THE SUBJECTIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF IDENTIFIED OR PERCEIVED MALE GBTQ
ADOLESCENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY

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A Thesis

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Abstract

of

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The concern of homophobia within the context of institutionalized settings such as high schools can be a damaging factor to the development of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) adolescents. This issue can have devastating affects on GLBTQ youth, and research suggests that such damage can come in many forms. Recent studies have found that identified or perceived GLBTQ youth have higher rates of self-injurious behavior, higher instances of drug or alcohol abuse, higher rates of homelessness, truancy, physical and or verbal abuse, and report having lower self-esteem, and higher instances of mental health issues. More research into this issue, in order to raise awareness is needed. This paper will give reason for the necessity of further qualitative research in order to give voice to queer identified or perceived adolescents. The current research into this topic is discussed to provide further support of the impact of this issue. The process, analysis, and results of this author's qualitative research interviews of eight 18 to 22-year-olds identified or perceived GBT males are detailed. Significant emergent themes that were identified from the content analysis of the interview data included, but is not limited to, a consensus that homophobia was observed

by all participants, and that having staff that would be properly sensitive to this population would be beneficial. Finally, this paper gives recommendations for how to address this issue, and to further provide sexuality sensitivity training for professionals working with this population.

_____, Committee Chair
Chrystal Ramirez Barranti, PhD, MSW

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the participants of my study, and I dedicate this thesis to all those boys who are afraid to

go to gym class.

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Throughout our culture's history oppression has been rampant and embedded.

The Queer community has been one of the most commonly targeted groups that have

been marginalized by oppression. For the purpose of this discussion, queer will be

defined as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (GLBTQ)

community. Many of these individuals have been the subject of intolerance, abused, and

discriminated against. In addition to direct prejudice and discrimination, institutionalized

oppression against queers has been significant.

One particularly vulnerable portion of this population are those in the adolescent

developmental stage (Fisher & Matarese, 2006). During this period of time the "queer"

identified or perceived person enters a very difficult stage of life. It is a challenging time

for all teens, but can be detrimental for those individuals struggling with gender or

sexuality identity issues (Fisher & Matarese, 2006). Institutions that are supposed to

protect the well being of children, such as schools, often are not up to par in their

institutional policies to protect and provide proper therapeutic interventions when dealing

with at risk youth. With this issue in mind, this study will examine difficulties

experienced by Queer youth in school settings, and take a scholarly look at the

corresponding issues that arise because of discrimination. Corresponding issues include

substance abuse, suicide rates and truancy. This paper will further address the socially constructed narratives that are involved in the creation of homophobic notions.

Rationale

This author's professional experience in the field is a driving force behind this analytical look at Queer youth in institutional settings. In the time that this writer has been working as a therapeutic staff for Sacramento City Unified School District, it has become obvious that proper therapeutic interactions and educational settings are not being applied to the work with queer identified or perceived youth. This author's personal observation of hate language and homophobic physical assaults toward these marginalized youth has heightened the writer's awareness to this issue. Words such as "faggot" and "dyke" are commonly used on the campus where this author is employed. Even beyond these inappropriate outbursts, this researcher has witnessed these homophobic slurs being ignored by the professional staff and teachers that work at this school. Unfortunately, according to recent studies (Craig, Tucker, & Wagner, 2008), this is not a unique experience for these Queer identified or perceived adolescents. For example, according to a recent national study (Craig et al., 2008), four out of five queer identified students expressed being harassed in one or more ways. This included physical, sexual, and verbal harassment (Craig et al., 2008). Homophobia and its treacherous effects on developing adolescents make it glaringly clear that social workers have an ethical obligation to explore research into this issue, and the further logic behind this topic.

Background

Homophobia can be inflicted in a myriad of ways. Hate crimes in California and across the United States are a growing concern. According to the Attorney General's 2007 Hate Crimes report (Brown, 2007), Sexual/Gender identity hate crimes constituted nearly 20% of all the hate crimes committed in California that year. However, these numbers can be argued as being highly deflated; many crimes that are truly hate crimes are not labeled as such. The same report elaborated that hate crimes against the Queer community had gone up a startling 77.2%. These statistics are representative of the violence that can impact the Queer community; however, these numbers do not completely comprise all forms of intolerance and abuse that is impacting the GLBTQ community.

Queer teens in institutional settings, such as school systems often report having torment and physical assault a constant theme in their lives. D'Augelli and Pilkington (as cited in Espelage, Aragon, & Birkett, 2008) published their study on Queer adolescents in 1995. In it, they reported that 83% of students that were identified or perceived to be of alternative sexuality experienced homophobic discrimination. This intolerance came in the manner of hateful and or derogatory speech and epitaphs, physical violence and or threats of physical harm, and also sexual assault (D'Augelli & Pilkington as cited in Espelage et al., 2008).

For Queer teens to develop in a healthy manner, they must be able to have a safe environment to finish their education. These scenarios in which the queer identified or

perceived teen is under constant harassment can lead to stagnation of appropriate emotional and psychological development, isolation, psychological disorders, substance abuse, and or suicide (D'Augelli & Pilkington as cited in Espelage et al., 2008). Frequently the queer identified or perceived adolescent is attempting to learn appropriate social interactions in a homophobic stigmatizing environment. This means the queer teen is developing without the necessary support to be healthy (D'Augelli & Pilkington as cited in Espelage et al., 2008).

Statement of the Research Problem

The research problem being addressed in this study is the lack of viable interview data and research studies exploring Queer youth's subjective experiences of institutional homophobia in school settings. Such a gap in the literature has left a vulnerable population's voices unheard. Lack of such knowledge has prevented an appropriate response from the social work profession for advocacy and social justice for these youth. This lack of knowledge becomes problematic when attempting to humanize institutions when working with these at risk youth. In addition, such a lack has slowed the development of culturally competent practice perspectives for social workers who may work this population.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this research study is to gain insight and understanding into the problem of institutionalized homophobia in school settings experienced by Queer youth. The focus of the study will be on documenting the individual and subjective

experiences and observations of GLBTQ young adults as they reflect back upon their time in high school. It is only after voice is given to this population can more research be done in order to demonstrate the need for appropriate interventions to be implemented on behalf of identified or perceived GLBTQ adolescents.

<div align="center">Theoretical Perspective</div>

The theoretical perspective social workers use is the lens in which clinicians perceive the world, and work with clients. For this reason alone, it becomes evident the significance of identifying an appropriate fit between a theoretical perspective and the population in which the social worker is working. For this population of adolescent queer persons, looking at the larger perspective, and gleaning what can be understood about cultural concepts within the context of a society, and more specifically, how this information is shared and produces response from members of Western society can be particularly significant. It is because of this, the two theories to be covered in this writing would be social constructivism and queer theory. Both theoretical perspectives are from the post-modern movement, and give insight into how society comes to identify and interact with queer teens.

Social Constructivism is a Post-modern theory with quite a unique perspective on how to approach clients and even to view the world (Blundo & Greene, 2008). Roberta Greene states constructivists believe that each person is constantly adapting, and creating new schema in which to understand their environment. They believe that everything known is "constructed" or learned, and thus attitudes and ideas pertaining to morality,

culture, "isms," or anything encountered is built off of these constructed ideas. In order for that to change, one must "de-construct" what is learned. This in turn recreates a healthier notion of self, and thus a new way to interact with one's particular world. If this discussion is addressing Constructivism theory it is imperative to have a clear comprehension of exactly what it is. To aid in understanding of this theory, it will be helpful to review Robert Blundo and Roberta Greene's discussion (2008) on Social Construction. The author's identify several main themes that are significant. One important theme is that the Social Constructionist takes a "not knowing" stance when used in clinical application with their clients. This allows the client to become the expert of their story and deconstructs the hierarchy that is created in the therapeutic environment. The practitioner should collaborate with their client to meet them where they are in their life experience. The social worker should also allow the client to narrate his or her own story. According to Social Constructionist theory, language, especially professional speech re-enforces the expert position that actually limits the therapeutic relationship. This impedes the process of therapy. Social Constructionists believe that a client in session is recreating their reality by de-constructing previous held beliefs.

The basic fundamental assumption for constructionist theory is that there are no underlying universal laws or truths, and that all that we believe is influenced and created by cultural bias. In addition, people come to understand the world based on the information that is available to them in their context. Pertaining to development, Social Constructionist theory believes that life stages are abstract concepts that are socially

constructed, and thus the meaning of age and development would differ depending on the cultural bias that each society dictates. Biological inclinations interact with Western culture and create an understanding of the world through language. This would explain differing social mores for when someone could be seen as an adult. In this culture legally an adult is 18, however many people would debate whether that chronological age would be an adequate signifier of adulthood. Social Constructionists would suggest that this is because of a person's cultural bias interacting with an individual's own independent life experiences thus creating a new perspective to view the world. Social Constructionists would say that people learn through their relationships and incorporate these concepts and experiences in a new schema for dealing with one's environment.

With this enhanced knowledge of Social Constructionist theory, it becomes evident that the impact this could have on a developing queer identified or perceived individual. Social Constructivism would argue that homophobic ideations within the society are solely created through the context within the culture. The dominant societal norm is one that is culturally biased toward heterosexuals. In order for a developing GLBTQ adolescent to have a positive identity, it would become necessary for this individual to de-construct the knowledge base they have learned through the dominant societal beliefs, and re-construct a healthier identity that would include a queer self.

Queer theory (Nylund & Tilsen, 2007) broaches this concept of deconstructing the dominant normative through language. In further analysis of this theoretical approach, Queer theory discusses a heteronormative culture in which the overwhelming assumption

is that our society is completely heterosexual. Institutions, religious organizations, laws, traditions, and the mass media consistently reinforce this. These concepts are perpetuated from one generation to another through language (Nylund & Tilsen, 2007).

Queer theory suggests that both homophobia and transphobia stem from the same heterosexist and sexist value systems perpetuated in Western society. Transphobia is the fear of individuals who are in the process of or outwardly practicing transgender or transsexual behaviors (Nylund & Tilsen, 2007). Queer theory suggests that the individuals who do not fit into the dominant mold of gender threaten the heteronormative cultural value system that is in place. This demonstrates how sexism also feeds into Western societal norms to oppress people of alternative sexuality or gender. The heroes of Western Culture then become heterosexual white men, thus causing conflict for those individuals who do not clearly fit into this mold (Wright, 2005). Queer theory further suggests that males that do not readily fit into this dominant norm are particularly vulnerable to being targeted. Further, the ideal male then becomes a "hyper-masculine icon" that is realistically an unobtainable goal (Wright, 2005). Queer theory is attempting to separate this idea of maleness and femaleness from socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity (Wright, 2005).

These concepts regarding the strict societal rules dictating behavior in Western culture become particularly poignant when discussing the fate of the queer identified or perceived adolescent. Both social constructivism and queer theory suggest that roles associated with gender are socially constructed ideations passed on by language. Further,

individuals who do not fit into said gender roles, and the designated sexuality to these genders, will suffer consequences within the context of our society. Queer theory argues that it is essential to de-construct ideas of sexuality and gender, and not assume that these behaviors are simply "natural" (McPhail, 2004).

<center>Research Questions</center>

In the process of this paper, this author will be attempting to address several questions. For example, what are the subjective life experiences of queer youth in institutionalized settings? How do queer teens perceive this impact of their institutionalized experience on their identity? How has the gender binary fed into homophobia? Finally, how would a solution-focused resiliency benefit the GLBTQ identified or perceived at risk youth in their institutionalized setting? This author will be addressing these four questions throughout this paper in order to expand the readers' general understanding and cultural sensitivity to this particular at risk population.

<center>Definition of Terms</center>

To more easily facilitate this discussion, several words will need to be defined and clarified. As was previously discussed, the word "queer" will be used interchangeably with GLBTQ in reference to individuals in this particular community. This author is using the reclamation stance of this word in support of alleviating its previously held stigma. In addition, the word homophobia needs to be clearly defined. According to the Social Work Dictionary (Barker, 2003), homophobia encompasses a fear or hatred associated with people who identify or are perceived to be associated with the GLBTQ

community. The dictionary goes on to break down homophobia into three general sub categories. The first is internalized homophobia and it is defined and commonly understood to be self –hatred or self-contempt that is experienced by an individual who perceives him/herself to be of an alternative sexuality or gender. Second, individual homophobia refers to the feelings or acts of an individual toward persons who are perceived or identify as being of an alternate sexuality or gender. The final sub-category of homophobia involves homophobia on an institutional level. This refers to the homophobic policies that are instilled within and from institutions that have a discriminatory affect on the GLBTQ community. This could be found in a myriad of ways including, but not limited to socio-economic standing, civil rights, laws, religious affiliation, and educational settings (Barker, 2003).

In addition to defining homophobia, other terms need to be understood in relation to this topic. For example, the gender binary refers to the strict social rules that require rigid behaviors based upon the sex and perceived individuals associated gender (Nylund & Tilsen, 2007). Further, since this discussion is regarding oppression and discrimination, it is significant to discern a clear understanding of oppression and discrimination. The Social Work Dictionary (Barker, 2003) defines oppression to be the act within a societal context that restricts rights and behaviors of a particular individual or group. This indicates a lack of power or rights within a society or community. Further, discrimination is understood by the Social Work Dictionary as the prejudice and

associated treatment of a group or individuals within a group based off of these negative

ideations or beliefs (Barker, 2003).

Assumptions

Several assumptions are necessary in order to move forward with this discussion.

Primarily it is essential for the reader to have a belief that queer or GLBTQ identified

individuals are not mentally ill or morally repugnant. It is essential that the reader does

not assume "immoral" behavior or weakness of character simply because of an

alternative sexuality or gender. In addition, there needs to be a general acknowledgement

that all individuals have the right to be in institutionalized settings such as high schools,

and be safe. It is further accepted that each person has a right to an education in which

they are not harassed or experience trauma. Another assumption would be that mental

health and high school professionals should be supportive, protective, and therapeutic

when interacting with identified or perceived queer adolescents. It should be understood

that the queer identified or perceived adolescent has the right not to be harmed by

professionals' ignorance, inaction, indifference or prejudice.

Justification

This thesis will be giving light to an issue that often goes unaddressed by our

profession. Not only is the GLBTQ adolescent an at-risk population social workers, as a

profession, are not sufficiently trained to deal with this particular disempowered minority

group. This discussion is to bring this issue to the forefront, and to give a voice to

individuals' perceptions, and experiences while in the institutional setting of a high

school. It is only after more research into this topic is done, will there be more pondering concerning best practices, and further cultural sensitivity in order to encourage support and aid this minority group. These concepts directly relate to our *National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics* (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1996). It becomes evident as early as the preamble that queer youth fit into a disempowered minority that the profession of social work should be working on behalf to create a higher quality of life. The context in which this marginalized population is living creates a situation in which social workers have an ethical obligation to get involved.

Delimitation

Although it could be determined that this study would involve both genders, it focused only on males. In addition, this author did not interview high school students because of the potential trauma this may bring up. Instead, young adult males were the subjects for this study. The researcher spoke with males who were identified or perceived to be of alternative gender or sexuality during their high school years; however they were between the ages of 18 and 22. This will give enough distance between the potentially traumatic experience and the present so the client would not deal with immediate traumatic events. Further, this study did not involve interviewing professionals who work with this particular population, although it could be assumed that this would be the case. Finally, the sampling method used for this exploratory study was a non-probability convenience sampling method, which did not provide for the generalizability of this study's findings.

Summary

This project attempted to touch upon several main points throughout each chapter. Chapter 1 of this endeavor addressed the identification of an issue, and the further reasoning why this issue needs more attention to better understand how to benefit this marginalized population. In addition, Chapter 1 defined key terminology that will behoove the reader to have knowledge of, and also detailed the research questions that were answered.

Chapter 2 is the literature review, in which more information of viable research and case studies will be used to provide better comprehension of this issue, and what professionals in the fields of social services have determined through recent investigations. Chapter 3 is the methods section and gives detailed information on the study that is being presented in this paper. This chapter discusses the type of design used, describes the characteristics of the sample, instrumentation, data gathering procedures, and the protection of human subjects process of this particular research activity. In Chapter 4, the analysis of data is presented, and information regarding the overall findings, specific findings, and additional findings of this research study are also discussed. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations for the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews academic research studies and articles written for scholarly

publications in order to give deeper insight to the issues facing Queer adolescents. This

segment is divided into sub-categories in order to increase the clarity of the topic areas of

discussion. Topics covered will begin with oppression and gender, move into review of

the research on the impact of oppression on queer adolescents, and end with a look at

individual case studies.

Queer Oppression and Gender Roles

Marilyn Frye (2007) in her article "Oppression" gives insight to the interlocking

systems in place that create marginalization across many levels. She elaborates by using

the metaphor of the caged bird. While looking at the one bar in front of the oppressed

individual it does not seem reasonable to understand how this could be an insurmountable

roadblock to overcome. It is only after one begins to step back, and look at the larger

picture that it becomes clear that the one bar is connected to others creating an

interlocking system that builds the cage of marginalization. This is how oppression

works. People are often kept in subservience through several arenas. For example, sexism

and homophobia feed into each other through social constructs created in Western

society.

When looking at oppressive cultural trends, it becomes obvious and necessary to

acknowledge that mainstream society does not give appropriate representation for queer

teens in the mainstream media. This invisibility is further indication of the marginalization that occurs within this community. David Nylund (2007) gives further insight into this ideation in his article "Reading Harry Potter: Popular Culture, Queer Theory and the Fashioning of Youth Identity. " In his writing, Nylund discusses an individual client, Steven, and his creative reading of the Harry Potter stories.

Steven identifies as a homosexual, and he is looking for role models within the context of the mainstream media. Since there are often few to no queer images in the mainstream media to be found (and those images that are present, often invoke negative stereotypical images), Steven broaches the Harry Potter books in a fashion discussed by Nylund (2007), as reading "against the grain. " In this process, Steven found hidden meaning within the text in order to have deeper association and connection to the main character. When asked by the clinician if it was possible that Harry Potter experienced homophobia from his family, Steven agreed, and further made links into his own life. The article goes on to discuss Steven's many connections associated with the discovery of this hidden queer text. Steven becomes quite comfortable seeing the dualities of his and Harry's experiences. This impacts Steven in that it gives him a context in which he can identify. Nylund continues his point by discussing the importance for all clinicians to be able to utilize this tool for their clients to feel more visible in a culture that does not give proper representation in its media imagery (Nylund, 2007).

Oppressive mainstream society keeps many queer teens "in the closet" because they are fearful of the reactions they will receive once they "come out. " Allan Barsky

(2005) writes about this process in his article "Assumed Privilege: A Double Edged Sword. " Many queer teens do not feel confident that they will have the support system necessary once they reveal same sex attractions. Thus each new stage of "coming out" is filled with anxiety, at the possibility that friends, peers, and eventually family will not be accepting of the queer teen.

In his writing, Barsky (2005) discusses how heterosexual teens struggle with the explorations of sexuality. This can be extremely exacerbated for queer teens when their path is not so clearly defined, as it is for those persons with an interest and desire of the opposite sex and gender. The article further discusses the confusion associated with sexuality and gender, for instance, when Western society suggests that homosexual males are effeminate or that lesbians are masculine. These stereotypical images can further convolute the coming out process for those individuals who may have same sex attractions, however behave according to their particular sex and corresponding gender (Barsky, 2005).

Barsky (2005) further supports ideations revolving around the interlocking systems of sexism and homophobia. Barsky discusses the privilege surrounding the assumptions of heterosexuality. These assumptions can work in the favor of the "closeted" queer individual. These stereotypical beliefs allow the observer to only identify sexuality with gender behaviors, thus masculine men or feminine women cannot be gay or lesbian. This further alienates the queer individuals that do not neatly fit into the rigid gender-role behaviors, and creates more anxiety for those individuals not readily

identified as being queer. These "closeted" persons then are faced with the dilemma of abandoning the privilege enjoyed as a perceived heterosexual or becoming a potential target of discrimination by disclosing a queer identity (Barsky, 2005).

Throughout this research process it has become abundantly clear that the issue of homophobia is directly related to the gender stratification that occurs in this country. Tilsen, Nylund, and Greives (2004) expanded on this notation by discussing the gender binary in their article. As they detail in their article the gender binary is defined as the rigid social roles that are held in our society. These unbending gender roles create a patriarchy that places individuals in boxes in which they have difficulty being free to exist without discrimination. Allan G. Johnson (2007) elaborates on these ideas about gender in his article "Patriarchy. " He addresses the gender stratification by enlightening us about the male celebrated attitudes that are commonly held in this culture. Women are definitely considered second-class citizens. He discusses the notion that women's contributions are devalued, and deemed as less important than men. Thus anything affiliated with femininity comes to be considered trivial and insignificant.

These negative concepts of female associated ideologies and gender roles are the underlying force behind homophobia today. Suzanne Pharr (2007) makes this link very clear in her article "Homophobia as a Weapon of Sexism. " Pharr takes the stance that it is because of the misogynistic ideals that are generally socially accepted in our culture that oppression like homophobia exists. Lesbian women become threatening because they upset traditional gender roles by not needing men to fulfill family functions in their lives.

In the same light gay men are considered traitors to their own. Unwilling to step up to their birthright as males, and succumbing to the most unspeakable act, falling in love and having sex with another man.

The gender binary by which males and females are placed creates a "boys' code" in which a culture of cruelty is created (Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003). This understanding of a boys' code that is formed during adolescence continues into adulthood, and dictates behaviors exhibited by men in our society. It constructs attitudes that discourage males from being vulnerable with their feelings, and further encourages male teens to harass and torment boys that do not readily fit into their gender role. This can be particularly true when looking at group dynamics especially in institutionalized settings such as a school.

Phoenix et al. gave light to this observation in their 2003 study of masculinity and homophobia in adolescent males. In their following publication (2003), they discuss the differing dynamics between the male subjects when they were in a group together, compared to when they were interviewed alone. Phoenix et al. consistently found what they referred to as a "softer masculinity" when the male teens were interviewed alone. There was more of a willingness to be open, particularly in comparison to the harsher and tormenting antics noted when the boys were together. This idea of males bottling up their feeling is further supported by the 1999 study done by Katz and Buchanan (as cited in Phoenix et al. , 2003). Their findings discovered that of the 1,344 teen males they interviewed, only 38% would share their feelings with someone if they were distraught.

The rest interviewed felt this was an indication of weakness, and was not a manly thing to do.

Deviation from the perception of appropriate gender roles can be the root of stigmatization, particularly for adolescent males. Cooper Thompson (2007) in his article, "A New Vision of Masculinity" discusses this concept of adolescent male torment and dominance. His article details his experience discussing masculinity with male adolescents in a high school setting. When speaking to a class the males, Thompson discusses, openly conversed about their perceptions of appropriate gender specific behaviors. The students spoke candidly of their put-downs, and identified using the term "fag" often. This word also held particular offense, and was considered to be the most insulting and degrading term. When Thompson called into question one of the student's sexuality for wearing a pink shirt, an infraction of the previously identified masculinity code, the student became enraged, and threatened to kill the author. Thompson goes on to discuss how violence is subsequently learned to defend developing males' masculinity, and is generally accepted as appropriate (Thompson, 2007).

<div align="center">Queer Adolescents and Impact of Oppression</div>

Western society gives lessons very early about what is acceptable behavior in the gender boxes. By the time an individual hits adolescence the messages have become very clear. With that said, it is easy to see the intolerance that can begin against individuals who do not readily fit into those gender roles. Queer adolescents are most at risk when discussing the affect of homophobia. The problem lies in that GLBTQ teens are forced to

be in institutional settings in which they may not be kept safe or treated with respect and dignity. In 2006, Georgetown University held a conference discussing the at risk queer adolescent. In their presentation they provided information from a research study done by S. Fisher and M. Maltarese (2006). This information was published in a Special Forum Summary in 2006. According to their data, 30% of Queer youth had missed school because they were fearful of being physically assaulted in a manner that would lead to injury. This percentage is over four times as high as those students that do not identify as GLBTQ youth. In addition, 28% have dropped out of high school because they claim to be afraid of physical and verbal harassment by their peers. These numbers are three times greater than dropout rates associated with heterosexual teens.

Further information provided by Fisher and Matarese (2006) studies showed that according to a school climate survey that 97% of students claimed to be exposed to derogatory comments regarding GLBTQ people on a daily basis. In addition, 19% of the students polled reported hearing negative comments regarding the queer community from staff/teachers at their school. Nearly 80% of the students acknowledged they heard anti-gay slurs approximately 26 times a day. This would break down to an average of nearly every 14 minutes. When GLBTQ students were asked if staff/teachers intervened when peers were harassing them, 83% reported that staff rarely would stop the bullying. In addition, over half of the queer students questioned, reported being physically attacked at some point because of being identified as GLBTQ.

Discrimination can have consequential repercussions beyond verbal and physical abuse. Fisher and Matarese (2006) also reported that substance abuse rates for queer clients tended to be much higher and beginning at earlier ages than their straight counterparts. Their study reported that 50% of the students surveyed had participated in both drug and alcohol abuse. The suicide rates for queer individuals are also significantly higher than heterosexual adolescents. Queer teens also run the risk of higher rates of homelessness, as a result of families that do not accept them as queer.

Mallon (2006) expands on the issue of discrimination for queer youth in the system in his article, *Busting Out of the Welfare Closet Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender-Affirming Approaches to Child Welfare.* Mallon (2006) points out the importance of having competent professionals working with this marginalized youth. Mallon goes on to iterate the heterosexism within professional systems designed to aid at risk youth, and the assumptions by professionals that their adolescent clients are heterosexual. This is indicative of a larger issue of discrimination within this country, and the consequences affect the queer population at large. Mallon (2006) also discusses how this marginalization eventually returns to a societal level in that services must be provided to this population as a result of discriminatory acts.

Further evidence to support the homophobic discrimination experienced by queer teens is demonstrated in a study done by Mason and Palmer in 1996. In their research they surveyed 4615 participants in the adolescent stage of development. Their findings supported the ideation that schools were unsafe environments for GLBTQ identified or

perceived youths. In fact, 40% of this population reported that violent acts of assault were perpetuated upon these individuals while they were on school grounds. Furthermore, 50% of these physical attacks occurred by peers of the same age or within the same age group (Espelage, Aragon, & Birkett, 2008).

A more recent study done by D'Augelli and Pilkington (as cited in Espelage et al., 2008) further supports these findings, and gives more in-depth statistics surrounding school aged gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens. In his research, D'Augelli and Pilkington (as cited in Espelage et al., 2008) found that 81% of queer perceived teens experienced name calling associated with this perception in the form of derogatory speech and homophobic slurs. In addition, 38% experienced threats of violence, and of those individuals 15% were actually the victims of an assault. His study further revealed the lesbian and gay identified or perceived students were in addition victim to physical assault with use of a weapon (6%). Finally, 15% of assaults were also sexual in nature (D'Augelli & Pilkington as cited in Espelage et al., 2008).

Beyond homophobic name-calling, physical threats, violent acts, and sexual assault, the Queer adolescent experiences other forms of abuse and ostracizing. A 2001 study by Rivers (as cited in Espelage et al., 2008) furthers comprehension of this notion. In this data set Rivers found evidence to support that Queer perceived or identified teens also experience teasing not associated with derogatory name calling (58%). In addition, queer students fell victim to heterosexual peers spreading untrue stories or rumors about them (59%). This enhanced feelings of being alone for the queer teen, and Rivers

reported that 27% reported feelings of isolation as a result of non-violent aggressive acts perpetuated by their heterosexual counterparts (Rivers as cited in Espelage et al., 2008).

These rigid concepts of gender facilitate feelings of negative self-image in the developing GLBTQ adolescent. The social constructs create strict rules of appropriate behaviors for males and females, and can be devastating for those who do not readily fit into this box. It begins to instill feelings of self-loathing for the queer identified or perceived adolescent. This initiates a struggle with internalized homophobia for the developing teen. In a society that panders toward heterosexuals, the developing queer youth will experience severe ramifications associated with internalized homophobia. These ramifications will greatly decrease self-esteem, and cause serious psycho-social stressors for the individual who is dealing with alternative sexual identity or gender (Appleby & Anastas, 1998).

<div align="center">Individual Case Studies</div>

After reading the statistics, and having a deeper understanding to the reasoning behind the social norms that encourage hate to be perpetuated in school systems it is important, to give a face to the victims. This section briefly addresses victims of hate crimes; more specifically, the circumstances that surrounded these traumatic scenarios. The situations are not the same, but there are several important similarities. Each teen was traumatized by a classmate, they all had experienced bullying in school that was consistent and unyielding, and each teen was perceived to be a homosexual.

In addition to the trauma these at risk youth experience, many are further isolated by the nature of the support system they have within their family dynamics. Many parents assume that their children are heterosexual. This can create alienation for the at risk youth, and further deepen depression, and feelings associated with internalized homophobia. Rejection that is assumed or perpetuated by significant family relationships can be detrimental to those teens that are contemplating suicide, as is demonstrated by several of the following examples (McVinney, 1998).

One such example of this is the story of Bobby Griffith. Bobby's story is detailed in the famous biography *Prayers for Bobby* by Leroy Aarons. Bobby started being identified as a "sissy" by family and peers at a very early age. This identity came about as early as five years old, and was a result of Bobby being considered a "gentle and obedient" boy (p. 44). This homophobia was exacerbated as he grew into adolescence, and Bobby began a battle with depression. Bobby made several attempts to have his family, primarily his religiously zealous mother, Mary, to understand that being a homosexual did not mean that he was an evil person. Mary's rejection and steadfast clinging to her religious beliefs alienated her son, to the point where Bobby left home, became a prostitute, and eventually killed himself (Aarons, 1995).

Carl Joseph Walker Hoover, a 10-year-old African American child, committed suicide because of the continuous bullying of his classmates. The child hung himself just days before his 11th birthday. Reporter Judith Warner of the New York Times interviewed Carl's mother, Sirdeander Walker, on April 16, 2009. During the interview,

Ms. Walker stated that other students would consistently torment Carl, and accuse him of being a homosexual. Although Carl never acknowledged his sexuality, his experiences at school with the harassment of bullies negatively affected his self-image to the point that he took his own life.

Adolphus Simmons was shot to death in Charleston, South Carolina. He was eighteen years old. His friends and family discussed how he enjoyed to dress like a woman. He was murdered right outside his home as he was taking out the garbage. There has been a 15-year-old boy that went to the same school as Simmons who is being charged with his murder. Charleston police are hesitant to refer to this as a hate crime, but there appears to be no other alternative motivation. The boy charged with his murder has been identified in making homophobic ideations toward Simmons prior to his murder (Haglund & Parks, 2008).

Time magazine reported that a classmate shot Lawrence King, a 15-year-old student of Oxnard, California, to death because he liked to dress as a woman. King's assailant is a 14-year-old child who would consistently physically and verbally assaulted King in the school they both attended. A new investigation is being launched to inquire why school officials often did not intervene on King's behalf when he fell victim to the homophobic harassment by his peers (Cloud, 2008).

Nancy Wadington was a high school student when she came to terms with her sexuality and came out as a lesbian. Although her family was supportive of her self-disclosure, Nancy's classmates began harassing her in both verbal and physical ways.

When Nancy was in ninth grade a group of predominantly male classmates began to torment her. They used homophobic and derogatory language to insult her, and also stole her property. Nancy's book bag and belongings were taken, and then later found in the boy's lavatory, completely soaked in human urine. Later that same year, Nancy's locker was burglarized, and her belongings were once again taken. Her books and personal items were strewn through the high school halls, spit on and destroyed. When Nancy's mother called to complain, the school responded by charging her for the books that were damaged (Peet, 2007).

Nancy's experience in 10th grade continued to escalate. It was then when her tormenters became physical. Nancy's abuse turned violent when one of her harassers threw her down a flight of stairs. Nancy's mother claimed to continuously ask the school to help her daughter, but found no support. In 11th grade Nancy's emotional state was quite fragile, and the school district responded by placing Nancy on extended home instruction. When Nancy had begun her senior year, the school district had labeled her "emotionally disturbed," and then transferred her to a high school for students with special education needs. Following this action, Nancy and her mother filed a lawsuit against the New Jersey school district. They are claiming that the school system failed to uphold anti-discrimination laws that are in place to protect GLBTQ teens in high school settings. They are further identifying the individual who allegedly pushed Nancy down a flight of stairs in the lawsuit. The school is claiming that they had no knowledge of any of

the harassment that was happening to Nancy. Nancy, now 18, refers to her high school experience as her "living nightmare" (Peet, 2007).

In addition to media covered stories detailing the individual experiences of queer adolescents and their dealings with homophobia, research has given individual accounts that can give insight into this issue. Similar to the results of this study detailed in chapter four, Craig et al. (2008) published findings of their research that gave anonymous individual accounts of homophobia experienced in high school environments. Although these experiences did not make the headlines or became the center of media attention, they are still noteworthy and compelling.

Craig et al. (2008) based their study on the data that was retrieved from the personal experiences of 24 participants. During this process, personal experiences were discussed in detail. The extent of the physical or verbal harassment and assault varied between participants, however, Craig et al. (2008) reported that each participant either witnessed or personally experienced physical or verbal abuse. Participants were encouraged to communicate these experiences several are presented in the paragraphs to follow.

One female participant reported an incident where two lesbian teens went to their prom together and experienced a severe trauma. The football team attacked the more masculine or "butch" girl. Her subsequent injuries included broken ribs and broken fingers. The incident occurred solely as a result of the two girls being on a date together (Craig et al., 2008).

Other participants reported similar physical abuse, and torment. One male participant reported being at a party with other high school students when he was held at gunpoint for being a homosexual. Another male stated that he was physically attacked in front of a teacher. His head was shoved into a locker, and he was repeatedly kicked, however the school professional did not intercede on the queer student's behalf (Craig et al., 2008). Another male participant reported that prior to his self-identification as a homosexual, he was harassed verbally by repeatedly being called a "fag," and having signs placed on his back with similar sentiments. The situation escalated when this student was stabbed in the head. The student's attacker suffered no consequences, as this queer teen was too traumatized and fearful to report his perpetrator (Craig et al., 2008).

Transgender teens are particularly vulnerable to the alienation that can occur with being different during adolescence. Sexual minorities, also experience limited resources for resiliency, however, they often have more of a support system than those individuals who identify as gender variant (Mallon, 1999). In his article, "Practice with Transgendered Children," author Gerald Mallon discusses the particular discrimination that can arise for gender variant children. In his article, he details the particular cruelty that transgendered youth experience in schools as a direct result of professionals not knowing how to interact with this population. Mallon goes on to identify the faulty identification of these students as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Further, male to female transgendered adolescents experience acute discrimination, and are often targeted to participate in masculine based behavior. Mallon refers to this as the "sports corrective;" a

time in which effeminate males are subject to hyper masculine activities in order to

overcompensate for what is perceived as weak or inappropriate behaviors for biological

males (Mallon, 1999).

Mallon (1999) provides an example in his article of an experience divulged by a

female to male client regarding the discrimination he felt within the school system. The

client discussed being pinned to the ground by his female peers. Once on the ground the

client stated that his peers forced lipstick on his face, degrading and mocking the client

while they did it. The client recalled seeing the school social worker watch the

interaction, and did nothing to intercede. In fact the client continued to state that the

social worker called his gender variant behavior "bad," and that he was putting his

parents at risk for losing both him and his sister (Mallon, 1999).

The death of Ben Brownlee is an example of the further isolation and devastation

that can occur as a result of ignorance and discrimination plaguing adolescents who are

dealing with transgendered issues (Smith, 2004). Ben disclosed to his mother, Karen

Johle, at an early age that he believed he was gay. His mother recounts that he was an

extremely effeminate child growing up, and when he had discussed this with her, Johle

never felt that this was quite right. When Ben became a teenager, and told Johle, that he

believed he was transgendered, this seemed to be more plausible to his mother (Smith,

2004).

Since Ben often experienced harassment from his peers prior to his coming to

terms with being transgendered, Ben broached the subject with the school district. He

thoughtfully reached out to all of his administrators, teachers, and counselors in the form of letters. He explained that he believed he had gender dysphoria disorder, and although was physically a male, he "mentally identified with being a female" (Smith, 2004, p. 1). Ben further explained that this was a real condition, and he was reaching out in an attempt to gain support from the school faculty, in order to prevent him from receiving further torment from his classmates.

Although the faculty that worked with Ben was made aware of his identity, and the harassment that he experienced, Ben was still targeted on a daily occurrence. He was called a myriad of names including fag, weirdo, hair girl, and queer boy. This daily bullying is reported by Ben's friends as to happen often right in the open, and without repercussions for the perpetrators (Smith, 2004).

Knowledge of the letters that Ben wrote to school employees was leaked to the student body, and Ben's torment was increased with a focus on his gender. His peers often referred to him as "fag boy" or "Benny boy" (p. 3) to demean him and degrade his interest in transitioning from male to female. The torment became more palpable as Ben initiated his transformation from Ben to Tesia Samara. Tesia started seeing a transgendered competent therapist, began taking female hormones, wearing makeup, growing his hair out, and wearing feminine clothing. Ben's harassment came to a climax when it is alleged that two football team players violently attacked Tesia on the way home from school on the afternoon of November 18, 2003. The two boys have been stated as physically assaulting Tesia, and knocking her down, and then each boy urinated

on her. When Tesia reached home that afternoon, she went into the garage, and hung herself (Smith, 2004).

Johle wanted justice for her daughter, so she informed the police of the alleged assault on Tesia on the afternoon of her suicide. Police state they could not find substantial evidence to support the claims; however, when asked if the police interrogated the football players about the allegations, the police acknowledged that not one of the team members were interviewed. Further, the police did not process the garage where Tesia hung herself as a crime scene, thus losing any possible evidence that could have been ascertained (Smith, 2004).

Johle claims that the school is directly responsible for her child's death. She furthers that because school officials ignored Tesia's harassment, she did not have a safe place to go to school. The school claims that Tesia was offered counseling, however, Johle counters by stating that she and Tesia inquired about school counseling, and they were left to their own means to find a therapist. Johle continued by stating that the school counselors were not properly trained to do interventions that would have benefited Tesia (Smith, 2004).

These stories of hate are far too common, and can be found all over the country. They demonstrate an urgent need for the at-risk queer student/client to be kept safe. These children were physically and verbally harassed and abused on a regular basis by their peers. These torments lead several children to take their own life, and in other cases this harassment was prelude to being murdered. It has been suggested that in all the cases

appropriate adult interventions were not used, and because of this these stories have ended in tragedy.

<div align="center">Alternative Education</div>

One potential solution to the issue of homophobia within the context of institutionalized settings such as high schools is the creation of alternative schools in which professional and paraprofessional staff are sensitive to the needs of the queer teen. One such school is the Harvey Milk High School in New York City. Nicole Rivard (2003) discusses the issues surrounding this alternative schooling in her article, "High School for Gay Students: Safe Haven or Segregation." This school was developed in 1984, and has been housing queer identified students as an alternative to regular public high school ever since. The students there have been harassed by their classmates and are choosing to participate in this alternative education because they feel it is a safe environment in which they can learn (Rivard, 2003).

In 2003, the Harvey Milk School created controversy by receiving funding from the Board of Education in an amount of $3.2 million. This money increased the student body from approximately 50 students to around 170 teens. The Harvey Milk School staff state that because of the hostility that queer students experience in regular high schools, there is a drop out rate for queer students as high as 28%. According to the Harvey Milk School spokesperson Craig Bowman from the National Youth Advocacy Coalition, which represents the GLBTQ students, he reported that it is often the lack of professional school interventions that perpetuate scenarios in which queer students are the victims of

violence in the form of both verbal and physical ways. As a result of this violence, alternative schools are becoming a necessity (Rivard, 2003).

Opponents to this alternative schooling disagree with Bowman, and in fact a lawsuit opposing the school to receive funding from the Board of Education was filed in August of 2003. The argument behind the lawsuit was that the Harvey Milk School is supporting segregation, and the $3.2 million should be allocated to schools all over the city. The lawsuit initiated by Senator Ruben Diaz, and a parent in the community further encouraged that all schools need to perpetuate a safe learning environment for everyone (Rivard, 2003). Rebecca Bethard (2004) in her article, "New York's Harvey Milk School: A Viable Alternative," presents evidence to dispute the opposition of Senator Diaz. Compared to the high dropout rate of queer students, the Harvey Milk School has an average of 95% graduation rate. Of that percentage, Bethard reports that 60% of those students go to a professional or technical school to receive further instruction (Bethard, 2004).

Bethard (2004) further discusses the up rise of civil suits being brought against school districts across the country. These suits are a direct result of professional and paraprofessional staff being unable to maintain a safe learning environment for queer identified or perceived students. From the years of 1998 to 2003, the ACLU aided in eight different lawsuits against school districts that were not providing a safe environment for the queer identified or perceived students in the students' school district. The corresponding victories awarded damages in the amounts ranging from $130,000 to

$451,000 (Bethard, 2004). As a result, this issue has come to be identified, but not on behalf of the adolescents enduring victimization on a daily basis, but instead, as a result of fear of repercussions. Laws that are in place in order to protect GLBTQ adolescents are not being upheld, and as a result of this, this population is being forced to advocate for their rights in the arena of the civil courts (Bethard, 2004).

Summary

This chapter has presented argument to support the ideation that queer individuals within the context of institutionalized settings such as public high schools experience a myriad of oppressive acts. Societal factors were discussed, including concepts such as the gender binary, thus supporting the relevance of sexism and gender roles within this society, and its impact on discriminating on GLBTQ adolescents. Further, statistical evidence was provided demonstrating that this social issue is consistent across many arenas, indicating that this is not an isolated problem in one particular school climate. In addition, this chapter has provided individual stories to give the reader insight into the personal struggles of queer youth. These stories have a common theme of verbal and or physical abuse as a result of the adolescent being identified as being of alternative sexuality or gender. There was an additional focus placed on transgendered youth, and the unique struggles of this particular population. Finally there was a succinct discussion of the Harvey Milk School in NYC, an alternative school site for those queer students who are being harassed to the point of wanting to drop out. This chapter briefly discussed

the controversy of this school, the allegations of segregation, and the benefits to its

students.

Chapter 3

METHODS

Design

For this study, the researcher employed an exploratory method of research design. This is defined as a study that is being conducted with the intention of exploring information of a certain topic. Exploratory research is designated to enhance understanding and to encourage that more research will be conducted in order to come to more definitive results in the future. This sort of research study examines a topic that has not been thoroughly investigated with previous studies (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

This is a qualitative research endeavor, in that it is being conducted through a series of interviews. Qualitative research studies are an attempt to find a more in depth comprehension of an issue (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). In the case of this particular study, the focus was based on a series of 8-10 interviews of identified or perceived GBTQ males, ages 18-22. The interview questions pertained to the participants' experiences and observations of the institutionalized setting of their high school. The interviews are an attempt to find deeper meaning in the participants' experiences and observations, and to find any running themes that may occur.

Sampling

The participants for this study were obtained through a process of convenience, snowball sampling technique. Convenience snowball sampling is defined as a nonrandom technique for acquiring subjects. This process is used when it may be difficult to find

certain members of a desired subject pool population. The researcher contacts a member of a particular participant population, and inquires about other members of this group, and asks the participants to pass on information regarding the study to other potential participants of the same group (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

In this study the researcher went to the Queer Straight Alliance meeting on November 18, 2009 at the California State University of Sacramento campus. The researcher was given permission to present his thesis topic and interview criteria, and asked for participants who were identified or perceived to be GBTQ males ages 18-22. The researcher further encouraged members who did not fill these criteria to pass on the study information via a flyer that was distributed by the researcher. The researcher was contacted by participants via email or by phone. Eight GBTQ persons participated in this study.

Measurement Instrument

The interview questionnaire was composed of 12 open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The instrument was developed by this researcher after a thorough review of the literature. Each question focuses on the experiences and observations of the participants' high school atmosphere pertaining to institutionalized homophobia as it affected the students.

Data Collection Procedure

The interviews began with the completion of the consent form (see Appendix B). The researcher then read the introductory paragraph of the interview questions. The

participant was then given a copy of the questions to enhance comprehension. The researcher proceeded by obtaining permission to record the interview. The researcher then asked the participant 12 open-ended questions regarding the participant's personal observations or experiences of homophobia within the context of their high school. The interview was recorded for future reference of the data. The researcher also took notes during the interview.

Each interview was allotted one hour for completion. Upon finishing the interview, the researcher gave the participant a list of possible referrals for therapeutic services if necessary following the interview. The recordings and notes for the interview were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home, and were destroyed following the completion and approval of the researcher's thesis.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher has completed and submitted, the Human Subjects Application to the CSUS Graduate Study office. The researcher received approval to move forward with the study as of October 20, 2009 (approval number: 09-10-010). The researcher also received permission to present the thesis study to the Queer Straight Alliance on the California State University of Sacramento branch, and ask for participation in this study from this organization's members. Permission was granted via email, and confirmed by phone prior to the November 18, 2009 presentation.

Statistical Analysis Plan

The researcher used content analysis in order to identify emergent themes within the summary of the interviews. These themes included, observations and or experiences of homophobic verbal and or physical aggression; gender variations of acceptance and aggression; response versus no response of high school professionals; self-injurious ideations and or behaviors; drug and or alcohol abuse; and negative self-image as a result of homophobia and or transphobia. These emergent themes are displayed in graph and table form to facilitate comprehension.

Limitations

This study presents with several limitations. The researcher has conducted an exploratory study with only 8 participants. Each participant is discussing their own individual perceptions and experiences within the institution of high school. These perceptions will be biased because they are subjective reflections. In addition, all participants identify as males, and this creates issues when discussing the validity of these experiences across gender lines. Finally, the experiences of the client are recollections that have occurred while they were in high school, and distortions of the participants' memory are not only plausible, but likely.

Summary

This chapter discussed the particulars involved with the procedure of this study. This study has been explained as an exploratory research design relying on convenient snowball sampling. The details surrounding the interview process have been recounted,

and the specifics, including instrumentation was also written about referencing the

questionnaire used for the interviews. Data gathering procedures were provided including

information on the distribution of consent forms. The approval number, for the human

subjects protection has been included. The process in which the data has been analyzed

was recounted. The chapter concluded with limitations of the study, for example, the

limited number of participants.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The research being presented in this chapter is based upon eight interviews of 18

to 22-year-olds identified or perceived GBT males reflecting on their experiences in the

context of the participants' high school setting. First, demographic data will be presented

as a way of introducing the reader to the participants who so generously shared their

stories. These findings will be followed by discussion of the qualitative findings. First,

the researcher will present each question with a more in-depth analysis of the

participants' responses regarding each participant's recalled observations and personal

experiences. The researcher will then present emergent themes, which were identified

across all, or the majority of respondents' interview data. The data will be presented in a

manner to facilitate identified similarities and differences for each participant.

The demographic information varies between the eight participants. The ages

range from 19 to 22 years old. Five respondents at the time of the interviews were 22

years old; two were 19 years old, and one participant was 21 years old. The ethnic

backgrounds also varied between participants. Two participants identified being of

Mexican descent, two respondents stated being of Asian descent, one participant stated he

was Jamaican, and the other respondents stated they were Caucasian.

In regard to race and the participants' experiences with homophobia, the

participant who was of Jamaican heritage identified a connection between his ethnic

background, and the homophobia that he witnessed during his adolescence. This respondent stated he grew up in a community that was predominantly Jamaican, and that his schooling was also primarily Jamaican students. He made the correlation of homophobia within the context to his school, and also the homophobia that is commonplace within the context of his ethnic population. This was the only participant that linked his ethnic heritage to the homophobia that was experienced or observed.

When referencing the question of religion, the demographic information of this category also varied. Three of the eight participants identified as being Catholic, one respondent stated he was Buddhist, one interviewee acknowledged Shintoism as his religious conviction, one respondent said he was Protestant, another stated he was non-denominational, but was raised in a Christian environment, and the final participant claimed that he had no religious affiliation. None of the respondents stated there was a link between homophobia and their religious convictions, however the participant that identified as being Jamaican did link his heritage to be generally Christian, and this could have been a factor in the Jamaican community's homophobic ideations.

All eight of the respondents claimed they attended some form of a formal high school. Six of the eight participants stated they were enrolled and completed a four-year public high school. One interviewee attended a private school for three years, and then completed his GED, and the final respondent claimed he was "kicked out" of high school for "rebellious" behavior. This respondent did complete his GED, and claims that as he reflected upon his experiences and substance abuse in high school, he believed if he

would have felt comfortable "coming out" in high school, his behavior would have been different, and thus his life would have been altered.

<div align="center">Specific Findings</div>

When asked to describe a "typical day" within the context of the respondents' school, each participant had varying descriptions, however there were several identified activities. Four of the eight participants identified activities, which included, classes, homework, schoolwork, extracurricular activities, talking with friends, and "hanging out." The other four participants identified negative experiences within the context of a typical day. One participant described his typical day by sharing, "For the most part, it was very nerve racking because everyone had a question for me." The other three respondents who discussed homophobia on a "typical" day all stated that they were called "fag" or "faggot."

When the respondents were asked if they had knowledge of homophobic treatment within the confines of their high school experience, all of the respondents had witnessed and or experienced personally homophobia during this time frame. The degree or extent of harassment varied between participants. Three participants experienced homophobia in a direct personal way. One of these three respondents experienced name calling, such as "faggot" or "gay boy," but did not witness other peers experiencing homophobic bullying. The other two interviewees that identified harassment based upon their perceived sexuality or gender identity also witnessed other peers being harassed. One participant who identified as being male to female transsexual discussed issues

particularly in the locker room, however identified a peer as experiencing much more difficult treatment. He stated, "…the more effeminate boys were harassed by the 'jock' types. One of my friends was regularly heckled for being feminine, even before he 'came out.'"

The other five respondents all identified observations of homophobic bullying within the context of their high school. Three participants discussed verbal abuse or torment of peers that appeared to be of alternative sexuality or gender. Two of these interviewees were completely "closeted" in the context of their high school, with one stating that he began divulging being of alternative sexuality to his family during this time frame, however, not to anyone at his school. The third participant had begun to identify as "gay" to close friends during high school. All three respondents stated they were not identified by their peers as being of alternative sexuality or gender during this time of high school.

The final two participants identified violent harassment of the participants' peers during high school. Both participants stated that the peers who were attacked physically were identified to be of alternative sexuality or gender. One participant stated that a 15-year-old at his school was physically assaulted based upon a rumor that the peer had been communicating via chat room with a gay man. This deterred this participant from being open with his sexuality, "I couldn't be open about it (his sexuality), especially after knowing what happened." This participant stated that he was not identified by peers to be alternative sexuality or gender. The final participant stated that a peer in his high school

was identified to be a "homosexual" because of the way he dressed, and his Mohawk. This student was attacked by peers, and as a result, school staff needed to call the authorities and emergency medical technicians. The participant elaborated, "I do not recall him finishing his senior year. I later found out that he was not a homosexual." This respondent also stated that he was not identified to be of alternative sexuality or gender.

When addressing school staffs' response to homophobic harassment within the high school setting, the respondents' shared differing experiences. Five of the participants stated that school staff was unaware and or ineffective when dealing with the issues surrounding homophobic bullying. One of these participants had identified a physical assault of a 15-year-old peer as is previously detailed. This respondent stated, "No, I had no knowledge of any response by school officials."

The other three participants that shared that there was school intervention when homophobic bullying was encountered at their high schools also had differing experiences. One participant shared that it was addressed only as a result of the violent episode that had occurred in which authorities and ambulance were necessary. One of these three respondents shared that although a peer was harassed and parents were notified, some teachers were more proactive than others. He stated, "In my experience, certain teachers at my high school would help more than others." Only one participant of the eight stated that staff was very aware and supportive of queer teens' issues. This respondent said in response to this question, "Absolutely school staffs were pretty supportive. Staff was fairly aware of the LGBTQ issues." It may be relevant to mention

that this participant is also the only participant who identified a large and diverse QSA, and this respondent shared that at his school, there were openly gay teachers.

In regard to the question on support systems that were available for queer adolescents there was also varying data. Four of the respondents stated that there was no school club such as a Queer Straight Alliance within the participants' high school, or a counselor in place that was sensitive to the issues particular to adolescents struggling with issues of sexuality or gender. All four of these interviewees' agreed that a school-affiliated support system would have been beneficial. One participant stated, "I think it would have been helpful if the school would have supplied information on where to go for LGBT support whether it be in the school or in the community."

The other four respondents stated there was a Queer Straight Alliance within their high school. One participant within this group identified the QSA as very helpful and quite large. The other three respondents discussed that the Queer Straight Alliances in their high schools were small or new, and needed to be a larger influence within the context of their high schools. One respondent stated, "…(the QSA) it was small, and it wasn't very publicized."

When the participants were asked if one gender was more empathetic or understanding than another, seven out of eight of the respondents identified female peers to be more understanding. One participant, who also identified as being Jamaican, stated that although females were not as aggressive, as the males in his school, he did not believe they were more accepting. One participant stated that it seemed as though both

genders were accepting, however male students had more issues than others. This participant stated, "It seemed that both genders were pretty open, but more boys appeared to have issues, and those boys avoided certain groups that would have queer individuals." Only one participant stated that it did not appear that one gender was more understanding than the other.

The participants had varying data in reference to the participants' observations or personal experiences with missing school. Four of the respondents stated they had no knowledge or personal experience with missing school in relation to homophobic bullying. The other four respondents shared variations of students missing school in association to homophobic harassment. One participant related this question to a previously discussed violent attack of a peer with a Mohawk who was attacked by other students for being identified as a "homosexual." This respondent stated that this peer did not complete his senior year. One participant stated that a female peer would miss school; however this respondent trivialized this observation by stating, "There was one girl, but she was very dramatic, and she also had family issues as well." The other two respondents shared personal experiences with missing school because of homophobia. Both students identified P.E. class to be particularly troubling, and one respondent stated, "I never skipped all of school, but there were more than one P.E. class I faked a stomach ache for in 9th grade."

The question of coping with homophobic harassment had very little consensus among the participants. Two participants stated they did not know how peers coped with

homophobia because those peers were not part of the respondents' peer group. The other participants had varying responses, which included alcohol and drug use, school involvement, developing a social system, ignoring, not discussing the issue, and denial of being a homosexual.

When asked to discuss drug and alcohol use specifically as a coping skill, the respondents' data was split. Four participants did not identify any observed or personal use of alcohol and or drugs as a result of homophobia. Of the other four respondents, one participant identified that some of his peers in theater would "get stoned," but the interviewee did not believe it was related to homophobia. Another participant stated he would imbibe alcohol on a regular basis, but he did not relate this to any form of coping skills related to homophobic treatment. It may be relevant to mention, that this participant did identify personal experiences with homophobia. Only two of the participants identified alcohol and drug use as a coping skill for dealing with homophobia. One respondent shared, "Yes, I smoked a lot of pot, and I used meth- amphetamines for two years during this time…I think if I had been out, and felt comfortable being out, I would've avoided doing a lot of this kind of stuff."

When asked if the participants had knowledge of or personal experiences with self-injurious thoughts or actions, the data was again split. Four of the respondents did not identify personal experiences and further did not have knowledge of others struggling with these issues. One participant did state that he at times engaged in cutting, however this participant did not relate this behavior to transphobia that the participant identified

experiencing during his high school experience. The other three respondents all shared they had personally contemplated suicidal ideations during the time of their high school experience. One participant stated, "I'm not sure about other people, but I thought about it sometimes, especially right before I came out."

In response to how the participants believed homophobia affected their self-image during their high school experience, the majority responded that homophobia negatively affected the respondents' self-image. Six of the eight respondents agreed that homophobia negatively affected their self-esteem. One participant identified homophobia being potentially negative toward his self-image, but identified an extremely large support network that prevented the respondent's experiences from having an affect. Only one participant did not identify homophobia as having an impact on his self-image, and further did not share any observations of this with his peers.

In regard to the question asking what could have enhanced or created a more positive experience for those students who experienced homophobia, there were three different answers from the interviewees. Two participants stated that having information and or diversity classes provided for all students might have been helpful. Two other respondents shared that having a support network of friends who were understanding was essential to coping with this high school experience. The other four respondents spoke of professional sensitivity at the school as being a significant factor to having support for queer adolescents.

The final question of the interview invited the respondent to discuss what qualities the respondent had or saw in others that made those who experienced homophobia resilient, the answers varied extensively. The responses included characteristics of the resilient person, such qualities included, positivism, strength, a good sense of humor, optimism, strong mindedness, and being able to ignore the negative judgments of others. In addition, to these descriptive terms for the resilient person, three participants identified the significance of having supportive friends and or family.

<center>Overall Findings</center>

The participants were in varying degrees of self-identifying to be of alternative sexuality or gender during their high school experience, with the majority of the respondents not openly self-identifying as being queer during this timeframe. The respondents who participated in this research study, all self-identified during the interviews to be of alternative sexuality or gender, however the degree to which the participants were open with family, friends, and co-workers varied. The majority of participants, at the time of the data gathering all felt comfortable self-identifying as being of alternative sexuality or gender with the respondents' friends, however, the majority were still not completely open with all or identified significant family members. Further, during the participants' high school experience the majority felt that female peers were more understanding and accepting of individuals who were of alternative sexuality or gender than the male students within the confines of the participants' high school.

This author's research supports findings that have been presented in Chapter 2 regarding the observations and experiences of identified or perceived GLBTQ adolescents within the context of the institutional settings of high schools. All participants identified at least one observation in which there was an individual who experienced negativity as a result of the assumption that this person was of alternative sexuality or gender. These observations came primarily in the form of derogatory speech with such words as "fag" or "faggot." One participant shared that his harassment would begin in the parking lot, "…a guy who would harass me sometimes flicking his headlights on and calling me a fag. Some days it would scare me. The same guy wouldn't walk near me in the hallways either…." The participants did not all identify these acts as being homophobia, but when asked for clarification, all agreed that these words were used to identify an individual who was perceived to be queer.

The majority of participants agreed that homophobia during their observations and experiences in their high school affected their self-image in a negative fashion. The respondents shared sentiments that if there was no homophobia, then they would have had more confidence and self esteem. One participant stated incredulously to this question, "Yes, of course, how could it not affect your self-image!"

Further running themes within the context of these interviews included a concurrence among participants that either there was a need for a Queer Straight Alliance within the confines of the participant's high school or that the Queer Straight Alliance within the observer's high school was helpful. For those participants that did discuss the

Queer Straight Alliance in their high school, there was agreement that this needed to be expanded to be a larger influence for those students who were identified or perceived to be of alternative sexuality or gender. Further, the majority of participants identified that if they had school staff that were GLBTQ sensitive, this would have greatly helped with the issues surrounding adolescents struggling with alternative sexuality and or gender, and homophobia.

When asked if the participants felt school staff were helpful in intervening on behalf of students who were experiencing homophobia, the majority of respondents stated school staff was not helpful. Further, participants stated that most school officials were completely unaware of the issues involved with homophobia. This happened for different reasons; however several participants identified school staff as deliberately ignoring homophobic interactions between the students. One respondent stated, "I rarely saw a lot of teachers say anything…in fact most teachers would ignore it."

Despite any homophobic interactions with peers, the majority of participants discussed feeling that their high school experience was "normal" or "average." The majority of respondents stated activities such as doing school work, studying, participating in extracurricular activities, and talking with friends. Even those participants who personally experienced homophobic interactions still identified these activities as being part of their daily routine.

Summary

This chapter has analyzed the data of this author's research. The introduction included demographic information, and the potential significance of this information. This author proceeded by giving specific data to the participants' responses to each individual question of the interviews. Similarities and differences were discussed during this section. Finally, this researcher discussed running themes that occurred within the responses of each participant. These themes were shared by all or the majority of the respondents, and were identified as significant during this section. Such themes included, but are not limited to, a consensus of personal or observed homophobia within the context of the participants' high school experience, a positive perception of Queer Straight Alliances, and the ineffective nature of school staff response to the issue of queer harassment within high schools.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In Chapter 1, several research questions were posed to guide this study.. Throughout the research process, definitive conclusions can be drawn regarding these initial queries. This section will address these notions, and give examples from the data to highlight and give voice.

In regard to the question of the subjective life experiences of identified or perceived GBTQ males, the respondents shared similarities in several arenas. First, all participants witnessed some form of homophobia within the context of the institution of high school. The degree to which these participants experienced or observed homophobia greatly varies. Several respondents voiced personal experiences of being called "fag" or "faggot," while others explained that the experiences were observed occurring to others. Two respondents reported that students in their high school were physically assaulted, and one described a scenario in which the participant claims that medical attention was necessary, "They physically assaulted him ripping both of his earrings out of his earlobes…staff contacted the authorities and ambulatory emergency services."

In addition, there was a consensus that having professionals within the high school that were sensitive to people of alternative sexuality or gender would have been greatly beneficial. One respondent stated when asked about what could have been more beneficial about his high school experience, "Someone who I could have really confided

in …someone professional who I could have talked too." Further, Queer Straight Alliances were also viewed as positive, or potentially helpful with dealing with homophobia. When asked about the QSA in one respondent's school, he stated, " [our school] had a large and very active LGBTQ QSA…we had a large, diverse, support network which helped people maintain a positive experience."

When addressing the question of how the participants viewed the experience of institutionalized homophobia upon the respondents' self-images, there was a consensus that homophobia does, and was observed/experienced to be negative on queer adolescents' self-image. However, there was a discrepancy to which the participants' expressed the personal experiences of this issue. Several participants identified a negative impact on their self-image as a direct result of the ostracizing effects of homophobia, but the degree to which this was a concern was subject to the participants' openness regarding being of alternative sexuality or gender. Those participants that did not have a support network expressed feeling a stronger negative effect on the respondent's self-image, than those participants that had supportive friends and family. One participant commented in reference to homophobia affecting his self-image, "Yes, of course it affected me quite a bit. If there wasn't homophobia I would have come out in high school, and my life would have been very different."

When discussing the gender binary, in its effects on homophobic interactions, as observed or experienced by the participants of this study, evidence supported that gender roles did play a part in the respondents' experiences. As was discussed in Chapter Four,

the majority of participants believed that females were more accepting of students who were of alternative sexuality or gender. Further analysis of the data suggests that the respondents experienced or observed more negativity from their male counterparts. Several participants identified "jocks" or male teens that were in traditional gender roles were more likely to express homophobic behavior than male students that had other interests such as drama club or chorus. One respondent identified physical education being particularly difficult, "…it could be awful, especially in 9th and 10th grade, there was a group of seniors in my gym class…they would call me all sorts of names, like femme, faggot, and all sorts of other negative gay names."

Finally, when addressing the benefits of a solution-focused resiliency for this population, this author's research provides insight. All the participants identified having an active Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) within the context of the respondents' high schools would have been beneficial. These organizations could work on education of to the general school population, and further could provide support for individuals who are feeling isolated or dejected. One respondent commented, "I think because of this large support network it helped keep people from letting others' bringing harm to individuals who identified as queer."

In addition, as was previously discussed, having school staff that are competent and sensitive to the unique experiences of queer adolescents is an important component in creating a safe school environment. This notion has been supported by the research of this author's study. One participant stated, "I think having more teachers that wouldn't

assume that everyone in the class is straight, and if not then at least not silently accepting stuff as ok or just kids stuff." This was a common theme through out the participants of this study.

<center>Recommendations</center>

Homophobia and its negative effects on developing adolescents make it glaringly clear that social workers have an ethical obligation to advocate on behalf of this oppressed group. This can come in many forms, however, due to the controversial nature of this topic, it becomes clear that raising awareness into this issue is an important first step. Presenting this issue to local advocacy agencies such as the Sacramento Gay and Lesbian Center in connection with National campaigning groups such as Human Rights Campaign, and the ACLU in order to begin the task of grassroots methods of public education of this topic could begin. This could come in a myriad of ways, such as door to door campaigning, professional presentations in college classrooms, and local mental health agencies, and information sessions being held at local centers could all be imperative techniques into raising awareness into this issue.

Once this has been completed, and significant numbers of people are aware of this issue, petitioning should begin in order to have an initiative placed on the ballad asking for a mandatory sexuality sensitivity certification be put into place for all professionals and paraprofessionals who are working with our teens in the school systems. The school districts all ready have stringent regiments, and qualifications necessary for professionals and paraprofessionals to work with students, it is extremely important to add a sexuality

sensitivity training to these requirements. Those parties who are unwilling or unable to successfully complete the necessary sensitivity certification should not be allowed to work with the students.

The proposed financial allocation of this certification training and process shall be paid for by a progressive tax. This means that lower income households would not bear the added financial burden of this additional requirement. Households with larger financial means available would be required to pay an additional progressive tax on their income in order for the school districts to receive the funds possible to provide the training for current school employees. Those individuals who are attempting to be hired onto the school district will need to participate in a Continuing Education Units presentation paid for out of pocket based upon a sliding scale of payment. Presenters on this topic will develop a curriculum that would need pre-approval by a certification committee, whose members will receive payment from funds obtained from the progressive tax.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This paper has discussed the issue of homophobic bullying in the context of the institution of high schools. Discussion has been raised to the significance of this issue, and supporting research has been provided sustaining the concept that homophobic harassment of identified or perceived queer students is a severe area of concern within Western culture. This researcher's qualitative data has also shown evidence to this problem of homophobia, and detailed accounts of the interviewees' responses have been

discussed during Chapter 4. This author has also provided a plan of action for raising

awareness, and giving proper education and certification for professionals to be properly

sensitive to the unique issues surrounding queer adolescents. It is only after awareness

and support is raised on the issue of homophobia within the institutions of high schools

can new laws and regulations be put into place. This study, and the corresponding

research has demonstrated the urgent need for queer adolescents to gain safety and

support within this context. Until more professionals are sensitive to these issues, it is

clear that damage will continue to be done to this oppressed group of GLBTQ

adolescents.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

The purpose of this study is to get a clearer understanding of the personal experiences that occur with individuals who are perceived to be or identify as being within the GLBTQ community during their high school education within the context of an institutional setting. The researcher will be asking a series of interview questions to each participant. A set of the questions is provided below. The researcher will be designating a period of one hour for each interview. Each interview will be held in a private room of the library. This researcher will be recording each session for the purpose of clarity during the research analysis. Participation is strictly voluntary, and it will be solely used to provide research information for this study. Each participant will receive an informed consent form, and also information providing follow up therapy if needed by the participant.

What is your age?:_____

How do you identify ? :_____

Were you raised in a particular religion? _____

1. Did you ever attend a formal high school (not home schooled) ?

    How long did you attend?

2. Were you "out" in high school?

If not were you perceived to be of alternative sexuality or gender in the high

school setting?

3. Can you describe a typical day for you in high school?

4. Did you have knowledge of any person who experienced negativity (bullying,

harassment, verbal or physical assaults, etc) associated with their perceived sexuality or

gender?,

If yes, did school staff respond, and if so how?

5. Were you aware of any support systems that were available to help persons deal with

homophobia in high school?

Did it appear that one gender was more empathetic or understanding than

another?

6. Did you have any knowledge of students missing school because of homophobic

treatment within your high school?

7. If you were aware of individuals who experienced homophobia, how did these

individuals cope with the homophobia they experienced in your high school setting?

8. Were you aware of individuals who used alcohol or drugs being to cope with

homophobia?

9. During your high school experience were you aware of individuals who contemplated

or engaged in self-injurious behavior because of experiences with homophobia?

10. If you had knowledge of individuals who experienced homophobia, did you perceive that the homophobia they experienced may have affected their self-image?

11. If you had knowledge of individuals who experienced homophobia at your high school, do you have any ideas of what could have made their high school experiences more positive or affirming?

12. If you knew someone in high school who experienced homophobia, what personal qualities did you notice that helped him/her to be resilient in such a situation?

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent to Participate as a Research Subject

Title: The subjective life experiences of identified or perceived male GBTQ adolescents in high school settings: A retrospective study

I hereby agree to participate in research which will be conducted by Paul Heffner, an MSW II student at California State University, Sacramento. He is working under the direction of Dr. Chrys Barranti, Associate Professor as his thesis advisor.

The purpose of this research is to:

The purpose of this study is to explore and give voice to the subjective life experiences of identified or perceived male GBTQ adolescents in high school settings.

Procedure:

The researcher will be asking a series of 11 interview questions regarding remembered subjective life experiences of day to day life as an identified or perceived male adolescent GBTQ person in high school settings. Such topics as coping skills, impact of homophobia on self image, and use of support systems will be explored. Minimal demographic data will be collected. The interview will take about one hour and will be held in a private room of the library at CSUS campus or at a private location of the participant's choosing. This researcher will be recording each session. You can request that the audio taping be stopped at any time during the interview without any negative consequence. All data, tape recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed upon completion of this study and no later than July, 2009.

Risks:

The participants will be asked to discuss their experiences in high school settings. Once again, participation is strictly voluntary, and the interview can be ended at any time without any negative consequence. It is possible that recalling past experiences may illicit difficult emotions. Should you experience any distress as a result of participating in this study or identify any potential needs you can access the following services:

> Psychological Counseling Services at Student Health Center (For CSUS Students Only)
> 916-278-6416

The Sacramento Gay and Lesbian Center
916-442-0185

Rachaell Wood, MFT
South Valley Center
(916) 995-5190

Melody Lee, MFT
916-704-4518

I understand that this research may have the following benefits:

This research study is to acquire knowledge on the issue of institutionalized homophobia in school settings. The information obtained will help shape future research on this critical issue. In addition, it is hoped that by giving voice to the subjective life experiences of identified or perceived male GBTQ adolescents and sharing such experiences with social workers that diversity competent practice skills can be improved and needed advocacy increased.

Alternatives/Rights to Refuse or Withdraw:
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you may decline to answer any questions and you may discontinue your participation at any point without risk or consequences.

Confidentiality:
Your identity will be kept confidential. No personally identifying information will be used in the study. All data and audio recordings and transcripts will be solely identified by an alias. During the analysis of the data all information will be kept in lock boxes to ensure confidentiality. The consent form will be stored separately from audio tapes, transcripts and any and all data. Later all information collected will be appropriately destroyed after the Master's thesis project has been filed with California State University of Sacramento and no later than July 2010.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Contact Information:
If you have any questions about this research project or would like to inquire about the findings from this research project, you may contact Paul Heffner at 916-743-3819 or by email at heffnerpaul@hotmail.com. In addition you may contact this researcher's thesis advisor, Dr. Chrys Barranti at 916 278-4161 or cbarranti@csus.edu.

mailto:
I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I may decline to participate at any time without risk.

Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research project.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

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