lived like that all my life. Like right now ... if I am too much of a problem at my job, they’ll get ... somebody else. So, I do the extra, I do the extra work. I’m always on the Internet looking at other, other things in case I missed something in meetings ... to be very knowledgeable of the subject.

This constant self-advocacy consumed Helen’s time “by always playing catch up.” After a meeting she could not just walk out like other people. She followed up, “Please clarify what you said.” She also made the effort not to force other people to change their environment just for her. Even when asked, “Do you want us to move so you can see?” She would reply, “I will move, I will move [my] chair.” She does this so those around her do not have extra work. She makes the extra effort, “I’m willing to do that extra work.”

Just as Helen advocated for herself, Ross advocated for himself when his supervisor asked him about the letter writing attack launched upon his character. His

supervisor asked, “What do you want me to tell board members, if they confront me about this and say this is out of hand, and you’re a liability?” He told his supervisor, “I would want you to tell them that I’m not a liability, you’ve got five years of record[s] ... and they’re glowing ... I would hope that you would focus on what I was hired to do.” Ross advocated for himself by helping his supervisor understand how to advocate for him to the board. Referring to the letters, his supervisor asked, “What about this other?” Ross indicated to him that his personal life was irrelevant to the situation and he trusted him “as a professional and a leader to share and remind them of the stuff they already know” because he had reported it to them each year.

*Being an Advocate: Building Bridges.* It was important to a number of the participants to make the effort to educate those around them how to relate to those who are different. Thomas explained his experience:

People see what they want to see ... they write a story for you. Even if it’s only in a preliminary way, they write a story for you, that if you want to change the script in their minds, you have to change it, and sometimes you have to do that because it’s important that they not have that script, but sometimes you have to do it because it is important to *you* that they don’t have that script ... I told this group of executives ... don’t start with the assumption that they’re hostile, start with the assumption that they’re ignorant [In the uninformed sense] ... So, give it to them, give them the way to deal with it, and, and, so that you throw them a life line, they’ll be grateful, overwhelmingly, and you’ll do not only you and them a favor in that context, but you will also do other LGBT people favors with them in the

future, because they will know what to do. They will know what to say. They will know what not to say and what not to do.

Thomas had learned the value of having those who are different “help” you understand how to relate to them. He described his experience with a disabled undergraduate student in the eighties:

I had a student ... really smart guy, who was shot in the lower spine in Vietnam, and was paralyzed from the waist down ... he maneuvered by ... two crutches, that he would put down and that he would swing his body out and then he could stand on his feet, but he couldn't move them, so he could stand there on them and just kind of keep himself balanced with the crutches, but he couldn't walk and he refused to use a wheel chair ... when we got somewhere and I started to do something to help him, he said, “No, don't do that ... the worst thing you can do is to help me ... It's not about my psychological state ... I'm very precarious in my balance, if you try to help me, you could inadvertently knock me over ... I appreciate the fact that [you] want to help ... But, let me negotiate my world, because it's the only way that I can maintain control of my body and my physical space ... just let me do this.” So I never held a door for him ... he didn't want anything, getting in and out of the car, open the door ... close the door after he was out, that was it.

This student had taught Thomas how to interact with his difference. “I'm going to tell you how to, in this context you don't know what is not offensive, so let me tell you what's not offensive.” Of course he acknowledged that each individual takes offense differently. So he said, “I'm perfectly cool with everything except ... for example I don't

mind being called a queer man.” As Thomas built bridges of understanding it was important to clearly lay out what was offensive and not, for those different generally, but for him specifically. His goal was to impart understanding which could help others deal with those with similar differences.

It was also important to Gary to convey understanding by “giving them the script.” He gave them a script while he came out during the interview process:

I felt it was very important to make sure that the people who were looking at me a possible colleague know that I was gay, and had a partner ... I always felt that the way to do it was not to say, “Now you know I’m gay.” But rather, depending upon the situation and what gets asked is simply if you are asked about someone, you just use the pronoun if you’re a man, you use the pronoun “he.” So, totally a matter of fact ... and usually, almost always found that people will play the scripts that give them. And if you give them a script where this is the most natural thing, not worth a comment, that is the script they will follow.

This is an example of giving a script – it is natural to have a same-sex partner. He felt the script was received with the meaning which was intended.

When the effort was made to educate others about our differences, it was not always given due attention. Lee told me, “I’ve had experiences with people who know about the difference, one way or the other, and who still either do not think about it, or remember ... that I have [these] challenges, who should.” He continued, “The other part of that question for me though would be whether people do know about and just don’t deal with them ... because its, it takes them out of their comfort zone.”

Lorde (1984) discussed the need to share our knowledge with the oppressors:



It is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. I am responsible for educating teachers who dismiss my children's culture in school. Black and Third World people are expected to educate White people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. (p. 114-115)

She continued, "The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions." Those who are different will have to continue to teach them until they take responsibility to learn themselves.

### *Being a Mentor and Role Model*

Ethan's experience as a college student without role models helped establish his goal of becoming a role model:

My whole reason for being out is ... to somehow provide role models that many of us didn't have ... growing up ourselves ... my whole reason for doing that, to be a role model for the students, or other ... people who are dealing with their own sexuality issues ... College students that I know ... are struggling with the same things I did in college ... their own identity ... maybe I could make a difference as a role model to them, and to be out to them.

His desire to be a role model extended to being out to his family, "I have eight nieces and nephews ... they all know I am gay ... if I can be a role model to them too ... at least that they would know somebody that was successful."

While Lee and I were discussing role models and mentors he described the difference between the two in his life, "I think of a mentor as being one who, who takes an active part in the relationship, and also the mentee which would be me in this case

learning from, being active in learning from that individual.” Maria described her experience mentoring, often with gay administrators:

What I find in mentoring gay people, it’s like a 100% of the time, when it comes to issues of identity and sexuality, is that a lot of people want me to mentor them, and are attracted to the fact that I’m comfortable being out, but a lot of times they’re not comfortable being out, there is a lot of arguing about ... I can’t [come out] ... I’m not interested in arguing with anybody about what they are ... you need to choose what’s right for you and your time ... it’s not my right to do that ... I’m a believer, you’re going to come out when you’re ready to come out.

She played an active role in these lives. Her openness about her sexuality appeared to draw those dealing with their own sexual identity to her. Ike and Helen also were involved in mentoring other individuals, imparting their understanding to those who wanted to learn from their experiences.

These participants were active in multiple ways, making meaning of their experience, and that the resulting meaning propelled them into action. The way they responded to their differences enabled them not only to have empathy but also to respond to the call to action, to go beyond the buzzwords of inclusiveness, tolerance, and diversity. They followed through on their empathy and impacted individuals’ lives.

Many of these leaders felt the need to be public about their differences, as it was an important aspect of themselves. For them, hiding their differences had made them less authentic, less genuine. It was important to expose their differentness, not just to hide it or from it. Many asked themselves and others around them difficult questions, “Shouldn’t we all be out? Are we actually hurting everybody, hurting all the gay people by

propagating the oppression through silence and inaction?” It seemed they felt the answer was we could overcome the repression through voice and action.

### Being Engaged

It was important for these leaders to be engaged in the lives of others and themselves. Many of the participants had partners; some had children and ongoing relationships with family members. It was also important for them to have peace and harmony within themselves.

#### *Being Engaged With Partners*

Having partners in their lives was important for Gary, Ron, Thomas, and Ike. Gary said, “In some many ways I wouldn’t be where I am if it weren’t for my partner.” During the interview process Gary recalled, “I heard a member of the committee say ... the positive energy that you and [partner’s name omitted] have together was one of the things we found so attractive.”

It was important to Ron – and significant to me – that Ron’s partner was included in the recruitment process for his current assignment, “They had one last dinner, where they ask one last time and they invited my partner to this dinner too, which was pretty smart on their part.” The search committee’s inclusion of Ron’s partner made a key impact on his decision to accept the assignment. Thomas spoke of his partner, “We have been together almost 26 years.” His relationship with his partner was important enough to him that during negotiations for his current position he arranged special provisions:

It’s important to me because although my partner’s mentioned explicitly in my contract, in the way I imagine my predecessor’s contract mentioned his wife ... the fact is that I wanted to be *absolutely* sure ... there was specific, explicit

conversation about it ... I guess there's probably more written in there than my predecessor would need because some of the things that are in there are things that his wife would have legally – automatically – that [his partner's name omitted] doesn't get because we can't get married. Alright, so we wrote them, without any trouble. [He was asked,] "Why do you want to put terms in, why do you want to put that in the contract?" I said, "Because we can't legally get married." ... He said, "Oh, oh, I never thought about it that way." I said, "I have to think about it that way." If I die ... and he has a great job ... so it is not like, you know, he is poor, but we live a certain lifestyle ... If I die, he's got to be protected.

He added, "He would kill me for saying that because 'I don't need protection' and he doesn't." But Thomas wanted him to have "certain kinds of transition things that wives get ... that partners don't get."

Ike cheerfully reported, "My partner, whose name is [omitted] ... [has] always been with me." Then he added, "Never 'known' to anyone." His relationship with his partner was very meaningful to him, "[He] has been very good to me over the years, and has traveled with me, and gone with me wherever employment would be had, [he] has not complained." Then he added, "But I will tell you that he is giving me, maybe one more year." Ike was the leader who lived in a rural community where he and his partner lived a deeply closeted existence. "I think being gay has helped in many ways, because my partner isn't as requiring of me, as maybe a wife and/or a wife with kids would be," he said. Ike explained his relationship did suffer because of the extensiveness of his work schedule, and he has "to be a little more attentive to his [partner's] needs because it can

be very lonely for him.” Ike talked about gay relationships being easier to maintain, because of the some of the demands being unlike those in heterosexual relationships.

Tim shared the same experience of being able to move for his assignments. “The fact has been I’ve been able to become a pretty senior level administrator because I’ve been able to move.” His mobility was a plus, but during one of his assignments he experienced a downside to his singleness. “My last administrative position I was de facto president of a small school ... there were an awful lot of social functions where, not having a spouse was a hindrance.” After we discussed this further, Tim clarified, “Not being in a heterosexual marriage was a hindrance. I know that, I think that a lot of limitations to events because I could not come with a wife.” The president is expected to have a domestic other half in many residential colleges. “There is a traditional place for ... as the inhabitant with his domestic other half, of the presidential house and the social duties that go with that. And, I just think it would be very difficult if one were single,” Gary said. On a cautionary note he said, “The people who are deciding to be ‘closeted’ as it were, in order of succeeding ... that they would not consider living with a partner, from my chair, they may be doing more to harm their chances.”

During his acceptance of a regional service award, Mark acknowledged gay and lesbian members of his profession who:

Probably do more work, because they have no homes to go to, no partners to celebrate with, no children that can make their lives more fleshed out. We often times go home to darkened households that are lonely, and our experiences are lonely.

This was indeed true of Mark’s experience.

Other participants had long-term relationships as well. Sadly, Robert lost his partner to AIDS in the 1990's. Ross also lost his partner of sixteen years. Ross' relationship started when he came out, they had "stayed partners for sixteen years, until he died from AIDS." Ross and Robert have since found new partners.

Ethan, who was not partnered at the time of our conversations, reflected on what it would take to introduce a partner into his professional life:

I need [to] be in a very well established relationship before I brought somebody ... I would be very cautious of who they are, what they did, how they present ... I know people would be ... unfairly looking at that person ... unfairly making judgments as well.

He recognized what he had said, "Maybe that's probably my internal homophobia, [and] we all have a little bit of that, right?"

#### *Being Engaged with Family and Children*

Beyond having partners, many of the participants maintained positive relationships with their families. Robert felt he would never "lose" his parents, even though they did not approve of his sexual orientation. While they were still married, Maria's former husband was the one who helped her understand her sexuality. He told her, "I've been watching you and I think you're really attracted to woman." Maria said of her former husband, "We're still friends to this day." Concerning her children, Maria said:

I've had to think about the impact on my children, as a parent ... showing up with two mommies at school ... different stages of my life I've had to negotiate that

with my children. Not in my life, but their lives, now what does that mean for them ... what are we subjecting them to and do they deserve it or not.

She described an experience with her one of her children:

In the school yard, kids were saying anti-gay things, and she was in the group, but she said nothing, and she came home, she was weeping, she said, "I didn't have the strength to stand up to them." She was ashamed for not standing up for her family. It was a really emotional moment, but at the same time my daughter grew for that. You know and she has her own journey.

Maria was very conscience of the impact of her differences on the lives of her children and actively negotiated what those differences meant to them.

Ross' children experienced the impact of his differences as well:

From time to time, [his first partner's name omitted] would ask them, he said, "So, what are you going to say to your boyfriend when they say, 'We hear your dad's a faggot, and he's living with this queer?'" They would say, just without thinking about it, they'd say, "Well we would deny it, of course." By the time they got to about to graduate from high school, and they're two years apart, and into college, when he would ask them that question they would, they would say, "Well, if they ask it like that, they'd be toast."

He was there for his children's journey as well as his own.

### *Being Engaged With Themselves*

These leaders valued those around them, but understood the importance of peace within. It was important for Maria to have a sense of faith that was "a spiritual way of dealing with everything." She explained how she engaged in her own life:

I want to live my life, and die in peace ... peace is important to me, inner peace is very important to me. Sense of self and self-love, and self-forgiveness are important to me, important spiritual values. I've developed a strong spiritual life ... I think spirituality is extremely important, because in some way, and I've learned that from Black people, particularly Black women ... who do God's work, especially Black lesbians are great. It's sort of like, you know what, God didn't put you in this body, [and at] this time as an accident. You know, you're here in a way to do good work ... don't shy away, don't go, "Oh Shit, why is this, why is this happening to me?"

Her own sense of faith included forgiveness, "Because if you carry that stuff ... I'm not going to die over this shit ... they're not going to kill me."

To be engaged in the lives of others and themselves was significant for these leaders. These leaders participated in the lives of their partners, children, and family members. It was also important for them to have peace and harmony within.

### Being Without Voice

This study gives voice to the oppressed. I stated previously, I wanted this research to allow for the individual to give voice to how they make meaning of their experience. This study gave the participants the ability and opportunity to express the meanings of their experiences of being different (Reinharz, 1994). For those who could not participate because of the fear of negative consequences, they continue in silence concerning the impacts of their differences on their *Being*.

### *Voices Not Heard*

A deep pang inside me began to grow as I first heard these words from Ike:



A couple of the presidents in our region ... who I contacted to see if they'd be, they'd be able to participate with you, or be open to talk to about, and are *not* ... are even more closeted than I, two lesbians and their partners. They live in an area of the state and one drives 35 miles to her job and the other one drives 40 miles to her job. And they live in some rural area and that's worked for them for 20 years ... and they both feel that they can't be out.

As I heard him tell me they could not be open to talk to me, the impact echoed in my mind. Later I wrote in my journal:

I really feel I want to give voice to those individuals who don't feel they can talk ... At least make it known that they couldn't express the experiences they've had. The meaning of their experience is that they cannot express it. The meaning of their experience is that their careers would be ruined or their personal lives would be ruined if they spoke of their experiences that they couldn't even do that. So I really want this study to give voice to that part of the experience, that they could not give voice to their experience out of fear, out of real and solid fear of repercussion.

Ike told me, "If [name omitted] or [name omitted] didn't send me that e-mail saying that this looks like something good to do, I'm not sure I would have talked to you, I would not have known you." Ike participated because of the referrals, and probably only because these referrals came from someone he had previously known and trusted. "I truly understand and can value it," Ike said about the other leaders' hesitation to participate. He followed with:

Ya know it's funny, I feel worse for them than I do for us. Feel bad for them that they can't do ... but in a sense I was really feeling bad for myself and I don't think of it that way, to let them get outside.

Both he and I felt as if these leaders were trapped, unable to get out. Ike indicated some of the individuals may have previously been betrayed by such a confidence, and told Ike, "I did this once before, and it didn't work."

During a follow-up conversation with Ike, we again discussed the individuals who could not participate. I explained to him how it saddened me because I was finding it hard to not afford those individuals an opportunity for a voice in this study. Ike replied, "I bet you will, in talking about people you interviewed and maybe those you weren't able to, 'because of'." While having a conversation with another participant I described those individuals who were unable to participate because, "even with the confidentiality, they, they just would not, that's how closeted they were." I continued, "I'm actually thinking about a section in my paper called "Voices Not Heard." Before I finished saying the last word, the individual shouted, "*Do it!*" I continued, "I've got to say something about these individuals ..." I was encouraged by, "Yes you do!" I continued again, "... that cannot speak for themselves, even if it's just a small section ... to me it's just 'sad', it's just so sad." Throughout the last sentence I was given confidence to proceed with my plan to include this section by the words "do it" several times. Then, as if a light was illuminated, the participant said:

I mean my voice still isn't being heard. You're, you're putting themes. So in that "Voices Not Heard," you have two parts. One, these ones that still, that their fear is so great, they wouldn't be part of themes that you find out. And those of us,

those of us that are participants ... [you had to] promise us ... no name ... I'm one of them. I also belong in ... "Voices not Heard," that make sense?

Because of the risk of being identified was too great, even the voices of those who participated were not fully being heard. This individual did not agree to participate until being assured of confidentiality. The participant said, "Because you said, 'Anybody that reads my paper will not be able to associate you with it.' That's what I needed to know."

Obviously by my comments, I found it quite disturbing that even under the shield of confidentiality these individuals could not feel comfortable describing their experiences leading institutions of higher education. The fear they would be found out was too great. They were not able to talk about their experiences or express their concerns. It was seen as threatening to their career, threatening to their livelihood. As I considered their plight, my heart goes out to them all!

#### *A Silent Voice*

On June 24, 2007 Denice D. Denton took her own life. Denton was an accomplished academic, a brilliant engineer, and served as the Chancellor of the University of California at Santa Cruz. She was well known for her "larger-than-life personality." As an example, Denton was critical of the comments made by Lawrence H. Summers, the former president of Harvard University who questioned the female aptitude for science. She was also an out lesbian (Fain, 2006; Fain, 2007b). As a leader in higher education with a concealable difference, Denton would have been a great potential participant in this study. Because of her high profile position, I asked each of the participants if her story had any impact on their lives. I was surprised by the responses I

received. Those who knew her story replied back to me in strongly emotional, even passionate terms.

Tim, typically the most reserved of the group, responded:

I thought it was a really sad story because, I mean, this, this woman was at her pinnacle of her profession and ... she obviously had some serious problems. And, I just felt very badly for her. And, I was really proud, when I learned she was an open lesbian, she had a partner, she was becoming a president at this excellent research university in California. I thought, "Wow, it's great, good for her."

He continued, "Maybe I should be as out as she is. She can do it, why not me?" After some discussion about the different stresses she faced, he said, "My overwhelming feeling was just one of great sadness, because I was just excited that this woman had become president, excited because she had such an interesting background, because she was lesbian." He ended with "and she killed herself."

Thomas' response when I asked about Denton was, "That's horrible." He went on to say:

The story there that interested me most was the way that, it was partly her story, and partly the community's story. The community's side of the story was the decisions that were being made and that they were angry, people were angry at the university, or at the state, or whatever. And, she, because she was chancellor ... she was the ... focal point, and they surrounded her car, they harassed her, so forth, and so on. My perspective, the story there on that is, "Why did she allow that to happen?" From her side, and from the other side, "Why did the people let that happen to her?"

When I asked Ethan if Denton's experience had an impact on him, he replied:

It had a profound impact on me because I had met with her, twice ... the first time I met with her we were in a round-table discussion ... 10 or 12 educators around the table ... Denice was really new in her position ... [we were in] the mayor's conference room, pretty big, pretty big conference table. And there was one person between Denice and I. Denice ... took up so much physical space, not being a big woman ... big, big, big gestures, big talk, big gestures, and so forth. I thought ... "Watch out this woman was going places." ... I had pretty strong sense that she was a lesbian .... So fast forward six months ... myself and ... one of the researchers make this trek over to UC Santa Cruz, and the first thing that was odd was that they brought us ... in this back way to this meeting room. That seemed odd to begin with ... what I later understand was there had been some like picketing ... demonstrators in her office ... she finally makes it into the room and she's got her two VPs there ... I'm a pretty ... gregarious guy, I can make conversation with anybody on the street ... I spend this first 10 minutes, like trying to ... engage her ... she was virtually catatonic for that entire meeting. And I'm not kidding you, night and day from the woman I'd seen. Of course I wasn't completely aware ... she was just not engaged at all.

He continued:

A huge tragedy, that, that loss is serious. Here this woman is one of the brightest people educationally. I don't know if you know her story, she was an engineer, and dean, done amazing things at ... University of Washington, as a Dean ... and really was a target here. And it is so interesting because UC Santa Cruz is very

liberal; Santa Cruz is very liberal area, so it's just really unfortunate. I think she became a real target ... I saw her state, her mental state, when I was with her was clearly not right. And certainly, "vastly" different than the experience I had with her previously.

Ethan's last words on Denice were, "Tragedy, tragic situation."

Denton's story also impacted Mark greatly:

It resonated, it resonated from within me, in a powerful manner, when I read that an openly gay woman was the chancellor for a leading comprehensive university on the west coast, and then subsequently leaped to her death in an act of suicide from a building that was at least 35 to 40 stories tall, it saddened me greatly, and I, can only empathized that her orientation made her life that much tougher because being a president or chancellor of a contemporary college or university is hard enough, without then having to respond to the critics that ... aren't going to approve of you because of who you are ... Because I was very saddened by a woman who obviously brilliant academically, just a powerful scholar, who then was elevated to presidency and depending on how you frame the article, hounded right out of office and driven to suicide.

A moving comment Mark made was, "it was a cautionary tale, for all of us, who might be gay or lesbian, and aspire to be presidents ... it gives another reason to want you out of office." Mark reiterated, "And she was openly gay, at a very large university, there tens of thousands of students at University of California at ... Santa Cruz, that's huge ... that's real progress for the LGBTQIS [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual] community, what a shame to lose her."

Gary was “very aware” of Denton, “Some of the issues that I thought were very unfairly, and surprisingly for me, tipped in a homophobic direction and were brought up, such as the job for her partner.” He described the common practice of providing job opportunities for significant others in the recruitment process. “I was deeply saddened, obviously, for this individual. Did I identify more? I suppose I did to a certain extent because I knew she was one of the rare out gay people.” He was distressed by the fact the office of the president did not support her on many of the issues. He said, “The pressures were enormous, and I was sorry to learn that she was not better liked.” He did not see the issue being her sexuality, “I think not because of the fact that she was an out gay person. That would be almost inconceivable on the Santa Cruz campus, to my mind.”

The most passionate of all the responses when asked about the impact of Denton on their lives was from Maria:

It was “hard,” because what it also what it meant to me is that I know a lot of what she was dealing with was homophobia. She was not closeted, but there was no question to me that there was hatred towards her, because she, she was very evidently a lesbian, she was like a dike ... classic dike and I thought to myself ... again privilege, people will never name, nor accept responsibility for the malice of homophobia that they directed at her and how they helped to kill her. There won't be an understanding that the society contributed to her death.

I related to Maria that she was the first participant who actually articulated homophobia as a factor. Because she was an out lesbian, I had wondered what role her sexuality played in Denton's death. Maria continued:

Like I said, she was sick; it was all of that psychologically sick but was it 100%? But ... I think because she was struggling on top of it ... if you would have seen the attacks on her, the venom ... she looked like a bull dike ... you know how people feel a woman who looks like that, and you felt the rage. I felt [the] venom towards her ... and she didn't have the strength, she didn't have the wherewithal. And there was kind of an innocence about her, she was a real intellectual, real intellectual.

She related her own experience:

I have been attacked so much for being gay, but I had to detach. And that is a very important skill, because if you don't detach, you can personalize it, and you can internalize it. Then it can make you sick, I think in Denice's case, it killed her ... when I heard, I was angry. I thought, "she got murdered, she was murdered and nobody will take responsibility for it" ... this big woman ... she was a puppy dog, she was innocent, she didn't think like that ... she didn't have the skill, to deal with what was being thrown at her ... there was no question about it, she suffered ... the way in which the media dealt with afterwards, kind of felt that people were feeling a little guilty ... there was not in the mainstream press ... there wasn't a ... look at what homophobia does ... 'cause it wasn't an obvious gay bashing, physical murder, but it was a gay bashing murder in many ways.

I can still hear the passion in Maria's voice when she said to me, "There were plenty of times I started going through stuff I was in my head going my god, leave her alone, leave her alone, *please* leave her alone."



The following is a portion of a letter to the editor of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, written by two of Denton's colleagues and friends:

Was Denice too young, too untested, not thick-skinned enough? Obviously it is easy now to say yes. On the other hand, did our society fail to compensate for the extra energy that Denice and others have to expend every single day because of their identity, just to maintain their sense of worth and efficacy? The answer is absolutely. As Gretchen [Denton's partner] said in the memorial to Denice, "The struggle continues." Please, stop contributing to the hate. (Watson & Algert, 2007)

#### Being Hopeful

Out of the experiences of this group of leaders, hope sprang up for the future. This hope was not expressed without understanding the harsh realities of the world we live in, nor with pessimism that would stand in the way of true progress. Truly these leaders saw a brighter future and were part of enabling that future to become a reality. They also received support from those who valued their contribution to the academy, without regard to their difference. These individuals stood up and did the "right thing" in many circumstances.

#### *Being Affirmed*

Mark's culture destroyed his self-esteem as a boy, because of its caricature of his sexual orientation. He said, "I did not think that I was worthy of anything." He was "pummeled by society's messages" to the point where he thought he was not "good enough" to fill roles of responsibility. It took him years to build the self-esteem, by one work assignment building upon another to overcome these attacks to his personhood.

Mark expressed a hope for the future, for his future assignments, and for those that follow him. But he did not hope without this concern, “I fear that our form of concealable differences is going to be the last one for which the doors are eventually removed.”

Mark found refuge in the halls of higher education, he said, “The world of higher education administration seemed to be the most progressive and welcoming for someone like me, who didn’t quite fit in to any other area.” He was very aware this world surrounded by the “intelligentsia” was an “insular” environment. However, this separateness gave him the environment he needed to progress to the point where he could acknowledge his orientation. Another participant posed a caution about this “insular” world who found it interesting administration had no negative reactions to faculty who asked for domestic partner benefits but raised concern when those in administration did. This was seen as a double standard, “Why is it okay for faculty, but there’s discomfort if you’re in administration?”

Gary hoped for the situations where people would get to know him first as the person he was, then as a gay man. Frank also wanted to be seen as the person he was and not be denied the ability to be a “key participant” just because of his background. “Don’t do anything ‘in spite of anything,’ but do it because of who you are, what you bring to the table,” Ethan empathically said to me during one of our conversations. He has delivered this message to his academic community; he hoped as he reframed the mindsets of those who are different he would empower them for greater opportunities.

Thomas’ experience with affirmation occurred when he took an assignment at an institution that was surprised to attract someone with his academic credentials. He said, “Because people like me didn’t go to places like that ... we stayed in the famous

universities, okay, but I needed to go to a place that would take me.” There he was accepted and valued for his credentials, without regard to his sexuality. Ross did not want to focus solely on the discrimination portion of his experience. He was fortunate to have a community of faculty who cared for him. The faculty at Ross’ institution stood up for him during a time he was being attacked and said, “There is no way that they’re going to get rid of you.”

Helen expressed hope for the future, “Slowly but surely, racism, all the ‘ism’s, will hopefully go away.” Like Helen, many of the leaders including Gary expressed hope for a future which would welcome them, not in spite of their difference, but to be simply welcomed. Gary described the reception that he and his partner received at his institution, “We’ve been welcomed.” Thomas explained, “In higher education, people are not yet ready, particularly not governing boards and particularly in public institutions.” He referred to the debate about the gay and lesbian community and “our rights as citizens” not being resolved.

However, Thomas gave an account of an encouraging story, the story of the genesis of his current assignment; his initial conversation with the headhunter:

I said, “No, they would never pick me because I’m a gay man, they won’t pick me.” And she said, “Oh, oh” she laughed, and she said “they already know that.” and you know at that point I thought, “Oh wow,” that changed the dynamics, “they’re willing to talk to me.” ... at least in their minds, was not a debilitating circumstance and I thought anybody that will do that I will, I should at least look into it.

He was hired for the position. Thomas expressed hope for being welcomed for who those who are different are, not in spite of those differences. This would make it important as then those differences would not impact our reception. In situations such as interviewing, Thomas expressed the reaction to his sexuality as being “neutral, which in some sense is therefore positive experience because it didn’t matter.”

There were hesitations and concerns expressed about this “neutrality” for the future. Mark asked, “What comes next? And will the search committees of the future hire gay boys like us?” Mark was hopeful his difference would someday not matter. Ethan placed significant meaning on the experience of coming out during his interview for his position. He said, “I think for the first time it was like, okay, this is happening, not in spite of my being a gay male, but perhaps because I was a gay male. And, so it was a very validating experience.” The experience impacted his interaction with students. “I frame things with my students that challenge[s] them to do great things and be, do all the right things, not in spite of anything, but because of it, because of who they are.”

Mark went as far as to say, “Part of me that thinks in a half dozen years, yeah, they’re going to be search committees out of the right schools, who have an open mind, or looking for somebody who has a resume like mine.” He felt institutions would want him for what he could add to the academy.

Maria was hopeful for the future:

My belief is one of these days, it won’t matter, and I, what I have seen in my career, the changes I’ve seen are remarkable. There would have been “nowhere,” when I first became a dean, there wouldn’t have been a single place that would have hired anyone like me. I don’t believe it ... they didn’t exist, there was no

evidence of it ... and now instead look what I have ... so I've been able to see these kinds of changes where we are able to get jobs and be out ... we have boards that are consciously looking for people like us and celebrate hiring us. "They're lucky to get to me ... I bring a lot to this community," Maria explained, "I'm going to work in a place where that's really valued, and you can start to find those places, but you have to believe it ... if you don't believe it yourself you're not going to find it." It was difficult for her to not say "thank you" to the boards willing to hire her, "I'm going to stop saying to my employers, 'thank you for hiring me,' because I know everything I am." She continued:

But many of us do ... you don't say, "Thank you for hiring me" ... but inside yourself, you're thinking, "My God this board had the courage to hire an out [ethnically diverse] lesbian ... God you guys are great, thank you." Somewhere inside you've gotta go, "Thank you." Because you know, they don't have to, and most boards won't.

Maria brought a rich experience to higher education. They were fortunate to have her serve in theirs.

### *Being Supported by Advocates*

This hope for the future was impacted by the leaders' experiences of being supported. Individuals in their lives had done the "right things" at the right times in the right circumstances. Advocates stepped forward, mentors made the effort to share their experiences, and individuals were willing to be visible role models for them. These leaders benefited from those willing to stand up and support them.

Before Ross ever came out, early in his career, he had a situation where he took the opportunity to point out what was important – to teach:

I had reporting to me on my staff, a lesbian, alleged ... I didn't feel like it was any of my business, she was responsible for national marketing of some of our products...at one point he [his supervisor] said to me, keep an eye on – and he named her – because she is a lesbian, and, you know how they do, and she's on the campus, they recruit young people ... and went into all these stereotypes.

When Ross' supervisor questioned him about her personal life, he replied:

Wow, I don't, I don't know what you are talking about, about any of that. I said, "But let me tell you what the return on investment on this gal." I said, "It's phenomenal, she, she leaves town, she's gone, she comes back like at two or three in the morning, she's got notes for everybody and the assignments and everybody is saying, 'Oh my god, she's been gone, we're going to be working our butts off.' ... and I said, "I, I don't know what she does with personal life, but I, I can't even imagine how she would have time [laughter] to have a personal life ... I can't report to you anything other than ... you are getting good return on the investment here."

His experience impacted me, I wrote in my journal that evening:

His example was a person in a position to redirect homophobia, to be able to help point out ... the *real* issue, how well this person performed ... someone who recognized the real value of somebody, who cares about their personal life, this person *delivered*.

Ross was able to redirect his supervisor to the important issue at hand, her job performance.

Thomas had advocates stand up on his behalf. Two years after he was hired for a position, he found out:

The search committee chair ... goes in and he says, "Okay folks." He says, "We are going to invite the candidates, we have ... six people, and we are going to invite them to campus, and before we have any discussion ... I think everybody would agree that [Thomas] is coming, but I have to tell you something before he comes." And so, and, they said, "What?" And he says, "He's gay." And ... there is this silence in the room ... the president [has] to make the decision, [but] you got to get past the search committees. So, they had to do their gut checks first. I don't know how they found out ... they're sitting there now ... what do we do ... a gay [administrator] ... it is very interesting, the undergraduate student sitting on the committee said, "Well, I don't understand why we care about that?" "Would somebody here tell me why we would care about that?" And because it was the undergraduate student, who said that, the other, the older people said, "Well, we don't care."

It would be great if all search committees had just such an undergraduate to speak up and say "Why would we care?" In addition to the student, the president also had become an advocate for Thomas, "He sorta protected me. He could have what he wanted. I just had to perform at a very high level ... in order to sustain his judgment/credibility in the community." Thomas wanted this president's advocacy of him to be vindicated, "I had to,

a real commitment to do well for my own purposes but also because I thought it was really important, he took a chance on me, and I had to deliver to him what he needed.”

Ike, the leader serving in a rural community, said “As president of this institution I would [be] fired if it was, if it was known and in print that I was a homosexual.” He was told by the hiring authority they did not want any of those “lifestyles coming into his community.” Ross’ situation and lack of advocacy was much more virulent. As you will see, I would even title it anti-advocacy. He had an individual, or a set of individuals, who took it upon themselves to “inform” the campus, the governing board, and even accrediting bodies about the “evils” of Ross. Most of the information was false. This letter writing attack occurred at a time in Ross’ life when physical danger was close at hand:

I moved in with my partner, and the kids ... anonymous mail started and was circulated at work, and other kinds of harassment. At one point, somebody threw a rock through the window with some crude note attached to it, “Faggot.” That kind of thing, which was ... alarming, especially since we had children there ... the nature of the, the, anonymous mail ... [was] lascivious, and juvenile in that respect.

With every new leader appointed, new board, and new accreditation process came a resurgence of this anonymous mail, which continued on for years. One new leader reacted this way, “I know all about [Ross’ institution name] and I know about you, and frankly, those are among the reasons that I’m coming, and I’m looking forward to working with you, and, so it’s fundamentally not an issue.” For the first time Ross



received that kind of affirmation from a boss, and it “felt very good.” This person became a “true champion” for Ross.

When an extremely conservative individual was appointed as member of the governing board, Robert’s president was concerned for Robert’s position. The president responded to the situation, “He’s going to have to come through me.” Robert finished the story, “It never happened, but she would have.” The impact of advocates was quite significant in some of the participant’s lives, Mark’s personal experiences was:

When I was hired, I wasn’t told that, that at least two trustees, perhaps three, made the announcement to my president in front of several colleagues that they had heard that she hired a gay man ... the room got very silent, the president had to look over and say, “I’ve hired an award winning administrator, who incidentally is gay.” And one of the trustees looked over at her, and in front of four or five of my current colleagues said, “Now ... this man will be working with students.” In a way that was fraught with implications ... a gay man working with college students ... “You just aren’t going to do that. It’s not good for the college and we are shocked that you would even consider such a thing.” ... two trustees subsequently made an effort with other trustees to gain forces and remove her from her position, her presidency was momentarily at risk because the hiring of a ... gay [administrator] was the last straw, she was known for being progressive, but this was outlandish, almost bordered on aberrant, no one in their right mind should hire an out gay executive to work with teenagers.

Mark’s president stayed calm, and “in another great gesture of leadership and camaraderie” she refused to tell Mark what the trustees had said until after he had served

the institution for six months. He did not know her employment was put at risk because he existed. “In that six month performance review she indicated to me, all is well.” She even had one of the trustees look at her and say, “Oh this is not at all what I expected; he’s going to be alright.” Mark said:

I am still not to this day certain as to what that trustee must have expected when I stepped foot on campus, as contrasted with [what the] trustee saw when I walked in with the same starched white oxford shirt, power tie, and charcoal grey suit as everybody else in the room.

These two trustees wanted to terminate the president’s employment before Mark even begun his assignment. “They simply had heard the statement that I was gay, and that was going to be enough to terminate her.” Mark said something which resonated inside me, “That’s frightening.”

Helen’s advocacy happened much earlier in her life:

I never had the protection ... I was before Public Law 94-142 [Education of All Handicapped Children Act] ... I grew up in a public school’s where ... the teachers were always trying to get me kicked out ... but we lived next door to the superintendent ... he said “No, she is staying there. So you have to do a little extra work, get over it.”

Helen was able to continue attending public school at a time when she had no such protection, because someone in authority spoke out on her behalf.

An advocate in Ron’s experience was a member of his governing board whose child had a disability. “He has a child with a significant disability, maybe that’s helped

him pay attention to, that strength of diversity, rather than diversity as a problem.” Ron spearheaded a number of diversity initiatives which this individual helped support.

Earlier I described the experience Ross and Robert had surrounding a non-discrimination clause. Thomas also had an experience related to the non-discrimination policy:

A board member ... pulled me aside and said to me, “I need your help.” I said “On what?” He said, “Is it true that because we don’t have a non-discrimination policy at the university that it makes it more difficult to recruit faculty, really good administrators, because we don’t say explicitly that we won’t discriminate against gay people? We just say we won’t discriminate against anybody in general?” I said, “Truth be told, yes. It is true, some people will not talk to us because of that, and they typically are high in quality.” He says, “That’s wrong, we need that talent.” I said, “We need to pass the non-discrimination [policy].” He said, “Alright.”

What Thomas did not know was the board member had a dearly loved nephew who was getting a Ph.D. whom he wanted to recruit. Thomas described what happened at the first board meeting of the new academic year:

He [the board member] said, “I am going to make a motion to add sexual orientation to the protection of our employees.” And he said, “I know that’s controversial, in some quarters, and certainly on this board.” He said, “But I’m going to tell you a story ... my nephew who’s a really great guy would contribute here won’t even apply because as a gay man we don’t tell him that we won’t discriminate against him ... I know that in this room we will not do that ... but

until we start saying what we won't do..." So, they passed it, and they don't discriminate ... "We do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation."

Both in Ron's case and Thomas' the advocates had individuals close to them living with differences, which impacted their ability to empathize with and advocate for individuals with differences.

### *Being Inspired by Mentors and Role Models*

These leaders also benefited from those who made the extra effort to mentor them. Helen served at an institution where the president was a mentor. She asked Helen to attend a leadership program. This president thought Helen would be suited for administration "just from my approach on some committees." Subsequently the president encouraged her to enter a doctoral program. As a young dean, Maria appreciated the mentoring she had received from her Black president:

I will just say this, my most significant mentor, and the only person I ever say "mentored" me, was an African American man ... seven years ... Straight Black male. And he was great ... I was in twenties ... he was extremely supportive of me, and it meant a lot to me, and because he was Black.

A significant mentor of Gary's served in a number of successive positions in academia:

He is an important mentor. And in this regard the most important ... I'm not sure that the fact that [Mentor's name] is also gay and out ... is the reason he's the most important mentor ... though I have certainly worked with and feel that I've learned a lot from other administrators ... it's certainly not accidental that, the fact that [Mentor's name] and I share so much makes him such an important mentor for me.

Frank's mentors also shared a common background. A significant mentor of his was "in many measures a modest kinda background." An earlier mentor's parents were non-professionals, a truck driver and a clerk in a store. I asked him what he thought it meant that his mentors were from similar backgrounds as himself. Frank responded:

I guess what it says to me now that you raised the issue is that ... I guess I've been drawn to people like me, or they've been drawn to people like them, or both ... we're comfortable with each other.

He added, "Maybe I like hearing the messages that people who have the same kind of background say to me."

The meaning of role models in these leaders' lives was also significant. Mark had been in denial about his identity as a result of all the negative images, "those terrible caricatures of men who are all pedophiles and sexually driven and effeminate." He had since come to respect those who fit all spectrums of the gay community, but at the time those were the only images he had of gay men. Ethan talked about his youth, and the lack of having role models. He did not even know if he had the label of being "gay" at the time, but he did note the lack of "having any real role models even in TV, or in the movies, or in popular culture." Ethan desired family role models:

The difficult thing, even though I had ... no role models in society ... there's people in my family that were gay, and yet, because of their own ... my grandfather was gay, my father's father ... I was only five years old when he died, and I'm just so sorry that I never got ... that could potentially a role model for me, that it would have made my whole coming out process easier ... his sister ... is still alive, she's 75 years old ... she's a lesbian ... I was going to go down and

talk to her, what I was hoping to get from her whether she would come out about herself, but I was also hoping to learn a little bit, bit more about my grandfather ... she said, "I'm the first person, first family member, she's discussed her sexuality with, ever." ... And so at the end of my time with her ... I made ... some observations about my grandfather and I heard some things ... I said, "Was he, was he gay?" And she said, "You know, we never talked about it ... but if I had to guess, I'd say yes he was."

He ended this story by saying, "The unfortunate thing Denny ... was ... not having a family role model." Over his lifetime he did start to see "a lot of characters on TV that were gay, and started to see more characters in the movies that were gay, and it was ... more acceptable." There started to be a move of a public consciousness about being gay was okay, it was not a "curse."

Ethan made a plea for more role models:

Until more people, in all fields that are gay, step up and be gay, I mean, open about it ... in their positions ... I think there is a lot more people out there that are gay that, that are not recognized ... what good that will do for young people ... that they're role models ... what good that would be for all gay peoples, just as far as being accepted in society.

Robert spoke to the need for role models for all differences, "What I found was, deaf teachers ... exhibited from their students [behaviors] were no better, no worse, than hearing teachers. Deaf students 'preferred' deaf teachers, because they related." He was not suggesting every child with any difference should have their own kind at the front of

the classroom. But he did underscore what he learned from his experience, “I want to see myself in front of the classroom, I want to understand that I can be successful.”

“Those of us who, so there is that trailblazer label, which I think is correct, and we have to keep doing it, but you get tired,” said Maria. She looked forward to “just having fun, and having coffee, I’m going to do that for fun, and the rest of the time I’m going to just sit around and watch the young gay activist ... ‘You go! Your turn!’” Being active was important for Maria. The experience of watching the struggle of Denice Denton was:

It’s kind of hard to watch people go through, through it ... [I] observed her, her struggle is, is, is very close ... but you know in some ways it also gives you resolve to keep doing what you’re doing ... because ... you don’t know how else to honor people, so you know what, we have got to make sure, it’s sort of like, it’s gotta stop, we have a responsibility to see that it stops.

Her call to action:

In our little ways we can ... we all have ... different levels of authority, maybe in your way, is like your tribute is ... whether it is to her or anybody else ... you would say something about ... your discrimination policy and in your institution, I mean, it’s just everybody in their own way ... can to do something.

Throughout the conversations the participants remained optimistic about the future. Some expressed concern about not being valued, while hoping for a day their contributions would be recognized. Others just yearned for the day when they were not hired “in spite of” their difference; a hope their differences would truly not be an issue. Or, some were even as bold to as to see a future that welcomed and sought out their

difference. The support provided by others added to their hope for positive changes to happen. Both overt action and working behind the scenes was seen as a way for these leaders to create this future.

### Just Being

This chapter examined the *Being* of these leaders, what meaning these leaders ascribed to living with concealable differences. These leaders were comfortable with who they were. They experienced life with their very *Being* impacted by being cast as different. I attempted to interpret the experiences articulated in the hundreds of pages of material gathered during our interactions. This interpretation was not simply a regurgitation of the conversations, but a purposeful accentuation of their themes, created so you may understand more fully their experiences (Gadamar, 1992).

### *Just Being Ourselves*

These participants just wanted to be who they were, to experience their lives to the fullest extent possible. For those of us who are gay, if we show up to an event with our partner, we are making a statement. For others, they are just living their life. Why are we not just living our lives as well? It is only a statement because it is not accepted. It is “they” who have the issue. Maria explained her experience:

When we show up with our partners at events, our families, and we just ... are inclusive, for, for people who are hung up about that, they consider it putting it in their faces ... it's not, you're just being a 100%, just like they are ... it's just showing up.



Gary said, “If I lived my life because I was afraid of other people of this, that, and the other thing, I was actually already inflicting on myself the ... entire category of negatives, that I ... might otherwise try to escape.”

*Being Okay with Being Different*

The leaders lived their lives in a way that spoke to how they were comfortable with who they were. Robert had the opportunity to add to his understanding of being different with being okay with those differences when he taught deaf children. At first all he could see were “ears” with “hearing aids.” He didn’t see the children. “I was the hearing savior and didn’t understand that they were saying: It’s okay to be who we are.” He explained, “First of all I see these kids who are born with predominately almost 95% of the time, hearing parents, who are trying to convert them into hearing children.” He related it to his own experience, “I’m born with heterosexual parents who wanna convert me into heterosexuality.”

Robert’s understanding went beyond his parents, “Not just by family, but by society. I see second class citizenship, and I see second class citizenship is given to me.” He related his own experience with the deaf children’s parents who were not “looking at from their children’s point of view.” He said, “My parents didn’t want bad things for me, but they weren’t looking at it from the standpoint of gay male.”

McRuer’s (2002) work, *Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence* addressed this issue:

“In the end, wouldn’t you rather be hearing?” and “In the end, wouldn’t you rather not be HIV positive?” would seem, after all, to be very different questions, the first (with its thinly veiled desire for Deafness not to exist) more obviously

genocidal than the second. But they are not really different questions, in that their constant repetition (or their presence as ongoing subtexts) reveals more about the able-bodied culture doing the asking than about the bodies being interrogated. The culture asking such questions assume in advance that we all agree; able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferable and what we all, collectively, are aiming for. *A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demand that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?* [Italics added]

... Compulsory heterosexuality is intertwined with compulsory able-bodiedness; both systems work to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality. (p. 92-93, 97)

Robert spoke about his sexuality and his HIV positive status. His comments challenged me:

Maybe there's some positive things that I can do, by being open and out. So, it's, if you would, both of them, in some ways a gift, I mean I have ... okay I am these two things, and I'm in a great place, to be open about it, and this is a gift to me, that allows me to be of service, as, as corny as that sounds. And it's ... very liberating ... it's extremely liberating.

I struggled with the thought, "Wouldn't you rather be more like me?" Quite sobering; it makes me understand: people are okay with being who they are.

These caring, concerned individuals worked for the betterment of all those they served. During my contacts with them, they thanked me for even conducting this study, thanked me for thinking of them, and thanked me for making this opportunity available

for them to participate. These leaders felt it was important for this topic to be discussed, explored, and examined. Mark's hope was for the details of this study to "prompt some additional sensitivity on the parts of those leaders in Higher Education."

These leaders' very *Being* was impacted by being cast as "different." Each individual had their own unique story, but combined they gave fuller insight into "Being Different" This label was seen as being used by society to define and limit them. I thank them for sharing their experiences and the meanings they placed upon them, so that I could present their story to you. These themes speak powerfully about the experience of these leaders. The participants described their lived experiences, and the meanings made of those experiences, which gave us insight into what has propelled these executives to become a positive impact on academia.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNINGS AND BEYOND

*I'm going to be an optimist, cockeyed optimist maybe, but I'm going to be an optimist and suggest that my difference in about five years is going to be considered a desirable category in college and university leadership ... in an effort to fulfill a desire to be even more layered and nuanced in their selection of executives.*

(“Mark,” 2007)

#### Intra-Actions: Impact of the Study

The hermeneutic process of this study yielded a collection of intra-related themes, each derived from the meanings of the lived experiences of the leaders who participated in the study. These themes converged on an ideal: We just want to be accepted for who we are as individuals and for what we contribute. These leaders were defined and set apart by their difference. They worked diligently to ensure their service in academia was more important than their difference. This understanding was actively exercised to make a positive impact on those they served. As we explored this topic together, some of the participants and I were led to re-examine, re-focus, and re-new our resolve to make a positive impact on our institutions.

The impact of the study on the participants themselves is examined in this chapter. This study influenced me personally and these significant impressions are presented. As I explored these leaders' experiences, important implications for applications to the academy emerged. Specific recommendations for practice, policy, and procedures are discussed. Particularly the expansion of non-discrimination policies and

the broadening of the views of search committees in academia are highlighted. A discussion on the limitations of this study and suggestions for future study follow.

### *Impact on the Participants*

For some of the participants the phenomenological approach to the study itself was found to be encouraging. Others took the opportunity to use the process to reflect on their lives and how their difference impacted themselves and those around them. Thomas said about our conversations, “It has been very engaging ... so thank you ... because you could have just done the interview thing and I don’t think I would have given you that good of a response.” Just after this comment, Thomas and I began to discuss a whole new stream of thought which was stimulated by our interaction. Ross reflected on his loss of privilege during our conversations. “I would guess that maybe that’s one of the ... lack of privilege that we might experience, that I hadn’t really thought about until we are having this conversation.”

As I reviewed my field notes and the transcriptions I would often see phrases that included “Now that you ask” from Helen and “Never thought of that” from Frank. Frank went as far to say, “I guess I could psychoanalyze myself” when we discussed his choice not to pursue a more discipline-specific education in academia. These leaders considered ideas and motivations they had not thought about before. As Lee reflected on his affinity with those who are different, he stated, “The question would be: Would I have the same sensitivities if I didn’t have those differences? That’s a very interesting question to me personally.” He re-examined his lived experience and the impacts of those experiences.

Ike also made reference to psychoanalysis, “I am almost doing psychoanalysis on myself.” My visceral reaction to his comment was one of terror. I had been

“programmed” that good research does not alter the subjects in any way, other than to observe, measure, and record. My years of exposure to quantitative study had caught up to me, and I had to face this fundamental difference in the paradigms. Ike’s comments made me realize that this study was going to impact the participants – and impact me. After I regained my internal composure, I heard Ike continue, “I’m here and I hide, every professional experience I had, I went to the monastery to hide. So in a sense I’ve been hiding my entire [life].” This conversation had given him the opportunity to consider the implications of his lived experiences. During a follow-up conversation he said:

I’m just grateful that we had the time together and I was delighted to be able to talk about my journey with you. It’s probably the first time I’ve ever been able to talk about it in kind of a reflective intellectual emotional way, with a colleague and not a friend.

Ike proceeded to tell me how he considered his concealed status. He expressed how much freer it would be to be able to use the term “we” instead of “I” when he discussed activities which included his partner. During the course of this study he indicated that the process afforded him the opportunity to raise some questions in a positive way about how he presents himself to his community.

In addition to Ethan’s participation in this study he was also interviewed for a magazine near the time of our initial dialogue:

I’ve kind of like[d] having the conversation with you and then again with this magazine interview ... it’s ... kind of made me re-examine how I’ve been showing up on a day-to-day basis, relative to this issue ... I told you I was in the process of changing my bio to, to just say ... I’m one of a growing number of

openly gay and lesbian leaders ... I changed my bio, I'm being a little more intentional.

Ethan noted that participation in this study had impacted him, "Thank you for, for inspiring me to do that." He concluded, "It was a good reminder for me. I revisit[ed] my values around and my experiences around this, kind of again why I've chosen to be out in the profession." It was not me, but rather it was the open discussion and examination of his lived experience that truly inspired him. The conversations that occurred during this study facilitated reflection, re-examination, and perhaps resulted in some positive impacts on the participants' lives.

#### *Impact on Myself*

I want to give due honor to the time, support, and energy these leaders provided me during this process. I was truly inspired by their dedication to having a positive impact on those around them. Through our interactions I was able to get a clearer understanding of a number of areas. For example, one insight in particular centered on the thought that the true impact of their difference was not the difference itself. The participants felt it was instead how they and others reacted to those differences. Lee helped me clarify what the impact of being from a poor socio-economic background really meant experientially. For him, it was not so much the economics, but the social impact of being from a non-educated family. This was indeed true in his and my life experiences. These conversations also focused my thinking on parenting and on systems of privilege.

*Impact on My Understanding of Parenting.* As a parent of three beautiful daughters, I was profoundly impacted by comments made by Ross. As has Ross, I also

have experienced a wonderful working relationship with my former wife in terms of the parenting of our children. Similar to Ross, I was concerned about the impact on the children being raised in an environment including an out gay man sharing childrearing responsibilities with a former wife. As an academic, Ross searched the literature on raising children in both heterosexual and non-heterosexual environments. Finding little at that time, he sought out professional counseling:

He [the counselor] said, "I've talked with you each, I've talked with you together, I've talked with your daughters. And it's very clear that these kids have been loved, and you care very much about them." And he said, "My best advice is just keep loving them and be authentic in your childrearing." And he said, "Their experience with one set of adults is going to be different than the other because you are two different people and as long as you honor that with one another, and don't let the kids play you off against one another they probably will grow up having been loved."

Ross felt this insight had proved true in his experience. My own parenting efforts have appeared to be positive as well. Ross' comments bestowed on me hope for the future with my own daughters.

*Impact on My Understanding of the Systems of Privilege.* Another understanding which greatly impacted me was the concept of "systems of privilege" which unfolded throughout the process of this study. McIntosh (2003) said of these systems of privilege, "The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects" (p. 159). The insidiousness of the



power of privilege in our society became obvious to me through the readings and interactions with the participants. Lubrano (2004) spoke about a state of being in limbo for white-collar professionals from a blue-color background. He wrote:

Well, the truth is, some of us are simply born to better circumstances and reap the benefits. One could argue that many middle-class people may not even be aware of the good things bestowed on them – they can't always see their advantages. (p. 4)

I reflected back on my own upbringing, on the influences that helped shape my perspectives on persons of color, on homosexuals, the disabled, and others who were different. The messages given to me portrayed those who were different as inferior. As discussed earlier, Mark's experience was greatly impacted by the attitudes that influenced him as a maturing individual. These messages emphasizing the superiority of the *norm* were infused into many of us.

McIntosh's (2003) work on the subject was especially helpful in gaining an understanding of these systems. She said:

I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth. Likewise, we are taught to think that sexism or heterosexism is carried on only through individual acts of discrimination, meanness, or cruelty toward women, gays, and lesbians, rather than in invisible systems conferring unsought dominance on certain groups. (p. 159)

McIntosh called for the redesign of our social systems. However, as a primary step everyone must acknowledge the existence of these systems of dominance.

My own understanding was impacted by the experiences that occurred during my childhood. The messages I received influenced my perceptions of these systems. As I reflected on those experiences, I discovered examples of how the operation of this dominance was subtly used to imbed these messages of privilege. Growing up, I consistently heard negative messages about persons of color and homosexuals. Some are so offensive and painful to even recall that I cannot restate them in this document. Their influence was profound on my life. Those negative messages propagated to me included those which connected race and crime and declared the perversion of those of different sexualities. The impact of family and peer interactions, religious organizations, and mass media had no small influence on my life. Perhaps these messages were a factor in my not coming to terms with my sexuality until later in life.

The power of these systems of privilege was apparent when Thomas discussed the resistance to gay men or lesbians as senior executive fund raisers for academic institutions by governing boards and search committees. He said, “I think it will change by example, and very slowly. Or it will change because the public discourse about us as a community will tip over. With time and then the issue just will go away.” My hope is that Thomas is right and that heterosexism will just “go away.”

He continued, “Or it will go underground more likely, just like it did with Blacks. It is underground but it’s there, not so much at universities but certainly the public at large in certain places.” The prospect of heterosexism going underground – as with racism and sexism – is not encouraging to me. In fact, this is a grave concern, because it would be just one more difference for which the invisible systems of privilege can leverage the norm to maintain its power. At least in the current environment we are

consciously aware of the discrimination faced by non-heterosexuals. Race, sex, and physical ability are still differences which separate – some of which were discussed in this study – but many of the impacts of these differences are hidden and thus difficult to identify and work to change.

Mark told me about his reaction to the news that his president was nearly terminated for even hiring him. The response of the governing board to someone who was different being appointed in their institution exemplifies the challenges faced. Mark explained:

It brought home all my worst fears about returning to my home state to work, and knowing how people talked about gay men and women. I did not think they had changed their hearts in only 25 years, I thought they've done a better job of maintaining their silence ... they just wouldn't express their derision as publicly, but they still felt negatively about gay or lesbian adults in their midst.

Mark was surprised that those in his home state had not changed at least externally. Interestingly these same leaders who expressed their contempt publically over his appointment accepted him in the months which followed. I propose that if their objections had been hidden and invisible they might not have confronted them or directly dealt with them.

Being accepted externally in the short term, may not be the best solution. For example, an external change such as desegregation has not eradicated racism. In fact, although segregation is generally not as visible, re-segregation is a current issue (Dillon, 2007). The issues of racism and sexism have not gone away; they have just been driven underground and perpetuated by systems of privilege. The oppression still exists, but is

hidden from view. Driving heterosexism underground only hides the problem.

Oppression continues to exist. Hiding heterosexism will not fix the oppression.

It will take more than individual acts to overcome these systems of privilege. The system itself needs to be dismantled (McIntosh, 2003). Heterosexism could be seen as a “stepping stone” but I believe it is a dangerous step as it does not “fix” the systems of privilege. As with women and persons of color, the invisibility of this oppression is a nebulous undercurrent that still exists. This unseen force makes the impact of privilege difficult to see at times but nonetheless is all too real in our society.

Waldo (1999) saw the results of these systems’ influence on our workplaces. He said in his study’s conclusion, “By preventing heterosexism in the first place, both organization and individuals alike will prosper.” Taking proactive steps to eliminate heterosexism and for those in society to face the reality of the existence of the systems of privilege is the hope for a better tomorrow.

Mark’s insightful approach was significant to me, as it revealed a potential solution for how as educational leaders I and others can begin to change these elusive systems, “[It is] important to me as an educator, to help debunk myths, stereotypes, and false stories. And then establish the new truths, using my students as the messengers [to] go out in the world and change their communities.” He acted on his understanding by helping his students see the truth of those with differences. The existence of these systems of privilege must be acknowledged and understood, especially by those who unknowingly wield the power it endows.

## Pro-Actions: Implications for Application

My experience conducting this study led to the consideration of many aspects of the meaning of being different. I had become consumed with learning more about these ideas. The previous chapter detailed the meanings the leaders associated with their experiences. As I wrote about our interactions, the implications would at some times overwhelm me. Significant inferences for providing the best possible learning experience for the students our institutions serve remained paramount in the participants' minds, and in mine, as I considered the application of what I had learned individually and collectively from them. The participants afforded me the opportunity to examine and understand the possible impacts from a variety of perspectives.

There is a value to bringing many different experiences to the table. This richness has the possibility to extend from the boardroom throughout the academy. However, having academic leadership stand behind any initiative such as inclusion helps assure its success (Topper, 2002). As this study shows, these leaders who were different in some way were able to take the experience of being different and apply their understanding for the betterment of those they served. Their experiences suggest that other educational leaders can positively affect their intuitions by creating an affirming environment for those with differences and by broadening the views of search committees and governing boards.

### *Positively Affecting our Institutions*

Broadening who we include at the table will enable us to take greater advantage of the richness of the diversity of experiences individuals have to add to our college and

university communities. Thomas empathically spoke about including others in the discussion:

It really is about opportunities that open up, because the people around the table are, are looking at those possibilities from diverse perspectives. Okay, it matters, in terms of what you can do, that you do have a diverse group of people because you will, in the give and take of discussion, and perspectives being what they are, you will come up with something that's a far richer outcome, for the organization, for you personally, for the group, than you would if you were just a bunch of people sitting with more or less the same perspective on life, so stop and think about the power of that ... it means that when there's somebody who's not at the table, you miss them, and you know that it's bad, that they're not there. Or that it's incomplete.

This depth of experience could serve to enhance our institutions. Including others is more than giving lip service to "diversity." Helen, in frustration, referred to "diversity" as the damn "d" word. She expressed her annoyance with the terms being used as an excuse to not really do anything practical at many institutions, but instead hide behind "diversity plans" which often have little impact. Educational leaders often undergo diversity training and set diversity goals, however she said it is "not about diversity, it's about the 'right' thing to do."

Taking real steps can positively impact our academies. We can improve our institutions if we create an affirming environment. Blimling (2001) observed:

Within the last few years, the argument for increasing diversity on college campus has changed. With more than 20 years of research to examine, consensus appears

to be building that diversity has strong academic benefits for students. The research shows that students who attend institutions with a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff report greater learning, increases in various measures of interpersonal competencies, develop greater self-confidence, are less likely to hold irrational prejudices, make greater gains in critical thinking, and have greater involvement in civic and community service behaviors. (p. 518)

The impact of diversifying our campus is far reaching. There is a vibrancy to be added to our institutions by including people in positions of leadership who are different. One of the differences examined in this study was sexual orientation. As of the writing of this paper there are only eleven openly gay and lesbian presidents of four-year colleges and universities in the United States (Fain, 2007a). Those leaders chose to reveal their differences and have made an impact on academia by doing so.

Through positive actions we can make it possible to bring more individuals with differences to the table. By creating an affirming environment for all organizational levels in our higher educational institutions, we all benefit. The educating of our search committees and governing boards of the value those with differences bring to the table will also have a positive impact on our institutions.

#### *Creating Affirming Environments: Non-Discrimination Policies*

By creating an affirming environment, institutions will be more likely to attract and retain individuals with differences. A positive first step in creating this environment is the establishment or broadening of non-discrimination policies to officially proclaim an institution's commitment to all forms of diversity. Ross was faced with the reality that his newly realized status as a gay man placed him in the same position as most of the gay

men and lesbians in this nation – he had no legal protection from workplace discrimination based on his sexuality.

Thomas told about the nephew of the board member who would not even consider taking a position at their university because it did not have such a policy in place. It is one thing for the culture of the university to value diversity; however it is even a stronger stance to have a statement spelling out non-discrimination. An institution that has a core value of non-discrimination can openly reinforce its stance by creating a written policy. Those with differences need to have a statement reassuring them that if they accept a position at the institution, they will be protected from discrimination. Ike spoke about the hope of serving at an affirming institution, in his case he was in an environment where he could not be out in any public way or his employment would be terminated.

For Ross, the inaction of his peers to initiate the inclusion of sexual orientation in the non-discrimination policy was a “long-term disappointment.” He had championed the cause of many others with differences, but felt he could not initiate such a policy because he would appear self-serving. Ross’ experience is related to systems of privilege: these other leaders did not see the need for it, as it did not impact them. When the policy was proposed by the faculty and students at Ross’ institution, the board questioned the need for it because they felt they did not discriminate against anybody. Legal counsel advised them, “Just say it, because you don’t.” His institution did put what they believed and how they functioned into writing.

The absence of these written policies can be of great concern for individuals seeking positions of greater responsibility and increased exposure to scrutiny. When asked if the lack of a non-discrimination policy was an issue today, Maria said:



Of course it is, it's an issue every day, ask gay people within an institution, if it's not an issue. Ask students if it's not an issue, it's an issue ... there are a lot of good people who will not accept jobs ... when it comes to hiring, yeah you need to protect people, because you know what, don't tell me there isn't discrimination and bias ... of course there is, this is the United States, this is 2007, we see it every day.

Maria took the issue on non-discrimination to the next level by raising concerns about partner benefits, "I wouldn't think of applying at a place that, not only had no discrimination, but didn't have benefits. You going to take me, you gotta treat me like everybody else baby. I got a partner and kids, damn right I want benefits, and I deserve them."

As just discussed, the importance of non-discrimination policies emerged during the study. The subject of discrimination surfaced from a number of the interactions with the participants. Some had experienced discrimination, while others expressed concern over not having protection from being discriminated against. The implications of these policies not being in place was woven in many of the conversations about being separated by privilege, being set apart, and being of value. During the interactions with the participants, many expressed the positive impact of being part of an affirming environment and the value these policies added. Even those legally protected expressed the need for further understanding of difference on the part of others around them.

Further advancement of our academies would be achieved with the establishment of non-discrimination policies to include those of all differences. This is not to say all institutions which have not extended their policy will discriminate against those who are

not covered. However, it does say they are not willing to put it into writing. This is cause for concern, as demonstrated by what participants in this study continued to face. It is likely that countless individuals are not revealing their difference because they are concerned for their employment. I propose highly qualified people with unprotected differences are just waiting to come out or at least come out fully until there is an environment in which they feel safe. These policy extensions are the first step in establishing the kind of affirmation expressed by some of the participants in this study as necessary for our institutions.

The inclusion of gay men and lesbians in such policies at the institution Thomas served was seen as simply another natural extension of the institution's value system. He quoted one board member, "Oh it was just the next step in the inclusiveness of the institution, that this was the ... 21st century way of being inclusive." It is admirable that this board member understood the value of diversity to his institution.

#### *Broadening the Views of Search Committees and Governing Boards*

The hiring process at our academies is impacted by at least two powerful forces including the governing board of an institution and the search committees. Their direct decisions and influences determine the possibilities of hiring people with differences in various positions in our institutions. Our search committees and governing boards need to seek out individuals who have something different to bring to the table, extending beyond the familiar or the *safe*. However, they might need to hire the person who does not have the typical credentials for a position. Maria gave me this example:

We don't even know how to recruit properly, we say we do, we don't know ...  
I'm amazed at things that I see today ... you have Ph.D.s in ethnic studies, but

people say can they teach history, yet you get a Ph.D. in history and people say but I'm sure they could take a few ethnic courses and they can teach [ethnic studies] ... but people want a historian and not the ethnic studies person. And they don't even realize that, they don't recognize that there is some sort of sorting and cutting that's going on.

These same hiring practices that have kept our institutions in a safe and comfortable place are the ones that will keep us from increasing diversity. In the specific case Maria referred to: keeping them White, leadership in academia needs to take a broader view while conducting searches. Individuals must be sought to fulfill the responsibilities on our campuses. At the same time the richness an individual with a "slightly" different experience brings, needs to be understood. If we do not, as the saying goes, "We can do the things we have always done, and get the things we have always gotten."

Tim observed this challenge in the re-educating of governing boards, "A lot of the boards of these places are very old fashion, because they're mostly older, White, grey-haired, conservative businessmen, republican, conservative, even the ones who are left of center, are only a little bit left of center." It is important for governing boards and search committees to understand the value that can be brought to the table by individuals outside their comfort zone.

As in the case with Ron, the inclusion of the candidate's partner in the recruitment process could prove a deciding factor in the acceptance of a position offer. It is important for governing bodies to extend contracts which cover the partner of the candidate in the same fashion as a spouse. For both Gary and Thomas it was important that their partners were covered explicitly by this legal arrangement. They did not want any questions

arising about the benefits related to their partners, which would be the same as their predecessors who did not need direct language to cover their spouses because they were legally married. Once the governing board's awareness was raised on this issue, neither of their institutions was hesitant to agree to the requested documents.

Both Thomas and Ron had board members who were sensitive to those with differences because of loved ones in their lives. Those who have not had personal contact with people who are different need to be made aware of the positive impact those with differences can have on the institution. By informing them of the value of difference, our institutions will be able to benefit from a broader range of leaders with a variety of differences.

During the interactions with the participants of the study, the value of governing boards and search committees to understand the asset those with differences added to the institution emerged. The participants had the experience of being defined by their difference and being set apart by that difference. These experiences had the potential to limit their impact on academia. However, these experiences led to their understanding of difference that positioned them to contribute to the growth of their academies. Some of the participants had experienced the help of advocates. This allowed them to attain positions which they used to make a positive impact on their institutions.

The executive search committees and governing bodies must be encouraged to understand the value of those who are different would provide to the academy. Educational material in the form of newsletters or bulletins could be created to inform them of the value of difference, giving opportunity to expand the views of these individuals. Insightful leaders must champion the need for valuing difference and educate

their colleagues. The benefits of including those with difference at the table must be thoroughly explained. Search committees should be encouraged to take a broader view of credentials. Subtle, but significant details such as the inclusion of partners in the recruitment process could be brought to their attention as well. Their understanding of the value of those with difference would positively impact their institutions.

*Follow Their Example*

The participants in this study made a conscious decision to act upon the understanding of difference they gained. The examples they have set serve as an inspiration for what can be accomplished if we are open to those who are different. Gary felt that he was given a “great good fortune.” He wanted to give back:

I certainly hope that if, if this story gives strength to others, whether it’s individuals who want to be an administrator, or is a board, or ... an individual board chair who says: No, this is not a reason not to take this wonderful candidate, let’s give him or her a chance, this is ridiculous.

The search committee for Ron’s position even had the foresight to include his partner in the recruitment process. They extended an invitation to his partner, understanding the significance of including him in the process. This was a factor in Ron’s decision to accept the assignment. The ability of the person to lead and execute responsibilities should not be limited by their sexual orientation, their disability, or their socio-economic background.

As those of us in academia follow these thirteen leaders’ examples of inclusivity and sensitivity, our institutions will benefit. By understanding that those who are different contribute to success in academia, we help propel our institutions to have a greater impact

on our students. My hope is that we continue to do the right thing, continue to look for those qualified, with the further understanding that those who are different will add richness to our institutions. Just after Helen expressed her frustration over the lip service given to diversity, she asked, “It’s the right thing to do, and what’s really relevant ... does it matter if you have cats at home or dogs?” What truly matters is the positive impact individuals with differences can have on our institutions. It is my hope that our governing boards and our search committees will do the right thing and value the differences of those seeking to serve their institutions.

#### Post-Actions: Future Study

As I consider the implications of this study for future research, I also need to outline the limitations of this process. This research examined the lived experiences of a group of executives with concealable differences. Because of the methodological approach to the study, and the extraordinary quantity of time involved in gathering a record of and analyzing these experiences, the number of participants was limited to thirteen. Even with thirteen, the process became unwieldy at times, as participants were selected from across the nation based on their potential for adding depth to the study.

Future studies would benefit from including a wider representation of women and persons of color. This would add to the understanding gained by this study’s in-depth examination of these mostly male and White participants’ lived experience. Although not a criteria for the study, the inclusion of a person of color and women in the group of leaders added a breadth to the findings.

Because of the lack of specific research into individuals with differences serving in our academic institutions, there are a variety of other opportunities for future study.

Such studies could focus more specifically on one difference. Potentially, examining the attitudes of leaders at all levels of our institutions would give us a broader understanding of how individuals across our institutions value those who are different.

Generational differences could also be explored. The impact of generational difference emerged in several of our interactions. Thomas explained the differences he observed amongst those of various generations in situations where they would need to come out to clarify their sexuality. Thomas said that, personally, he would be inclined to consider whether to come out about his difference in a situation, but likely would not come out. Whereas, his younger colleague would consider if he should, and would likely come out. Their still younger colleague was surprised they gave it consideration at all; he would simply come out. It would be important to investigate the impact of generational difference on the decision-making behind the revealing of difference.

Relationship status is another consideration for candidates of the senior leadership positions. Gary expressed a concern that not being in a relationship put a candidate at a disadvantage. Tim felt those who were single, whatever their sexuality, were at a disadvantage during the recruitment process. A study could be conducted to explore the impact of singleness on candidates for high level positions in our institutions.

Many individuals who were not at or near senior leadership positions of their institutions expressed interest in participating in the study. I found it difficult not to include their voice in this study as well. A broader study which focuses on various levels of leadership at our academic institutions would give the needed insight into their experience. Academia would also benefit from an extensive examination of the attitudes toward those with differences from all constituent groups of our institutions.

## Inter-Actions: The Bottom Line

This study illuminated a number of themes of understanding that must be explored in broader contexts. The interplay of interactions illustrated by these themes show that these leaders were comfortable with who they were. They executed their responsibilities with understanding and thoroughness. They hoped to be accepted for who they were and what they had to offer. The interaction of these findings show the importance of the value these individuals add to our institutions. We can benefit if we take the opportunity to use this understanding to make a positive impact on our institutions.



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