SEXUAL PREFERENCE - AND BEING OUT AT WORK: THE IMPACT ON GROWTH WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

by

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A Research Project Submitted to the Faculty of Mercer University

Penfield College in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

HENRY REGIONAL ACADEMIC CENTER

2016

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Sexual Preference - And Being Out at Work: The Impact On Growth
(Under the direction of Dr. Susanne Diggs-Wilborn)

Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals within the workplace have been topics of conversation for many years. For some, this discussion was during a time where it was taboo to talk about sexuality and preference within the confines of work. During the year 2016, American culture has seen many changes in the way diversity is viewed and accepted on every level – federal, private and the public sectors, within this country. In this research study, the mask is removed from sexual preference within the workplace. Willing research participants were identified through the process of snowballing and the research methodology used was phenomenology. These participants have all worked or currently hold various roles throughout Fortune 100 companies. Through their voices, in addition to literature reviews, research was conducted that allowed for in-depth exploration of "living openly" or being out in workplace and the impact this has had on LGB individuals and their careers. A summary of findings concluded that living openly within the workplace is still a difficult decision for LGB individuals to make. The choice to be out at work is impacted by the level and status individuals hold within their companies, age and maturity in addition to the policies or inclusion practices of their respective organizations. To break these barriers, the language of LGB individuals has to change from comparisons to heterosexual individuals, which diminishes or infers being gay is not normal. In addition, organizations can begin to take a stand against unequal laws and begin to support the Equality Act that was introduced in 2015.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The importance of work is sometimes unknown until we are in the trenches. While conducting this research, I found myself overwhelmed with appreciation by the voices and thoughts of each interview participant. Thank you for your assistance in making this research possible. There is a duty in making sure these words do not just remain on paper. I would like to also acknowledge the power of a persistent advisor, Dr. Susanne Diggs-Wilborn. It was through her encouragement and experience in the OD realm, that I was allowed to connect many of the dots of this research and create a concise research study. The completion of a Master's program is never an easy task, especially as a full-time working professional. Additionally, I must thank my "backbones": the cohorts and the academic staff of Penfield College, Mercer University for their continued support and weekly challenges to deliver our greatest work and be the bear (mascot).

In closing, I have one last thanks. Writing about lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals is a focus for me as I am a proud, African American, gay male. I could never be my authentic self if that did not start with the right education at home from an early age. I was always taught the following: Believe in yourself, be who you are; accept it and live out loud. Thanks MOM!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Growth and aspiration to do and obtain more within the workforce are often driving forces for every working individual. Based on 2014 data from the US Department of Labor - Bureau of Labor Statistics, salaried workers worked on average 8.8 hours per day in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). During this time at work, most individuals are able to come in and be their authentic selves. This means, they can disclose who they are, their backgrounds, families and passions that motivate them. As with any large population, there are minority groups who live in seclusion or withhold certain parts of their lives in an effort to fit in with the masses. This is often the case with gay individuals in the workforce. However, there are individuals who identify as gay or LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual; used throughout study) who have chosen to be "out" at work. This research focused on *these* individuals and the impact of their decision to live openly.

Nature of the Problem

Gay individuals have faced discrimination and stigmatization based upon their sexual preference for hundreds of years. Examples of this stigmatization include the use of the bible as condemnation, as well as less than equal rights by individual states and the United States government. The government, even with the separation of church and state, has only recently allowed the legalization of gay marriage in the year of 2015 when the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was overturned. Consistent with the government, the public and private work sector have not been the most welcoming environments either with laws such as Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), which was formally ended in 2011 yet still holds an unwritten bias for those who may choose to enlist in the military as openly homosexual. In workplace settings, gay individuals

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often feel the need to hide their sexuality in fear of retaliation, rejection or hindered growth potential (Gates & Viggiani, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to address the issues and common experiences many lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals (hereafter 'LGB') face in the workplace as it relates to job growth, security and potential stigmatization based on their decision to "live openly" or "out" at work.

Work-related stress is a common trait that many people can identify with, regardless if they are straight or gay. In this research study, the main question examined is, "What is the impact of being out versus not in the workplace?" Furthermore, this study explored the role this decision plays in the mental anguish an individual can experience as they attempt to live an authentic life while in their places of work (Huebner & Davis, 2005).

Importance of the Study

As a human race, everyone faces mounting pressures in their career decisions and what affects growth potential. For LGB individuals, an important question that bears asking is what is the impact of "living openly" at work and how does this affect employees' future success and upward growth within their company? Where there is debate is the question of the rationale of coming out at work and its importance to the work being done within the workplace. There are multiple implications that come from an individual being out at work. Through research, the goal is to identify what areas are different for homosexuals as opposed to their heterosexual counterparts such as stress, pay, work/life balance and equality.

When discussing the terms "living openly and "out" it is best to define what is exactly being described as they will both be used throughout the continued research. As defined by the

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Human Rights Campaign, "Living Openly is a state in which LGBT (Transgender) people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity – where and when it feels appropriate to them." This definition is used in conjunction with the word "out" (Human Rights Campaign, 2016).

When equal pay and benefits are a concern, there are often two groups who are thought about: women and people of color; however, there is another minority group where pay is also at a disproportionate level. Research indicates that pay is often less for individuals who identify as LGB as opposed to heterosexuals (Badgett, 1995). This study examined stigmatization as well as levels of education, which could both be factors that contribute to lesser pay.

There is a term that has been used around workplaces and gay communities for many years to describe two people of the same sex who are partnered but without children. This term is DINK. The translation for DINK is "Dual Income, No Kids". This term is a common area of contention for many single and partnered gay individuals as there is often a perception that due to their non-family commitments they have additional free time unlike those who are part of what society has deemed traditional families (heterosexual, married with children). This ideology, can lead to false assumptions, stigmatizations and overbearing workloads due to the perception that this set of individuals has a more uncommitted schedule than their heterosexual counterparts.

The groups covered under the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964, protect individuals based on color, national origin, race, religion and sex (Martinez, Ruggs, & Sabat, 2013). Those who are not covered under CRA (or Title VII), which prohibits employment discrimination, are individuals who identify as sexual orientation minorities (SOM). There is currently support by many political leaders to enact the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would

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protect against employment discrimination based on sexual orientation (Martinez, Ruggs, & Sabat, 2013). Although there has been progress in the public and private sectors to ensure employees have equality, there is no law protecting against discrimination based on sexual preference/orientation. By reviewing various organizational structures that have and do not have employee discrimination practices in place to protect LGB individuals, the research attempts to decipher what equality looks like in the near future for gays.

Understanding the needs of employees is inherent to the success of both the company and the employee. Studying the needs of LGB employees is essential to employee loyalty and engagement. It allows for organizations to better provide support to their employees, offer safe workplaces and allow for acceptance and the ability for employees to be their authentic selves. This study also dissects the current state of how employees who do identify as LGB are stigmatized based on their preferences, and how it can lead to discrimination including loss of job opportunities, pay differences and rejection amongst other employees.

Other studies have been done that examine how individuals who identify as gay cope while at work or remain closeted in an effort to fit in with what is considered the norm (Gates & Viggiani, 2014). In addition, wage gap studies have been done in relation to heterosexual men versus homosexual men, which suggest homosexual men are paid at a disproportionate rate compared to heterosexual men (Martell, 2013). However, in reviewing the collection of research on the topic of sexual preference and being out at work, there does not appear to have been a complete study on organizations and their work to improve workplace environments, attitudes, social acceptance and equality amongst all employees, in particular LGB.

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Relationship to the Concentration

Organizational development can be described in multiple ways but at the core, it is about helping to change the belief and attitudes of the culture as a whole. With the movement and growth of ideas surrounding equality for the LGB community within government and the public as a whole, there is a need for organizational change to match these efforts. When reviewing the top Fortune 500 companies, over 400 already have polices in place against discrimination of LGB employees (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). Although this is a great start, it is necessary to explore how these policies are enacted and the quality of the work lifestyles LGB employees have in these companies and beyond.

The results of the study are expected to help contribute to the organizational development efforts for companies who are seeking to expand their understanding of LGB individuals and their needs, disappointments with the current systems and opportunities for improvement.

Research Questions

For this study, there are five research questions. The questions are:

- Q1. What is the definition of being out or "living openly" in the workplace?
- Q2. What perceived or proven impact does sexual preference and the choice to "live openly" or out at work have on careers and growth (i.e. succession plans, promotions, mentoring, monetarily, etc.)?
- Q3. Is there a difference in the success of gay (LGB) individuals' growth as opposed to their heterosexual counterparts within an organization based upon sexual identity and openness?
- Q4. What role does fear, stigmatization and or retaliation play within the day-to-day work life of LGB individuals?

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- Q5. What programs are organizations offering that support or hinder inclusiveness of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees within their organizations?

Definition of Terms

Employment Non-Discrimination Act (EDNA). A proposed act by government officials that would protect against employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Lesbian, gay and Bisexual (*LGB):* This term is often used in reference to the gay community. There are different variations of the term. For the purposes of this research study, LGB will be used: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual. The studies that are selected may not use the exact same term.

Living Openly/Out: A state in which LGBT (Transgender) people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity – where and when it feels appropriate to them (HRC.ORG, 2016).

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CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This study included a formal and comprehensive review of literature, which provided a basis for the research. As stated in Chapter 1, addressing concerns, issues and commonalities many lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals (hereafter 'LGB') face in the workplace as it relates to job growth, security and potential stigmatization based on their decision to "live openly" or "out" at work is the purpose of this study.

The literature review consisted of theoretical perspectives and previous research findings related to sexual orientation and the implications of being a LGB (Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual) person in the workplace. The review provided a focus for the study and detailed the important concepts and data related to sexuality and difficulties faced in the workplace. It includes an overview of hiring and job promotion decisions as it relates to sexual orientation and sexuality stereotypes within the workplace; organizational policies and programs have been researched which affect or benefit LGB employees; the befriending or becoming an ally for LGB employees, and, lastly the fear and stigmatization that comes into play for many LGB employees and the affects this has on their ability to live openly.

A variety of resources were utilized for reviews of literature pertinent to the project and to answer the research questions. Textbooks, professional periodicals and journals, online databases, and other reference materials are tools that were used to gather data for the review of the literature. The researcher utilized computerized databases, such as the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), journal articles, and abstract series, books related to LGB persons as well as internal organizational development, social behavior, stereotypes and workplace

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environments, conference papers, and abstracts of dissertations, web site articles and research studies in preparing the synthesis of the literature collected.

Hiring and Job Promotion Decisions as it Relates to Sexual Orientation

In researching sexual preference and the stigmas attached to LGB persons within the workplace, literature was obtained that explored biases, discrimination and the hiring challenges faced by this minority group. The literature surrounding hiring practices and sexual orientation is often a high-level overview focused on discrimination as it relates to gender bias towards gay men and women. When diving deeper into sexual orientation bias, studies have shown gay men may face a higher level of discrimination in career progression compared to lesbians due to acceptance of positions which are perceived as feminine-induced tasks (e.g,. elementary school teacher or trainers) as opposed to stereotypical male-dominated fields (Nadler & Kufahl, 2014). In reviewing the researched literature, there was a high amount of "perceived" discrimination faced by individuals who are LGB and have felt ostracized, lost opportunities for growth and promotion and for some job displacement after disclosing their orientation. The problem that exists in much of the research, are that many times these areas of discrimination cannot be proven, similar to race and gender discrimination (Martinez, Ruggs, Sabat, Hebl, & Binggeli, 2013).

In comparing gays and lesbians in the workplace there seems to be a disproporation in salaries and also growth advancement. Lesbians have been perceived to even have an advantage over presumed hetrosexual women. "These advantages are said to be higher earnings… work commitment and competence and a reduction in sexual advances and harrassment" (Wright, 2011, p. 701). "Work plays a central role in the lives of the great majority of lesbians due to the

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economic nesccessity to support themselves as they are unlikely to be financially dependent on either a male of female partner" (Duane, 1997, p. 175).

Sexuality Stereotypes within the Workplace

The legally and socially accepted western tradition is heterosexism. Starting from this point of view, research was conducted to identify what stereotypes exist within the workplace as it relates to sexual orientation and employee satisfaction amongst gay individuals. Studies that have been done within and about organizations in reference to their internal stereotypes suggest many workplaces are still predominantly run by heterosexual men. This can lead to a lack of protective legislation for gays and lesbians in the workplace due to an inferior representation of diversity and culture at the executive level. Furthermore, literature reviews surrounding high levels of organizational heterosexism within the workplace suggest job satisfaction is much lower, organizational commitment is lessened and there is a potentially large level of turnover for LGB employees (Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). When employees do stay, productivity is often lessened due to hostile work environments, as described below:

> When workers experience hostility towards individuals or groups because of difference, organizational cultures are impacted through a diminished worker esteem and increased job dissatisfaction. As a result, stigmatization often affects organizations through increased turnover and decreased productivity – two components that organizations must manage to optimize success. In short, both employees and employers are affected by hostile work environments and addressing hostility can increase organizations' overall success. Because of the influence that organizations have in society they are ideally situated to begin addressing and combating stigmas and the resulting hostility. In fact

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authors such as Raeburn (2004, p.1) consider organizations to be the new frontier for lesbian, gay and bisexual rights (Lewis, 2009, p. 208).

Another area of consideration presented in the literature is the lack of formalization of mentor/mentee relationships as well as interpersonal relationships with others within their organizations. Research suggests that LGB individuals are inhibited from creating interpersonal relationships or even go out of their way to shun other gay men and women out of fear of the assumption that association will mean they will be "outed" or their orientation will be put into question (Wood, 1994; Badgett M. L.; Day & Schoenrade, 1997).

Moving ahead within individual career paths is a process for anyone, but for gays and lesbians there are additional steps that must be overcome. As mentioned, there is assumed stigmatization, egos and prejudices, which are hurdles that have to be overcome in addition to the competition of competing with heterosexual counterparts. To combat this or overcome this challenge many gays and lesbians find their key resource in creating friendships with straight allies. As mentioned above, this can be a challenge, as well as a direct path to career growth.

> Employees who are excluded from friendship networks can struggle to advance their careers because access to important organizational resources of influence is limited. While the drawbacks of being isolated from workplace friendships are likely to be felt by many employees, it is managers who might feel the disadvantage keenly (Rumens, 2011, p. 445).

It is important to know that "lesbians and gay men stand to gain from forming friendships and friendly relations that provide access to organizational role models, support and encouragement. These relationships might be easier to establish within organizational settings that bear witness to progressive developments in 'gay friendly' policies, initiatives and work

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practices, designed to address the needs of a sexually and gender diverse workforce" (Rumens, 2011, p. 447).

In an effort to synthesize these findings, additional research was gathered that examined the attitudes of millennials in the workplace. The purpose of reviewing this group's attitudes was to examine how a shift in time may also present a change in thought patterns of the prior generation. Though this research in particular is not based on sexuality, it speaks to the desires, needs and wants of this group (millennials) in the workplace. Interaction with those of different races, sexual orientations and religions are not strong factors in forming interpersonal relationships as well as creating mentor/mentee relationships. Based on the data, this generation of employees (millennials) places more value on progression and acceptance versus differences unlike their predecessors (PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited, 2013). Millennials may be the driving force in assisting to change workplace policies and attitudes towards LGB individuals due to their acceptance and intolerance for negativity towards differences.

Organization Policies and Programs Which Affect LGB Employees

To understand LGB employees and their work lifestyles or personas that are presented in the workplace while at work in an effort to "fit in", it is important to decipher programs and policies that are in place that affect the day-to-day work environments and organizational cultures of various organizations. In researching the topic, other researchers have noted "Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) identity has received little attention in the Human Resource Development leadership literature" (Collins, 2012, p. 349) and sexual orientation has been characterized as an area of invisible diversity (Bairstow, 2007). What this alludes to is that organizations have much work to do in the area or HR and organizational development as it relates to gay individuals. "It is not enough for employers to develop practices and values that

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promote inclusion and diversity without assessing how they might unwittingly (re)produce patterns of discrimination and disadvantage" (Rumens, 2011, p. 457).

In relation to organizational diversity, various laws of protection were examined. Additional research focused on the Employment Equality Regulations of 2003 and 2010 (United Kingdom Federal Government) which prohibits employers from discriminating against employees based on sexual orientation or perceived orientation (Bairstow, 2007). This however is not a law or an admendment in the United States (as mentioned in the introduction section). In the US, the Equality Act seeks to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide equal rights for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) people "across key areas of life, including employment, housing, credit, education, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and jury service" (Human Rights Campaign, 2016)

Conclusion

After reviewing multiple literary articles related to gay individuals and workplace practices and culture, the message that resonated throughout was there have not been many, if any comprehensive studies that clearly define the gay experience in the workplace. Further studies must be conducted to determine what values are placed on acceptance of sexual orientation in the workplace today as opposed to what was accepted 5 years ago, 10 years ago and beyond.

The literature reviews did provide an opportunity to further explore LGB employees' needs, desires and satisfaction as it relates to their needs at work. Research has shown if there is not a balance where employees feel comfortable and welcomed, this leads to employee dissatisfaction and discontent resulting in less productivity and job abandonment/turnover (Woodruffe-Burton & Bairstow, 2013). The research studied also provided a glimpse into the

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minds of LGB employees, many of whom still feel ostracized, and believe that their sexuality plays a part in his/her opportunity for growth within their organization (Martinez, Ruggs, Sabat, Hebl, & Binggeli, 2013).

Much of the research conducted was done using qualitative studies. Understanding the composition of this group of individuals helps to understand why there are not larger amounts of quantitative studies. Past research has shown this group of people has been stigmatized historically and approaching organizations to gather detailed survey or statistical information has the potential to be skewed or flawed. There as there is no ethical or full proof way to identify all gay and lesbian individual within the company nor ask them to self-identify at the risk of their information being disclosed.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Methodology

The study of sexual preference poses many obstacles due to possible perceived connotations associated with such a sensitive subject. The main research question that this study attempted to answer required choosing a meaningful methodology for this type of study. This (methodology) is crucial to its validity and to the care of those involved as voluntary participants. After reviewing both qualitative and quantitative approaches in gathering data for this study, phenomenology was chosen as the best fit. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design and is most closely aligned with the desired needs of the study (Marques & McCall, 2005).

Phenomenology research is often linked to German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl believed that based upon individual consciousness, people can be absolutely certain about how things appear and or present themselves. For this to be true only the direct experience can be viewed and all other elements must be ignored (Eagleton, 1983; Fouche, 1993). Phenomenology can be broken down to the study or science of any 'phenomena". As researchers, it is important to remove brackets or pre-set frames of mind and remain true to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). In his publish journal article, *A Phenomenological Research Design*, Groenewald states, "A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people" (2004, p. 5).

In thinking about how phenomenology could be applied to this particular study, a review of literature was done which provided various analogies. One analogy in particular focused on painters and poets and how they all have something to say through their expression of work. This expression of work provides a common bond/knowledge amongst those groups of

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individuals. This knowledge, allows them to become phenomenologists as there are particular sets of information that only they as a minority group will understand or have shared transferable experiences (Groenewald, 2004; Vandenberg, 1997).

With phenomenological studies, "respondents are asked to describe their experiences as they perceive them. They may write about their experiences, but information is generally obtained through interviews" (Nieswiadomy, 2010 p. 27). To accomplish the goals of this study an informed consent form was created and signed by all participants. The informed consent described the purpose and procedures of the research, risk and benefits, the participant's right to end their participation at any time and a confidentially clause was utilized. In collecting research, semi-structured interviews were conducted using a series of five questions that allowed for additional prompts and follow up questions to be injected based on the flow on conversation. In addition to the use of audio recordings of the interview sessions, participants were invited to provide personal essays, due to the lengths of the interviews (average time 45 minutes). All participants opted out of writing a follow up essay but most said they would be happy to provide additional information if needed.

Due to the variation in the amount of data that needed to be analyzed, the sample size was set to no more than ten individuals with a minimum of seven. The results included nine full interviews, with eight that were useable for this research study. The ninth participant opted out of the study after his interview. There was a desire to have a balanced mixed population involved with the study (gay and lesbian participants), the researcher began by identifying subjects through special interest groups and from these individuals the snowballing method was utilized to obtain additional participants. "Snowballing is a method of expanding the sample by asking

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one informant or participant to recommend others for interviewing" or purposeful sampling (Groenewald, 2004, p. 9).

Procedures

The steps in conducting the actual study included the following activities in chronological order:

- Creation of an email for the study: While communicating with members of the population who participated in the study, all written correspondence was handled through the researcher's Mercer University email address and newly created email address specifically created for this study. This email address was only used for one participant who was not able to meet in person and needed to meet via phone and send documents back electronically.
- Creation of a paper and electronic informed consent form: This study required consent from all subjects that are involved. Participants have not been identified by their actual names (pseudonyms used) as well as IDs (letters A-H) to identify race, gender and sexual orientation. During the interviews, additional fields of information collected were in relation to individual's job sector and socioeconomic status, which assisted in providing demographics for the study. Participants were provided full details of the study, its purpose and the principal researcher's contact information and full opportunity to opt of the study at any time without repercussion. Each informed consent statement was recorded and each participant was asked to state their name and agree with a verbal yes in addition to their written signature. After one interview was completed, one participant asked to have their information omitted. Dr. Peters' pseudonym information has not been used in the study and all data has been deleted.

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- The setting of meeting location for interviews with research study participants: Due to the nature of this study, an individual company or organization has not been used. Instead, individuals who work for various companies who can speak to their personal experiences of being an LGB person in any workplace are the goals of the study. To eliminate the conflict of interest of interviewing participants within their place of work (which could be a source of the participant's personal reflection), research was done offsite. Four options were offered: Mercer University, a local coffee house/restaurant an online option (i.e. GoToMeeting – which allows for face-to-face dialogue), and lastly a phone interview. No payment was made for participation in this research study.
- Following the actual interviews and data collection, findings were reviewed: After each interview, participants had the option to write a personal reflection essay (discussed further in the 'Instrument' section, which will be used for additional data). During each interview, Mercer University's subscription to Microsoft OneNote 365 was used as the tool of choice for data collection. This allowed for recording of interviews and typing at the same time. Once the interviews were complete, MS OneNote allowed for complete synchronizing across platforms – laptops and cellphones as well as the ability to play a recording from any spot where a bookmarker/note had been placed for follow up.
- As research was completed, it was compiled into a detailed research report: This report was an ongoing updated document, which served as collection point for the all interview data until information could be sorted, analyzed and any additional research on the study had been finalized.

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Assumptions

In studying a minority group - in particular those identified as LGB, there were some generalizations that were made prior to the beginning of the research study:

- There would be feelings of shame, guilt and insecurity: Even though individuals may be "out", there could be opposition in wanting to be part of a study that posed questions that forced individuals to face questions they may be uncomfortable with – sexuality and their livelihood.
- People of color may be less apt to participate than those of Caucasian descent: There is still a large stigma placed upon being gay, lesbian or bisexual in minority ethnic groups based on many personal accounts of people of color and gay individuals. Due to this stigma and even studies of the past, there may be barriers for some that prevent members of these groups from participating (i.e. religion, deep southern roots, talking with strangers).
- There was an assumption on the part of the lead/principal researcher, that being "out" at work has impacted the job growth of many LGB employees: The lead researcher had to use the principles of phenomenology and practice bracketing to ensure personal perceptions and experiences did not influence or change the scope of the study.

Delimitations/Limitations

The delimitations/limitations of the study included the following:

- Research and delivery of study was conducted within a short time period (less than one year)
- There was limited to no funding for study
- Primarily one researcher conducted research for the study.

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Description of Population

Participants asked and then selected to be part of the study have all been identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) and out as defined in the *Chapter 1's Introduction* section of this proposal. In addition, focusing on primary research question that this study attempts to answer, *"Does sexual preference – and being out at work affect growth within organizations?"* it was important to identify individuals of the population who classify themselves as out, homosexual individuals who can add honesty to the conversation and .participants needed to have had working experience for a minimum of 5 years and the ability to discuss past and present work experiences in relation to the research questions. This research is primarily focused on job growth within the corporate and academic sectors. Participants were sought after from these fields of work.

With this being a phenomenological research study, much of the data collected was based on the personal experience of the research participants and not scientific fact. To add validity to the study and remove the barrier of subjectivity, strong emphasis was placed on past literature reviews, the study of phenomenology research and also the professional background of interview participants (at least 5 years in corporate positions, detailed work history and no entry level roles).

Sample

Identifying the participants who represent the sample population was two-fold. The primary researcher reached out to contacts at various Fortune 100 companies to compile a list of potential individuals who would be willing to partake in such a study. Once a list of 20 individuals was compiled the process of snowballing began, which was used to identify additional study subjects who added to the list, including some who were a better fit for the

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project, than some on the original list based on their desire to participate, career trajectory, and availability.

All participants chosen to participate have self-identified as working at various Fortune 25, 50 and 100 companies. The use of participants from this demographic (Fortune companies) assisted in reviewing the practices of well-known organizations. Although the names of these companies cannot be used in the study per IRB regulations, descriptors of the companies can be used in addition to pseudonyms of the participants. This was important to this study as the focus is to study sexuality in the workplace and living openly. With phenomenological research, much of the information received is based on experience. By understanding the working environment of professionals whom all work for commonly known companies there is a similar thread that binds them, corporate roles and the availability of job growth and succession. This was the baseline. Their experiences may prove to be very different, but the research focused on people who could provide a background and history of experiences and discuss their current working environments.

Instrument

In phenomenological research, often the main instrument is the researcher. In conducting research for this study, a review of a leading phenomenological researcher John Creswell's work was reviewed.

> Creswell suggests for a phenomenological study the process of collecting information should involve primarily in-depth interviews with as many as 10 individuals… In a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and

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describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language (Marques & McCall, 2005, p. 444).

For this study, the primary instruments were the in-depth interviews, Informed Consent forms, notes and audio recordings stored on MS OneNote, which were input into the software system by the lead researcher.

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CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Results of the Literature Review

Depending on what the reviewer is seeking, one can find an array of affirmative and negatively based LGB literary articles with supporting documentation. The purpose of this study from the start has been to discover what impact, if any, "living openly" has had on the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. In that respect, the literature that was reviewed focused on the following areas: homosexuals in the workplace; lesbians in the workplace; living openly in the workplace; sexuality in the workplace; gays and lesbians in the workplace; fear and stigmatization, and organizational development. In focusing on those areas, much of the literature obtained highlighted the disparities that are still ongoing within multiple cultures when it comes to choosing to be out at work and the impact it has on career growth and succession.

In the area of "*Hiring and Job Promotion Decisions as it Relates to Sexual Orientation*", the literature review dived into hiring practices and discrimination that is faced. Researchers noted that as with much discrimination (i.e. race, gender and even disability), discrimination based on living openly or sexual preference can be hard to prove, if not impossible, without recording or legitimate proof (Martinez, Ruggs, Sabat, Hebl, & Binggeli, 2013). Much of the results are based on perception. The literature reviewed not only focused on the differences mentioned above. The articles and journals also highlighted disparities LGB individuals faced in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts. In addition, there was a subculture of literature that presented additional points of view in relation to disparities. Researchers noted there are key differences between growth and success for lesbians and gays. Multiple articles suggested that lesbians might have an advantage over both gays and heterosexual females in the workplace for

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advancement opportunities (Duane, 1997; Wright, 2011). As stated previously, out or "perceived-to-be" gay men face a higher level of discrimination compared to lesbians due to sexuality stereotypes which perceive some job roles as feminine-induced task (e.g., elementary school teacher) (Nadler & Kufahl, 2014). This research went beyond the literature reviews and intersected the interviews. The results are highlighted and discussed here in the *Results of Data Collection, Chapter 4*.

When reviewing "*Sexuality Stereotypes within the Workplace",* fellow researchers noted that heterosexism is what is legally and socially accepted in western civilization. This has led to LGB employees having to adjust their personalities, comfort levels and personalities similar to a woman working in a male dominated organization or a person of color in a predominately-white company to fit in with company culture. As stated within the research, although many organizations (Fortune 500) are moving towards embracing this new subculture with policies and non-discriminatory practices, there need to be more than just policy changes. The culture of the organization must practice and live these values. The literature indicated that work is still needed for LGB employees not to feel ostracized and, in turn not valued, which leads to high turnover in today's work world (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001).

In the continued review of "*Sexuality Stereotypes within the Workplace",* some of the daily conflict that an LGB employee faces included biases based on sexuality and not personality or character. Some researchers suggest that for heterosexuals, becoming an ally or a friend to homosexual individuals is looked poorly upon. For the heterosexual, their sexual orientation may be called into question and for the gay man or lesbian this lack of interact inhibits their career growth (Wood, 1994; Badgett M. L.; Day & Schoenrade, 1997). On the other hand, additional research shows that forming meaningful relationships, going beyond the surface and

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creating key "allies" with straight colleagues is a necessity in the workplace for advancement (Rumens, 2011). The key difference noted between these two opposing views are the timeframes in which these areas of research were conducted (1994 and 1997 and the latest taking place in 2011), this suggest a change in the view of society as a whole about friendships, and work lifestyles. This is further explored here in *Chapter 4's The Results of Data Analysis* section.

Chapter 2's Literature Review also focused on "*Organization Policies and Programs Which Impact LGB Employees"*. The primary focus of this section highlighted the amount of work that still has to be done by organizations large and small in the field of LGB inclusion. In Chapter 1, we reviewed of the top Fortune 500 companies, over 400 already have polices in place against discrimination of LGB employees (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). In Chapter 2, it is noted that although these polices may be in place, "It is not enough for employers to develop practices and values that promote inclusion and diversity without assessing how they might unwittingly (re)produce patterns of discrimination and disadvantage" (Rumens, 2011, p. 457). As presented in the research, some organizations are continuing to try to identify ways to meaningfully fit gays, lesbians and bisexual individuals into its company's culture. In human resource literature, the topic has been almost non-existent and for many organizations, it has been the invisible diversity (Button, 2001; Collins, 2012). With key initiatives taking place within the last year in the United States, i.e. marriage equality; largest mass shooting in America's history impacting primarily homosexual individuals, it is inevitable that the invisibility not just in mainstream culture will transcend across all platforms and this will impact work-life as well due to an outcry from this group similar to the Civil Rights Movement and Act of 1964.

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Results of the Data Collection

The process for collecting the data used in this research study has been discussed in detail in the *Chapter 3's Methodology and Procedures*. For the purpose of this section, the focus was on the collection period post IRB approval. As mentioned in earlier in Chapter 3, the goal included interviews with no more than 10 for a complete phenomenological study (nine participants completed the study with one opting out of the study, as was an option as indicated on the informed consent). Phenomenology was chosen based on the nature of what was being studied.

As discussed in the *Chapter 2's Literature Review* and in the present chapter, *Results*, studying sexuality and living openly is not a defined science where facts can be proven with multiple scientific studies or comparable data numbers. Many are still closeted, the subject is still a sensitive area for many and perception does play a key role. To justify this, it was important to interview participants, gather viewpoints from their work backgrounds as well as understanding the practices and policies of various organizations, and compile these into shared groupings where experiences were similar and point out key variances that may have impacted the participant's work or career path. To do this, participants were identified by the following, ID, sexual orientation, age group, race, gender, geographic location job type and company/organization. As noted in Chapter 3, company names have not been used but descriptors were important as it lends validity to this study, organizational growth and/or change, the ability for these participants to act as a voice for their community (LGB persons) and the experiences some may be having within their own organizations. As can be noted from Table 4.1, many of the research participants are people of color and gay. One lesbian participated in the study as well as one bisexual female. Two Caucasian men (gay) participated with one later

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asking to be removed. At the onset the intent was not to focus on the African American experience in corporate America of being LGB and living openly; however, as can be noted from *Chapter 3, Methodology*, one of the assumptions that proved to be false was that people of color would be less apt to participate due to stigmas (religion, politics) and invasive studies of the past (i.e. Tuskegee Syphilis study). Although there were still stigmas brought up during the interviews, the participants who were asked to participate all accepted.

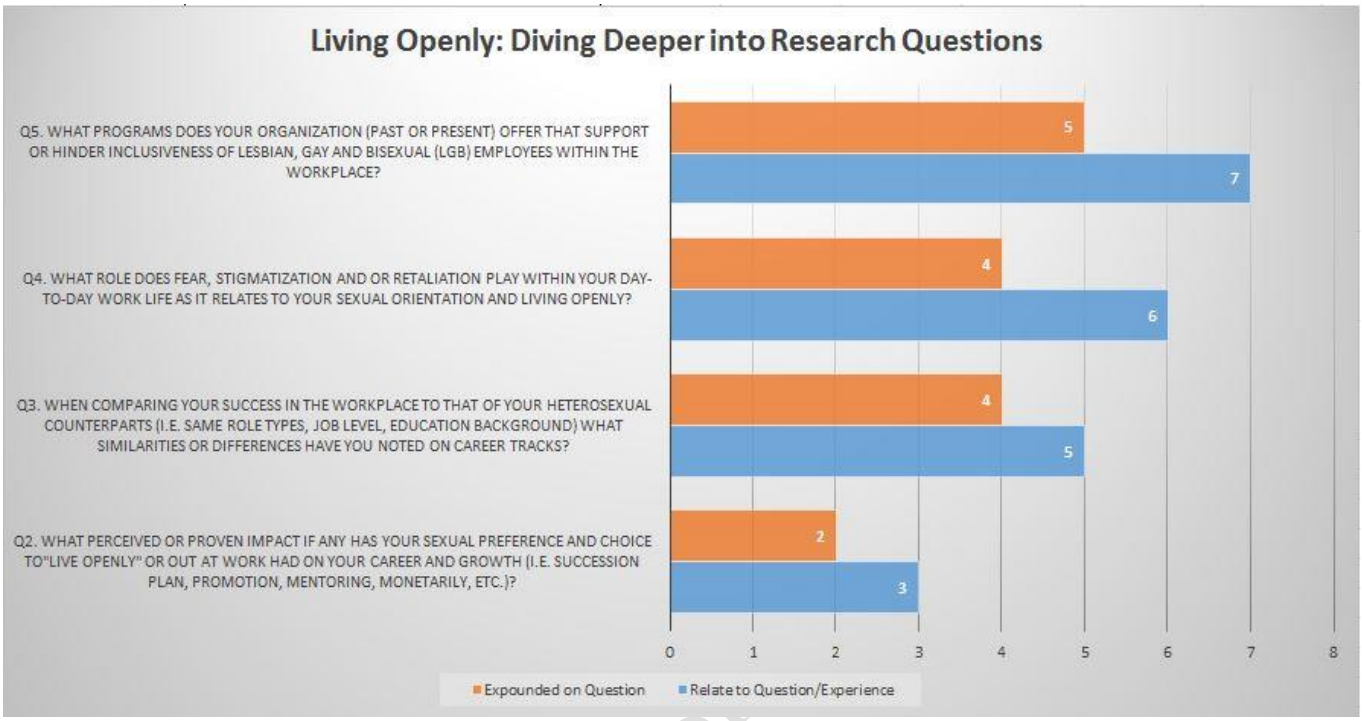
Table 4.1: Chart of Participants

Living Openly: Participants in Research Study								
ID:	Pseudonyms:	Sexual Orientation:	Age Range:	Ethnicity:	Occupation:	Company/Descriptor:	Fortune 100 Company?	Location:
A.	Aaron G.	Gay	Late 30s	African American	Corporate Trainer	Leading Cable Provider	Yes Fortune 50	Western Region
B.	Calvin D.	Gay/Married	Mid 30s	African American	Manager IT	Global beverage and bottling	Yes Fortune 50	Southern Metropolis
C.	Mary S.	Lesbian	Mid 40s	Biracial	Operations Manager	Home Improvement/repair Corp.	Yes Fortune 50	Southern Metropolis
D.	Brad B.	Gay	Mid 40s	African American	Sr. Logistics Manager	Corp Offices big box retailer	Yes Fortune 10	Southern Metropolis
E.	Thomas L.	Gay/Married	Early 30s	Caucasian	Project Manager	European Vehicle Manufacturer	Yes Fortune 100 (Global)	Northern Region
F.	Laura B.	Bisexual	Early 40S	African American	Contact Center Supervisor	Home Improvement/repair Corp.	Yes Fortune 50	Southern Metropolis
G.	Larry C.	Gay	Mid 30s	African American	Previous - COO High profile non-profit/Current - Architect	Previous -Minority based Outreach Non-profit/Current Architectural Firm (Midsize) 30-50 People	No	Midwest Region
H.	Joshua L.	Gay/Married	Early 40S	Caucasian	Learning Performance Mgr.	American Vehicle Manufacturer	Yes Fortune 10	Southern Metropolis
	Dr. Peters	Gay	Late 30s	Caucasian	Specialized field of Medicine	Asked to be removed from Study	Removed*	Removed*
								Fortune Ranks 2016*

Results of the Data Analysis

After all data had been collected, which included nine interviews, reviewing of literature and compiling the source information into manageable spreadsheets the work of reviewing the audio recordings and notes began. During each interview a series of five standard research questions were asked (listed in Chapter 1). These questions were then charted into a clustered bar graph (see Figure 4.1 below).

Figure 4.1: Living Openly – Diving Deeper into Research Questions



The graph accounts for eight participants (please note Dr. Peters has been removed from the study). For each question, the two baseline questions remained the same whereas the research questions changed. The question(s) posed included:

"Can the research participant directly relate to experience/question that is being asked?"

And if applicable, the follow up question stated:

"Did the research participant expound upon their answer?"

From these questions, it became easier to flush out what areas of research were important not only to this study but also to the participants of the study. They also helped to drive the direction of where analysis needed to happen.

Based on the conversation and feedback from research participants the area of research where additional analysis was needed included research questions 2, 3, 4 and 5. Research

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question 1 was important as it established an understanding of what living openly means to each individual but did not require an analysis.

In choosing what information to include and what to eliminate, the intent was to review the baseline questions, anytime research participants provided information that was congruent with others and his/her experiences, I sought out audio clippings from our interviews where there might be quotes that could best capsulate everyone's overall thoughts. These quotes are expressed in the Research Question(s) portion of this *Chapter 4 Results* and *Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations*.

Results of the Research Question 1.

Q1. What is your definition of being out or "living openly" at work?

As stated in the *Data Analysis* section of Chapter 4, question 1 helped to establish a foundation and purpose of the study for each participant. As with all questions, answers varied but some of the key standouts include the following:

Laura B. (Home Improvement/Repair Corporation.)

"Being out publically and comfortably with your partner and not worrying what other people think. Not allowing my affection or words to be based on the opinion of those around me."

Brad B. (Corporate office, Big Box Retailer)

"For me, it's just as normal as heterosexuals living out in their environment as well. Sharing my life with my partner and my experiences with coworkers as well. That's living openly."

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Mary S. (Home Improvement/Repair Corporation.)

"To be able to be myself without being judged. Acting 'normal' in any surrounding but feeling free to discuss my preference if and when it comes up with my upper management and direct reports."

Aaron G. (Leading Cable Provider)

"Not necessarily letting everyone know your sexual orientation or lifestyle but also not trying to mask it. I also believe it means you are also very comfortable with who you are as a person. As with any conversation at work, I believe it should be kept at work appropriate conversation."

Results of the Research Question 2.

Q2. What perceived or proven impact if any has your sexual preference and choice to "live openly" or out at work had on your career and growth (i.e. succession plan, promotion, mentoring monetarily, etc.)?

In asking this question, five out of eight stated that they have not seen or felt an impact on their career based on their sexual preference and living openly. Three participants expounded upon the question and their results are below. Most stated due to the types of companies they work for – larger companies within metropolitan cities - opportunities have been based on their work ethic and education and the need within their specific job fields. As job roles were examined and addition clarifying questions were asked, it was noted that the higher a participant was in position (i.e. management, senior management or a specialized field) the less open they were about their sexual reference with colleagues or subordinates. It was felt that their positions did not call for that type of openness and at that level it is about commanding respect and authority as one participant suggested (Brad B.).

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In speaking with Aaron G., who has a career in training, his perspective was different from many of the other participants. He lives his life openly, just as the others. Similar to what was discussed in the *Chapter 2's Literature Review*, Aaron mentioned the idea of hitting a glass ceiling or not being able to move ahead because of his sexuality and working in what is often seen as a female role. He states,

> *"Gay men tend to be more accepted in roles such as training or instructional design, where it's ok. I don't really see companies putting an openly gay man in a Sr. Management role or as a Director. Stereotypically, openly gay men are flamboyant and full of life, so what better place to put them in a training role. Again stereotypically for a straight-male dominated company where would they place us? In training, that's the safe place. I've interviewed and been declined for management roles a few times. Afterwards, I attempt to do a compare and an analysis to see where I failed compared to the person who was hired. There have been times when it has been justified but others where my experience has been greater, education is superior, and company know-how is prevalent yet the difference between me and the candidate is that he is an all American. Meaning he's the safe bet, presumed to have or does have a wife and kids, can be an easy representative in meetings and with other executives, can converse about kids and if problems arise no one on the team can state there would be male to male sexual discrimination."*

Aaron's view may serve as a representation of many frontline employees whom are educated, LGB employees living openly but cannot seem to move ahead due to the politics and stereotypes of those in charge.

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Unlike Aaron, when an employee works in a specialized field, sexuality is even less of a factor than the skill and education that is needed and the company cares much less about the personal relationships in his/her life. Calvin D., Manager of IT Operations notes that he has been able to celebrate his sexual preference in his company. Due to his specialized field of IT he has always felt comfortable being himself as the group of people he has always worked around in any company has always been a hodgepodge of people from all different backgrounds. Calvin noted that with his current company – a global bottling and beverage company – the inclusion and celebration LGBT people and backgrounds is part of their culture of diversity. His company makes it their mission to be involved in LGBT issues, and partners with the Human Rights Campaign organization (HRC) as well as local and national programs. In turn, this allows employees to feel comfortable and accepted. Many other managers aside from Calvin are openly gay which has an impact on up and coming associates. It lets them know there is acceptance of their sexuality as the company places value on being your authentic self and celebrating diversity. Calvin stated the following about his choice to live openly and the impact it has had on his success, "The culture of the organization is what makes it an inclusive company, it's ingrained in you from day one. Thus it has been easy for me to be who I am, the company even help pay for my wedding to my husband. That's major."

In some of the past research articles and journals that had been reviewed the researchers pointed to sexual preference and living openly as a possible hindrance to growth. As mentioned above, Aaron G. also discussed how he believes it has been a hurdle in his job succession. However, Thomas L., Project Manager for a European Vehicle Manufacturer started his career at a time when many of the marriage equality laws were coming into place and from his perspective he has built a normal or similar to career track to heterosexual individuals. He states,

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"I don't withhold who I am anymore. It's self-limiting, you think about it later, you've put up a wall around yourself, and people can feel it. People will make things a big deal (gay) if you make it a big deal. As a gay man, I introduce it and let it flow in conversation so that it in turn lets my boss or colleagues feel comfortable. The onus still falls on me but it helps others to adapt…. I started my career right around when marriage equality progressed which has helped me feel open and comfortable in the workplace. When me and my (now) husband were domestic partners I was comfortable talking about it and when we got married, it simply transitioned."

Results of the Research Question 3.

Q3. When comparing your success in the workplace to that of your heterosexual counterparts (i.e. same role types, job level, education background) what similarities or differences have you noted on career tracks?

In continuation of the discussion about growth within the workplace and the impact of sexual preference, an additional question about success compared to heterosexual counterparts was asked of all research participants. The results, however, focused more on the success of lesbians over their gay counterparts rather than LGB versus heterosexuals. This insight was noted in *Chapter 2's Literature Review* by fellow researchers as a factor that had been a challenge facing gay men and heterosexual women in the past (Wright, 2011; Duane, 1997). In speaking with Brad B., Sr. Logistic Manager who works for the corporate offices of a Fortune 10 big box retailer, he stated,

"It's an easier path -- an easier pill to swallow for a woman, a lesbian to be out and in management. I think (pause), it's easier for the heterosexuals --males, to see and understand. In my experience, they are very fond of something like that even if she is

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considered butch. No one will say anything to a lesbian based on the notion that in a male society it still is an ego or pride thing. Whereas when some heterosexual men see gay men they see them as being weak and inferior and classify them as unable to lead."

Adding to this conversation, Mary S. and Laura B. both who work for a Fortune 100 home improvement/repair corporation in Operations Management and a Contact Center Supervisor roles respectively. Mary S. stated, "It is difficult for a gay male as opposed to a lesbian female, we can camouflage it (sexuality) a lot where as a gay male may have a hard time, thus he is setup for rejection by management and moving ahead." Laura B. suggested that it is the fantasy of straight men that still helps lesbians move ahead. She stated, "It is the ever present fantasy of two women being together whereas some find it so hard for two men to be together, especially if the controlling party is a straight man." These three statements help validate that even with a high degree of education and knowledge, the gay man still faces an uphill battle when placed against a lesbian female or a straight counterpart as they are both seen as the safer choice.

Results of the Research Question 4.

Q4. What role does fear, stigmatization and or retaliation play within your day-to-day work life as it relates to your sexual orientation and living openly?

In response to question 4, most research participants could identify with having experienced a form of fear, stigmatization or retaliation in their work lives based on their sexual orientation. A common theme that ran through most interviews was the impact of fear. As age, and maturity increased, six of eight participants stated that they stopped letting the fear of what others think of their sexuality control how they come across in the workplaces.

An additional consideration that arose was geographic location. As presented on Table 4.1, of the eight participants, four are in corporations that are based in southern metropolis, one

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in the western region, one in the northern region and one in the Midwestern region. Based on feedback from the research participants, stigmatization and fear are further removed in geographic locations of the U.S. where LGB individuals feel freer to be themselves and work for companies that have policies or groups that support LGB initiatives. Some examples of the fear and stigmatization from the interview participants included the following:

Larry C. (Previous COO Non-Profit/ Current – Architect)

"The older I get, the less fear I have. Accept me or not. The laws are changing, things are changing. I support a level of expertise that is needed. My sexual orientation shouldn't impact what I do…. Once my family knew, the rest (outside people, friends colleagues), didn't matter; the weight was lifted."

Joshua L. (American Vehicle Manufacturer)

"When I was younger, there was definitely fear involved. The fear of will I be shunned? Will I not get promoted based on my sexual preference? But again, I was much younger. Now that fear is gone based on my level of experience and my experience with people. There seems as if there is a cultural change whereas people are more accepting… I do believe if I lived outside of Atlanta the experience would be different based on conversations with friends and colleagues outside of this city. I have been fortunate to be able to be who I am in my career without judgement."

Aaron G. (Leading Cable Provider)

"Gay people – male or female are viewed as sexual deviants. So anything that we do has some sort of sexual undertone. This is a fear and stigma that I have. Because of this, I believe that many members of management and executives may fear or question how other members of team will accept us in roles? How many of the team are homophobes?

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Ultimately, can this person and their outward sexuality successfully lead the team or will it be a hindrance? But – it's ok, almost a double standard for a straight male to have sex with women in a department, who also happens to be in a leadership role. Too often, that gets brushed under the rug. We as gays, play it very 'safe' when at work and keep our private lives close to the cuff even if we are out, because we don't want to say the wrong things to offend heterosexuals. There is so much that has to be thought of when being gay to make others comfortable. I will say that being professional doesn't have a gender or a sexual orientation. I carry myself with humanity, decorum and fairness and hope that's enough."

Laura B. (Home Improvement/Repair Corporation)

"In a previous role (small call center environment), I felt completely restricted in what I could say, in a male-controlled environment because of the attitude of the director. Being a single, African-American, bi-sexual, mother verses the married, white employees of the company. I felt ostracized within the company."

Each of the above statements, although different, highlight areas of concern for both the individual and organizations as whole. LGB individuals are a minority group, many of whom are highly educated but underrepresented in management level positions. There is still work that needs to continue within organizations large and small. In *Chapter 1's, Introduction*, it was noted that over 400 of 500 employers on the Fortune 500 list as well as many organizations in large metropolitan areas with higher gay populations now have policies in place that reflect non-discriminatory laws protecting LGBT persons (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). Based upon what was discovered in these interviews and the literature reviews, research shows that a

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majority of people who are living openly still fear or have concern about living in their truth or being their authentic selves the problem has yet to be solved.

Results of the Research Question 5.

Q5. **What programs does your organization (past or present) offer that support or hinder inclusiveness of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees within the workplace?**

When programs are discussed within organizations, often LGB individuals are not the focal point. Many time organizational development or HR focuses on the obvious areas of interest women in leadership, minority (people of color) and military based groups. As previously mentioned, the struggle that many organizations face with gay, lesbian and bisexual support groups are the guiding principles of the company and not having a full understanding of where they actually stand in relation to their own practices (Collins, 2012; Bairstow, 2007). Many companies have non-discriminatory practices, but when employees who are LGB look for people like themselves in leadership roles, the landscape is few and far between. This is not true of all companies as has been noted from interview participants.

When asked what programs, groups or resources were offered by the various companies that each research participant worked for, the results varied. For Larry C., the only participant to work for a small organization, there was no resource group or programs offered to benefit LGB employees. In the case of the other participants, although there were resources, some felt they were not promoted enough, while others felt their companies truly were on a mission to be inclusive of all.

Brad B. (Corporate Office Big Box Retailer)

"Within my company being gay or lesbian is a protected class, same as being a woman or having a disability. This is great for a company as large as we are – we must begin to

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embrace a subculture... This will be the first year that we have a full out PRIDE day where employees can wear colors and flags and truly support the cause of gays and lesbians or those who are in question. It is open to allies as well. As for the future, there is still work to do. We don't have pamphlets or resources online that are geared towards adoption or domestic partnerships or marriage, which embraces the notion that we are completely inclusive. In our stores we have a large amount of frontline employees who I would assume would appreciate knowing that as a corporation we fully support their lifestyle choices and offer benefits and resources."

Mary S. (Home Improvement/Repair Corporation)

"My organization offers a PRIDE group which is one of many affinity groups. This allowed people that share similar interest to come together and fellowship, network, volunteer and also provide mentorship. It has allowed me to stand as a gay leader and provide support to members and colleagues who I might not otherwise have a chance to get to know."

Thomas L. (European Vehicle Manufacturer)

"I know we have a group, but it focuses on all diverse groups – women, minorities, gays, etc.… Am I involved with it? No. Do I think many are? No, it seems we could do more to highlight various groups instead of having one large group. I think the company would be surprised if there was more internal push to get employees involved with LGBT issues. When I look to other companies who embrace LGBT issues and then do a comparison to us we are not up to par."

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Joshua L. (American Vehicle Manufacturer)

"From the two major corporations I have worked for here in the south, both have equally supported LGBT issues by having groups that encourage employees to live authentically. These were not just something on a checklist but ultimately helped my growth path in both my companies."

In all of the statements above there is a clear pattern that remains: the need for support. In Larry's company where he does not have a group, he is placed at a disadvantage because he cannot glean insight from other gay and lesbian individuals who may be willing to guide him along a career path or help further develop him. Although not a requirement, being able to relate to someone who has shared experiences, advice and/or backgrounds can ultimately be an asset in growth and development. As suggested by Thomas, the organization he works for has the intention to provide a diverse affinity group but combing all groups into one may lessen the impact of what is truly needed to inspire employees and obtain their involvement in creating a better and more inclusive organization. Everyone who has chosen to participate in their respective organization's various support groups has stated it has helped them to feel accepted and welcomed in their workplace environments.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study started as a desire to understand how LGB individuals who are "living openly", which again as defined by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) means "A state in which LGBT (Transgender) people are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity – where and when it feels appropriate to them" (HRC.ORG, 2016).

To restate, the purpose of this study has been to address concerns, issues and commonalities many lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals ('LGB') face in the workplace as it relates to job growth, security and potential stigmatization based on their decision to "live openly" or "out" at work. With this purpose in mind, research was conducted that included multiple literary journals and articles that provided focus for the study.

Although the interview participants all had varying answers to the five interview questions, they all spoke of change and progression. No one mentioned that things were as bad as some of the researchers alluded to 10 years prior, but everyone made mention of the need for progress to continue. Some even mentioned that their organizations aren't doing enough. A majority of individuals interviewed, work for Fortune 100 companies. For many, there was a clear distinction in the level of acceptance and integration into company cultures where diversity is celebrated and the qualities of what individual contributors bring to the organization versus the stigmatization of their sexual preference or the limits placed on their growth in workplaces that did not foster or support their lifestyles. It can be noted that some of limitations placed upon LGB individuals has to do with the size of the companies they work for and geographic location. The interviews aligned with studies of the past - smaller companies can hinder the visibility of

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LGB employees as there are not as many opportunities as well as potential personal stigmas by those in positions of power. In addition, geographic locations where gay, lesbian and bisexual persons have not been embraced or integrated into the everyday population also plays a factor in living openly and career growth..

Conclusions

Choosing to live openly can be a difficult choice for LGB individuals. The factors in disclosing or the repercussions pose different outcomes as opposed to when a heterosexual individual lives life as society has grown accustomed. Based on what is a current and past view of American society, heterosexual individuals typically live authentically or out with their sexuality without question. The decision to announce or live life as a heterosexual does not require analysis regarding the repercussions in having to choose if he or she wants to share their sexual preference in most workplaces, unlike an LGB individual. When the question of living openly was asked to interview participants, everyone defined being out in their own voice, but, the one constant in each response was age and maturity. Every interview participant, although out and living out at work, has not always been. In previous positions and/or companies, many chose to not share their sexuality. This omission for many related directly back to fear and stigmatization, comfortability and desire for growth within their respective companies.

When reviewing the various positions that many interview participants hold, it can be noted that many are in management and executive roles. It was not until many reached a level of management that they became comfortable in sharing their authentic self. Based on the dialogue from the interviews, the conclusion drawn here is that as careers are being built for many LGB employees, they feel it necessary to hide or withhold their personal lives in an effort to build their professional life. This is unlike many heterosexual individuals who are free to blend both

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without stigma or prejudge. Once a certain level has been reached for LGB employees, within their career but also in their lives (age and maturity) most of the interview participants stated life brought them to a place of "this is who I am; accept it or don't". The major factor contributing to this was also the company culture. After speaking with all individuals, and reviewing all interviews it was noted that participants who worked for inclusive environments were freer, happier and acknowledged that their companies accepted them as their authentic selves. This in turn, made them want to be themselves, no longer hiding facets of who they were, ultimately living openly. This was mentioned by Calvin D., Mary S., Thomas L., and Joshua L.

As previously mentioned, of the literature reviewed, some refer to lesbians, gays and bisexuals as the hidden group in organizations, their plight is not discussed (Badgett M. L.; Gates & Viggiani, 2014). Excluding one interview participant (Aaron G.), all felt as if their careers could or have paralleled their heterosexual counterparts. Although this was the overall consensus, it was noted that for a career to be parallel, many members of management who are now living openly had to reject who they were or hide it for many years prior to where they are currently to fit the norms of their current or previous organization. Once they were finally at a level of comfort it only then, that many of them felt comfortable to be who they were or live openly.

Recommendations

In conducting the research for this study, the challenges facing organizations became clearer. These challenges included factors surrounding LGB engagement, inclusion and career growth. This can only happen if organizations believe their company culture can evolve past the stereotypes and stigmas of the past. They will need to match society and the norms of today, this

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includes the successful integration of LGB individuals into their mission and vision and ultimately visibly meaningful roles throughout the company.

When reviewing the hiring and job growth opportunities among gays and lesbians, stigmatization can be a contributing factor to the upward mobility of gay men and their opportunities within the workplace. This is not just in comparison with their heterosexual counterparts but also lesbians, as noted in past literature reviews (Martinez, Ruggs, Sabat, Hebl, & Binggeli, 2013; Nadler & Kufahl, 2014), and also during the discussion with interview participants. It is recommended that organizations begin by working internally with their respective HR and internal or external Organizational Development/Effectiveness groups and research change management models. Thus, effectively incorporating management sensitivity training in relation to LGB employees, management resistance and stigma as well as development plans for the inclusion of LGB employees and their career paths into operational plans.

On an individual level, LGB persons who are working at various companies, whether they are Fortune 100s, 500s or smaller organizations, have decisions to make. Prevalent throughout this research study and the interviews were the desire and the need for company cultures that embrace sexuality and the ability to be one's authentic self. Education is key here for both organizations and individuals on tolerance and inclusion practices and the release of stigmatization against LGB solely based on their sexuality. As noted by multiple interview participants, what has been consistent in their choice to live openly was age and maturity in addition to the companies they have worked for throughout their professional careers. When various interviewees mentioned they are a master in their field or they had been promoted solely based on the work they have done and sexuality had not been a hindrance, this leads to the

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recommendation that personal education (i.e. college, trade school, becoming a subject matter expert) must be placed at the center of the lives of LGB individuals. If they find they are being held back within careers based on their sexuality, it is with education and know-how that he/she will be able to transition if the organization is not the right fit.

Recommendation for Action

Language needs to be changed. In every interview that was conducted, all individuals discussed their sexuality and what was considered "normal". For LGB individuals to move ahead and have the same respect amongst all peers including their straight counterparts, the comparison of what is socially acceptable for "them versus us" has to come to an end. To that end, the suggestion is to eliminate language that diminishes or infers that being lesbian, gay or bisexual or any other form of sexual preference is less than or not normal when compared to the lifestyle of a heterosexual. Although this may not happen globally or right away, this is a policy that can be added to multiple HR workplace policies and practiced as well as reinforced with zero-tolerance policies.

With this research study primarily focused on top Fortune companies, there is a need to address what these organizations can do to benefit the individuals who have taken part in this study and how similar organizations can benefit from similar practices. As mentioned, 400 of the top Fortune 500 have polices in place to protect against discrimination. Policies like these can be great, but also hard to prove if there are cases of discrimination as there is typically no physical evidence. It is recommended that companies work as allies with organizations such as the HRC to help with the passing of the Equality Act introduced in 2015 and seek to "establish explicit, permanent protections against discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity in matters of employment, housing, and access to public places, federal

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funding, credit, education and jury service. In addition, it would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in federal funding and access to public places" (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). Companies who have made a strong commitment to the support the equality of LGBT have pledged their name and company recognition to the HRC's Business Collation (formed March, 2016) in support of the Equality Act. This list includes companies such as The Coca-Cola Company, Apple Inc., and Google. See Figure 5.1 for full listing (Human Rights Campaign, 2016).

Figure 5.1 HRC Coalition for The Equality Act

Recommendation for Dissemination

The results of the study are intended to be shared and distributed to organizations who are interested in aligning or shifting their culture and become more inclusive with LGB issues. This

will be done by reaching out to the various state equality organizations as well as seeking opportunities to have results published to online electronic publications.

Recommendation for Further Study

This study focused on issues and concerns that were of concern to LGB individuals who are living openly within the workplace. There is a need for an additional study on individuals who remain closeted, and still feel uncomfortable living openly amongst all the change that has happened in relation to public perception and marriage equality. In addition, as this study had a mixture of ethnicities for the interview groups, there is a place for continued study of the needs, wants and desires of people of color who are gay, lesbian or bisexual, as most studies have focused primarily on Caucasians, which limits a true representation of US society today.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
For Research Involving Human Subjects

15-Dec-2015

Mr Chase Turner
Penfield College
Penfield College of Mercer University
3001 Mercer University Drive
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: Sexual Preference - And Being Out At Work: The Impact On Growth Within The Organization (H1512332)

Dear Mr Turner:

Your application entitled: Sexual Preference - And Being Out At Work: The Impact On Growth Within The Organization (H1512332) was reviewed by this Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under Category per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 15-Dec-2015. The protocol expires 14-Dec-2016. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
New Application fact to face interviews, GoTo Meeting, phone interview

Please complete the survey for the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance. To access the survey, click on the following link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/K7CTT8R

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, M.ED., CIP, CIM
Member
Intuitional Review Board
Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone (478) 301-4101
Fax (478) 301-2329
ORC_Mercer@Mercer.Edu

APPENDIX B

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Penfield College

Informed Consent

Sexual Preference - And Being Out At Work: The Impact On Growth Within The Organization

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators
Chase Turner, Penfield College of Mercer University
Graduate student – M.S. Organizational Leadership (August 2016 graduate candidate)

Student Advisor – Dr. Susanne Diggs-Wilborn, Visiting Assistant Professor
Organizational Leadership - Penfield College of Mercer University

Purpose of the Research
This research study is designed to address concerns, issues and commonalities many lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals face in the workplace as it relates to job growth, security and potential stigmatization based on their decision to "live openly" or "out" at work is the purpose of this study.

The data from this research is expected to help contribute to the organizational development efforts for companies who are seeking to expand their understanding of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) individuals and their needs, disappointments with the current systems and opportunities for improvement within the workplace.

In relation to my field of study and concentration Organizational Leadership and Development, this research on LGB individuals and their choice to live openly within their workplaces has a direct correlation to organizational development. With the movement and growth of ideas surrounding equality for the LGB community within government and the public as a whole, there is a need for organizational change to match these efforts. When reviewing the top Fortune 500 companies, over 400 already have polices in place against discrimination of LGB employees (Human Rights Campaign, 2015). Although this is a great start, it is necessary to explore how these policies are enacted and the quality of the work lifestyles LGB employees have in these companies and beyond.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to describe your work environment and any assumed implications, repercussions or opportunities that have come about due to your choice in being out or living openly at work as an LGB individual.

Mercer University IRB
Approval Date 12/15/2015
Protocol
Expiration Date 12/14/2016

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Penfield College

Your participation will take approximately one to two hours, with an additional follow up phone call (15 minutes approximately) by the research investigator.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
Foreseeable risk and discomfort with this study are minimal. Due to the nature of this study, an individual company or organization will not be used. Instead, individuals who work for various companies who can speak to their personal experiences of being an LGB person in any workplace are the goals of the study. To eliminate the conflict of interest of interviewing participants within their place of work, which could be a source of the participant's personal reflection, research will be done offsite. Three options will be offered including a local coffee house, an online option i.e. GoToMeeting – which allows for face-to-face dialogue and lastly a phone interview.

Potential Benefits of the Research
Potential benefits of this research include the opportunity to publish and share the results of the completed study with various organizations that will can use the data to enhance this particular group's (LGB) employee engagement and involvement within their workplaces.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
Confidentiality and privacy are of the utmost importance within this study. Interviewees names will be withheld from any published work or information shared with companies to further their research on the topic.

Audio recording will be used during the interviews but will be destroyed approximately 1 year after all findings have been published.

Although individual names will not be used, identifiers such as place of employment (if applicable), type of job and age and sex of individuals will be used.

To ensure data will not be comprised after the initial meeting with interviewees, all documents will refer to individuals under pseudo names.

Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant, you may refuse to participate at any time. To withdraw from the study please contact:

Principal Researcher:
Chase Turner
Chase.A.Turner@live.mercer.edu
404-578-0607

Mercer University IRB
Approval Date 12/15/2015
Protocol
Expiration Date 12/14/2016

Withdrawal from the study can be done at any time prior to publication without repercussion.

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, please speak with:

Principal Researcher:
Chase Turner
Chase.A.Turner@live.mercer.edu
404-578-0607

Student Advisor
Dr. Susanne Diggs-Wilborn, Visiting Assistant Professor
Organizational Leadership - Penfield College of Mercer University
Diggs-Wilborn_SC@mercer.edu

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS ONLY WHEN APPROPRIATE

Audio or Video Taping
As mentioned in the confidentiality and Data Storage section, audio recording may be used while conducting interviews. This information will be used to ensure accuracy of information and will be destroyed one year after publication. Pseudo names will be used on all audio recording, which correlate with names used in research findings.

Reasons for Exclusion from this Study
Subjects will be excluded from participating in the study if they do not self-identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual and out or living openly within the workplace. Individuals cannot be closeted or assumed to be LGB as the goal of the study is to research effects on members of the community who are *out.* In addition, the focus of this research is on growth, advancement and limitations, which have affected this community within their organizations. To that end, individuals must possess a solid five years steady working experience to reflect upon for research.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University's IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.

Mercer University IRB
Approval Date 12/15/2015
Protocol
Expiration Date 12/14/2016

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Penfield College

KEEP SIGNATURES

Signature of Research Participant	Date
Participant Name (Please Print)	Date
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

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Protocol
Expiration Date 12/14/2016

APPENDIX C

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Penfield College

Phenomenology Research Design – Survey/Interview Questions:

Sexual Preference - And Being Out At Work: The Impact On Growth Within The Organization

Investigators
Chase Turner, Penfield College of Mercer University
Graduate student – M.S. Organizational Leadership (August 2016 graduate candidate)

Student Advisor – Dr. Susanne Diggs-Wilborn, Visiting Assistant Professor
Organizational Leadership - Penfield College of Mercer University

Purpose of the Research
This research study is designed to address concerns, issues and commonalities many lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals face in the workplace as it relates to job growth, security and potential stigmatization based on their decision to "live openly" or "out" at work is the purpose of this study.

The data from this research is expected to help contribute to the organizational development efforts for companies who are seeking to expand their understanding of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) individuals and their needs, disappointments with the current systems and opportunities for improvement within the workplace.

1. What is your definition of being out or "living openly" at work?

2. What perceived or proven impact if any has your sexual preference and choice "live openly" or out at work had on your career and growth (i.e. succession plan, promotion, mentoring, monetarily, etc.)?

3. When comparing your success in the workplace to that of your heterosexual counterparts (i.e. same role types, job level, education background) what similarities or differences have you noted on career tracks.

4. What role does fear, stigmatization and or retaliation play within your day-to-day work life as it relates to your sexual orientation and living openly?

5. What programs does your organization (past or present) offer that support or hinder inclusiveness of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees within the workplace? Is there additional feedback you would provide to enhance or remove offerings from your employers programs/initiatives, if so what?

Approval Date 12/15/2015
Protocol
Expiration Date 12/14/2016

APPENDIX D

A

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Signature of Research Participant Date

[redacted] 4/9/2016

Participant Name (Please Print) Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent 4/9/2016 Date

Rev.11/07/2015

B

MERCER UNIVERSITY
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4/10/16

Signature of Research Participant — Date

[redacted]

4/10/16

Participant Name (Please Print) — Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent — Date 4/10/2016

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C

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Penfield College

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Signature of Research Participant — Date 5/26/16

[redacted] — Date 5/26/16

Participant Name (Please Print)

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent — Date 5/26/2016

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MERCER UNIVERSITY

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[redacted] [redacted] 4/12/16

Signature of Research Participant Date

[redacted] 4/12/2016

Participant Name (Please Print) Date

4/12/2016

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

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E

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Penfield College

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4/18/16

Signature of Research Participant — Date

[redacted] 4/18/16

Participant Name (Please Print) — Date

4/15/16

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent — Date

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F

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Penfield College

KEEP SIGNATURES

[signature]	26 May 16
Signature of Research Participant	Date
[redacted]	26 May 16
Participant Name (Please Print)	Date
Chasey Turner	5/26/2016
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

Rev.11/07/2015

6

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[redacted] 4/24/16
Signature of Research Participant Date

[redacted] 4/24/16
Participant Name (Please Print) Date

4/24/2016
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

Rev.11/07/2015

H

MERCER UNIVERSITY
Penfield College

KEEP SIGNATURES

Signature of Research Participant — Date: 5-23-2016

[redacted] — Date: 5-23-2016
Participant Name (Please Print)

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent — Date: 5-23-2016

Rev.11/07/2015

APPENDIX – TABLES

Living Openly: Participants in Research Study							
ID:	Pseudonyms:	Sexual Orientation:	Age Range:	Ethnicity:	Occupation:	Company/Descriptor:	Fortune 100 Company?	Location:
A.	Aaron G.	Gay	Late 30s	African American	Corporate Trainer	Leading Cable Provider	Yes Fortune 50	Western Region
B.	Calvin D.	Gay/Married	Mid 30s	African American	Manager IT	Global beverage and bottling	Yes Fortune 50	Southern Metropolis
C.	Mary S.	Lesbian	Mid 40s	Biracial	Operations Manager	Home improvement/repair Corp.	Yes Fortune 50	Southern Metropolis
D.	Brad B.	Gay	Mid 40s	African American	Sr. Logistics Manager	Corp Offices big box retailer	Yes Fortune 10	Southern Metropolis
E.	Thomas L.	Gay/Married	Early 30s	Caucasian	Project Manager	European Vehicle Manufacturer	Yes Fortune 100 (Global)	Northern Region
F.	Laura B.	Bisexual	Early 40S	African American	Contact Center Supervisor	Home Improvement/repair Corp.	Yes Fortune 50	Southern Metropolis
G.	Larry C.	Gay	Mid 30s	African American	Previous - COO High profile non-profit/Current - Architect	Previous -Minority based Outreach Non-profit/Current Architectural Firm (Midsize) 30-50 People	No	Midwest Region
H.	Joshua L.	Gay/Married	Early 40S	Caucasian	Learning Performance Mgr.	American Vehicle Manufacturer	Yes Fortune 10	Southern Metropolis
	Dr. Peters	Gay	Late 30s	Caucasian	Specialized field of Medicine	Asked to be removed from Study	Removed*	Removed*
								Fortune Ranks 2016*

Table 4.1

APPENDIX –FIGURES

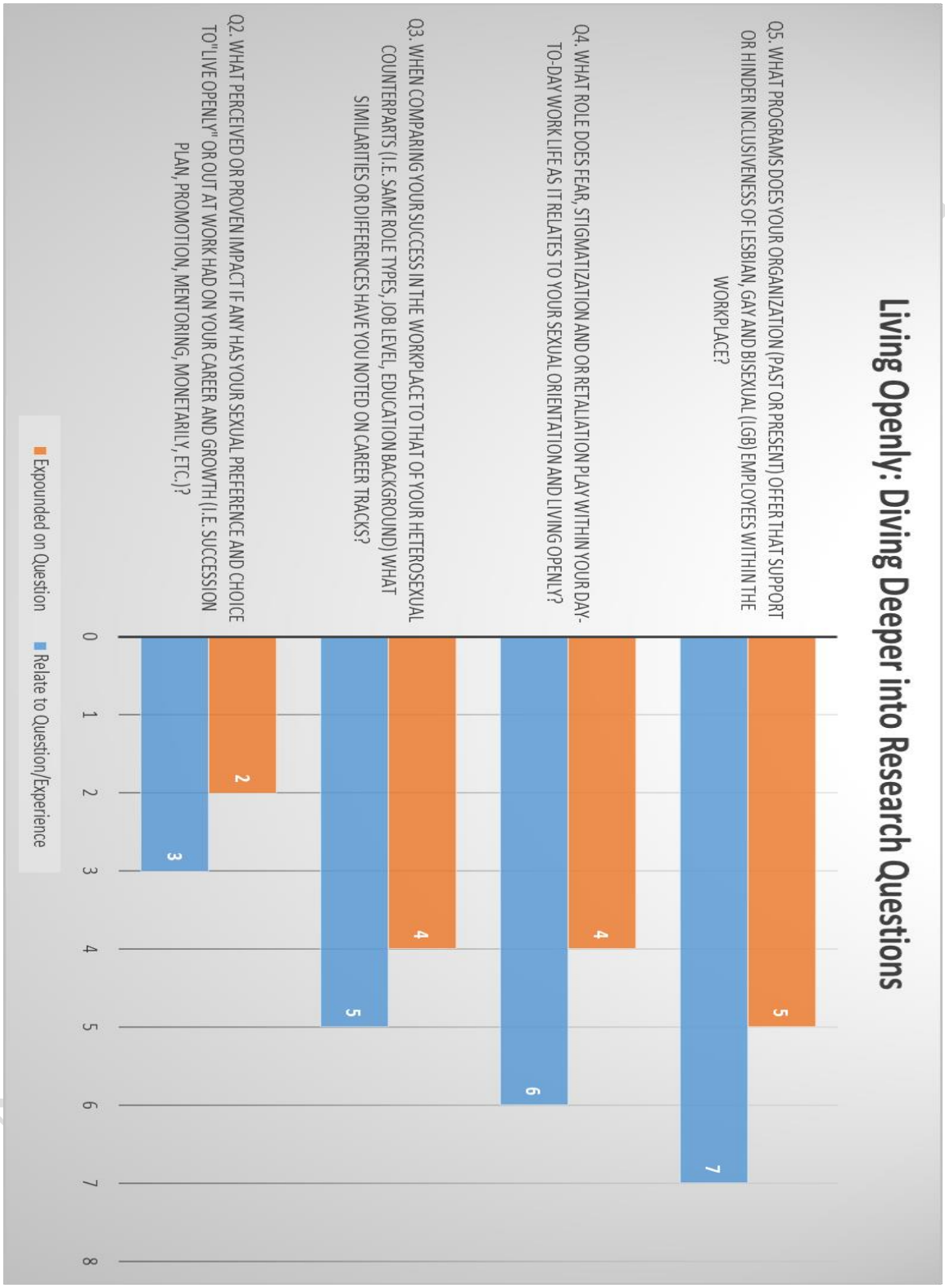

Figure 4.1

APPENDIX –FIGURES

Figure 5.1

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