

**HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE TEXAS OIL PATCH: THE IMPACT OF  
PRACTICES, POLICIES, AND CURRICULUM ON GAY WHITE STUDENTS  
IN THE TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**

A Dissertation

by

MICHAEL ANDREW THORSON JR.

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Chair of Committee,	Kathryn McKenzie
Co-Chair of Committee,	Patrick Slattery
Committee Members,	Linda Skrla
	James Scheurich
Head of Department,	Frederick M. Nafukho

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## ABSTRACT

In the past two decades there has been an increase in public demand for the creation of a school environment that is positive and safe for all students. Nearly 90 percent of LGBTIQ students surveyed reported hearing “gay” used negatively, as well as, hearing homophobic remarks on a daily basis. Although quantitative research exists, there is no qualitative research addressing these specific issues in Texas, a Southern state with strong conservative religious and political affiliations. With this in mind, I set out to explore how heteronormativity influenced practices, policies and curriculum from the perspective of participants who identified as gay and white and had attended the Texas public school system.

The study is composed of seven participants with data gathered in a multi-stage unstructured interview process. This process consists of an initial interview, analysis, and follow-up interviews. These interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed using holistic thematic analysis.

All seven of my participants were able to articulate their experiences not only within the Texas school system, but within their family and community interactions. Themes that emerged included religion, heterosexual costume, personal homophobia/homonegativity, homophobic slurs, inaction of teachers and administrators, and LGBTIQ curriculum omission. This led to considering what can be derived from these experiences in regards to creating a positive school environment for LGBTIQ in Texas public schools. With these themes, several recommendations are made, including:

- Student organizations providing positive supports to LGBTIQ students
- Inclusive nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies
- Training for administrators and teachers on LGBTIQ issues
- Inclusive curriculum

The issues that affect LGBTIQ students within school districts across the country are varied and complex. This study begins to explore these complexities in order to better understand how to facilitate inclusivity for LGBTIQ youth in Texas public schools.

Educators and school leaders must realize by not being mindful of the enacted curriculum, policies, and practices, they are potentially creating an oppressive and harmful school climate that not only affects LGBTIQ students physically, but emotionally with negative consequences on their academic achievement and mental health.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters—Stella and Zooey. May you both continue to always be who you are without letting others put you in predefined boxes.

You are unique. You are beautiful. You are loved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot fully express my thanks to all the individuals who have supported me throughout the past five and half years. It would not have been possible for me to complete this journey without their help.

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Fourth, I want to thank my parents who have always supported my educational endeavors. Although my family was never considered well off when I was growing up, my parents worked hard to provide me opportunities in life. They may not always agree

with my point of view, but this never deterred them from giving me their unwavering support in all my endeavors.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction and Personal Context**

This dissertation is a study of heteronormativity within the Texas public school system with a focus on its impact on gay white students living in the Texas oil patch. Specifically, it will examine how the normative constructs of sexuality and gender shape policies, procedures and curriculum within the Texas public school system. Before introducing the research questions and methodology for this study, I will address the centrality of narrative, autobiography, and autoethnography in this dissertation. Since this dissertation will focus on the personal narratives of participants, it is important to locate my own positionality and autobiography. Scholars such as Ronald Pelias and Patti Lather contend that researchers' personal experiences can lend themselves to research. Pelias (2003) contends that by writing autobiography and autoethnography to a certain extent researchers are better equipped to engage in a critical cultural analysis because they are able to "get to culture" (p. 372). Furthermore, Lather (1991) states that "research that encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of developing progressive groups requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work" (p. 80). I agree with these scholars, and offer my own autoethnographic reflections to begin this dissertation.

I grew up in an industrial city in southeast Texas, whose blue collar population relied heavily on the oil refineries and chemical plants for employment. This is

exemplified in the fact that the majority of men in my family have worked in the oil industry since the 1920s. I was the first man in my family to break this norm, which came as no surprise to many since I was viewed as different from early on. I began to notice a difference between myself and other male students in the fifth grade, and it was around this time I began to be picked on for being too sensitive. I was not physically imposing or tough as young boys should be by normative standards of masculinity in Western society. The teasing began with other students calling me a cry baby and pushing me around because they felt they were tougher than I was. This treatment increased in severity when I entered junior high in the sixth grade. It was at this age that I joined the band and was the only boy who played the clarinet. I was repeatedly told I played a “gay” instrument by other students, even though I was completely unaware musical instruments possessed a sexual orientation. In seventh grade I joined the football team because I thought it would make me more popular and the teasing would end. This could not have been further from the truth. In fact, playing football made it even more apparent that I was not “like the other boys.” I was not physically imposing or aggressive, so I was pushed around and tackled very easily on the field.

There is a specific incident that exemplifies the experience I had both on and off the football field in junior high and through the early part of high school. One day in the seventh grade after dressing out in my football pads and making my way outside with the rest of the seventh grade team, some other players started to call me a “fag” and said I was a “queer” and that everyone better not stand too close to me or I might try to kiss them. I felt so alone, even my so-called best friend moved away from me when the other

players continued their barrage of insults. After a few more minutes of sustaining this treatment the coaches came out and directed us to the field. However, the coaches' presence did not stop the teasing; it simply lowered the volume of insults as the boys who started the teasing kept saying, just loud enough for the other players to hear, "Hang your helmets on your tailbone pad Thorson is walking behind you." A majority of the other players followed these boys lead and hung their helmets off their tailbone pads. The coaches were aware that I was being picked on, and I received the usual junior high response of "toughen up" and "stop being so sensitive, you're a football player." It was the standard "boys will be boys" mentality with the idea being that by enduring this teasing it would make me mentally and physically tough.

It did not. If anything it led me deeper into a depression that had begun to emerge in the fifth grade. I took all this teasing very hard. The other boys made me feel out of place and not "normal." All of this was exacerbated by the fact that I grew up in a conservative Christian home where I was always told that it was a sin to be gay and that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer/questioning (LGBTIQ) individuals went to hell. From hearing this multiple times, especially from my mother, it made me feel as if something was wrong with me since people obviously thought I was gay. It was not until after years of receiving this type of treatment from my peers that in my sophomore year of high school I decided I did not care what others thought of me and became comfortable in my own skin. I was who I was and if they did not like it then the hell with them. I believe it was from ending a quest to be accepted as a stereotypical "masculine" male that I became a stronger more confident person, and I began to

question more and more what I had been told was true my entire life. This questioning and refusal to accept the social scripts I was given as a child has served as the driving force behind my study. I began to wonder about the experiences of students', like myself, who do not fit the sexual and gender norms of Western society and how it impacted them within the public education system focusing specifically on LGBTIQ students. Therefore, my research will focus on the possible impact that heteronormative practices, policies, and curriculum has on LGBTIQ students within the Texas public school system. This will be coupled with an examination of the language and discourse that not only drives and sustains sexual and gender inequities within our society but can be used to bring change to how educators view and approach issues that affect LGBTIQ students inside, and outside, their schools.

### **Related Literature**

Undoubtedly the scholarly research that pertains to issues that face the LGBTIQ community, not only within public schools, but society as a whole is expansive. It was with this in mind that I wanted to narrow my review of literature to what would be beneficial in researching the causes and effects of LGBTIQ issues in the public education system, specifically within the state of Texas. Admittedly, in my review I did not focus solely on LGBTIQ educational issues, although this was emphasized, but also examined the ways that sexuality and gender are defined and normalized within our society. This normalization of sexuality and gender is significant since it is perpetuated and sustained within social institutions like schools. It is with this in mind that my literature review was divided into numerous topics including: heteronormativity, queer

theory, proposed LGBTIQ biology, history of sexuality, religious viewpoint on homosexuality, intertwining of religion and politics, the impact of religion and politics on public schools, inaction of educators, court rulings on LGBTIQ inequities, and school programs that address LGBTIQ issues in schools. It were these topics that led to a review of literature meant to assist me in attaining a broader perspective of the issues LGBTIQ students face within the public school system while at the same time gaining a better understanding of the societal structures that sustain sexual and gender inequities within Western culture.

First, in researching specific LGBTIQ issues within an educational setting I came across a series of quantitative studies conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) that utilized a questionnaire to gather information on the experiences of LGBTIQ students in public schools. These studies are conducted yearly, both nationally and in certain states, including Texas. The GLSEN found in the responses given that LGBTIQ students heard antigay slurs and homophobic remarks repeatedly throughout the day, with over thirty-two percent of students reported hearing negative remarks in regard to gender expression and twenty-six percent hearing homophobic remarks from teachers and administrators (GLSEN, 2011; Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Furthermore, these surveys indicated that a majority of educators have opposed integrating LGBTIQ issues and studies within their schools curriculum (GLSEN, 2011; Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Issues that comes with the GLSEN school climate surveys is they only statistically quantify the experiences of LGBTIQ students, and lack a richness and depth that personal narratives can provide to

educational research. It is this lack of exploration in individual narratives of LGBTIQ students in the public school system, specifically in Texas, that I intend to rectify within my study.

An important piece of information to note above is the large percentage of educators who are opposed to integrating LGBTIQ issues within their curriculum and schools in general. It is blatant displays of homophobia and heteronormativity like this by educators that leads to cultures of fear and hatred in schools around the country. However, the creation of negative school climates should not be our only concern in addressing the issues of LGBTIQ students with the public school system. Rather, researchers must also explore the unintentional support of social norms through current educational curriculum, policies and practices (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Altogether, regardless of whether the actions of educators are intentional or unintentional school climates in the United States are being stymied from evolving into arenas where LGBTIQ students feel comfortable or free to make themselves seen and heard (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Consequently, this failure of schools to evolve into more welcoming spaces for LGBTIQ students can be attributed partially to the idea of heteronormativity, or the idea that heterosexuality is the unspoken norm in regards to sexuality.

With this in mind I began to explore the institutions that support and perpetuate the idea of heteronormativity within our society, specifically fundamentalist religion and politics. The literature on religion and homosexuality in the United States tends to center on Christianity, specifically conservative Protestant faiths that tend to be less

accepting (Lugg, 1998; Rudy, 1997). I focus on fundamentalists within Christian faith, as they tend to have more visibility in the debate on sexuality and gender in our society. This visibility can be considered especially true in Texas which is considered part of the “South,” where fundamentalist religion plays a larger role in the lives of Southerners than it does to others in the remainder of the country (Matthews, 1998).

While fundamental religious groups have always been present in our society, up until the last thirty years they have not wielded great influence in shaping policy since they had previously attempted to persuade both side of the political aisle in America rather than focus on one particular political party (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). In the past thirty years several large and prominent fundamental groups have formed, such as, Focus on the Family, Christian Voice, and the Moral Majority, and have attached themselves to the Republican Party causing religious and political rhetoric to intertwine until almost undistinguishable from one another (Myers & Cibulka, 2008; Rudy, 1997). This is exemplified in the religious language employed by some conservative Republicans when speaking about sexual orientation. For example, the Texas Republican Party in their 2014 platform describe homosexuality as “a chosen behavior that is contrary to the fundamental unchanging truths that have been ordained by God in the Bible, recognized by our nation’s founders, and shared by the majority of Texans” (Texas Republican Party, 2014, p.12). This statement explicitly indicates that their opposition to homosexuality stems from their faith. This example illustrates how fundamentalist religious doctrine can play a profound role in shaping public discourse within the political arena, as well as, how easily religious values can be transposed on

the political landscape of the state, which can affect public schools in Texas. Furthermore, the link between fundamentalist Christian organizations and certain conservatives within the political arena serves to perpetuate the injustices aimed at individuals who do not fit the normative ideals of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression that exists in Western society (Sherkat, Powell-Williams, Maddox, & Mattias de Vries, 2011). It is through understanding this interconnectedness of religion and politics that I believe a deeper understanding will be gained in regards to the social and cultural background that LGBTIQ students face living in Texas.

Therefore, in examining the ways that fundamentalist religion and conservative politics shape normative values in Texas through public discourse that has a direct impact on LGBTIQ students in public schools it became clear to me that it is imperative that the concept heteronormativity serve to inform my research. It is with this in mind that I began to gain a deeper understanding of the historical context of heteronormativity within our society. This search led me to the concept of compulsory heterosexuality which emerged during the 1960s and 1970s from feminists who were interested in the mechanisms within heterosexuality and “the ways in which heterosexuality” depended upon and guaranteed gender divisions within our society (Jackson, 2006, p. 105). Feminist researchers noted that heterosexuality is not uniformly defined and practiced by individuals who identify as heterosexual. Therefore, this led to the contention that compulsory heterosexuality serves two functions, specifically “regulating those kept within its boundaries as well as marginalizing and sanctioning those outside of them”

(Jackson, 2006, p. 105). The boundaries referred to are those of gender roles within relationships (Jackson 2006; Seidman, 2009).

It was not until the beginning of the 1990s that queer theory reconstituted the concept of heteronormativity (Seidman, 2009). Michael Warner coined the term heteronormativity during this time frame to describe normative behaviors in regards to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender roles and gender expression (Warner, 1991). The research that has been produced since this time views heteronormativity as being present in all spheres of our society while remaining largely invisible (Yep, 2003). Warner (2002) describes this invisible, unspoken understanding of “normal” sexuality as being present in “the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations” which makes heterosexuality “seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (p. 309). Ultimately, the normalization of heterosexuality serves as the “invisible center” of the social power structure, which creates, sustains, and perpetuates the “erasure, marginalization, disempowerment, and oppression of sexual others” (Yep, 2003, p. 18).

Finally, the literature review will examine the inaction of educators in creating policies and practices that foster safe, nurturing environment for all students, including LGBTIQ students. The research shows little action has been taken by educators to make large-scale systemic changes in regards to expanding discourse on LGBTIQ issues within the public school system (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). The reasons for not doing so are varied, including fear of negative reaction from parents and community, beliefs that sexuality is a private issue, belief that homosexuality is a sin, and many

more (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Regardless, resistance to creating policies, practices, and a curriculum that is inclusive of all students, including LGBTIQ students, is strong. It is because of this resistance by educators that it is imperative to research what is currently not being done so we can proceed in shifting our pedagogy to being more caring and nurturing to all students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In exploring the scholarly literature that pertains to LGBTIQ issues within public schools it was apparent that much of the research that exists within this area of study is either quantitative, like the GLSEN survey, or examines LGBTIQ student issues from the perspective of teachers and administrators. There is virtually no qualitative educational research that examines the viewpoint of any LGBTIQ students, in depth, who are affected by the actions or inactions of educators. Moreover, very little educational research specifically examines the experiences of LGBTIQ individuals within the context of the South, which is considered to be a bastion of conservative politics and evangelical religion.

### **Purpose of the Study**

It is the gap in the research that I intend to begin to close with this study. The need for qualitative research that examines the experiences of the student is important since the issues that affect LGBTIQ students within school districts across the country are varied and complex. This complexity makes it imperative for educators to understand the need to examine the policies, practices, and curriculum being implemented within their districts and campuses to ensure a “one-size fits” all approach

is not being taken in dealing with their student populations. Student populations are not homogeneous, but are diverse in regards to race, ethnicity, religious, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Educators and, most importantly, school leaders must realize that by not being mindful of the enacted curriculum, policies, and practices, they are potentially creating an oppressive and harmful school climate that not only affects LGBTIQ students physically, but also emotionally, with negative consequences on their academic achievement and mental health.

In the past two decades there has been an increase in public demand for the creation of a school environment that is positive and safe for all students (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). However, this call for fairness and change has largely fallen on deaf ears when it comes to addressing issues that deal with sexual orientation in public schools. This is exemplified in the lack of action on the part of district and campus leadership to change the discrimination and bullying that dominates the experiences of LGBTIQ students across the United States educational system (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009).

### **Research Questions**

The questions guiding this research on heteronormativity and its impact on gay white students in the Texas public school system and how the normative constructs of sexuality and gender are shaped by language and public discourse, include:

1. In a selected group of gay white students who attended Texas public schools, what experiences did they have with students, teachers, and school leaders in regards to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression?

2. In a selected group of gay white students who attended Texas public schools, how did they perceive these experiences affected them within and outside the school setting?
3. In a selected group of gay white students who attended Texas public schools, if their experiences were negative, what could school leaders and teachers have done differently to create a school environment that is nurturing and caring?

### **Overview of Methodology**

The methodology for this research is thematic narrative analysis. In my research, thematic narrative analysis is situated within the critical framework of queer theory which focuses on emancipation of oppressed groups, specifically LGBTIQ students. These methodologies have ultimately informed the methods that will be utilized within my study, which relies heavily on participant interviews.

The participants in my study were selected through local and national organizations, such as, college GLBT Resource Centers and the GLSEN. These participants consist of seven individuals that meet predetermined criteria. The criteria selected requires that they are former students of the Texas school system, that they identify as gay and white, that they are 18-35 years old, and they come from cities within Texas where the oil industry is present. In this particular study, the research was completed within the context of the Texas public education system. The context informs the age requirement of participants as it is felt that their experiences will be fresh in their mind making experiences easier to recall accurately. Furthermore, the criteria for participants are important since oppression cannot be understood except through

relationships and interactions with individuals being oppressed (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Once participants were selected a multi-stage unstructured interview process was used, consisting of an initial interview, analysis, and follow-up interviews. These interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. It is through these interviews with participants that personal narratives were gathered that examine their perceptions of heteronormativity and its impact on their public school experiences in Texas.

As stated previously, these narratives were analyzed utilizing thematic narrative analysis. Thematic narrative analysis is capable of generating significant findings by utilizing prior theories, discussed in the literature review, which serve as the basis of interpretation and that generate common themes among participant narratives (Riesmann, 2008). It is through the experiences in the Texas public school system, as described in detail by participants, that I challenge perceptions within the social, cultural, and political structures that marginalize LGBTIQ students.

It is through selecting this particular methodology and method that I intend to challenge the normative structures in our society holding fast to the belief that individual and collective consciousness can be transformed (McKenzie, 2001). However, it is not until individuals are able to understand the experiences LGBTIQ students have because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression that society as a whole can begin to move away from the normative structures and discourse that serve to

strengthen the inequities that exist in Western society. It is my hope that this research will serve as a stepping stone in this direction.

### **Definitions**

Included below are terms and their definitions. I have provided these terms for the reader to assist in understanding how they are utilized for the purposes of my study.

- *Gay* is a term that is generally used to describe sexual and romantic desire between men.
- *Lesbian* is a term that is generally used to describe sexual and romantic desire between women.
- *Bisexual* is defined as an individual who is sexually and romantically attracted to both men and women (Halperin, 2009).
- *Transgender* is a term for individuals “whose gender identity is different from the sex and gender role they were assigned at birth” (Sonnie, 2000, p. 247).  
Transgender individuals can be “heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual and may or may not identify as queer” (Sonnie, 2000, p. 247).
- *Intersex* is generally used as a catch-all term for individuals with a mixture of male and female characteristics. This is sometimes referred to as the third sex, but it is important to emphasize there are many degrees between biologically male and female (Fausto-Sterling, 1993).
- *Queer* although this term has commonly been used and viewed as offensive and scathing, in contemporary usage it has come to be utilized as a unifying, self-

affirming umbrella term for anyone that falls outside the heteronormative and gender mainstream (Sonnie, 2000).

- *Questioning* refers to the process of exploring one's sexual orientation, gender, or both because they may be unsure and/or concerned about applying a social label to themselves (Martin & Murdock, 2007).
- *Sexual Orientation* describes a person's attraction to another person—physically, romantically, emotionally, and/or spiritually (GLAAD, 2011).
- *Gender Identity* is a term that signifies how an individual identifies with a gender category. Gender identification does not always correlate with biological sex categories of male and female.
- *Gender Expression* is how an individual expresses their gender, which may or may not correlate with one's biological sex.
- *Heteronormativity* refers to the support and sustainment of heterosexuality as the norm, supported through social institutions and practices (Martin, 2009).
- *Homophobia* refers to emotional responses like anger, fear, hatred and aversion toward homosexuality and LGBTIQ individuals (Slootmaeckers & Lievens, 2014).
- *Homonegativity* refers to intellectual negation through “anti-gay attitudes, beliefs, and judgments” (Slootmaeckers & Lievens, 2014, pg. 963).

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. Chapter I introduces the purpose of this research and the gap it fills within the current literature in regards to LGBTIQ

students in our educational system. Chapter II reviews current and relevant literature in the field of queer theory. This includes an examination of heteronormativity and the way we construct gender within our society. Furthermore, it will examine how sexual and gender norms are perpetuated through social and cultural institutions, like religion and politics. Chapter III outlines the methodology, criteria for participant selection, and mode of analysis that will be utilized within the study. Chapter IV presents a profile of each participant and their narrative of their experiences within the Texas public school system. Chapter V examines the analysis and the emergent themes that occurred throughout the narratives of all participants, all of which coincide with the research questions posed earlier in this chapter. Chapter VI will review what meaning can be derived from these students' experiences and what educators can do to create a positive, nurturing school climate for LGBTIQ students in, not only Texas, but the entire country.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of the public education system in the United States has been evolving since its inception by Horace Mann in the nineteenth century. It has been argued by many that the main function of public education has been to educate student in an effort to produce American citizens that reflect the values and culture of that given time period (Brint, Contreras, & Matthews, 2001; Glazer, 1996). Although it is tempting to accept acculturation, assimilation, and socialization as the core of educational philosophy, it is important to realize the complexities of our educational system. I am not arguing that acculturation, assimilation, and socialization have not been tenets of the educational system of the United States, but rather noting that they have not been seen as the only function. Many educational reformers saw education as not a way to socialize individuals to a certain way of thinking, but rather saw it as a vehicle for social change, emancipation, and freedom from social norms.

Education being utilized in facilitating social change, emancipation, and freedom from social norms can be seen clearly within the realm of progressivism. Progressivism was a political and social movement that can be dated back as far as the Age of Enlightenment, although it did not gain significance in America until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Guttek, 2009). The progressive movement in America grew out of the harsh conditions many people faced living and working in urban centers in the United States, and because of this Progressives promoted “social and educational change and reform” in an effort to alleviate the problems faced by many Americans (Guttek,

2009). This is illustrated in how Progressives, prior to the 1912 Presidential election, stated that their platform was written by men “who would make the American man better and happier, the burdens of the American woman lighter, and the life of the American child brighter” (Payne, 1912). Progressives ultimately wanted to fix real human problems within society through action and reform.

Education was one of the key areas of reforms for progressives. It was believed that education should be democratic, and progressives did not see this happening in what they deemed traditional teacher-centered educational systems (Sadker & Zittleman, 2006). Progressives made six major assertions in regards to education: it should reflect life instead of teaching how to live, learning should mirror student interests, real learning occurs through problem solving, the teacher should be a guide, school should encourage students to cooperate instead of compete, and learning should be democratic (Dewey, 2012). John Dewey, who was considered a progressive, although he personally did not like using this term, was at the forefront of educational reform. Dewey believed that education had become too rigid, with the idea that it has a “specific aim—an ideal person or way of life as its outcome” (Noddings, 2007, p. 26). He believed that people learned through real world social interaction and was opposed to educational instruction dominated by teachers and textbooks because it was not an adequate substitute for learning through experience (Guttek, 2009).

It is because of this idea that Progressives advocated for an educational system that was student centered with instruction based on student interests instead of compulsory goals (Guttek, 2009). In other words, students would develop their growth

in education based on their own interests and experiences in the world. This was contradictory to the time as many people thought of education as having a specific goal, while Dewey believed simply that growth was the educational systems central purpose (Noddings, 2007). Dewey stated that growth led to more growth and by dictating its direction and goals the educational system becomes rigid and unproductive (Noddings, 2007). Furthermore, Dewey and others stressed the use of the scientific method in learning, which entailed becoming aware of a problem, defining the problem, propose numerous possible solutions, examine the consequences of solutions based on previous experience, and test the most likely solution (Sadker & Zittleman, 2006). The scientific method was a way to steer away from the metaphysical guesswork of other philosophies and come up with real solutions to problems that many people faced and continue to face in our society.

Although John Dewey and other theorist, with various philosophical views, saw the possibility of education as being able to fix the social injustices that exist in part by the public school system being complicit in social indoctrination (Slattery, 2006). There is a variety of historical evidence to point to schools serving as an institution meant to reproduce and sustain our existing society by continually supporting and implementing policies, practices, and curriculum that serve the function of assimilating students to understand what is considered “normal” within the context of our society (Slattery, 2006). This is illustrated throughout United States history with various racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups. One example can be seen with Native Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the United States governments’ efforts to

assimilate Native Americans into what Americans considered to be civilized society. David Wallace Adams in his book *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* states that “the boarding school, whether on or off the reservation, was the institutional manifestation of the government’s determination to completely restructure the Indians’ minds and personalities” (Adams, 1997, p. 22). From the majority point of view within the United States, this restructuring of Native Americans’ minds and personalities was not a negative because the boarding school experience was seen as the “first step out of the darkness of savagery into the light of civilization” (Adams 1997, p. 22). Although there was some initial resistance from Native American students, it was the wish of the parents that their children be educated in the American way (Adams, 1997).

It is important to note that assimilation of groups into the mainstream of American society is not always so easy or successful – as seen with Catholics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Protestantism, which dominates the religious landscape of the United States, supported “common schools as a way to bring all students together for the nonsectarian portion of their education” (Moreau, 1997, p. 70). Many Catholics believed that “nonsectarian simply meant Protestantism of the lowest common denominator, a compromise religiosity that ignored their concerns,” which included offensive terms like papist and popery and the absence of Catholics from the curriculum (Moreau, 1997, p. 71). The solution to this problem was seen as being rather simple — let the Catholic Church maintain separate schools for Catholic students. Religious private schools have

remained a viable alternative for many individuals, of all religious persuasions, to the public school system where religion does not exist outside of an educational context.

The concept of assimilation, however, has not become extinct within the educational system of the United States, but rather has morphed and expanded as can be seen with heteronormativity within public schools. Today, to some degree, the public school system has included many minority groups in their standard curriculum, with the exception of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) individuals. (Thornton, 2003). LGBTIQ figures are not represented in textbooks, which can lead many LGBTIQ students to believe that LGBTIQ individuals played no role in our nation's history, which can have a traumatic effect on their self-perception (Fontaine, 1998). Noddings (2002) wrote that, "to improve their status, the vulnerable must either become more like the privileged or accept some charitable form of the respect taken for granted by those acknowledged as full citizens" (p. 441). It is with this in mind that I examine how public schools in Texas sustain and perpetuate heteronormativity through curriculum, policies and practices and the impact it has on LGBTIQ students in order to challenge societal norms as it pertains to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (Giroux, 1988; Slattery, 2006).

In the past two decades we have seen an increase in public demand for the creation of a school environment that is positive and safe for all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). These calls for fairness and change have largely fallen on deaf ears when it comes to addressing issues that deal with sexual orientation in public schools.

This can be seen in the fact that there has been little done to change the discrimination and bullying that dominate the experiences of LGBTIQ students across the United States educational system (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). These negative experiences of LGBTIQ students are further exacerbated by a resistance by educators to change pedagogical practices that question the normative nature of heterosexuality in our society.

It was the beginning of the 1990s when Michael Warner coined the term heteronormativity to describe normative behaviors in regards to sexual orientation, gender identity, roles, and expression in our society (Warner, 1991). Heteronormativity is viewed as being present in all spheres of our society but remains largely invisible (Yep, 2003). Warner (2002) refers to heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (p. 309). He notes this privilege can take several forms, such as, “the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment” (Warner, 2002, p. 319). Ultimately, heteronormativity is viewed by queer theorists as the “invisible center” of the social power structure, which creates, sustains, and perpetuates the “erasure, marginalization, disempowerment, and oppression of sexual others” (Yep, 2003, p. 18). It is the concept of heteronormativity that I will examine in-depth the next section.

## **Heteronormativity**

In order to understand the impact of heteronormativity on LGBTIQ youth we must first come to an understanding of what heteronormativity is and what it entails. This concept emerged from the 1970s feminist movement that was seeking to understand the basis of women's oppression in the United States (Ingraham, 2002). At its most basic heteronormativity is the perspective that heterosexuality is the norm in regard to sexual orientation, thus giving it a privileged status in our society. The idea of heterosexuality as the norm is supported through institutions and practices, such as monogamous relationships and reproducing offspring, while other forms of sexuality, most notably homosexuality, are deemed deviant (Martin, 2009). Feminists saw this as a way to normalize the power men have over women not theorizing at the time other forms of dominance and ideological control heteronormativity perpetuated—specifically in regards to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (Ingraham, 2002).

The majority culture creates the values and norms of our society in the United States and is generally regarded as the culture of those that come from white, Anglo Saxon, Protestants who initially formed the base of our country. The idea of normal that has been formed by this majority culture serves, in various forms, as an inhibiting agent, in terms of achievement and social standing, to minority groups in the United States (Glazer, 1996; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; MacLeod, 2004). This begs the question, how are we conditioned to think of heterosexuality as the norm? Some researchers argue the public school system serves as a major socialization tool that passes cultural norms and expectations from generation to generation in order to sustain a social structure that has

existed in United States throughout our nation's history (Bourdieu, 1973; Brint et al., 2001; Glazer; 1996; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; MacLeod, 2004). While this is true to an extent, this does not explain the perpetuation of normative heterosexuality in its entirety and leaves out a substantial socializing institution: family. It is through examining families, specifically parents, that we can gain an understanding of how individuals, regardless of their later sexual identification, come to accept the idea of heterosexuality as normal and natural (Martin, 2009). Some research has pointed to mothers as being primarily responsible for conveying heterosexuality values and norms to children beginning at a very young age (Blum, 2007; Martin, 2009). This is not to suggest that children simply accept, without questioning, the concepts taught at childhood by their mothers, but rather alter, resist, and integrate these concepts with other cultural ideas (Martin, 2009). In essence, this means mothers socialize their children through knowledgeable interaction with inquiring, interested children (Martin, 2009).

It is important to note that the role of mothers in instilling the value of heterosexuality within our society does not give us a full picture of how heterosexuality is taught in the home. The role of husband/father has traditionally been defined through earning money to support his family, or being the "breadwinner," with raising children being left to the wife/mother, or the "homemaker" (Coontz, 1992; Coontz, 2005). Research has revealed a shift in these normative gender roles within the family, beginning in the 1960s (Coontz, 2005). The heteronormative socialization that takes place in the home is not blatant, but rather is done through coded language that conveys the normative sexual boundaries accepted in our society. Parental socialization begins

with the belief that their children are heterosexual, which therefore shapes the way in which parents communicate sexuality to their children (Martin, 2009). The theory of social reproduction illustrates this since it focuses on processes that sustain a given social structure over a period of time (MacLeod, 2004). It is in this way that schools assist in constructing in students minds societal expectation, values, and norms passing them down from generation to generation, just as parents do through interactions in the home (Bourdieu, 1973; Brint et al., 2001; Glazer, 1996; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003).

What is considered normal in regards to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression has not changed much over the past hundred years in the United States. This lack of change is due to normative ideas in regards to sexuality and gender that have been reproduced through various social institutions like schools (Romesburg, 2005). Societal arrangements define sexuality in terms of appropriate and inappropriate sexual partners and suitable and unsuitable sexual behavior, shaping the sexual ideas and conduct of students (Trolden, 1989). For example, gender and an individual's understanding of what it means to be male and female is closely policed in the public school system, and if students do not conform to this societal construct they can risk disciplinary action and the "queer stigma," even if they are not gay (Lugg, 2006). This concept is taught in the same respects that all things are taught – through social scripts on what are considered acceptable male and female gender-roles, which take place during adolescence and the socialization that takes place in the public school system (Trolden, 1989; Glazer, 1996; Brint et al., 2001; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003).

The learning of what is considered “normal” in regards to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression can be seen in the manner that students interact with one another in a school setting. Pascoe (2005) in her article, *Dude You’re a Fag: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse*, challenges and critiques the feminist idea that homophobic teasing characterizes masculinity in boys and that homophobic remarks are generally directed at gay boys. The author states that she is both critiquing and building on this finding by “(1) pointing to the limits of an argument that focuses centrally on homophobia, (2) demonstrating that the fag is not only an identity linked to homosexual boys but an identity that can temporarily adhere to heterosexual boys as well and (3) highlighting the racialized nature of the fag as a disciplinary mechanism” (Pascoe, 2005, p. 330). She accomplishes this by using queer theory to show “relationships between gender, sexuality, identities and power with the attention to men found in the literature on masculinities” (Pascoe, 2005, p. 331).

The research asserts that the use of the word fag as “homophobia” has been oversimplified in feminist research, which can be seen with the way that the word fag is sexualized, being hardly ever utilized with adolescent girls (Pascoe, 2005). It is argued that being a “fag” during adolescence is fluid and can change rather easily because it is not necessarily a comment in regards to someone’s sexual orientation, but rather their competence at masculine tasks (Pascoe, 2005). In other words if an adolescent boy does not live up to the heterosexual concept of masculinity and strength then by utilizing the term “fag” other boys are making him aware of this “deficit” so that it can be corrected and not repeated (Pascoe, 2005). It is another way to socialize boys so they are aware of

how to be masculine, instead of feminine, through their actions. It is believed by some researchers that this form of socialization among boys confirms homophobia is essential to adolescent masculinity and that “fag,” rather than necessarily referring to an individual’s sexual orientation, can mean that adolescent males are not being competent in masculine activities (Pascoe, 2005). Furthermore, it is noted that these “fag” encounters happen among both straight and gay adolescent boys (Pascoe, 2005). Although this research pokes holes in feminist research connecting the use of the term “fag” to homophobia within adolescent boys, it must be noted that more research in this arena is needed in more schools, geographic locations, and groups based on religion, age, and class (Pascoe, 2005).

As illustrated in research on the term “fag” being used in adolescent boy discourse to normalize what is viewed as masculine, scripts being presented in school take shape in the form of heterosexuality being the ideal and gender roles of masculinity and femininity corresponding with an individual’s sex (Schiller & Rosenberg, 1984). It is essential to understand the impact that heteronormative policies and curriculum can have on the LGBTIQ population within our countries educational system since it is during a student’s most formative years that they begin to recognize and accept their sexual identity (Cass, 1979; Zera 1992).

The formation of an individual’s gay identity was outlined in four steps in a model developed by Troiden (1989), these steps include: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment. These four stages are age specific beginning with sensitization before adolescents where an individual has same-sex

feelings without fully understanding them, while during the identity confusion stage, which occurs during adolescence., an individual realizes that they are gay (Troiden, 1989). It is not until an individual reaches the identity assumption stage that they come out as gay, later being comfortable living openly as gay in the commitment stage (Troiden, 1989). One can note that the identity confusion and, in some cases identity assumption, take place during an individual's adolescent years. The research of Kosciw, Byard, Fischer and Joslin (2014) indicates that by 9 to 10 years of age a child is aware of their same gender attractions, and by 14-16 years of age they identify as LGBTIQ. It is during this time period when LGTBIQ students go through the public education system and most affected, either negatively or positively, by the decisions made by teachers and administrators in how they deal with their LGBTIQ identity. It is precisely for this reason why my research will examine the actions and words of educators and the impact that they have on LGBTIQ youth in the Texas public education system.

### **Queer Theory, Feminism and Gender Related to LGBTIQ**

At one time the term “queer” was considered homophobic slang meant to hurt LGBTIQ individuals. Recently the term “queer” has taken on a new meaning, sometimes being utilized as a catch-all term for sexual self-identifications that are seen as being on the margins of society, while at other times it is used in describing a theoretical model that has developed out of the feminist movement and gay and lesbian studies, like queer theory (Warner, 1999). Queer theory is largely seen as emerging from LGBTIQ and feminist studies during the 1990s, building upon the feminist critique of the socially accepted idea that gender is part of the essential self.

The theory of heteronormativity, stemming from the concept of compulsory heterosexuality developed by second wave feminist of the 1970s was an attempt to explain how heterosexuality being considered the “norm” and “natural” created a power structure that elevated men above women (Ingraham, 2002). Research has argued that this argument is flawed in the sense that it is counterproductive to its purpose because feminist are seeking to emancipate women and bring about equality in terms of languages and politics (Butler, 1990; Thurer, 2005). This is illustrated with the common term “women” being used to describe individuals whose biological sex is female. The term has been placed in quotation marks because this can be seen as a category that has been constructed by the very structure that the feminist dialogue is attempting to emancipate themselves from (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) in her book *Gender Trouble* emphasizes this point stating that, “*man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (p. 9). This can be seen in general perception of men and women where “males, typically were the big hairy ones who left the toilet seat up” and “females were the smaller, less hairy ones who put the toilet seat down” (Thurer, 2005, p. 1). These stereotypes are starting to be challenged with men and women breaking the social normative mold in regards to gender with men who sport ponytails and work in “traditional” female occupations” while “women flaunt their tattoos and biceps and smoke cigars” (Thurer, 2005, p. 1). Individuals who do not conform to what is considered gender appropriate behavior within our society are referred to by some as “gender-benders” (Thurer, 2005). Butler (1990) and Thurer (2005) both argue that it is

through questioning the expectations for masculinity and femininity to correspond to an individual's biological sex that it will be possible to breakdown societal constructions that negatively impact not only women, but the LGBTIQ community.

Some researchers, like Lévi-Strauss, have argued that an individual's sex is determined by nature, while gender is determined by culture (Butler, 1990). This construction of sex and gender has been supported by some feminist in an effort to support sex/gender difference (Butler, 1990). This has drawn criticism though with some feeling that "the binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely imposes meaning on nature" (Butler, 1990, p. 50). In other words, the theory espoused by Lévi-Strauss is self-defeating when dealing with gender, as a society's culture influences the idea of nature or what is "natural," which can be seen in the way that conceptions and views on homosexuality have shifted and changed throughout history.

Furthermore, queer theory also examines the socially constructed sexual/gender identities, as well as, sexual acts generally within the context of gay and lesbian studies. Within the culture of many Western countries human sexuality is relegated to the five categories of biological sex, gender role, gender identity, sexual behavior and sexual identity that encompass a very basic definition within the realm of study that is layered with complexity (Slattery, 2006). It is for this reason that research working within a queer pedagogy is ultimately seeking to challenge the notion of identity within our cultural lexicon. For example, Thurer (2005) argues that there are no gender differences because there are no gender categories because the gender and sex binary is a "poor

invention.” This is largely because of the five categories of biological sex, gender role, gender identity, sexual behavior and sexual identity that are considered to compose an individual’s sexuality very rarely align perfectly (Slattery, 2006).

Moreover, the idea that gender and sexual identity are “too diverse and individual persons too complex and fluid to create rigid categories” in regards to sexuality is not easily understood and accepted by the general population (Slattery, 2006, pg. 164). Furthermore, the very idea that there are no fixed categories in regards to human sexuality does not come without anti-liberal political consequences as how can we have woman or gay liberation movements if there is no “woman” or “gay” identity (Slattery, 2006). Thurer (2005) asserts another possibility within her research stating that “the average gay on the street, or anyone on the street, views “queer” as another label, albeit a hip, less restrictive one than homosexual or lesbian. In popular culture it means an identity that is sexier, more transgressive, that signals a deliberate show of difference, that doesn’t want to be assimilate or tolerated” (p. 99). It is important to note that regardless if an individual views queer theory as a “deconstructive subversion of identity categories or a deliberate attempt to establish transgressive identity,” that it renders the normative categories of human sexuality archaic (Slattery, 2006, pg. 162).

### **Biology and LGBTIQ**

Regardless of the deconstruction of gender and sexuality that has taken place in the realm of queer theory, these two topics have not kept some researchers from trying to understand how individuals acquire their sexual orientation. Research tends to be split into two camps of thought: nature or culture (Jannini, Blanchard, Camperio-Ciani, &

Bancroft, 2010). The nature argument is based on the belief that individuals are born either heterosexual or homosexual, and that homosexuality can be explained within the study of human biology (Jannini et al., 2010). On the other hand, advocates of culture, also known as the psychosexual neutrality theory, propose that humans are psychosexually neutral at birth and that sexual identity, rather than sexual orientation, is formed by socio-cultural and environmental influences (Jannini et al., 2010).

First, I will examine the research that looks to explain homosexuality on a biological basis. It is important to note that this research tends to focus on male homosexuality, as it is generally believed that female homosexuality is more complex (Jannini et al., 2010). The emphasis on male homosexuality in current research has occurred for three reasons: “(1) homosexuality in males is more common than homosexuality in females, (2) male homosexuality is much more scientifically studied than female homosexuality; and (3) moral and religious concerns seem much more concentrated on male homosexuality than on lesbian behavior” (Jannini et al, 2010, p. 3246).

Researchers who are attempting to explain male homosexuality through human biology have developed several theories including: brain anatomy, genetics, and immunology (Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capiluppi, 2004; Jannini et al., 2010). In 1991 a neuroscientist by the name of Simon LeVay published an article in *Science* magazine outlining his research conducted on the anterior hypothalamus, which is believed to govern sexual behavior in homosexual and heterosexual test subjects (LeVay & Hamer, 1994). LeVay stated in his examination of the anterior hypothalamus region of the brain

in gay men that the size of the region was roughly half the size of a heterosexual male's region, and was comparable to the size of a woman's hypothalamus region (Camperio-Ciani et al., 2004; Jannini et al., 2010; LeVay & Hamer, 1994). This has produced further research on other regions of the brain such as, the anterior commissure and suprachiasmatic nucleus, which supposedly follow this same pattern (Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu, & Pattatucci, 1993). The findings have had a dramatic effect on research being done in regards to determining the cause of homosexuality, even though it has been disputed by the fact that there were a number of exceptions (Allen & Gorski, 1992). For example, in studies on the size of the anterior commissure region of the brain 27 out of 30 gay men fell within the normal range of heterosexual men (Allen & Gorski, 1992). The biological research on the structure of the brain is not alone in attempting to explain homosexuality. There has also been an effort has also been made in the fields of genetics and hormones and their potential role in forming an individual's sexual orientation.

Another theory that attempts to explain the cause of male homosexuality deals with genetics, specifically the X chromosome. Research has indicated that there are biological predictors that indicate a possible genetic factor in the X chromosome, such as, the prevalence of homosexuality in the maternal family line (Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capiluppi, 2004). This has led researchers to conclude that the q28 region of the X chromosome may pass a gene or genes partially responsible in the formation of an individual's sexual orientation and that it is predominantly passed down through the mother (Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capiluppi 2004; Hamer et al., 1993; Jannini et al.,

2010; Pool, 1993). The maternal transmission of the proposed “gay gene” is explained by researchers that “since males receive their single X chromosome exclusively from their mothers, any trait that is influenced by an X-linked gene will be preferentially passed through the mother's side of the family” (Hamer et al., 1993). Hamer and his colleagues (1993) attempted to support this conclusion in a study of 76 gay brothers and their families. It was noted in Hamers’ research that there were more gay uncles and cousins on the maternal line of the family which led them to the conclusion that if the X chromosome “contains a gene that increases the probability of an individual's being homosexual, then genetically related gay men should share X chromosome markers close to that gene” (Hamer et al., 1993, p. 323). It is from this point that subjects were tested for chromosome linkage, which consisted of 40 gay brothers and their families (Hamer et al., 1993). While it was reported the Xq28 played a role in determining sexual orientation of these brothers, it is important to note that out of the 40 sets of brothers studied that nearly 18% did not share all of the Xq28 markers (Hamer et al., 1993). This was believed to be the result of the “homozygosity of the mother at the sexual orientation-related locus, recombination between the locus and a marker gene, genetic heterogeneity, or nongenetic sources of variation in sexual orientation” although further studies, in some instances, have failed to replicate these results (Hamer et al., 1993, p. 325).

The final biological theory that will be examined involves antigens and their proposed influence in sexual differentiation in the fetus that ultimately leads to the development of sexual orientation in adults. Some research suggests that homosexuality

correlates with late birth order, especially in men. This is explained by what is referred to as the maternal immune hypothesis which proposes that “the fraternal birth order effect might involve a maternal immune reaction that is provoked only by male fetuses, and that becomes stronger after each pregnancy with a male fetus” (Blanchard & Klassen, 1997). This progressive immunization in regards to male fetuses is believed to “reduce the sexual differentiation of the brain in succeeding male fetuses” (Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capiluppi, 2004). It has been suggested that with each male child born to the same mother, the chances of the next male child being gay is increased by 33 percent (Blanchard & Klassen, 1997; Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capiluppi, 2004).

As stated earlier, not all researchers focus on homosexuality being caused by some factor or factors of biology, some believe that homosexuality is not innate, but rather learned through various influences during an individual’s sexual identity formation (Jannini et al., 2010). This theory, known as psychosexual neutrality, contends that gender identity and expression plays a key factor in determining sexual orientation (Jannini et al., 2010). For example, if a boy expresses his gender in a way that does not conform to the societal construct of masculinity and what it means to be a boy, then it increases the boy’s odds of developing a gay identity (Jannini et al., 2010).

Herdt (1990) divided sexual development into two categories: continuous and discontinuous. Continuous development implies sexual development is linear and there is steady, continuous progress from childhood through adulthood with clear expectations of how an individual’s sexuality should emerge (Bancroft, 2009). However, it is the discontinuous development that is thought to be most relevant in assisting researchers

demonstrate homosexuality being determined by socio-cultural and environmental factor. (Jannini et al., 2010). Discontinuous involves “a series of stages that, although they follow a particular sequence, differ in substantial ways from each other, with varying degrees of awareness or involvement by family or society” (Jannini et al., 2010, p. 3251).

In the context of psychosexually neutral theory, discontinuous sexuality involves individuals going through a homosexual phase, followed by a final heterosexual phase. This is a concept that is explored in Herdt’s research dealing with the Sambia people of Papua New Guinea. The Sambia boys’ ritual is one that is very different from any ritual in Western culture. Before the age of ten, boys must have their female traces removed to become “pure” sexual virgins (Herdt, 1997; Jannini et al., 2010). This removal of female traces from young males of the tribe involves nose-bleedings, which are believed to cleanse the body of any effeminacy present in maternal blood that the Sambia people believe can be transmitted to offspring in the womb (Stewart & Strathern, 1999). It is by this purge of maternal blood from boys coming of age that men in the tribe promote masculinity and aggression (Herdt, 1997). From this point while the boys are considered to be in “clean” states, they can move on to the next stage in which they engage in oral intercourse with older, wiser men (Herdt, 1997; Jannini et al., 2010). It is through this process that boys acquire semen from the older, wiser men for growth, becoming strong and fertile (Herdt, 1997). There are four underlying cultural purposes for the semen exchange. First, the Sambia tribe believes that through insemination they are “growing” boys through substituting their mother’s milk with semen (Herdt, 1997). Second, the

ritual is viewed as masculinizing the boys through insemination and other ordeals to transform them into warrior – a central aspect of their culture (Herdt, 1997). Third, it is a provision of “sexual play” for older boys prior to marriage, and finally it serves as a transfer of essential “soul substance” from generation to generation (Herdt, 1997). Eventually, when the boys reach puberty they will become semen donors themselves for the younger boys going through the ritual process (Herdt, 1997). However, once the boys enter into heterosexual marriages they are considered men and discontinue their relations with younger boys so as not to interfere with the men’s family life and duties (Herdt, 1997). The underlying gender distinction behind these rituals are based on the belief that women are naturally competent and complete since through the initiation of menstruation they reach maturity, while men are incapable of achieving adult reproductive manliness without ritual treatment (Herdt, 1997). The practices of the Sambia people serves as a good example of Herdt’s concept of a discontinuous development pattern marked by these boys passing through a homosexual phase, which he equates with oral sex among males within the tribe, during adolescents into a heterosexual phase of adulthood (Jannini et al., 2010).

Whether biological or cultural, all this research is problematic as its foundation relies on the fundamental assumption in our society that there are only two genders— male and female. This dichotomous idea is too simplified in explaining gender, sex, and ultimately sexual orientation since gender cannot be determined by a set of traits, as has been done in the past, but rather that it is a product of social acts (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 2011). What individuals generally refer to as gender can actually be

divided into three concepts: sex, sex category, and gender (West & Zimmerman, 2011). Sex has generally been defined by the biological attributes of genitalia—a male having a penis and a woman a vagina. The idea of sex sets the foundation for sex categorization, which is essentially categorizing individuals by their appearance into “appropriate” sex categories. A method of determining sex category is the if-can test – which is “if people can be seen as members of relevant categories, then categorize them that way” (West & Zimmerman, 2011, p. 204). In other words, if an individual has the physical appearance and attributes commonly thought of as male then they are categorized as male – unless one is given a reason to doubt an individual’s sex. This categorization based on superficial physical and behavioral attributes is considered to operate within a social context. Categorization occurs based on the male and female characteristics that society uses to construct what it means to be male or female (West & Zimmerman, 2011). An individual’s biological sex and their sex categorization are generally viewed as being the same thing, but this is not the case since someone could be biological male and categorize themselves as female. The need for categorization becomes increasingly complex when we consider gender.

Gender is often used interchangeably with sex although it is not so simple as seen in the previous paragraph—just because someone is biologically male does not equate to their gender being male (West & Zimmerman, 2011). An individual’s gender is denoted by many through the way gender is performed in social situation, which is expected to coincide with one’s sex. This social performance of gender has been referred to as “doing gender” as the so-called differences between men and women are not natural and

are constructed by society to enforce the “essentialness” of gender (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 2011). The societal constructs are socialized into children, whether at home, school, church, or other institution, at a very young age with young boys and girls being taught what it means to be a boy or girl.

Therefore, the formulation of gender has a very real affect in our society, determining division of labor, power, and social change. This can be seen with of how labor is divided around the household with it being generally lopsided with the woman doing the majority of the housework. This is because household tasks have been genderized with the perception being that the home is a woman’s domain even when a woman works outside of the home (Coontz, 1992; Coontz 2005). The formation of behaviors and characteristics that are seen as “normal” for men and women within our society have led to a power structure based on male dominance and female deference which supports and sustains the societal hierarchy as it pertains to gender (Coontz, 1992; Coontz, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 2011).

It is important to note that this exists widely within Western societies that have constructed a dichotomy of sex, sexuality, and gender and coupled it with a belief that these categories are congruent with one another and unchangeable—this is not the case in other cultures. This can be seen with the Native American berdache which is a standardized cross-gendered role that gives credence and validity to males performing women’s work (Lorber, 2011). The berdache is socialized into their role in Native American society in two ways. One, the berdache is a sacred role and therefore if a boy’s dreaming guides him to this task (Lorber, 2011). This legitimizes the berdache role

within Native American society and provides a legitimate way out for boys that do not want to follow their culture's norm of violence and warfare (Lorber, 2011). Second, the role that berdaches play in their society is educating children, singing and dancing at tribal events, caring for the ill, carrying war party provisions, and performing special ritual functions (Lorber, 2011). These social roles connect the berdaches to women roles because they are seen as doing "women's work," but berdaches are not solely seen as feminine as they are also the head of the household and farm and raise sheep, which connects them to men's roles by doing "man's work" (Lorber, 2011). Another role that sets them apart as a third gender is their role of performing sexual acts with other men, and their ability to marry other men. They are considered heterogendered rather than gay. This is because the berdache and his husband are not seen as having the same gender status since the berdache has assumed the gender status of a woman (Lorber, 2011).

The examination of cultures that do not operate within sex and gender binaries have led some researchers to suggest that it is possible to go further than the binary that has served as the basis of societal conceptualization of gender. Fausto-Sterling (1993) in her research *The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough* proposes that since in nature there are "many gradations running from female to male" that it can be argued that there are *at least* five sexes in human beings (p. 21). She refers to these five sexes as male, female, herms, merms and fermes (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). For centuries, medical examiners have noted the presence of the intersexual body where an individual exhibits both male and female characteristics—however these individuals have been condensed

under the term intersex (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). Fausto-Sterling (1993) believes that there are a minimum of three major subgroups underneath the umbrella term intersex—these include: herms, merms, and ferms. Herms are true hermaphrodites that possess one ovary and one testis, while merms are male pseudohermaphrodites who have testes and some form of female genitalia without ovaries and ferms are female pseudohermaphrodites who have ovaries and some form of male genitalia without testes (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). These three subgroups only serve as a basis as the degree of male and female genitalia present in merms or ferms can vary among individuals within these subgroups (Fausto-Sterling, 1993).

Moreover, Fausto-Sterling offers an interesting look at the category of sex within Western society, one that has not been widely accepted by the general population that still clings to the binary that has operated within our society for generations. Outside of Western society though there are examples of cultures that utilize other ways of defining sex in a way very similar to the five sexes outlined by Fausto-Sterling. The Bugis, a major ethnic group of South Sulawesi in Indonesia, is an example of a culture that constructs sex outside of the dichotomy of male and female. The Bugis recognizes five different sexes – male, female, Bissu, calalai, and calabai (Andaya, 2000; Graham, 2001; Graham, 2004). The Bissu are what Western societies would consider hermaphroditic or intersex having either male and female genitalia or indistinguishable genitalia (Graham, 2004). They serve a ritualistic function in Bugis society which is illustrated with the fertility ritual where the Bissu priests are believed to be capable of contacting the spirit world because they embody both “male and female elements” (Graham, 2004, p. 108).

The calalai are biologically female but live their lives as men, while the calabai are biologically male and live their lives as women – both are accepted within the Bugis culture (Andaya, 2000; Graham, 2001). The Bugis believe that all five genders must coexist for there to be universal harmony because as they view the world if one of the five genders becomes separated then the world would become unbalanced (Andaya, 2000; Graham, 2001; Graham, 2004).

The Bugis culture and their expanded view on sex within their society would be viewed quite differently within the western dichotomous framework. The Bissu would be considered to be intersexed or hermaphroditic, but ultimately would be categorized as either male or female – whether through attempted socialization, surgical, or in many cases both. The calalai and calabai in Western culture would be considered transvestites. In the Bugis, calalai and calabai live as the opposite gender, which is fully accepted within their culture. However, when this is attempted in Western culture, it is considered to be deviant behavior and unacceptable as living as a woman when you are biologically a man, or vice versa. This type of activity does not match up with our idea of congruency with biological sex and gender. It is not impossible to break free of the dichotomies within Western society as these examples offer evidence of different ways sex and gender have been constructed within other cultural system. Furthermore, it is not only through examination of different cultural groups that it is possible to develop different ways of viewing sexuality within Western society as this can also be accomplished by looking at past Western thought on these subjects. It is the views on

sexuality in the Western societies of antiquity that will take center stage in the next section.

### **History of Sexuality**

Michel Foucault in his series the *History of Sexuality* sought to examine the evolution of sexuality throughout history—his work will be the basis of this section. It is important to note that in this section although I am utilizing Foucault’s work to illustrate and trace how Western culture perspective has shifted in regards to sexuality that this was not the author’s intent. The primary interest of Foucault was the recognition of power relationships that exists in “social discourse, institutions, and relationships, no matter how often power holders claim that they are fair, objective, or disinterested (Guttek, 2008, p. 137). In *History of Sexuality* Foucault explored the ways that individuals form and relate to themselves as subjects of a variety of discourses, practices, and rationalities with sexuality being used as the object of how power is carried out and sustained over time.

In his examination of sexuality Foucault notes what he terms the “three axes” that compose it: “(1) the formation of science, (2) the systems of power that regulate its practices, and (3) the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of sexuality” (Foucault, 1985, p. 4). While the first two axes are easily tied to the fields of medicine and psychiatry, the third axe cannot be examined so easily. This difficulty arises from the inability to analyze the development of sexual experience without looking more in-depth at “desire and the desiring subject (Foucault, 1985, p. 5). This idea of desire and the desiring subject are considered to be closely tied

to the West and Christianity and if we are to understand how Western man has come to be viewed as subjects of desire, we must examine how this viewpoint developed over centuries.

Therefore, I will begin with the common belief that paganism related sexuality with “symbolic value,” while Christianity correlated sexuality with the Fall of Man and therefore valued virginity and abstinence (Foucault, 1985). There are in fact the persistent themes of feelings of anxiety and emergency that are present in the Christian morality and ethic in modern societies, but only because they were already at the core of Greek and Roman thought (Foucault, 1985). In order to understand these feelings of anxiety and emergency within Christian morality and ethics as it concerns to sexuality fully we must examine the meaning of morality. Morality can be defined as “a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals,” but that it is also “the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them” (Foucault, 1985, p. 25). In this sense morality is more about how individuals or groups act – either precisely or inherently – appropriately in compliance to norms within their culture (Foucault, 1985). There are several ways to explain an individual’s practice of morality: determination of ethical substance, mode of subjection, elaboration of ethical work, and telos of the ethical subject (Foucault, 1985). Determination of ethical substance is the individual ultimately resisting temptation which serves as the primary motivation to sustain moral practices deemed appropriate within a particular culture (Foucault, 1985). Mode of subjection is the way in which individuals consider themselves obligated to practices deemed as moral. Elaboration of ethical work is an

individual bringing their behavior in line with a rule or law, while telos of the ethical subject states that “an action is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct” (Foucault, 1985, pp. 27-28). All four of these explanations can be used in defining “moral” practices in regards to sexuality.

Although a perception persists that the ancient Greeks were self-indulgent in regards to sexuality, *Greek texts* actually illustrate sexuality within Greek culture being viewed with a “great deal of reserve” (Foucault, 1985, p. 39). To the Greeks it was more about excess in pleasure, rather than the subject of their pleasure, that was central to their idea of sexual behavior. However, the Greeks did differentiate between masculine and feminine roles in sex, which they termed active and passive—language that is still used in describing sexual acts in modern society (Foucault, 1985). This differs from modern conceptualizations of sexuality as it is not necessarily delineated to specifically male and female – but rather “active actors,” or the “subjects of sexual activity,” and “passive actors” or the “supporting players with whom it was carried out” (Foucault, 1985, p. 47). Ultimately, the ideas of excess and active versus passive sexuality shaped discourse in Greek texts in regard to appropriate sexual behavior for the time period. It is only by taking control of desires and pleasure that an individual could truly act ethically. This concept was so important to the Greeks that “the first and best is the victory of oneself over oneself, whereas being defeated by oneself is the most shameful and at the same time the worst of all defeats” (Foucault, 1985, p. 69). It is in the mastery of the self that helps to govern a man’s violent tendencies. Greeks saw overcoming and moderating

desires and pleasure as something that required training, which was essential for individual's to fully develop their morality (Foucault, 1985).

Greeks viewed the only way for a man to overcome and moderate his desires, rather than to be enslaved by them, was to develop a regimen. The idea of regimen covered five items that needed to be measured: exercises, foods, drinks, sleep, and sexual relations. From this list regimen needed to establish the quantity need to be just right – not too much and not too little (Foucault, 1985). If exercises, foods, drinks, sleep, and sexual relations were not properly measured it would lead to an unhealthy body that could cause “forgetfulness, loss of courage, bad temper, and madness” (Foucault, 1985, p. 103). To be able to accomplish a healthy body and mind Greeks believed it required a necessary moral determination in order to make it possible to observe an individual regiment so as not to lead to excesses (Foucault, 1985). Greeks distrusted excess in regimens since it was not meant to “extend life as far as possible in time nor as high as possible in performance, but rather to make it useful and happy within the limits that had been set for it” (Foucault, 1985, p. 105). This was not easy and required serial attention, or the order of activities, and circumstantial vigilance, or attention to the outside world and its elements (Foucault, 1985).

These ideas of moderation and regimen dealt with all forms of sexuality—heterosexual and homosexual. This is because there is a great difference in the modern concept of homosexuality and ancient Greek ideas on homosexual relationships. The Greeks did not see loving a member of one's own sex and loving a member of the opposite sex as radically different behaviors (Foucault, 1985). Rather in Greek society

“it was common for a male to change to a preference for women after boy-loving inclinations in his youth” (Foucault, 1985, p. 188). At this point it is important to remember the Greek view of same-sex relationships cannot be compared within the modern concept of tolerating homosexuality. The Greek acceptance of same-sex relationships did not mean that homosexuality within Greek society and culture did not have its problems. Greek writings, primarily those of Plato, acknowledge five themes in regards to pleasure and its application to male same-sex relationships in Greek society. The first theme “is that the philosophical and moral reflections concerning love did not cover the whole field of sexual relationships” and the focus of Greek writers were on “privileged” relationships (Foucault, 1985, p. 193). These type of relationships were “an object of special concern” because it was a relationship “that implied an age difference and, connected with it, a certain difference of status” (Foucault, 1985, p. 193). When looking at same-sex relationships the writings of many Greek authors focused on honored relationships, which generally dealt with two males belonging to different age groups (Foucault, 1985). This focus on relationships between young boys and older males was mainly because the Greeks viewed these relationships as having more at stake than other relationships (Foucault, 1985). The second theme states there “does not appear that the privilege accorded to this particular type of relation can be attributed solely to the pedagogical concerns of moralists and philosophers” (Foucault, 1985, p. 195). In other words, the Greek love of boys was not based in an education or philosophical foundation, but rather was a reflection of widespread acceptance in Greek society (Foucault, 1985). The third theme within the texts of Plato is that the

relationship between men and boys was open with the boy being “free in his choices, in what he accepted or rejected, in his preferences or his decisions” (Foucault, 1985, p. 198). In other words, unless a boy was born into slavery, decisions could not be forced upon him by someone of authority. This correlates with the idea that relationships in Greek society were exclusive and it being common for preferences to shift from men to women. The fourth theme entails at what age it is seen as no longer being honorable to be a partner in a male same-sex relationship. A conversion from a “bond of love” to a “relation of friendship” was seen as both ethically and socially necessary (Foucault, 1985). It was by this process that Xenophone states “that men continue to love their mutual affection and enjoy it down to old age” (Foucault, 1985, p. 201). The final theme is that the questioning in regards to relationships with boys became reflections on love. An issue within the Greek conceptualization of same-sex relations was that of passivity – which was not considered unnatural for slaves and women, but was an issue with young men. This is because that active, or dominating, role was seen as honorable in regards to free men. So although male same-sex relationships were not looked upon negatively within Greek society, there was a negative connotation attached to the passive role within a male same-sex relationship.

As time went on the views of same-sex relationship began to evolve and change. This can be seen as Greece falls from prominence and the Roman Empire begins its ascent. In the Roman Empire a new attitude of severity towards homosexuality began to emerge during the first two centuries of the Common Era, which Christian authors would borrow from as time passed and Christianity began to dominate the religious

landscape of the time (Foucault, 1986). This stricter view of pleasure that was evolving was not legally prohibited, but rather focused on practice of self-respect, which was denoted by confining sexuality in the act of marriage or procreation and divesting sexuality from simple pleasure (Foucault, 1986). Individual's began to become less reliant on city life during this period and through this became more self-reliant and created rules of behavior for themselves that were more individualized. This idea of cultivating the self was expected of all men and not only took time, but work – as it centered on not only working on oneself, but also communicating and helping others (Foucault, 1986). It is important to notice that during this time the idea that sexual pleasure is still something that *individuals*, not institutions must endeavor to dominate and control.

It is during this period medicine becomes just as popular as philosophy since its purpose was “to define, in the form of a corpus of knowledge and rules, a way of living, a reflective mode of relation to oneself, to one’s body, to food, to wakefulness and sleep, to the various activities, and to the environment” (Foucault, 1986, p. 100). Medicine, just like philosophy, served a framework to consider sexual pleasure as it pertained to the health of the body. It was believed that Nature wanted to create an immortal being, but did not have the material necessary to do so, which led to the creation of three elements: organs for fertilization, capacity for pleasure, and the desire to use these organs (Foucault, 1986). These three elements were believed to help individuals to reproduce and essentially overcome their mortality (Foucault, 1986). However, medicine viewed sexual acts as being able to affect an individual greatly – both in

positive and negative ways. An example of this can be seen with the idea of abstinence from sexual acts, which is largely viewed as positive in today's society. In the first two centuries of the Common Era abstinence was generally viewed as safe except when it was a drastic change to an individual's norm. It was seen as positive for men because of the value placed on sperm, but negative in women because of their role in procreation. It is important to understand that, unlike commonly held beliefs today, abstinence was not seen as a responsibility and sexual acts were not seen as evil—this viewpoint of sexual morality would not be fully developed until the fourth century (Foucault, 1986).

During the first centuries C.E. in the Roman Empire a decline in the discussion of same-sex relationships can be observed. It is not that a desire for same-sex relationships changed, or that judgment was passed on those who engaged in these sexual acts during this time period, but rather it simply declined in importance in both philosophical and moral discourses (Foucault, 1986). Although same-sex relationships declined in importance, they did not cease to exist which can be seen in dialogues written during this time that address the love of boys. For example, in Plutarch's *Dialogue of Love*, which was published in the late first century C.E., the main protagonist Bacchon must choose between two loves – a man and a woman. Bacchon decides to let his elders decide for him. These elders include Protogenes, Pisiias, Anthemion, and Daphnaeus. Protogenes and Pisiias advocate for the love of boys, while Anthemion and Daphnaeus for the love of women. It is in this text that “one sees the effort to constitute a unitary erotic, very clearly organized on the model of the man-woman, and even husband-wife, relationship” (Foucault, 1986, p. 199). However, while

the text disqualifies the love of boys, it does so “without rigid lines of demarcation being drawn” as is done in modern times with the distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual acts (Foucault, 1986, p. 199). It is in dialogues like this that we start to see evidence of a new concept of sexuality beginning to emerge with special attention being paid to “the existence of a heterosexual relation marked by a male-female polarity, the insistence on an abstinence that is modeled much more on virginal integrity than on the political and virile domination of desires” (Foucault, 1986, p. 228). This begins the formation of the idea of relationships between men and women that values the attribute of virginity and is built around the concept that it is in this union that individual’s find perfection (Foucault, 1986).

It is from this point we can begin to notice an attempt to gain control over sexuality through censoring “the things that were said” and limiting “the words that rendered it to visibly present” (Foucault, 1978, p. 17). However, by trying to control sex through language the opposite affect occurred leading to an intensified discourse on sexuality (Foucault, 1978). Eventually this discourse on sexuality focused on individuals outside of this context of heterosexual marriage leading Christianity to demonize sexuality that fell outside this context in order to maintain the power structure of the church, as well as, what is considered normal and natural in regards to sexuality and gender within our society and culture.

### **Religion and Homosexuality**

As seen in the previous section, Foucault illustrates a decline in same-sex relationships beginning in ancient Greece progressing through ancient Rome.

Unfortunately, Foucault would pass away before completing *History of Sexuality* but he does hint within these initial volumes the further decline of same-sex relationships in early Christianity. I do not claim from its inception Christianity was against homosexuality, but the church's viewpoint on homosexuality has shifted over time, and has become much more negative and intolerant. It is for this reason I will examine religion, specifically fundamentalist Christianity, and its stance on homosexuality and the way it attempts to influence discourse within Western society.

Religion is an institution that remains entrenched in the psyche of individuals in our society. It is for this reason that religious beliefs and affiliation often serve as strong indicators of an individual's attitudes toward homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Many religious texts present homosexuality using negative terminology, such as, ungodly, abomination, and unnatural (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Yip, 2005). It is important to emphasize that religion is not easily defined, and practitioners present a multitude of views and beliefs in regards to the interpretation of the Bible and the practice of their faith. In the United States the degree to which religions condemn homosexuality varies. Judaism and mainline Protestant faiths are viewed as the most liberal, conservative Protestant faiths being less accepting, and Muslims being the most critical (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Rudy, 1997). Since the religious landscape of the United States is predominantly Protestant in its make-up, this section of Christianity will be my focus in examining religion as it relates to attitudes toward homosexuality. It is important to note the significance differences between mainline and conservative Protestantism in the United States in regards to their views and beliefs, which are complex and varied.

Conservative Protestant faiths assert their commitment to a “consistent, unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity,” while mainline Protestant faiths hold a stronger affiliation with modernity and reform – essentially they are differentiated by how they view change within the church (Hunter, 1992, p. 44).

It wasn't until the 1970s that a split in the Christian church started to appear and widen because of the issues that arose in the 1960s dealing with the “sin of war, the plight of the United Farm Workers, the injustice of the criminal justice system, the lack of adequate housing for the poor, the iniquity of capitalism, racism in American institutions, world hunger, and women's role in church and society” (Rudy, 1997, p. 1). In American Christianity “what some of us saw as spiritual renewal and long needed challenges to straight, white, male hegemony, others saw as the unnecessary disruption of stability and religious consensus” (Rudy, 1997, p. 2). It was during the time period of the 1970s that Christians, instead of belonging to a conservative or liberal denomination, expressed their faith in small groups specifically organized to voice social and political opinions that transcended a particular denominational attachment (Rudy, 1997). This has led to Christians today not belonging to a conservative denomination or a liberal denomination, but rather to denominations that are split between conservative and liberal members. Some commentators contend that since conservative and liberal Christians do not easily fall within the realms of fundamentalist and modernist factions, which makes concretely defining these competing factions difficult (Rudy, 1997).

However, I focus on fundamentalist Christian factions that tend to be conservative in regards to their personal beliefs and values. The topic of sexuality has

always been a contentious one for the church, with it formulating only two viable solutions when attempting to channel sexuality in an acceptable way: celibacy and heterosexual marriage (Ellingson, Tebbe, Van Haitzma, & Laumann, 2001). It is this belief in heterosexual marriage that is the foundation of many fundamentalist and evangelical Christians in the United States. It is through the condemnation of homosexuality that conservative Christians strengthen their claim that heterosexual marriage is the only proper avenue for sexual activity (McQueeney, 2009).

### **Intertwining of Religion and Politics**

The involvement of religious groups, both fundamentalist and progressives, began during the nineteenth century in the United States (Justice, 2005; Marty, 2004). The amount of power and influence religious groups have held in American politics has waxed and waned over the years in regards to degree, but has remained constant over the past two hundred years. Prior to the 1870s, fundamentalist groups in the United States were divided over sectional issues like slavery, prohibition, and anti-Masonry (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). It was not until the 1870s that a national coalition of fundamentalist groups formed to amplify their influence in forming educational policy (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). It was at this time in American history that fundamentalist groups united over the issues of anti-modernism and anti-Catholicism (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). During the remainder of the nineteenth century, old fundamentalists engaged in Bible wars with local school boards over the issue of whether the theology of Protestantism would continue to dominate or Catholics, wanting to guarantee that their children were appropriately catechized, would be allowed within schools (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). In

essence, Protestant fundamentalists were fighting to ensure that federal and local funding was not used to support Catholic parochial schools (Justice, 2005). This political fight, coupled with the fight against Darwinism, occupied much of the remainder of the nineteenth century with the purpose of ensuring Protestant hegemony within American institutions, like schools (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). Through World War II Protestant groups were able to maintain their influence, but it is after this time period that their power and influence started to decline (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). This is largely because the old issues of anti-modernism and anti-Catholicism ceased to serve as a uniting force for many fundamentalist groups at the end of World War II (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). Anti-modernism had declined in importance as a political issue during this time and fundamentalist Protestants showed increasing willingness to unite with Catholics to combat a common foreign enemy — communism (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). It was not until the 1970s that divided Christian fundamentalist groups united under new common issues: family and sexuality (Myers & Cibulka, 2008).

During the 1970s Christian fundamentalist groups, commonly referred to as the Christian Right, re-emerged as a political force in the United States. It has been argued to have begun with the creation of four organizations: National Christian Action Coalition (NCAC), the Religious Roundtable, Christian Voice, and the Moral Majority (Rudy, 1997). Unlike Christian fundamentalist groups prior to World War II, these coalitions included not only Protestant but Catholic groups marking a broadening of the Christian Right's base (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). In 1976 these groups worked together to elect Jimmy Carter, who was a self-proclaimed evangelical Christian who made

personal faith a campaign issue to the presidency (Wuthnow, 1989). President Carter's election to the presidency marked the first time a presidential candidate was successful at making personal faith a campaign issue leading him to capture the support of conservative Christians in the United States (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). However, this support did not last and the inclusive, pro-choice president lost the support of the Christian Right four years later. During the 1980 presidential election the National Christian Action Coalition (NCAC), the Religious Roundtable, Christian Voice, and the Moral Majority, all worked for the election of Ronald Reagan because they believed that he could restore the moral center of a "traditional" America based on his campaign promises in regards to access to abortion, smaller government and welfare reform (Myers & Cibulka, 2008; Rudy, 1997).

The Christian Rights' entry into American politics was very successful in 1980 and led Republican Party leaders to push forward their conservative social issues such as school prayer and abortion (Rudy, 1997). It is important to note the Christian Right that emerged during this time period was very different from their fundamentalist counterparts in the earlier part of the century because of their ability to utilize television for the purpose of furthering their political, as well as, evangelical goals (Rudy, 1997). Furthermore, while fundamentalist groups prior to World War II were bipartisan and attempted to influence both the Democrats and Republicans, the Christian Right is closely identified with the Republican Party (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). By uniting and affiliating themselves closely to the Republican Party and the success that followed led to the establishment of grassroots organizations where conservative voters and leaders

could be recruited. Recruitment of local leaders would become very important within conservative Christianity because after several scandals involving national leaders of the Christian Right power would shift to these individuals on the local level. It has been argued by utilizing television and televangelist in spreading their message this coalition of conservative Christians was able to form their identity (Rudy, 1997). This identity became so powerful that even with scandals involving several prominent televangelist, including Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, and Jim and Tammy Baker it did not hurt conservative Christianity but instead “helped to police the boundaries of conservative membership” (Rudy, 1997, p. 8). In other words it caused the Christian Right to clearly define what it meant to be Christian, which could include individuals like Jimmy Swaggart if they repented for their sins but would exclude individuals who continued to live in sin. Rudy (1997) states that “while it might have *former* sinners, *former* adulterers, *former* homosexuals, *former* militant feminist in its ranks, the Right contained none of these undesirable elements who still practices their sins; its self-definition was based on these specific claims to moral high ground” (p. 8) Television was not the only method the Christian Right utilized in organizing its political actions but also relied on various media sources at the local level, such as radio, mass mailings, rallies, book and sound recording sales, telephones, leaflets, and personal contacts to assist in getting political candidates elected that would further their causes. The rapid rise of the Christian Right during the 1970s and subsequent decades as politically organized and active was in large part a reaction to the liberation movements of the 1960s (Rudy, 1997). Furthermore, the popularity of the Christian Right rests in the fact

that “it offers a theologically sanctioned voice for conservative resistance to newer models of family living” especially those offered by women’s and gay liberation movements (Rudy, 1997, p. 10). Their ideology lies in the belief that the best form of American Christianity lies within “the way things used to be” (Coontz, 1992; Rudy, 1997).

The intermingling of evangelical Christianity and politics can be seen in Texas which has been slow in coming to the aid of its LGBTIQ student population. The Texas Republican Party has controlled the politics of the state by holding a majority of statewide offices since 1994, which gives them a big hand in forming the policies, practices, and curriculum of the public school system (Maxwell & Crain, 2007). The role of religion tends to take an accelerated role in determining school practices, policies and curriculum when issues involve the topic of sexuality (Boyd, Lugg, & Zahorcheck, 1996; Marty, 2000).

Although evangelical Christianity, more commonly referred to as the Christian Right, is a small component of Christianity as a whole it tends to play a large role in politics and the shaping of policies and practices around the country in regards to education (Lugg, 1998). This involvement in public school by the Christian Right tends to be amplified when dealing with issues and perceived threats towards family and normative values (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). As noted previously, the Christian Right tends to wield this influence through conservative Republican politics, a shift that began to take place in the mid-1960s and was completed in 1980 and the election of Ronald Reagan as president (Myers & Cibulka, 2008). This was in large part due to the fact that

Democrats, who previously had the support of this group, started to form a more liberal minded ideology toward cultural issues like school desegregation, abortion, and LGBTIQ rights (Lugg & Robinson, 2009).

The intertwining of the Christian Right and Republican Party can be seen in the Texas Republican Party platform which states that:

Homosexuality is a chosen behavior that is contrary to the fundamental unchanging truths that have been ordained by God in the Bible, recognized by our nation's founders, and shared by the majority of Texans. Homosexuality must not be presented as an acceptable alternative lifestyle, in public policy, nor should family be redefined to include homosexual couples. (Texas Republican Party, 2014, p. 14).

This statement largely reflects the conservative, evangelical Christian foundation of the Republican Party that is quick to condemn homosexuality on the basis of the scriptures denoting homosexuality as an abomination and as a threat to "traditional" family values (Karlslake, 2007; Myers & Cibulka, 2008). This mixture of Christian Right rhetoric and Republican politics can be seen playing out repeatedly on the national stage. A primary example of this can be seen during the eight year presidency of Ronald Reagan who has in recent years become a symbol of the Christian Right in America. President Reagan specifically addressed homosexuality during his presidency during the height of the AIDS epidemic. A reporter asked for President Reagan's viewpoint on homosexuality to which he replied that it was a "tragic illness" even though the American Psychiatric Association depathologized homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973 (Lugg, 1998;

Lugg & Tooms, 2008; Schiller & Rosenberg, 1984). Another example can be seen with former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee who made the remark: “I believe that it would be a lot easier to change the Constitution than it would be to change the word of the living God, and that’s what we need to do is to amend the Constitution so it’s in God’s standard rather than try to change God’s standards” (Lugg & Robinson, 2009).

It is this conviction by politicians, like Reagan and Huckabee, that “God’s standards” state that homosexuality is an abomination in the eyes of God or an illness that serve to further push members of the LGBTIQ community into the margins of society and perpetuated the negative perceptions and misunderstandings associated with homosexuality in the United States (Schiller & Rosenberg, 1984; Lugg, 1998; Karslake, 2007; Lugg & Robinson, 2009). Huckabee has reiterated the position that politics are directed by an individual’s worldview on numerous occasions and because of this separating politics and religion is nearly impossible.

### **Religion and Politics Impact on Public School Policy and Curriculum**

The viewpoint of heterosexuality being normal and homosexuality deviant is not a new development in the United States, but has been the standard for over 100 years starting in 1904 when Dr. Prince A. Morrow and psychologist G. Stanley Hall pushed to get sex education programs in schools but warned educators about promoting homosexuality (Romesburg, 2005). This trend continued into the 1980s when the Christian Right wielded influence within the government, leading Senators Jeremiah Denton and Orrin Hatch, both Republicans, to pass the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) which led to sex education classes with religious underpinnings to promote

morality and self-control – attacking homosexuality in the process (Romesburg, 2005). In 1988 the Helms amendment was passed in Congress, which affected AIDS education by forbidding the federal government to fund the program if it encouraged or promoted homosexuality in any way, shape, or form (Romesburg, 2005).

A product of both Texas state and national politics, President George W. Bush in 2001 passed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which when examined has serious ramifications in regards to school policies and curriculum as it pertains to homosexuality. NCLB is a perfect example of the Christian Right’s influence on shaping policies that affect school, not only in Texas, but across the United States. This is exemplified in the sections on character education and school prayer (Spring, 2005).

President Bush went even further in 2004 when he articulated that schools should implement abstinence-only sex education, which stressed the importance of abstaining from sexual intercourse prior to marriage (Fisher, 2009). In essence conservatives who favor abstinence-only sex education programs view these programs in being “essential for building character traits that value hard work, personal advancement, and a democratic society” (Spring, 2013, p. 111). The Texas Republican Party in its 2014 party platform explicitly expressed their support of abstinence-only sex education programs stating that:

We oppose any sex education other than the biology of reproduction and abstinence until marriage. We should prohibit entities and their affiliates that have a conflict of interest with our beliefs from conducting sexuality education in public schools and from conducting teacher training. The

social aspects of sexuality should be left to the family (Texas Republican Party Platform, 2014, p. 22).

Abstinence-only sex education proves problematic to LGBTIQ students since gay marriage is legal and an option only in approximately a third of the states and territories of the United States of America – so in essences not only was the president stating the importance of teaching abstinence, but was supporting the heteronormative idea that marriage can only exist between a man and a woman (Avery et al., 2007). While there has been progress in the gay rights movement, Christian forces have mobilized in an effort to stunt this progress. In 2004 the Republican Party, backed by the Christian Right, called for a Constitutional Amendment defining marriage between a man and a woman, effectively making same-sex marriage illegal in the United States (Spring, 2013). Although the attempts to make same-sex marriage illegal across the country have failed the attempt, along with the push for a sex education curriculum that promotes abstinence until marriage, has further perpetrated the idea that heterosexuality is normal and natural leaving LGBTIQ students left with the feeling that they are unnatural and wrong and will never be capable of living a so-called normal life (Fisher, 2009). These issues are exacerbated by educators because instead of taking action to fix inequality within their schools, excuses are made on why it is not possible to present LGBTIQ curriculum and leadership models within Texas schools in hopes of circumventing problems that may arise in implementation (DePalma, 2009; Fontaine, 1998; Reese, 1997).

Moreover, the impact of religious elements on educational policy and practices can be seen in the curriculum taught within the public school system where homosexuality is non-existent (Fontaine, 1998). In the past, the social studies curriculum of schools was based on an ideal of being male, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon, excluding women, African Americans, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and a plethora of other ethnic, racial, and religious minority groups (Thornton, 2003). Now, to some degree, these groups have been included into the social studies curriculum as it works towards becoming more inclusive to these groups; the same cannot be said for sexual orientation because curriculum still makes the assumption that everyone is heterosexual (Thornton, 2003). Gay figures are not represented in textbooks, which lead many LGBTIQ students to believe that LGBTIQ individuals played no role in our nation's history, and can have a traumatic effect on their self-perception (Fontaine, 1998). The open acknowledgement of LGBTIQ individuals through curriculum, and not just the subjects that lend themselves easily to their inclusion, can help to decrease misunderstandings about homosexuality and homophobia, but this task is not an easy one (DePalma, 2009; Fontaine, 1998; Newman, 1989). In a study examining sexual equality in primary schools in the United Kingdom, DePalma (2009) noted in many instances it was not because of a teacher's inability to incorporate individual differences in sexual orientation into the curriculum, but rather a lack of confidence based on factors such as community reaction and administrative support for such actions. It was noted that it was necessary to think about sexual equality in a broad way, whether it means talking with students about sexual orientation and gender stereotypes when the topic

arises, or examining LGBTIQ individuals within the context of topics being discussed in class, such as, civil rights (DePalma, 2009). Changing curriculum to reflect the diverse backgrounds represented in our society would seem at first glance to be a straightforward exercise, but the religious and political proclivities of individuals making curriculum decisions in regards to content and implementation can make this quite difficult. Schools serve as a socialization tool for children across the country and through interactions, verbally and non-verbally, students are heterosexualized, leading them to believe that being heterosexual is normal and homosexual is the deviant (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Sumara & Davis, 1999). The Christian right opposes inclusive practices in regards to sexual orientation and gender expression in school policies and curriculum because they claim it promotes homosexuality and perversion, which makes this process complex for educators (McGillivray, 2008). It is not impossible to change this, but it is necessary to have the support of the administrators in the school district, not only in regards to curriculum changes, but also training teachers to discuss LGBTIQ issues in their class in a meaningful way (DePalma, 2009).

### **Inaction in Schools**

Although there has been ethical appeals toward decency and equity, more transgressive calls for educators to queer their academic practices, policies, and curriculum, and an all-around expanded discourse on LGBTIQ issues in public schools there has been no large-scale systemic effect on how educators address these issues (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Many LGBTIQ students in school deal with physical

and verbal harassment from students within their school, and many times these incidences go unreported to administrators due to the fact administrators tend to remain silent in regards to harassment due to sexual orientation and gender expression (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Fontaine, 1998). This comes from a variety of excuses that teachers and administrators employ to explain why they have not acted and dealt with the issues that LGBTIQ students face within the public school system in the United States. These include the belief that sexuality is a parental issue that should not be discussed within the curriculum, that the school district must uphold the values of the community, fear of losing their job for speaking out, or the common religious reason that homosexuality is a sin (Elze, 2003; Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Even teachers and administrators that wish to speak out against the issues LGBTIQ students face often state that they are simply not equipped to deal with issues concerning sexual orientation and gender expression within their school (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Although upon further research, programs and recommendations on how to deal with LGBTIQ issues in education have been present for quite some time (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). For example, there have been recommendations for how to integrate the topic of homosexuality with school curriculums and programs, like the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Networks (GLSEN) Safe Space program, designed to assist teachers and administrators support LGBTIQ students on their campus (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Therefore, it is essential that teachers and administrators are aware of the resources available to them since not only do LGTBIQ students deal with physical violence, but experience much higher rates of depression and suicides than other

adolescent groups (GLSEN, 2007; McAndrew & Warne 2010). This comes in large part to the antagonism between the broader challenge toward heteronormative structures at large in our society and school cultures that create hostile environments for LGBTIQ students (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Research has revealed that LGBTIQ students report hearing antigay slurs and homophobic remarks repeatedly on a daily basis, with over 33 percent of students reporting hearing these remarks from teachers and administrators—the very people entrusted with the care of all students (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Furthermore, 85 percent of teachers have opposed integrating LGBTIQ issues and studies within their schools curriculum (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). It is not only blatant displays of homophobia and heteronormativity by students, teachers, and administrators that lead to cultures of fear and hatred in schools around the country, as sometimes this culture is formed and sustained unintentionally (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). For example, schools contribute to the acceptance of heteronormative oppression when educators choose not to intercede when students or others within the educational setting verbally express homophobia (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). It is this type of non-action by teachers and administrators that explicitly endorses the acceptance of these actions, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). These actions, intentionally or unintentionally, have kept school cultures in the United States from evolving into arenas where students who do not fit within the mold of heteronormativity feel comfortable or free to make themselves seen and heard (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009).

The problems of LGTBIQ students are exacerbated further within this context since the development of an individual's sexual identity is a very complex process that leads to students being alienated and pushed to the margins in our educational system (Cox & Gallois, 1996; Coyle 1992; Troiden, 1989). This feeling of alienation that is experienced by many LGBTIQ students within the public school system can lead them to believe that something is wrong with them simply because they deviate from the norm of heterosexuality espoused in many school cultures (Cox & Gallois, 1996; Coyle 1992). While the creation of LGBTIQ identity is an ongoing process that takes place during an individual's adolescent years, it can lead to an interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict caused by individual's feeling compelled to conform to the norms of the majority, while at the same time having a growing sense that they are different and that this difference needs to be hidden (McAndrew & Warne, 2010). The knowledge of this difference from the majority culture can lead to an individual becoming sex-stressed because of a sense of being a failure at meeting the cultural norms of society (Drescher, 1998). Promoting heterosexuality and homophobia in the public school system, even without knowingly doing so, can lead to LGBTIQ students development negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Sears, 1997). This can lead to damaging a student's psychological health, causing LGBTIQ students to develop an abhorrence of their own sexuality, which can lead them to engage in homophobic behavior toward other LGBTIQ students (Hansen & Horowitz, 2008; Sears, 1997). The damage that building a school climate on the basis of heterosexuality and homophobia can cause to LGBTIQ students illustrates

why they are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight counterparts (McAndrew & Warne, 2010).

The verbal and physical abuse LGBTIQ students endure within our school systems has negative effects on achievement because a hostile school environment can lead LGBTIQ students to skip class or miss entire days of school (GLSEN, 2007). The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) national survey of LGBTIQ students in 2007 found that 31.7 percent of LGBTIQ students reported missing classes because they did not feel safe at school; this is over five times higher than the national average of secondary students in general (GLSEN, 2007). The fear of frequent physical and verbal abuse at school undermines the open and fair ideals promoted by the meritocracy system believed to exist in the United States (Elze, 2001; MacLeod, 2004). Instead, these barriers support social reproduction as it restricts the ability of LGBTIQ students to learn and achieve at a high levels. It is estimated that out of every 30 students in a classroom, nine are affected in some way by LGBTIQ issues – either having a gay relative or being gay themselves (Fontaine, 1998). If school districts and individual campuses are serious about serving the entire student population they must take into account the diversity of their student population, not only in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, but also in regards to sexual orientation and gender expression. Educational research does not support that this is happening within the public school system in the United States (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Fisher, 2009; Fontaine, 1998).

Fontaine (1998) in her research discusses that many administrators and teachers remain silent about issues dealing with sexual orientation and gender expression in an effort to avoid controversy and conflict with parents and the community at-large. Even for those educators who want to promote respect for differences in sexual orientation and gender expression, it seems that fear and misunderstandings prevent them from doing so (DePalma, 2009; Fontaine, 1998). Regardless of the reasons, educators today are not receiving the necessary training or support to deal with these issues effectively in their districts and on their campuses. In a recent study in the United Kingdom, it was found that many teachers held misgivings about curriculum promoting diversity in regards to sexual orientation and how it would be received by the communities that they served. Teachers in rural areas felt that it would be better accepted in urban areas where populations were more diverse and adapt to deal with these issues (DePalma, 2009). The study found the same beliefs in regard to a teacher's years of experience. New teachers felt that if a teacher had more experience and was already established within the community, teaching a curriculum that respected differences in sexual orientation would be easier, while experienced teachers believed it would be easier for new teachers because they were more flexible and had less to lose (DePalma, 2009). The most interesting finding of this study was that most teachers believed they would not have the support and backing of their school administrators, who in reality set the tone for the rest of the district and individual campuses (DePalma, 2009; Fontaine, 1998). The fear of controversy is what leads many administrators to be silent in regards to social justice dealing with sexual orientation within their districts and schools, with his fear being

fueled by societal constraints around the administrators, especially in Texas where politics and religious ideals play a hand in shaping the educational landscape (DePalma, 2009; Fontaine 1998; Lugg, 1998). Another factor that leads to this deafening silence in the public school system is the definite lack of training for teachers in university teacher education programs on how to deal with issues of sexual orientation and gender expression (DePalma, 2009; Fontaine, 1998; Human Rights Watch, 2001). This lack of training for educators leads to a failure in providing support for LGBTIQ students in their schools which can be further exacerbated by fear of controversy and homophobia (Fontaine, 1998; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Letts & Sears, 1999). This lack of training is illustrated in McGillivray's (2008) study, *Religion, Sexual Orientation, and School Policy: How the Christian Right Frames Its Argument*, with responses from teachers. Teachers in the study comments reflected a stark difference in their views in handling issues of race versus issues of sexual orientation. It was viewed as more important to challenge and stop racist comments than it was to challenge and stop antigay comments. This difference was largely due to teacher's reluctance to be seen as approving of homosexuality and challenging a parent's antigay religious beliefs (McGillivray, 2008). It is because of these issues that university teacher education programs need to focus on how to handle LGBTIQ issues in schools in order to create a safe, supportive environment for LGBTIQ students. Training teachers to handle issues LGBTIQ students face is urgently needed, as over 2 million students in the United States identify as LGBTIQ and deal with physical and mental abuse from peers, as well as, teachers and administrators (GLSEN, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2001).

It is not impossible for teachers and administrators to build school cultures that are conducive to students feeling safe, both physically and emotionally, regardless of sexual orientation. Teachers and administrators can resist institutional contributions to heteronormativity in the school system by implementing “well-defined staff development, policy, student support, and curriculum” that stops avoiding LGBTIQ issues and begins a discourse between everyone involved in educating students (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009, p. 165).

### **Court Cases Addressing LGBTIQ Inequity and Religious Resistance**

Unfortunately, political acts affecting educational policy and curriculum have been propagated and supported within the public school system regardless of various court cases that have defended students, regardless of sexual orientation, from discrimination and insensitivity not only from students, but from administrators, teachers, and other school staff (Reese, 1997). Public schools are essentially governmental institutions that must adhere to laws that deal with issues of discrimination and harassment within the educational setting, but this has not been the case. School districts and individual campuses have instead found ways to work around these laws instead of allowing the so-called gay agenda to infect their campuses. This can be seen in the context of Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) student clubs that operate on secondary campuses around the country (Lugg & Tooms, 2008). The fourteenth amendment, in its Equal Protection clause, guarantees equal protection under the law. Although this amendment originally applied to freed people after the Civil War, in a modern context it applies to all marginalized groups – including the LGBTIQ community (Kosciw et al.,

2007). However, school districts in Texas have found ways to infringe on rights of LGBTIQ students as it applies to the Equal Protection clause. For example, Gay-Straight Alliance clubs that focus on creating a safe space for LGBTIQ student are present in many schools across the country, but have found resistance in the state of Texas. There are numerous examples of schools that instead of allowing GSA student clubs to exist on their campus have opted to ban all student groups. Actions like these serve to create non-inclusive school environments but since all student clubs were treated “equally” the court system has viewed it as not being discriminatory (Lugg & Tooms, 2008).

Laws that specifically protect LGBTIQ students, teachers, and families are slow in coming, and many will argue that it is not necessary to specify sexual orientation and gender identity because simply stating “all” covers everyone (Macgillivray, 2009). This is unacceptable in building a safe environment for LGBTIQ within our public schools because all does not always mean all – an example of this can be seen with the civil right laws passed in the 1960s. Until laws specified that you could not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, and abilities, people of color, women, and individuals with disabilities were not protected equally under the law (Macgillivray, 2009). Many states in the United States have passed what are known as “no promo homo” laws that ban the promotion of homosexuality on campuses (Eskridge, 2000). This can be seen in the actions of administrators at Okeechobee High School where the campus Gay-Straight Alliance was banned by the school, which claimed it was a sex-club that went against the school’s abstinence-only curriculum (Macgillivray, 2009).

Actions like these are taken by school districts in total disregard of court cases like *Tinker v. DeMoines ISD* (1969) and *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003); there is no legal foundation for these type of discriminatory practices in the United States educational system (Lugg & Tooms, 2008). *Tinker v. DeMoines* stated that these laws restrict an individual's freedom of speech, while *Lawrence v. Texas* stated that no school district could suppress speech advocating for the equality of LGBTIQ individuals on the grounds that it promotes criminal behavior (*Tinker*, 1969; *Lawrence*, 2003; Ruskola, 2005). *Lawrence* is referring to laws passed in fourteen states that made it illegal to practice sodomy – even between consensual adults (*Lawrence*, 2003; Ruskola, 2005; Lugg, 2006). However, even with these Supreme Court rulings, nothing has been done by these fourteen states, including Texas, to change school practices so that they comply with the *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling (*Lawrence*, 2003; Lugg, 2006). Over the past twenty years this has been changing with the fact that LGBTIQ students, and the harassment and violence that they experience within school has become more visible, where school districts can no longer ignore what is going on their campuses (Kosciw et al., 2007). Furthermore, the inequitable treatment within schools that LGBTIQ students have experienced has led to a string of legal cases filed against school districts and, for the most part, the courts have been in favor of the students under the Equal Protections Act or Title IX (Kosciw et al., 2007). It is becoming more and more difficult for school districts to condone or ignore the treatment perpetrated on students because of the real or perceived sexual orientation (Kosciw, et al., 2007). For example, a female student who is a member of the football team cannot be harassed, physically or verbally, because she

does not conform to what societies view as girl and boy activities. If the school district did not take action in an example such as this, they would be violating the students' rights under the Equal Protection Clause that makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender and Title IX which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, specifically an individual's failure to adhere to societal concepts of what it means to be masculine and feminine (Kosciw, et al., 2007). While the LGBTIQ community fights for the protection of LGBTIQ students in the public education system and for changes to the policies, practices, and curriculum, the Christian right is also fighting to continue the status quo (Macgillivray, 2008). The arguments of the Christian right have shifted from "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" to accusations that their First amendment and rights as parents to educate their children as they see fit have been violated by what they see as the promotion of homosexuality, even going to the point of arguing that they are the ones being discriminated against (Macgillivray, 2008). Furthermore, antidiscrimination laws that protect individuals on the basis of sexual orientation and gender expression are viewed as attacks on their religious and moral beliefs (Macgillivray, 2008). It is this type of argument that further drives educators to remain silent when dealing with equity issues as they pertain to LGBTIQ students because it is easier to stay silent than deal with the controversy that comes with creating equitable policies and practices for LGBTIQ students in their schools.

### **LGBTIQ School Programs and Effects**

It is important to remember though that while there are many school districts that are not inclusive to LGBTIQ students and breed homophobia within their walls that not

all hope is lost. There are several instances of schools across the country that have implemented programs in an attempt to create a positive, inclusive school climates for LGBTIQ students. One example is the Out for Equity (OFE) program that was implemented in 1997 by Saint Paul Public School District in Minnesota (Hansen & Horowitz, 2008). The school district adopted several initiatives including crisis intervention, staff development, and class presentation to help promote “respect, positive self-esteem, and academic success” for its LGBTIQ student population by reducing homophobic actions at three high schools (Hansen & Horowitz, 2008). Improving school climate can also take place in student clubs that help in extending support to LGBTIQ students in public education. Over 3,000 Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs are present in all fifty states, with over 680 in the state of California alone (Macgillivray, 2009). Macgillivray (2009) in his study on GSAs found that there were several benefits to these clubs being present among student organizations on campuses. LGBTIQ students were more likely to feel safe because their schools supported the establishment of a GSA and this in turn leads to greater school inclusion of LGBTIQ students (Macgillivray, 2009). Furthermore, studies have found that involvement within a GSA correlates with a decrease in risk-taking behaviors, such as taking drugs, having sex, or attempting suicide mainly because GSA’s help students with handling identity issues, overcoming isolation and victimization, and reducing anti-gay slurs through educating other students (Macgillivray, 2009). Although these groups face resistance on some school campuses, it is groups like this that assist LGBTIQ students to navigate their school environment and to come to terms with their homosexuality by giving them an

outlet to express themselves and gain support and acceptance from their peers (Lugg & Tooms, 2008). Unfortunately, programs such as these are the exception rather than the rule, as school districts tend to steer clear of programs and groups that may tend to be seen as controversial and could cause issues with the community at large, regardless of its psychological impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning students (Hansen & Horowitz, 2008; Macgillivray, 2008; Macgillivray, 2009; Lugg & Tooms, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

The issues that affect LGBTIQ students within school districts across the country are varied and complex, but it is important for educators to examine the policies, practices, and curriculum that they implement within their school districts and campuses. School districts must remember that student populations are not homogeneous, but are diverse in regards to race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. By not being mindful of their policies, practices and curriculum, and how they affect LGBTIQ students, administrators and teachers are creating oppressive, harmful school climates that not only affects LGBTIQ students physically, but also emotionally with negative consequences on their academic achievement and mental and physical health. This can be particularly true in Texas where the political and religious landscape can be especially oppressive to LGBTIQ individuals who do not fit into the societal constructed idea of what it means to be normal. It is with this in mind that I examine the ways in which school administrators and teachers affect the LGBTIQ students in the Texas public school system.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study examines heteronormativity within the Texas public school system, with a focus of the impact on gay white students. It has been noted in quantitative surveys conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2007) that LGBTIQ students experience high levels of harassment and bullying because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. The surveys reflect that verbal and physical harassment can be linked to risky behavior, poor academic performance, and emotional distress (GLSEN, 2007). A qualitative study of these experiences and their impact on LGBTIQ students in Texas schools requires an in-depth analysis to assist in creating a change in public discourse that transforms unsafe school environments into caring, nurturing ones that are inclusive to all students (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). The intent of this study is to bring to light the personal experiences of gay white students in an effort to better understand the struggles LGBTIQ students face due to current practices, policies and curriculum in the Texas public school system. For this study, participants are defined as individuals who self-identify as gay and white, who attended Texas public schools from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in cities where the oil industry was present, and who are 18 to 35 years old.

This study draws from various research studies that examine the difficulties of creating school practices, policies and curriculum that are inclusive of LGBTIQ students (Fontaine, 1997; GLSEN, 2007; Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009; MacGillivray, 2000). Much of the research available focuses on administrators, teachers, and other educational

leaders and their reasons for not creating and instituting curriculum, policies and practices that do not marginalize and minimize LGBTIQ students within their districts and schools. It is for this reason I chose to study students, specifically those who attended and graduated from the Texas public school system. This particular age group was chosen because the period of time since exiting the Texas public school system would more easily enable former students to *reflect on* their experiences during their time in Texas public schools. The participants' ability to recall their experiences is imperative in gaining understanding the issues LGBTIQ students face in Texas public schools.

Furthermore, I have developed this research study within the queer theory paradigm in order to develop a “discourse of social transformation and emancipation” for normative ideas and values that marginalize LGBTIQ individuals, such as heteronormativity, or the idea that heterosexuality is “normal” (Giroux, 2003). Specifically, my study is meant to highlight the oppressive forces at play in the Texas public school system that have been shaped from societal constructs, such as heteronormativity, which seeks to marginalize LGBTIQ students. It is through exposing the injustice that exist within the school system of Texas hope to create an opportunity for a shift in public discourse which can assist these students in being freed from the margins of the state's educational landscape. These injustices can be seen within the stories and experiences of LGBTIQ students within our states school system. The importance of the narratives has led me to select a research methodology and method that will allow me to collect, examine, and analyze these narratives to highlight

the impact heteronormativity's influence within the Texas public school system has on LGBTIQ students.

A qualitative study can be approached through various methods based on what the researcher decides is best for their particular study (Creswell, 2007). For the purposes of my study I have decided to utilize the method of narrative thematic analysis. Narrative thematic analysis is used to analyze specifically “the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals,” or in other words the participants’ narrative (Creswell, 2007, p. 54).

### **Qualitative Study: Importance of Narrative**

Qualitative research, especially critical/queer theory which serves as the basis of my study, believes knowledge is composed of multiple truths, and because of this viewpoint narrative plays a central role within the data being analyzed. The narrative of participants is considered by many researchers to be a universal mode of expression that is taught at an early age (Smith, 2000). This can be seen in everyday conversations as we tell stories about our experiences meant to “inform, entertain, impress, empower, or exonerate” (Smith, 2000, p. 327).

The analysis of narratives is useful when studying individuals, groups, cultures, or even historical periods as it allows for the preservation of context and accuracy within discourse (Riesmann, 1993; Smith, 2000). Furthermore, narratives help to define the identities of various groups present within our society (Riesmann, 2008). Narratives serve an important function within society and culture in large part because they rely heavily on language, which is a “major, and often distinctive, source of information” in

qualitative research (Smith, 2000, p. 313). This value is derived from the fact that language both facilitates and reveals the development of individuals, both internally and externally, and allows the research to make “inferences regarding subjective experiences, intentions, and internal structures that influence overt behavior” (Smith, 2000, p. 313). The importance of language within participant narratives is central to narrative thematic analysis.

### **Narrative Thematic Analysis: Finding Themes**

In determining what form the narrative analysis within my study should take, it was decided that utilizing narrative thematic analysis would be most appropriate. In qualitative research, this form of analysis is one of the more commonly utilized methods (Riesmann, 2008). This narrative analysis approach is interested and centrally focused on the story being told by the storyteller (Riesmann, 2008). Interpretation using narrative thematic analysis and developing themes occurs based on what the researcher is told specifically by informants of the events and experiences (Riesmann, 2008, p. 54). It is because of this when developing themes from the interviews I paid little attention to how the narrative was spoken, and focused rather on what was said by the participant throughout the course of the interview (Riesmann, 2008). This statement is not meant to imply that I paid no attention to how the narrative was spoken; simply it was not imperative in regards to creating themes.

As a researcher the goal of using this approach is to identify specific themes that appropriately reflect the narrative being analyzed. This method has been noted to assist researchers in keeping the story of the participant intact by “theorizing from the case

rather than from component themes (categories) across cases” (Riesmann, 2008, p. 53). In other words, instead of taking simple excerpts from participant narratives to illustrate common themes, I use longer segments that tell a story. Through keeping participant narrative intact, I am ultimately able to provide readers in-depth detail of participant experiences.

Data was analyzed to help uncover themes in the responses of participants within the study. This information is organized into large clusters of ideas that will help provide details that support the emergent themes (Creswell, 2007). Establishing the appropriate themes is a crucial part of the analysis of participant narratives.

Furthermore, in categorizing participant experiences’ it is important to locate the similarities within experiences of participants. This development of themes assists the researcher in formulating coherence and demonstrating a rigorous study on how thoughts are linked together in a meaningful way. After the data was categorized using narrative thematic analysis it was compared with current LGBTIQ educational research, while considering how it could inform and add to the existing body of literature.

### **Researcher Role**

My own personal narrative reflects the issue and presence of heteronormativity within the Texas public school system. I grew up experiencing bullying and harassment because I did not appropriately express masculinity as defined within our society. I was teased incessantly and made to feel different and wrong because of my sensitivity and lack of an aggressive personality, which has carried over into my adult life to some extent. My experiences in one sense led me to develop into the individual I am today,

but in another sense they represent a time period that was very painful within my life. There were times where I was steadfast in not letting others get to me and times when I felt so depressed I did not want to face those that would taunt and tease me during the school day.

I explained in depth my experiences during my formative years in the Texas public school system in Chapter I, and will speak to my experiences within my role as an educator in Chapter VI. This reflection of my own personal experiences is imperative due to the fact that the background of the researcher plays an integral part of the study itself in qualitative research. This is because the researchers' background "can influence the way in which the situation is described, interpreted, and appraised; hence knowing who the researcher is and where he or she has come from is not altogether irrelevant" (Eisner, 1998, p. 193). The researchers' background and experiences can lead to greater perceptivity and understanding of the experiences of the participants, but it can also lead to bias. It is with bias in mind that I discuss how I intend to limit bias within my research.

### **Trustworthiness**

When developing this study I was well aware I would have to ensure my research and interpretation of data was as trustworthy as possible. My intent was to interpret the data collected, which includes "developing a description of an individual, setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about the meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learned, and offering questions to be asked" (Wolcott, 1994).

As a qualitative researcher I filtered my data through “a personal lens that is situation in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment” (Creswell, 2009, p. 182). I realize I cannot escape “the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis” (Creswell, 2009, p.182). It is because of this realization I understand I must utilize strategies to help maximize the trustworthiness of my study. I am not interested in reflecting my own personal opinions within this study, but rather to give a voice to the participants and their stories. It is because of this desire to put the voice of participants first that I put much thought into the design of my study. In this study I employed what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as trustworthiness criteria that ensures the quality of qualitative research:

1. use triangulation in checking the integrity of the inferences drawn from participant narratives;
2. utilize member checking by having participants review their story for accuracy and completeness;
3. provide rich, thick descriptions of participant experiences.

The first strategy for ensuring the trustworthiness of my research and the inferences I drew from my data is triangulation. The term triangulation denotes the use of “multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305). For the purpose of my research, triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources, or participants. Triangulation is key because it contends the process of discovering genuine meaning can be “uncovered by viewing it from different vantage points”

(Schwandt, 2007, p. 298). In other words, the experiences of the participants in this study will ultimately converge allowing me to draw meaningful conclusions.

The second strategy I utilized in minimizing bias within my research is member checking. In using member checking I “solicit[ed] participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” which included taking “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). In my use of member checking I did not provide participants with any raw data—my transcripts of our conversation—but instead gave them my initial analysis of our conversations in follow-up interviews. I did this because I am most interested in their viewpoints on the initial analysis’ accuracy, as well as, what might be missing. I developed questions for clarification and checking accuracy of my interpretations prior to a second interview in order to stimulate discussion between myself and the participants. In doing this I hoped to fill-in what they felt was missing from their initial accounts. This strategy assisted in ensuring the data was more reflective and representative of participants within the study.

The third and final trustworthiness criteria I utilized was providing rich, thick description of the experiences of participants (Geertz, 1983). As a researcher the aim of approaching participants is to find out about them within the context of the study. In finding out more about the experiences of the participants it was imperative to gather as many details as possible during the course of our conversations. In other words, when participants are describing their experiences it is the job of the researcher to attempt to dive deeper into the motivations for the actions and feelings felt during those

experiences. Overall, these strategies served as the foundation of my quest maximizing trustworthiness in my research and findings since I realize if this is not done, then the research is for naught.

## **Participants**

As stated earlier, my research was completed within the context of the Texas public education system. I utilized purposeful sampling as I selected participants that suited the purpose of the study and the research questions outlined in Chapter I (Creswell, 2009). Purposeful sampling is useful as it is likely to be “information-rich with respect to the purposes of a qualitative study” (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003, p. 165). It is important to note purposeful sampling can take many forms, with researchers suggesting fifteen different purposeful sampling strategies, each serving a different purpose in qualitative research (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). For my study, participants were chosen by criterion sampling which sets specific criteria for participant selection to ensure that they fit within the purpose of my research on heteronormativity in Texas public schools and its impact on white gay students. I established four criteria for participants in this study.

The first criteria for the study is that each participant identifies as gay and white. These two identifying categories are central to the research questions and purpose of the study. Seven participants were selected through local and national organizations, such as college GLBT Resource Centers and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) within Southeast Texas. This does not imply that all participants were from Southeast Texas, as by utilizing GLBT Resource Centers on college

campuses, like Texas A&M University, and the GLSEN I was able to pull a sample that was representative of the different regions of Texas, as well as, rural and urban communities within the state. This was beneficial as my research is focused on LGBTIQ issues in the *entire* state of Texas, not just a single region of Texas.

The second criteria for participants is they must have attended schools in the Texas public school system—kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. As the study is situated within the context of the Texas public school system, it is imperative participants have experienced all stages of educational progression. The third criteria for participant selection is each participant must be between 18 and 35 years of age. This was done in an attempt to ensure a wide base of participants to pull from, but to still ensures the experiences within their respective schools could be recalled and reflected upon. My final criteria is that these students come from cities, either rural or urban, where the oil industry is present as it is my intent to relate these experiences to my own personal experiences with gender expression while in the Texas public school system.

Once participants were selected based on this criteria, each participated in one-on-one interviews that took place in neutral locations in order to assist in building a rapport with each participant, which helped them to become more comfortable in sharing their experiences. Interviews were semi-structured in nature with a base of six questions during the initial interview that were designed to lead to deeper discussion of experiences. The initial interviews were then transcribed and used to develop follow-up questions for future rounds of interviews that continued until stories were told in their entirety.

## **Research Design**

My research design centers around the narratives of seven participants that were selected based on the four criteria outlined in the previous section. Semi-structured interviews were used in gathering data with a set of topics discussed and explored with participants. These topics centered on the research questions that drive this study including:

1. In a selected group of gay white students from the Texas public education system, what experiences did they have with students, teachers, and school leaders, in regards to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression?
2. In a selected group of gay white students from the Texas public education system, how did their experiences affect them within and outside the school setting?
3. In a selected group of gay white students from the Texas public education system, if their experiences were negative, what could school leaders and teachers have done differently to create a school environment that is nurturing and caring?

In investigating these questions, I employed various interviews that varied in time determined by participants and were centered on open-ended questions that allow participants to form their narratives naturally. I gained signed consent from participants before conducting these interviews that allowed me to record the interviews for transcription at a later time. The first interview were analyzed and served as the basis

for future interviews. Every effort was made to guarantee the participants that all interviews, recordings, and transcripts will remain confidential and that their identity will be kept private.

### **Data Collection**

As has been described, I rely heavily on participant interviews in collecting data for my research. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), in their article *The Corporatizing and Privatizing of Schooling: A Call for Grounded Critical Praxis*, explain that an “understanding of oppression must emerge out of dialogic relationships with specific people and in dialogical interactions with those people” (p. 440). This is exactly what I hoped to accomplish in the course of data collection.

Participants selected the time and the place for their interview, which was essential to building trust and rapport with each. It was imperative that research take place in a natural setting for the participant as this enabled me to “develop a level of detail about the individual...and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). It was my intent to conduct interviews in private in order to facilitate the participant opening up about their school experiences without feeling restrained by surroundings and other individuals. This did not always prove to be necessary, as several participants chose to talk in public spaces, such as coffee shops, although others preferred the privacy of isolated locations or to speak over the phone.

A multi-stage semi-structured interview process was used, consisting of an initial interview, analysis, and a follow-up interviews. The first interview focused on gathering background information on participants. This background information assists in giving

context of their experiences within the Texas public school system, which was another topic of discussion during the initial interview. All interviews on average lasted 45-60 minutes. First round interviews were transcribed and analyzed, which set the basis of the future interviews and follow-up questions. Each of the seven participants went through two rounds of interviews, with several sending follow-up e-mails for simple clarification. E-mail was utilized as it was not felt another full interview was necessary based on questions developed from second round interviews. Within these interviews I allowed the participant to speak at length in regards to their experiences, mindful not to interrupt as this interruption in thought may cause valuable information to be lost.

As noted above, once interviews had been completed, the next step in the process was transferring them into written form, or transcription. While the transcription of participant interviews does not sound like a major decision, it can have very real ramifications that affect the interpretation of data. In transcribing interviews I made decisions on displaying what was stated in a particular way, and in a sense shaping the meaning of the narrative. After careful consideration, I decided to include in my transcriptions false starts and pauses in speech (Riesmann, 1993). I did this because all narratives are essentially co-constructed as “the audience, whether physically present or not, exerts a crucial influence on what can and cannot be said, how things should be expressed, what can be taken for granted, what needs explaining, and so on” (Riesmann, 2008, p. 31). Ultimately false starts and pauses play a crucial part in interpretation since what is *not* said or *how* something is said can be as revealing as what is said and will assist me in forming topics of discussion in the follow-up interview with participants.

## **Data Analysis**

These interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed using narrative thematic analysis (Riesmann, 1993). In qualitative research, narrative thematic analysis is one of the more commonly utilized methods (Riesmann, 2008). This narrative analysis approach is interested in the story being told by the storyteller (Riesmann, 2008). Although all narrative analysis is concerned with “what is said, written, or visually shown” in narrative thematic analysis the content of the narrative is the central focus of analysis (Riesmann, 2008, p. 53). Interpretation using narrative thematic analysis and developing themes occurs based on what the research is told namely “informants’ reports of the events and experiences, rather than aspects of the telling” (Riesmann, 2008, p. 54).

As can be seen from above, an important component of my analysis was to develop themes and codes that are found based on my interpretations of the data. In the transcripts I examined I developed emergent themes to find areas of commonality within participant responses. Themes were determined through commonalities in participant narratives as broken into story segments. By developing these common themes it enabled me to illustrate the connections in experience that exist within the Texas LGBTIQ community, as represented by gay white students, in the public school system.

It was my goal to uncover themes that connect all participants’ narratives in a search for commonality within various contexts within the diverse state of Texas. The data is organized into large clusters of ideas that will help in providing details that support the emergent themes within the narratives (Creswell, 2007). These themes are

supported by the use of direct quotes within the narratives of all participants in the study. It is by uncovering the commonalities between the experiences of the participants in the Texas public school system, I was able to facilitate a better understanding of the issues gay white students face because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

### **Chapter Summary**

This dissertation examines the experiences of gay white students in the Texas public school system. These experiences are to be examined in regards to the challenges they faced because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression, which conflict with the value placed on heterosexuality in societal institutions, specifically public schools. Using a purposive sample of seven students who identify as gay and white who grew up and attended schools within the Texas public school system from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, this research focuses on their experiences within this context. I have positioned myself within my research as an individual who has experienced bullying and harassment because of not meeting normative standards generally associated with being male and “masculine.” I utilized strategies to minimize the impact of bias within my research. These include utilizing open-ended question in an unstructured interview, monitoring my interaction with participants and reactions to their narratives, and member checking.

Chapter IV presents a profile of each participant, along with their narratives describing their experiences in the Texas public school system. Chapter V analyzes their experiences in an effort to find emergent themes that connect the experiences of each

participant's narrative. Chapter Six reviews and considers what meaning can be derived from the shared experiences of the participants, while examining what steps can be taken to address the issues faced by LGBTIQ students in the Texas public school system. It is my intent and hope this will open a discourse in what is needed to create a nurturing, caring school climate for *all* students.

## CHAPTER IV

### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter will serve as an introduction to the individuals who chose to participate in my study. In this chapter I begin to paint the mental picture of who the participants are and what their overall experience as gay individuals in the Texas public school system has been.

It is important to note I have given each participant a pseudonym to protect their identity within my study. Pseudonyms have also been used to conceal any identifying information, such as, city and school names.

#### **James**

*“I am a complex and ever changing person, discovering countless different sides of myself as I move on and grow. Discovering who I am in the places I’ve lived has made me strong and stubborn, but also deeply sensitive and empathetic toward the people around me. Overall, I’d say I’m a dreamer at heart who can’t wait to find out what else the world has in store for me”* (James, personal communication, November 7, 2013).

James is a soft spoken twenty-three year old college senior who grew up in the shadow of the oil derricks that dot the west Texas skyline town of Rockefeller, Texas. The city of his childhood contains roughly 120,000 inhabitants with its main employers being in the energy industry. James has two older sisters and is the youngest of his siblings by ten years. This disparity in age led to James being the only child at home during his formative years of junior high and high school with his sisters being out of the house in college and beginning their lives outside his parents’ home. The energy

industry which dominated his hometown is reflected in his parents. His father operates his own oil company, while his mother is in the land leasing business for oil companies.

It was shortly after his sisters left the house that his family life began to change. It was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, at the age of ten, his parents separated and then divorced a little over a year later. After this life-altering event James recounts how he has never really had a close relationship with his father, which he relates to personality differences that, in his mind, stem from his sexual orientation and not meeting the masculine norm, which his father exemplified. James recounted why he views his father as a stereotypical macho man: “Yeah...yeah he’s just kind of rude pretty much all the time, it is just his personality, he is very crass” (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013). This description of his father correlates with his description of what he views as the masculine norm: “In my mind, kind of crude sort of, just very, like, not necessarily chauvinistic, but very, I don’t know, just always kind of puffed up, always showing off” (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

The school district James attended consisted of thirty-five schools; including two 5A high schools were football dominated the cultural landscape. James describes the two high schools in his town being very different: “There were two main high schools in my town. My high school was more...there weren’t cliques, it was like everyone knew everyone...everybody had gone to school with everybody since like pre-school” (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013). He remembered: “nobody looked down on you for being friends with the geek or anything like that...it wasn’t really like that...people...people were just always together. There just wasn’t...wasn’t really geeks

for the most part...the only people that really got bullied were the ones that were just weird and were just off into things that everyone else just wasn't into" (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013). An interesting statement he made when describing the student body of his high school was that it was like a "hive mind" where everyone thought the same thing for the most part, even though he admits there were outliers that were essentially outcasts within the school (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

James related in our interview that he did not want to be one of these outliers within his school and just wanted to be "normal." He wanted to be considered "normal" and not stand out so much, and decided he would get involved as much as possible in extracurricular activities. James described the depth of his involvement in school to avoid confronting his growing awareness of his sexual orientation: "I was a member of student council, president...and I volunteered pretty much every week or every other week. What else? Pretty much every club that I could somewhat relate to I was in...Spanish club...I was in all sorts of things that really didn't take up a lot of time but if you really put yourself in all this stuff it not only gives you a lot to do in school and out of school but also gives you a lot of people to surround yourself with" (James, personal communication, July 11, 2013).

It was because of this desire to fit in that it wasn't until right after graduating high school that James came out to his best friend on July 4, 2009. This was not without trepidation, as James continually described himself as someone that does not like confrontation. James' fear has been misplaced thus far as he relayed his friends have

been largely supportive, noting that most “barely blinked” when he came out to them (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013). Even his family, including his “stereotypical macho” father, have been open-minded and took him coming out as gay much better than he had anticipated (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013). It is important to note, while James describes his family and friends as being open-minded and supportive, he is still not comfortable informing people he meets that he is gay because he does not want to be judged based one aspect of his personality since as he notes in his self-description he is much more complex than any singular characteristic.

### **George**

*“We accept the love we think we deserve”* (George citing Chomsky, personal communication, November 7, 2013).

*“My life amounts to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean. Yet what is any ocean, but a multitude of drops?”* (George citing Mitchell, personal communication, November 7, 2013).

*“All boundaries are conventions, waiting to be transcended. One may transcend any convention, if only one can first conceive of doing so”* (George citing Mitchell, personal communication, November 7, 2013).

George was perhaps the most introspective of the seven participants and continually analyzed and re-analyzed his experiences through the course of our interviews. He is a twenty-three year old college senior preparing to continue his education in graduate school. George is an only child, and describes his parents as not accepting him for who he is, as they tried to continually put a square peg in a round hole.

There had been various issues with his parents throughout his childhood—mostly with his father. When describing his relationship with his father he stated: “He was always a disciplinarian, and he’d always try to get me to do things that I never wanted to do...football, karate, he wanted me to do swimming. I just always felt like I wasn’t the son he wanted sort of thing because I was always an effeminate child...I wasn’t him” (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013). George describes his mother being largely subservient to his father and not really being one that contradicts his opinions.

It was through the course of our conversations that it became apparent the issues George has experienced with his father in regards to his sexuality stem from his religious upbringing. George states he was raised within the Baptist denomination of Protestant Christianity. It is the biblical foundation of his parents’ beliefs that have, in his mind, created the rift that exists between him and his parents who he feels do not accept him in all facets. He has tried to create dialogue with his parents in this area, but as he described, it has led to his parents exclaiming that “you can’t ask those questions...you can’t question God” (George, personal communications, July 13, 2013). The relationship with his parents continues to be an ongoing struggle for unconditional acceptance.

His story within the Texas public school system is a tale of two cities, school districts and high schools. George grew up in the rapidly growing urban city of Sinclair in Southeast Texas with a population of approximately 62,000 inhabitants and home of fifty-five campuses, including six high schools. During his freshman and sophomore years he attended a 5A high school with a student population of approximately 3,100

students. It was because of the negative experiences, which will be explored more in-depth in Chapter V, which George moved to the much smaller city of Esso nearby with roughly 600 inhabitants with a school district composed of eight schools and one high school with only 2,000 students.

George describes these two high schools being drastically different. The high school he attended his freshman and sophomore years was much larger and was not a place that he felt protected by administrators and teachers against his tormentors. During our conversations George described himself during this time period, stating: “I used to wear glasses and I was kind of like...I was kind of like the nerd stereotype...growing up I was kind of the nerd stereotype...made good grades, was kind of anti-social. I basically fit that stereotype perfectly” (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013). This all changed his junior and senior year when George moved schools and attended a high school that was smaller which he recounted in a more positive manner. The positive experiences were driven partially because he was able to reinvent himself with new “contacts, new hair, new outfits, new just attitude” (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013). However, more importantly George felt that the teachers cared much more about their students and were overall just more positive about their jobs as educators. Furthermore, the experiences during this time period were amplified by George finding a niche on the tennis team with other students he identified with. It is important to note that although George appears to have viewed his experiences later in high school as largely positive, he still possessed a low self-

esteem that he relates being tied to his relationship with his parents and early negative experiences in junior high and early high school.

**Peter**

*I am currently a graduate student studying anthropology with an emphasis in Texas archaeology. Originally I was raised on a cattle ranch in far West Texas, where I developed a keen interest in ecology, archaeology, and raising livestock. Despite growing-up, participating in, and studying within a field that is/are stereotypically dominated by straight men, I knew I was different than those around me, but eventually accepted my sexual orientation, yet strive to make this not my only defining characteristic (Peter, personal communication, December 13, 2013).*

Although I had several participants who grew up in what would be considered a largely rural area of the state, the cities they grew up in were urban in their make-up. This was not the case with Peter, who grew up in a far west Texas city of Drake which was composed of 9,000 inhabitants. A large portion of the community makes their living through the oil drilling industry or ranching. The latter is where Peter and his family fall. Peter grew up in a family that had ranched in the area for six generations.

Peter is twenty-three years old and described his family, especially on his mother's side, as being very religious. This made his coming out a little more difficult although he stated that at first his family, even his mother, "was cool" (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013). However, it turned out to be more complex with his mother offering him ex-gay literature and a formerly open-minded aunt who believed that he chose his sexual orientation. These reactions have softened somewhat in the past

few years, with his boyfriend even being accepted within the familial fold—although their sexual orientation is never mentioned or talked about.

Of all the participants Peter proved to be the most introverted and this seemed to affect his public school experiences. It is important to note that Peter being introverted is not solely a factor of his sexual orientation, but also his family's economic situation.

Peter described:

My immediate family, up until that point, we were pretty poor and so I wasn't wearing Abercrombie & Fitch, Hollister, Aeropostale and all the name brand stuff. I was running around in t-shirts, Wranglers, jeans and tennis shoes (Peter, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

He states that keeping to himself was an effort to not be singled out in a crowd as he felt different from other students in his school. Eventually, Peter would begin to change from an introvert to extrovert during his junior and senior year, although he did not feel the transition was easy or natural for him since he was always worried that he was "going to get made fun of for it" (Peter, personal communication, July 31, 2013). He believes this transition was because he realized he had friends across the state from involvement in 4-H and thought he should be able to make friends more easily at home—and began to make the attempt and, from his viewpoint, was successful.

Once Peter graduated from high school he attended a small university near his hometown before transferring to a larger university in the state. It was not until this time that he became more comfortable and accepted his sexuality at 23 years old when he came out to his family. It is after coming out that he feels he became more open and

outgoing since he was no longer attempting to conform to a mold that did not fit who he was. Currently, Peter is thriving in a positive relationship with his partner while being the only participant attending graduate school.

### **Elisha**

*“I am a very loving and caring person, and I always strive to show that towards the people I care most about. I am very hardworking and determined, and dedicated myself to my goals. I am also very outspoken, loud, and outgoing. I have always spoken my mind, and never been ashamed to be myself or speak out against others who have tried to make me feel bad about it”* (Elisha, personal communication, November 8, 2013).

Elisha is a participant whose experiences varied greatly from others within my study and offers an interesting contrast. He was born in Lucas, Texas which was home to 35,000 inhabitants but moved in his early years to Southeast Texas, Joiner, a city that is a largely oil refining city of 55,000 inhabitants. Elisha is twenty-five years old and is one of three children, having a twin sister and younger brother. Elisha and his sister both identify as being, in regards to their sexual orientation, as homosexual. It is important to note that while they share this similarity they are, based on our interviews, very different personality-wise and had very different experiences in high school.

Elisha’s parents divorced when he was very young but they are both were very active in his childhood and continue to be to this day. Furthermore, his mother remarried and Elisha described a very positive relationship with his step-father. Elisha’s mother has worked in the Texas public school system for over a decade as a language arts teacher and counselor. He describes his family as always being supportive and

never judging him after he came out. Elisha explains: “I would say that I was one of the lucky ones I never had any...no one in my family has ever made me feel guilty or bad about it at all” (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

Elisha is the only participant in my study that identified as gay at a very young age. He recalled that he knew he was not attracted to the opposite sex in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade without having a fully formed conception of sexual orientation. In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Elisha came out to his family and friends. This occurred during an argument with his brother: “Me and him got in a fight over something and his thing back then was that everything was gay...that’s gay...this is gay...and then he just screamed that Elisha is gay! And I hadn’t even told him or anything and then I see my mom and she had her suspicions and she was like is this true? And I was like yes...so my brother kind of did it for me” (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

Elisha stated that he was not one to hide who he was, and if someone asked him about his sexual orientation he would be honest—even in school. The school district that Elisha attended during the time he was opening up about his sexual orientation was composed of eight schools—five elementary schools, two junior highs and one high school. The fact that Elisha does not recall many negative experiences in junior high and high school is intriguing, since the school district has been plagued in recent years with issues tied to racial matters. This is not to say issues of race and sexual orientation are the same, rather it could be assumed that if there is a lack of understanding that leads to racial tensions that this might be mirrored in regards to sexual orientation. This is a

topic that will be explored in examining Elisha's experiences in the Texas public school system that offers an interesting contrast to other participants in this study.

### **Edward**

*"I'm a strong willed (stubborn), socially active young man. If it makes you sweat, I'll probably enjoy it. I don't like to be stationary most of the time, but there really is nothing I enjoy more than being at home. I'm open minded, open to suggestion, but hate big changes. And, if anyone is looking, I'm single"* (Edward, personal communication, November 14, 2013).

Edward is one of the older participants in my study at thirty-two years of age. He grew up in the city of Titusville located in Southeast Texas. Titusville was a city that was founded for one reason: to drill and refine oil. The area that would become Titusville in the 1910s was relatively uninhabited, but with the discovery of oil the city population and economy boomed. The city population today is approximately 76,000 people with continued growth. The school district Edward attended growing up in Titusville is home to fourteen elementary, five junior high, and three high schools.

Edward told how he was the youngest of three children, all boys, to parents who he saw growing up as being relatively religious. He was raised in the evangelical Protestant Southern Baptist denomination of his mother, although he was exposed to certain tenants of Catholicism from his father. He stated that initially the religion of his parents led him to realize that homosexuality was not viewed as normal and that the idea of "normal" was important to his family because in his words: "none of us are" (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013). Edward's coming out was more accidental than

other participants, as he was walked in on by his mother with his brother's best friend at the time. This led to a very negative reaction by his mother. Edward convinced her initially that it was just a phase that he was going through, but during his senior year of high school he left home and started doing his own thing while his parents "sort of figured it out" (Edward, May 4, 2013). The family issues of his youth led Edward to engage in dangerous behaviors, dropping out of school and disengaging from his family.

Edward explained:

Drug use, felonies. I dropped out of school because of family issues. I dropped out and I moved out and I left...so I dropped out my senior year. It was just school was easy, I was just lazy, uh, but the home thing was uncomfortable, um, my brother had told me that he wasn't comfortable with me changing my nephew's diapers because I was gay, my parents didn't let me have friends over because they thought I might be having sex with them, um, so I became very isolated at home (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

Edward states that his family issues, although the most prevalent, were not the only reasons his disengagement from his family and friends at the time. He recalled that although he was out during high school that he became more withdrawn from his friends and felt very alone. Eventually, Edward would reengage and begin to rebuild a relationship with his parents. He stated that this became easier to do once his parents got divorced because they started to understand and accept him for who he was and not who

they wanted him to be. This repairing of familial relationships led Edward to move in with his mother in order to help in her new life separated from his father.

### **Sam**

*I view myself as a loving man, brother, son, uncle, cousin, grandson, friend, etc. I would do anything for a friend as they are the family that I got to select. I'm quirky, fun, intelligent, good looking, and never shy away from a challenge or an adventure. Basically, I'm an average guy looking for happiness; love, to be content, and to be full of serenity. I'm a recovering alcoholic that takes it one day at a time and relishes every moment of life” (Sam, personal communication, January 13, 2014).*

Sam grew up within the same community as Edward, although they are a year apart in age, with Sam being the elder of the two. Although they both grew up in the same community and attended the same high school—they had very different experiences. It was found during the course of our discussions that Sam’s sexual orientation had a major impact on his life and led to some very rough patches which he is still learning to cope with today. This is not to say that Sam viewed his life in a negative light, but rather the opposite. Sam saw the good in his life while being aware of the problems that existed.

Sam was born in 1980 and, unlike Edward, grew up in a very tight knit family being the middle sibling of three. He has for the most part always had an open, loving relationship with his parents and grew up around his entire family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Sam recalled that he had a very happy

childhood and had a lot of friends growing up and, although he and both his siblings moved away from their hometown, they all still speak on a daily basis.

The story of his coming out as gay began when he was around four or five years old, although he didn't know exactly that he was gay: he stated, "I knew that I was different" (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013). He noticed this with the fact that he was closer to his brother's friends growing up because he liked the attention they gave him, while his sister's friends he viewed like platonic girlfriends. It wasn't until he was nineteen that he truly came to realize and identify as gay, stating:

I was 19. I want to say it was my first semester in college and I was dating Albert Burnet. It was weird. I was staying the night at his house and I still didn't know and I had never...you know I never had put much emphasis on it because sex was never a big deal to me because I had never had it...even today...it's whatever but like our friendship got closer, and closer and closer and eventually like I stayed the night and we were in bed and stuff like that was the hardest thing to admit...he knew before I knew and so he was like...were...he wanted to mess around and I was really extremely shy and I couldn't bring myself to do it and I don't know how it happened but he finally got me to admit that I was gay and that was the hardest thing. Even though I knew he was attracted to me and wanted to date and stuff it was still just really hard to let me guard down and tell that to somebody (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

It is at this point in Sam's life that he hits a rough patch in coming to terms with his new identity. This was a hard process for him since he had conflicting emotions stating that "it kind of felt right but kind of felt dirty" (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

He told me that he never really felt like he fit in and in high school he played sports to feel a part of something and to find a group of friends. This transformed once leaving high school and coming out—Sam began to drink. Sam recalled:

I was 19 because at the time I was [now] dating a guy that was 35 and we could get into the gay bars...he could get me in and I could drink so it really started around that time. I experimented with it in high school a few times and it really wasn't my thing because I would get wasted and [they were] horrible experiences. [In high school] I found a group of friends I could hang with [but] when we graduated they all went off to school my parents decided they wanted me to stay close to home. (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

It was in drinking that Sam found comfort and it would lead him down a long hard road of addiction over the next ten years. Luckily for Sam, through the closeness of his family and a few close friends who provided needed support, he was able to find help with his alcoholism. It was through this fight that Sam would begin to become more comfortable in his own skin and who he is as an individual. Sam will be the first to admit that he still has a ways to go but he recognizes that he is on the road to recovery and is learning to love himself and appreciate more those around him.

## **Francis**

*I am a very outspoken person. I'm analytical, compassionate and driven.* (Francis, personal communication, June 1, 2014).

Francis is the youngest of all the participants at eighteen years old. At the time of our first interview he had just recently graduated from high school. He grew up in the rural community of Cullen in Southeast Texas with a population of approximately 8,000 inhabitants. It is important to note although he attended school in one of the largest school districts in the state, he attended school in a rural area in the eastern section of the district composed of several smaller communities, including Cullen, Texas.

Francis had a turbulent childhood with the only constant in his life being his mother and sister. His mother and father divorced when Francis was very young and he relates that the relationship he had with his father was inconsistent. His relationship was so inconsistent that Francis does not see his relationship with his father being central in his development with an interesting exception. Francis seems to correlate the lack of a real relationship with his father and his sexual orientation. He recalled during the course of our first interview: “my mom and dad divorced when I was young so I didn’t have a father figure there to guide me” (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013). When asked to go into more detail about what he meant in regards to guidance he explains:

Yeah...and so I mean I went to his house probably every other weekend and I was supposed to go every other weekend and every Wednesday. It got to a point when I didn’t want to go every Wednesday so we just kept it every other Wednesday and every other weekend. So like you know

when I was over at his house there were moments where he was a father figure to me but you know he didn't try to make any extra effort you know to interact with me like you know when I was there at his house it was always stuff that he wanted to do usually. You know I mean I tried to do that stuff with him but you know it would either end up in a fight or you know just you know him telling me to go do something else. So I mean at times you know he was a father figure but you know he didn't try to make any extra effort out of the visitations (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

Francis grew up with his sister, mother and the men who his mother would get into relationships with, but that would quickly fall apart. It is because of this he sees being raised essentially by two women, his mom and sister, led to the "feminine" characteristics he described having during the course of our conversation. It is also apparent during our discussions that Francis felt he was lacking a father figure in his life and that every time he thought he might have found one they too would leave.

It is not only the lack of a male role model in his life that leads to Francis' inner conflict in regards to his sexual orientation but this is exacerbated by a religious evangelical streak not found in my other participants. Religion seems to play a pivotal role within Francis' life but also serves as a source of confusion. He states:

I just need to get my values together you know what I believe in, like what being homosexual means to me and you know...being like I still want to follow like...I don't want to say a Christ centered homosexuality

I mean I believe in God and I go to church and I love going to church but just being with a woman doesn't seem right for me (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013).

Francis is so conflicted that he is the only participant within my study that considered participating in reparative therapy, which research has shown can have negative psychological effects. All of this confusion and inner conflict with his sexuality could be related to his youth. It will be interesting to see how this continues to unfold in the years to come.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYZING AND UNDERSTANDING

This dissertation explores the experiences of gay, white men who attended the Texas school system for the entirety of their public school education. This topic was initially broken down into three main questions:

- What experiences did they have with students, teachers, and school leaders, in regards to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression?
- How did their experiences affect them within and outside the school setting?
- If their experiences were negative, what could school leaders and teachers have done differently to create a school environment that was nurturing, caring, and inclusive?

These questions served as the catalyst in dissecting the experiences of my seven participants. It was from these questions asked during the course of several interviews and follow-up communications that all other topics and questioning sprang.

All seven participants were able to articulate their experiences not only within the Texas school system, but their family and community interactions that helped to shape their experiences. During the course of our discussions each participant proved to be unique in both personalities and experiences, while all meeting the same selection criteria. It was from stepping back and looking at the bigger picture that commonalities began to emerge between participants. For the purpose of this study I closely examined the experiences of these seven participants in order to discover commonalities, in an effort to better understand some of the issues LGBTIQ youth face within the public

school system of Texas. There were several themes that emerged including: religion, heterosexual costume, personal homophobia/homonegativity, homophobic slurs, inaction of teachers and administrators, and LGBTIQ curriculum omission.

### **Religion**

Gordon Allport (1954) in his book *The Nature of Prejudice* stated:

The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and unmakes prejudice...The sublimity of religious ideals is offset by the horrors of persecution in the name of these same ideals. Some people say the only cure for prejudice is more religion; some say the only cure is to abolish religion.

While Allport was not writing in regards to prejudice as it relates to an individual's sexual orientation, but rather to their race, this excerpt emphasizes that "the relationship between religion and prejudice has historically been far from straightforward" (Ford, VanValey, Brignall, & Macaluso, 2009, p. 146). Bernadette Barton (2012) contends that "gay people are often *talked about* but seldom *listened to*; rarely are they asked about their own oppression and the individuals and institutions oppressing them" (p. 466).

The majority of the participants in telling their stories kept coming back to the topic of religion. Religion was discussed at length in regards to their relationships within their families and in describing their communities. The one thing missing was religion being mentioned specifically within the walls of their schools. While at first glance it may appear religion within the context of family and community cannot help to reshape the practices and policies on a school campus as it relates to gay youth, this

proves to simply not be true. Christianity does not solely exist within the context of a church but rather “Christian crosses, messages, paraphernalia, music, news and attitudes permeate everyday settings” (Barton, 2012, p. 466). This is especially true in the *Bible Belt*, a region of the United States whose “ideological landscape of conservative, Christian fundamentalism” saturates the “multiple environments in which residents work, shop, exercise, socialize and worship (Barton, 2012, p. 470). Texas is home to the largest evangelical Protestant population in the United States with 6,457,044 adherents and is a prominent part of the Bible Belt in the United States (Texas Almanac, 2010). Barton (2013) in her book, *Pray the Gay Away*, provided interesting statistics that indicate that “a much larger percentage of respondents who live in the Bible Belt self-identify as fundamentalist” (p. 9).

Table 1 - Fundamentalist Christianity by U.S. Regions

<i>Region of the US</i>	<i>% of individuals who self-identify as fundamentalists</i>		
	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>
East South Central	62.5	63.8	57.9
South Atlantic	49.7	39.9	41.1
West South Central	45.5	38.7	40.6
East North Central		27.2	20.1
West North Central	28	24.3	22.3
Mountain	26.7	23.8	15.3
Pacific	18.6	15.5	14.3
Middle Atlantic	12.5	14.5	14.1
New England	11	11.5	7.1

In 2010, as Table 1 above indicates, individuals who identify as fundamentalist are more concentrated in regions of the United States considered to be part of the Bible Belt, like Texas. What was alarming when examining the region that includes Texas is the trend between 2008 and 2010 for individuals who self-identify as fundamentalists has started to move upward. For this reason, it is not surprising there have been many incidents of school policy on LGBTIQ issues being driven by religious teachings and belief systems that exist within the communities they serve. This has been illustrated over the past few years in schools and districts across the state:

- **2010:** A gay 13 year old eighth grader in Cy Fair ISD commits suicide after a year and half of being bullied for being gay. School administrators were informed by parents and no action was taken (O'Hare, 2010).
- **2011:** Flour Bluff High School in Corpus Christi refuses to allow students to form a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) on campus while allowing the Fellowship of Christian Athletes to meet violating the federal Equal Access Act.
- **2013:** A gay student is suspended after tearing out portions of Leviticus to protest the treatment of a friend being harassed for "homosexuality being a sin condemned by God" (Nicholson, 2013).

These three incidents serve as just a small glimpse in the anti-gay rhetoric and the lack of action from educators when it comes to LGBTIQ issues on their campus and in their districts. James T. Sears (1991) in his book *Growing Up Gay in the South* contends the

“pervasiveness of fundamental Christian values and beliefs continue to set the South apart from other regions of the country” (p. 13). Texas is no exception with evangelical Christian values being allowed to permeate and touch every aspect of life within the state. This permeation of religion within these participants’ families and communities is key to understanding their experiences in school, as it gives a “societal sense of permission to harass and assault those who violate gender norms” (Aston, 2001, p. iii). This sense of permission is further driven by schools passively, or in some cases actively, contributing to its validity because of pressure from the community. This section will examine the experiences participants had within the context of religion while keeping in mind the religious landscape of their communities which ultimately shape the public schools they attended.

**Peter.** Peter grew up in a small town in West Texas with a population of 8,535. Within this population the majority of individuals affiliate with Roman Catholicism (38.3%) and Southern Baptist Convention (35%) with the latter being considered an evangelical Protestant denomination (Jones, 2002). Peter begins by describing how religion within his family shaped their reaction to him coming out as gay when he was twenty years old. He began speaking of his aunt who initially was open minded and “progressive,” but whose attitude began to change as time went on:

She is progressive but something has happened recently and she’s...um...I’m not going to say found God but she’s got a lot more evangelical. At one point like she messaged me on Facebook. This is when things started to get weird for about a year, but she said you know

you need to be careful about what you post because people are saying things and its really hurtful when people come up to your family and say things in the grocery store. I had had a little bit to drink so I just told her that that shouldn't matter and that I've been on this social network [Facebook] for like twice as long as she has and that she needs to accept it and she should defend me just like everyone else in the family should. She also made a comment about choosing this and I told her that it's not a choice and that I can't explain being gay any more than she can explain being straight (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This is followed by a similar reaction from his mom who Peter describes as being very religious and a member of the Church of Christ:

[My mom] was cool and then all of the sudden there was one time where she called [and told] me that she had found these books that she want[ed] me to read that are about...it was essentially ex-gay literature. She seemed to understand that it wasn't a choice in the beginning and then something happened and she started thinking otherwise. So she wanted me to read this stuff and I was like no and we got into it a little bit and then after that she's been fine. [For example], the guy I am dating now he went to her wedding, all the family functions and she is totally cool with him and asks about him all the time (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

Peter recalled that the church his mom was a member of played a part in this mentality of homosexuality being wrong and possibly a choice. Homosexuality was a topic that was condemned within the church and the larger fundamentalist community of his hometown (Peter, personal communication, July 21, 2013). Peter goes as far as to state he believes the anti-gay and homophobic mindset is driven by fundamentalist Christianity, as well as, the oil industry and it's ideal of masculinity, stating:

I think it has to do with there [are] a lot of fundamentalist Christians that are against it and then the oil field industry is huge in the town and...so and that's uh yeah. I would say those are the two main things (Peter, personal communication, July 21, 2013).

**James.** James is another participant who grew up in a town in West Texas, although much larger in size, with a population of 111,147. Within this population individuals affiliate with Southern Baptist Convention (40%), Roman Catholicism (22.3%), United Methodist (9.2%), Churches of Christ (6.7%), Presbyterian (4%), Non-Charismatic Churches (3.4%), Disciples of Christ (3.2%), Episcopal Church (2.5%), and Assemblies of God (1.6%) (Jones, 2002).

James, in his telling, had really no issues within his family, who he did not view as being very religious (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013). Where religion first comes into play in his story is his account of coming out to one of his close friends. James gave a detailed account of the encounter he had with this friend that did not take the news well, and began to use religion to justify her distaste for him being gay. He recalled:

When I first came out to her she told me that this...well I guess to kind of describe her she is very much so against any kind of change even dramatically so. She would make a show about how she didn't like change in any aspect of anything. I think that was mostly to be dramatic, but at her core she was not comfortable with change. When I told her she said that it was very difficult for her to understand because it has always been something that freaked her out and that she never really understood it or wanted to understand it, but for me [since] she loved me she would make an effort to and we really...me and her didn't directly address it for several months but we had were in a group of friends and my other friends did address it quite a bit and she would visibly get uncomfortable whenever they would bring it up or I [brought] it up. Finally, we just started pulling away from each other and the actual fight that occurred or argument was when she accused me of being a bad friend because I was pulling away. I think we were both kind of pulling away and we were in our first year of college and we were really going in very separate directions. I accused her of just saying that she was trying to adjust or not really making an effort and after me saying that several times she was like you are right I'm not going to adjust to this because it's too weird and it freaks me out. Then she made a few religious references that I don't remember the exact ones but things about the...I think the general sum was that she was afraid I was going to hell and that was pretty much the

straw that broke the camel's back and I was like okay I can't have somebody like you around me and she said I don't want to be around somebody like you...so that was it (James, personal communication, July 11, 2013).

It is important to note that James was unsure if this argument was really religiously based or if his friend was using the religious argument for validation against something she found "weird" and not "normal" (James, personal communication, July 11, 2013).

He stated:

Honestly, I don't think she was a very very religious person. She never really struck me as that kind of person...ever honestly. I mean I knew that she was religious, but not really a deeply religious person. I think that she was so uncomfortable about the whole aspect of it and how different it may seem that she was searching [for] a way to validate that and I think...that is pretty much the most common argument made and since she needed some kind of validation I would assume it would make her feel better about being uncomfortable about it and to make her not feel so bad of being the only one of my friends that wasn't okay with it. I really think that the religious aspect of it was more for validation purposes as opposed to actual belief (James, personal communication, July 11, 2013).

When posed the question of what exactly his friend viewed as “normal” since he had stated several times that his being gay was viewed as “weird” and not normal he responded:

I think as far as relationships should be between a man and a woman. She wasn't very...I mean I wouldn't say she was a very buttoned up, very prude person, but her [view] of normal was people who didn't stir the waters at all, didn't push back too much against status quo...good Christian people. Again I think more than conviction it was more what she was raised as...um I guess come from a family a mom and a dad and I think nothing too broken like divorce...nothing too broken. [It was] very much so a cookie cutter lifestyle (James, personal communication, July 11, 2013).

James' story serves to illustrate the negative response of his peers, in this case someone he viewed as a close friend, who used religion as the basis of her argument for not being able to accept his homosexuality. Although James believes that her arguments were not based in actual ardent conviction but were used to justify personal feelings of her own this does not diminish the role of religion within this encounter. I contend that his friend being able to use religion within her argument shows exactly how religion has permeated facets of life within his community where even someone who is not an ardent believer can use it as the basis of an anti-gay argument.

**George.** George is unique among the seven participants as he grew up and attended school in two separate towns—Sinclair and Esso. These two cities differed

greatly in size, with Sinclair being much larger than Esso, but their religious composition are very similar. In both locations the population of these towns affiliate with Southern Baptist Convention (40%), Roman Catholicism (22.3%), United Methodist (9.2%), Churches of Christ (6.7%), Presbyterian (4%), Non-Charismatic Churches (3.4%), Disciples of Christ (3.2%), Episcopal Church (2.5%), and Assemblies of God (1.6%) (Jones, 2002).

Religion played the biggest role within his family, with his parents not being able to accept the fact their son is gay. George noted he was raised in a very religious Southern Baptist home. It is his religious upbringing that serves as the backdrop to his experiences, especially with his parents. When describing their reaction to him coming out when he was twenty years old he stated: “They hated it and didn’t believe it...thought it was a phase. The usual uh Christian argument against it I suppose and uh even to this day they are still in denial” (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013). He emphasized the denial of his parents in regards to his sexual orientation by noting, “Yeah it is just something that we don’t really talk about...my Dad will ask me jokingly every now and then if I am still gay” (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

George recalled growing up in a Southern Baptist church and home and heard about the “evils of homosexuality” frequently. For example, shortly after the ruling of *Lawrence v. Texas*, which declared anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional, George recalled his churches preachers’ anti-gay viewpoint, and the emotions this stirred in him at a time

when he was attempting to come to terms with his sexual identity as a gay man. George recounted:

Well here's the thing...um...and I remember this very, very clearly. I forget how old I was or how often ...probably a handful of times...when Texas passed its constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage the preacher was talking about that issue in a biblical light. I remember just sitting there and feeling very uncomfortable. I don't remember how old I was but I just remember feeling very uncomfortable because I knew even back then that it was something I didn't want to talk about, I didn't want to acknowledge that it was a whole category of people...I didn't. So I just remember sitting there and feeling very uncomfortable and they would talk about the issue and it just sort of...it made me...um...very uh...God it wasn't...I never hated gays per say, but I was very much so homophobic. Not in sense that I hated them I just sort of hated...hated the idea of it and I hated that I could be that. [It] definitely stemmed from religion and just sort of everything in the church...It was Adam & Eve, not Adam & Steve (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

It is from this point that George shifts the discussion from the anti-gay sentiments within his church to those of his community and schools. George demonstrates an adept knowledge of the biblical arguments against homosexuality utilized in evangelical, fundamentalist circles. He became well versed in these particular verses in the Bible to initially be more knowledgeable in his arguments with his parents. He states:

There are two in Leviticus, one in Genesis, one in I Timothy and one in I Corinthians, and I think there is one in Romans as well. So there is six...five or six I might have messed something up in there but the one in Leviticus says "One shall not lie with man as he does with a woman it is an abomination"...um...and then the one in Genesis says "A man shall leave his parents and cling to his wife," there's the Sodom and Gomorrah story...is that the New Testament? That one comes up a lot and there is...I think it is...I think it is the I Timothy verse it says, "Drunkards, prostitutes" etc. etc. "and homosexuals shall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven" so they basically just say the same thing. So when I level with my parents I'm just like you know I don't take this book as the literal word of God and they are like "Blasphemy! Heresy!" but I'm like seriously we can take each of these books and trace [it] back to find who wrote each of these books. They are like they were influenced by the hand of God and I'm just like what does that mean? Just questioning things and I [asked] what if I decided to sit down and write a religious doctrine and claim I was inspired by God. How do you quantify that? And they are just like you can't ask those questions...you can't question God. And we just get nowhere. I read a book called God v. Gay and I'm still reading it, very interesting. Apparently, there was never a Hebrew word for homosexual because that concept just didn't exist. Man on man sex was mostly just rape to you know establish dominance and it was

pretty common which is what Sodom and Gomorrah [is about]. [The leader of the mob] was trying to rape the angels not have sex with them out of homosexual lust. My parents are ridiculous. Anyways if you take away the view of it being the literal word of God and see it as more of a primary historical source that's been converted into religious doctrine then it's easier to combat each of those verses and each of those biblical claims, but you can't do that with people who have held these beliefs for so long. My entire research project last fall was how you transform religious beliefs on homosexuality and the most...the best way of doing that was people just knowing gays and sort of experiencing them as people [and] seeing them as people and not these evil God destroying, blasphemizing, country ripping apart, marriage trampling upon group of people (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

The viewpoints of his parents and church, from Georges' point of view, are that of the larger community as well, including his school and teachers. When asked about this he talked about his experience in going to school in a very small town. George contended:

In smaller towns where I'm from, like Esso, where they are all really religious. I mean my history teacher was very vocal about sort of his activism in the church and how God save him from alcoholism...and start a family yadda yadda yadda (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

George states that the religious streak he saw in his history teacher was pretty dominant among his teachers in both towns. He does note one exception with regard to his science and physics teachers, who would skip over the intelligent design section in their textbooks (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013). Even though at first glance this statement about his science and physics teacher's seems innocuous or maybe even positive, it offers an interesting perspective on religion and school. George provides in this statement a look at how religion influences political entities like the State Board of Education who review the Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills (TEKS) that drive the composition of textbooks throughout the state with the addition of intelligent design, or creationism, within the science curriculum and textbook.

**Sam and Edward.** Sam and Edward are two participants who both grew up in Titusville in Southeast Texas with a population of 71,802. Within this population individuals affiliate with Roman Catholicism (36.1%), Southern Baptist Convention (28.3%), United Methodist Church (10%), Charismatic Churches Independent (2.6%), Episcopal Church (2.3%), Presbyterian Church (2.2%), and Lutheran (2%) (Jones, 2002).

Edward first mentioned religion in our conversations within the context of coming out to his parents. Edward grew up with a Southern Baptist father and Roman Catholic mother and stated that it was this upbringing that led him to not talk about his sexual orientation with his parents. He recalled:

I just knew that it wasn't widely accepted. I knew that it wasn't "normal" and I knew that was all my family wants is to be normal because none of

us are. So I just kinda I never really brought it up I didn't want to...I didn't even bring it up. I got caught (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

Edward was "caught" by his mother with his brother's best friend at the time when she walked in on them. He remembered that this did not initially go well and led to some stress on his relationship with his parents at first:

She was very upset and I told her...I convinced her that it was just a phase so we went through that for a while. [It was] several years, until my senior year then I left the house and started doing my own thing and they sort of figured it out (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

In his experience being raised within the confines of the Southern Baptist Church and hearing the Roman Catholic views of his mother, he noted that it was just known when he was growing up that "if you're gay you're going to hell" (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013). Edwards' sexual orientation worried him so much that he initially came out to his friends as bisexual because in his mind it was not as bad as being gay (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013). Edward related that his religious upbringing made him very scared to tell anybody that he was gay for fear of the way they would react. This is illustrated with the reaction of his church and peers within it when he was banned from attending summer camp and becoming a camp counselor. Edward recalled:

When I came out as bi and it leaked out to the church summer camp that I was going to and I wanted to be a counselor there...they said “Hey we heard you were bi and we just can’t have that reputation around”. So I was not allowed to go back to that camp because of the Christian rules and all that kind of stuff and that played a big part. I mean I never went back to that camp (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013).

Sam, although he grew up in the same town as Edward, had slightly different experience, although religion played a big role in the relationships he had growing up. Unlike Edward, Sam did not have any issues with his parents once he came out as gay at twenty years of age. Sam stated that his family was never really religious, and out of all of them, he was the only one who attended church on a regular basis (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013). Sam’s experiences focus mainly around his friendship with a classmate and his family—who he had known since they were very young. For the purposes of this study I will refer to his friend simply by Hardin. Hardin and his family attended the Church of Christ in Titusville. Sam accompanied Hardin to church on many occasions. They were very close and were always at each other’s houses. This all changed when Sam came out. Sam recounted:

I lost Hardin over that because of his parents. They actually moved their family to another city because of that. They sold their house. They didn’t want their son to associate [with me]. I worked at Red Lobster at the time and one of my friend’s had left and he came back and he was like “Hey Hardin’s dad and brother are waiting under the underpass at I-10 for you”

because that's the way I went home. Hardin's parents had turned him against me. My friend told me I might want to take a different way home...so yeah that was very traumatizing (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

When the question was posed if he believed this treatment by Hardin and his family was driven by religious fervor and the belief in homosexuality being wrong Sam contended:

That and their ignorance which I mean if...they already knew me...if they had given me a chance they would have been like, "Oh cool he's not after our son, he's not here to change him, he's not here to do anything different to the family." If they'd just given me a chance (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

Sam never got that chance though and even nearly fifteen years later he remains estranged from someone that had once been a very close friend and a family that had considered at one point to be his second.

**Francis.** Francis, the youngest participant at 18 years old, grew up in a small unincorporated rural area with a population of 1,615. He is distinctive from other participants in my study because religion plays such a dominant role in his life with family, peers, and himself. It is because of religion and the role it plays in his life that I was left with the impression that Francis has not fully accepted his sexual identity as a gay man. Francis not accepting his sexual identity is something that will be explored throughout this chapter. The area that he grew up affiliates religiously with Southern Baptist Convention (57.2%), Roman Catholicism (19.2%), United Methodist Church

(6.6%), Assemblies of God (4.3%), Churches of Christ (3%), Church of Latter Day Saints (2.1%), Baptist Missionary Association of America (1.4%), American Baptists Association (0.8%) (Jones, 2002).

Francis came out in high school within the past year, and chose social media as his outlet. He first mentioned religion playing a role in his life through the reaction of his father to the news.

Yeah, I mean he was like I...I guess a couple of days after I had come out I text him and asked him something and I can tell when he is being short with me...even over text message. I was like are you okay? He was like I saw your little announcement over Facebook. He doesn't have a Facebook so his wife had to show him so I knew it would get to him either way, but he was like we'll talk later about this or we'll talk when you get here. So when I got there that day we didn't ever talk and so I mean Christmas [came and went] and he never...he didn't talk to me. So finally he talked to me around I am going to say New Year's...around that time maybe after. He sat down and talked to me and he was like you know God says it's a sin and dah dah dah dah dah (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013).

While Francis' father was very outwardly upset about his son coming out and used biblical arguments to argue why being gay was wrong this did not bother Francis as much as the conflict he saw within his mother. This needs to be placed in context of the relationship Francis held with his parents. Francis grew up for the most part with his

mother and older sister, and while his father did play a role in his life, Francis does not feel that he had a “father figure” growing up (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013). His mother was the person who raised him and has always been an integral part of his life. Francis states that although his mother is there for him, he does feel being religious affects the way she handles issues he is having that correlate with his sexual orientation.

You know the religion does affect how she gives me her opinion. I kinda of feel it’s like where these rich people are at this country club and something provocative happens and all their country club friends come to look at them like why did they do this or you know...but uh no I think she’s worried about what her church friends think and instead of dealing...it kind of sucks because you know you always want to have your parent there to support you. I mean I know she supports me but there are things that I want to hear and I guess sometimes I don’t want to hear the truth you know. I’m not saying that everything that she says is the truth, but you know you want to have that parent guidance. (Francis, personal communication, June 3, 2013).

Francis discussed at length in our discussion the relationship he had with an older gentleman who was employed in a non-teaching capacity in the school district Francis attended. For the purposes of this study I will refer to him as Pendleton. Pendleton is an individual who Francis looks up to and had a sexual relationship with in the past. Pendleton recommended, along with his wife, that he and Francis attend Christian based

counseling known as Journey into Manhood. Francis described this counseling in the following way:

It's this Christian based counseling and they have all these different counselors. The person that founded it was the person I was going to be going to. It is counseling to get your life straight...literally. (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013).

Francis was ready to attend this counseling to “get away from the [gay] lifestyle” and that his mom was for it and wanted him to do it (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013). Due to legal issues that arose, that will not be discussed in detail in this study due to privacy, Francis was unable to attend this Christian counseling with Pendleton but stated he was not against doing it eventually (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

During the course of our discussions Francis made it clear that Christianity played a major role within, not only his family, but within his community. This has led to Francis not fully accepting his sexual orientation and viewing it as rather a “lifestyle” as he termed it (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013). This will play a major role in the way he views himself and how his peers view him within his school which will be explored in later sections of this chapter.

The problematic relationship that exists between conservative evangelical Protestantism and homosexuality that participants narrated through their experiences does not come as a surprise. Their experiences represent personal illustrations of a conflict that is occurring across the state of Texas in churches, homes, communities,

schools, and within state politics. It is not hard to see how far evangelical Protestantism has permeated and been absorbed within the various agencies within the state. The Republican Party, which has dominated all statewide offices since 1994, states in its own platform:

Homosexuality is a chosen behavior that is contrary to the fundamental unchanging truths that have been ordained by God in the Bible, recognized by our nation's founders, and shared by the majority of Texans. Homosexuality must not be presented as an acceptable alternative lifestyle, in public policy, nor should family be redefined to include homosexual couples. We believe there should be no granting of special legal entitlements or creation of special status for homosexual behavior, regardless of state of origin. Additionally, we oppose any criminal or civil penalties against those who oppose homosexuality out of faith, conviction, or belief in traditional values. (Texas Republican Party, 2014, pg. 14).

This statement within the 2014 Texas Republican Party platform mixes religious and political rhetoric to extend the hold of evangelical Protestantism within the state. This rhetoric has translated into action on how to shape schools to fit within the worldview of evangelical Protestantism. There are numerous examples that illustrate this, including:

- The push to include creationism within science textbooks and curriculum while deemphasizing evolution.

- The passage of “no promo homo” laws that prohibit teaching of homosexuality within the context of sexual education classes.
- The exclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity within state anti-bullying law, as well as, in a majority of local school districts non-discrimination statement.

These are just a few of the ways that evangelical Protestantism has been absorbed and disseminated across the state of Texas. The religious mindset of Texas, and a large portion of its populace, creates a potential volatile environment for LGBTIQ students in the school system. The negative portrayal of homosexuality by evangelical Christianity helps to sustain the idea of heterosexuality being normative within our society. The idea of heterosexuality being “normal” and homosexuality being “abnormal”, and a threat to traditional values, stems from religion and the culture of the South, including Texas, being intricately bound together (Sears, 1991). Essentially religion works to shape the cultural landscape of the state in order to “maintain social order” (Maccio, 2010, p. 444). The maintenance of this illusion of social order results in negative side effects for LGBTIQ students who do not fit within its boundaries. Maccio (2010) contends that when an individual threatens “social order and social cohesion” that there is greater pressure to conform with failure to do so leading to marginalization (p. 444). This statement reflects the experiences of the participants as many growing up in communities they viewed as conservative and religious felt the need to conform. Failure to conform would have negative consequences.

## **Heterosexual Costume**

The next theme that kept surfacing throughout our discussion was that of gender roles. Gender roles refer to societal beliefs present in schools that define what is considered the norm when it comes to masculinity and femininity. This concept is taught in the same respects that all things are taught – through social scripts on what is acceptable normative male and female behavior, which take place during adolescence and the socialization that takes place in the public school system (Trolden, 1989; Glazer, 1996; Brint et al., 2001; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Lugg (2006) describes that gender and an individual's understanding of what it means to be male and female is closely policed in the public school system, and if students do not conform to this societal construct they can risk disciplinary action and the “queer stigma” – even if they are not gay. Slattery reiterates this idea (2006) stating “despite the acceptance of gender-role diversity in the postmodern era, there remains intense pressure on people to conform to traditional norms” (p. 152). The concept of traditional gender characteristics can be especially tough within the borders of Texas where there seems to be a very distinct concept of masculinity that failure to live up to results in being ostracized.

This statement is not made lightly, but rather from my own personal experiences discussed in Chapter I of growing up in an oil town where masculinity was defined by the characteristics of the men who worked within the refineries and chemical plants in the area. Oil industry employees are composed largely of men and because of this masculinity is a principle structure that forms behaviors within the industry and the communities they employ (Collinson, 1999). It is important to note at this point

masculinity characteristics are not simply a juxtaposition with feminine characteristics, but that it is also formed in regards to behavior of other men (Connell, 1995). Connell (1995) contends that there are four types of masculinity: hegemonic, complicit, subordinated and marginalized. Hegemonic masculinity has been used in describing white, heterosexual men within the labor force (Connell, 1995). Filteau (2012) contends that “oilfield work is man’s work, and the predominance of men, rigorous labor and working conditions perpetuate a hegemonic ‘roughneck’ masculine structure within the oil and gas industry”—to state simply it is not a job for “sissies” (p. 31).

The hegemonic masculinity that exists within the oil industry is extensive through the state of Texas. The states relationship with oil started in 1901 at Spindletop, and for the majority of the twentieth century was the backbone of the state’s economy. While it is no longer the dominant force within the state economy, Texas still leads the country in oil production. Texas produces 22% of the country’s oil and provides 1.8 million jobs across the state. The economic benefits are obvious but the societal drawbacks as it relates to how individuals develop concepts of appropriate gender roles is less so although pervasive. It is the hegemonic masculinity that exists within the oil industry that I grew accustomed to and had to contend with during my adolescent years, as did many of the participants. I failed to live up to these characteristics and was teased, verbally and physically, by my peers and not supported by my teachers, coaches and administrators which led me for some time to attempt to live up to the expectations of masculinity within my hometown.

Many of the participants were driven to “play straight” in school by societal masculine expectations and the queer stigma that occurs when an individual fails to meet these masculine norms. The constant reinforcement of what was considered “normal” when it came to boys and girls led many participants to put on heterosexual costumes. These heterosexual costumes masked their true selves from family, friends, peers, teachers and administrators in an effort to not stand out from the crowd as different in any aspect—especially as it pertained to sexual orientation.

**James.** James grew up in a home where his father was a prominent figure within the oil industry of his hometown of Rockefeller. He described his father as being the stereotypically masculine, or “macho” and stated that around junior high he began to realize that he did not fit that mold. James recalled:

I don’t know...I don’t really have many masculine tendencies...not really. I don’t really have many feminine tendencies [either]. My voice is a little higher than other guys, I’m not that tall, [and] I never really fit into this physical like masculine thing. I’ve always had the perception in my head that I [have] never really act[ed] that masculine. I’ve just never been a macho person (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

When I prompted James to describe to me what he viewed as the masculine norm in his experiences growing up and going to school in Rockefeller he stated:

In my mind, kind of crude sort of, not necessarily chauvinistic but very...I don’t know...just always kind of puffed up, always showing off, always I guess thinking...I don’t really know how to describe it. I don’t

really know I mean...just very show offish and very always puffed up, always trying to impress, never saying anything girly or anything like that, never hanging out with a lot of girls, [and] having mostly guy friends and playing sports...that kind of thing (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This idea of masculinity falls in line with the common manly ideal described within the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). This led our conversation to exactly how James came to this perception. Since he had talked earlier about his father's personality and that he worked within the oil industry I thought this would be an expansion on those thoughts, but this is not where he first learned what was "normal" boy behavior. James remembered:

I don't ever really remember knowing what masculine was in elementary it was really junior high when I played football for the first year and a half and being around those guys...all the time it was basically a comparison. I would kind of compare myself to them and I would think I am not really like them. I don't walk like them, I don't talk like them, I don't really talk about the same things as them. When I would listen into what they were talking about [and] the way they interacted with one another and rough house[d] I just never really did that. It was basically [from] comparisons that I got the idea of masculine. It was the other guys I was around and went to school with that I realize[d] I didn't have the

same mannerism, likes or interests as them or everyday habits (James, personal communication, July 11, 2013).

It was this sense of what it meant to be masculine and the stigma that he knew went along with not fitting that led James to be “normal.” He explained this:

Yeah I liked being normal. I was not really popular in high school but I was the student council president, the class president, the homecoming king, [and the] prom king...all that stuff. It wasn't that I was super popular it was just that I had a whole lot of friends and I liked fitting in. I liked being the guy that everyone could approach. I liked being that person. I guess anything that didn't really fit into that I put into the back of my mind. I think I wanted to be [that] type of person. This is the person I wanted to be [and was] going to be...and that was good (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

**Peter.** Peter although he grew up in the much smaller West Texas town of Drake the masculine mindset he encountered was similar in nature. It was in his formative years of junior high and high school that he recalled really remembered noticing what was considered normal behavior for boys. Peter recalled how he formed his perception of what was considered masculine in his community:

I developed my perception of masculinity based on being around guys who were older than me. I showed livestock, worked, and/or went to church with. Also interacting with my Dad, grandfathers, and uncles had

a heavy influence on my masculine perceptions (Peter, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

He had touched upon this in an earlier conversations stating that “guys were supposed to act a certain way” (Peter, personal communication, July 21, 2013). I asked Peter to expand on what he meant by this and he explained:

In my community guys were expected to be masculine in the highest sense possible. Basically no feminine actions or antics [and] didn't pay much attention to how one dress[ed] or look[ed]. Guys who had a slightly higher pitched voice or a lisp usually had to compensate for this to gain social ground, i.e. be good at sports, not be scared of a fight, date a really good looking girl, [or] have a really nice vehicle, etc. (Peter, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

Peter states that he always knew that he did not fit this conception of being “masculine in the highest sense possible” and that his personal characteristics were more effeminate in his mind. He stated:

I always had a pretty high pitched voice. I always sang tenor and I can sing soprano. I think things like that because I was really active in choir. I could understand I was more effeminate but then just like my body language in general. I would use my hands and whatnot. You would expect it more from a girl in my opinion than a boy (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

It was at this point that Peter tried to put on his heterosexual costume to avoid being verbally or physically harassed by his peers. Peter described how he went about trying to act heterosexual at school:

Yeah, um those parts of my personality that they were making fun of I just didn't do anymore. I would try to hide whatever part it was so that way I wouldn't get made fun of any longer. I guess maybe things I would say or how I would say things. I think it was how I would say things was the main deal...that I can remember. I guess I wouldn't say them in a "manly" way even though we were in junior high and there was no being manly (Peter, personal communication, July 21, 2013).

Peter learned that trying to live up to masculine expectations of his community was harder to do than he had anticipated. His hometown of Drake was slightly different from those of other participants being much more rural in nature and on top of oil being the economic backbone of the town there was the secondary activity of ranching which his family had been a part of for six decades. He described that the way he dressed and even to an extent the activities that he participated in were not considered to be masculine enough. Peter explained:

I wasn't wearing Abercrombie & Fitch and Hollister and Aeropostale and all the name brand stuff. I was running around in t-shirts, Wranglers, jeans and tennis shoes. So, I looked like a goober and did all this other stuff that wasn't considered very manly. (Peter, personal communication, July 21, 2013).

Peter found this constant thinking of how he should act to fit in with his peers to be exhausting but that from seeing how students who were out in his high school and how they were treated by their peers he felt he did not have any other option. Upon reflection stated “looking back I suffered from depression especially in junior high” (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

**George.** George who grew up in the dual cities of Sinclair and Esso was very straightforward with attempting to appear “normal” in school. He stated that he knew was different as far back as when he was attending junior high in Sinclair. George described:

Early on I knew I didn't fit sort of an idealized version of masculinity. I knew I didn't meet that criteria, but in junior high I ran cross country and I was always sort of hesitant to shower with the other guys because I was quasi-attracted to some of them and was learning around that time what it meant or what would happen when you were sexually attracted to someone and didn't want to be in the shower with them. So luckily a good half the cross country team didn't want to shower with other guys [or] with everyone else because it was just a big room with multiple shower heads coming down. So we would just like cake on deodorant, cologne. This one time there was this one kid...I can't remember who it was...and he was in the shower with all the guys and he popped a boner and it was like the gossip for a solid month. No one actually thought he was gay but it was just sort of like “what's wrong with you” sort of a

thing, but after that I was like I can't shower...I can't shower because that's going to happen to me and it's not going to be good. (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

Just as other participants he began to describe what characteristics he had that he felt did not meet the masculine expectation for his community and school. For George this appeared to not only derive from what he had gathered from interacting with his peers but also from stereotypes pertaining to gay men. George stated:

I don't know what it is...it's always been my voice, something in my voice even back then people were like it's just the way you talk. What does that mean? There was this one kid on the team he was...he's one of those we are still waiting to come out. If there is a criteria for being gay he had the voice, he had sort of the gait in his walk, he had sort of a fashion sense, [and] he had a lot of girlfriends that's a thing. Every stereotype he had and still has from what I hear. He was one of those whose very sort of...he wouldn't just slap people's ass he would cup it and then he would...on me he would reach around and grab my junk so and people would see this...I would just...I would just...I would be like what the fuck man? (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

George, as with Peter, did not focus solely on "acting straight" but also focused on "straight dress" among his peers in Sinclair and Esso (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013). He stated "no V-necks, no tight jeans, running shoes [and] I wouldn't do my hair" or what he felt was masculine slobbish dressing habits (George, personal

communication, April 27, 2013). Now from George's account it appears that he began to figure out how to "act straight" while he was living in Sinclair, but that it was not until he moved to Esso that he was successful. George stated it was through monitoring his mannerisms, dress, and his reactions to certain social situations that assisted him in "acting straight" and not "rock[ing] the boat" (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013). This is explained in George's interaction with his tennis teammates and his reaction to behavior in the locker room:

It was all very kind of bromancy. [It was] slaps on the ass which I didn't like at first but, then it was kind of like if I appear homophobic then they are going to think I'm gay so I just went along with it [and] oh God [I was] just intentionally flamboyant...just to sort of be funny. In my mind I was just sort of doing it all to be funny and I mean no one ever questioned me (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

For George policing his mannerisms, monitoring the way he dressed and not reacting to certain situations with his peers were all part of how he sought to act "straight" in junior high and high school—all in an effort to not appear being different. This did not come without repercussions as George notes that maintaining this façade led to depression and drinking became a way to cope with these feelings. He described:

It was kind of harder to ignore my attractions and my feelings when I was under the influence of alcohol but then as I started to realize that those feelings and attractions were homosexual feelings and just sort of recognize them for what they were I would drink just out of

depression...so it was kind of cyclical (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

**Sam.** Sam during our discussions remembered while growing up in Titusville he knew that he needed to start “acting straight” and exactly what that entailed (Sam, personal communication, May, 11, 2013). He recalled this within the context of getting to high school and his peers beginning to notice, from his perspective, him being effeminate:

I guess it’s easier to describe it. When I got to high school and people start[ed] to notice then thought I better start acting straight...well not straight but masculine. I better have a girlfriend and fit more inside the box. So I had a girlfriend freshmen and sophomore year [and] we dated for a really long time. I haven’t kept in contact with her. I know that after we graduated she got an apartment and we started hanging out again, but then she met this guy, [got] married and has kids and stuff...we are friends on Facebook. But yeah I sort of had to butch it up a little bit, act straight, watch what I was saying and how I was saying it, watch my mannerisms (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

When I asked Sam to expand on this and explain what he meant when he said “act straight” he stated:

Definitely a conscience effort not [to] act flamboyant like when I get excited, unexpectantly excited I can nellie out. The pitch of my voice, my hands, my mannerisms...so to act straight, it was hard trying to pay

attention to everything I was doing all the time. I still do it sometimes now but it's just because I don't think that should like get all nelled out at work or if I'm talking to a doctor or a veteran. I'm not going to be like heeeey. But just like the way I talk the inflection of my tone (Sam, personal communication, July 20, 2013).

He noted that he did not feel the need to act hyper-masculine and saying "Let's go fishing and watch some sports y'all" but that he was definitely conscious of behaviors that other might consider feminine (Sam, personal communication, July 20, 2013). Sam recalled how it affected him to constantly hide something that was a part of himself from those around him. He stated:

Tons of repression. It didn't come out until I was in rehab [and] because alcoholism was just a symptom it's usually an underlying issue like depression. I dealt with a lot of depression. I started dealing with depression really badly my freshman year in high school. The season affect[s] it too, so like whenever the winter time comes I sink into a very deep, dark place and it wasn't until I was in rehab that I started figuring all this stuff out [since] I had a therapist and stuff. We had a therapist there on site since I was an inpatient for 30 days and we'd talk about it and stuff. It wasn't really the therapist so much that helped me out but my friend...he is one of the pillars of the AA community out here. He has a huge house and lives right down the road. Some of my friends in AA lived with him. He saved their lives so people that keeping going in and

out they live with him and they have a lot of time and sobriety now. I remember when I first got there I didn't get (intelligible) and he introduced himself to me. He was like your ego stands in your way of success and at the time I was like "my ego? I'm completely humble. I'm broken. I'm a broken man. That's where I am today." But it was a totally different thing. It was my ego [that was] cutting [me] off from the rest of the world. I wasn't comfortable in my own skin. I didn't like myself [and] actually got into rehab on a suicide attempt [and] I sort of had to do something about it. I was living with my grandma and I had gotten really wasted and I went home and I had quit drinking for two weeks and I sort of relapsed. I had disappointed everyone again. I disappointed myself. I broke up with my boyfriend that night because I would spend half my time at his house, we lived together, but my grandma I thought I was helping her out because my grandfather had passed away but hindsight is a b[itch]. It turns out she was taking care of me because she knew I was an alcoholic. She had it where I would stay with her two days out of the week. She had it where she was taking care of me. Anyways, one of the guys committed suicide and he was bisexual and he told me off a couple of days before he committed suicide. Yeah, that was really...it was very surreal...I mean I came in on a suicide attempt and to [know] a guy [that] actually did it I was like crap if I'm feeling this bad think about how his family feels and I was like crap if I did it feel how my family would feel.

I've attempted it and they know it...how do they feel already? (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

**Edward.** Edward who is slightly younger than Sam but grew up in the same hometown recalled experiences that differed from Sam with how he formulated what were acceptable forms of masculinity. He contended that because he played sports he was a "more masculine homosexual" than others he knew who were out in high school but that he still had mannerisms that would be considered effeminate. Edward explained:

I was awkward. I sat with my legs cross I didn't really...when I played sports and stuff nobody really cared it wasn't a big deal. I just had some mannerisms that gave away a little bit. (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013).

Edward stated several times over the course of our discussions that even though he was out a large part of his junior and senior years in high school that since he was more masculine the ridicule that he received was less than that of peers who were simply perceived as being gay because they had effeminate characteristics. This sense of masculinity seemed to come from one thing: sports. Edward mentioned this when explaining where he learned acceptable masculinity through his parents, siblings, and activities he participated in:

I guess my parents always tried to make me do "boy" stuff. Little league, boy scouts, other sports. However, it wasn't weird for me. I enjoyed all that. I asked for a diary, and I remember mom telling me that boys didn't

have diaries, they had journals. It was my brothers who made fun of me for wanting to learn piano, or when I had to put make up on for theatre. So, I never took piano lessons. (Edward, personal communication, January 3, 2014).

That Edward, and his parents, considered playing sports to be masculine activity, or “boy stuff,” is not surprising as research contends that “to be feminine is to be communal or expressive” and to be masculine is to be competitive (Alley & Hicks, 2005). McCormack and Anderson (2010) contend that “organized competitive team sports serve as a deeply ingrained social institution principally organized around the political project of defining acceptable forms of heteromascularity” (p. 913). From Edward’s narrative this holds some truth, as it was through sports he was accepted by peers, but when he would display “feminine” or non-masculine characteristics, as described in his above statement, he would be brought to task by his peers and referred to as “fag.” Edward described the behavior that took place in the locker room of his high school:

I saw them being really mean to some more feminine guys. There was another guy that was really feminine that went to school with us and they made pretty hardcore fun of him (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013).

It was through discourse with other members of the sports team where masculinity was regulated, and how “boys discipline themselves and each other” (Pascoe, 2005). This type of discourse sets the stage for the rejection by individuals of these behaviors that are

viewed as unacceptable making it possible for individuals, like Edward, to maintain their masculine identity. For Edward, his story of his time in Texas public school has a different ending than the other participants, as he is one of three participants that came out while still in school. He notes when he came out it no longer became acceptable by the members of his sports team to call him “gay” or “fag” because as he put it: “They were like, whoa whoa whoa, I guess we can’t call him gay because he’s gay” and he was able to shed the heterosexual identity he had maintained up until that point during his junior year in high school. It is important to note that it is unclear whether the teasing stopped because his friends no longer found it morally acceptable since he was out, or if his prowess in sports overrode negative connotations in his hometown of being gay. When juxtaposed against the experiences of Sam, who grew up in the same town and attended the same high school, it seems more likely to be the latter—although this cannot be said with any finality.

**Francis.** Francis, who just graduated from high school in his hometown of Upton in 2013, continued the theme similarly to the previous participants in this section. He referred to his mannerisms when discussing masculinity or femininity. Francis stated that he “acted feminine” and when asked to expand on what he meant by this he explained: “I guess just maybe my gestures or my voice” (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013). Francis at one point describes what he did not want to be, specifically what he termed a “flamer” (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013). When I asked him what the term “flamers” meant to him on reflection, he explained:

I guess just overly gay. You are just so gay that you are completely feminine and I mean you know I'm not saying that I used the term on people, but I get where people are coming from. I mean I don't try to lay low by any means but I'm not like...I don't wear high heels to school and wear a corset (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

Overall, Francis had a very negative mindset in regards to other gay males at his school. He tended to view overly feminine tendencies within a negative context. This was largely driven by his evangelical religious background, which I believe led to conflicting feelings about his sexuality and individuals around him, leading him to judge others by standards of masculinity he had created through personal experiences.

In this section we saw a majority of participants maintained a complex balancing act of their sexual and gender identities based on what they viewed as acceptable masculine traits. Heterosexual masculinity can be created and policed in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this study I will focus on social environments such as schools. Social environments “constantly recreate and redefine plural categories such as masculinity in particular and gender in general” (Annes & Redlin, 2012, p. 258). Simply stated, participants develop what they deem as acceptable heterosexual masculine behavior and judge themselves against this perception, as well as, other men and boys around them. The creation of appropriate heterosexual masculinity manifests in the participants seeking to avoid feminine behavior that is often associated with gay men. This desire to conform to a heterosexual masculine ideal is due to the negative reactions

of others when they ventured, even unintentionally, outside the accepted norm of heterosexual masculinity.

This can be seen in the story of George, who was very cognizant of what was viewed as acceptable behavior by those around him and attempted to fit and blend in, especially during his freshman and sophomore years of high school. This process of living up to the heterosexual, masculine norm is two-fold, as the perceptions which participants formed in their minds come from the governing of sexual and gender identity. Michael Warner (1999) describes this stating: “we do this directly, through prohibition and regulation, and indirectly, by embracing one identity or one set of tastes as though they were universally shared, or should be” (p. 1). It is this concept that is tied to our first theme of religion as it has shaped the community, including public schools, through moralism and a politic of shame. This concept of politic of shame that has been created to lead individuals to believe they should conform to an accepted norm in regards to sexuality and gender comes through “silent inequalities, unintended effects of isolation, and lack of public access” (Warner, 1999, p. 7). Warner (1999) points out the fundamental problem that explains the slow rate of change in regards to heterosexual, masculine norms:

It seldom occurs to anyone that the dominant culture and its family environment should be held accountable for creating the inequalities of access and recognition that produce this shame in the first place (p. 8).

In fact not only does it not occur to the participants to challenge the dominant culture and the heterosexual, masculine norm by shedding their costumes, but in some instances

they assist in reinforcing this norm. This can be seen with many participants who exchanged “fag jokes” with their fellow classmates, or jokingly acted flamboyant, illustrating what was not acceptable in displaying heterosexual masculinity. It is this type of culture and social interaction with Texas public schools and other public spheres in the South, as well as across the country, that educators need to combat in an effort to build positive school climates. It is through the creation of positive school climates that are conducive to LGBTIQ students that will encourage them to be who they are regardless if it fits within a normative paradigm that society has created in regards to sexuality and gender.

### **Personal Homophobia/Homonegativity**

The first two themes discussed led directly to and intertwine with the third theme found throughout my discussions with participants: homophobia and homonegativity. These two terms are in some ways used interchangeably but, although linked, are quite different. Homophobia refers to several negative emotional responses toward homosexuality and LGBTIQ individuals, while homonegativity is “anti-gay attitudes, beliefs, and judgments” (Slootmaeckers & Lievens, 2013). Slootmaeckers & Lievens (2013) note that sociological studies explain homophobia and homonegativity in terms of five factors: religion, gender, age, education, and contact with LGBTIQ individuals. In terms of these seven participants their own personal homophobia and homonegativity stems clearly from three of these five: religion, education, and contact with other LGBTIQ youth in their schools. This is reflected in their narratives, as they frequently expound on how they were affected by religion within their families and communities,

as well as, their contact with other LGBTIQ youth in their schools while coming to terms with their identity as gay men.

**George.** Personal homophobia and homonegativity can be seen prominently in the experiences of George, especially through a religious lens. George grew up in a Baptist family and described his parents as being very religious and wanting to have a “normal” family life. He recalled his experiences at church right after the Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage was passed in Texas and how uncomfortable he felt in his own skin regarding his sexual orientation. He stated this discomfort with his sexual orientation stemmed from religion and he was “very much so homophobic” in a sense he “hated the idea of it and hated that I could be that” (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

The fact that George’s church spoke out against homosexuality is not surprising, especially in a highly religious and conservative state like Texas. These teachings have a very negative side effect in that they instill in their listener negative thoughts and feelings regarding homosexuality—toward others and themselves. George described how this drove his interaction with other students and his own self-identification as a gay man:

I was one of those that would be like stop being a faggot or you’re such a fag, you’re so gay...seriously meaning it but joking at other times as well.

I was the classic closet case afraid to be it so I hated it...sort of a thing

(George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

George states that even though he felt his high school in Esso was a more positive environment than the school he had attended in Sinclair, he still never thought of coming out in high school because as he put it: “That wasn’t even an option for me because I couldn’t accept that I was gay back then...I hadn’t reached the point of self-acceptance...that was still a ways off” (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013). George effectively relayed the homophobia and negative self-perception he felt while working toward accepting his identity as a gay man in one question: Have you heard it said that the most homophobic people are the ones that are the deepest in the closet? (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

**Francis.** The youngest participant, Francis, described how Christianity played a major role in his upbringing and his identity. He went as far as to describe his intentions within the past year to attend Christian counseling in order to assist him in getting away from the gay lifestyle. This has in one respect given him a very negative perception of himself in regards to his sexual orientation. When asked if he saw being Christian and being gay as two things that are not compatible in the context of religion he contended:

They talk about all the sodomy and stuff. I don’t know I think if we are made in God’s image and you know I’m not saying that God made us gay and I’m not saying that it wasn’t Satan that put that perversion into us but if...and I’m not trying to play the blame game but if God really wanted to help us be heterosexual or whatever then why hasn’t he? And I’m not saying that God is going to pop out of nowhere and heal me [but] people

see homosexuality as a disease and you know a curse...why would I be cursed? Why me? (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

This statement illustrates a negative bent to Francis' viewpoint on being gay conflicting with his Christian identity. He goes as far to state he doesn't necessarily believe God made him gay and seems to point toward the other end of the religious spectrum stating that Satan put "that perversion" into him (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013). I followed this statement with asking him if he felt he was a good Christian regardless of his sexuality, to which he stated: "In every other aspect yes but when it comes to sexuality you know sin is sin...one sin doesn't outweigh the other" (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

The negative view of homosexuality that Francis appears to have of himself, instilled in him through his Christian faith, extends to other LGBTIQ youth he encountered within his school. During our discussions he stated there were other students who had come out in his high school. He recalled:

Yeah, I mean there had already been a bunch of other gay guys...not a bunch but a handful of gay guys in the school but I guess they...I'm not trying to be discriminatory or rude in anyway but I guess they would be called flamers (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013).

When I asked him later to describe what exactly he meant by the term "flamers" he explained they were "overly gay," so much so they were "completely feminine" (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

**Sam.** Sam dealt with some very negative feelings about being gay which came in large part to the need to live up to the normative concept of masculinity. He stated the negative feelings he had toward being gay and other LGBTIQ individuals:

One day somebody said something and I was like, I don't like gay people and they were like, aren't you gay? And I was like, yeah. So he pulled me to the side and we had a really good talk and he said, "How do you feel about Sam?" We had another guy in the program called Sam. I [said] I like him he's really awesome and he [said], "We'll start from there. Let's build a better relationship with gay people." I think where my strong dislike of gay people comes from...I used to call them retail whores. [Retail whores] are the people that work in retail and they go out every single night. Gay bars never worked out for me. I mean I would go...I would go with a big group of friends. I'm not there...I [didn't] want to meet anybody there I wasn't interested in dating at the time. The last time I went some guy was hitting on me and I wasn't really interested. I told him I'm just here with friends and I'm not interested, and he knocked me on the ground. I was like, you're really not going to get my number now. I had this preconceived notion that all gays were aggressive party animals, [but] I know differently now. I [had] some really close gay friends but yeah...I generalized the whole entire group people and that's as bad as racism. I don't know...I'm working on it still

to this day, but I got really close to the other Sam - he moved to Colorado (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

Upon further reflection Sam admitted, “Oh I wasn’t comfortable in my own skin whatsoever. I didn’t like gay people. Everything I didn’t like about other people I was” (Sam, personal communication, July 20, 2013).

The personal homonegativity and homophobia expressed by participants is not uncommon and is linked to the concept of “acting straight” through performing masculine expectations and shunning perceived effeminacy. Sánchez and Vilain (2012) state that “survey studies with gay men have yielded results that support the idea that gay men scrutinize gender roles in themselves and in other gay men” (p. 112). This scrutiny of appropriate gender behavior is illustrated in how participants viewed effeminate traits, such as with how their voices sound or their mannerism. It was the negative perception of effeminacy, as well as, the importance placed on appropriate masculine behavior in their schools that led many participants to put on their heterosexual costumes. It also led, in several cases, to participants measuring their own masculinity against those they perceive as being effeminate, such as with Francis who distinguished himself from those he termed “flamers.”

There has been research conducted that has attempted to explain why gay men focus on their perceived masculinity (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012). Harry (1983) suggests gay men reject what is viewed as effeminate traits as protection from further ridicule and estrangement from their peers, while Bailey (1996) contended conforming to masculine norms assists in distancing themselves from stereotypes associated with homosexuality.

The focus on masculinity in gay men is not without its negative effects. Researchers contended it tends to internalized homophobia and negative feelings about being gay (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009; Sanchez, Westefeld & Liu, 2010).

Gender roles in the public school system are real. Lugg (2005) contends that “gender, or how an individual performs his or her socially constructed understandings of what it means to be male and female has been tightly regulated in public schools” and that individuals “failing to tightly conform to these social expectations are at risk” of having a queer stigma attached to them (p. 37). The perpetration of accepted gender roles is seen within the school curriculum. The teaching of stereotypes and gender expectations can blatantly be seen within sexual education. Sexual education is unlike other academic subjects as it “openly aims to influence students’ aspirations and intimate choices about sexual activity and family relationships” (Hendricks & Howerton, 2011, p. 611). Gender stereotypes of the masculine and feminine are illustrated in a story utilized in a popular sex education curriculum:

Deep inside every man is a knight in shining armor, ready to rescue a maiden and slay a dragon. When a man feels trusted, he is free to be the strong, protecting man he longs to be. Imagine a knight traveling through the countryside. He hears a princess in distress and rushes gallantly to slay the dragon. The princess calls out, “I think this noose will work better!” and throws him a rope. As she tells him how to use the noose, the knight obliges her and kills the dragon. Everyone is happy, except the knight, who doesn’t feel like a hero. He is depressed and feels unsure of

himself. He would have preferred to use his own sword. The knight goes on another trip. The princess reminds him to take the noose. The knight hears another maiden in distress. He remembers how he used to feel before he met the princess; with a surge of confidence, he slays the dragon with his sword. All the townspeople rejoice, and the knight is a hero. He never returned to the princess. Instead, he lived happily ever after in the village, and eventually married the maiden—but only after making sure she knew nothing about nooses. Moral of the story: occasional assistance may be all right, but too much will lessen a man's confidence or even turn him away from his princess (Hendricks & Howerton, 2011, p. 589).

This very same sexual education curriculum lists the five major needs of women and men. It states that men need “sexual fulfillment, recreational companionship, physical attractiveness, admiration, and domestic support” while women need “affection, conversation, honesty, openness, financial support, and family commitment” (Waxman, 2005).

It is important to note the public school system is not the only place individuals experience gender socialization, this also occurs within interactions with the community, family, and peer groups. This socialization takes many subtle but substantial forms, such as, what is considered appropriate toys, sports, and/or other activities for each gender. Genderization can be seen as early as elementary school where students play games and activities that “are loaded with gender codes, such as the dress-up corner,

building blocks and trucks, mini-kitchen sets, and even books in bins sorts by ‘boys interests’ and ‘girls interests’ (Meyer, 2010, p. 7).

It is through these types of gender socialization that LGBTIQ students display homophobia and internalized homonegativity, which can have several negative effects—most prominently depression (Rosser et al., 2008). The public school system can take a leading role in rewriting the social scripts by working toward non-gendering them and creating an environment that is conducive to the development of all students. I am not so naïve to think that this can be done easily, especially in Texas with the deeply entrenched social norms associated with male and female—but the possibility is there and will be expounded upon in Chapter VI.

### **Homophobic Slurs**

The religious views of participants’ parents, teachers and community members led to feelings of isolation and negative self-image. These feelings were exacerbated by homophobic slurs expressed within interactions with their peers.

**George.** This is illustrated in an interaction George recalled, with vivid detail, during his freshman year of high school where his tormentors became physical after a period of time where homophobic slurs were constantly directed toward him. George explained:

Faggot...queer...yeah a list of gay slurs...all of them. Then my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year my freshmen year nothing really happened, but my sophomore year though every day after lunch this like group of guys started following me. [They were] following me down the hallway and just sort of yelling

things at me and then one time they encircled me and were like “You are such a faggot. No one likes you. No one wants you here” and after that I started taking a different way back to my classroom. I was essentially late back to class every day after lunch (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This had a very real effect on George’s feeling of safety at school especially after the experience of being accosted and taunted in the hallways after lunch. I asked him to describe exactly how this affected him during this time in his life and he stated:

It didn’t affect my grades. It did affect my feelings of safety and comfort, well-being ‘cause it was depressing I would worry every day. I would sit with my friends at lunch and they would all...they would all leave to go back to class and I would be like...what I would do is I would go and get a slushy and be like, “Oh yeah y’all go back to class I am going to go get a slushy and I will see y’all up there.” I would always show up late back to class with my slushy just to avoid that hallway with those people. So I mean that was...my friends noticed and they were concerned but I would just tell them don’t worry about it...it will be fine. It made me really depressed because I didn’t understand why they would do those things to me when I was so far from being out. Um, and it was hard (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This altercation with other students over his perceived sexuality, as he had not come out at this time, led to a conscious change in his routine going to and from class:

Yeah, but after that after I started taking the long way around I uh I didn't really see them again. If I saw them I...uh...it wouldn't be like all of them it would just be like one or two and if the two people the one or two people who I actually knew from that group...if I saw anyone else and they weren't around them they would leave me alone...but uh if it was one of those two people they would yell... (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

**Francis.** Francis had similar experiences with students using homophobic slurs like “faggot” and “gay” but he remembered that these slurs were often coupled with rumors being starting about his gay exploits (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013). When asked to recall these experiences, some of which were very recent, he stated:

Well let's see...when I...when we were younger my best friend lived next door to me. He still lives next door to me but we're not really friends anymore we are acquaintances I guess. I would always go over to his house and we'd just play video games or we'd do our homework and so people would start rumors and stuff. I mean we were in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade I mean come on! So then my friend started thinking that you know there was something wrong with me and he started making rumors about me (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013).

Francis remembers that these rumors were pretty common throughout his time in public schools and always involved his sexual involvement with another student on campus. He stated that:

Usually a lot of the same people would generate the rumors, but [it was] people that were their followers that would spread the rumors. After I confronted them they would stop. It seemed like after a new rumor would start they'd start again (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

**Peter.** Peter was raised in the smallest town of all the participants. It was through the course of our discussions that Peter described his experiences and how they deeply affected him and how he interacted with his peers. Of all participants Peter was the only one to recall a staggering number of homophobic slurs being hurled his way in the hallways during his junior high and high school years. When I asked him to discuss specific instances of verbal harassment he experienced in school Peter recalled:

When I was in junior high everyone...just everyone kind of joking around [and] would say stuff like "Peter likes boys" and stupid stuff like that. The worst thing that happened [was that] one of my big nicknames among several groups of people, especially in high school when I was a freshmen. They would take my name and make it sound "gay"...yeah that was probably the worst thing that happened (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

Peter stated this treatment was not uncommon for him, and he was called “gay, queer, fag and faggot” consistently throughout junior high and high school (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013). This treatment by his peers had a profound emotional impact on Peter who felt very isolated:

When I was in junior high there were several times that it was just constant um and I would cry. There were several nights in junior high that I would cry myself to sleep so that sucked and that was the only really, really tough time was junior high (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This eventually would impact his behavior in school and although Peter never experienced any problems academically because of the harassment there were other negative side effects:

Academically it didn't...at all...but like socially and...and I was always pretty shy in general even though I love being around people I was always pretty shy. I essentially am an introvert in a lot of way, but it made it worse where I didn't want to and then...that was the biggest issues that I kind of just secluded myself to my friends and I wasn't quite as friendly with most other people (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

Peter believes that being introverted and keeping his sexual orientation hidden during the time he attended public schools, especially high school, was driven by the treatment he saw of other students who were openly out in his school. He noted:

They were just...always just kind of picked on especially by the jocks in the school. They...they never had that many friends, they were always...they were like kinda outcasts in a way. One of them was actually one of our first guy cheerleaders, and at one pep rally he, there were only just a few of them, that did this dance [in the routine] and at the end of it nobody clapped, nobody did anything because he was out there, and so stuff like that. (Peter, personal communication, July 21, 2013).

Peter saw these students ostracized at his school because of their sexual orientation. It was because of these students that he kept a very tight knit group of friends he could trust and felt comfortable around. He stated that even when he started to become a little more extroverted during and after his junior year in high school that the group of friends remained as a “security blanket” of sorts (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

**James.** James illustrates a slightly different perspective among participant narratives. He recounted during our conversations that although he attended a school in a small town where he had known his peers throughout school that he never really heard homophobic slurs directly. When asked to recall an instant when someone had used the term “gay” toward him James stated:

I did the announcements in the morning like over the loud speaker and people would tell me that when I came over the speaker...people would say it's the gay kid or something like that. So no one ever really said much to my face unless I got into an argument with someone in class.

There were a few people that would throw that in there just too kind of piss me off (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

James noted that it never got more graphic than the word “gay” being used as a descriptor by his peers in reference to him. This does not mean students did not use harsher terms toward him but simply did not do so directly. He stated:

I got lucky in that nobody ever really...I never really got called a fag or anything. [At least] not to my face and if it wasn't to my face I didn't really care. I had a lot...like I said I had a whole lot of friends so usually people wouldn't say too much just in case because you never [knew] who [hung] out with who because we were all raised all over the place (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

In his mind homosexuality was viewed as very negative within the context of his school and community but the small town mentality came into play in regards to being harassed in school by other students. It was not because students necessarily did not say disparaging, homophobic comments toward him but rather they were simply careful about who the comments were made around.

Unfortunately, within the public school setting the use of homophobic slurs by students and in some cases teachers is all too common. When the use of homophobic slurs go unchallenged this “indicates that the classroom space or the hallways at school are unsafe places for students” who are gay or perceived to be because of a failure to conform to gender expectations (Mayo, 2007, p. 458). This environment precipitates in creating hostile school climates for LGBTIQ students and others who are perceived as

gay. The failure for gay male students to “act straight” comes with harsh consequences of verbal and physical harassment (GLSEN, 2007). The verbal and physical harassment experienced by LGBTIQ students predominantly occurs when they fall outside the boundaries of acceptable behavior for male and female students.

Pascoe (2005) extrapolates the concept of “fag discourse” in the public school system. She contends the use of homophobic slurs is not necessarily related to sexuality but rather hostility toward gender nonconformity (Pascoe, 2005). McCormack (2011) attempts to take this a step further by determining what makes language homophobic and outlines three qualifiers: malicious intent, negative social effect and a homophobic environment. The first requirement, malicious intent, “recognizes that the speaker is intending to degrade or marginalize a person or behavior by use of the association with homosexuality” (McCormack, 2011, p. 666). The second qualifier, negative social effect, refers to the negative social impact of homophobic bullying. Research has noted that LGBTIQ students or students who do not conform to gender norms experience higher levels of absenteeism, drop-outs, anxiety, feelings of guilt and shame and suicide (D’augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 2001; GLSEN, 2007; McCormack, 2011; Warwick, Aggleton, & Douglas, 2001). It is important to note that regardless if homophobic language “is intended to marginalize a behavior or action rather than a person, it still reproduces homophobia because users intend to stigmatize same-sex desire” (McCormack, 2011, p. 666).

An area of particular concern in the public school system, where homophobic discourse is utilized, is extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activity, especially

sports, play a prominent role within the Texas public school system, and is where the promotion of homophobia through the “types of messages concerning socially unacceptable behaviors”—specifically homophobic slurs exist (Osborne & Wagner, 2007, p. 600). Messner (1990) contends that organized sports have been transformed into a homosocial sphere “in which competition and (often violence) physicality” is valued, while what is viewed as “feminine” is devalued (p. 416). This is not altogether surprising, as sports such as football, baseball, and basketball are viewed as “masculine” in nature, while sports like tennis and water polo are not valued in socializing young boys into “male roles” (Messner, 1990; Osborne & Wagner, 2007). The value of sports in the formation of normative masculinity is illustrated in the narratives of George, James, Edward, and Peter.

James illustrated the importance of sports in regards to forming masculinity in terms of football, which was an obsession within his small West Texas town. He stated:

I mean, I played football my first year and I was horrible. I quit. I was really bad and I hated the helmets because I’m kind of claustrophobic, [but] that was how you were judged in my junior high...if you played football and how good you were...or basketball...but that was it. Even people who played other sports all played football too. Everybody played football and I was like no, and I went to the tennis team and that’s kind of an easy target sort of thing. That’s when the gay references started to come out (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This was echoed by George, who did not want to play football like his father had throughout school. He explained:

I felt like a failure when I didn't want to play football and when I stopped doing karate and picked tennis as the sport because there was always that drive growing up to be like your father, be the football player (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

Peter, who like James, lived in a small West Texas town also felt pressure to play the “masculine” sports:

No, I was doing my own thing...my dad wanted me to be in sports playing football, running track and whatnot and I never really wanted to, but I did virtually everything in UIL and choir and I showed livestock and did all sorts of stuff with 4H (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

**Edward.** Edward had a different experience, as he played and loved sports such as baseball, swimming, water polo, and hockey. It was interesting to find that, although Edward was out in high school and was admittedly comfortable with his sexual orientation, he still viewed himself as a “masculine homosexual” (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013). This viewpoint of being a “masculine homosexual” illustrates perfectly how sports in the public school system serve as a conduit to defining masculine and feminine. Edward was viewed as masculine by many due to his involvement in “masculine” sports, and did note the teasing he experienced was less

severe than what was described by George, James and Peter, who opted for either not playing sports or sports viewed as feminine like tennis.

LGBTIQ students “face specific challenges to their physical and emotional well-being” during their formative years in the public school system (Warwick, Aggleton, & Douglas, 2001, p. 129). It is because of these challenges administrators and teachers must begin to address homophobic bullying in regards to sexual orientation and gender non-conformity within their schools. Despite this need to be active in protecting the emotional and physical health of LGBTIQ students, teachers and administrators in Texas have remained silent or actively spoken out against initiatives intended to address this need. This inaction by teachers and administrators is the next theme that emerged in discussions with participants.

### **Inaction of Teachers and Administrators**

Another theme to emerge from interviews with these seven young men, not wholly unexpected from my own experience within the Texas public school system, both as a student and teacher, is the inaction of teachers and administrators toward the use of homophobic slurs and other forms of teasing that took place between participants and their peers. The teachers and administrators at many schools the participants attended were viewed as taking no action in regards to the teasing and bullying that occurred due to not fitting into the normative mold of masculine heterosexual.

Unfortunately the inaction of school teacher and administrators was not surprising as participants’ relayed the stories of relationships, or the lack thereof, with the teachers and administrators on their campuses. Research has found that this

reluctance to address normative standards of sexuality operates out a heterosexual framework (Vega, Crawford & Van Pelt, 2012). This reluctance can take many forms within the public education system.

The first way that teachers and administrators show their reluctance to address the issues that face LGBTIQ youth in schools is silence (Vega, Crawford & Van Pelt, 2012). Teachers and administrators appear to lack the vocabulary to discuss sexuality within the classroom that is conducive to creating nurturing; safe school environments LGBTIQ youth need (Vega, Crawford & Van Pelt, 2012). This leads to complete silence on the issue, which can have dire consequences for LGBTIQ youth. When teachers and administrators fail to speak up on behalf of students being harassed due to their sexual orientation, real or perceived, they leave others with the idea that homophobia is acceptable (Fontaine, 1998). Silence is what many participants remembered hearing when they were harassed by their classmates in school and because of this the harassment did not stop during their time in the Texas public school system.

**Francis.** Francis, my youngest participant at 18 years of age, when asked about teacher reactions to hearing or seeing homophobic slurs and/or physical altercations take place in his high school recalled his feelings on why teachers and administrators did not address these instances of LGBTIQ students being harassed and/or bullied within his school. He stated:

...it was all really kept...not quiet...it was just like they didn't talk about it always in the hallways, but I would hear from friends that so and so said this and so and so said that. I guess they don't want the image of

their school being you know marked or you know they don't want it...they don't want to make their school look bad. (Francis, personal communication, June 8, 2013).

This sentiment was reiterated when we revisited the rumors that seemed to be always present during his time in public schools. I inquired about teacher reactions to these rumors since he described them as not being kept hidden from teachers. Francis remembered that teachers and administrators never really did anything and rather were more concerned with protecting the reputation of the school.

Yeah that is what I feel like it is like with schools today. We can just sweep it under the rug and nobody will know. I think in general they try to keep it quiet like...just keep it swept under the rug...like anything. I mean I'm not trying to name call or say anything bad about someone, but it seemed like the assistant principal at the junior high he'd sweep things under the rug (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

Francis went on to state there were teachers who would use homophobic slurs in the classroom when speaking with students. When remembering this teacher he stated:

I mean I know she's not saying it to be mean, but I've heard her saying to her students "Stop being such a fag." I've heard her say to one student "don't be such a douche" or will tell her kids to "shut the fuck up" (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

The way this teacher interacted with students, and did not lose her job, drove home to Francis that teachers and administrators were not going to be proactive in dealing with

the issues that he was facing in school as they pertained to his sexual orientation. Essentially he viewed LGBTIQ issues as not getting the same kind of attention as other issues seen in public schools. He explained:

...also since the fact it is a homosexual issue because I see the fact that you know...I'm not trying to be racist but any Hispanic or any other boy or girl you know kind of like violence or verbal violence would get that kind of treatment. I guess the school doesn't want any stink on them so they don't investigate those (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

This appears to be a reoccurring theme in Francis' story in feeling it is simply that the school does not want the community controversy that might ensue if they were proactive in dealing with issues that dealt with sexual orientation. This is part of what Francis sarcastically sees as the "charm" of his community, which as seen previously is evangelical and conservative in their mindset (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

This is not to say that he did not feel he had anyone to talk to but rather there was not much he felt they could do about it. He relays this when talking about a unique situation where he became intimately involved with two older men—one employed in the district, although not a teacher, and the other involved in district functions. This situation came out into the open his senior year of high school and invoked media attention at his high school. This obviously brought about some issues in school between himself and his peers although it was not openly known that he was the teenage

involved. During the course of our interview he did describe how different individuals dealt with him in regards to this situation. Francis recalled:

I sat down and talked to my counselor. I didn't really tell her any details I just told her how I was feeling and I mean, I don't know, I think I had actually talked to her before everything had broken out. She didn't really know what was going on. I think after the media had come out she knew what was going on so I didn't give her any details. I just told her what was going on and um but...no nobody from administration had asked me how I was feeling you know. There was, I mean, my choir teacher, we sat down and talked about things and she had kind of figured out that I was gay and stuff 'cause I had brought one of my boyfriend's at the time to one of my choir practices for the summer. It was for all-state choir and we practiced a couple of days during the summer and he would come to those practices...and um...when I had later told her she was like I knew but I wasn't and we had talked about all the stuff. She just wanted to know or she just wanted me to know that she was there for me. She was just like, you know, I know you are still a Christian and you know...she was like so she was like I just want to pray for you and I was just like that is completely okay. We had gotten to a point...I don't know what the breaking point was for me but I just started to kind of cry and she just got up and just started to hug me and I felt good that somebody had asked how I was doing. I mean she was really the only one who was there for

me you know at that moment (Francis, personal communication, August 3, 2013).

This experience seemed to be the culmination of all that Francis had experienced during his time in the school system. Francis contended throughout our discussions that teachers and administrators did not want to address these issues because they were controversial within his community. He reiterates this within this account where his counselor did not really do much for him, but in reality he didn't really feel she was capable or willing since there was not a school environment that led him to feel this was a possibility. In regards to his choir teacher, he felt that this was someone who he could talk to openly and she did act as a sounding board to what he was feeling and going through, but at the same time it illustrates the lack of action by teachers as all this teacher could offer was praying for him.

**George.** George, who experienced the most direct harassment of all the participants, believed that it was the environment of the two different high schools he attended that drove whether or not a teacher would react to homophobic bullying or was easy to approach about incidents when they occurred. His experiences offer an interesting contrast in what he viewed as hostile and positive school environment. He described the high school he attended his freshman and sophomore years:

Teachers at my first high school had the worst students. I took pretty much level classes because I was so lazy in high school. I didn't want to do homework after so many hours of tennis practice, so in those level classes a lot of minority students would be in them and they were just the

worst kids always causing a ruckus and being disrespectful. Even in like the two or three Pre-AP classes I took the kids were just...they were just awful to teachers and didn't care. So the teachers in turn [said] "Fine you don't want to learn then we'll just sit here and do nothing" and we would sit there and do nothing (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

George's account of the atmosphere at his high school was dire and he did not really feel as if there was support for him there for what he was going through and he tried to just hide in the crowd of his rather large high school population. This is punctuating when we revisited the harassment in the hallways that led to him taking a different route from lunch every day and I inquired where teachers in the school were when this was taking place. He simply stated "I don't ever recall seeing any teachers in that hallway after lunch" (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013). The experiences he had during these initial years of high school with his teachers did not leave him feeling as if he could approach them and let them know what was happening between him and his classmates. George expressed that he was embarrassed and reiterated a dominant fear of his during this time when he stated "I didn't know what would happen; I didn't want my parents to find out" (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

When asked about teachers at the high school he attended, in a much smaller community, his junior and senior years he painted a much sunnier picture of school teachers. He stated: "They smiled more...they...they I feel genuinely enjoyed their jobs....whereas at my first high school I bet they were waiting until 2:30" (George,

personal communication, April 27, 2013). When prompted to describe how his relationships differed with teachers between his two schools and if he had better relationships in general with the teachers at his new school he responded:

I did actually at my first high school there was one, two teachers that I sort of would talk to but they were family friends and I took their classes just because they were family friends. In Esso there was I felt more of...I felt like they were easier to talk to despite not knowing them outside of school and they were just more positive. One of them was like, "You don't belong in this level class. Why are you here?"...just very reassuring. My English teacher my senior year played tennis and I found that out. I asked her if she wanted to play with me in the little school tournament type thing we were having that year. So yeah I felt...I felt a lot more comfortable around the teachers there (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

George, in continuing in this vein, noted that teachers seemed to be much more involved in the incidents that occurred between students even when it dealt with sexual orientation. He recalled a specific incident during his junior or senior year where his tennis coach, who was also a teacher, specifically confronted students for using homophobic slurs and teasing another player on the team. George noted:

...actually there were a lot of gays on the tennis team I came to find out over the years. One guy was sort of in the process of accepting himself in high school and being comfortable with that. I can't remember if it was

my junior or senior year, but we had this one douchebag on the team and no one liked him because he was really arrogant. He was nice to me [but] he would be cool and then he would be a jerk just for the sake of being a jerk to get attention. He was one of those...he was a class clown always goofing off having to be yelled at by the coach...but anyways...the other guy he was gay. It was obvious the way he talked, the way he dressed and carried himself. For some reason gay guys have a lot of girlfriends...like not girlfriends...but girls as friends and he was one of those and [anyway] he sold his iPod to the douchebag whose actually married now with a kid...it's so weird. [Anyways], he sold him his iPod and one day he was getting on the internet and looked through his history and there was gay porn on there. So we all sort of knew, but we didn't talk about it. We knew about it but didn't talk about it...wasn't a big deal, [but] the douchebag showed everyone the iPod and outed him. [He] would call him a faggot and not...I don't...he didn't dislike the guy or mind him being gay he just was a douche in general and we all saw that. I didn't get involved because I didn't want the spotlight to be shown on me, but other people on the team were like. "Stop that. That's not cool" and I think even...I think...pretty sure our coach even said something to him to even stop that...because our coach wasn't going to take any shit on that team (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

**Sam.** Sam unlike other participants remembered teacher inaction at a much earlier age. He recalled as far back as the 4<sup>th</sup> grade in elementary school being called homophobic slurs by his classmates and the inaction that followed by his teachers. The first account he gives is very detailed of a time in elementary school when his choir teacher used silence as a way to avoid discussing an issue that he feels made her very uncomfortable. Sam recalled:

I was in choir in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and we had a school performance and this is what my biggest fear is...it used to be public speaking...and we were performing and during between songs this guy stood up in the back and was like “He’s gay!” and he was pointing at me. I will never forget the moment; I was horrified it was so horrible (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

This inaction repeated itself when Sam got into junior high in his 8<sup>th</sup> grade art class. This experience appears to have affected Sam much more than his elementary experience since the teacher actually looked at him and still chose to walk away rather than deal with the situation in her class.

My 8<sup>th</sup> grade Art teacher they were talking...there was this guy that I just really didn’t like and he would tease me like really viciously and he was doing it in front of her and he was like “He’s gay!” and the teacher just looked at me and just walked away and I was like “Oh cool I get no support” (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

Sam attempts to explain why his 8<sup>th</sup> grade art teacher opted to walk away from what he felt was an uncomfortable situation for her. He states:

I don't know if she just didn't know how to handle the situation or if she thought getting onto the guy that it would further the guy's cause....or just lead them to think that oh I'm getting in trouble so this guy must be gay. So I don't know what her reasoning was but I held resentment toward her for a really long time...it happened all the time. (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

During this same time period of 8<sup>th</sup> grade Sam did have the experience of a teacher standing up for him when a classmate called him gay.

Well this teacher...I grew up with her daughter. I think somebody had said something about it and when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, she was my 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher, and...we're all family friends she knows the entire family she grew up with my father and stuff. I think in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, somebody had actually teased me in front of her, and she stood up for me. [She said] something to the effect of "I know gay people and they are not bad people so regardless if Sam is gay it is none of your concern." I think she was one of the very first people to ever actually...she knew and I know that she knew (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

This was a very positive moment in Sam's recollections from his time in the Texas public school system but it appears from the experiences of the other participants to be much more the exception than the rule as when asked if there were any other instances

where a teacher stood up for him Sam stated “none that I can think of” (Sam, personal communication, May 11, 2013).

**James.** James who grew up in a small West Texas oil town had similar experiences with teachers showing ambivalence toward the homophobic slurs and taunting that were occurring in their hallways and within their classrooms. He described during our discussion that he would get into arguments with other students in the hallway who would bring up the fact that they thought he was gay when asked how teachers would react he remembered it more for the teachers total lack of reaction:

No, not at all like they'd...when we would argue...like the only time that they ever really cared was when we were being too loud. That's the only thing they ever really cared about. I mean I never really had an experience where anyone ever just yelled it at me. I just never had...I never witnessed teachers stepping into an argument and telling them to be nice or don't say that or anything like that unless it was extremely inappropriate. I never witnessed that but for the most part they taught...that's it...I mean if you were talking when you weren't supposed to be that is about the only time they ever got mad...they weren't involved at all (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

James would have liked to think that his teachers would have reacted if the verbal teasing had gone too far or if the altercation had become physical.

They were so quiet about it like I never...they weren't ever really a player. In my mindset I never...they could [have] not been there and it

wouldn't have really...obviously in school mind it would [have] made a difference, but as far as that goes no. I mean I always knew if someone was really trying to pick on me I knew in the back of my mind that hopefully a teacher...or if someone was trying to physically pick on me somebody would stop them (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This lack of teacher reaction toward arguments that led to students calling James "gay" and other homophobic slurs brought to the forefront of our conversation of whether he ever thought it was a possibility to go to a teacher or administrator and talk to them about what was going on between him and his classmates. He didn't really see this as an option, explaining:

Yeah, I didn't want anybody to know. I didn't want anyone to think of me differently. I wasn't really sure [and] it was difficult for me to explain back then because I didn't really know what I was feeling. So I didn't really want to try to explain it to anybody else and I never really felt close to any...I mean I liked my teachers and they liked me, but never like really on a personal level. It was more just getting along. The only people I would talk to were my friends and only a select...I would never talk to my parents, my sisters...my sisters were moved, gone, but no mostly just my friends. Even then it was more of them just reassuring me it didn't matter what they say you're not gay. They didn't mean it in a derogatory way they just knew it would upset me when people would say

stuff like that and just wanting to comfort me. Mostly it was just me in my head and handling it myself (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

In our follow-up interview I asked James why he thought teachers were not quicker to step in and address the issues he was experiencing on campus. James felt it had a lot to do with the mindset of his community, which he described as conservative. He explained:

I don't think that in such a conservative town that it was viewed as appropriate to talk about alternative sexualities. I guess maybe to avoid possibly influencing them or getting complaints from parents. I think that it was much better to just stay away from it, [don't] mention it, and [don't] touch it so they wouldn't get complaints from parents and community (James, personal communication, July 11, 2013).

**Peter.** Peter, similar to James, grew up in a small West Texas oil town where there was only one high school and the community was small and rather tight knit. Although their two cities are 85 miles apart their experiences are very close in similarity. Peter and I began to discuss how he dealt with being teased and called homophobic slurs like “fag” and “gay” and by in large this was through having a very close group of friends. He felt this was necessary largely due to the fact that teachers were inactive when incidents occurred in the hallways and within the classroom and administrators were apparently not visible within the school. Peter, like James, did not recall teachers

ever stepping in to stop the teasing he experienced in school. When I asked him how he dealt with the constant teasing from his peers he stated:

The way I dealt with that in junior high is that I had a very strict group of friends. I wouldn't...other people I would talk with but I knew my close friends wouldn't [tease me]. Yeah but teachers never really addressed it. [The] principal was not around. In junior high I never saw the principal. You would see the vice principal he was out and around some. The counselors I never saw except...well even in high school, you'd see them walking down the hall to their office but that was it. (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

Peter noted that this inaction was not just regulated to him but was prominent in other situations especially with students who were openly out in regards to their sexual orientation at his high school. He recalled two male students at his school stating:

There were two kids that were two years or a year younger than me and they were out. One of them was actually a cheerleader and whatnot but even then...they would get picked on and stuff but no one ever said anything (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

Similar to James, Peter felt that a lot of this inaction was driven by the community. He explained:

I think it had to do with just the community. Guys were supposed to act a certain way, girls were supposed to act a certain way and being gay is...and most of these teachers knew...know of people who still live there

and identify as gay or lesbian but it's just something that is never talked about and it's uh...I wouldn't say accepted but it's frowned upon at the same time (Peter, personal communication, July 21, 2013).

In a later session Peter expanded on this to better explain upon reflection why his high school lacked a sense of openness where a student, such as himself, could feel free to be who they are without fear of being teased by his peers or not being protected by his teachers. Peter states:

Lack of openness at my high school was largely due to ignorance, lack of acceptance, and a highly conservative Christian mindset. Ignorance and lack of acceptance went hand-in-hand as most students were very clique oriented. The conservative mindset was present in both teachers and students and was not limited to specific ethnicities (Peter, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

Peter explains this lack of action from teachers, and openness as a whole, affected him in high school. He states he suffered from depression, but went on to show a resilience and determination to not let his negative experiences overwhelm him in the end. Peter explained that “probably the biggest way this affected me was developing a thick skin, knowing who my true friends are, and being able to overcome the bullies to show that I was way more successful than they ever would be” (Peter, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

**Edward.** Edward's experiences with teachers and administration addressing LGBTIQ issues was slightly different from other participants. Edward is one of two

participants that was open about his sexuality while in the public school system. He came out during his sophomore year of high school with the help of another friend who identified as a lesbian. Edward recalled this friend made him more at ease about coming out in high school. He explained: “I was like cool, I guess we can hang out, and it wasn’t nearly as bad as I thought it would be” (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013). It was with this friend Edward attempted to address some of the issues that LGBTIQ youth faced in his high school. He recalled during their junior and senior years in high school they attempted to get approval from the school principal to bring same-sex partners to prom. Edward described their argument:

I told them that I saw girls go to prom together all the time as friends. I see girls dancing at prom together all the time. It [was] the fact it was sexual orientation that [made] the difference that really bothered me. I was like, “These girls can go and have a good time with their friends, but I can’t, and my friend can’t take her girlfriend and be intimate with her and dance with the way she wants to” (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

This argument did not sway school administration as he remembers that “they wouldn’t allow us to bring same-sex partners [because] it was against school policy” (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013). He never found out what the exact school policy was they only knew they would not be allowed to bring same-sex dates to prom. In a later session Edward related a very detailed account of what occurred at his meeting with the school principal about bringing same-sex dates to prom. He recounted:

It was brief. It wasn't even a sit down meeting it was more like "hey can I talk to you for a second?" knocking on the office sort of thing. He was like yeah, come on in, and I was like I'm seeing someone and I would like to take him. I said him. I didn't even say hey I'm gay. I said I'd like to take him to prom with me and I understand it isn't supposed to be like that, and that I can't really bring someone of the same-sex with me. His main concern was my safety. I was like, "No everyone knows. I mean people know that I'm gay and it's not an issue." [The principal] was like "I just don't think it's a good idea, I think it's going to cause a lot of strife, a lot of problems and a lot of uncomfortableness. It's supposed to be a good time for all seniors." I was like, "I am a senior and I won't be having a good time because I can't take who I want to take and you just said it's supposed to be a good time for everyone." It just kinda went back and forth and I saw I [didn't get] anywhere (Edward, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

When asked what safety concerns the principal had about bringing same-sex dates to prom Edward stated:

Physical. He was worried that something was going to happen to me or the person who was with me. He thought there was going to be a fight you know or something like that. I [didn't] really think that there [was] anything that [was] going to happen to me (Edward, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

Edward also noted that this fight for LGBTIQ equality as it related to school prom was further complicated since it was not backed by any teacher within the school. Edward noted:

That was more of a fight on our own. [My friend] wanted to take her girlfriend and that is the whole thing that started it. She wanted to take her girlfriend and they said no. So I got in the middle of it and tried to persuade them to let her, but they wouldn't let her (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

This uncomfortableness of the principal and lack of support among the teachers was all about the comfort level of teachers, administrators and the community from Edwards' point of view.

Well it made them uncomfortable I'm assuming because there weren't many of us that were out and it was just fear of the unknown. They [didn't] know how the other kids [were] going to react. They [didn't] know how the parents [were] going to react. It's just unknown and it it's kinda terrifying when you don't know something and you don't know how things are going to play out. I feel it was more of a controversy thing rather than our safety. They didn't want to deal with backlash from parents. If it was the case of being different then it would still be an issue now like okay so we allowed it to happen and everything went fine so now we know and its okay. I guess just not knowing what's happening, not knowing what's going on, what could happen especially back in '98

you know in '99 whatever it was just a very different time. (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

Edward does not feel the fear of the unknown will continue indefinitely. He explained in our conversations that he believes things are changing for the better in his community—although slowly. Edward stated:

We are set in our ways. It is an old city. We've been here for a long time. I mean it's not progressive but we're making progress. I think [that] because when we were in high school we wouldn't be sitting here having this conversation in public. I know I'd be somewhere a lot more private if I was having this conversation and I'd be much more worried about what all these people were hearing. So it's not where we should be, but I do believe we've made progress. I mean it's because a lot of us who are [from] our generation [are] starting to run things. It's our turn to be the adults and we're teaching our kids to be a little better, a little more understanding, [and] a little more accepting of things that are different (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

In the follow-up interview I conducted with Edward we explored how administrators, teachers, and other students reacted to him being called homophobic slurs in school. His answer surprised me. He stated:

You know, I never really saw teachers as protectors, I saw them as learning instruments. My protectors were me. I was always taught that if someone was going to protect me it was going to be me. If my feelings

are hurt it is up to me to fix it. If I get hurt physically then it's up to me to fix it or I have to go to the hospital. So I don't know them not reacting [to the homophobic slurs] just reaffirmed [my] thinking that I didn't have any adults to talk to and that I shouldn't go and talk to them. To me adults are just really big kids. I mean they are taller and bigger, but not when you're in high school. I mean most of the kids are almost as big as the teachers, if not bigger, and a lot of the teachers at my high school were fairly young. I mean you had some old teachers, but then you had some new ones (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013).

Edward believed he was the only one he could count on to protect himself. He stated in our conversations that growing up he always felt responsible for taking care of himself and not to rely on other people. This was exacerbated in high school with the family issues he experienced that were tied in part to his sexual orientation and the lack of action he saw by teachers and administrators in regards to issues that were relevant to him.

As discussed at the forefront of this session, teacher silence and inaction can have serious consequences for LGBTIQ students in the public school system. It is during this time that students begin to form ideas of what is acceptable and not acceptable within the context of their community and society as a whole. Although teachers may not necessarily hold prejudices toward the LGBTIQ community or individual students, their inaction gives the perception that the use of homophobic slurs and actions are acceptable. It is with this in mind that schools can serve a key role in

transmitting prejudice (Pérez-Testor et al., 2010). Farr (2000) noted the importance teachers play in the lives of their students stating that teachers responsibilities ultimately pupils attitudes towards subjects like sexual orientation and diversity. Research shows there are two forms that homophobia can take: overt and subtle (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Overt homophobia is what probably comes to mind to most individuals where there is a direct expression of prejudice and discrimination through hostility and force toward LGBTIQ students (Pérez-Testor et. al., 2010). This overt expression of homophobia is best illustrated in the constant use of homophobic slurs and actions of the participants' peers in school. However, the teachers appear from the description of their experiences to have participated in a more subtle form of homophobia in their schools. Subtle homophobia expresses prejudice in a veiled and indirect way (Pérez-Testor et al., 2010). Devine (1989) in her research involving racial prejudice developed a model where there are levels of prejudice in an individual which affects how stereotypes are activated around stigmatized individuals. She states that:

“...high-prejudice persons are likely to have personal beliefs that overlap substantially with the cultural stereotype, low-prejudice persons have *decided* that the stereotype is an inappropriate basis for behavior or evaluation and experience a conflict between the automatically activated stereotype and their personal beliefs” (Devine, 1989, p. 6).

This model offers an interesting point of view for examining the actions of teachers within the Texas public school system within the context of the experiences of these seven participants. It is important to note at this point that I am not claiming all these teachers who failed to act are necessarily prejudice. It is more likely many are not sure how to address issues of sexuality on their campus. However, this does not make them any less culpable for what occurs to LGBTIQ students in Texas public schools across the state every day. In the context of the shocking statistics that illustrate the negative impact homophobic bullying has on LGBTIQ students', administrators and teachers can no longer afford to make excuses on why they do not act—even in the conservative bastion of Texas.

### **LGBTIQ Curriculum Omission**

The final theme to emerge through the narratives of the participants is the omission of LGBTIQ topics from the curriculum and classroom discussions. In Texas this takes shape in the political and religious arenas—many times located in the same place. This is evident in the passage of laws that effect educational programs for students in the state of Texas. These laws are known as “no promo homo” which either restrict inclusion of homosexuality within the curriculum or require homosexuality be taught strictly within a negative context (McGovern, 2012). Texas is one of eight states with “no promo homo” laws. Specifically, the Texas Health & Safety Code 85.007 states that: “The materials in the education programs intended for persons younger than 18 years of age must state that homosexual conduct is not an acceptable lifestyle and is a criminal offense under Section 21.06, Penal Code” (McGovern, 2012, p. 473). This is in

spite of the fact that the Supreme Court in 2003 with its decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* struck down anti-sodomy laws not only in Texas, but the entire country. The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in their 2011 School Climate Survey found in Texas only 11% of individuals surveyed were taught about LGBTIQ individuals in history in a positive manner. This is drastically lower than in places that are generally considered traditionally more liberal with less influences from evangelical Christianity, such as the West and Northeastern United States, where 22% to 37% of individuals surveyed were able to access curriculum in their schools that were inclusive of the LGBTIQ community (GLSEN, 2011).

**Peter.** Peter, being from the smallest town of all those I spoke with, when asked if LGBTIQ topics were present within the curriculum at his high school simply responded, “No, nothing” (Peter, personal communication, April 27, 2013). He went on to discuss how he felt that this was not something that could not or should not be done:

I guess I don't know really with curriculum because I can't think of...other than if there was a sociology class or an anthropology class. I can't think of another way of incorporating the history unless of course GLBT related things like start with the Stonewall riots and whatnot [and] the history of activism. Then obviously in health class when talking about safe sex and whatnot [have] sections for same-sex partners because that wasn't brought up in my health class. Also, I'm a big fan of the *Guess Who's Gay* panels (Peter, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

He would reiterate this sentiment during our third conversation when discussing how his high school could have made LGBTIQ youth feel more included, stating:

I also think that, in general, in any kind of literature or history oriented class the teachers/instructors explain the personal lives of writers and historic figures they may be discussing. This should go beyond GLBT, and include any disability, the socio-economic background, and potentially the racial background of the individuals. A discussion of social dynamics at the time and place may also be a good idea. Not only would this allow students to become more interested, or even personally identify, with these individuals but it will demonstrate how diverse the world is and has been. Covering safe sex practices for gays and lesbians in addition to heterosexual acts in health classes would also be a good idea in schools that do discuss sex ed (Peter, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

It is important to note that although Peter felt LGBTIQ topics could be incorporated within the curriculum, he did not know how this could be done in such a small community like his own, which he had previously described as being conservative religiously and politically (Peter, personal communication, July 13, 2013). Peter made an interesting admission at the end of our second conversation when this topic was being discussed, in that he did not know if the addition of LGBTIQ issues in a positive light would have been helpful or would have changed his negative experiences in high school. He stated:

You know I don't think so. I would been more knowledgeable about them but I really didn't want to be gay...really didn't want to so yeah I don't know how much help that would have been (Peter, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

This statement is interesting when compared to his later statement about how inclusion of LGBTIQ issues and topics would have made LGBTIQ youth feel more included on campus. This feeling of inclusion would not have extended to him by what appears to be the effects of his personal homophobia and homonegativity discussed in a previous section.

**James.** James echoed these sentiments when asked if LGBTIQ topics were discussed at his high school in Rockefeller he simply responded: “No, not even mentioned once...ever...ever” (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

However, James unlike Peter discussed how this affected him once he became more self-conscious and accepting of his gay identity. He explained:

When I started to think about it more I think I would of liked if it had been discussed just so that I would of felt more comfortable. It would have been a way to gauge how people feel about it. When you know who is okay and who is not okay...that is really probably my only main motivation. I mean I was curious about it and I didn't want to get all my information from the internet so I would of liked it to be discussed more. I felt like if I brought it up in front of other kids it would be like a giant red flag and I'd feel like I'm wearing a neon sign that says I'm gay...so

like I never brought it up (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

This lack of discussion of LGBTIQ issues in his school's curriculum, as reflected in his statement, is a prime example of the contention that schools play a key role in transmitting attitudes (Pérez-Testor et. al, 2010). James' high school communicated its' attitude on sexual diversity and issues that are relevant to LGBTIQ youth by omitting them from the curriculum and ignoring the harassment he experienced by his classmates—leaving James feeling uncomfortable and that he was not capable of asking questions out of fear of negative reactions by his peers and teachers.

**George.** George discussed the omission of LGBTIQ topics in Texas school curriculum within the context of the health class curriculum. For him, as with other participants, including LGBTIQ topics was about creating understanding through knowledge. He explained:

I am sure you know better than I that it is sort of a nationwide thing where health classes don't talk about GLBT topics...more so down here. I think California is starting to, [but] it's sort of like if you don't talk about it [and] you don't learn about it then you're not going to be afraid of it. (George, personal communication, April 27, 2013).

George went on to express some very pointed views on why LGBTIQ issues are not more prominent within the Texas public school system. He stated:

I think it is just a part of the conservative mindset which drives Texas and the state legislature, education board...everywhere. Just sort of if

we don't acknowledge it then it doesn't exist sort of thing and if we keep kids ignorant of it then we can let the Southern Baptists conservative ideals shape their negative bias towards it. I think education has become too politicized...funding and you know creation science in there. I mean all of it has become these obnoxious political issues when it shouldn't be. I feel like at least in my experience a lot of conservative people don't...they just devalue science. A quote I throw at my parents sometimes whenever they decide to call me a bleeding heart liberal is conservatives favor indoctrination while education is inherently a liberal ideal. (George, personal communication, July 13, 2013).

**Edward and Sam.** Edward and Sam who both grew up in Titusville shared similar stories and like other participants seemed to gravitate toward LGBTIQ topics in regards to sexual education classes. When referring to his sexual education class in high school Edward remembered:

It was just like [here is] how you put a condom on a banana [and] this is how babies are made. There was nothing about protecting against same-sex transmissions, there was nothing about same-sex intercourse. I don't know if there is now or not. I mean sex ed was just sex ed. It was what it was supposed to be: protect yourself, how reproduction works, [and] what can happen if you end up pregnant in high school. You know...basic knowledge that everybody should know homosexual or not. I mean you

should absolutely know how those things work (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

In our second conversation we revisited this topic and I asked Edward if he thought there were other effective ways of including LGBTIQ topics within the curriculum outside of sexual education. He stated:

Yeah I think the passage of same-sex marriage should be in history books. I think the Queen just passed same-sex marriage over there. I think that should be taught in school because it's a significant historical marker. If it had never been any kind of historical marker or if there wasn't ever any issue with it then no, but since it has been such a big milestone and there have been so many issues with it I think it should be part of the curriculum (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013).

He continued along with the historical perspective toward LGBTIQ topics including that he felt teachers needed to be cautious when discussing homosexuality in history.

Edward explained:

Harvey Milk is [a] very good example. He was openly gay and there was a movie about him, but it's just the historical figures that it's not a 100% known, I feel like that is not a good thing. If you can figure out a way to open them up to it with historical figures that were known to be gay, even like Alexander the Great was bisexual...he had a lover (Edward, personal communication, August 4, 2013).

Sam recalled homosexuality being mentioned once during an open discussion in science. He described the discussion:

We had a conversation about AIDS and all that stuff. It was about how homosexual men get it. A girl in my class explained it to everybody and she [said], “When guys have butt sex this is bigger than this. When you stick this in this something will get ripped and it is transmitted through blood and that is why gay men get it more often” (Sam, personal communication, July 20, 2013).

Unfortunately, this is the type of negative context that homosexuality is discussed within classrooms—when it is discussed at all.

Ideally the purpose of a school curriculum is to enable *all* students to be successful learners and confident individuals. In Texas, it has become increasingly obvious that the curriculum taught in its’ public schools is not meeting the needs of LGBTIQ students, as well as, many other students. This is largely due to the large influence of politics and religion on what individuals and topics are and are not discussed within the walls of a Texas classroom. The proof of this lies in the recent debate involving the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) that would be taught to students within the science and social studies curriculum. In 2010 the State Board of Education (SBOE) in Texas questioned teaching the “theory” of evolution without including the biblical account of creation (Smith, 2010). This would not prove to be the biggest controversy to come out of the review of what Texas students were learning in the classroom. Conservative members of the SBOE would attempt and in many ways

succeed in creating a conservative revisionist version of history. Smith (2010) noted that:

Thurgood Marshall and Cesar Chavez were among those on the chopping block, while the inventor of the yo-yo was cheerfully inserted and the laundering of Joseph McCarthy's reputation was contemplated. Aesop's fables were found wanting, as was a discussion of the separation of church and state. There was also a problem of race and ethnicity—or lack thereof. Board member not allied with the conservative bloc complained that the non-Anglo history of the state was getting increasingly short shrift—despite the demographic makeup of the Alamo battlefield, or the fact that Texas will soon be majority Hispanic (“The Texas Curriculum Controversy”, para. 3).

Although these examples do not deal directly with the omission of LGBTIQ topics from the curriculum, it does illustrate the conservative mindset that keeps LGBTIQ issues from being discussed within the current curriculum being utilized in the state of Texas. However, their stance is made clear within the Texas Republican Party platform (2014) which states: “Homosexuality must not be presented as an acceptable *alternative* lifestyle, in public policy, nor should *family* be redefined to include homosexual *couples*” (p. 14).

Administrators and teachers should not be discouraged by the current state of Texas politics, as they relate to education, but rather should work toward overcoming obstacles to creating positive, safe, inclusive schools—something *all* students deserve

regardless of political or religious arguments. How administrators and teachers can take charge in doing this will be discussed in further detail in Chapter VI.

### **The Outlier: Elisha**

At this point it is important to look closer at a participant whose experiences did not mirror those of others within my study: Elisha. Elisha grew up in the small community of Debs which has a population of approximately 4,000. The religious composition of his hometown is largely Southern Baptists with 31.2% of the population claiming affiliation within the church (Jones, 2002). Along, with oil, the city's economic structure is composed of other industries that are traditionally seen as more "masculine" with their emphasis on hard manual labor, such as, petroleum, lumber and agriculture industries. This is where the similarities with other participants nominally ends. Elisha's experiences do not have the wide array of negativity, in and out of the school system, that many other participants noted in their narratives of growing up in Texas and within its public education system. In our interviews Elisha described that he knew that he was gay in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and that he publically came out to his family and others when he was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade:

So it was probably 5<sup>th</sup> grade. My coming out story is kind of funny. I mean my brother, my little brother...you know how you pick on your siblings? Well, we got in a fight over something and his thing back then was everything is gay. "That's gay, this is gay" and then he just screamed to my mom, "Elisha is gay!" And I hadn't even told him or anything and then I see my mom and she had her suspicions and she was

like is this true? And I was like yes. So my brother kind of did it for me  
(Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

I saw with many participants in our interviews that family members were seldom 100% supportive when they finally came out, at least initially, and in some case were vehemently against it. Elisha described that his mother and father have always been very supportive of him and have never felt ashamed or the need to hide that fact that he was gay. He went on to describe his overall experience with his family as a whole upon coming out at such a young age:

I would say that I was one of the lucky ones I never had any. No one in my family has ever made me feel guilty or bad about it at all. So as far as family wise yeah I have never been...I remember more like my mom being I knew since you were two (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

This admission, that his mother actually stated she knew since he was two years old, prompted a closer examination of what exactly he meant by this statement. Elisha stated:

You probably have to ask her what she was observing that made her think that way. I think she told me in my family when we turn one or two when we are baby we eat our own cake and people watch us eat it and they laugh. I have a twin sister so we had our birthday together and so my sister who is the lesbian dove into [the cake] face first and ate it like

crazy and I'm like barely picking at it...stuff like that not wanting to get dirty I guess (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

It is important to note here that although Elisha's experiences, as we will see, were not negative from his point of view that normative constructs of masculine and feminine still drove others to make judgments having to do with his, as well as his twin sister, sexual orientation—including his mother. However, these normative constructs did not have a negative effect on him as he described his childhood and public school experiences as being “pretty good” noting:

Nobody picked on me for being gay and stuff like that. So even after I told my friends and pretty much anyone who asked...nobody ever bother me about that. I just never...I wasn't picked on in high school at all (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

I found this statement very intriguing since it deviated from the stories of the other six participants in my study and Elisha simply stated that “people just didn't care about it” (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013). It is important to note that my surprise was not driven by the lack of negative experiences but rather that it occurred in a small Texas town that has been known for racial tensions and problems in the past. I asked him to explain why sexual orientation was not something that a lot of people seemed to focus on in Debs. After contemplating the question he stated:

Debs to me wasn't really kind of bullying it was more like ghetto hood rat kids that wanted to fight each other like gangs. I remember the school

would break out in fights. It is predominantly Hispanic and black (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

This comment is telling of the perception of his hometown which has been documented in the media as having issues stemming from race. Although it must be stated the issues of race within Elisha's hometown go beyond just the Hispanic and African American population but also from the white population. When asked if he felt the racial tensions he saw in his school were simply more dominant than issues stemming from sexual orientation Elisha admitted that it was not something he had ever really thought about.

He went on to say:

I mean of course, I don't want to say it didn't exist maybe I was oblivious to it. I really don't remember walking down the hall and seeing people getting picked on. You would see people fighting I mean fist fighting I mean maybe people were just more violent but I don't know this is a hard one I don't know (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

While other participants repeatedly asserted that they would not have felt comfortable going to teachers or administrators with issues they may be having with their peers, Elisha did not share this sentiment. He stated:

All of my teachers I know I would have definitely been comfortable going too. I had a really good relationships with my English teacher and art teacher and I was also an office aide and the lady who ran the office that I assisted and they all knew about me and my sexual orientation and

they didn't care. We just talked about it (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

We discussed this further, and I asked him exactly what it was about these individuals that made him feel so comfortable going and speaking with them. He answered:

I mean they were just really outgoing and accepting people I mean they never really asked questions and they were just not negative about it or anything where you wouldn't want to continue talking to them. It's like the conversations that we're having they just talk to me normally (Elisha, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

Elisha stated that he does not believe these individuals, that he felt very comfortable around, necessarily approved of his sexual orientation stating "I didn't know them outside of school so I can't really say what kind of people they were outside of school but I didn't feel judged by them based on the way they spoke to me" (Elisha, personal communication, July 31, 2013). Elisha expanded on this thinking in stating: "Now that I am older I know there are people that do not agree with you but that you know still respect you. I mean obviously that isn't everyone but...I guess...this could be a case" (Elisha, personal communication, July 31, 2013). These statements give insight into Elisha's belief that people do not necessarily have to agree but that they can still be respectful and create a positive environment where you feel comfortable going to speak with them.

The experiences of Elisha do not necessarily reflect that his experiences are the norm for gay white youth living in Texas. During the course of our discussions Elisha

even commented on the fact that he saw his own experiences as unusual based on conversations he has had with other gay friends and feels that he was really lucky to not have experienced the issues that others had to endure. He commented:

I was going to tell you I mean I think I have really had...like I told you I am lucky. I mean everyone else always seems to have a hard time. They have family members that disown them, they get kicked out, they get beat up at school and I mean I have honestly just never have had any of that (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

The question that I was left with after speaking with Elisha on a couple of occasions was: What made his experiences so different from the others? Although I cannot speak to this definitively there were a few circumstances that occurred to me when reviewing our conversations. These are:

- Elisha had parents who were not religious and were very open-minded.
- His family and friends offered support and never made him feel that there was something wrong with him because of his sexual orientation.
- There were teachers and other adults at his school that he felt comfortable being open and honest with about his sexual orientation without fear of reprisal or condemnation.

Although these factors do not represent all of the reasons why Elisha's experiences in the Texas public school system were overall positive, it does give a glimpse into how families, communities, and especially schools could play an essential role in supporting LGBTIQ students. However the question still remains, is there more to Elisha's

perceived positive experiences? Was the lack of negative experiences driven by more than the factors listed above?

Racial tensions and racism in the city of Debs have been well documented in the past. Although Elisha just touched on this with his comments about “ghetto hood rat kids”, in my personal dealings with other educators I have heard Debs ISD referred to as part of the “good ole boy network” (Elisha, personal communication, June 10, 2013). The perception of a “good ole boy network” existing within the school district speaks to white privilege and patriarchy entrenched within the community of Debs. McIntosh (1988) describes white privilege as being like “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” (p. 1-2). In other words, an individual who identifies as white fits within the hegemonic viewpoint that dominates discourse and is shielded from issues that arise from being non-white in our society. Patriarchy is similar, but instead of whiteness being the dominant characteristic it is maleness that takes center stage. While Elisha identifies as gay—a marginalized status—he also identified as white and male, which are both privileged statuses within our society.

In examining the racial composition of Elisha’s high school in 2011-2012 the Texas Education Agency in its annual Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data shows 60% of the student body was white, while 40% were African-American and Hispanic. This in stark contrast to teacher racial composition which was 88% white, 4% African-American, and 8% Hispanic. Furthermore, Elisha noted that his twin sister who identifies as a lesbian and had a hard time in high school due to her sexual orientation.

This begs the question within the community and school district that Elisha resided, did his privileged statuses of being white and male protect him from negative experiences common in other participants' narratives? Did race and gender hold greater importance in his community than an individual's sexual orientation? This is not something at this point that can be answered definitively and would require further research in regards to how race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect within school districts where racial tensions and racism are well documented, such as Elisha's district in Debs.

## CHAPTER VI

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In Chapter IV the picture of the participants was painted in broad strokes and Chapter V explored their stories and experiences within emergent themes. The following questions remain:

- What meaning can be derived from these students' experiences?
- How can these experiences assist educators in creating safe, positive, nurturing school climates for LGBTIQ students?

Chapter VI will explore these questions, as well as, examine ways that policies, practices and curriculum can address the needs of LGBTIQ students. The need for a change in the policies, practices and curriculum of Texas public schools is illustrated repeatedly throughout the participants' narratives.

#### **Implications**

In the themes that emerged from the narratives of participants whom participated in my study there was much to support the existing literature and quantitative studies.

The themes that most prominently supported the literature outlined in Chapter II include:

- Heteronormativity
- Religion, Politics, and Homosexuality
- Inaction in Schools
- LGBTIQ School Programs and Effects

It is at this point that I feel it is appropriate to link these back to literature in preparation to discuss recommendations for creating positive school climates for LGBTIQ students in Texas public schools.

**Heteronormativity.** Heteronormativity is a concept that is entrenched within the social discourse of our society. Essentially, heteronormativity is the idea that heterosexuality is normal and other forms of sexuality are abnormal. Warner (1999) states this succinctly as individuals “embracing one identity or one set of tastes as though they were universally shared, or should be” (p. 1). It can be argued that the participants’ experiences were driven by this very concept. The society that we live in is dominated by prevailing discourses that sustain identities viewed as normative within our society. These identities include being male, white, Protestant Christian, and heterosexual.

All the participants are marginalized in regards to at least one of these categories: sexual orientation. This is due largely to binary systems that we have within our society that set-up one component within the mainstream and the other component within the margins. It is recognized that this dissertation operates within this binary examining the relationship and tensions between the identities of heterosexuality and homosexuality. It is this binary that participants viewed and lived their experiences. Nearly all participants saw heterosexuality as normal and felt a sense of otherness because of it. It is their marginalization which led to serious issues emotionally, and in some cases physically issues.

**Religion, Politics, and Homosexuality.** As noted in Chapter V, religion played a large role in the experiences of participants although not directly within the school setting. Politics were not directly referenced by participants, but many referred to their communities as being “conservative”. Over the past few years in Texas evangelical religious and conservative political organizations have worked together to enforce practices, policies, and curriculum that emphasize a heterosexual viewpoint within the walls of the state’s public schools. This is seen with the implementation of abstinence-only sexual education and the complete omission of LGBTIQ topics within the curriculum. All participants from the oldest to youngest noted this was the case, and they had never had LGBTIQ issues taught within their schools.

It is important to note that a shift in evangelical religious thought began during the course of this study which provides hope for the future for LGBTIQ students in public schools around the country. In some evangelical circles there has been a divergence from long held convictions as they pertain to same-sex relationships. This divergence can be seen in *God and the Gay Christian* by Matthew Vines, who identifies as an evangelical Christian and gay. Vines (2014) states he believes that “scripture is inspired by God” and is the supreme authority in how to live his life (p. 2). However, while he recognizes that most evangelicals interpret the Bible as condemning same-sex relationships that he believes “Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships” (Vines, 2014, p. 3).

There are examples of progressive churches supporting and fighting for LGBTIQ rights within their communities. For example, just recently in North Carolina where the

United Church of Christ challenged the constitutionality of the state's constitutional amendment that defines marriage between one man and one woman (Ford, 2014). The United Church of Christ is taking the stance that the law infringes on the church leaders religious liberty, which ironically the same stance taken by anti-gay churches and organizations fighting same-sex marriage laws in other states (Ford, 2014).

It is through rediscovery of ancient Biblical texts and reinterpretation of the canonized Christian Bible by some evangelical Christians, like Matthews Vines, that will have the largest impact on evangelical Christians and their view same-sex attraction and relationships. This shift and winds of change are becoming more evident even within the evangelical Christian community. The nonpartisan Public Religion Institute recently reported that in the past ten years evangelical support for same-sex marriage has doubled and "about a quarter of evangelicals now support same-sex unions" (Hinch, 2014). This is surprising since evangelical churches have largely been discriminatory in their words and actions toward the LGBTIQ community throughout their history. I am not contending this will be a quick reformation of the evangelical mindset toward same-sex relationships, since many still defend traditional teachings in regards to homosexuality. The traditional viewpoint in regards to same-sex relationships is still very much alive in many parts of the South, especially Texas where extreme religious rhetoric is at the forefront of the dominant political party's platform.

This is seen repeatedly with participants referring to how evangelical religion played a role in their relationships with their family, friends, and other community members. Furthermore, it showed to be a factor in the formation of their personal

identities and self-perception. Many participants struggled to come to terms with their sexuality because of the evangelical message that being gay was a sin. The youngest participant, Francis, illustrates this as he still appears to be forming his identity as a gay man and has not seemed to have fully accepted his sexual orientation. This is shown with his desire to be a good Christian, and not ruling out reparative therapy in the future.

The question that remains becomes, why do evangelical Christians from the South seem determined to entrench themselves within the folds of traditional teachings toward homosexuality? Why does there appear to be no room for reinterpretation of Christian scripture, especially the six scriptures that from their viewpoint condemn same-sex relationships? The answer to this may lie in the South's long history of racism and discrimination that still tints the perceptions and beliefs of some within evangelical communities. Unfortunately, the homophobic viewpoint of the South wrapped within disguise of religion is something I am painfully aware of through experiences within my own family, and is supported by the experiences of the participants in this study.

**Inaction in Schools.** LGBTIQ students face safety challenges on a day to day basis in public schools. In the United States “over 85% report being harassed because of their sexual or gender identity, and over 20% report being physically attacked” and these numbers increase within Texas public schools (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010; GLSEN, 2007). Furthermore, studies over the past twenty years “have documented the higher rates of harassment, exclusion, and assault by LGBTIQ youth in schools as compared to their heterosexual peers” (Russell, Kosciw, Horn & Saewyc, 2010, p.6). Harassment has

taken several forms including homophobic language, verbal teasing, and physical aggression (Russell, Kosciw, Horn & Saewyc, 2010).

While there have been gains in equality in the legal arena, the problems LGBTIQ students face in public schools is substantial and is exacerbated by the inaction of teachers and administrators. This is noted with the majority of participants in my study feeling there was no real support from teachers and administrators on their campus. However, addressing the needs of LGBTIQ youth is growing as more and more youth are coming out and at younger ages (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006).

In a 2010 study addressing school safety for LGBTIQ students in public schools, Stuart Biegel and Sheila James Kuehl note several organizational and institutional failures (p. 1):

- failure to appreciate the overarching importance of school climate generally
- failure to address the persistent overt homophobia in many school sport programs

While this list notes important public school failures in regards to their LGBTIQ student population, it is not all inclusive. Biegel and Kuehl do not address the failure of the public school system to address sexual orientation and gender identity in other ways. I contend there are three central concerns administrators and teachers need to examine:

1. the importance of student organizations in providing support to LGBTIQ students.

2. the training of administrators and teachers to deal with issues that face LGBTIQ students.
3. the creating of an inclusive curriculum that does not ignore the needs and contributions of the LGBTIQ community.

The participants' stories have supported this assessment, as many experienced one or more of these failures by their district, administrators, and/or teachers during their time in Texas public schools.

**LGBTIQ School Programs in Effects.** Many participants noted there were no organizations promoting awareness of LGBTIQ issues, although they felt this would have been beneficial in creating a positive, inclusive school climate. The amount of support participants felt among teachers and administrators in their school was nearly non-existent, which led to the need to hide their sexuality while in school. This can lead to feelings of isolation which produces negative outcomes academically, physically, and/or emotionally (Currie, Mayberry & Chenneville, 2012; GLSEN, 2007; Heck, Flentje & Cochran, 2011; Szalacha, 2003). Furthermore, studies have found that LGBTIQ youth are rarely, if ever, represented in school curriculum and are at increased risk for verbal and physical harassment (GLSEN, 2007; Lee, 2002). This harassment experienced by LGBTIQ students can lead to lower academic achievement and attendance and higher rates of drug use, homelessness, and suicide attempts (GLSEN, 2007; Heck, Flentje & Cochran, 2011).

The first step to combat these negative outcomes for LGBTIQ students and build a positive school climate in Texas, as well as other schools across the United States, is to

create and promote a safe space within the school. In many schools, this has taken the form of student organizations. While there are numerous shapes which these student organizations can take, I will focus on one: Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA).

Gay-Straight Alliances were created in Los Angeles and Boston during the 1980s and have grown into a leading initiative in building safe, inclusive environments for LGBTIQ students in the United States (Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lee, 2002). These student organizations are designed not only to combat discrimination, violence and harassment, but to work toward “eliminating homophobic attitudes and practices in schools” (Currie, Mayberry, & Chenneville, 2012, p. 56). It has been reported that GSAs are more likely to form in “liberal urban and suburban areas, in larger schools districts with greater financial resources, and in communities with existing support groups for LGBTIQ youth” (Heck, Flentje & Cochran, 2011, p. 163). None of the participants that participated in my study lived in areas that fit this description, and all stated there was virtually no support for LGBTIQ students on their campus. It is distressing, although not surprising, to find the formation of GSAs in school districts across the state of Texas have met with opposition.

A highly publicized example of the type of opposition GSAs can encounter occurred in Flour Bluff ISD in Corpus Christi. In 2010 a senior, Nikki Peet, attempted to start a Gay-Straight Alliance on her high school campus but was denied the right to form and meet on campus. This refusal by Flour Bluff ISD blatantly violated the Equal Access Act that was created to essentially provide equal access to student groups in public schools. The superintendent, instead of enforcing the Equal Access Act by letting

the GSA form and meet, decided to opt out by denying all student groups from meeting on campus, including the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Nikki Peet and other advocates fought this decision and ultimately won with the GSA being allowed to form in 2011, but this shows the impact heteronormativity has in school districts across the state.

These kind of actions by school districts in attempting to restrict GSA access to campuses is particularly distressing, as research has found several positive benefits related to attending a school where a GSA exist. First, it sends a message to students that homophobic hate speech and harassment of LGBTIQ students will not be tolerated on campus (GLSEN, 2007; Heck, Flentje & Cochran, 2011). This message sent by educators translates into students in schools with GSAs being less likely to hear homophobic comments when compared with students in schools without a GSA (Heck, Flentje & Cochran, 2011; Lee, 2002; Szalacha, 2003). Second, the decrease in likelihood of homophobic comments leads to schools being viewed by LGBTIQ students as places where they belong and are supported by teachers and administrators (Heck, Flentje & Cochran, 2011; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2010). Finally, students attending schools with GSAs who feel greater support among teachers and administrators were found to have higher GPAs and a feeling of belonging as compared to students in schools without GSAs (Szalacha, 2003; Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2010).

The majority of educators understand that schools must address the needs of their students, which are various and complex, in order for teaching and learning to be productive (Szalacha, 2003; Tirrozzi & Uro, 1997). School initiatives like Stop the

Violence and Save Our Schools have been geared to “eliminating violence and enhancing the safety of our school environments” but very few states have addressed the safety of LGBTIQ students in public schools (Szalacha, 2003, p. 58). This lack of action to create school climates supportive of LGBTIQ students is surprising when viewing research that notes the positive impact it can have academically and socially for these students.

### **Be the Change: Promoting Inclusive Practices, Policies, and Curriculum**

The GLSEN (2007) found in their school climate surveys that 39% of Texas LGBTIQ students stated their school had a policy that outlined reporting incidents of harassment and verbal and physical assault. However, only 9% stated the policy specifically mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This is an alarming statistic which shows the need for action to be taken within the Texas public school system to create safe, nurturing environments for LGBTIQ students.

The narratives and experiences of participants in this study humanizes the statistics that are quoted time and time again in research studies dealing with LGBTIQ issues in the public school system. This has led me to several conclusions and recommendations for the Texas public school system for creating these safe, nurturing environments for LGBTIQ students. These include the adoption of nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies, training for administrators and teachers, and the creation of an inclusive curriculum (Russell & McGuire, 2008).

## **Nondiscrimination and Anti-Bullying Policies**

Cerezo and Bergfeld (2013) point out “most schools, and consequently school climates, are rooted in historical and political policies that inadvertently (although sometimes purposefully) discriminate against students from historically marginalized backgrounds” (p. 358). The need for districts and schools to have a comprehensive, inclusive nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policy is imperative to all students’ development. This is especially true in the case of LGBTIQ students who, as I’ve stated repeatedly, experience frequent homophobic bullying leading to a higher rate of negative behavior and suicide. It is important to note an inclusive nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policy serves as the backbone of efforts to create positive, inclusive school climates in Texas schools and without it the other two recommendations of training of administrators and teachers and the design of an inclusive curriculum are not possible.

A key component many school districts and campuses lack, in some cases intentionally, is a comprehensive list of characteristics that pertain to specific types of bullying. Often policies are seen that note race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, color, and/or religion but do not mention sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. When characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, are omitted from nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies the district or campus leaves LGBTIQ students vulnerable to attack—both overt and subtle. This omission can be remedied although in some areas, such as Texas, this may prove easier said than done.

The need is apparent and resources are available to create an enumerated nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policy in districts and schools across the country. However, when sexual orientation is mentioned as an enumerated category, putting a comprehensive nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policy into practice becomes decidedly more difficult. Macgillivray (2008) offers an example of this in a town he refers to as High Plains, where in 1994 sexual orientation was added to the school district's nondiscrimination policy. This initial event "met with some opposition but quickly blew over, probably because there were no resulting efforts to change school practice" (Macgillivray, 2008, p. 29). It was not until 1998 when teachers, parents, and students wanted the school district to include sexual orientation in the definition of diversity in the district's strategic plan that problems arose (Macgillivray, 2008). At this point Christian fundamentalist organized. Macgillivray (2008) states:

The ensuing debate, which spilled out of the school boardroom and into the community's churches and schools, and the editorial page of the local newspaper, brought up themes of discrimination against Christians, violations of parents' rights to educate their children as they see fit, the balkanization of society by highlighting sexual orientation differences and debates over the purpose of school (p. 30).

This is unfortunately not an isolated incident, especially in the state of Texas. In 2012 Texas school districts were required to implement anti-bullying policies. While at first glance it appears Texas has taken a step in the right direction, it is not as far-reaching as needed to truly protect students. A fatal flaw in the requirement to implement anti-

bullying policies in Texas is that the law does not require school districts to include enumerated categories, which have led most districts to approve generic policies. The difference is noticeable and important. Dallas ISD, one of very few school districts in Texas, that has implemented an enumerated anti-bullying policy, defines bullying as:

Bullying means systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on one or more students. Bullying of a student may include hazing, threats, taunting, teasing, confinement, assault, demands for money, extortion, destruction of property, theft of valued possessions, ridicule, name-calling, rumor spreading, slurs, jokes, innuendos, demeaning comments, and ostracism of the person or another. It is further defined as any unwanted purposeful gesture or written, verbal, graphic, or physical act (including electronically transmitted acts – i.e., Internet, cell phone, personal digital assistant (PDA), or wireless hand-held device) that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as *race, ethnicity, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, socio-economic background, social/family background, linguistic preference, political beliefs, or a mental, physical, or sensory disability, difference, or impairment*; or by any other distinguishing characteristic or because of one’s association with a particular person or group of persons. Bullying also includes, but is not limited to, any threatening, insulting, or dehumanizing gesture, by a

student, that has the potential to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment or cause long-term damage, cause discomfort or humiliation, or unreasonably interfere with the individual's school performance or participation, or is carried out repeatedly and is often characterized by an imbalance of power.

Now compare the Dallas ISD anti-bullying policy to that of Goose Creek CISD, which has the more common anti-bullying policy found across the state. Goose Creek CISD defines bullying as:

Bullying means engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct that occurs on school property, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, or in a vehicle operated by the District and that bullying means engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct that occurs on school property, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, or in a vehicle operated by the District and that is sufficiently severe, persistent, and pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student. This conduct is considered bullying if it exploits an imbalance of power between the student perpetrator and the student victim through written or verbal expression or physical conduct; and exploits an imbalance of power between the student perpetrator and the student victim through written or verbal expression or physical

conduct; and interferes with a student's education or substantially disrupts the operation of a school. The principal or designee shall determine whether the allegations in the report, if proven, would constitute prohibited conduct as defined by policy FFH, including dating violence and harassment or discrimination on the basis of *race, color, religion, gender, national origin, or disability*. If so, the District shall proceed under policy FFH. If the allegations could constitute both prohibited conduct and bullying, the investigation under FFH shall include a determination on each type of conduct.

At first glance the differences between these two school districts anti-bullying policies may appear small, but the minor differences can have far reaching consequences. Dallas ISD includes enumerated categories that specifically protect LGBTIQ students under their anti-bullying policy, while Goose Creek CISD does not include these enumerated categories. Goose Creek CISD, and many other school districts in Texas, include only the enumerated categories of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, and disability—completely ignoring sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. In 2003-2004 the U.S. Department of Education noted that Texas consisted of 1,241 school districts, which is the most heavily populated school district state in the United State of America. It is alarming then to realize out of this number, only four districts across the state contain all of the enumerated categories of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression within their anti-bullying policies—Dallas,

Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio, while Austin includes the enumerated category of sexual orientation.

The majority of nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies in Texas, as illustrated, meet the bare minimum as required by the law. This is largely due, as noted throughout this study, to the conservative political and fundamentalist mindset within the state. Macgillivray in his 2008 study stated that “almost all opponents believed that including sexual orientation in a school policy would open the door to informal classroom discussions of homosexuality and would eventually result in the formal inclusion of homosexuality in the curriculum” (p. 30). While the opposition experienced is not surprising, the lack of comprehensive nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies that have negative consequences for LGBTIQ students cannot continued to be allowed. The GLSEN (2007) found in Texas that due to bullying experienced in school that:

- Of all LGBTIQ students surveyed, 31% had skipped class and 32% missed an entire day of school at least once in past month for safety reasons.
- Students who were more frequently verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation were twice as likely to miss days of school because they felt unsafe than students who were less frequently harassed (45% vs. 21%).
- Students who were more frequently verbally harassed because of their gender expression were almost twice as likely to miss school because they felt unsafe (43% vs. 28%).

- The grade point average (GPA) of LGBTIQ students who were more frequently physically harassed because of their sexual orientation was significantly lower than the GPA of students who were less frequently harassed—2.5 vs. 3.0 (p. 2)

These negative consequences are in addition to LGBTIQ students having higher levels of depression, lower self-esteem, and higher rates of suicide than other groups. It is because of how generic nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies can affect LGBTIQ students that administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members cannot idly stand-by and let political ideology and religious doctrine dictate the safety of all students.

It is clear there is a need to create clear, comprehensive nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies in Texas schools that address the homophobia that creates hostile school environments for LGBTIQ students. These types of comprehensive policies are even more important due to the fact that without them the last two recommendations: training for administrators and teachers and the creation of inclusive curriculum cannot occur—at least not effectively.

### **Training for Administrators and Teachers**

Administrators and teachers are reluctant to engage in conversations about LGBTIQ issues within their schools for numerous reasons. Some of these reasons include not having the knowledge to address these issues, as well as, a discomfort and lack of understanding in regards to the issues that LGBTIQ deal with on a day to day basis (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Furthermore, there are very few teacher programs

across the country that includes LGBTIQ issues in necessary coursework (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). For these reasons it is not surprising to find many teachers either do not know how to address LGBTIQ issues in school or are not aware the problem exists (Payne & Smith, 2011).

While ignorance of the problem and how to address it is a convenient excuse for teachers who are reluctant to engage in conversations regarding LGBTIQ issues, silence “is a moral failure of educators and citizens that amounts to complicity in the crime” (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009, p. 162). Koschoreck and Slattery (2009) state succinctly what we must strive to do within the Texas public school system:

We must arouse educators—if they are silent on the matter—to examine their complicity and silence on gay bashing, teasing, and violence against minorities and those perceived as different in schools and society (p. 164).

The arousal of educators to begin to address issues of sexuality and gender within the classroom can only be successful through passionate, empathetic leadership that establishes an inclusive environment through teacher workshops, creating of administrative policies that targets homophobic actions of educators and students, and classroom practices (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009).

There are educators in other regions of the United States that have seen this need for professional development opportunities and started to create programs meant to assist educators in effectively handling issues affecting LGBTIQ students. Payne and Smith (2011) recognized a need in their native state of New York for practical teacher

education and professional development that reached all educators and which could be tailored toward individual campuses—rather than a one size fits all solution. They outline five components of their program, Reduction of Stigma in Schools (RSIS) that make professional development for teachers regarding LGBTIQ issues more effective:

1. The program utilizes the educator-to-educator model where interns involved in leading the staff development have worked in the public school system, which “allows them to speak to how the workshop content fits with the day-to-day operations of schools” (Payne & Smith, 2011, p. 176).
2. The program brings the information to schools where teachers are resistant or have not pursued more information into addressing LGBTIQ issues in schools.
3. The program brings the “training into the teachers’ professional environment, connections between the lived experience of school and the workshop content can be facilitated” (Payne & Smith, 2011, p. 176).
4. The program is based on educational research and not political or moral discourse.
5. Teachers are given not only the facts and statistics about LGBTIQ students in our schools, but are allowed time to experiment with how they would integrate new knowledge into practice (Payne & Smith, 2011).

The Reduction of Stigma in Schools program was established in 2006, and by 2009 had reached “1000 educators trained” (Payne & Smith, 2010, p. 12). At this time Payne and Smith (2010) evaluated the program’s effectiveness and found that the workshops are “making the case that educators need to be mindful of their LGBTIQ students’ school experiences to support their well-being and academic success” (p. 19).

The RSIS program is an excellent step toward making educators aware and giving them the tools to deal with the issues LGBTIQ face on a daily basis in our schools. However, this is only one of the numerous resources and tools available for administrators and teachers in the effort to create positive, inclusive school environments. Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) offer a myriad of resources to supplement administrators and teacher training, such as the RSIS staff development. PFLAG National has created the program Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All which “seeks to provide support, education, and advocacy to students, parents, families, friends, and educators to help them create a learning environment that is conducive to the educational success of all students” (“Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All”, para. 2). They offer ten ways that administrators and teachers can get support, educate themselves, and become advocates for LGBTIQ students. These best practices are illustrated in Table 2 below and include:

Table 2 – PFLAG 10 Ways Educators Can Be Advocates for LGBTIQ Students

1. <u>Learn the Facts</u>	Students who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender—LGBT—are at higher risk for depression, self-harm, and dropping out of school.
2. <u>Understand the Language</u>	Using respectful appropriate language is an important benchmark to set a tone of respect and understanding.
3. <u>Stop Bad Behavior</u>	Don't ignore or excuse discriminatory behaviors or harassment, and don't be immobilized by fear: Not taking action can endanger students and make the classroom unsafe.
4. <u>Set the Policy</u>	A strong and inclusive anti-harassment policy not only protects students; it also protects the school.
5. <u>Plan School-Wide Activities</u>	Showing films, reading books, and planning school wide activities offers opportunities for everyone to learn and participate. These programs help build community, empathy and understanding.
6. <u>Be Public</u>	Adults should go public with their support for diversity, and oppose bullying and harassment.
7. <u>Address Cyber Bullying</u>	Take cyber-bullying seriously. Add cyber bullying to existing anti-harassment or bullying policies.
8. <u>Train and Educate Everyone</u>	It is imperative that every adult—parents, teachers, administrators, is trained to respond to bullying in ways that support every student.
9. <u>Work for Comprehensive Health Education</u>	Youth must have a clear understanding of their bodies, and health, in order to respect themselves and their classmates.
10. <u>Provide Resources</u>	Learn more about our partners and resources.

This list is not meant to be comprehensive but it can be useful in giving administrators and teachers the support and tools to address the needs of LGBTIQ students on their campuses.

### **Inclusive Curriculum**

Each participant in my study remarked homosexuality was not discussed within their curriculum. When asked if LGBTIQ topics were discussed within his high school James replied, “No, not even mentioned once...ever...ever” (James, personal communication, April 27, 2013). This was unheard of within their communities and was not deemed socially acceptable within the context of their schools. George explained his opinion for why LGBTIQ topics are not more present within Texas public school curriculum. He contends:

I think it is just a part of the conservative mindset which drives Texas and the state legislator, education board...everywhere. Just sort of if we don't acknowledge it then it doesn't exist sort of thing...and if we keep kids ignorant of it then you know we can let the South Baptists conservative ideals shape their negative bias towards it (George, personal communication, July 20, 2013).

Hill (2006) notes that once LGBTIQ individuals are in the workforce they are part of “organizations where the dominant culture has been silence regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, with the concomitant expectation of invisibility” (p. 8). Essentially this contends LGBTIQ individuals will continue to face heterosexism and homophobia outside of the public and higher education system. It is for this reason that creating a

curriculum which is inclusive of LGBTIQ issues is imperative to dismantling deeply entrenched prejudices and stereotypes that currently exist.

The reasons for lack of action by educators to create a more inclusive curriculum for LGBTIQ students are varied. The omission of LGBTIQ issues and topics can be caused by teachers' own fears and concerns. Some educators view sexual orientation as a topic within the private sphere, and do not view it as an appropriate focus within the classroom (DePalma & Atkins, 2006; Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). There are also those acting through religious motives, believing homosexuality is a sin which should not be normalized (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2009). Regardless of the reason, educators are failing to act despite evidence demonstrating the negative impact of heterosexism and homophobia for LGBTIQ individuals (DePalma & Atkins, 2006).

There are many ways to incorporate LGBTIQ issues within the curriculum, and I will offer a few suggestions, which are in no way meant to be regarded as all inclusive. First, I will examine the current state of sexual education within the Texas public school system. Currently, sex education is presented most prominently in the United States within the context of abstinence, condom use, and HIV prevention. The Texas Republican party, which dominates state politics, views abstinence-only until marriage sex education as the best option for Texas students. Fisher (2009) notes that "the Sexuality Information and Education Counsel of the United States (SIECUS) has conducted investigation and reported on some of the most popular of the abstinence-only sexuality curriculum" (p. 63). The investigation by SIECUS found that this curriculum either ignored homosexuality or placed it in a negative context. Furthermore, this type

of sexual education leads students to adopt very narrow definitions in regards to sexual relationships and tends to “emphasize heterosexual marriage as essential to healthy sexuality” (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2013, p. 1). This seemed to be the viewpoint of Edward in his description of sexual education in high school:

It was just like hey this is how you put a condom on a banana; hey this is how babies are made. There was nothing about protecting against same-sex transmissions; there was nothing about same-sex intercourse. I don’t know if there is not now or not. I mean eh I mean it...so I mean sex ed was just sex ed it was what it was supposed to be protect yourself, show us how reproduction works, shows what can happen if you end up pregnant in high school you know um basic knowledge (Edward, personal communication, May 4, 2013).

It is with this in mind that it should be evident to educators that the implementation of the abstinence-only sexual education viewpoint can lead to negative self-perception by LGBTIQ students within the Texas public school system since marriage is not an option of them in Texas, as well as, the majority of the country.

The question that this poses is: What does it mean for sex education to be inclusive for LGBTIQ? This is not an easy question to answer. Gowen & Wings-Yanez (2013) found in a mixed method study that members of their focus group had a variety of ideas on how to create a more inclusive sexual education curriculum. They found many participants simply wanted sexual education to focus “on topics that would be relevant to all young people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity”

(Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, it was viewed as the teacher's responsibility to learn about sexual orientations and gender identities to enable them to be capable of presenting this information more fully to students. The key is that administrators and teachers need to stop ignoring the topics of sexual orientation and gender identity that leave many LGBTIQ students feeling isolated and alone.

Another vehicle for introducing LGBTIQ topics to students in Texas, as well as across the country, is through literature. Bittner (2012) states that "the majority of young adult (YA) novels written before 2004 present little to no physical intimacy and, more often than not, queer relationships and sexual experiences are either presented in a negative light or the queer characters fall prey to some sort of negative consequences" (p. 357). In recent years these portrayals in YA novels have begun to change due to the increased visibility of LGBTIQ celebrities and role models (Bittner, 2012). The role of literature in addressing LGBTIQ issues is important as it shifts focus away from physical intimacy and discusses "relationship dynamics, and the role of love, emotion and desire" (Bittner, 2012, p. 358). Moreover, the act of reading and writing serve as the vehicles for thinking and feeling (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). It is important to remember that LGBTIQ topics and discussions on same-sex desires can be incorporated into the larger context of diversity, with the teacher carefully considering "their students and communities, not to avoid differences of opinion but to include them in classroom discussions" (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005, p. 210).

In an effort to provide teachers with resources to accomplish integrating and introducing LGBTIQ issues and topics into the classroom, the GLSEN offers lesson plan

resources for English/Language Arts teachers. An example of this uses the book *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shephard* which outlines, through sixty-eight poems, the events of the hate crime perpetrated against Matthew Shepard, a gay student at the University of Wyoming in 1998. The lesson plan outlined on the GLSEN assists teachers in discussing empathy and social justice with their students, while at the same time “implementing LGBT-inclusive curriculum” (Newman & GLSEN, 2012, p. 9). Furthermore, it poses questions to students like “How might this book contribute to making a difference? How has it made a difference with you? How might it make a difference with others?” (Newman & GLSEN, 2012, p. 12). The lessons engages students in activities, such as, writing letters to Matthew Shephard and/or his parents or writing a poem in the voice of the bullied and bully (Newman & GLSEN, 2012, p. 12). The imperative thing to remember is that these types of questions and activities meet the reading and writing standards within the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for ELA—making it easier to defend their inclusion within the curriculum.

The final vehicle for introducing LGBTIQ topics in public school curriculum is one dear to my heart—history. I have spent several years in the classroom teaching the history of the state of Texas. I think John Steinbeck (1962) showed great insight into the state of Texas when he stated “like most passionate nations, Texas has its own private history based on, but not limited by, facts” (pp. 201-202). It is this statement which gives insight into the subject of all history. History tells the story of the majority group at the expense of minority groups, which have been pushed to the margins of history. It is for this reason I attempted to look at a particular moment in history from multiple

perspectives while engaging my students in activities that supported this goal. For example, when teaching the Texas Revolution I did not just focus on the story of the revolution from the perspective of the white American settlers that made up the majority of the rebel army, but also the Tejanos who fought alongside them and the Mexican soldiers they fought against.

The GLSEN offers lessons that accomplish the goal of looking at history through the lens of the LGBTIQ community. One lesson titled “The History and Impact of Anti-LGBT Slurs” studies the LGBTIQ civil rights era by examining the derivation of homophobic terms like gay, faggot, and dyke (GLSEN, 2011, p. 16). The lesson utilizes oral histories collected by the GLSEN, Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and Story Corps which set up the discussion of using these terms, as well as, expression like “that’s so gay” (GLSEN, 2011, p. 17). This examination allows for the history of the words, that “often carry decades—even centuries—of weight and meaning,” to be discussed in an open frank manner leading students to realize their choice of words can have a larger impact on people than they previously realized (GLSEN, 2011, p. 17). Other lessons include the study of important LGBTIQ figures like Harvey Milk, Walt Whitman, Susan B. Anthony, Alexander the Great, and George Washington Carver—many of which students would have never realized with LGBTIQ figures (GLSEN, 2011).

Heterosexual hegemony, or the domination of heterosexuality, is real and exists within the Texas public school system. Slattery (2006) contends this hegemony “can affect classrooms when a teacher does not encourage or allow students to question the prevailing values, attitudes, historical interpretations, and social practices in a sustained

and critical manner” (p. 38). The world we live in is structured within dichotomous thought - male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual. It is the responsibility of educators to break these societal modes of thinking so the public school system is not used as a tool to indoctrinate and perpetuate heteronormativity. Sharp (2009) sums up succinctly the responsibility of teachers and administrators to not only LGBTIQ students, but all students:

As educational leaders, we need to push toward deconstructing the isolation produced by our dichotomous social constructions. If we interrogate and queer the construction of our own identity in a critically reflective way, searching for ways that we may unconsciously perpetuate social injustices through binary thinking, we may realize a possibility for more equitable existences inside and outside the classroom (p. 105).

Texas public school administrators and teachers can be the leaders of change within the Texas public school system, but they must be willing to break the silence that has loomed over our schools for too long. As illustrated in this chapter, there are a plethora of resources available for administrators and teachers. However, it will not be an easy task to implement these changes in the state of Texas where politicians, fundamentalists, communities, parents and even other students have resisted recognizing homosexuality as “normal” within the societal fabric of the state and are therefore paralyzed by homophobic attitudes. This does not translate into an impossibility, or that LGBTIQ activist should not speak out against the ignorance and silence many LGBTIQ students face in the public school system. It simply means ally administrators, teachers, and

LGBTIQ students must continue to be vigilant and speak out against the injustices within our states' public school system.

### **Personal Meaning and Closing**

In the opening section of my dissertation I began by exploring my positionality with regard to my research, as this has greatly influenced my examination of heteronormativity within the public school system and its impact on gay white students in the Texas oil patch. I will end this dissertation in the way I began since my viewpoint, beliefs, methodologies and the questions I explore in my research are built upon my own experiences. My early experiences in school of being teased and called homophobic slurs like fag, gay, and queer simply because I did not fit the heteronormative masculine mold, therefore being considered effeminate, served as the catalyst for choosing my topic of research.

However, it is through my experiences in the Texas public school system within the capacity of teachers and administrators that have served to strengthen my conviction for change in the way that Texas schools, and schools in general, view and address sexual orientation and gender identity. Although in many ways we have made great strides in our country the South, including Texas, still lags behind in social progress due to the stranglehold of conservative politics and evangelical religion within the state and region. It are these factors that influence administrators, teachers, parents, and the community that make teachers and administrative hesitant to act in creating inclusive, safe spaces for LGBTIQ students in Texas schools.

I have seen the hesitation and experienced negative school climates first hand during my tenure as a public school educator. There are two particular examples which stand out and illustrate the need for change toward positive, inclusive school climates in Texas. The first occurred during my third year of teaching, and first year of doctoral work. I came across the Safe Space program of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). This program was created to assist middle and high schools across the country to create spaces where students could feel free to fully express themselves without fear of being made to feel as they did not belong. I expressed interest in this program, and through the generosity of a friend, a Safe Space kit was donated and sent to me at my campus. I received all the resources with the hope of being able to implement this program on my campus. The program would include training for the staff, by me, in regards to unique issues that face LGBTIQ students at school and how to best support these students. I felt this was a great step toward creating the inclusive, safe, nurturing school climate that I had been advocating—the next step was to present the idea and materials to my building principal for approval. The response I received was surprising.

The principal appeared to respond positively to my idea of implementing the Safe Space program on campus, but stated she would have to check with the district office for final approval. I left her office hopeful it would ultimately be approved. It was two days later when the principal emailed asking I stop by her office during my conference period. At our meeting I was informed she had spoken with the district office and the program had not been approved for implementation, which led me to

inquire about the reasoning behind this decision. The response I received was that the district office did not want to single out a specific group of students within the school in regards to a training. This line of reasoning I found ridiculous on the basis that groups of students are singled out in staff developments across the district and on individual campuses. Over the course of several years I had attended staff developments and student assemblies that discussed teaching low socio-economic students, minority subpopulations on campus, and one specifically dealing with the issue of girl-on-girl bullying. I brought this observation to my principals' attention and was simply informed again that the district did not want to single out a specific group of students within the school without being given any satisfactory details for this decision.

The second example is essentially a montage of offensive, insensitive comments made by teachers and administrators that served to further strengthen the heteronormative strangle hold on the Texas public school system. Just as I had been teased in grade school as being effeminate, this has not completely subsided in my professional career as an educator. For example, I worked with a teacher who always felt the need to comment on my style of dress and the colors I chose to wear. It seems every time I wore the colors pink or purple he saw it as necessary to remind me those were girl colors with this being followed-up with a stereotypical "limp wrist." This has not stopped me from wearing these colors because colors do not define my sexual orientation or gender. I simply refuse to be confined to a heteronormative masculine mold by any person.

Unfortunately, I have seen and heard teachers subject other teachers and even students to similar treatment. I have repeatedly heard teachers in discussions with each other attempting to figure out if another teacher is gay based on their style of dress, haircut or mannerisms. I have worked with teachers that feel it is appropriate to use the term “gay” within the classroom in referencing items or actions that they view negatively. I have heard administrators talk about adolescent males being “light in the loafers” or “queer” and adolescent females as being “butch” or “dykes.”

The experiences of my youth similar to these current experiences led me into a depression that took me years to conquer. It was because of these experiences that in adulthood I have strengthened my resolve to not remain silent and to fight to improve the educational experiences and lives of LGBTIQ and non-gender conforming students in the Texas public school system—so they do not feel alone as I often did.

It is with my personal experiences in mind that I conclude this study. It is important to note the experiences of my seven participants cannot speak for all gay white students, much less all LGTBIQ students, in the Texas public school system. There are still many unanswered questions that need to be examined in more detail. As noted in Chapter V and earlier in this chapter, religion was a factor at work within the narratives of the participants’ experiences. It is interesting to note for many participants this was a footnote within their experiences and the work of religion was not seen as being a major force at work within their educational experiences.

In my analysis of the data though it appeared it impacted their experiences much more than participants may have realized. It made me reflect further on my own

experiences discussed in Chapter I. I was tormented by my peers with teachers and coaches doing very little to stop the verbal abuse perpetrated on me by others. Many of my teachers and coaches I am sure identified as good, God fearing Christians, and yet lived in contradiction to Christian doctrine in their inaction. They were charged with protecting the students in their care and failed. It was interesting to see many participants did not blame the teachers and administrators, but blames themselves for what was happening. It was almost universal among participants that it was their lack of living up to masculine ideals, as in regards to perceived feminine speech and mannerism, which led to the problems they faced. Some, like Sam, even went as far to attempt to rationalize teacher inaction as them actually trying to protect him by not bringing attention to him.

Furthermore, as I began to explore at the end of Chapter V with Elisha, how does white privilege and patriarchy influence the experiences of participants? All participants in my study were within the societal hegemony of white maleness and were only marginalized by their sexual orientation. How would their experiences have been different if they fell outside the dominant culture in other categories like race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and the multitude of categories that as a society we apply to one another?

All of these questions illustrate the need for further research to explore the experiences of all LGBTIQ students, especially in regards to how sexual orientation intersects with race, gender, ethnicity, and religion within Texas which, regardless of the prominence of conservative ideology and Christian fundamentalism, is filled with a

kaleidoscope of people and cultures. Through conducting research in this vein, which challenges the idea of sexuality, gender expression and/or identity, we can begin to create a paradigm shift in regards to these topics in education. This shift would assist in emboldening Texas educators to stand up and speak out and do their part to create an inclusive, nurturing, safe space for *all* students in Texas public schools.

*“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

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