WRITING MATTERS:
UNDERSTANDING THE WRITING PRACTICES OF FIVE YOUNG ADULTS
SELF-IDENTIFYING ON THE LGBTQ SPECTRUM

A dissertation submitted to the
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by

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to further the understanding of how LGBTQ self-identified young adults perceive using writing and various forms of self-expression. Naturalistic inquiry case study was applied to explore the participants’ experiences with writing/self-expression by addressing the following questions: (a) What are the experiences of LGBTQ self-identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond? (b) In what ways are a variety of modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ youth/young adult community? Specifically, this study focused on investigating these questions through the lens of Nel Noddings’ Ethics of Care to determine whether these individuals utilized writing or other forms of expression as a self-care tool. Participants were five young adults between the ages of 18–25 who self-identified on the LGBTQ spectrum. Multiple data were collected: journal entries, poetry, essays, articles, photographs, drawings, and two 1-hour interviews with each participant.

Results revealed that LGBTQ students often experience a disruption in the carer-cared for relationship between teachers and students and may turn to writing and other multi-modal forms of self-expression on their own as a means of self-care. The implications for research and instruction highlight the use of choice and a multi-modal approach to writing/composing in schools would be beneficial to all students.
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In some ways, this is the most difficult part to write. How do you begin to thank the people in your life who guided you, supported you, and celebrated with you all along the way? Completing my doctoral studies and obtaining a Ph.D. was a long-held dream and something I never thought would actually come to life. Not until I was near completion of a 30-year career in teaching and raised two wonderful children, did I feel the time was right to begin this journey. Oh, what a journey it has been!

Professionally, it really began when I decided to enroll in the Northeast Ohio Writing Project and met an inspiring mentor named Dr. Nancy McCracken. Nancy saw something in me and encouraged me to push myself further than I’d ever gone. With her trusty co-director, Dr. Anthony Manna, and the personal mentor they assigned to me, Dr. Deb Debendecitis, I not only flew, I soared. My experiences with the writing project led to the eventual publication of my first journal article and joining the board of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts. It really wasn’t until Dr. Alexa Sandmann entered the picture and put the bug in my ear about considering entering a doctoral program, did I even think about it as real possibility.

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I would be remiss if I did not thank all of the many new friends and colleagues in the LGBTQ organizations with which I am now affiliated. I look forward to continuing to work alongside you as we strive to make this world a safer place.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and Related Terms</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics of Care</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ Issues</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Gay Rights Movement: A Brief History</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewall</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissension within the ranks</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society Today</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing theories</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate crimes</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying and harassment</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing in particular</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition Studies (1912–Present)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 19th Century</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 20th Century</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCTE: The Beginning</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends and Research in Writing Instruction by Decade</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY SECTION ........................................... 89
   Naturalistic Inquiry Case Study ................................................................. 89
   Role as Researcher ......................................................................................... 91
   Participant Selection .................................................................................... 93
   Data Collection ............................................................................................ 96
      Semi-structured interviews....................................................................... 96
      Artifacts of self-expression ...................................................................... 99
      Researcher reflections/journals ............................................................... 100
   Data Analysis .............................................................................................. 100
      Transcription ......................................................................................... 101
      Coding ..................................................................................................... 102
   Trustworthiness ......................................................................................... 103
      Triangulation .......................................................................................... 104
      Peer debriefing ....................................................................................... 104

The 1920s ........................................................................................................ 45
The 1930s ........................................................................................................ 45
The 1940s ........................................................................................................ 46
The 1950s ........................................................................................................ 46
The 1960s ........................................................................................................ 48
The 1970s ........................................................................................................ 50
The 1980s ........................................................................................................ 54
The 1990s ........................................................................................................ 56
Early 21st century .......................................................................................... 56
2009–present ................................................................................................. 57

The Ethics of Care ............................................................................................ 63
Writing as Healing .......................................................................................... 64
   Clinical Research ....................................................................................... 67
   Classroom Action Research ..................................................................... 70
Writing as a Therapeutic Tool For LGBTQ Students ..................................... 72

New Literacies ................................................................................................. 75
What Puts the “New” in New Literacies? ..................................................... 75
   Origins ......................................................................................................... 78
   Interpretations of terminology .................................................................. 78
   Realities of the classroom ......................................................................... 82
   Outside the classroom .............................................................................. 82

LGBTQ Youth/Young Adults and New Literacies ......................................... 83
   New literacies: Online/social networking ................................................. 84
   Social support ............................................................................................ 85
   Seeking information and advice ............................................................... 85
   Gaps in access .......................................................................................... 85
   Bullying and harassment .......................................................................... 86
   New literacies: Arts-based ........................................................................ 86

Summary ......................................................................................................... 88
Summary

Pilot Study
Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis

Research Question

Research Question 1

The K–12 experience

Earliest memories

Difficulties

Positive

Beyond the K–12 experience

Research Question 2

Positive

Difficulties

Earliest memories

Research Question 1

The K–12 experience

Earliest memories

Difficulties

Positive

Beyond the K–12 experience

Research Question 2

Journaling

Book chapter

Photography

Social media

Summary

Isobel

Research Question 1

The K–12 experience

Earliest memories

Difficulties

Research Question 1

The K–12 experience

Earliest memories

Difficulties

Ethics
Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis
Pilot Study
Summary

Member checking
The reflexive journal
Purposive sampling
Audit trail

Ethics
Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis
Pilot Study
Summary

 initial:

Backward:

...
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Q &amp; A poem</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-portrait</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Trans*Problems Comic: Binders</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Genet</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Snake-Dog</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Journal: Front Cover</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Journal: Back Cover</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Journal Entry June 14, 2013</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Journal Entry August 7, 2014</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Journal Entry August 29, 2014</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Email of Second Interview Reflection September 13, 2014</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Poem I Sent, Still Writing</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Aftermath of a Fire</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Teamwork</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Rescue Flight</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Country Life is Peaceful</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Freedom and Pride</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Lord Byron quote meme from April 21, 2015</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Anne Frank quote meme from April 22, 2015</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Stand strong meme October 26, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Strength meme from October 19, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Story of your life meme October 22, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Semi-colon meme from December 29, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Samples of journal entries referencing nature from Feb/March 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Traits of Comic Book Heroes—sample (reposted meme, Tumblr, June 6, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Journal entry from September 23, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Untitled entry, February 7, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Tumblr post, May 15, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Tumblr repost, Judgments, from “roseaposey,” January 7, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Tumblr repost, When is Rape Ok?, via “katiedann,” April 1, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Tumblr repost, meme, April 22, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Retweet on Twitter, September 5, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Retweet, Black Lives Matter movement, May 23, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Retweet, refugees, November 24, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>“Struggle for Solitude,” Fall 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How the Data Informs the Research</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Transcription Chart Example</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Timeline of Study</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ryan’s Artifacts</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Renee’s Artifacts</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Isobel’s Artifacts</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Holden’s Artifacts</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. John’s Artifacts</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Participant’s Identities</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Genres/Forms of Expression</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Social Media</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Purposes</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Themes</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Participant Response</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Participant Advice to Teachers</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“When we write, we enact a sense of ourselves as beings in the world . . . Therein lies the transformative power of writing.” –Robert P. Yegelski (2009, pp. 7-8)

Background

The air is warm on this spring day and the lunchtime playground is filled with the shouting and laughing of elementary school children. One group of boys chases after the popular girls while others shoot hoops or toss a football. Small groups of children play hopscotch, jump rope, or swing across the monkey bars, and all seems right with the world. But take a closer look. Over near the wall to the side of the steps and against the building stand “those” kids, the ones who are different, the ones who have some type of disability, the ones no “normal” child dares to play with for fear of jeopardizing his or her social status. Except for me.

This was a typical scene on any given day when I was an elementary school child in the 1960s. Although I was born and raised in a Northeast Ohio suburb that was anything but diverse, I was fortunate to have two parents who believed that all people are equal and that we should live guided by the notion of treating other people as we want to be treated. I knew I wouldn’t want to feel isolated and alone. While my community was not racially or religiously diverse, the school climate always has a way of spotlighting those who are different in some regard and in my elementary school, we had a self-contained classroom of students who were physically, cognitively, and/or academically challenged. These students were often ignored or even teased on the
playground and I remember feeling confused and horrified that anyone would treat them so poorly. Even at this young age, I recognized that this behavior was wrong and I often played with these children in an attempt to help them feel a part of the social fabric. I never gave a thought to my place in this stratified system. My true friends did not treat me differently, but they did not often join me when I spent time with this group of children. In this way, I was befriending the kids whom others deemed outcasts or socially awkward.

Clearly, I recognized at a young age that all people did not seem to be treated equally, but was never quite sure why. Of course, as I grew older, I realized that certain groups within our society hold the power and privilege and that groups and individuals who did not fall into the “right” groups were marginalized in some way. Whether I knew the correct terms for these issues or not, I knew it did not seem right and I have continued to position myself as an ally motivated by a strong sense of social justice for all marginalized people.

As an educator for over 30 years, I brought this caring attitude to my classroom and always made time for each of my students. No matter what grade I taught, from first to eighth, the most important thing for me was to make sure my students knew I cared about them and that my classroom was a safe, non-judgmental place. In this comfortable environment, I believe my students felt free to speak and write honestly without fear of ridicule. As I grew as an educator, I soon learned that there were names and even constructs for what I was doing instinctively. I learned about allowing students to write in stages through *The Writing Process* (Murray, 1968, 1972) and that these stages were
recursive (Elbow, 1973; Emig, 1971). I practiced differentiation (Tomlinson, 1999, 2003; see also Guild, 2001) by allowing students’ interests and prior knowledge help me design lessons, and I became aware that issues of social justice (Bender-Slack, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) are still in question, as they were all those years ago when I was an elementary school child.

It should be noted that social justice is a term with multiple definitions and Bender-Slack (2010) explained that trying to understand and implement such pedagogy in the classroom is difficult when these concepts are based on educators’ individual understandings. What seems to be consistent, however, according to Bender-Slack, is the notion that social justice deals with challenging institutional power structures and striving to “construct empowering alternatives” (p. 195). It is with this idea in mind that I attempted to incorporate social justice into my classroom.

Through my intense focus on using writing in a variety of ways, I noticed that students often revealed their emotional lives through seemingly benign written assignments, whether narrative, expository, or poetic. For example, when I asked students to write about a favorite pet, one student wrote about how he was not allowed to have any and indicated that this was a major cause of distress in his life. I had experiences with several students using basic classroom writings to express emotional trauma that they were not revealing to anyone because they knew I would treat them with respect and care.

Two instances were especially troubling. One sixth-grader revealed deep anger and thoughts of suicide, whereas a fourth-grader wrote a poem about extreme loneliness
and wanting to run away from home. With these students, I felt the need to intervene by showing their work to our school counselor who was able to help them further. These were crucial experiences for me as a teacher, validating my caring approach, and encouraging me to continue paying close attention to student writing, yet always using writing for exploration and expression. Never was I more convinced than when I read in the year-end issue of our school newspaper these words from the young man who wrote of suicide: “My favorite memory from all three years at this school was when Mrs. Tollafield told me I had a poet’s soul.”

Over the years, I had the opportunity to teach at various grade levels and work with many teachers. This allowed me to compare students of different ages and varying teaching styles. I noticed that, as children get older, they tend to grow less comfortable writing honestly in the classroom, especially when the kinds of safeguards I was providing are not established. One particular group of students in our schools today, those students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*gender, or Queer (LGBTQ), are often forced to hide their true identities for fear of being ridiculed or even attacked (Blackburn, 2002; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Boske, 2011; Clark, 2010; Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Pachankis & Godfried, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Sadowski, Chow, & Scanlon, 2009; T. A. Savage & Schanding, 2012; Sheriff, Hamilton, Wigmore, & Giambrone, 2011; Thein, 2013; Vetter, 2010; Watson, Varjas, Meyers, & Graybill, 2010).
One incident during my teaching career has stayed with me and was a catalyst for this study. One day, two years before I retired, I heard that our high school’s Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), an organization for LGBTQ students and their allies (straight students who support them), needed a faculty advisor due to a retirement. Even though I worked at the elementary level, I called over to inquire to make sure someone was picking up the mantle for these students and learned that no, they were having difficulty finding someone. I immediately emailed the student president and arranged for a meeting. We met and she was excited to welcome me as their advisor. When I told a colleague at my elementary school that I was the new GSA advisor at the high school, her only words to me were, “Why would you do that?” I was stunned. How could an adult, a teacher, react that way? Her response brought me back to those elementary playground days and it was then I began to think about our LGBTQ students and whether a climate of not only social justice, but one of caring exists in the classroom for these students.

Statement of the Problem

This pivotal experience, along with my experiences teaching writing, caused me to pursue a line of inquiry that has provided evidence that classrooms are not always the safe havens educators hope them to be, especially when students are asked to write about their experiences, connections to content, or their inner lives and they happen to identify outside of traditional gender or sexual orientations (Albertini, 2008; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Clark, 2010; Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011; Kilman, 2010; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; T. A. Savage & Schanding, 2012; Thein, 2013).
Because the American school climate is firmly rooted in the traditional hegemony of heteronormative beliefs (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Crocco, 2001, 2002; Franck, 2002; Irvine, 1997; C. W. Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014; Payne, 2007; Payne & Smith, 2012a, 2012c; Pinar, 2007; Thornton, 2009; Walton, 2010), schools in general, and classrooms in particular, might become uncomfortable places for LGBTQ identified youth (Blackburn, 2002; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Boske, 2011; Clark, 2010; Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011; C. W. Johnson et al., 2014; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Pachankis & Godfried, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Sadowski et al., 2009; T. A. Savage & Schanding, 2012; Sheriff et al., 2011; Thein, 2013; Vetter, 2010; Watson et al., 2010). Due to these feelings of discomfort with being outsiders within the school’s dominant culture, it can be assumed that these students are not reaping the full benefits of their educational experiences. It might even be said that their emotional needs are not being met. If this is the case, they are not being cared for in school in the way that has been elucidated by Nel Noddings (1984/2003, 2012a, 2012b) for the last three decades. As a former language arts teacher with many experiences teaching writing, I wondered if this might lead LGBTQ youth to lose interest in writing for anything more than fulfilling required assignments. Are they turned away from writing or do they turn to writing on their own to care for themselves?

**Purpose of the Study**

As noted earlier, my experience, coupled with the current heteronormative school climate (Albertini, 2008; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007, 2010; Kilman, 2010; Reese, 2000; Thein, 2013) and my own experiences seeing the work of my
students when they opened up their lives via their writing, made me wonder if writing might provide a vehicle for LGBTQ youth to care for themselves when used for their own purposes.

My study attempts to look at how LGBTQ-identified young adults use writing in their lives. As the literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrates, the existing research on writing as a therapeutic tool lies within three major fields: the psychological and medical fields, which is traditionally quantitative or causal in nature (Burton & King, 2004; Pachankis & Godfried, 2010; Pennebaker, 1997a, 1997b, 2004; Singer & Singer, 2008; Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002a); and in the field of critical research, looking specifically at writing in terms of identity (Albertini, 2008; Ball & Ellis, 2008; Blackburn, 2002; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Bowles, 1997; DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005; Moje & MuQarib, 2003; Vetter, 2010). The only research I found that directly relates writing with self-care focuses solely on adults in the counseling field in order to help alleviate the burnout and “compassion fatigue” (Warren, Morgan, Morris, & Morris, 2010, p. 109) they may experience. There is little research focusing on LGBTQ identified young adults and their own writing practices, which demonstrates an important gap in the literature that needs further investigation. While care ethics (Noddings, 1984/2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2012a, 2012b) is the main framework through which I contextualize this study, it focuses solely on the carer/cared-for relationship, and does not address the possibility of caring for the self. In this study, I also explore how expanding the ethics of care to caring for the self might improve both personal and educational practices.
This Naturalistic inquiry case study sought to further the understanding of how LGBTQ identified young adults perceive using writing and various forms of self-expression, and explored the experiences of this community with writing/self-expression through various modes in academic, private, and social settings.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?
2. In what ways are a variety of modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ youth/young adult community?

**Definitions**

There are terms in this study that require further clarification since they deal with a specific theory or concepts that have more than one contextual definition. Although certain terms may be defined within specific sections of the study, I have chosen to provide definitions in one place for easy reference. For the purposes of this study, I defined *youth* as a young person in grades 6–12, whereas the term *young adult* refers to anyone ages 18–25.

**Gender and Sexual Orientation**

It is important to present a clear definition of the essential terms related to the gender and sexual orientation aspect of this study since the general public may not be familiar with their distinctions. McShee (2008) and Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2011) explained that *sexual orientation* is the internal desire to whom
we are attracted and sexual behavior is the external manifestation of that desire. Gender identity involves self-labeling in terms of gender (e.g., male, female, androgynous, trans*gender, intersexed, genderqueer), regardless of biological sex (sex assigned at birth, determined by chromosomes, internal, and external genitalia), while gender expression deals with “an individual’s physical characteristics, behaviors and presentation that are linked, traditionally, to either masculinity or femininity, such as: appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions” (GLSEN, 2011, p. 41).

The next set of terms relates to the specific gender and sexual orientation identities that people may claim (GLSEN, 2011). An ally is a member of the majority or dominant group who works to end oppression by supporting or advocating for the oppressed population, sometimes referred to as a straight ally. Heterosexual or straight is a sexual orientation of a person attracted to some members of the opposite sex. The term lesbian refers to a sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is female-identified and who is emotionally and sexually attracted to some other females. This term was derived from the Greek island of Lesbos where, in the seventh century B.C.E., the poet Sappho lived with and taught a circle of young female poets (N. Miller, 1995). Gay refers to a sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to some members of the same sex. Although gay can refer to both males and females, many prefer the term lesbian for females. Bisexual refers to a sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to some males and some females. Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with their gender assigned at birth, whereas trans*gender refers to
an identity of a person whose gender identity is not aligned with their sex assigned at
birth and/or whose gender expression is non-conforming. Please note that my use of the
* is intentional as that is a preferred symbol by many people in the trans* community to
indicate the diversity within this subgroup of the LGBTQ acronym. Basically, it was
created to go beyond the binary of male and female genders and help people realize the
other possible identities, “including transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, genderfluid,
non-binary, genderfuck, genderless, agender, non-gendered, third gender, two spirit,
bigender, trans man, and trans woman” (Killerman, 2012, para. 2). Intersex is a general
term to describe

A variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual
anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. These
conditions can affect the genitals, the chromosomes and/or secondary sex
characteristics. (GLSEN, 2011, p. 42)

Queer is an umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity,
or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms. Although it is
used as a neutral, or even a positive term among many LGBT people today, historically it
has been used negatively. Another term related to the LGBTQ community is the word
out. This refers to an individual who has declared their (use of plural pronoun is
intentional as I recognize the existence of more than two genders—his or her) identity,
specifically, being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*gender, or queer, whether to a person in
private or a group of people. This is particularly important since our modern society
holds to a heteronormative belief system in which “heterosexuality is the norm; the
assumption that heterosexuality is universal and that anything other than heterosexuality is unnatural” (GLSEN, 2011, p. 42). A related term is *heterosexism*, which is any “attitude, bias and discrimination in favor of heterosexual sexuality and relationships” (p. 42) and presumes that everyone is or should be straight. The last term in this category is *coming out*, which refers to the act of “declaring one’s identity, specifically, being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, [or queer], whether to a person in private or a group of people” (GLSEN, 2011, p. 40).

**Literacy and Related Terms**

Relating to some specific literacy terms, for the purposes of this discussion, the terms *read* or *reading* are meant to indicate the understanding of any form of representation in a particular context and experience (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). This study looks at writing experiences or other self-expressions and so, for these purposes, *writing* is defined as composing text on paper or online; *composing* as conveying thoughts or feelings through any number of media including, but not limited to, written text, music, dance, or visual art that may “draw on speech, writing, image, gesture, and sound” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 224) to create meaning; *experience* as an individual’s observation or participation in an event; and *expression* as the conveying of thoughts and feelings. Because the terms genre and mode can have various meanings, I have chosen to use the Oxford Dictionary as my source for these two terms. I use the term *genre* to identify a type or category of writing/composing/artwork and the term *mode* to identify the manner in which something is written/composed and presented. Finally, the terms *therapy* or *therapeutic* are used in relation to something having a beneficial effect on
one’s mental state, especially in serving to relax or calm. It is also necessary to mention that for the purposes of this study, the word trauma, when used in connection to students in school, relates to any situation in which it is difficult to cope.

Because there are so many different ways to communicate thoughts, I use the term new literacies to suggest the various forms of representing meaning (Kist, 2010). Finally, the term agency refers to “the initiation of relatively autonomous acts governed by our intentional states—our wishes, desires, beliefs, and expectancies” (Bruner, 1994, p. 41).

Ethics of Care

I end this section with terms from Nel Noddings’ concept of the Ethics of Care (1984/2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2012a, 2012b). The focus of this concept rests on the relationship between the carer and the cared-for. These are individuals in a reciprocally dependent, but not necessarily equal relationship—the carer focuses attention on the cared-for in order to respond to his or her expressed needs. These expressed needs are needs that the cared-for has indicated through behavior or words, while inferred needs are needs identified by the carer, or someone other than the cared-for. Since everything revolves around this relationship, there are specific terms Noddings used to help further define this relationship. The term attention refers to the active listening, observation, and receptivity by the carer to the expressed needs of the cared-for. Responsiveness is the attention and care for others in response to their expressed needs. Empathy is the receptive reading of others, embodying both feeling and understanding as opposed to the traditional projective attempt to understand. Receptivity means to be open and vulnerable to truly be able to attend and respond to the expressed needs of the cared-for. The last
term related to the Ethics of Care to be defined is *reciprocity*, which is the existence of a relationship between the carer and the cared-for. It is important to note that the student-teacher relationship is not equal in that the teacher is in the carer role and the student is in the cared-for role; however, the cared-for must show recognition and appreciation for the carer’s response since this establishes the relationship at the heart of care ethics.

**Assumptions**

This study rests upon many assumptions that are addressed in detail in the Literature Review in Chapter 2. The first assumption is that many LGBTQ students might not be comfortable within the heteronormative environment that exists in K–12 schools. This discomfort may leave them unable or unwilling to express themselves in the ways they would like or be full participants in the classroom. This, in turn, may leave them feeling uncared for in the manner Nel Noddings (1984/2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2012a, 2012b) described as the Ethics of Care.

Another assumption involved in this study is that the American educational curricula are not conducive to addressing the emotional needs of students in general, let alone those of LGBTQ students. The use of writing as a therapeutic tool in school has been promoted at various times historically, but has not found a home in educational practices.

The last assumption relates to my particular research questions. LGBTQ young adults may find comfort for themselves by taking their writing outside of the classroom
by expressing themselves through a variety of genres and modes now available to them through new literacies to serve purposes of self-care.

**Significance of the Study**

A naturalistic case study inquiry aimed at understanding how LGBTQ identified young adults use writing for their own purposes in their lives will address a gap in the current literature that exists from a methodological standpoint, since most of the research on the use of writing in this way is in the fields of medicine and psychology and is quantitative in nature. Research centered on LGBTQ young adults and writing does exist in the qualitative realm, but tends to focus more on identity or critical action (Albertini, 2008; Ball & Ellis, 2008; Blackburn, 2002; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Bowles, 1997; DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Vetter, 2010).

My study looks specifically at personal uses of writing, especially related to self-care, and the possibilities the various genres and modes of writing hold for LGBTQ identified individuals, especially those whose voices are often silenced (Albertini, 2008; Blackburn, 2002; DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Rhoades, 2012). In this way, I extended Nel Noddings’ concepts of care ethics to focus on writing as self-care when the cared-for perceives that he or she is not receiving the necessary care from the carer [teacher].

Information gathered during this study may also be used in various academic settings in which writing is used, such as high schools, colleges, universities, and informal educational settings. It is my hope that eventually this study’s “insight would lead to improvements in practice” (Niesz, 2012) in a multitude of educational settings.
The potential to help all students through writing is great since it has the capability to help “shatter the silences [and] make meaning” (M. Greene, 1995, p. 108). My study lessens the gap that I have found in the literature and that Singer and Singer (2008) highlighted when stating that the work on writing has “energized a research program among psychologists and medical scientists, but writing researchers have yet to join this community” (p. 485).

**Summary**

The American school climate is based on the hegemonical beliefs that students identify as either male or female, and heterosexual. This heteronormative belief system marginalizes students that do not fit within these parameters and often create situations in which students do not feel included or cared for. Research in the areas of medicine and psychology has shown that writing and other forms of self-expression help to provide personal care, but little research in the writing field has been conducted.

In this chapter, I provided a rationale and purpose of this study, along with two research questions. I also provided the framework in which this study resides and explained the significance of the study. Furthermore, working definitions in the following categories have been included: Gender and Sexual Orientation, Literacy, and Ethics of Care.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When considering possible theoretical frameworks, I first considered using a critical perspective, but found conflicting definitions of exactly what that might mean. Although my critical stance is implied based on my assertion that heteronormative biases are predominant and marginalize LGBTQ students in the school culture, research through this lens “should lead to action to reduce the problems caused by oppression” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 21). In addition, using a feminist lens expects that the interviewer “will be in the same position as the interviewee” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 21). As a 57-year-old heterosexual female, my experiences are unlike those of the LGBTQ identified young adult participants.

I do, however, recognize that my work will be slanted through a queer lens, the mismatch between sex, gender, and desire (Jagose, 1996, p. 3), because I am focusing on the experiences of LGBTQ youth. Since Queer Theory is concerned with “identity and identity construction” (D. Johnson & Lugg, 2011, p. 236), the fact that my participants self-identify on the LGBTQ spectrum situates my study within this paradigm, even though I am not studying identity, per se.

Although my study focuses on the personal use of writing and various other forms of self-expression by LGBTQ young adults, my underlying assumptions are based on the ramifications of the heterosexist beliefs that permeate educational practices and the school climate. For these reasons, I see that Queer Legal Theory also is an underpinning for this study because it “seeks to unmask areas of homophobic and heterosexist
influence and power . . . [which] might include: curricular content . . . policies governing extra-curricular activities . . . and the degree or regulation of hate speech and bullying” (D. Johnson & Lugg, 2011, p. 239). This connection poses the possibility that any insight gained from this study might lead to further study and be used to help educators improve practices.

Conflict does exist within this field, however, as Michael Warner (1992) stated, “the appeal of queer theory has outstripped anyone’s sense of what exactly it means” (p. 18), and Edelman (1994) called it simply “a zone of possibilities” (p. 114), whereas Butler (1994) and Halperin (1995) claimed that the more it becomes an academic discipline, the less queer it becomes and loses clout.

The purpose of this study is not to imply that changes must be made in classrooms at this time, but to see if these young people use writing and other forms of self-expression as a means of self-care when this marginalization may lead to disruption in the caring relationship among teachers and their students as outlined in the work of Nel Noddings. For these reasons, I have chosen to ground my study in the following topics: LGBTQ issues in and out of school, composition studies in schools, Nel Noddings’ ethics of care, writing as a healing tool, and new literacies as diverse forms of representation for marginalized student populations. First, I establish the issues facing the LGBTQ community as a whole in society and within educational institutions, then I provide a brief historical analysis of composition studies in American public schools over the last 100 years in order to frame the experiences of these students, followed by Nel Noddings’ ethics of care as the underpinning to lead into the review of research into the field of
writing as a healing tool. Finally, I end with a look at new literacies and the diverse forms of representation they provide for this population.

**LGBTQ Issues**

As briefly noted in Chapter 1, the American educational environment is often uncomfortable for students identifying as part of the LGBTQ community (Blackburn, 2002; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Boske, 2011; Clark, 2010; Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011; C. W. Johnson et al., 2014; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Pachankis & Godfried, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Sadowski et al., 2009; T. A. Savage & Schanding, 2012; Sheriff et al., 2011; Thein, 2013; Vetter, 2010; Watson et al., 2010). Since my study focuses on the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults in regard to their experiences with writing in and outside of the K–12 environment, it is important to gain an understanding of the issues faced by this community across the nation.

With the current fight for same-sex marriage to be legalized nationwide gaining strength; many television shows and movies featuring lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans*gender (LGBT) characters; and an increasing number of high profile people deciding to “come out” by publicly identifying somewhere on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*gender, queer (LGBTQ) spectrum, it would seem that society as a whole is becoming increasingly more accepting of this population. While that may be true, even through the eyes of people in the LGBTQ community (Pew Research Center, 2013), the 2013 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014) conducted by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reminds us there
is more work to be done in schools. In order to better understand current issues in education, it is important to take a look back at the fight for LGBTQ equality over the last few decades and to trace the impact this burgeoning movement has had on K–12 education.

**Modern Gay Rights Movement: A Brief History**

Whereas the term *gay* is often used for anyone who identifies outside of a societal norm concerning sexual orientation or gender identity, many people identifying within this community today “prefer the more inclusive term, LGBT(Q)” (GLSEN, 2011, p. 41). I use the term *gay* for the purposes of this section since it is more historically appropriate when discussing the earlier decades.

Varying sexual orientation and gender identification/expression have existed among all cultures throughout history across the world. The ways in which society has reacted to such variation has fluctuated, depending upon time and place. In the United States, the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s hosted a thriving gay culture until it was pushed underground in the 1930s during what has been dubbed the queer panic, when homosexuality was associated with sexual deviancy. This occurred when a series of child murders in the late 1930s and early 1940s were deemed sexual in nature by the police and homosexuals seemed likely scapegoats and viewed as sex deviants (Cornwall, 1997). Even so, various independent groups of gay people were attempting to organize from the 1920s through the 1940s, but it wasn’t until the Mattachine Society formed in 1950, that we see anything close to an organized movement (Clarke et al., 1997). The name Mattachine was derived from the Italian theater character, Mattaccino, who would speak
the truth when no one else would. Organizing such a group was especially difficult during the McCarthy era when the second gay panic was “in tandem [with the] fear of Communism” (Cornwall, 1997, p. 490), this time making homosexuality akin to a national security threat. The organizers of the Mattachine Society realized they needed to begin to build a community and develop as a minority in order to try to change laws (Clarke et al., 1997); however the term minority was unpopular in the gay community, since many said they wanted to be “like everybody else” (p. 264). During these uncertain times, talk of communists in the leadership of the movement scared the more conservative members and the national structure of the Mattachine Society was dissolved, making way for local chapters to decide which direction to take (Bernstein, 2002).

During the early to mid 1960s, many gay men were dismissed from the military and U.S. Civil Service jobs for “immoral conduct” (Bernstein, 2002, p. 543) and some local Mattachine Society chapters took up the cause by picketing outside the U.S. Civil Service Commission headquarters in Washington, DC.

Gay people were not only experiencing discrimination by the government, but other minorities made it clear they were not willing to support their cause. Leaders of the Civil Rights movement “forbade activist and homosexual Bayard Rustin from speaking at the 1963 March on Washington, which he had organized, for fear that his homosexuality would discredit the movement” (Bennett & Battle, 2001). Also at this time, lesbians involved in the feminist movement were not welcomed for similar reasons (Bernstein, 2002).
Stonewall. While some gay activists had been making inroads, it was the riot at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, however, that has become synonymous with the beginning of the modern gay rights movement in this country. In late June of 1969, patrons of a Greenwich Village gay bar, tired of consistent police brutality, decided to finally resist arrest during a police raid, igniting “three days of public uprisings” (Meyer, 2006, p. 441). Stonewall, as it would later become known, marked the push back that “galvanized a younger group of gay people” (Silverstein, 1997, p. 364) to eventually form the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), identifying with more social activist liberation movements like the Black and women’s movements (p. 364). This event represents a turning point in the movement when “gay men and women renounced their victim status and collectively stood up for their rights as American citizens” (Tyson, 2006, p. 319).

As within any group of people, there will be individual differences, but the problem arose when the individuals involved could not agree upon the goals. Some wanted to focus more on political change dealing with laws and policies, whereas others thought trying to change the culture by helping change societal attitudes was the best way (Bernstein, 2002; Meyer, 2006).

Dissension within the ranks. Not only did members of the movement disagree on what type of change they sought, inequalities were surfacing within the community, itself. Lesbians found themselves to be oppressed by the White male leadership, while any gay men or lesbians who also belonged to another minority group were virtually ignored (Tyson, 2006). In essence, there was a complicated layer of marginalization occurring within the very organization fighting against it within society.
Today, there are still various critics of some of the highest profile LGBTQ groups. For instance, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), “the largest political organization in the United States” (Summers, 2011, p. 1), has had its detractors over the years. Basically, the critics see this organization, and others, as championing gay and lesbian rights over rights for gender identity (people who identify as trans*gender, queer, or non-conforming). The gay rights movement is also still perceived as supporting more privileged groups within this community, those people who are White, non-immigrant, middle/upper class, and gender-conforming (Summers, 2011).

Today, over 70 organizations in the United States focus on supporting the rights of the LGBTQ community in some way. Some groups are specific to particular identities (e.g., trans*gender people, lesbians), whereas others are supposedly all inclusive under the LGBTQ umbrella. Some groups function at a local or state level, although others are national in scope.

**Society Today**

What the gay rights movement attempted to do was to make visible American society’s predominantly heterosexist and heterocentrist culture (Tyson, 2006). According to Tyson, heterosexism is a term “commonly used to refer to institutionalized discrimination against homosexuality and the privileging of heterosexuality that accompanies it” (p. 320). Heterocentrism (or heteronormativity) focuses more subtly on “the assumption, often unconscious, that heterosexuality is the universal norm by which everyone’s experience can be understood” (p. 320).
Before focusing on the heteronormative educational setting, it is important to examine a few major problems that exist within society and how they contribute to the present attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity that, in turn, have a direct effect upon the school climate.

**Differing theories.** Debates as to the causes of homosexuality and gender non-conformity have raged for a century. The fields of psychology and psychiatry pathologized these as mental illnesses in need of treatment (Burr, 1997) until the mid 20th century, when homosexuality was officially removed in 1973 from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, the official book of common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders (Nadon, 2009c). However, the classification of Gender Identity Disorder for anyone considered to be gender variant (e.g., trans*gender) was recently changed to Gender Dysphoria in 2013 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This means that trans*gender individuals are no longer officially classified as having an illness unless they experience “clinically significant distress associated with the condition” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Some trans*gender people are upset that even this classification remains, but for those who want psychiatric or medical treatment (e.g., sex reassignment surgery), they would need a specific diagnosis to be covered under their insurance plans (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

As the move away from the idea of homosexuality as a pathology began mid 20th century, the field of Sociology began viewing homosexuality as a social problem and debated whether the blame should be on the homosexual or on society (Nadon, 2009b).
Throughout the late 20th century, sociologists began to move away from homosexuality as a social problem, but a new debate arose between the essentialists and the social constructionists (Nadon, 2009b; Slagle, 2006). Essentialists believe that homosexuality is an immutable biological part of an individual, whereas social constructionists believe that identity and orientation are chosen or constructed (Rupp, 2006; Slagle, 2006). The debates raging within these scientific communities make it difficult for society in general to gain any real perspective on these issues.

So, not only does the LGBTQ community face opposition from society, in part due to such confusion, but there is discord within the community, as well, and can be seen as a parallel to the traditionalist versus progressive struggles within education. Certain groups promoting the rights of lesbians and gay men tend to view identity through an essentialist lens, claiming that LGBTQ people should be given all the rights afforded heterosexuals. They believe that “a strong gay past makes for a strong gay present” (Schneiderman, 2010, p. 11) and that queer theory will rob them of all the progress that has been made toward gay rights. Queer theorists espouse that the progress made benefits only a “select few” (Slagle, 2006, p. 318) and worry about bisexual, trans*gender, and other queer identities “vanishing from public life” (p. 317). They believe that identity is more fluid and changeable, that labels are socially constructed and that LGBTQ people should not try to assimilate into society, but help to create a new version with a spectrum of normal. Seidman (1994) suggested that creating a homosexual ethnicity has a minoritizing effect and actually supports the “normative heterosexuality of the dominant social institutions and conventions” (p. 174).
This dissension puts the aspect of finding a biological link into the spotlight. For the essentialists, it would seem to be a reason to celebrate, finally quieting the voices that call homosexuality a choice and leading furthering political and legal gains. Some people believe, however, that finding such a link may lead to considering homosexuals as a minority and somehow thought of as “inferior,” or that abuse of this knowledge may lead to attempts at a “cure” or even selective reproduction through gene manipulation or other biological treatments (McShee, 2008; Nadon, 2009a). For the queer theorists, a definitive biological inborn explanation for homosexuality and gender variance would negate their beliefs that sexual orientation and identity are fluid over time. Another thing to consider with proving biological causes for homosexuality and gender variance is that prejudices would still exist, so it isn’t the fix it may seem to be (Long, 1997). We still see prejudice against groups of people based on the biological differences of race, ethnicity, and gender (McShee, 2008; Wyndzen, 2008), and these differences are not as controversial as homosexuality and gender variance are in our current society. As this oppositional discourse rages, it makes it more difficult to make headway in changing society’s views.

**Religion.** Organized religion often influences societal attitudes toward homosexuality and gender variance with approximately 89% of the adult population in the United States indicating that religion plays an important role in their lives (Garcia, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles, 2008). Many denominations within institutionalized religions (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam) maintain intolerance to people identifying as LGBTQ, with some condemning their behaviors as sinful and morally evil (Davidson, 2000). Often this causes a conflict for the individual who feels shame, rejection, and
guilt, and may feel forced to conform to heterosexual norms or leave their congregations (Garcia et al., 2008; Richards, 1997). There are many religious denominations, however, that have become more accepting and welcome LGBTQ people into their organizations (Chauncy, 2004).

**Media.** Because popular culture now includes LGBTQ characters on TV and in movies, society is beginning to demonstrate a *tolerance*, but in reality, it is what Steinberg (2000) called “intolerant tolerance” (as cited in Pinar, 2007, p. 127). She said that there are certain lines of heterosexual decency that still cannot be crossed. Whitlock (2010) discussed how media images of lesbians and gays are skewed to present them as White, professional people living in metropolitan areas. She wants people to remember that not all LGBTQ people flee to the big city. They are complex, have a variety of jobs, live across all geographic areas, and also deserve tolerance.

**Legal issues.** A major victory for the gay movement came in 2003 when the United States Supreme Court overturned Texas’ homosexual conduct law (dubbed the sodomy law), and that of similar laws remaining in the nation (Chauncy, 2004). Even so, it is more than a decade later, and Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas have yet to remove these laws from their books (Tomlinson, 2013). At the time of this study, the most recent victories in the spotlight were the legalization of same-sex marriage in 12 states, while at the same time, opposition groups continually pushed against any gains made. While the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to overturn two laws in particular, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and California’s ban on same-sex marriage (Proposition 8 or Prop 8), the proponents of these laws continued the fight (Leitsinger, 2013). On June 27, 2015, the
Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage nationwide. This ruling was a historic moment, but the current political climate has proven there are still many other legal issues with which to contend. Adoption involving same-sex couples is complicated since, historically, “the families of same-gender couples exist on the periphery of legally recognized family forms, not quite captured within the social lens by which we validate the American family” (Hare & Skinner, 2008, p. 366). As of June 2015, however, joint adoption was legal in all 50 states (Family Equality Council, 2016). A few states were refusing to acknowledge this, with Mississippi being the last holdout until a federal judge struck down its ban on same-sex adoption in March of 2016.

Along with issues concerning family life, the ability to serve the country has been an issue for decades. The first demonstration protesting discrimination in the military took place on September 19, 1964, in front of the Whitehall Street Induction Center in lower Manhattan (Campbell, 2007). A small group of people picketed the rejection of gays from the army and the issuance of “less-than-honorable discharges” (p. xvii) to those who were discovered to be gay while serving. In 1993, with growing public sentiment to lift the ban, The Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy (DADT) was issued as a compromise (Psychology, UC Davis, n.d.) and was only recently repealed in September of 2011.

Inequities are blatant with the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) since it only ensures that gays and lesbians can serve openly in the military without fear of discharge (K. Miller, 2012) with no provisions for trans*gender people.
Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is considered a mental disorder by the American Psychological Association, and the military considers it a medically disqualifying condition. Not only are transgender individuals who wish to join the military prohibited from doing so, those already serving honorably in the Armed Forces can be ousted if suspected to be transgender or found cross-dressing. (K. Miller, 2012, para. 3)

With these legal issues in the news over the last few years, it is apparent that lesbian and gay issues are at the forefront with little mention of bisexual, trans*gender, intersexed, or queer identified individuals. It is only recently that issues related to trans*gender people are surfacing in the mainstream. Laws relating to gender identity are currently up to individual states with some allowing people who have had sex reassignment surgery, which is actually a small percentage (Trotter, 2010), to change their birth certificates and marry according to that state’s laws, while other states do not. One main factor involved in determining the legal status of sex is that “legal standards used by courts may not be consistent with medical knowledge” (Newlin, 2008, p. 466). These inconsistencies affect not only marriage, but also divorce and child custody, should they move from one state to another.

Most recently, at the time of this writing, many states are proposing bills that prohibit trans*gender people from using the public restrooms that align with their gender identity. This issue has become so heated that on May 13, 2016, President Obama felt it necessary to issue federal guidance to public schools to allow trans*gender students to use bathrooms that match their gender identity.
Many facets of life are affected when someone identifies outside the norm even though there has been legislation to end discrimination. The 1964 Civil Rights Act did not specifically provide “protection from discrimination for individuals based on sexual orientation or transgender [identity]” (Trotter, 2010, p. 55); some federal courts have “broadly interpreted” the act and its amendments to provide such protection. This broad interpretation has not been enough, however, and currently, it is “legal to fire someone for being gay in 29 states and for being transgender in 34” (Margolin, 2013, para. 5). The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) has been proposed legislation since 1994 and has just been reintroduced this spring (Margolin, 2013). Even so, ENDA “explicitly exempts religious organizations and small businesses with less than 15 employees” (Burns & Krehely, 2011, para. 17) and does not require that benefits to employees’ same-sex partners be provided.

**Hate crimes.** Not only do legal, political, and religious inequalities make life more difficult, but many LGBTQ people continue to be victimized, ranging from “harassment and threats to physical assault” (Bantley, 2008, p. 549) and sometimes even murder. These hate crimes are committed by individuals, groups of people, and sometimes by law enforcement officers (Bantley, 2008; Wolff & Cokely, 2007), which is one reason many LGBTQ victims do not report assaults. Statistically, hate crimes seem to follow the trend of the political climate and so when legislation like DOMA and Prop 8 is passed, hate crimes rise. Conversely, when legislation passes that “increases the rights of LGBTQ people, hate attacks appear to decrease” (Bantley, 2008, p. 560). The climate
today is quite volatile with a strong opposition even as LGBTQ issues are becoming much more visible, which tends to suggest there is still work to be done.

**School Climate**

While society at large slowly begins to be more accepting of LGBTQ people as deserving of the same civil rights as enjoyed by other American citizens, our political and legal systems tend to lag behind. Lagging further behind is the American public education system, which functions under a predominantly heteronormative/heterosexist belief system (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Crocco, 2001, 2002; Franck, 2002; Irvine, 1997; C. W. Johnson et al., 2014; Payne, 2007; Payne & Smith, 2011, 2012c; Pinar, 2007; Thornton, 2009; Walton, 2010) that “basically goes unchallenged in teaching materials for K–12” students (Thornton, 2009, p. 362) and renders LGBTQ students invisible unless they choose to disclose those identities (Lopez & Chism, 1993; Thornton, 2009). Hermann-Wilmarth (2007) suggested colleges and universities often do not fare much better, although the main focus of this paper is public K–12 education.

Schools promote a heteronormative belief system in several ways, the most obvious being their promotion of gender binaries (male or female), traditional gender roles (e.g., homecoming kings and queens, school dances for heterosexual couples), and non-inclusive curricular and program choices (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Including references to the contributions of LGBTQ people and events, either historically or in contemporary study, would show them in a positive light and as part of society and the world. Instead, this exclusion only perpetuates the illusion that either they do not exist or that only heterosexuality and traditional gender expressions are normal and right, making
gender variance and homosexuality “not normal and wrong/bad or less than” (Payne & Smith, 2012b, para. 4). In this way, LGBTQ youth are “one of the most neglected and marginalized groups of students” (Mayo, 2014, p. ix).

Even when schools recognize the need for change in order to reflect our changing society, the implemented programs do not usually go far enough. While Diversity Awareness and Acceptance seems to be the catch phrase of the day to help teachers be more mindful of their attitudes and practices within their classrooms as they apply to the ever growing diverse religious and ethnic populations, LGBTQ issues do not garner the same acceptance as racial, cultural, and religious differences do (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Boske, 2011; Clark, 2010; Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011, Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Pope, 1995; Rhoades, 2012; T. A. Savage & Schanding, 2012; Thein, 2013). Pinar (2007) went further, saying that it isn’t enough to simply tolerate diversity, but that LGBTQ students, their families, and teachers should not only feel safe, but also feel welcomed.

This heteronormative school culture not only privileges the traditional (hetero)gender performances, but “creates social benefits” (Payne & Smith, 2013, para. 1) for those who conform to these norms. Those students choosing to step outside that norm are “policed by their peers and denied access to social power and popularity” (Payne & Smith 2012a, p. 188).

**Bullying and harassment.** Being denied social benefits is one major problem for LGBTQ students, but this school climate often leads to more dangerous situations. For students who are, or are perceived to be, gay or gender variant, a heterosexist
environment breeds bullying. While there is much discussion on bullying and harassment in schools, it is important to determine exactly how the term bullying is defined. Olweus (1993), a noted expert in the field for over 40 years, uses the words bullying and victimization synonymously and believes this occurs when a student has difficulty defending herself or himself when repeatedly exposed to negative actions from one or more students. This aggressive behavior is intended to disturb or harm and there is a perceived imbalance of power (Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying appears in many forms. It manifests in physical and verbal abuse, as social exclusion and through the spreading of rumors (Wang, Iannotti, Luk, & Nansel, 2010), which can have deleterious effects on the victims’ social and emotional well-being. Schools are typical settings for bullying/victimization, and with the use of the Internet, bullies now have an even farther reach in the form of cyber-bullying (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009).

With at least 44 states mandating the implementation of anti-bullying programs over the last several years (Davis, 2011), it would seem that the school climate would be improving. However, Owens (1998) summed up the current climate when he stated: “the American high school remains one of the most homophobic and change-resistant institutions in the United States” (p. xi). The key findings from Kosciw et al. (2014) supported this statement as they reveal that in 2013, middle and high schools across the nation are still hostile environments for 56%–84% of the LGBTQ students with “the overwhelming majority of whom hear homophobic remarks and experience harassment or assault at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression” (p. xiv). The study also found that 18%–38% of students were physically harassed
(pushed/shoved) or actually physically assaulted (p. xiv). Students who experience high levels of victimization were “three times as likely to have missed school” out of fear for their safety (p. xv) and had higher levels of depression.

Why are the percentages still so high when more focus has been placed on these issues? One reason, according to Davis (2011), is the relentless ubiquity of cyberbullying, “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Davis (2011) reported that many of the state mandates are unfunded and the laws are so varied. She related that only six states mention cyberbullying by name and 31 specifically mention electronic harassment. Payne and Smith (2013) and Walton (2010) suggested that the problems stem from the inaccurate premise that schools are neutral sites and that schools must focus on the bullies and the victims as individuals. In this perception, “the dominant understanding of bullying fails to acknowledge heteronormative social systems of power that support acts of bullying targeted at LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students” (Payne & Smith, 2013, para. 1). Instead, Payne and Smith (2012b, 2013) advocated for changing school culture in order to make schools safe, welcoming environments. While this may be the answer, school culture is slow to change, as noted earlier, so some areas of the country are experimenting with creating separate schools for LGBTQ students since they were “three times more likely than straight peers to miss school because of threats to their safety . . . and students who faced regular harassment were more likely to drop out” (Kilman, 2010, p. 36). These gay friendly high schools were proposed as a means to offer bully-free environments that were safe and welcoming. One of the quotes
from a *coming out* story in Merla (1996) brings the reality to light quite succinctly:

“Being gay was not itself the problem. Everything else was the problem—the pressures, the opprobrium, the future, the double life” (p. xviii).

**Research and curricular matters.** So what is to be done to change the school culture? GLSEN (2011) discussed how to make curriculum more inclusive by incorporating LGBTQ history and literature, and by acknowledging the diversity of what constitutes a family. Before we can implement changes to the curriculum, more needs to be done to educate the adults who should be helping to create safe spaces for everyone (Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Moe, Perera-Diltz, Spulveda, & Finnerty, 2014; Moje, & MuQaribu, 2003; Rhoades, 2012; Slesaransky-Poe, 2013) since US teachers in K–12 settings are “woefully unprepared to teach LGBTQ and non-gender conforming youth and to work against heterosexism and homophobia in schools” (Clark, 2010, p. 711). This not only deals with practicing teachers in K–12 environments, but also goes all the way through teacher education classrooms at the university level (NCTE, 2009; Steffel & Renzi-Keener, 2009). Hermann-Wilmarth (2007) revealed her frustration that “few university professors find time in their curriculum to integrate topics of homophobia and heterosexism into their classroom discussions of other ‘isms,’ like racism and sexism” (p. 349). Again, schools are trying to change something without really taking notice of the real problems. Once educators are more comfortable and the administration is supportive, only then can curricular changes truly be effective.

Currently, these changes usually begin with implementation of diversity programs. A few of the criticisms arise when implementing the most common types of
programs. A culture-based model of lesbian and gay issues works well in a culture-based program that allows teaching of these issues on par with multi-culturalism and normalizes homosexuality as a minority group rather than pathologizing it (Irvine, 1997). The controversy occurs when opponents of this model insist that homosexuality does not constitute a culture or that it is an immoral lifestyle. Another popular model is based on incorporating these issues into a public health curriculum that builds programs around safety and danger. The strengths of this program are in dealing with the fact that many of these students do need assistance and prevention efforts due to the social ostracism they face. These programs often “put a human face on discrimination” (Irvine, 1997, p. 580) since young people are often involved in speaking out. The drawbacks of these programs stem from how they strengthen the pathologized representation of homosexuality. These models also tend to focus on gay and lesbian issues, while bisexual, trans*gender, and queer students are pushed to the side once again, reflecting society’s level of comfort/discomfort with these issues.

Instead of simply adding diversity initiatives as separate entities, the research in subject area integration is primarily being done by using critical, feminist, and/or queer lenses. Some of the research is in the social studies field by researchers like Crocco (2001, 2002), Thornton (2009), and Franck (2002), but for purposes of this study, I focus on what I found in the reading/language arts field. Most of this research, again positioned through critical, feminist, and/or queer lenses, relates to the importance of incorporating texts (fiction and non-fiction) with gay and lesbian characters/issues in order to “help facilitate discussions about systems of oppression that are at work in our
society” (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2010, p. 189) and so LGBTQ students have role models or relatable characters and situations to help them feel connected and part of the school culture (Clark & Blackburn, 2009). There have been many novels and picture books published in recent years that would be effective materials, but Banks (2009) cautioned that this material should be thoughtfully included with critical discussions rather than simply having books available. Some scholars promote the queering of the canon (Collias, 2004) and other classic literature by either discussing the sexuality of the authors (many of whom were gay) and/or reading texts through a queer lens (Ressler, 2005).

Included here are some examples of anthologies that would be effective materials in middle and high school classrooms. While not compiled by researchers, these books could be a starting point for teachers interested in incorporating more inclusive materials into the curriculum. The stories in Merla (1996) are unique in that they are not only the personal coming out stories from notable gay writers born or raised in the United States; they are also arranged chronologically so they form a “cultural history” (p. xviii). These stories are powerful and clearly spoke to the struggles and the joys experienced by these writers. Such stories could be used in the classroom to demonstrate the historical contexts of gay issues (all the writers are gay men) and to give gay students something with which to identify.

In an interesting contrast, Bauer (1994) has collected original stories from notable authors (some gay and some not) in a unique YA collection. These fictional stories feature at least one character who is gay or lesbian and include the overarching theme of
dealing with coming to terms with their homosexuality, yet they all differ in genre and subthemes. The aim of this book was to offer these much needed stories in order to “tell challenging, honest, affecting stories that will open a window for all who seek to understand themselves or others” (p. ix). Again, like the Merla book, this book could be useful in the classroom.

D. Savage and Miller (2011) have collected original essays and testimonials written to LGBTQ teens by celebrities and everyday people to show them “the kind of happiness, potential, and satisfaction their lives hold if they can just get through these early years” (inside flap). This is the only collection of the three that include more than just stories by and for lesbians and gays. Bisexual and trans*gender people are also included here. This may be due to the significant span of years between this book and the last two. I would use this collection with LGBTQ youth in particular, rather than within the classroom itself because these stories are meant to be read for personal healing. However, in the hands of the right teacher, they could be powerful tools to promote understanding and acceptance for all.

**Writing in particular.** Because my research focus deals with writing, I address this subject separately from the previous section on curriculum and research. Writing is often emotionally charged and can be quite personal, but can lead to difficulties even when it is topical. This is in evidence as Kemp (2012) related the story of a teacher assigning an essay about any current event topic, but would not allow a student to write about same sex marriage due to the teacher’s discomfort with this topic. This reinforces the marginalization students face on a daily basis and Albertini (2008) reflected this when
he asked, “Should students be encouraged to cultivate a voice in writing that may be unacceptable to the academy?” (p. 387). While writing can be a means of making sense of the world and a means of expression, the social or public aspect of writing in school lacks the ‘safe’ environment needed and opens up the way for ridicule. Moje and MuQarib (2003) suggested that LGBTQ students often “sanitize their reading, writing, and discussion choices” (p. 206) because any reference of non-normative sexual orientation or gender variance can be controversial and/or taboo in classrooms.

Although this study is framed through uses of writing and other forms of self-expression, the participants self-identifying on the LGBTQ spectrum firmly situate it through a queer lens. In addition, my underlying assumptions are based on the ramifications of the heterosexist beliefs and policies that undergird the current American school climate that may increase feelings of isolation/marginalization for LGBTQ identified students and create a need for self-care. The focus on LGBTQ students in school also situates this study within a queer theory/queer legal theory paradigm, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

**Composition Studies (1912–Present)**

Although this study is grounded in the writing practices of LGBTQ young adults beyond K–12 schooling, it is based on examining their experiences during this time in their lives and comparing those to their writing practices in the present. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of these experiences, it is necessary to investigate the historical basis for the theories and implementation of current writing instruction.
With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 45 states (Nelson, 2013) and student performance on high stakes testing influencing teacher evaluation (Reform Support Network, 2012), the field of education is once again in the spotlight. The CCSS call for a major shift across the content areas by considering all teachers to be teachers of literacy (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; National Center for Literacy Education, 2013), which has spurred debate across the nation regarding the teaching of reading and writing.

American education has been fraught with such debates about the definition of, and the best practices for, the teaching of literacy over the last 100 years. In 1912, James Hosic, a prominent leader in the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) and founder of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), discussed how progressive teachers were conducting student-centered classrooms emphasizing self-expression; authentic writing with specific, meaningful purposes; and spontaneous discussion. “It has been sufficiently demonstrated that the old process does not secure results—except in the examination room, of course—and thoughtful workers are sure to turn increasingly to new methods” (Hosic, 1912, p. 639). These words are echoed by those of Christian Goering (2012) as he lamented the renewed focus 100 years later on “test prep or worksheets to aid reading comprehension, all in the name of the state assessments” (p. 17). These are some of the old processes that Hosic projected would fall away as progressive teaching took hold. Why are we still waging the same battles 100 years later?
For my purposes, I focus on the history of writing instruction to see where we have been and where we are now and how these practices relate to LGBTQ students. I have chosen to focus on the last 100 years in American education for this is when we see the beginnings of the push and pull of various theories that permeate writing instruction throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. However, it is important to understand that the underpinning of modern composition studies was born in Ancient Greece as the civic spoken art of *rhetoric* (Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993; Roen, Goggin, & Clary-Lemon, 2008,). Although the actual definition of rhetoric has changed over time and remains a topic of debate within the field (Berlin, 1987; Johnstone, 1996; Nystrand et al., 1993), there is general consensus today that it pertains to basically anything involving the production of spoken or written texts (Berlin, 1987; R. E. Young, Becker, & Pike, 1970).

**Late 19th Century**

In order to gain a clear picture of how writing instruction has changed over the last century, it is important to have a basic understanding of what was taking place during the last decades prior to 1912. During the late 1870s, Greek and Latin were the languages most revered in education at the college level and English studies met with great resistance (Gere, 1986). Up until that time, free public secondary schools were rare since the traditional goal of schooling at this level was for the college prep students and not the *terminal* students (Hook, 1979) that would go on to work following their time in secondary school.
When an 1874 court case in Michigan made it legal to use tax money to fund education, hundreds of new schools opened each year due to the “steadily increasing demands by members of the working class for secondary-level education for their children” (Hook, 1979, pp. 7-8). University professors complained about the lack of preparedness in students, yet their requirements and reading lists changed from year to year and college-to-college, making college entrance exams unfair as half the candidates failed the entrance exams even though they were students from the finest American preparatory schools (Nagin, 2006).

When English and composition were required at Harvard by 1885, in large part due to Harvard’s professor of rhetoric, Adams Sherman Hill, the other faculty members were none too pleased since they believed these courses were elementary in nature and better served in grammar schools (Gere, 1986). In support of this, a series of three Harvard Reports, published in 1892 and prepared by a select committee of educators, recommended that composition be taught in high schools. Gere (1986) described how the committee recommended “admission requirements be raised to eliminate students underprepared in composition” (p. 36). This charge put the onus on teaching writing in high schools, but offered the narrow view of writing instruction as focusing on mechanically correct papers and neat handwriting. Other colleges followed suit and accepted the narrow definition that Harvard held regarding writing, which set the stage for the long-lasting negative view held regarding composition instruction (Gere, 1986; Hook, 1979). As literature came to the forefront of English education, writing instruction continued to exist as error avoidance and good penmanship. In 1903, the pedagogical
section of the Modern Language Association (MLA) disbanded in favor of scholarship and thus, the “practica and colloquia for new teachers of college writing vanished” (Roen et al., 2008, p. 357) in most universities, leaving the impression that just anyone could teach writing and emphasizing the relegation of writing instruction to its component parts and visual aesthetics.

Hook (1979) stated that at the same time the specific requirements for writing instruction prior to college entrance were provided by the *Harvard Reports*, the National Education Association (NEA) asked Harvard’s President Eliot to preside over a *Committee of Ten* to establish a standardized curriculum for both college bound and terminal students. This committee established the required reading canon of literary “masterpieces” for college entrance, but continual additions over the next several years made it unwieldy and segments of the general public, as well as in education, began to question such uniform college requirements that exerted a type of “feudal” (Scott, as cited in Hook, 1979, p. 12) system control over secondary education.

**Early 20th Century**

As major economic and technical changes were taking place from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries, a shifting demographic was another concern in the field of education as the influx of immigrants entered the United States. The Progressive Movement that was already underway was coming to the forefront since teachers were speaking out about how traditional English courses failed to recognize “educational problems due largely to the lack of homogeneity in our population” (Breck, 1912, p. 66). These teachers also pointed out that these courses were boring and irrelevant to the needs
and desires of the students. Prominent at this time was the notion of *Aims Talk* in reform to determine: What is the aim of English education? What are we trying to do? Is it worth doing? and What can we do better? (Brass, 2012). Bates (1912) asked, “What is worthwhile?” (p. 15) in regards to reading requirements. He saw the benefits of using the popular fiction of the day and promoting that idea saying, “We must remember that some popular writers of today are the classics of tomorrow” (p. 15). These questions and declarations can still be heard today.

The three key debates of this time period revolved around “the science of teaching writing, cultural versus practical training, and student-valued pedagogies” (Holmes, 2012, pp. 36-37). Since science and research were highly valued in this era, composition teachers were called on to be more like laboratory science teachers and move around among the students as they worked. They used scientific methods and terminology to be cast in a favorable light and make a case for smaller classrooms (Holmes, 2012). The Cooperation Movement (the early version of writing across the curriculum) was introduced but many secondary English teachers resisted since the implementation of this program meant they needed to grade the work from other subjects (Russell, 1989). These concerns are echoed by some teachers even today in other disciplines as the CCSS call for all teachers to be teachers of reading and writing.

By 1918, William Heard Kilpatrick’s call for project-based classrooms in which students would choose lessons they wanted to do, echoed Fred Newton Scott’s (1912) insistence that writing tasks be meaningful, using the example of the student newspaper to make his point. This call for assignments to be “meaningful and engaging to students”
(Kennedy, 2005, p. 8) continues to be a concern as education reform turns once again toward more restrictive instruction and high stakes testing.

**NCTE: The Beginning**

With beliefs based deeply in the ideas of the Progressive Movement, led by reformers F.W. Parker; John Dewey; and Ella Flagg Young, secondary English teachers in 1911 saw the need to speak out against educational practices that promoted uniformity over diversity and preparing dutiful, not critical, citizens (Hook, 1979). They went on to form the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) “primarily out of protest against overly-specific college entrance requirements and the effects they were having on high school English education” (NCTE, 2011). Their overall goal was to improve the teaching of English at all levels through the aims of teaching as both culture and efficiency, and to “develop a true pedagogy of English teaching” (Hook, 1979, p. 21). At that time they emphasized the power in speaking and writing and composition as the center of the English course, rather than literature (Hook, 1979).

During the formation of NCTE, the debate between whether literature or composition should be at the base of English courses was rooted in the different notions that English is either best taught through the Transmission model: teacher centered with the teacher as giver of knowledge and student as receiver (Holt, 1994), or the Constructivist model: student-centered with students as meaning-makers (Nystrand et al., 1993). Even within this debate, a sub group of teachers were not unhappy that colleges were prescribing reading lists, but they were not happy with the particular choices provided since they felt they were inadequate to the interests of the students and for
“developing them into the type of citizens our civilization demands” (Breck, 1912, p. 66). This disagreement among reformers about what direction to take seems to be a familiar story in American education in general, and literacy in particular.

**Trends and Research in Writing Instruction by Decade**

**The 1920s.** The pushback that began with the formation of the NCTE helped move questions about school curriculum “to the forefront of researchers’ attention” (Lagemann, 1997, p. 8). This curriculum research moved in the direction of the scientific method (Kliebard, 1986), espousing quantitative measurements for diagnosing and addressing educational problems (Judd, 1925). The Progressive Movement, begun in the earlier part of the century, was still alive and focusing on student-centered practices and expressive writing, even though the transmission model practices of lecture, recitation, and writing as skill and penmanship were dominant in the classroom (Holt, 1994). It is interesting to note, however, that while the transmission model in writing instruction was dominant during this decade, there were educators pushing for more Constructivist approaches (Roen et al., 2008) just as James Hosic had expressed the importance of student centered curricula in 1912.

**The 1930s.** With the country in an economic depression, there came a dawning of a New Realism in which fairy tales were out and realistic stories were in (Monaghan & Barry, 1999). In writing instruction, Willard Waller (1932) observed that subject matter was boring and irrelevant to life outside of school, which is a recurring theme throughout the decades (Kennedy, 2005). Educational researchers realized that they should involve teachers in curricular change through the notion of cooperative research (Lagemann,
1997), which meant little more than asking some classroom teachers to adjust their practices based on the researchers’ studies. It was at this time we see the creation of writing centers, but they served strictly remedial purposes since the dominant philosophy dealt with correct products (Roen et al., 2008).

This decade did see the emergence of the curriculum as a “distinct subfield of education research” (Lagemann, 1997, p. 9) with the Progressive Education Association’s launch of its Eight-Year Study serving as a training ground. This study allowed for experimental teacher-designed courses of study (Aiken, 1942; Graham, 1967), and the debates between the proponents of more child-centered curricula versus the society-centered advocates within this movement led curriculum development away from academics and into what was known as life-adjustment education (Lagemann, 1997).

The 1940s. With life-adjustment education backed by the U.S. Office of Education (Bestor, 1952), courses focused on basic problems of everyday living with some traditional academic content incorporated. As the G.I. Bill (1944) and the Truman Commission on Higher Education (1948) began to bring college back into the forefront for an increasing number of students (Lagemann, 1997), parents and the opponents of progressivism began to worry about the move away from traditional academics. Arthur Bestor (1953), a University of Illinois historian, voiced such concerns, worrying that “the great intellectual disciplines” (p. 103) had been removed from schools and needed to return in order for the restoration of proper learning.

The 1950s. Due to the worry about what progressive education really was and the advent of the Cold War, this decade saw a reemergence of Formalism, which was a
swing back to error avoidance, form (5 paragraph essay), enforced standards of mechanical correction, and prescriptive grammar. Commercial reading programs were in vogue and spelling, handwriting, and language arts texts were set up with an arbitrary scope and sequence (Goodman, 2011). The transmission model was alive and well with the explicit teaching of phonics and isolated skills with direct instruction. When imaginative writing was introduced into the elementary classroom at this time, “it was labeled ‘creative writing’ and regarded as something of a frill” (Monaghan & Saul, 1987, p. 91).

This was the McCarthy era, a restrictive and menacing time. Although Hook (1979) was reminding educators that strict error avoidance was ineffective and students must learn to use language as a tool for expression and original thought, progressive education was being marginalized. Many teachers “were reluctant to take responsibility for professional decision-making and were practicing self-censorship to avoid risk” (Roen et al., 2008). In the 1954 decision of Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education determining that segregation was unconstitutional a new layer was added to the educational debate with consideration for teachers understanding how different students learned, much like Breck’s (1912) concerns in the early part of the century.

The biggest influence on literacy education during this decade was the 1955 publication of Rudolph Flesch’s famous book, Why Johnny Can’t Read. In it, he attacked the whole word approach to reading (popularized in the mid 19th century and the root of the reading wars debate since that time), even hinting at left wing conspiracies and a communist plot to dumb down America and promoted phonics instruction as the true
instructional strategy (Trelease, 2006). Although proponents of the constructivist model of education continued to fight for a place in schools, the transmission model was dominant at this time and writing instruction focused on spelling, grammar, and the correctness of form (Goodman, 2011). This back-to-basics movement also coincided with the 1957 launch of the Russian spacecraft, Sputnik, and American education was scrutinized further.

**The 1960s.** In a social and political time of unrest, it would seem the time was ripe for major changes. Although the idea of a good product being a correct product was still evident, the tide began turning toward understanding the importance of process over product by focusing on the personal growth of the writer (Burnham, 2001).

In 1961, Edwin H. Saur, a Harvard professor, promoted teaching writing to all students and not just the college bound (Roen et al., 2008). He argued that nothing but grammar drills is an ineffective strategy for teaching writing. Due to this dissatisfaction with product-centered pedagogy, Composition Studies became an area of specialization within English Studies (Bizzell, 1986; Nystrand et al., 1993) and there was a resurgence of the progressive movement once again. At this time, composition specialists considered themselves writing teachers and not researchers, but their work strongly influenced the research of the next two decades. They established the professional agenda for composition, but remained at odds with the academy, parents, and administrators, who were still focused on writing instruction as error avoidance. Writing teachers were still struggling with the mainstream belief that anybody could teach basic
grammar drills and handwriting (Bizzell, 1986). This attitude harkens back to the beginning of the century and never really lost hold.

With the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, President Johnson’s War on Poverty initiated the 1965 Title I Act in order to improve education for economically disadvantaged children. In the same year, Gordon Rohman and Raymond Wlecke’s study (1964) determined that successful writers followed a linear three-stage process and that the pre-writing stage emerged as having a significant effect on the written outcome. They promoted this linear composing process as an expressive act that was considered to be the main content of instruction, rather than the idea of mechanical correctness. This proposal directly “stimulated research in response” (Faigley, 1986, p. 531) in that same year by Janet Emig who argued against such a model of linearity, but instead, for the recursivity and cognitive nature of composition (Faigley, 1986). Her work is discussed again in the section outlining the 1970s.

With these progressive views being brought forward, the traditional model of instruction was viewed by teachers and the general public as promoting social sorting with its adherence to academic expository prose that was “verbose, indirect, and impersonal . . . meant for white, middle class men being educated for positions of power” (Bizzell, 1986, p. 52). Writing teachers were encouraged to foster student-centered classrooms, much the same as in the early part of the century echoing Kilpatrick’s 1918 call for meaningful and engaging work.

In a famous 1966 address at a Dartmouth conference of professors and secondary teachers, James Moffett asked the question, “What is English?” He discovered two basic
camps: those who believe it is “what one learns” and the others who believe it is “what one does” (Spalding, Koshnick, & Myers, 2012, p. 27), thus demonstrating that the division between the traditionalists and the constructivists was alive and well. The Dartmouth conference, however, reinvigorated the progressive movement and emphasized an expressivist view of writing instruction keeping the student’s individuality and thinking at the center (Burnham, 2001). Janet Emig was one of “the first writing researchers to act on calls for research on cognitive processes” (Faigley, 1986, p. 532) issued during this conference, stressing the importance of analyzing the composing process (Faigley, 1986, p. 533). The focus on the expressive model of writing remained popular, however, and by 1968, Donald Murray was emphasizing the writer as individual and developing voice in writing was essential. He was a proponent for the writing process promoting multiple drafts and revision in a workshop atmosphere.

The end of this decade once again saw James Moffett continually fight for this more humanistic approach to education as his next questions to teachers, this time at a 1969 NCTE session, were: “How different would you teach if students did not have to come to class? and How different would you teach if you never had to test?” (Spalding et al., 2012, p. 29).

The 1970s. The progressive, constructivist nature of writing instruction that emerged again in the 1960s started shifting back to a call for the traditional model mid-decade. Although innovators in the field were able to develop programs that took hold in part, achievement was still being measured by performance on standardized tests (K. Greene & Albers, 2012). Nevertheless, NCTE passed a resolution in 1972 stating
that students have a right to their own language, causing heated debates regarding dialect and other languages coming into classrooms (Goodman, 2011, p. 20).

Also in the early part of this decade, writing as a cognitive practice (Nystrand et al., 1993) was coming to the forefront. While Murray (1972) continued to push for viewing writing as a process, Janet Emig (1971) and Peter Elbow (1973) faulted the current ideas of the writing process for its linearity, suggesting instead that the process of writing involved more complex, recursive, and open-ended elements. This premise was supported later in the decade and into the 1980s by Flower and Hayes (1981). Both Elbow (1973) and Macrorie (1970) also promoted free-writing and writing groups, along with both criterion and reader-based feedback/response. It was through Emig’s (1971) work that the idea of the environment or context began to be seen as an influence on the various strategies students followed when writing. Her work provided a new methodology and the impetus for subsequent research on the composing behaviors of writers (Faigley, 1986).

Merrill Sheils highlighted a new perceived literary crisis in a 1975 *Newsweek* article entitled, *Why Johnny Can’t Write*. Sheils cited the “long-term impact of television” (p. 58) and poor reading/writing instruction to blame for the declining standardized test scores. Universities saw the need for more remedial writing courses and proclaimed the need for a back to basics movement that had some educators and policy makers once again questioning literacy practices. However, they were not taking into consideration the complexities of composition; those issues dealing with the familiarity of the writer with the expectations and conventions of the written language, their previous
experiences and comfort level (Shaughnessy, 1977). Other complexities may include the way a writer interprets the task (Flower et al., 1990). These issues related directly to the fact that open enrollment meant opening the doors for students who were likely the first in their families to attend college (Nagin, 2006) and may have “been left so far behind the others in their formal education that they appeared to have little chance of catching up” (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 3). At this time, teachers began to realize the disparity between their responsibility to teach writing and their lack of understanding and training (Nystrand et al., 1993).

This perceived crisis gave birth to the National Writing Project (NWP) in 1974 in the San Francisco Bay area “whose mission and professional development model are committed to bringing exemplary writing instruction to all of America's schools” (Nagin, 2006, p. 2). The creation of NWP was a catalyst for focusing on writing as a complex activity and a means of inquiry and expression. This organization is dedicated to helping schools improve writing instruction through examination of current trends, best practices, and research. The effects of NWP are far-reaching with nearly 200 university-based NWP sites, with at least one in each of the 50 states, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Important changes made 1976 an eventful year. With the success of NWP, there was now a call for teacher as researcher; rather than being information providers, they should be questioners. Previously, teachers had a negative view of research as something far removed from daily classroom life (K. Greene & Albers, 2012). Donald Graves (1973; 1980) and Lucy Calkins (1980) joined Donald Murray in the call for process over
product, and to not stifle the child’s natural desire to write by restricting them with uninteresting assignments and the dominance of constant correction. They also focused on writing as craft (Calkins, 1980; Graves, 1973; Walshe, 1981) and the importance of rewriting.

During this time, there was also greater attention paid to multi-culturalism focusing on student experiences, languages, and dialects (Green & Albers, 2012). These proponents challenged that language was dynamic and that communication systems were not a set of rules set in stone; further demonstrating the complexities of language and composition. They believed that students’ home and native languages should be integrated into their reading and writing. The debate raged as to whether standardized testing truly measured student learning, but SAT scores across the country were down and the call for back to basics instruction continued (K. Greene & Albers, 2012; Hook, 1979). NCTE raised concerns about standardized testing due to their outdated norms and often culturally biased references (Hook, 1979). Opponents of the traditional model and heavy reliance on standardized testing fought back and encouraged deeper thinking and creativity instead (K. Greene & Albers, 2012; Hook, 1979). Mina Shaughnessy (1977) was one of the first composition scholars to claim “writing is a social act” (p. 83), especially in relation to her belief that basic writing instruction required a fundamental understanding of errors and the need for tracing these back to a “lack of practice and familiarity with the forms and conventions of academic discourse” (Nystrand et al., 1993). In this way, her focus was more on the writer than the writing, itself.
The poor test scores across the nation encouraged publishers to respond to the back to basics call by suggesting schools make “prudent textbook choices” (K. Greene & Albers, 2012, p. 78) like John Warriner’s 1969 *English Grammar and Composition*, newly updated in 1977. Applebee (1986) warned that Warriner’s book was “prescriptive and product-centered” (p. 95), emphasizing the traditional method that opposes composition research. Also at this time, R. C. Gebhardt (1977) wrote the award-winning essay, *Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers*, demanding that the training of writing teachers be taken seriously (Roen et al., 2008); even after all this time and the changes occurring in writing instruction, little time was devoted to teacher training. Emig (1977) conducted research that also supported these claims.

**The 1980s.** Finally, during the beginning of this decade, textbooks on teaching writing began to appear, but mainly for teaching assistants in college courses. Some of the best known titles include, “Gary Tate’s (1976) *Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographical Essays* (revised and enlarged to 12 essays in 1987), Gary Tate and Edward Corbett’s (1981) *The Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook*, and Erika Lindemann’s (1982) *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*” (Roen et al., 2008). It was also during this decade that states began direct testing of writing using samples rather than objective tests. However, these were timed write-on-demand prompts that ask students to write quickly on random topics and offer little to no data or information (Hillocks, 2002). Hillocks argued that these assessments “engender vacuous writing” (p. 114) that set low writing standards.
The Whole Language Movement was taking root at this time, led by Ken and Yetta Goodman. Although catching on, it was continually contested throughout the 1980s and 1990s by traditionalists and being misconstrued as a philosophy set against phonics, rather than one that integrates phonics into the experiential activities of reading and writing. The followers of whole language believe in meaning making and comprehension through experience and not simply “word calling” as traditional phonics instruction has often promoted (Goodman, 2011).

The 1983 landmark report during President Reagan’s administration, *A Nation at Risk*, focused on the “rising tide of mediocrity” (Kennedy, 2005, p. 5) and laid the groundwork for the standardized testing movement. Public education was blamed for the “economic problems of the United States in competing with the rising economies of Europe and Asia” (Goodman, 2011, p. 22).

Even as the continual traditional back-to-basics call raged on, the progressive/constructivist proponents pushed forward. The NWP was in full swing and promoting the ideas of Graves, Murray, and Calkins. Nancie Atwell (1987) continued to focus on the workshop model of writing instruction that “reflects the importance of recent research findings on the composing process and the teaching of writing” (Spalding et al., 2012, p. 27). Applebee (1986) warned, however, that teachers began to misconstrue the process by making it a “rigid set of procedures” (Sperling & Dipardo, 2008, p. 76), highlighting the gap between “educational theory and educational practice” (Applebee, 1986, pp. 97-98).
The 1990s. Although this decade began with the whole language movement at its peak (Goodman, 2011), the presidential campaign of 1996 focused attention on the perceived crisis in education started earlier in *A Nation at Risk*, and blamed whole language for the “disastrous declines in reading scores” (Goodman, 2011, p. 23). While whole language was the prime target of these attacks, “all learner-centered practice” (Goodman, 2011, p. 23) was painted in an unfavorable light.

Although Standards-based education and high stakes testing were once again the main focus in education, Moffett continued to challenge this practice by saying, “children are not products, despite what the assembly-line mindset approach to education seems to believe” (1994a, p. 24). George Hillocks’ (1995) ideas are in line with Moffett’s as he promoted writing as reflective practice, as interpretive, discovery, and a way to make meaning, even as the standards-based model persisted. The ideas that engagement and meaning were important factors in education continually resurfaced during this decade, as they had in 1918 and in the 1960s (Kennedy, 2005), but the influence of reformers was limited because teachers were more concerned with “students’ compliance with prescriptions than any other aspect of writing” (Kennedy, 1998, p. 169). By 1997, American education was criticized for being “a mile wide and an inch deep” (Schmidt, McKnight, & Raizen, 1997, p. 62). This is directly related to the struggle faced by standards-based reform as it continues its attempt to “balance pressures of a one size fits all structure with the needs of diverse learners” (K. Greene & Albers, 2012, p. 80).

Early 21st century. There was still little Aims Talk (Breck, 1912) evident in educational reform (Brass, 2012) as the new century began, reminiscent of a century
earlier, and in 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), proposed by President Bush. While this legislation supported the traditional standards-based education model, the voices of progressive reformers were still rising. Tom Romano (2000) promoted the blending of genres in writing and reading instruction, and Peter Elbow (2004) suggested that students “invariably read better if they write first” (p. 12). However, the enthusiasm over process writing was waning in favor of direct instruction and product oriented strategies for passing the high stakes tests (Scherff & Piazza, 2005).

Robert Tremmel (2001) noted that in the 20th century, even with all the research and books on teaching composition helping teachers, “English education, while not totally ignoring composition, certainly marginalized it” (p. 9). Secondary teachers were still holding onto the literary canon with which they were most familiar, not being as comfortable in the role of writing instructors. Constraints of the realities of the classroom involving test performance and limited time were also factors.

2009–present. American education continued to struggle in finding support for the best conditions for writing instruction, namely time and smaller class sizes (Holmes, 2012). Teachers still lacked preparation as teachers of writing, especially those who teach other content areas (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009), and continued to be under increasing pressure for their students to perform well on the standardized tests. To complicate matters further, funding had been cut for programs like the NWP in favor of the Race to the Top initiative, President Obama’s version of nationally standardized education reform, in which high stakes testing performance is now tied to teachers’ evaluations (Reform Support Network, 2012). The Common Core State Standards
(CCSS) are also part of this initiative and State Education Departments have been rolling these standards out slowly across the nation (Nelson, 2013).

Applebee and Langer (2011) found that regardless of educational research, curriculum and instruction decisions were primarily influenced by the state exams, which do not focus on extended written responses. When writing is included in instruction, frequently it is “timed, on-demand writing” (p. 19) in preparation for the tests. The only times exams were considered a positive influence was for schools focused on “the International Baccalaureate or certain Advanced Placement examinations” (p. 19) since these programs emphasize written reflection. These findings are in stark contrast to an earlier 1979–1980 study (Applebee & Langer, 2011) that found teachers felt no pressure from external exams.

With CCSS including writing across the curriculum (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), when writing instruction was emphasized, teachers were primarily concerned with process-oriented methods that were teacher-led rather than collaborative for the sake of time (Applebee & Langer, 2011). The later study did find that teachers today provide more clarity in directions (rubrics) and more opportunities for process activities (pre writing, revision) than teachers from the earlier study who were more inclined to make comments and suggestions as a response to completed work. Applebee and Langer (2011) pointed out that even though the CCSS call for more analysis, instruction and assessment continued being more formulaic (five paragraph essay), which Hillocks (2002) called the testing trap.
Since the roll out of the CCSS drafts in 2009, NCTE has officially responded to each incarnation through their open letters. Beers (2009a), in her role as NCTE president, agreed that standards may be created by groups, but NCTE supported that curricular/pedagogical choices for assessment of achievement of standards were best made by teachers. Following the September 2009 draft release, Beers (2009b) related that the review team found the standards narrow in scope and included more individual, testable activities rather than authentic ones. This is reminiscent of Hillocks’ (2002) claims that high stakes testing “reduce the scope of curriculum and decrease student engagement” (NCTE Review Team, 2009, p. 3). The NCTE Review Team (2009) also noted that the CCSS document claimed to be evidenced-based, but they could see only references to surveys conducted by the testing companies and no studies from peer reviewed journals. As the CCSS implementation began, Gilyard (2012), in his role as NCTE president, clearly stated that NCTE was committed to supporting teachers, but “opposes any initiative or standards that would reduce educational opportunity or equity in our schools through top-down, one size fits all implementation programs” (para. 2). Hayes (2013), in her role as NCTE president, reported on the NCTE’s current stance that the CCSS program is being rushed under a flawed implementation plan and, therefore, there should be a “moratorium on standardized testing and immediate suspension of the practice of evaluating teachers based on student scores on standardized tests” (para. 1) until better implementation strategies, including adequate materials and professional development, are provided. Although progressive educators have always existed, they are in a precarious position. As with the previous government reform programs, money
is tied to compliance and, if they wish to be part of the decision-making body, they must walk a fine line. “With high stakes testing as the single measure on which to judge teachers and student performance, it is easy to make it appear that public education is a failed experiment” (Goodman, 2011, p. 23).

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and now 13 and a half years into the 21st, the Transmission (Traditional) Model of instruction has been in conflict with The Constructivist (more Progressive) Model, with the prevailing philosophy dependent upon the theoretical, social, and political views in vogue at varying times (Goodman, 2011).

Based on my teaching experience, I thought that educational trends swung back and forth like a pendulum, but doing this review of literature has clarified for me that at least for the last 100 years, the traditionalist approach has been the foundation of American education and reform movements have been tolerated by the policy makers for a while. During my 30 plus years in education, it seems that the government often blames public education for society’s ills. It doesn’t seem to matter what model is at the forefront, there is always a literacy crisis and the solution is to return to a traditional model that has never really been gone.

So why does the transmission or traditional model linger when research shows that this model is contrary to what we know about teaching and learning? I believe that Mary Kennedy (2005) has accurately answered this question when she said, “classroom life gets in the way of good teaching” (p. 2). She continued to discuss the fact that as reform movements go in and out of vogue, they don’t have much impact because reformers don’t take into consideration the “realities of classroom teaching” (p.3). In my
experience, proper writing instruction takes time, time for students to think and experiment. If students learn to write by writing (NCTE, 2004), then it is important that they have time to “generate and regenerate ideas” (Writing is a tool for thinking section, para. 4), time for students to write and revise and think some more. Students need time to confer with themselves and others (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1980, 1994; Graves, 1973; Murray, 1968; Walshe, 1981), time teachers don’t have to give (Kennedy, 2005).

Textbook publishers, professional associations, religious groups, business alliances, administrators, and state and local policies all hold influence over teachers. Reformers disagree on what is needed: the call for more challenging content contains debates on which content is important; debates rage over the importance of the arts; debates about whether curriculum should be teacher-centered versus student-centered (Kennedy, 2005). Large class sizes with a wide diversity of students who all have different needs make a writing teacher’s task daunting. It can all be so overwhelming with that “mile wide and inch deep curriculum” (Schmidt et al., 1997, p. 62) mentioned earlier, that teachers can only do what they can do and the fight is exhausting.

As a personal case in point, I was in attendance at a Minding the Gap meeting on April 17, 2012, at Kent State. This meeting was part of a consortium of area high school English teachers and college professors who are interested in working together to help struggling readers and writers. The college professors discussed the remedial writing class for incoming students in terms of how it is stretched over two semesters in order to allot the time and individual attention necessary to support these students in becoming more confident in their abilities. When they mentioned that their focus is initially on
allowing the students to simply be able to face their fears of the blank page to get their ideas down in some form and not worry about the mechanics, many of the high school teachers were aghast. They said that was all well and good, but the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) and other standardized tests do not care about that. They need to get at the surface grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

When one of the professors cited research that indicated that intense focus on surface detail did little to improve these aspects for struggling writers in the initial stages and had everything to do with intimidating them further, the teachers said they felt pulled in both directions and were beyond frustrated. Again, this is the dilemma that has haunted writing instruction for more than 100 years and the classroom teachers are the ones caught between these warring factions. They are the ones who have to implement the impossible tasks they are given and I do not see how this will change as long as American education is swept up in this political agenda.

Although this study is grounded in the writing practices of LGBTQ young adults beyond K–12 schooling, it is essential to examine their experiences within the school environment in order to gain a perspective on what may have influenced their current practices. The review of this literature has shown that currently, American curricula are not conducive to using the type of writing or other forms of self-expression that might be helpful/therapeutic (M. Greene, 1995; Jersild, 1955; Moffett, 1994b; Moustakas, 1966, 1969; Singer & Singer, 2008) to all students in general, and those in marginalized populations, in particular. I see the possibility for this study to lead to further
investigation of how using writing and other forms of self-expression in the classroom have the potential for helping all students.

**The Ethics of Care**

In order to study whether LGBTQ students care for themselves through writing, it is necessary to first examine what Nel Noddings calls the *ethics of care*. Noddings (2005a) distinguished her concept of care in schools as different from the traditional pedagogical belief in inferring what children need and making them “do what is thought to be good for them” (p. xiv). Instead, Noddings (2012a) restated the Golden Rule to reflect the ethics of care when she suggested it should be “Do unto others as they would have done unto them” (p. 55). In essence, the carer must think of others and understand their feelings without projecting his or her own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings onto the cared-for. She believed that the focus of caring is the reciprocal relationship between a carer and the cared-for. In schools, typically the teacher is the carer who cares for his or her students. While this is what Noddings called an unequal relationship (p. 54), it is still reciprocal since the cared-for must in some way show recognition and appreciation of the carer’s response. It is then the carer’s job to continue to respond in order to “deepen or broaden the caring relation” (p. 53). Noddings (2005b) highlighted the fact that “in trying to meet inferred needs, however, we often neglect the expressed needs of our students” (p. 147).

While Noddings (1984/2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2012a, 2012b) promoted alternatives to education in terms of expressed needs of students and the ethics of care, her perspective is still more of a focus on changing curricular decisions in terms of
students’ learning needs rather than their expressive/reflective needs. She does mention that students may sometimes hide their needs (2005b) for various reasons and it is the educator’s job to “hypothesize and make inferences in trying to get at them” (p. 150). Noddings (2005b) recognized that the student with “overwhelming needs” (p. 151) spends much time and energy “enduring, worrying, and covering up” (p. 151) personal and or social issues during school and are not able to adequately attend to the lesson. With respect to the student who identifies on the LGBTQ spectrum, I would add that not only does this fear and worry interfere with his or her learning, the fact that what he or she need to express might be objectionable keeps him or her from writing honestly (Albertini, 2008), which is one of the prime expressive outlets available to them (Blackburn, 2002; Cappello, 2006; DeSalvo, 1999; DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005; Espinosa, 2006; M. Greene, 1995; Singer & Singer, 2008).

**Writing as Healing**

The history of writing instruction in American schools over the last century is complicated. The traditional model of instruction has remained dominant throughout most of this time, while educational reformers continue to introduce various research-based models they believe to be more effective. One aspect of writing that is not currently considered in most classrooms at any level deals with writing as a means of healing. This does not seem to be an appropriate consideration for the classroom since most research in this area has been done within the fields of psychology and medicine, and, as stated earlier, “writing researchers have yet to join this community” (Singer &
Singer, 2008, p. 485). James Moffett (1994b), however, was turning his attention to the importance of this topic twenty years ago when he said,

People don't learn to write well just to accommodate an institution and then the one after that, even if they try to and think they should. We get good at doing something as a part of getting well and realizing our deepest being. I know, the university feels it shouldn't play doctor or priest, dirty its hands with therapy and its mind with religion. But if it has real live students on its hands, its hands are already dirty. And the time has come for intellectuals to quit confusing spirituality with superstition and sectarianism. Unhealed wounds and undeveloped souls will thwart the smartest curriculum. (p. 261)

In this article, Moffett was writing in response to a set of journal articles written by women about bringing together writing and spirituality. Rather than religion, these women were referring more to inner peace and identity. Feeling that writing was an integral part of this (Campbell, 1994; Swearingen, 1994), they lamented the fact that this type of writing was not welcomed in the classroom. For the purposes of this study, the word healing indicates any derived or therapeutic effect (beneficial in helping to cope, as defined in Chapter 1) to help students deal with perceived trauma (difficult situation, as defined in Chapter 1).

Beginning in the 1930s, the movement to incorporate aspects of emotional well-being with intellectual accomplishments was “supported by humanistic psychologists who believed that therapy could take place not only behind closed doors but . . . in school and community settings as well” (Brand, 1980, pp. 31-32). Jersild
(1955) and Moustakas (1966, 1969) continued this movement throughout the 1950s and 1960s, indicating that emphasizing only intellectual pursuits contributes to “alienation, desensitization, and personal fragmentation” (Moustakas; Brand; as cited in Bump, 2000, p. 316). During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, there was growing interest in emotional intelligence (Berman, 1994; Brand, 1980; Goleman, 1995), considering it “more crucial as we move into the 21st century” (Bump, 2000, p. 316).

Here it is important to make a distinction between the terms emotional intelligence and emotional literacy, which have been debated to be two separate ideas. The criticism is that emotional intelligence, swept up as part of Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, is really only a measure of conformity (G. Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2004). The term emotional literacy was used by Steiner (1997), who believed it to be

The ability to understand your emotions, the ability to listen to others and empathize with their emotions, and the ability to express emotions productively . . . to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power and improves the quality of life around you . . . improves relationships, creates loving possibilities between people, makes co-operative work possible, and facilitates the feeling of community. (p. 11)

In essence, emotional literacy involves social justice and equality (B. Matthews, 2006; G. Matthews et al., 2004), along with promoting well-being for the self (self-care) for teachers and students (B. Matthews, 2006). Using writing to promote emotional literacy for students is echoed in M. Greene’s (1995) statement, “How inattentive so many
teachers have been to hidden silences in students and how these silences can be overcome if we can free students to write” (p. 108).

Clinical Research

In considering using writing as healing (or therapeutic writing) in the classroom, it is important to take a look at the research on writing as healing in general. Over the last few decades, Dr. James W. Pennebaker (1993, 1997a, 1997b), professor of psychology at The University of Texas at Austin, has conducted comprehensive research examining the therapeutic effects of writing. Many of the researchers (Burton & King, 2004; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Singer & Singer, 2008; Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002a, 2002b; see also DeSalvo, 1999) that followed in this area most often cite his work. Based on Pennebaker’s research, his studies (1993, 1997a, 1997b) show significantly positive results in regard to writing as healing with participants who suffer or have suffered in some physical, psychological, emotional, or social way (considered as ‘trauma’ for the remainder of this paper). He also discussed the differences between talking about such traumas and writing about them. He then compared these findings with those of people who have not disclosed their traumas at all. His studies over time have been unique in content and method, but the positive results have been continually repeated (Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Singer & Singer, 2008; Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002a, 2002b; see also DeSalvo, 1999). It is interesting to note that Pennebaker (1997b) focused his results in terms of biological changes occurring in the body. His major hypotheses were that the “excessive holding back of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors” put people “at risk for both
major and minor diseases” and that “confronting our deepest thoughts and feelings can have remarkable short and long-term health benefits” (p. 2).

At first, just the act of disclosing personal trauma was thought to help in the healing process. Writing seems to be key, however, since “individuals benefitted as much from writing about traumas about which they had told others as from writing about traumas they had kept secret” (Greenberg & Stone, 1992, as cited in Pennebaker, 1997a, p. 164). Further studies involving expressive bodily movement, movement and then writing, or prescribed exercise, supported findings that writing may be a key element in healing effects since “only the movement-plus-writing group showed significant improvements in physical health . . . gains appear to require translating experiences into language” (Pennebaker, 1997a, p. 164).

Singer and Singer (2008) discussed the studies of Ullrich and Lutgendorf (2002a, 2002b), which found positive effects regarding journaling over time as it applies to use with people suffering emotional trauma/stress. Journaling that focuses on emotional expression and cognitive processing, an effort to both feel and make sense of an event, may offer greater benefits than journaling focused only on negative emotion (p. 492). Louise DeSalvo (1999) reflected those findings when she said, “Writing that describes traumatic or distressing events in detail and how we felt about these events then and feel about them now is the only kind of writing about trauma that clinically has been associated with improved health” (p. 25).

Later researchers, Burton and King (2004), decided to focus on studies using writing about positive experiences to improve mood and physical health. In these
studies, one group was instructed to write about wonderful life moments or their happiest, most ecstatic moments. The control group was asked to write about their plans for the day. They found that the health benefits for the test subjects were similar to those when writing about traumatic experiences, leading the researchers to conclude “that writing is effective when it releases and processes any powerful emotional experience whether intensely negative or intensely positive . . . expressive writing permits cognitive processing of feelings that are not in themselves language-based” (Singer & Singer, 2008, p. 493).

These research studies refer to healing from trauma, but what does that mean in regard to classrooms? Sitler (2008), while discussing the effects of trauma on learning, provides a clinical definition of trauma for children as any situation in which they feel “helpless by overwhelming forces . . . [that overpowers] the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning” (Herman, 1997, p. 33). This harks back to Moffett’s (1994b) concern about unhealed wounds thwarting curriculum and using writing as a means to support this trauma. The concern is that most teachers at all levels have no training in recognizing or dealing with the effects of trauma in the classroom (Sitler, 2008), especially when their experiences differ vastly from their own (Jones, 2004). Nevertheless, there are teachers who understand the power of writing in this way. The next section provides a snapshot of what types of classroom research has been done to cast a light on using writing for dealing with trauma in other than clinical settings.
Classroom Action Research

Some forms of research into the use of writing as a therapeutic agent has been done with young people for various reasons since at least the mid to late 1990s. The book *Teens Write Through It* (Staff of Fairview Press, 1998) intrigued me since it was an entire volume of the collected writings of a group of teens that wrote about their challenges and struggles with drugs, depression, family issues, body image, self-esteem, racism, sexual assault, and other issues, and how they overcame such adversity. This is a clear example of using writing as an expressive outlet for dealing with traumatic or stressful situations of all types, although the work was done through a healthcare facility and not in classrooms.

I did find some, although very little, individual action research in English Language Arts classrooms at various levels dealing with writing. The work in the elementary classroom of Cappello (2006) and the high school classroom Gaughan (1997) is similar in that both allow students to use writing in personal ways and as a thinking tool, as promoted by the writing researchers, Calkins (1994) and Graves (1994).

A high school student reveals, “it (writing) helped me to discover and express my feelings. It enabled me to think through my situation and realize how I felt and what I should do” (Gaughan, 1997, p. 79). Some interesting points were made in an article discussing the writing of third graders. “Writing from within affords Ally a place to have her say in her texts, a place to assert her voice” (Cappello, 2006, p. 485). In order to make sense of their social worlds, students in this class created writing that not only reflected, but also shaped “what the world is like and/or should be like” (Lensmire &
Beals, 1994, p. 423). One third grader revealed a great deal about what writing means to her when she said:

It helps me feel better . . . it helps me feel what my brain and my heart want to say. There are times when it is easier to express my feelings or thoughts on paper than to tell someone. When I write, it feels like I have power in my pencil. It makes me feel strong and confident . . . It helps me to calm down. (Cappello, 2006, p. 491)

In a fifth grade classroom, the teacher discovered that by helping her students incorporate their “lives, languages, and experiences” (Espinosa, 2006, p. 143) into their writing, she enabled them to discover and affirm who they really are.

Helen Frost (2001) used her skills and experiences as both a teacher and a writer to explore using writing in a therapeutic manner. She believed that “in every classroom, no matter what the writing activity, one or two students present a piece of writing that requires special attention” (p. xiii). She believed in the trauma theory that is outlined in the works of Dutro (2011), Herman (1997), Jones, (2004), Sitler (2008), and Wiseman and Wissman (2012). Through her experiences, Frost (2001) outlined the benefits of helping students write out what is important to them as threefold. She listed these benefits as: “personal investment in their writing; element of control over some of the difficult, and often private, issues they may be facing; and a sense of connection to you and one another, all of which helps create a sense of community” (p. xvii).

Whether or not there will be a place for the type of writing required for a therapeutic environment depends upon which model of education is in place at any given
time. Actually, many teachers have continued to practice the progressive approaches within their individual classrooms whenever possible, even when the traditional model is dominant. Only teachers comfortable with writing instruction itself, and the possibilities of the emotional ramifications such writing brings about will endeavor to implement therapeutic strategies into their classrooms. Regardless of the number of teachers interested in working in this realm, based on what I have found while doing this literature review, writing instruction in general needs to be given the emphasis it deserves in the American classroom.

It is my bias that teachers are provided the appropriate support to integrate some of this therapeutic writing into their classrooms. Dutro (2009) warned that the ability to use writing in the classroom to help students through trauma and to serve “liberatory or social justice ends is increasingly imperiled with the rise of commercialized and scripted literacy programs and high-stakes testing” (as cited in Wiseman & Wissman, 2012, pp. 129-130).

**Writing as a Therapeutic Tool For LGBTQ Students**

Again, researchers using writing with LGBTQ students or in relation to LGBTQ issues come from the critical/feminist and queer theory fields. DiGrazia and Boucher (2005) conducted an experimental writing class to help college students “use writing to re-imagine and rearticulate (the structures of society and our identities) in ways that allow them to reconfigure the mental map with which they navigate the world and understand themselves” (p. 29). Nine of the 11 students identified as other than straight and the main goal of the course was to “write queerly and queer writing” (DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005,
One student is quoted in the article as to how writing and receiving feedback in a safe environment really helped her “to be able to understand what I am feeling inside . . . there are times when you just can’t sort that out in your head. You have to write it down and look at it two days later” (p. 38). These researchers focused on the intertwining of identity and writing and concluded that autobiographical writing may be an important tool to use in future work in this area.

Blackburn (2002) explored the use of literacy and identity work in an after school LGBTQ social center and discovered that through poetry and journaling, one student “positioned herself with more power, and by reading the poem aloud, she invited others to support her” (p. 318). In this way, Blackburn (2002) used writing as a way to help LGBTQ students feel empowered “by providing a venue for reflecting on oppressive circumstances and imagining alternatives” (p. 314). The importance of Blackburn’s work is supported as Vetter (2010) discussed the disconnect students feel towards assignments when they cannot see the relevance to their lives. This is especially true for LGBTQ youth when they cannot safely share much of their lives since they feel that “my sexuality is part and parcel of who I am, and my poetry comes from the intersection of me and my worlds” (Rowell, as quoted in Vetter, 2010, p. 99).

Two anthologies have been created that share pieces written by LGBTQ youth for healing purposes. Sycamore (2004) has compiled intimate stories from queer youth who are survivors of abuse, in contrast to the fact that most nonfiction books about childhood abuse are usually written or edited by therapists. He continued by saying that this type of “recovery literature can be immensely important for healing, but can only go so far” (p.
3). His book allows the survivors, themselves, to go “beyond the recovery narrative to create a new queer literature of investigation, exploration, and transformation” (p. 3).

Bowles (1997) is the only editor to offer a collection of writings that were written in order to “grapple with the values, needs and fears they’ve [queer youth] inherited” (p. xiii). Another major difference is that these are written as performance pieces, which adds another layer of self-expression for these young people. Through these performances, the youth hoped to be seen “as more than statistics . . . but to see them as, first, as human beings with names, and dreams, and hopes, and aspirations” (p. 169). It is clear that this project did provide some therapeutic benefit when I read the words of Mark Rosenthal; “I have learned that the truth only cuts me if I hold it too tightly. If I present it to the world, it is always blade out. Nothing has changed, yet everything is different” (p. 200). Bowles (1997) presented concerns she had as to whether the “empowerment” they experience through this project stays with them. She discussed the fact that she knew of several young people who backslid following the conclusion of the project and she worried that rather than helping to make their lives better, she made them “more vulnerable, opening up old wounds without providing them with adequate post-production psychological support” (p. 158).

The gay rights movement’s continual push to keep important political and legal issues in the spotlight, and the increase of characters representing varied sexual orientations and gender identities in the entertainment field, have increased society’s awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of LGBTQ people over time. Unfortunately, the American educational system is not as reflective of those changes and the efforts made
are not always focused on the actual problems. Since the majority of studies with this population in the literacy areas of reading and writing use a critical/feminist or queer lens, I see a gap in the literature concerning writing research and the use of writing as it applies to caring; teacher to student, student to self, and even student to others. This is the area my research explored.

**New Literacies**

While my primary focus for this research study is to learn how LGBTQ students may use writing in their lives, I realize that the term “writing” holds different meanings today. The ways in which we all write have evolved to include other modes and modalities (Kist, 2010) that have influenced my thinking and motivated me to include *new literacies* as part of the framework for my study.

If literacy pedagogy has traditionally been associated with reading and writing “in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language . . . restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of languages” (New London Group, 1996, p. 61), what are new literacies and are they really new? There have been many interpretations of these words over the last 20 years and it is important to take a brief look at the history of this term and to clarify how I interpreted it for the purposes of my research.

**What Puts the “New” in New Literacies?**

Long before our digital media age, there were advocates for considering literacy as something more than simply print-bound text. By the turn of the 20th century, early filmmakers were experimenting with fictional narrative through visual imagery, and
eventually sound with the advent of the *talking picture* in 1927 (C. A. Young, Long, & Myers, 2010, p. 7). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) officially recognized this medium in 1932 and made recommendations regarding the use of film in English courses, even developing study guides for teachers (C. A. Young et al., 2010). Hatfield (1935a), one of the detractors of this idea, criticized that teachers were not properly trained to teach film, yet NCTE continued to promote the inclusion of this medium (C. A. Young et al., 2010). Even though NCTE (1997) broadened its definition and added a resolution to include media literacy in the English curriculum (Costanzo, 2004), the debate regarding the legitimacy of film as text rather than simply part of popular culture entertainment continues today. Many teachers use film in the classroom as a treat for reading the book, which Teasley and Wilder (1997) called the “read-the-book-see-the-movie pattern” (p. 6).

Even beyond the notion of alternative media as new literacy, however, is what are being touted as the necessary *21st century skills* of collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, and self-direction (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011). These are not new, either. One could argue that they have always been essential to best educational practices, but our transmission model of education that is teacher centered with the teacher as giver of knowledge and student as receiver (Cummins, 2006; Holt, 1994) is not always conducive to this way of teaching and learning. Traditional education has been dominated by monomodality (Kress, Jewitt, & Tsatsarelis, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) in which all genres use one mode and medium, “one language to speak about each” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 1), while
our world continues to move beyond this toward the notion of multimodality, or “the interplay among modes and media” (p. 1).

While the traditional transmission model has remained the prominent model in American education, there have always been divergent thinkers. As early as 1801, elementary and secondary teachers were influenced by the Swiss educational reformer, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, who believed that children should pursue their interests and write about them (Roen et al., 2008). Even in the 1880s, Francis W. Parker was calling for doing away with phonics instruction and promoting the idea that students would learn to read by writing their own books (Roen et al., 2008). These ideas were echoed in Fred Scott’s (1912) insistence that writing tasks be meaningful, using the example of the student newspaper to make his point, as mentioned earlier. While these are still considered print bound literacies, they reflect the progressive thinking of whole language, child-centered pedagogy. The 1935 NCTE-developed Experience Curriculum (Yancy, 2009) was also child-centered and supported the idea that literacy is “always social” (p. 3) and included authentic, everyday genres for real audiences (Hatfield, 1935b). Not only would these assignments be “meaningful and engaging to students” (Kennedy, 2005, p. 8) but would provide opportunities for students to be self-directed, creative, collaborative, critical thinkers (Sanders & Albers, 2010), all well before the 21st century. Today, these skills are being introduced through something called project-based learning (Boss, 2011; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).

So, while these ideas are not really new, they are often used rarely when the traditional transmission model of teaching is in play (Cummins, 2006; Holt, 1994).
However, the advent of the new media/technologies available have given this story a new twist, allowing teachers to implement instructional best practices more easily. For this reason, I take a look at the term new literacies and see exactly what interpretations exist.

**Origins.** During the 1990s, the term new literacies was often interchangeable with other terms (e.g., digital literacy, computer literacy, information literacy) describing reading and writing “mediated by digital technology” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013, p. 1). However, the “first formal recognition” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013, p. 1) of the term new literacies is credited to David Buckingham in 1993 who was actually calling for a “new definition of literacy” (Buckingham, 1993, p. 20) rather than a simple interjection of technology into education. Public debates at that time reflected the worry that computers threatened print literacy and video games were nothing more than addictive leisure pursuits without educational merit (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). Buckingham (1993) promoted a “blurring of boundaries” (p. 25) between texts and media to create this new definition that “is not tied to particular technologies or practices [but rather] allows us to look at the competencies that are developed across the whole range of culture and communication” (p. 20). The “pessimists” (Postman, as cited in Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 167), on the other hand, considered the increasing use of images as not only threatening to traditional literacy skills, but as a “dumbing down of not only textbooks, but culture in general” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 167).

**Interpretations of terminology.** As noted earlier, the term new literacies can have multiple meanings and the implications of this can make a difference regarding educational practices. When used in regard to technology, new literacies are often
considered by the terms: digital literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, multi-media or multi-modal literacy (Hicks & Turner, 2013; National Writing Project, DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, & Hicks, 2010). The rapidly changing technological landscape does mean that what is considered text has changed (Hull & Nelson, 2005) and the experience of reading and writing are now “interactive, nonlinear” (Kist, 2005, p. 5) activities.

However, other writers in this field focus on the fact that technology is just one component and are more concerned with “literacy practices and literacy events” (Kist, 2005, p. 6; Street & Leung, 2010, p. 297), or as Barton and Hamilton (1998) described, “what people do with literacy” (p. 6). In this way, literacy is considered a “socioculturally mediated practice” (Gee, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, as cited in Kist, 2005, p. 6).

In their seminal paper, the New London Group (1996) brought these two major ideas in new literacy together when they wrote:

We decided that the outcomes of our discussions could be encapsulated in one word—multiliteracies—a word we chose to describe two important arguments we might have with the emerging cultural, institutional, and global order: the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity. (p. 63)

By integrating and embedding all forms of literacy into the curriculum (Boss, 2011; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Damico & Riddle, 2006; Gee, 2009; Harste, 2010; Hull & Katz, 2006; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kist, 2010; Kress et al., 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010; Lemke, 1998; NCTE, 2005), teachers can create
environments conducive to authentic and meaningful work that “invite (and incite) real participation and learning” (Kajder, 2010, p. 3).

Regardless of what terms are used, it is clear that students must be able to collaborate, communicate, solve problems, be creative, self-directed, motivated, and familiar with reading and writing in a variety of media and modes in order to successfully navigate the multi-faceted and media rich environment in which they live. What does this really mean for today’s teachers?

The traditional transmission model of education is considered to be passive and a one-size-fits-all model that does not allow for diversity or foster creative, collaborative learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Cummins, 2006; Damico & Riddle, 2006). A new literacies approach, however, “involves building on cultural capital that students bring to school” (Cummins, 2006, p. 53) and incorporating the “multimodality of today’s communication forms, but also the interactivity that is embedded in them” (Kist, 2010, p. 2). It is important to note that these new literacies reflect a broadened view of literacies “to include the performative, visual, aural, and semiotic understandings necessary for constructing and reconstructing print and nonprint-based texts” (Alvermann, 2002, p. viii). This is an important consideration as M. Greene (1995) suggested when she stated that she “connect(s) the arts to discovering cultural diversity, to making community, to becoming awake to the world” (p. 4).

Another term that continued to appear in this research was that of agency (Hull & Katz, 2006; Kress et al., 2000). While the proponents of new literacies expound on the value and necessity of collaboration, they also recognize the importance of each student’s
individual ability to “agentively engage in learning and shape their social futures” (Hull & Katz, 2006, p. 73), in finding their own voices and making meaning for themselves. Cummins (2006) saw the increasing cultural diversity in classrooms and the change from an “Industrial Age economy to an Information Age economy” (p. 51) as a call to educators to embrace these changes and fight to integrate them into educational practices. Lent (2007) laid it on the line when he discussed that “the ability to read, write, and communicate effectively” is important, but students must be able to “learn instead of memorizing and reciting isolated bits of information” (p. 35). He said that “such skills require deep and critical thinking related to multiple literacies” (p. 35) of the kind in which they are already engaging outside of school (Au, 2001; Harste, 2010; Hull & Katz, 2006; Lent, 2007). This bridging between school and home “enables more children to enter into academic thinking and literacy than uni-dimensional forms of literacy instruction” (Sanders & Albers, 2010, p. 20).

With the push for thinking about literacy as a sociocultural practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Harste, 2010; Kist, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Street & Leung, 2010), the traditional view of literacy will go out of fashion. The transmission model will need to give way to a multimodal/new literacies approach in which students truly collaborate and technology and other forms of representation are not merely add-ons, but integrated into the curriculum (Boss, 2011; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Damico & Riddle, 2006; Gee, 2009; Harste, 2010; Hull & Katz, 2006; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kist, 2010; Kress et al., 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010; Lemke, 1998; NCTE, 2005). Kress (2003) and Hull and Nelson
(2005) pointed out how important it is for educators to realize the fact that “images, written text, music, and so on each respectively impart certain kinds of meanings more easily and naturally than others” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 229), whereas Kist (2013) reminded us that new literacies will promote the higher-order thinking necessary for students today. With this approach, students learn to interpret and analyze messages (read) and respond and create with purpose (write) so they can be the “agents of text rather than the victims of text” (Harste, 2010, p. 32).

**Realities of the classroom.** This “participatory culture” (Jenkins, as cited in Vaish & Towndrow, 2010, p. 317) calls for a change in teaching practices and what is considered to be learning. The question is whether this type of learning is actually happening in classrooms or not, especially in light of the adoption of the CCSS and increasing pressures on teachers to ensure their students pass the mandated achievement tests. Teachers’ jobs will be on the line as these test scores will be tied, in part, to their evaluations (Reform Support Network, 2012). With these considerations in play, collaboration and creativity may often be pushed aside in favor of direct instruction and product oriented strategies for passing the high stakes tests (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Scherff & Piazza, 2005). This is reminiscent of Hillocks’ (2002) claims that high stakes testing “reduce the scope of curriculum and decrease student engagement” (NCTE Review Team, 2009, p. 3).

**Outside the classroom.** Some teachers continue to do what they can to provide what they know are best practices for optimum teaching and learning and manage to create lessons with a new literacies approach. Kist (2005, 2010, 2013) outlined how
some teachers are integrating student-centered topics into their lessons to engage and motivate their students. They are creating lessons that involve true collaboration, creativity, and problem solving in various forms of representation that are appropriate for each project. When these opportunities are not possible, some teachers have implemented “gaming clubs” and “online social networking tools” (Kist, 2010, p. 109) in afterschool venues to help motivate and support students outside of school since these are often considered not appropriate or educational by the traditional view of curriculum. Gee (2003), however, considered video games to be powerful tools to motivate students, keep them engaged, and even incorporate opportunities for problem solving.

What it comes down to is summed up by Sperling and Dipardo (2008) when they asked the question: “How does one reconcile contemporary calls for a more creative, innovative, collaborative, globally minded workforce with the traditional view of English as stable skill set and knowledge of a Western canon?” (p. 90). Individual teachers in classrooms dotted across the country can make inroads, but something needs to change in the whole of our nation’s educational system if we are to see a true new literacies approach become the dominant philosophy in American education.

LGBTQ Youth/Young Adults and New Literacies

Because my research is focused on writing with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*gender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, I wanted to take a brief look at what this field of new literacies might mean for this population. I always kept the idea of healing, or self-care in the back of my mind to see if any research was similar to my own line of inquiry.
**New literacies: Online/social networking.** Much of the research I initially found focusing on LGBTQ youth writing online was done by Alexander (2002, 2004). His research found that this population uses the virtual world to make contact and communicate, to create community, to search for identity and belonging, to tell life stories, and to find information and role models for advice. He also discussed the social activist or political uses these online communities can foster and that using the Internet to establish romantic or sexual relationships was more of a stereotype than an actual focus in most cases.

Much was discussed in reference to the safety factor for expressing their thoughts about sexuality that they don’t feel in ‘real’ life (Alexander, 2002, 2004; Munt, Bassett, & O’Riordan, 2002; Paradis, 2009). Ideas of searching for and constructing identity in these online communities seem to be highlighted in each of the articles, as well. Paradis (2009) also discussed the importance of allowing this population to identify in multiple ways when doing any research in this area or they may opt out. This definitely related to my study and was something I was sensitive to during my pilot study.

Alexander (2002) discussed the revolutionary changes the Internet helps provide for queer youth in “growing up gay” (Egan, as cited in Alexander, 2002, p. 78). This seems to be supported by Mike Glatze (as cited in Alexander, 2004), founder of the activist website Young Gay America, when he noted: “Gay youth use the web like no other subset of the population. . . . What exists today was completely unheard-of even 10 years ago” (p. 5).
The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has been conducting school climate surveys for many years. In 2013, they published a new report, in conjunction with the Center for Innovative Public Health Research (CiPHR) and Crimes Against Children Research Center (CCRC), called *Out Online* in order to provide information on how LGBTQ youth are utilizing the Internet. Since this population is often marginalized by curricula that does not reflect their experiences or meet their needs and they often “experience stigma and disproportionate harassment in school” (Byrd, 2013, p. vii), LGBTQ youth are turning to the Internet to provide what school (and often home) cannot. GLSEN, CiPHR, and CCRC (2013) discussed findings in several areas. I have briefly summarized these findings.

**Social support.** Youth who are out in person and those who are not all seem to seek social support, “whether to reinforce their existing, in-person networks of support or to expand them” (GLSEN, CiPHR, and CCRC, 2013, p. viii). Some LGBTQ youth only participated in civic activities online, which suggests that they feel online spaces may serve as a safety zone for engagement with like individuals and their community.

**Seeking information and advice.** In this study, large numbers of LGBTQ youth used online resources to find information “related to sexuality, sexual attraction, general health or STIs” (GLSEN, CiPHR, and CCRC, 2013, p. xiii). These findings support the need for LGBTQ “inclusive sexual education programs” (p. xiii) or in helping them find accurate, appropriate resources.

**Gaps in access.** As mentioned in the Barriers section, gaps affect this population, as well. This research found that LGBTQ students in rural areas had less access, both at
home and in school, than their urban and suburban counterparts. These findings indicate “the importance of schools as sites of resource access” (GLSEN, CiPHR, and CCRC, 2013, p. xiii) for these students.

**Bullying and harassment.** This report did find that online bullying was prevalent and has a direct impact on student learning. Even though it occurs outside of the school environment, it was recommended that teacher training programs include programs to address this for all students. While this report acknowledges the potential for cyberbullying and harassment, they are encouraged by the “potential positive features of online spaces, including their role in fostering LGBT identity development, social support, and civic engagement” (GLSEN, CiPHR, and CCRC, 2013, p. xiii).

**New literacies: Arts-based.** Since the idea of new literacies incorporates more than just using social media, I began to look for any arts-based research with LGBTQ youth and found work interweaving activism with multiliteracies. Rhoades (2012) discussed the Youth Video OUTreach (YVO) organization. In this study, Rhoades helped LGBTQ create personal documentaries for outreach and advocacy. This program enables these students to give voice to their own stories and then to use them to effect positive community change through *artivism*, “a powerful tactic for reaching broader audiences with narratives, experiences, and perspectives that contradict and complicate dominant ones” (p. 317). Although his study is clearly giving voice to these students, it focuses more on activism and not on any realizations of composing for their own self-care.
The performance pieces that Bowles (1997) helped LGBTQ youth create, as described earlier in this document, helped these students explore their lives and find their voices using writing coupled with various forms of expression. Her concerns about opening wounds without post support serve as a reminder that this work is delicate and educators are not always able or willing to take the risk, so these types of programs must be carefully monitored when included in in-school or out-of-school programs.

While it is difficult for many educators to swim against the tide of traditional, dominant school practice, there are those who succeed. It may take these small grassroots movements to finally make a dent in some long-held beliefs. With the call for 21st century skills to mean more than adding technology to lessons and project-based learning being more than an end of unit activity, schools will have to start making adjustments. For my study purposes, I focused on how LGBTQ young adults utilize these new literacies in their lives beyond their K–12 schooling since the possibilities are great for LGBTQ youth to care for themselves by reaching out to others via social networking in order to not feel so alone. These sites may also allow for self-expression more comfortably than those found in schools.

I am encouraged by the GLSEN, CiPHR, CCRC (2013) report’s call for more research in looking at LGBTQ youth online, especially in light of what I saw firsthand during my pilot study where my participant used different modes and media (page-bound text, online blogging, illustration, and spoken word poetry) as empowerment, identity development, and civic engagement.
Summary

It is clear that LGBTQ-identified youth remain “one of the most neglected and marginalized groups” (Mayo, 2014, p. ix) in American educational settings and may feel uncomfortable expressing themselves honestly (Blackburn, 2002; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Boske, 2011; Clark, 2010; Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011; C. W. Johnson et al., 2014; Kitchen & Bellini, 2012; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; Pachankis & Godfried, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Sadowski et al., 2009; T. A. Savage & Schanding, 2012; Sheriff et al., 2011; Thein, 2013; Vetter, 2010; Watson et al., 2010). Because today’s American school curriculum continues to be focused on high stakes test performance, the use of writing as a means of “getting well and realizing our deepest being” (Moffett, 1994b, p. 261), and allowing students to overcome their hidden silences (M. Greene, 1995) is not welcomed (Campbell, 1994; Swearingen, 1994). This study aimed to learn if and how LGBTQ-identified young adults care for themselves through writing and other forms of self-expression. In so doing, the possibility exists to expand the use of writing and other forms of self-expression for the purposes of self-care and well-being.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY SECTION

In this chapter I describe and provide a rationale for my design and methodology choices, including research context and participant selection procedures. I outline my data collection and analysis methods, as well as address trustworthiness and ethical considerations. I also include a brief description of the pilot study I conducted in the spring of 2013.

Naturalistic Inquiry Case Study

I believe that an interpretive approach to this research fits best since it can be described as research that focuses on understanding meanings: the way people interpret and make sense of their lived experiences (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). I chose a naturalistic inquiry case study format since I was interested in how LGBTQ identified young adults construct meaning from their experiences (Maxwell, 2005, p. 75), specifically answering the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?

2. In what ways are a variety of modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ youth/young adult community?

I was interested in eliciting “the interviewees’ views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 20) in relation to the use of writing (see definition section for how this term is used for this study) in and out of the classroom in order to emphasize self-awareness and self-care.
These purposes are more in line with the interpretive constructivist perspective within the naturalist paradigm (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Identifying within this paradigm, I was interested in exploring the possibilities of co-constructing understandings of meaning with my participants. In order to do this, I interviewed my participants to learn what they had experienced during their K–12 education and how they utilized writing and other forms of self-expression then and now. As a naturalistic interpretive study design indicates, I used their own words to help me extract meaning and then I sent each participant their individual profile write up so they could read through and let me know whether or not I had captured their meanings accurately. In so doing, I hoped to provide the thick, rich description necessary so that “readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 2002, p. 29) rather than be generalizable to a vast population, which is the essence of naturalistic qualitative research.

This interpretive naturalistic study contains elements of collective case study design focusing on five young adults who identify on the LGBTQ spectrum as my cases or objects of study (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). Because these individuals vary in their sexual orientation and gender identification/expression, I analyzed each case individually and then included a cross-case analysis among all participants to provide more robust findings (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). According to both Stake (2000) and Yin (2009), case studies are utilized when researcher interest lies in experiences in context. For Yin (2009), such focus on describing these circumstances is considered a descriptive study,
and for Stake (2000), focusing on one issue or concern using multiple cases to convey the issue is considered to be a collective case. For these reasons, I have situated my study as constructivist and interpretive because I sought “emic meanings held by people within the case” (Stake, 2000, p. 441) and worked closely with each one to be sure I represented them accurately. It was also important to examine each participant’s work in specific new literacies, first as related to their individual needs and also in order to compare across cases. This in depth look at how each participant used/uses writing and other forms of self-expression and the personal interviews allowed me to formulate a fully developed picture of my participants.

**Role as Researcher**

Since I was dealing with a sensitive population, that of the LGBTQ community, it was essential for me to proceed with much care when choosing the participants. I was concerned that my being a straight woman in her 50s might make me seem like an outsider to this population, but was assured by the leaders I have met in this community that my extensive work in this field in the last few years has given me some “street cred” as far as they are concerned. For this reason, it is important to highlight the work in which I am involved in order to situate my role as researcher.

Through a serendipitous meeting, I began work with the Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio on a newly formed LGBTQ initiative called the Pride Alliance of Northeast Ohio. This group aimed to join various local organizations in helping the LGBTQ youth in the Cleveland/Akron community. Through this work, I met the director of GLSEN Northeast Ohio (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) and learned of the
training being offered to become a Safe Space Trainer for that organization. After my
training, I worked in various capacities to help school districts and individual educators
learn how to make school environments safer and more welcoming for LGBTQ students.
My desire to work with LGBTQ youth and young adults led me to join the GLSEN
JumpStart Youth Leadership Team, which helps high school students learn leadership
skills and ways to help their schools and communities in doing this diversity work.
Through this organization, I currently sit on the board of the Teen Pride Network in
Akron as a GLSEN representative. This new group is sponsored by Akron PFLAG
(Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians), CANAPI (Community Aids Network and
Akron Pride Initiative), GLSEN NEO, and the UUCA (Unitarian Universalist Church of
Akron). These groups have collaborated to form a pro-social, volunteer based group for
LGBTQ teens and Allies that is dedicated to hosting supervised, healthy, safe, and fun
events for LGBTQ teens and their allies in order to allow them engaging ways to meet
other teens and form friendships and network.

In addition, due to the work I am doing in this region, I have been appointed as
LGBTQ Liaison to the board of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts
(OCTELA) and am working closely with their parent organization, the National Council
of Teachers of English (NCTE). With these state and national organizations, I hope to
help ensure the inclusion of LGBTQ friendly curricula and safe spaces in schools.

The rapport I have been able to establish with leaders in this community is key to
the methodology of this study. Naturalistic inquiry depends upon providing a
comfortable setting and building trust with the participants in order to obtain artifacts and honest responses to the interview questions in order to present a trustworthy study.

**Participant Selection**

When considering my selection of participants, I first had to decide upon the age group that would be labeled *young adult*. For the purposes of this study, young adult was considered anyone aged 18–25 so they would be able to consent without needing parental approval. This was important since younger LGBTQ identified people may not be *out* to their families or have family support. In this way, too, I was able to learn about their K–12 experiences and beyond.

Prior to beginning my pilot study in the spring of 2013, I made connections with both the LGBTQ Center at a major suburban university in northeast Ohio and an urban community LGBTQ center in a major city in northeast Ohio in order to build relationships with possible liaisons who could help me invite participants within my focus population. I included the urban site because I did not want to limit my participants to only university students. Both of these organizations are safe places for LGBTQ identified young adults and their endorsement of my study served as an important factor in gaining the trust of the participants to initially feel comfortable accepting my invitation.

My connection to the urban center is through my work with GLSEN NEO, but I needed to find a liaison to the university’s LGBTQ Center and arranged a meeting with the director. She suggested I connect with the student LGBTQ group on campus. I sent a message to the group’s vice president via Facebook and we arranged to meet for coffee
so I could explain my study. He was excited about the study, but was too busy to help at that time. Fortunately, I was able to find a participant who was active in this same student LGBTQ campus group, but through another connection I had with a different university organization. This individual served as the sole participant in my pilot study, which is detailed later in this section.

Once I was ready to begin conducting my full research, I knew that securing four more participants might be a sensitive task due to the delicate nature of the study. Once again I went to my connections in the various organizations serving the LGBTQ community in Northeast Ohio for referrals for possible participant nominations. With this snowball sampling (Merriam, 2002), I hoped to have more than enough nominations from which to solicit participants who identify as LGBTQ, but vary from one another in their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. It was also important to find participants who do use some form of self-expression, as this was the focus of my study with this population. I contacted five organizations in the Cleveland/Akron area that serve the LGBTQ population, and three individuals who were well ensconced in this community. They agreed to send out my recruitment email (Appendix A) on their listservs. I received exactly five responses by email from individuals interested in participating in the study. I contacted them by email and asked each to complete a brief questionnaire of identity and self-expression (Appendix A) consisting of 12 multiple choice questions and ending with one open-ended, short response. This was initially intended to narrow down the participants to a manageable number while ensuring representation across the spectrum (meaning choosing participants who differ in their
gender identity and sexual orientation from one another), falling within the
18–25-year-old age band, and use of writing and/or other forms of self-expression. It was
not necessary to use this tool to narrow down the participant pool since I only received
two responses, but it did help during the interviews and analysis of the data. The first 12
were questions regarding how the nominee identifies along the LGBTQ spectrum in
regard to both gender identity and sexual orientation. There are labels from which they
could choose and a write in option in case I had not included their particular identity.
The other questions asked about the age or grade level at which they became aware of
these identities, and offered lists from which to choose the types of writing or other
self-expression and the various modes/media they use now, and for what purposes. The
last question asked the nominees to consider the effect (if any) on their lives if these types
of self-expression were not available to them. I aligned this questionnaire with my
research questions that explore how LGBTQ young adults use writing and other forms of
self-expression and in what modes or media. As stated earlier, this questionnaire was
originally designed to help me choose participants who vary from one another in identity
and self-expression in order to compare across cases.

The rationale for this purposive sampling is based on a variety of reasons the
participants may use writing and other forms of self-expression. They include: (a)
face-to-face social networking; (b) online social networking and communication; (c)
private/personal use; (d) personal earnings/money-making; (e) emotional support; (f)
self-expression; and (g) personal growth and development.
Data Collection

Since naturalistic inquiry uses the researcher as instrument to “gather data from a variety of sources, and preferably in a variety of ways” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 81), I chose the three methods that fit my study best: semi-structured interviews, written artifacts, and researcher reflections and journals. (See Table 1 for a detailed timeline.)

It is important to note here that prior to the beginning of the interview process, I explained the study and had all participants sign an informed consent form. All interviews were audiotaped on my computer using the Audacity software, and I took handwritten notes occasionally to help with follow up questions throughout the interview. I also noted thoughts and reflections in my journal following each interview. All tapes and transcripts were locked in a file cabinet in a faculty advisor’s office for privacy and confidentiality. I did not need to physically collect the artifacts since I either scanned them as PDF files using a portable wand scanner, or the participants emailed them to me. Some artifacts were obtained from an online source like a private blog or public social media account.

Semi-structured interviews. Because I was specifically interested in learning how this population uses writing in various aspects of their lives, I chose the semi-structured interview technique (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) in which I prepared questions on a specific topic to learn about. In this way, I was able to get to the heart of what I wanted to know. I wanted to collect thick, rich descriptions (Geertz, 1973), even though I realize this is geared more for a combination of observation and interview. I thought about thick rich description in terms of the level of detail I provided when
Table 1

*How the Data Informs the Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Participant Interview Schedule</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?</td>
<td><strong>Interview 1:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Initial Questions&lt;br&gt;Appendix A</td>
<td>During two one-hour face-to-face interviews with each participant, they relayed their experiences and I recorded them on Audacity through the computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study:&lt;br&gt;Ryan&lt;br&gt;April 2, 2013</td>
<td></td>
<td>I transcribed all interviews and color coded the paper transcripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Study:&lt;br&gt;Isobel&lt;br&gt;August 28, 2014&lt;br&gt;Renee&lt;br&gt;August 29, 2014&lt;br&gt;Holden&lt;br&gt;September 2, 2014&lt;br&gt;John&lt;br&gt;September 8, 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways are various modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ young adult community?</td>
<td><strong>Interview 2:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Follow-up questions&lt;br&gt;(Appendix A) and Artifacts&lt;br&gt;(Appendices B-F)</td>
<td>To the second interview, they brought any documents/artifacts they wished to share for the purposes of this study (either online or paper)&lt;br&gt;Poetry—Ryan (paper, online, performed spoken word), Holden (paper), Isobel (online)&lt;br&gt;Personal Narrative—Isobel (online)&lt;br&gt;Essay—Ryan (paper), Holden (paper), Isobel (online)&lt;br&gt;Short Story—Ryan (paper), Holden (paper)&lt;br&gt;Journal—Renee (paper)&lt;br&gt;Blog—Ryan (paper taken from online Tumblr), Isobel (online)&lt;br&gt;Academic articles/papers—John (paper)&lt;br&gt;Sketches/Drawings/Text of a painting—Ryan (paper)&lt;br&gt;Comics—Ryan (paper)&lt;br&gt;Photographs—Renee&lt;br&gt;Song lyrics—Isobel (paper), John (paper)&lt;br&gt;For my use, allowed me to access on my own: Facebook (Renee, Isobel, Holden), Instagram (Renee, Isobel, Holden), Twitter (Isobel)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
relaying my participants’ stories, however, so through my follow up questions I was sure to encourage them to elaborate and provide detailed answers. I asked about the use of writing and other forms of self-expression throughout their lives at home (personal and possible social networking online), in school, and at work (if applicable). Since this line of questioning required the participants to think back about past experiences, it was important for me to make it clear prior to the interviews so they had sufficient time to think and feel more prepared. During the interview process, I also made sure to engage in sufficient ‘wait time’ to provide the gentleness that Kvale (as cited in Gibbs, 2011) mentioned in order to “give time to finish and time to think.” This lent itself well to the responsive interviewing technique (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) I felt was important since it “emphasizes the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee that leads to more give-and-take in the conversation” (p. 36).

I conducted two rounds of interviews. The first round of questions (Appendix A) served to establish a sense of comfort and rapport between interviewer and participants, to provide baseline data about their K–12 experiences with writing and self-expression, and how they view writing and self-expression in their lives currently in regard to self-care in whatever ways that may apply. This began their thinking about this subject in new ways and set the groundwork for the second round of questions (Appendix A) in which we were able to delve into this topic further and allowed them to bring in any artifacts for me to view for analysis. During the second interview, we reviewed the artifacts together and I took notes as I did during the first interview. I also asked if they would provide links to additional material on any Internet/social media sites they used.
This thoughtful interview process allowed me to continually clarify any points during our conversations to ensure I was understanding what they were saying and not misinterpreting their meanings.

**Artifacts of self-expression.** Since my interpretive study focused on how writing is used in the lives of LGBTQ young adults, it was important for me to collect any examples of various pieces of writing or other forms of self-expression they allowed me to see. For example, in my pilot study, it was imperative that I build rapport and trust in the beginning so Ryan felt comfortable sharing his work with me (this is discussed further in the Ethics section of this paper). The use of the wand scanner was helpful so I did not have to actually collect the paper documents he brought or take time away from the interview to make copies. This allowed us the opportunity to look at these artifacts together and for Ryan to explain them to me, but I still had them in digital form so I could take my time analyzing this data later. Ryan brought a journal of writing, a sketchbook, and various single written/drawn items. He also provided links to his blog so I could review any other material that he did not bring to the interview. During this second interview, Ryan felt comfortable enough to read aloud several of his spoken word poems and this provided even richer data than simply having the printed text. I continued the practice of first building rapport with my other participants since I understand that by asking the participants to bring artifacts, they are censoring what they choose to provide. I strove to help them feel comfortable and encouraged them at the end of the first interview to bring a variety of material and links to any online sites if they were willing
to share that information. Table 1 provides a summary of how the data connects to each research question.

**Researcher reflections/journals.** As a researcher, it was vitally important for me to continuously document my thoughts, experiences, questions, and feelings as I learned about the lives of my participants through their interviews and the artifacts they shared. Reflecting on such elements provided me the space to maintain “the attitude of a learner” (Erlandson et al., 1993) throughout my study. Schram (2006) believed that “developing self-awareness—that is, examining what I know and how I know it—is essential to determining the influence of research relationships on your inquiry and to constructing an authentic understanding of what’s going on” (p. 9). Keeping meticulous notes/memos in these journals helped me maintain perspective and provided a place for me to record my own questions as they arose and prepare any follow up questions for interview 2 with each participant.

**Data Analysis**

If data are considered to be “constructions offered by or in the sources; data analysis leads to reconstructions of those constructions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 332). Marshall and Rossman (1989) explained this further by stating “data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p. 111). Because naturalistic inquiry is flexible and reflexive, this inductive analysis is considered to be progressive in nature and not a static one-time procedure, beginning on day one of the study. Erlandson et al. (1993) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the
interrelationship between data collection and analysis and the need to be cognizant of emerging patterns and theories, as well as those that may be divergent.

For the naturalistic researcher, data analysis is such an interactive process that it is sometimes difficult to separate it from the data collection (Erlandson et al., 1993). The researcher must continually “initiate the process” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 114) following interviews or after each observation by asking what was learned in order to prepare for the next set of interviews, follow-ups, or thinking about emerging themes, patterns, or even working hypotheses. In this way, ongoing data analysis occurred throughout the study, which constantly informed the development of the study. I chose to follow the elements that Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 333) have outlined as the naturalistic data analysis process: unitizing data; emergent category designation; negative case analysis; bridging, extending, and surfacing data.

Transcription. During the pilot study, I discovered that transcribing the interviews myself was helpful for reliving the experience and picking up on nuances from the conversations. Although time-consuming, this practice was invaluable in gaining more insight into the experiences of my participants. I found that using a simple three columned chart worked best for providing an easy way to analyze the data. This chart included a column for my voice, the voice of my participant, and a space for notetaking (Table 2).
Table 2

Transcription Chart Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KT</th>
<th>[participant name]- Interview 1</th>
<th>notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Coding. To help organize my thinking, I read through the transcripts and marked each of the interview questions by numbering to the left of where I asked the questions #1–10. Next, I read through each transcript to get a holistic feel for the information. Then I reread the transcripts, making notes in the third column trying to capture the major gist of what emerged from their conversations and started categorizing their responses looking for patterns/themes. I also wrote the numbers of the interview questions 1–10 on a separate sheet of paper, leaving room to take notes. As I read through each transcript for the third time, I jotted down the gists I had noted earlier onto this sheet in order to create an ‘at-a-glance’ type document grouping the main ideas with each of my questions.

From this initial attempt at coding, I decided to look at my notes in terms of my two major research questions and noted the emerging themes. I analyzed the data line by line to unitize by identifying the smallest pieces of information and then looked for categories to emerge based on like characteristics. I assigned each category a different colored marker and used color-coding by highlighting the data in the transcript chart in these colors to help me keep track of the data easily. Bridging was utilized when the data suggested links and extending when an emerging category seemed viable, but
incomplete. I utilized surfacing when emerging data from round one needed to be explored in the second interview. For question one, I assigned a color to the themes related to writing experiences in and out of school and color-coded these in the transcripts with highlighters. For question two, I assigned colors to categorize mentions of genre, mode, and purpose. Once the color coding was complete, I created a running record for each participant on a separate sheet of paper to create a visual for myself as to what types of genres and modes of self-expression they used and for what purposes. I also read the transcripts again to pull quotes that were directly related to my research questions for inclusion in my dissertation.

In order to ensure that I was addressing any possible elements of negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I consistently asked clarifying questions during the interviews and, in some cases, via email afterward if I had questions while reading through the transcriptions and artifacts. My goal was to represent the participants as authentically as possible and not misinterpret something. After completing the analysis of the transcripts, I turned to the artifacts. As with the interviews, I color coded the PDFs I had made, using the same categories and looking for any others that may be different from those found during our conversations.

**Trustworthiness**

Although I was not looking for objective *truth*, I was entrusted to provide a study that is trustworthy in order for it to be taken seriously in the world of research. The term *credibility* is used to name the relationship researchers must establish with their respondents in order to provide a trustworthy study. To do this, I had the task to
Somehow reconstruct the constructions of the respondent in such a way that the respondent can verify them . . . then provide a translation or report that will enable similar constructions by others, not engaged in the original research, to benefit from it. (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 25)

There are several strategies found in Lincoln and Guba (1985) that I utilized in order to ensure the trustworthiness of my study. The following references reflect those I chose as the best fit for my purposes.

**Triangulation.** Using both interviews and writing samples as my data sources, I attempted to provide triangulation, which is the practice of looking at various aspects of what is being studied from different viewpoints. Using “multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories” in different combinations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305) help to “elicit the various and divergent constructions of reality that exist within the context of a study” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 31). The more methods used, the better are the chances of understanding how complex human beings construct meaning in/from their lives and of decreasing the chances of misinterpretation (Fontana & Frey, 2005). In all cases, the artifacts supported what the participants discussed during the interviews.

**Peer debriefing.** I asked three peers outside of my study context to listen, ask probing questions, and “play devil’s advocate” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 140) in order to help me keep perspective and be aware of biases, test emerging hypotheses, develop and test next steps in the emerging design, and to vent frustrations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). These peers were all trusted and respected colleagues in my doctoral program who had completed their programs or are in various stages of the process, but have experience
with analyzing and coding data and are not considered experts in my field. I met with them individually several times throughout my study to help keep me grounded and make sure I was being as objective as possible.

**Member checking.** This is an important technique for establishing credibility since it involves including the respondents in the process by allowing them to indicate the accuracy of the researcher’s reconstructions of “their own realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This is done continually and can be formal and informal. For the purposes of my study, I chose the following from a list provided in Erlandson et al. (1993) as to when and how member checking may be conducted:

- conducted during interviews by verifying data collected in earlier interviews;
- before the final report is submitted, written copies of the final report should be given to respondents for verification.

I was careful to consistently ask clarifying questions during each interview and as we discussed the artifacts. Prior to the conclusion of the second interviews, I asked the participants if they would review the final profile write ups for purposes of member checking. I gave them the option of a third face-to-face meeting or receiving the profiles via email. All five were eager to meet again, but the elapsed time between the interviews and the completed write ups was lengthy and made in person meetings highly unlikely. However, I did send them their individual profile write ups via email in hopes they would read through and offer any insight, but only two of the five responded. Both Renee and Isobel read through their profiles and had only positive comments. Renee said, “It was really good and I wouldn't change anything,” while Isobel said, “I read through it and it
brought tears to my eyes. Thank you very much for your research, dedication, and compassionate methods.”

**The reflexive journal.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this as a type of diary in which the researcher regularly records information about himself or herself (e.g., daily schedule, reflections, insights, reasons for methodological decisions) as a way to provide information about the “*human* instrument being used in the study” (p. 327). I kept a small notebook for purposes of recording my own thoughts and feelings while going through this process. In addition, I kept a spiral notebook for each participant in which I jotted notes about the experience of talking with them, my personal impressions and a summary of the emergent themes from the analysis of their interviews and artifacts. This documentation became part of the audit trail discussed in a later section of this study.

**Purposive sampling.** In contrast to the random sampling used in traditional research, to support credibility, this type of sampling focuses on “maximizing the range of information obtained about the context” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 148) to provide rich detail and not to develop generalizations. I chose to utilize snowball sampling (Merriam, 2002) due to my extensive networking in the LGBTQ community. As outlined in the role as researcher and participant selection sections, it was imperative to create a sense of comfort and trust for the participants in this study given the sensitivity of the population with which I was working. In order to do this, I made every effort to become immersed in this community and gain the trust and respect of the people who served as my liaisons in helping nominate participants or spread the word about the study in order to provide the best range of information I sought.
Audit trail. In order for the study to be deemed dependable and confirmable, and thereby trustworthy, an auditor, who is a disinterested third party with a “high level of methodological sophistication, recognized integrity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 379), some knowledge of the subject matter, and some experience as an auditor, reviews a carefully kept material trail. Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 319-320) suggested the following six categories of material to be included: (a) raw data (interview guides, notes, documents); (b) data reduction and analysis products; (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products (data analysis sheets, reports); (d) process notes (journal); (e) materials relating to intentions and dispositions (inquiry proposal, journal, peer debriefing notes); and (f) information relative to any instrument development (The Belmont Report, 1979).

I did not engage an auditor, but have prepared all materials should it be necessary to do so. In preparation, I have organized all loose notes, transcripts, and artifact PDFs in a binder for easier organization and review. I have also kept the individual spiral notebooks, along with my personal notebook.

Ethics

It should be noted here that issues of power and ethical considerations must be addressed, especially since I was dealing with what could be sensitive issues as they pertain to my participants as being part of a marginalized population. Power can be at play on both sides in naturalistic studies. Liaisons are often needed in order to gain entry into a site, so they hold some power over the researcher in those decisions. Similarly, respondents hold some power since they can choose how forthcoming they want to be during interviews and producing documents or artifacts. I realize that my participants
may have chosen to hold back information or writing samples since they may deal with personal sensitive information. For these reasons, I saw my most important task as being able to build a rapport quickly by making sure they understood my intentions, that they would be part of the process all along, and to craft my interview questions carefully in order to build trust. As stated previously, I made every effort to work within this community and make connections with people who serve in leadership roles. Their support of my research and recommendation to nominees to participate helped build the comfort and trust levels needed to recruit participants who were honest in their answers.

The power that I had as the researcher was in the way in which questions were asked and responses were analyzed. However, the researcher in a naturalistic inquiry study, “rather than acquiring power or supporting existing power structures” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 158) should actually strive to honor and empower the respondents by not only giving them a voice, but also by expanding “their understanding and insight regarding each other’s constructions” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 159).

Ethical considerations due to privacy and confidentiality concerns are inherent within a naturalistic study since the researcher is working closely with respondents and may encounter many “unanticipated ethical dilemmas” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 156). These were considered carefully as I asked questions and wrote up reports. Developing an honest relationship and allowing for member checking at all times aided with some of these issues. However, a concern of proactively protecting the respondent from any harm, physical or psychological, was the bigger picture. In order to build in safeguards, I employed the following strategies prior to beginning the study: completing the CITI
training course and submitting a study proposal to the IRB. Once my participants were chosen, I provided informed consent forms that disclosed the study’s purpose, procedures, data collection methods, benefits, and possible risks/discomfort. I also provided my contact information and made it clear that they were free to leave the study at any time. Although this study was one of minimal risk, there always existed the possibility of some questions triggering emotional or unpleasant reactions relating to past experiences since they have identified outside societal norms in some way. I made it clear that they could choose not to answer questions or discontinue as a participant in the study at any time. Member checking also provided opportunities for the participants to be part of the process. I continually reminded them that pseudonyms would be used in all reporting in order to protect confidentiality.

**Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis**

Table 3 reveals the actual schedule of all major events occurring during my study.

**Pilot Study**

As part of my Advanced Qualitative Research course in the spring of 2013, I was able to design and implement a pilot study based on my planned line of inquiry. In doing so, I was hoping to hone my skills as a responsive interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and see if my interview questions would get to the heart of what I wanted to know. Originally, I had planned to recruit for a participant through the LGBTQ student group on campus, but my liaison there became overwhelmed by his workload and was unable to help me. I then turned to someone I had worked with in a different organization on campus. Via email, she introduced me to a student (who chose the name Ryan) and we
Table 3

**Timeline of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2013</td>
<td>● Pilot interviews (1 &amp; 2) with Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 and 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2014</td>
<td>● IRB approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>● Contact liaisons via phone/email re: possible nominee names/emails and/or sending my call for participants on their listservs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>● <strong>Renee</strong> contacted me (responding to my call on an organization listserv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>● Link to questionnaire sent to <strong>Renee</strong> / Response received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 / 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2014</td>
<td>● <strong>Isobel</strong> contacted me (responding to my call on a different organization listserv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>● Link to questionnaire sent to <strong>Isobel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>● Response received (<strong>Isobel</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>● <strong>John</strong> contacted me (heard about my study directly via a personal contact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>● Response received (<strong>John</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>● <strong>Holden</strong> contacted me (heard about my study directly via a personal contact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Link to questionnaire sent to <strong>Holden</strong> / Response received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Interview 1 with <strong>Isobel</strong> (60 minutes) set up Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Interview 1 with <strong>Renee</strong> (60 minutes) set up Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2014</td>
<td>● Interview 1 with <strong>Holden</strong> (60 minutes) set up Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>● Interview 1 with <strong>John</strong> (60 minutes) set up Interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>● Interview 2 with <strong>Renee</strong> (60 minutes) collect/discuss artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>● Interview 2 with <strong>Holden</strong> (60 minutes) collect/discuss artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2014</td>
<td>● Interview 2 with <strong>Isobel</strong> (60 minutes) collect/discuss artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>● Interview 2 with <strong>John</strong> (60 minutes) collect/discuss artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>● Begin transcription of interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2014 through May 2015</td>
<td>● Continue transcription</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (table continues)
Table 3 (continued)

*Timeline of Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>June 2015 through</strong></td>
<td>● Analysis of transcribed interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November 2015</strong></td>
<td>● Analysis of artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 2016</strong></td>
<td>● Profile write up sent to Ryan via email and message sent via text for purposes of member checking (no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>● Profile write up sent to Renee via email for purposes of member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>● Positive response received from Renee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>April 2016</strong></td>
<td>● Profile write up sent to Isobel via email for purposes of member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>● Positive response received from Isobel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>● Profile write up sent to Holden via email for purposes of member checking (no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>● Profile write up sent to John via email for purposes of member checking (no response)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

agreed to meet for coffee at a nearby Starbucks so I could explain the study in person and have him sign an informed consent form. After a comfortable hour-long conversation, he agreed to be the sole participant in my pilot study and we arranged the date for the first interview.

After my interviews with Ryan, his story and insights were so compelling that I decided I needed to incorporate them into my dissertation. I was only able to transcribe and analyze the first interview and a few artifacts due to time constraints during the spring semester, so that was the perfect opportunity for me to wait and include Ryan as one of my five study participants whose stories are detailed in Chapter 4. My work with Ryan taught me to listen and to hear. Doing this pilot study helped me to understand that
the complexities of gender identity and sexual orientation are finely layered and
dependent upon so many variables. Our conversations were rich and they helped me to
realize the need for the questionnaire (Appendix A) in order to find the participants that
would be most likely to speak openly and honestly and represent various identities along
the spectrum. My conversations with Ryan also helped to inform the questions for the
questionnaire and to revise some of my initial and follow-up questions (Appendix A).

The initial analysis of the first interview and artifacts encouraged me to be
optimistic that my research study will serve to move the field of LGBTQ youth and
writing research forward.

Summary

A naturalistic inquiry case study aimed at understanding how LGBTQ identified
young adults use writing for their own purposes in their lives will address a gap in the
current literature. Most research on the use of writing is in the fields of medicine and
psychology and is quantitative in nature. Research combining writing and LGBTQ
young adults tends to be in the qualitative realm, but focuses more on identity or critical
action, while my study looks at understanding the personal uses of writing and other
forms of self-expression, and the possibilities that all genres, modes, and media hold for
individuals. The findings may also transfer to settings in which writing is used in hopes
of improving practice related to the caring relationship between teacher and student.

The benefits of this research may extend to the participants since it will give them
the opportunity to discover or reflect upon how they do or do not use writing as a means
of self-care and how they may use writing in the future.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how LGBTQ young adults use writing in their lives today based on their K–12 experiences. My study examined the experiences of five young adults who met the three requirements for participation in this study: they all self-identified on the LGBTQ spectrum, were within the age band of 18–25 when the study began, and currently use writing in some way in their lives. For the purposes of this research, I defined writing as composing text on paper or online; composing as conveying thoughts or feelings through any number of media including, but not limited to written text, music, dance, or visual art that may “draw on speech, writing, image, gesture, and sound” (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 224). This chapter presents findings for the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?

2. In what ways are a variety of modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ youth/young adult community?

As referenced in Chapter 3, I conducted a Pilot Study with one participant in the spring of 2013 during my Advanced Qualitative Research class. Since that participant revealed a compelling story, I decided to include him in the full study as one of the five participants. I conducted two separate one-hour interviews with each of my five participants and collected writings or other forms of expression they chose to share with me for review.
The discussion of my findings first focuses on the five participants as individual cases, with each case beginning with a general overview and then extending into an in-depth exploration of both their K–12 experiences with writing and how they use writing today. Following the individual cases, I provide a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2000) in order to examine the cases as a collective study, which focuses on similarities and differences among the individual cases.

**Ryan**

“Never be afraid of the truth.”

My pilot study participant, who chose the pseudonym of Ryan, was 21 years old at the time of the study and identifies as trans*gender and bisexual, but said he also identified as queer. He went to a suburban high school in a neighborhood near the university he attended at the time of this study. As an English major, he hopes to one day be a college professor. Biologically a female, Ryan lives openly on campus as a male, is active in the LGBTQ community, and was in a relationship with a male at the time of his participation in my study. At that time, his friends and brother were aware of his bisexual trans*gender identity, but he has only come out to the rest of his family as bisexual. At the time of this study, he was working on how he will come out as trans*gender to his mother.

After the initial meeting for the pilot study, Ryan decided he did want to participate. He and I met twice for one hour each time and I asked semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A). In addition to the recorded interviews, I collected various artifacts Ryan chose to share with me: blog posts, written poems (some of which
Ryan decided to perform for me live) and essays, journal entries, drawings, and comics (see Appendix B). I also decided to keep a separate researcher journal for each participant with notes and reflections to help me remember my thoughts and feelings throughout this process.

**Initial Pilot Meeting**

Ryan and I decided to meet in the loft area of a Starbucks near campus so he could get to know me and hear more about the project before committing. I arrived early, got my drink, and settled in upstairs to wait. I scanned the room to make sure he was not already there, although I had no idea what he looked like.

He arrived on time wearing a crisp buttoned-down shirt with a sweater vest and bow tie. Ryan sported short-cropped hair with the front part spiked up. He spotted me and walked confidently to my table. Our initial conversation flowed comfortably. After learning of my background and my reasons for conducting this research, he told me he was excited to lend his voice to this project because he thought it was an important study. We talked for about an hour and set up our first interview. During this meeting, Ryan revealed himself to be a thoughtful young man who knew himself quite well. My first impression was that he was an “old soul” and would be able to discuss his experiences with deep insight.

**Research Question 1**

My first research question was, “What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?”
The K–12 experience. This section discusses Ryan’s experiences in school during the K–12 years. Please note that all words within quotation marks are direct quotes taken from the interviews conducted with Ryan.

Earliest memories. From the beginning, Ryan was eager to explore with me his use of writing and other forms of self-expression. He had no difficulty relating that his earliest memories of writing were as punishment; first at home and then at school. His mother used writing as punishment “whenever we [Ryan and his siblings] did something really stupid” by making them copy a page or two out of the dictionary. He holds no ill toward his mother for this, however, and even credits her with helping him develop his vocabulary by engaging in this activity.

In school, Ryan had difficulty holding a pen or pencil and “was constantly being corrected,” and being made to form letters in an awkward way. Consequently, Ryan feels his handwriting is “really strange” and difficult for people to read. Early on, he was shy about showing anyone his writing, but typing has helped a great deal. He says that he thinks this early admonishment has contributed to his pickiness about fonts; however I think it might simply be due to his artistic leanings.

During these elementary years, Ryan felt comfortable with the content of his writing, especially if it was something only the teacher would see. He remembers feeling a bit nervous to read his work in front of the class. Ryan was not aware of his trans*gender identity or bisexual orientation at this earliest stage, but his feelings about writing did begin to change once these issues came into play.
**Difficulties.** Many of the problems Ryan experienced in school seem to revolve around the aspects of gender roles and stereotyping that were prevalent, beginning in middle school and escalating during high school. Ryan had discovered his bisexual orientation between the ages of 11–14 and came out in high school, but was still struggling with his gender identity (assigned female at birth, but privately identifying as a male) at that time.

He said that attending middle school in a small Pennsylvania town was difficult enough, but realizing that he identified as bisexual made it more difficult since others did not quite know what to do with that information. He said that, “Gay people were like zombies. They were in the movies, but they didn’t actually exist in real life.” What struck him particularly hard was the definite gender divide in this town. Even though he was not yet fully aware of his trans*gender identity, it was during these years that he discovered it difficult to write from a female character’s perspective. He related that, on many occasions, the writing assignments in school were to write from prescribed gender roles in which girls were to respond to readings from the female character’s perspective and boys were to take on the male character’s point of view. Ryan consistently was unable to “get into the headspace of the female characters” and even received a poor grade on one assignment for not being able to write enough, being “half a page too short,” and not really getting into the character’s head.

In an effort to train himself to write from other viewpoints, Ryan discovered that writing fan fiction was helpful. By writing new stories using characters he had not created, but with whom he was familiar, Ryan was able to “get into the headspace” of a
person different from himself much more readily and sometimes submitted fan fiction pieces when fiction writing was assigned in class. Unfortunately, these attempts were blocked when his high school English teacher would not accept such writing as valid, saying it was a lazy way to write. Ryan disagrees and thinks writing fan fiction is almost more difficult since the stories that fans create using someone else’s characters have to make sense in that world. He even likened it to the accepted instructional technique of writing in a particular author’s style and was not sure why fan fiction would be so abhorrent to this teacher.

He also experienced prevalent gender stereotyping in classrooms in relation to the books teachers chose to have the students read and in the way students were often grouped for discussions or writing assignments. Ryan felt that the books contained characters with stereotypical feminine female and masculine male characters. He also remembers many times teachers grouped the girls together and the boys together to discuss short writing projects and discussion groups because they thought they would be “more comfortable” grouped this way. Ryan also thinks the teachers expected that gender groups would “agree with a certain side of the argument better, so they expect less arguments.” For Ryan, these groupings were uncomfortable since he felt he did not fit in either group. During this time, Ryan was not outwardly identifying as a male, so would be included with the girls, yet he found it difficult to relate to them exclusively in discussions and preferred hearing various viewpoints.

While the gender stereotyping in high school was a sensitive issue for Ryan since he was struggling with his gender identity at the time, as noted earlier, he was out as
bisexual and began writing persuasive essays about the LGBTQ community. He said that during this phase of his life he began realizing that he was trans*gender, but was in denial because he knew “how much trouble that would be.” He said that even though trans* issues were what really interested him, he “never wrote anything specifically” about them since he was not comfortable publicizing his discomfort with the new realizations of his gender identity. He said that during this time he was so uncomfortable with anyone even thinking he might be trans*gender he entered a “really feminine phase” in which he wore skirts, heels, and make-up every day. Looking back, even as far as to some middle school writings, Ryan says that if he “had been comfortable with myself, I probably would have written [these] in a completely different way.” For these reasons, Ryan felt his writing never truly reflected his actual thoughts or creativity. He also made conscious choices to not write honestly because of these societal issues he was not able to face at the time.

**Positives.** While Ryan felt that much of his writing during his K–12 schooling was not reflective of his true self due to his identity struggles, he did find mentors or guides that helped him discover ways to write more authentically. Ryan related the progress he experienced in being able to more accurately express himself in writing directly to four influential adults in his young adult life. There were two major influences during high school and two beyond the K–12 years. The first was Mr. S, a high school English teacher who Ryan says got him “back into writing” by being less traditional or formulaic. Mr. S allowed the students to make meaning for themselves and choose the perspective from which to write. He provided interesting background and incidental
asides for the works they read and tied the classics to modern literature. Ryan says this helped him feel more free and inspired more writing ideas. It is interesting to note, however, that even this beloved teacher was also the source of an unintentional insult. In trying to compliment Ryan on being able to write from a male character’s perspective, he indicated it was “cool” because he [Ryan] was [identified as] a female [at the time]. Ryan knew this was not meant as an insult, but he felt hurt, or “thrown” by it. Ryan had difficulty trying to explain exactly why this statement hurt him, but he said, “It was kind of telling me you are such different things, it should be hard for you and it’s weird and it’s wrong, but it’s not.” Despite this, Ryan does still attribute his new ability to write from other gender perspectives to the encouragement from Mr. S.

The second influential adult was a high school psychologist with whom Ryan credits “getting him back into journaling.” Up to that point, Ryan had seen other psychologists who insisted he show them his journal writings, which “stopped him dead in his tracks.” As referenced earlier, Ryan was always a bit reluctant to share his writings. This psychologist allowed him privacy, suggesting he did not even have to tell her if he was journaling. It was just her strong belief in the benefits writing could provide that she encouraged him to do it. Ryan said he was still hesitant at first and “pulled back from it for a couple weeks” until the words “gay” and “dyke” appeared in graffiti on his locker and he decided to rant about it on paper, producing three to four typed single spaced pages. He says that it “definitely helped” since he started out ranting about that incident and then “ended up ranting about everything and I felt better after that. I just ended up starting an online journal.” Although this journal is a private space for Ryan to
record his writings, he has since gone on to create an online blog, as well, which has
become a major social justice advocacy blog he hopes will help others. This is discussed
further in the Beyond K–12 section, as well as the second two influential people.

**Beyond the K–12 experience.** At the time of my interviews with Ryan, he was a
college junior working toward an English degree in hopes of becoming a college English
professor. Ryan always enjoyed writing, but found most middle and high school classes
to be constraining. Because of this, it was in college that he discovered his unique voice
and what writing could provide for him. The third influential person in Ryan’s life was a
college English professor and poet, Ms. W., who helped Ryan break free of the idea
[from high school] that poetry had to be written in strict, formulaic patterns, or that there
was one correct interpretation of a poem. It was in this class that Ryan realized that
poetry “was a good way to express myself.” It was also at this time that the fourth
influential adult came into Ryan’s life in the form of the renowned educator, teacher
advocate, and award-winning slam poet, named Taylor Mali. Mr. Mali is a former
teacher who now travels the country as an inspirational speaker using slam poetry as his
vehicle. Most of his work advocates for the importance of education and the respect
teachers deserve. His most famous piece, “What Teachers Make,” has oft been quoted in
response to derogatory statements about teachers since it reflects on the inspiration
teachers can be and the influence they can have on their students, rather than the
monetary rewards of other professions.

Once Ryan heard Mr. Mali’s poetry, he was “sucked in and branched out,
listening to a lot of spoken word poetry” and these slam poem pieces inspired Ryan to
write his own performance pieces. Ryan was inspired not only by the messages in Mr. Mali’s poems, but in the powerful way he performed them. He felt drawn to this form of expression, finally aware that he had found a way to explain how he was feeling as he struggled with his identity. Ryan acknowledges the power that the words on a page can have, but recognizes the greater impact they have when spoken aloud. At the time of this interview, Ryan was still trying to muster up the courage to perform on stage, but he did perform a few pieces for me. These are discussed in the next section since it deals with the various modes and genres in which Ryan writes.

It was also during this time that he discovered the social media site, Tumblr, which is for microblogging (making short, frequent posts) that uses text and multimedia. He said this is also his greatest resource for staying current with LGBTQ issues and providing advice for others. He decided that his blog on Tumblr would be anonymous since it is more personal and he is “free to be who I am” without worrying about being outed before he is ready. Ryan also has a Facebook page, but is not as active on this site. His use of social media also is discussed in the next section.

**Research Question 2**

My second research question was, “In what ways are various modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ young adult community?”

For the purposes of this study and as referenced in Chapter 1, I used the Oxford dictionary definitions of the term *genre* to identify a type or category of writing/composing/artwork, and the term *mode* to identify the manner in which Ryan expresses his work. The data clearly reveal that Ryan writes for personal reasons and for
social justice advocacy. He writes for personal self-expression, stress relief, and to
escape, in other words, to care for himself. He writes to help others understand the
LGBTQ community and to reach out and care for those in that community to let them
know they are not alone. This section serves to tell Ryan’s story through his words.

Ryan expresses himself through various genres of writing/composing and uses
different modes for distinct purposes. When I asked him how he expresses himself, Ryan
said, “I sketch a lot and I’ve done some painting, but it’s more often writing.” The
various genres are discussed in detail in this section, along with the purposes they serve
for Ryan. The mode he chooses most often for his writing is online, both privately in
Google docs and through his public Tumblr site, although that is anonymous. For his art,
he prefers pencil sketching, but does work in other media occasionally.

In written text, Ryan does write by hand on paper, but, as stated earlier, prefers
the use of digital text in cyberspace for privacy purposes and safekeeping, having lost his
original digital journal when his computer died. He says that taught him to keep even his
private writings on Google docs so he could access them if anything happened to his
computer.

Ryan writes for many different reasons. His enjoyment of fan fiction on various
websites has led him to try his hand at writing some, but he did mention that this is not
the type of writing in which he engages most of the time. His essays, fiction, poetry, and
journal entries (all in Appendix B) reveal that writing is something Ryan uses to express
his inner thoughts and work out problems. As noted earlier, he began journaling at the
request of therapists, but was hesitant to open up completely. It was only after one
therapist made it clear that Ryan need not always share what he wrote that he realized the benefits writing could offer him. His first journals were in spiral notebooks and he does continue to use these paper journals, but he transfers their content to Google docs so as not to repeat the disaster of losing his work.

For an at-a-glance comparison of the pieces Ryan submitted for this study, I have included a chart (see Table 4) with each artifact labeled and in the order in which I discuss it in the following section.

This section looks at the genres of writing and in which modes Ryan composes by looking at excerpts of various pieces and what benefits they may provide for him. It is important to note that some of the artifacts are included in typed form, whereas others are shown as scans of original art or handwritten text. I have used these scans whenever the artifacts were submitted that way.

**Letters.** Once Ryan found writing as an expressive outlet, he began using letter writing to help convey his feelings to himself and others. He thinks that in a face-to-face conversation about a difficult issue, he would be too emotional. He said that writing it out “gets the emotion out [and] when I finish I’m just like, I’m ok now, they don’t even need to see this.” He went on to say that when he writes this type of letter, he will “literally burn it when I’m done. [I] just gotta get it out.” He did indicate that if the issue was an important one, he would give it to whomever he was writing the letter initially. Ryan shared with me the fact that he was crafting an important letter to his mother in an effort to come out to her as trans*, but was finding it too difficult. He was not sure if she suspected he was trans*, or how she would react to the news since suspecting and
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Written Artifact and Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal entry: <em>Problems with Being a trans</em>male*</td>
<td>Autobiographical bulleted list</td>
<td>Hand-written notebook</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (highlight the daily problems of identifying as trans*gender)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Appendix B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal entry: <em>It's a Girl</em></td>
<td>Autobiographical short entry</td>
<td>Hand-written notebook</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (highlight society’s preoccupation with and normalizing the binary)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Appendix B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal entry: <em>Q &amp; A</em></td>
<td>Autobiographical Poem</td>
<td>Hand-written notebook</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care Advocate for trans<em>community: Help others (highlight the daily struggles/questions of others related to identifying as trans</em>gender)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Figure 1</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Gender Neutral Pronouns</em></td>
<td>Persuasive speech for class</td>
<td>Typed out on paper Spoken aloud</td>
<td>Fulfill class assignment Self-expression Advocate for the use of Gender Neutral Pronouns: Help others (highlight the complexity of gender identification)</td>
<td>Published: Presented in class</td>
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### Ryan’s Artifacts

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<th>Written Artifact and Corresponding Appendix</th>
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<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
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<tr>
<td>Blog post: <em>Dysphoria</em></td>
<td>Autobiographical poem (intended as a spoken word piece eventually)</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog (anonymous)</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care, Help others understand what it is like to have gender dysphoria</td>
<td>Published online blog: anonymously</td>
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<td>Appendix B</td>
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<tr>
<td>College poetry class assignment: <em>Word Pool</em></td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care (exploring what poetry is to him)</td>
<td>Published: turned in for class</td>
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<td>Appendix B</td>
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<tr>
<td>College poetry class assignment: <em>To All You Pity Seekers</em> [sic]</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression, Social Commentary</td>
<td>Published: turned in for class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal entry: <em>Let Them Go</em></td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care (express fear of rejection from new boyfriend when he reveals his trans* identity)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>What it Takes to be a Man</em></td>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care (explore trans<em>issues and writing from a trans</em>man’s POV for the first time)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Appendix B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Therapist’s assignment: <em>Trans</em>ition*</td>
<td>Autobiographical essay</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care (explore coming out journey)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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*Ryan’s Artifacts*

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<td><em>Self-Portrait</em> Figure 2</td>
<td>Pencil sketch</td>
<td>Drawing pad</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care (express his true identity)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td><em>Trans</em>Problem Comic: Binders</td>
<td>Humorous Comic pencil sketch</td>
<td>Drawing pad</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care Care for others (highlight problems identifying as trans*gender in a humorous way)</td>
<td>Published: online Tumblr blog anonymously</td>
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<td><em>Genet</em> Figure 4</td>
<td>Pencil sketch</td>
<td>Drawing pad</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td><em>Snake-Dog</em> Figure 5</td>
<td>Pencil sketch</td>
<td>Drawing pad</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Scientist’s Manifesto</em></td>
<td>Acrylic painting</td>
<td>Canvas</td>
<td>Self-expression, Self-care Care for another (gift for boyfriend)</td>
<td>Published: given as a gift</td>
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<td>(Referenced in text, not available)</td>
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knowing are two different things and he wanted the words to be the right ones. At the time of our interviews, he was still working on a version of this piece, so he did not submit it for inclusion in this study.

*Autobiography.* Although Ryan primarily writes poetry, he does write in many other genres. One consistent thread throughout much of his writing and across genres is the inclusion of autobiographical elements. This section discusses how these elements
are woven into his poetry, essays, journal entries, and even his advice blog. Incorporating his life experiences into his writing is the way Ryan has discovered to work through his identity and develop his advocacy for the LGBTQ community, especially “advocating for trans* rights.”

Once he was given the opportunity to experiment with form and ideas (in college), the pieces Ryan began writing were mostly about gender issues, trans*gender in particular. Many of these he calls “rants” because they are short poems or essays that are of a single topic focusing on his feelings about being trans*, while at the same time he tries to help the reader understand these feelings. Some rants call out the injustices faced by the LGBTQ community. It is clear that in every piece mentioned in this section, Ryan balances his desire to educate people on these issues with his journey of self-discovery. In this way, writing serves the purpose of self-care. During our interviews, it was clear that writing was a life-line for him during his identity struggle and continues to help him through his life. I did ask what he considered to be the value of writing in his life and he said:

It’s definitely a stress reliever. It’s a way to escape and it’s a way to express myself where I know I’m safe and nothing’s, like I can’t even offend anyone ’cause no one’s gonna read most of it [or know who wrote it on the anonymous blog].

At the time of this interview, he was working on a piece in which he was “trying to explain what gender dysphoria feels like” (see Appendix B). He writes with passion and the desire to help others understand what he experiences is evident in his words and
tone. In this poem titled “Dysphoria,” Ryan opens with the line: “Dysphoria, it’s like waking up from a dream that felt real, / from a body that felt real, and realizing that it was nothing more than wishful thinking.” Through one spoken-word piece he performed for me, “Q & A” (see Figure 1), he was able to help me, as the listener, understand what he was going through and get a sense of his ongoing journey. The words on paper were powerful enough, but hearing them performed in his voice gave them an authentic resonance and power that the words alone could not convey.

### Q & A

But who will love you now?
Answer is-
The exact same people who would’ve loved me before because if they will not now, I wouldn’t have wanted them to have loved me anyways.

Why do you want to be a guy?
Because I already am one, always have been, and all I want now is for my body to reflect a truth I’ve always known.

Have you had your surgery yet?
Instead of answering, let me ask you this:
What do your genitals look like? Oh, I’m sorry, was that rude? Well then, what gives you the right to ask about mine?

And, why do you hate yourself so much that you feel you have to change?
I don’t hate myself. I love myself enough to know that I deserve to be happy in my own skin. I love myself enough to realize that I do not need to change myself to fit what society expects, and that I am strong enough and I am worth the trouble to instead change my body and change my world to fit me.

*Figure 1. Q & A poem. Hear this poem in Ryan’s voice: [https://youtu.be/mN00cKeEaNA](https://youtu.be/mN00cKeEaNA)*

The questions listed in this poem are indicative of what Ryan and other trans*gender people are asked on a daily basis. His responses reflect careful thought,
deep soul searching, and growth when compared to his discussion of his K–12 years. In his essay, “Trans*ition” (Appendix B), Ryan recounts some of those feelings from high school when he says he was “in denial for years” and “I began to realize my moments of depression tended to coincide with something gender related.” In the essay he continues with: “I couldn’t be trans, couldn’t put myself through that. I went into denial, tried to make myself as feminine as possible. It was skirts and heels and makeup and a whole load of unnecessary anguish.”

In “Trans*ition,” Ryan discusses his resorting to ultra-feminine expression in high school to disguise his struggle with his realization that he might be trans*gender. It is interesting to note, however, that in a journal entry titled “It’s a Girl” (Appendix B), Ryan reflects back to being a young child and having “all attempts at escaping my femininity blocked.” This entry recounts one of his early memories of being about six, when he begged his mother to allow him to be a Power Ranger for Halloween instead of the fairy or princess costumes he usually had to wear. Even though his mother relented that year, he was made to wear the pink Power Ranger costume. In this piece, Ryan is highlighting how “the binary of gender” is impressed upon children, even prior to birth when ultrasound technicians proclaim, “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!”

Another piece based on Ryan’s experiences, “Gender Neutral Pronouns” (Appendix B), was a persuasive poem/speech written for a college class to advocate for the accepted use of gender-neutral pronouns in our society. When discussing this piece, Ryan said that while he was discovering his gender identity, he “went with gender-neutral for awhile, but, as I accepted myself, I accepted the pronouns that really fit who I am.”
By writing this persuasive piece, he used his personal experience to demonstrate the complexity of the issue and help advocate for all the gender non-conforming individuals who are not comfortable with gender specific pronouns.

Once he came to terms with his trans*gender identity and sought guidance from a trans* identified friend, he reveals in “Trans*ition” that “by the start of junior year [college], I was out and proud and, most importantly, happy as a transman.” It is important to note, however, that while the final paragraph of this piece lists the positive things that had occurred during that junior year: “an awesome, accepting boyfriend, am out and loud in the community and have reopened and am leading an on-campus trans* group. I’m starting gender therapy and for once, the future is looking bright,” he casts a shadow upon the light when he concludes with, “We’ll see if it stays that way.” It is clear that he is still working out his issues and cannot trust these unfamiliar circumstances. This concept is reflected heavily in, as Ryan calls it, his cynical love poem, “Let Them Go” (Appendix B). Here, Ryan relates the fear of rejection he faced in the early stages of a new relationship with a boyfriend who had previously dated only heterosexual, cisgender (gender identity/expression align with gender at birth) women. At that time Ryan was dressing more androgynously, but was not yet out as trans* and worried that this young man would not be interested when he discovered Ryan’s trans*gender identity. The opening lines convey this feeling quite beautifully:

We lie together hand in hand

And you smile

And I fear
Because we are together
We are in love
And it is perfect
And it is temporary

At the time of this study, Ryan and this young man were in a committed relationship and Ryan felt comfortable and safe discussing his struggles with him. However, Ryan did tell me that regardless of having people in his life to whom he can speak about his most private issues, he still needs to “write it all down.”

In “Word Pool” (Appendix B), Ryan ruminates on the fact that “maybe poetry is many things.” He seems to sum up what poetry represents for him when he writes:

And maybe it can be
The thing that drives you onwards
In the face of horrors that you might otherwise hide from
Or the thing that pummels your heart
And boils your blood
Into a coagulated mess
While you, enraptured,
Pull your own ribs open,
To welcome more

This poem informs the reader that Ryan views his poems as windows into his soul as he exposes himself, raw and bloody, on the page.
Fiction. As stated earlier, Ryan does dabble in fiction, but even the pieces he shared with me have some connection to his life, being based on some aspect of his past and current experiences. In the short story, “What it Takes to be a Man” (Appendix B), Ryan writes from the perspective of a now grown trans*man who has come back to town for his mother’s funeral. The main character recounts the struggles he faced coming out as trans* and who in the family did or did not accept him. Even though this story is a work of fiction, Ryan easily gets into the “headspace” of this character and seems to be trying out this identity through the thoughts and feelings conveyed by this character as he reflects back. The ease with which Ryan is able to write from this perspective is in sharp contrast to the difficulty he experienced getting into the “headspace” of characters he was reading or writing about in high school. Ryan said that he wrote this story during his freshman year of college, when he was still researching trans* issues because he was starting to realize this may be his identity. This seems to be a turning point for him because he said that writing this story

Was part of what helped me accept [being trans*], it’s like, my first thought was, ok, I’m gonna get into the head of a trans*man, and I was like, oh, my god, I can’t get into his head and then I just started writing and I’m like, I’m already in his head.

Some of the incidents in the story run counter to his real-life. For example, his real brother was accepting, whereas the fictional brother, Sam, was not, although this might have been written prior to his discussing any of this with his brother. There is also some wishful thinking reflected in the story regarding the mother character in relation to
his own mother. The fictional character fondly recalls the first time the mother referred to him as her son, while as of this study, Ryan was still trying to come out as trans* to his mother. Since Ryan was still in the beginning stages of coming to terms with his identity as a trans*man, the following excerpt may reveal some anguish about the future when he writes:

> I find myself watching them and placing a hand flat on my own stomach, wishing that I could have a child some day. Hormone treatments and surgery took away my ability to carry a child without giving me the ability to create one and, for a moment, I hate Sam and every other man on earth who was born right. It goes away quickly; I’ve all but exhausted my supply of mass hatred over the past few decades.

Through this piece of fiction, Ryan is possibly exploring his future and thinking through the decisions he might have to make if he decides to have surgery and take hormones in his quest to “change my body and change my world to fit me” (Q&A, Figure 1). These are serious considerations he would have to make and he clearly uses writing to work out his struggles.

Ryan also writes fiction based on his life experiences in his poetry. “To All You Pity Seekers [sic]” (Appendix B), is a poetic commentary on the “insincerity bandwagon” that Ryan loosely based on a high school incident involving the suicide of a boy in his class. For his poem he changed the boy to a girl in an attempt at anonymity and had the girl die of a disease instead of suicide. This poem is one of the rare pieces of Ryan’s that does not relate to sexual orientation or gender identity, but still advocates in the social
justice realm and caring for others. In the poem, the narrator reflects on the fact that all the classmates are mourning the girl when the teacher announces her death, but when she was alive they did not have anything to do with her or know she existed. Although Ryan primarily focuses on LGBTQ issues for his advocacy, this piece clearly demonstrates his deep concern for various social issues and wants to bring them to light. In this way, he not only uses writing to care for himself, but also to extend that care to others.

**Pamphlets.** Another way Ryan uses writing to demonstrate his advocacy for the trans*gender community and providing advice is through his creation of pamphlets. He has already completed two pamphlets that he would like to distribute to doctors’ offices or other appropriate organizations, one providing resources and websites and the other about “what not to say to trans*people.” Currently, he is working on a third that will provide help for families with trans*children to “make it easier on them.” Ryan mentioned to me that he is writing about things he wishes his family would do and joked that he could give his mom the letter and the pamphlet and say, “Read this and come back to me in a week.”

**Social media.** Even though Ryan is an artist, he said he was not comfortable with the photo aspect of social media. He said that Instagram “always weirded me out” and he discussed the fact that he does not take pictures of himself currently and needs to find someone who will help him take pictures that are “as masculine” as possible. For his Facebook page that was mentioned in the last section, he often uses Pokemon icons or some other image as his profile pictures. However, he uses his chosen male name because it is his middle name and formally switched to using male pronouns on this site.
Ryan primarily uses this page as a way to stay in touch with people because “I’m very bad at answering my phone.” It is interesting to note that he uses masculine pronouns, but has not yet come out as trans* to his mother or some other family members. He said that his mom did ask him about the male pronouns and he told her “it must have glitched or something.” While this is not his main social media site, he does post about some trans* issues on Facebook. Because of this, he does feel the need to block certain status posts from family members if they refer to anything that may “out” him prematurely.

As mentioned earlier in this section, Ryan primarily chooses to post on Tumblr over all other social media sites. His blog is a combination of the written pieces he calls rants (short pieces that share his feelings about being trans* and helping others understand, or pieces that focus on the injustices facing the LGBTQ community); written informational/advice pieces for the LGBTQ community, especially trans*gender related; illustrations/sketches he draws for pleasure; and an original comic series he calls Trans*Problems Comic that he hopes will demonstrate the lighter side of being trans*.

These sketches are discussed in the Art section.

His use of Tumblr as a way to engage in the LGBTQ world is also a way in which Ryan cares for himself and others. He feels that the anonymity this provides allows him a safe space to do this work without worrying about being outed to the family members who were not aware of his trans* identity at this time. This site is also one that offers Ryan a safe place to gather information as he learns more about the trans* community for his own purposes and to advocate for others. In his words, Tumblr has “done so much for” him.
Art. Ryan uses drawing in much the same way he uses writing. While he does draw for pleasure by copying favorite cartoon and anime characters, or different animals, he often uses drawing to express how he sees himself and the problems of being a trans*man. His self-portrait (see Figure 2) is definitely a male figure and he has drawn himself wearing some type of uniform with a crest on the upper left chest area. Ryan said that he likes super heroes and was designing the uniform he would like if he were a super hero and was deciding on what the symbol should be. As mentioned earlier, he also draws a comic for his Tumblr blog. The one he shared with me, “Trans*Problems Comic: Binders” (Figure 3), shows that he has a sense of humor when depicting a problem he encountered in his daily life when he asked his boyfriend if he had seen his binder. Ryan was talking about his notebook for class, but his boyfriend thought he was talking about the wrap he uses to bind his chest. He found that to be a humorous bit of miscommunication and thought it would make a light-hearted commentary on some simple problems in the trans* community.

![Figure 2. Self-portrait](image-url)
It is interesting to note, however, that even when he draws for pleasure, he still expresses a duality that is a reflection of how he sees himself. Ryan’s favorite animal drawings are not easily recognizable as any particular animal and people often comment about not being able to discern exactly what they are. For example, the drawings of both his favorite real-life animal, the mongoose-cat-like genet (see Figure 4), and his creation, the snake-dog (see Figure 5), reflect his own non-binary gender identification since these animals are a bit ambiguous. He says he relates to them because “it is personal and I like the idea of combining things. You don’t have to be just this or just that—everything I do is a combination of something.”
Ryan also discussed a completely different form of art that he had created for his then-boyfriend who was a physics major. Ryan painted the Scientist’s Manifesto:
Learn not because you have to, but because you want to.

Be inspired by what you understand and be driven by what you do not.

Use your mind to realize who you are and to help mankind reach its potential.

Shun ignorance, combat indifference, question everything, and above all,

Never be afraid of the truth.

These words were meaningful to Ryan in that he could relate them to his own life. He said, “That last line hit me really hard ’cause I was in denial for so long, but ‘never be afraid of the truth.’”

**Summary**

Ryan lives as a trans*male and his friends and some family members are aware, but at the time of this study he was still working on telling other family members. In this way, he continues to be stifled in his writing in some ways, always needing to be wary of what he writes and to remember to block certain posts.

The fact that Ryan did not feel he could express himself as he desired during his K–12 years indicates there may have been a disruption in the carer/cared-for relationship between Ryan and many of the educators in his life as he had to contend with the prevalent gender stereotyping and heteronormative climate in school.

A few influential adults in Ryan’s life awakened him to the possibilities that writing/composing could be the keys to finding his authentic self and help him find ways to care for himself. He said,

Once I was free to express myself in writing, I became comfortable with who I was. Once I became comfortable with who I was, I was able to come out about
who I am. Once I was out about who I am, I had no reason to hold back anymore, even a little bit.

He concludes his thoughts on the value of writing with, “If you can’t express yourself in private, on a page, you’re never gonna be able to express yourself in the real world.”

Ryan used various genres and modes to work out what it was like to have gender dysphoria, while also highlighting society’s preoccupation with, and normalizing of, the gender/sexual binaries. Ryan also explored his identity through these writings, as well as his coming out journey, and what the future might hold. What surprised me the most during my time with Ryan was how he not only used various genres and modes of writing/composing to care for himself, but also to reach out through social networking sites and care for other young people who may be experiencing the same problems he encountered. The use of self-expression to reach out to care for others is an additional facet of this exploration I had not initially considered.

View a short multi-media found poem: https://youtu.be/IQde6vCXIpc

Renee

“Life is a book only you can write.”

My next study participant chose the pseudonym of Renee, had turned 26 just prior to our first interview, and identifies as a lesbian. At the time of our interviews, she was out to her mother and sisters (she is one of a set of triplets); some close friends and co-workers; and had recently come out to one set of grandparents, who happen to be quite religious. Although her mother knows, she is worried about what other family and friends will say and so is only supportive to an extent. Renee desperately wants her
mother to accompany her to a PFLAG meeting (Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), but her mother has yet to make that commitment because “there’s probably somebody I know there.” Renee made it a point to say that she is not yet out to her maternal grandfather or her stepfather. Renee lives with her mother and stepfather and fears that she might be kicked out if he knew the truth because when she cut her hair short, her stepfather called her a “dyke” and that hurt her deeply. She was not sure if he was joking, but she felt she could not take that chance.

She graduated from a small rural high school in Northeast Ohio, but did not attend college at the time of this study. Her hope is to one day earn a degree in social work so she can continue providing care for others, which she feels is her calling. Currently, she works as direct care staff for an organization that works with individuals with disabilities and their families. Renee is also a volunteer firefighter/photographer for a small community fire department near her home. In her spare time, she volunteers for several organizations that work with LGBTQ youth and adults.

Renee found my call for participants on a listserv for an organization that serves the LGBTQ community. Due to her caring nature, she decided that she would like to be part of my study in order to help other people like herself. Renee and I met twice for one hour each time and I asked the same semi-structured interview questions that I asked Ryan (see Appendix A).

When I met Renee initially for our first interview, we were both surprised when she walked into the small library conference room in a city not far from the university I attend. We realized we had unofficially met at a recent LGBTQ function and recognized
one another and we fell into a comfortable conversation from the start. In addition to the two recorded interviews, I collected various artifacts that Renee chose to share with me, as I had done with Ryan. She offered journal entries, Facebook posts, a book chapter, and popular song lyrics that speak to her in a meaningful way (see Appendix C). She also provided some of her photographs and journal cover art for me to include (see Figures in body of text). These items are listed and discussed in detail in later sections.

**Research Question 1**

My first research question was, “What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?”

**The K–12 experience.** This section discusses Renee’s experiences in and out of school during the K–12 years. She actually does not have many memories of specific school assignments, but her personal and school social life during this time had a direct effect on how she uses writing/composing in her adult life. Please note that all words within quotation marks are direct quotes taken from the interviews conducted with Renee.

**Earliest memories.** Renee’s only true early memory related to school is her love of reading and dreaming of being an author one day. She wrote “little stories here and there” during her elementary years, but her memories grow fuzzy after that and she only remembers having to take many tests or doing some projects that just did not stick with her. What she remembers much more clearly is the social aspect to school. In a chapter she wrote for inclusion in a book about school bullying (see Appendix C), Renee relates, “At an early age, I knew I was different than other girls. I didn’t know what to do, I just
knew I woke up every morning and wished I didn’t exist.” She was what people call a tomboy, wearing blue jeans and T-shirts and loved getting dirty. Her classmates made fun of her “because of her style,” yet she “would go to school and put on a fake smile and take all the bullying and act like it didn’t hurt me [in order] to fit in and be normal.” This book chapter and how she came to be a part of it are discussed further in the Beyond K–12 section.

**Difficulties.** Her clearest memories related to writing begin in Middle School where she says she “hated English a little bit, it was hard for me because I had ADD (attention deficit disorder)” and in particular, she “hated essays.” She feels that her spelling and grammar difficulties slow down the whole process and made writing a chore. Renee was more of a visual learner in school and recalls struggling, especially with essay portions of tests. She said she needed time to think and reflect about her answers, and even preferred to see something “done more than once and then I’ll jump in and do it . . . I’m so afraid to fail.” Being in intervention classes also pulled her from her regular classes and she fell further behind.

Renee’s eighth grade year was particularly rough due to family and social issues. At this time, even though she was not aware of her sexual orientation, she knew she was different. She dated her first boy and found it “awkward and weird.” They called one another on the phone, but never talked because they did not know what to say. While this is not so unusual at this age, she remembers it as an uncomfortable and depressing time. She was questioning whether or not she was gay, but she was confused and just thought she was a tomboy. It was also during this year that her uncle was diagnosed with cancer
in February and died in June. She took her tomboy reputation seriously and, “even though I’m a woman” she felt the need to “be like a man” and never let anyone see her cry. Upon further discussion, she disclosed that even when she was much younger she felt like “the man of the family” before her mom met her stepdad and her sisters were more “girly” and her brother was just a baby. The only outlet she allowed herself was to cry alone in her room. In her book chapter mentioned earlier (Appendix C), she says:

I became more depressed and somewhat suicidal ’cause of all of the bottled up emotions I had. I saw a school counselor and talked to her about my uncle. Part of me wanted to tell her I think I might be gay and I need help, but I didn’t because I was afraid and all I needed was normal.

It is clear from these excerpts that Renee was dealing with many personal issues related to family and peers, and school was not a safe and supportive place during this crucial time in her life. She did also mention there was a time she contemplated suicide.

During her early high school years, Renee remembers her health teacher requiring that the students keep food journals and reflect on what made them decide to eat the food they chose each day. She really liked the reflective piece to that assignment, but was uncomfortable having to read portions aloud to the class or turn it in to the teacher. Renee felt that those requirements nullified the positive aspect to the task because she knew students were not being truthful. As she puts it, “Who’s gonna admit the truth that, yeah, I ate a Twinkie, or something?” We did share a good laugh over that comment, even though she was serious about these issues. Our discussion led to her realization that requiring students to read work aloud might affect what topics students chose to write
about in any given class, especially in terms of sexual orientation or gender identity. Since LGBTQ issues were never spoken about and there were no students openly out, Renee felt she had no place to turn, further fueling her feelings of isolation.

Freshman year proved to be another difficult year out of the classroom, as well, when a classmate committed suicide because of his girlfriend’s pregnancy. Renee was a scorekeeper for the wrestling team and this young man was a wrestler. Although he was more of an acquaintance to Renee, he was a friend of Renee’s sisters who were devastated by his death. Because she was used to bottling up her emotions and feelings about her internal struggles, she also felt the need to keep her emotions in check during this time to help her sisters through this. This stoicism was taking its toll on her internally, however.

During her senior year, she began focusing more on coming to terms with her sexual orientation. Renee recalls that year as being a lonely, confusing time because she thought she was the only one struggling with her identity. At that time, there was no Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) where students could go for support and information. She knew of no other LGBTQ identified or questioning peers and was not comfortable letting her friends in on this deeply personal conflict. Renee has since discovered that there were actually seven other students in her graduating class who have come out on the LGBTQ spectrum as adults. Although they now socialize, she feels many of her difficulties during this time could have been avoided if the school climate had been supportive for this population. With all the work she does with LGBTQ youth currently, she has the opportunity to see how things are changing in some areas. Renee said that most of the
students she sees now are out in their high schools. While discussing this, her voice
tailed off with, “if only high school was like that for me.” She did say that she was “so
shocked” to find that her alma mater now has a GSA and hopes students are finally
getting the support they need.

She does not recall any time that LGBTQ issues were mentioned in school or
teachers allowing such discussions to take place. The only influential teacher Renee
mentioned was her gym teacher, Ms. A. She hated gym class, but loved Ms. A. for being
that:

One teacher where you said “fag” in front of her, or said, “that’s so gay,” or
something teasing a kid, she would be the one to put you back into your body,
into the right person or write you up for it or give you a detention. You didn’t
want to get a gym detention!

So, even though Renee was not out at the time, she felt that Ms. A. was supportive of all
students and she felt safe in that class. Other than the indirect support of Ms. A.,
however, Renee had no outlets during this time and, throughout the interviews, she often
referenced how she continued to “bottle up her emotions” and how that was taking a toll
on her.

When I asked her about using the Internet to possibly reach out to others or gather
information about the LGBTQ community, she said that they only had a family computer
and her mom “looks up the history.” Renee was still questioning her sexual orientation
and in conflict at the time and was scared for anyone to know that there was a possibility
she was gay.
**Positives.** While Renee did not find much enjoyment in writing/composing during most of her schooling, she discovered a way it could help later in high school. During her junior year of high school, Renee began writing in a wire-bound spiral notebook and found that it was one way to not feel quite so bottled up. She said she does not remember why she started doing this, but thinks it might be because she enjoyed the reflective piece of the health food log assignment. She said that since she did not have a group of friends to go to with her problems, she decided to “just get her words out on paper.” When she began, Renee was “writing just about random stuff that happened in my life.” It was during the following year, her senior year of high school, that everything changed. Renee discovered the true power of writing through a serendipitous encounter at a camp for kids with cancer at which she volunteered. Although she had volunteered at this camp prior to that year, it was during a new art session on creating journals that Renee felt the spark to use writing in a completely new way. She says now that “writing is almost like therapeutic for me.” The types of writing in which Renee engages are discussed in later sections, along with the benefits she derives from these activities.

**Beyond the K–12 experience.** As mentioned earlier, Renee did not go to college following high school and felt drawn to the service of being a care provider at a facility for individuals with disabilities and their families. She continues to use journaling in her adult life as an outlet for her thoughts and emotions and the particulars of which are discussed in the next section.
It was also after high school that Renee discovered her love for photography and found that she is quite skilled, having won first or second place in several local competitions. One of her photographs has even been featured in a local hospital calendar.

Combining photography and text, Renee has discovered, is not only a way to stay in touch with family and friends, but also to share her thoughts and express emotions. She enjoys finding just the right quotes with images as an artistic outlet, but is particularly fond of finding memes (images with short text that are spread widely on the Internet) that have an image and quote that represent something she wants to share, either to express how she’s feeling or to inspire others. She does have a separate Facebook page for the wedding/portrait photography business she is trying to get off the ground. In addition to her Facebook pages, she also posts photos on her Instagram page. Along with her journaling, Renee has realized that photography is another outlet she can turn to as a way to provide care for herself as she cares for others.

Writing by hand in small homemade journals is still her primary choice of genre and mode. All of these genres and modes are discussed in detail in the next section.

**Research Question 2**

My second research question was, “In what ways are various modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ young adult community?”

As I did with Ryan’s profile, I use the terms genre and mode to indicate the types of writing/composing Renee uses and the manner in which she uses them. Like Ryan, Renee writes for personal reasons and social justice advocacy. She writes/composes to care for herself through personal self-expression, stress relief, and to reach out and care
for others in the LGBTQ community by offering support and hope for the future. This section serves to tell Renee’s story through her words and the images she feels are representative of how she uses other media.

Renee expresses herself through various genres of writing/composing and uses different modes for distinct purposes. For an at-a-glance comparison of the pieces Renee did submit for this study, I have included a chart (see Table 5) with each artifact labeled and in the order in which I discuss it in the following section.

Table 5

Renee’s Artifacts

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<th>Journal Cover Art and Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
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<tr>
<td>Journal: Front Cover</td>
<td>Inspirational quotes and images</td>
<td>Handcrafted journal</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (using words/phrases and images to convey her thoughts through artistic decoration)</td>
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<td>Inspirational quotes</td>
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Table 5 (continued)

*Renee’s Artifacts*

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<td>Self-expression/Reflection&lt;br&gt;Self-care (feeling pride in her advocacy)&lt;br&gt;Care for others (Advocating about issues to professionals who work with LGBTQ youth)</td>
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<td>Journal entry</td>
<td>Handcrafted journal</td>
<td>Self-expression/Reflection&lt;br&gt;Self-care (Acknowledgement of the organizations that saved her)&lt;br&gt;Care for others (Support through fundraising walk)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
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**Renee’s Artifacts**

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</table>
| Journal entry 7/28/14                       | Journal entry | Handcrafted journal | Self-expression/Reflection  
Self-care (Pride in helping others and in starting a new group; Hopeful in seeing more support in her conservative community)  
Care for others (Now active in a third advocacy group that she helped create; encourages an LGBTQ teen to keep journaling) | Not published |
| Appendix C                                 |           |                  |                                                                          |                          |
| Journal entry 8/7/14                        | Journal entry | Handcrafted journal | Self-expression/Reflection  
Self-care (Decided to come out to grandparents as a birthday present to herself; Reflects on pride of surviving a rape and suicide attempt) | Not published |
| Figure 10                                  |           |                  |                                                                          |                          |
| Journal entry 8/29/14                       | Journal entry | Handcrafted journal | Self-expression/Reflection  
Self-care (Realizing benefits of writing)  
Care for others (Wanting to promote journaling to LGBTQ teens) | Not published |
| Figure 11                                  |           |                  |                                                                          |                          |

*(table continues)*
Table 5 (continued)

*Renee’s Artifacts*

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Still Writing Anonymous

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Journal entry 7/28/15

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Book chapter

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<th>Edited book</th>
<th>Self-expression/Reflection Self-care Care for others (Wanting to get her story out so LGBTQ teens know they are not alone)</th>
<th>Published</th>
</tr>
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**Photo Artifact and Corresponding Appendix**

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<td>Digital Camera</td>
<td>Published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
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<td>Documenting the aftermath of a fire</td>
<td>Published Won 1st Place at the Medina County Fair (table continues)</td>
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*Renee’s Artifacts*

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<td>Representing teamwork on the fire department</td>
<td>Published on Fire Department Facebook</td>
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<td>Rescue Helicopters</td>
<td>Color Photograph</td>
<td>Digital Camera</td>
<td>Documenting a UH rescue helicopter flight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country Life is Peaceful</td>
<td>Color Photograph</td>
<td>Digital Camera</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self Care: Finding peace in nature (Capturing a peaceful moment with two horses in a field)</td>
<td>Published on her Photo Facebook page</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom and Pride</td>
<td>Color Photograph</td>
<td>Digital Camera</td>
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<td>Facebook</td>
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Renee’s Artifacts

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<td>Published (Shared online via Facebook)</td>
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<td>Facebook Post October 22, 2015</td>
<td>Meme with image and text (not her original work)</td>
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<td>Self-expression Self-Care (Strength Taking control of own life) Care for Others (Support/Advice)</td>
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<td>Meme with image and text (not her original work)</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-Care (Strength) Care for Others (Support/Advice)</td>
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This section looks at the genres of writing and in which modes Renee composes by looking at excerpts of various pieces and what benefits they may provide for her. It is important to note that Renee confessed at the beginning of the second interview that she
was nervous to share her writing with me. She said she felt comfortable discussing these personal aspects of her life, but she had two worries. Since these journal entries are handwritten, she felt a bit self-conscious about her spelling and grammar, and she was not sure which entries to share. I think this goes back to her feelings of being afraid to fail and thought she needed to choose specific pieces to share with me. Her desire to help others helped calm her nerves because she said she felt this study would be “doing good” for LGBTQ kids. Since I have provided actual photographs of some of her journal entries and her book chapter, I have blocked all reference to names of people and specific places mentioned in her written text to protect Renee’s anonymity. It is important to note that some of the artifacts are included in typed form, while others are shown as scans of original art or handwritten text. I have used these scans whenever the artifacts were submitted that way.

**Journaling.** As discussed earlier, Renee began writing in a spiral-bound notebook in her junior year of high school in order to relieve some of the stress she was experiencing at home and in her school/social life. At that time, she was simply writing down events and random thoughts in order to “put [her] words on paper and just get it off my chest and not worry about it that much.” Little did she know that journaling would be the catalyst that changed her life.

Renee volunteered for several summers at a camp for kids with cancer. In June of her senior year, she was helping during the craft activity, which happened to be creating homemade journals. She enjoyed the artistic aspect to making these small books and choosing how to decorate them. Once she got home, however, she wondered what she
would do with hers. She decided that she liked the look of it and wanted to transfer her writings from her spiral notebook into it. Once her words were inside, she said something changed in her and she started decorating the outside with LGBTQ symbols and inspirational quotes and song lyrics (see Figures 6 & 7).

*Figure 6. Journal: Front Cover*

*Figure 7. Journal: Back Cover*
She had never been open about questioning her identity, but the artistic experience of writing these quotes and decorating her new journal inspired her and helped her realize her desire to “come out.” Once she made this decision, she began writing about her thoughts and emotions in a deeper, more reflective way than she had been doing in her spiral notebooks.

The first entry she shared with me was from June 14, 2013 (Figure 8), and was five years after creating her first handmade journal. Although she began writing more openly after making her first one, it took her this long to privately come out enough to attend a support group. The group she mentions is specifically for people identifying on the LGBTQ spectrum who are coming out as adults. Referring to the group, she says, “I love it,” but she reflects that she wishes she “could open up to the group but I’m scary [sic] somewhat.” She continues with, “To tell them I’m gay is easy, but to tell them why is hard. I’m gay because this is who I am. I like women.” By ending the entry with “God loves me for who I am,” she seems to be finally reconciling her identity against the messages she received through her religious upbringing.

Figure 8. Journal Entry June 14, 2013
In the June 15, 2013, entry that immediately follows (Figure 9), Renee reveals being conflicted about wanting to live openly as a lesbian, but being afraid to do so. She says:

I’m so tired of living 2 faced. I put on a show and I’m not myself. I look in the mirror in the morning and can’t tell who I’m anymore. I went [sic] to live open but what that. I need help.

Figure 9. Journal Entry June 15, 2013

The next entry Renee shared with me shows that almost a year later, March 23, 2014 (Appendix C), Renee is out enough to participate with PFLAG (Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) in a panel event at a local high school gathering of counselors, health department workers, and judges to advocate for LGBTQ youth. Although not explicit in the text of this entry, I can assume that at some point, Renee had come out to her mother and she has communicated this during the panel discussion that her mother is less than supportive. This is implied through Renee’s mentioning that a woman came up to her after the meeting and told her that her parents would “come around.” Her pride and growing confidence shines through her final comment; “I know I
could of never done this a year ago.” It is important to note that even though she is still struggling with living her authentic life, she cares enough for others to openly advocate for the community.

A journal entry from April 2014 (Appendix C), makes it clear that Renee did come out at least to some friends and family in 2013 since she says, “Can’t believe it been a yr that I have been out.” Her caring is again evident as she talks about participating in a fundraising walk for suicide prevention. This may be her way of reaffirming her decision not to end her own life, while showing understanding for those who struggle with these issues. Renee boldly states that the two organizations with which she is affiliated have been her saving grace. She says she owes her life to them “because without them I would be dead. ☹️”

By the July 28, 2014, entry (Appendix C), Renee has helped the mother of a trans*gender son create a new advocacy/support organization in her home county. It was at one of these meetings that she helped an LGBTQ identified teen who had mentioned to her that he had just started journaling. She told him to “keep doing it, dude, ’cause it’ll help you.” In this entry Renee also reflects on how hopeful she feels to see her traditionally conservative (even though she wrote the word liberal in her entry, she recognized that she meant conservative when we discussed it) hometown county “change right in front of my eyes.” She is beginning to see more acceptance of LGBTQ people and feeling more confident since coming out to some family and friends. This entry also lists many of Renee’s recent advocacy activities with the organizations for which she
volunteers and once again indicates her pride in doing this work when she says, “To think I save a life.”

The journal entry on her birthday, August 7, 2014 (Figure 10), reveals that things are changing once again. The last two lines of the entry above this one on the same page show that her grandparents being unaware of her lesbian identity is “eating me up inside” and she decides to tell them on her birthday the next day. This was a brave and frightening thing for her to do since her grandparents were of the Mennonite faith and very religious. Renee begins with “Happy Birthday to me, wow what a birthday.” She is 26 years old at the time of this entry and just three weeks prior to our first interview. Although this entry is only a few lines long, much is exposed. Renee is casting off her fear and reflecting on how far she has come. She reveals for the first time that she has survived both a rape and a suicide attempt, but she is putting those events in the past and looking toward the future. That decision led to her coming out to her grandparents via email. Here again, she is using writing to convey an important message. She said:

It was my birthday present to myself, so I sat down and actually did it as an email ’cause I could get it all out. I didn’t have to sit and cry, I could get a hold of myself and get it all out [without interruption].

She was relieved that they were accepting and told her they loved and supported her.

The next entry she shared with me was one she wrote following our first interview on August 29, 2014 (Figure 11). In this entry, she mentions she:
Never really saw what writing did for me till this interview; writing is my stress relieve and timeline on my life as a LGBT person. I hate writing growing up, but now I love it and can’t stop doing it.
In writing, she reflects on the benefits of writing in her life. Not only is it a stress reliever for her, but also serves as a timeline, or a way to document her identity struggles and eventual coming out as a lesbian. In our second interview, she told me she thought it was so interesting to be examining her writings and discover this timeline aspect. In this entry, Renee also mentions her desire to share her story with LGBTQ teens and help them discover the benefits of journaling. This entry ends with a line that she mentions throughout her writings and interviews, “Life is a book only you can write.”

The next entry Renee shared with me was actually via email. She decided to reflect on our second interview and sent me her journal entry from that evening on September 12, 2014 (Figure 12). The actual scanned email is available in Appendix C because it did not fit the parameters of this document to include it here. It was this entry that truly exposes her heart. She talked about being “so nervous for her to see my journal to let her into my life that I close off to the world.” She discovered it was therapeutic when she read aloud excerpts of her journal and the book chapter that tells her story in more depth and is discussed in the next section. Nervous or not, she saw the value in participating “because I knew in the end she was helping LGBT people like me and to do something to get our voice hear [sic].”

Since meeting Renee and getting to know her, I sent her a poem last summer (2015) that I thought she might enjoy, called “Still Writing” (Figure 13). Not only did she like it, she surprised me by emailing another journal entry on July 28, 2015 (Appendix C). She wanted to let me know that she had been inspired by that poem and sent it for inclusion in this study.
Figure 12. Email of Second Interview Reflection September 13, 2014

Still Writing
(anonymous)

To you, who wronged me, thank you.
Thank you to the stranger who calls at 3 am
To the doctors who can’t figure out what’s wrong with me,
Making me believe that every problem I had
I made up in my head,
To the president who allowed me to live
In this fantasy world we call America,
To the teacher
Who took my confidence and threw it away in one breath,
When she told me I couldn’t write.
Look at me now: I’m still writing.
To the friends who treated me as if I was the weakest
Link on a journey
And left me behind when I changed,
To my guidance counselor who said I had no purpose,
And the police officer who wouldn’t believe the truth,
Even when I was crying.
I thank these people for giving me an example of who I’m never going to be.

Figure 13. Poem I Sent, Still Writing

Renee’s words are a strong reminder of the impact writing has had in her life.

She writes: “Writing is my future and it makes me feel whole and human. Writing is like
my medicine that no doctor has to prescribe you.” She says she “can write about anything and remember or forget about it with just a pen and paper.”

**Book chapter.** Through volunteering with many organizations that work with, and advocate for, LGBTQ youth, Renee met a professor, Dr. B., from a nearby university. In late 2013/early 2014, Dr. B. was compiling stories for a book she was editing that would give voice to the experiences of students and adults addressing bullying in schools. Dr. B. encouraged Renee to tell her story for inclusion in the book. Renee said she was hesitant at first, not feeling confident about her writing ability, but when she sat down to try it, she discovered that her journals were the perfect framework from which to write her chapter (Appendix C). Renee said she “actually sat down and wrote it in three days” because she could use her journals to reconstruct the timeline and events of her life. She said the act of just writing her full story down was “good enough, I don’t care if it gets in the book or not. Still happy that I actually wrote it.” Writing her story gave her more confidence and she now sees herself as a writer. Although she was simply pleased at her individual accomplishment, she was excited to learn that her chapter was included in the book because “it was a way to get my story out and to let LGBT kids know that they’re not alone.” Not only did her writing provide another outlet for expression, she could use her words to help others.

Through her journal entries and our discussion, I learned a great deal about Renee. It was only when I read her book chapter that the full story began to emerge. I definitely saw the bits and pieces she allowed me to read from her journal, but the anguish she experienced in her life was more detailed. Early in the chapter she writes, “a
couple of times I thought of ending my life,” where in the journal entries I had only seen that mentioned once.

Through our discussions and from her photographs, I knew that being a firefighter was important to her. What her chapter reveals is much more complicated. Renee joined her local fire department after high school graduation. She said, “My mom was an EMT and my grandpa on my dad’s side was a firefighter when I was growing up, so I knew it was in my blood to help people.” Only after that statement does she open up about the bullying she experienced as a female firefighter. She says she “got a lot of shit” from the guys “telling me that a woman doesn’t belong in a man job, that I was not strong or smart enough. I took this bullying and let it push me to prove them wrong.” Renee eventually found supporters in the department and she “worked her tail off” to gain the respect her co-workers now have for her.

Renee came out to a fellow firefighter who was an out lesbian. The strong support she received gave her confidence to tell a few other friends, but when she told her mother, her experience was the opposite. Her mom told her she was just confused and should not tell anyone. Renee was so emotional she “decided to go back in the closet” and it would be five years until, at the age of 25, she came out again. This time she decided to “grow up and put my big girl pants on and come out to everyone that would hear me.” She began going out with friends who also identified on the LGBTQ spectrum. Once out, she experienced harassment at both the Columbus and Cleveland Pride Parades, but held her own with the help of her new friends. During these trips, she “had the time of my life because for one weekend I got to be myself and be around
friends that support me for me; they don’t know they saved my life with that trip.” She said she “came back home from both of the prides [parades] with the courage of a lion.” This courage is what prompted her to tell her sisters and her mother, again, but this time it was different. On the last page of her chapter, her words are stronger and she skillfully shows how she holds her own with her mother and maybe that was what her mother needed to hear in order to accept that Renee does know who she is. As Renee told me early in our discussions, while her mother supports her personally, she is still trying to come to terms with what others will say and so Renee cannot come out to her entire family or their church community. Writing this chapter helped Renee review this timeline of her life and grow more confident in her identity with the LGBTQ community.

Photography. As mentioned previously, Renee uses writing for expressing her thoughts and emotions, for caring for herself as a kind of therapy, and reaching out to help others. She is also a skilled photographer who uses images for some of the same reasons.

Renee is the official photographer for her local fire department, but she takes pictures everywhere she goes. Through the lens of her camera, Renee is able to capture the world as she sees it and express various thoughts and emotions in this way. Long before she discovered how important putting down her words could be, she was comfortable with the camera because she considers herself a “visual learner.” She not only takes pictures for work and her own pleasure, she has opened up a side business as a wedding/portrait photographer. Her prices are much lower than will be found elsewhere because she enjoys caring for others by offering this service to them at minimal cost.
Since she has so many photographs from which to choose, I asked her to share with me a few she feels represent something about her as a photographer and what she wanted to convey through these particular pictures. The first ones she sent were related to her work at the fire department. Being a fire fighter is an important identity for Renee. It was in the firehouse that she found some true acceptance by friends who identified as lesbians and served as role models for her and helped her begin to accept herself. Not only does she take pride in being the firehouse photographer, it is an integral part of who she is. For the photo showing the aftermath of a fire (Figure 14), Renee won first place at her local county fair. She is proud of this photo and feels she has captured this scene well.

*Figure 14. Aftermath of a Fire*

In the second photo, “Teamwork” (Figure 15), Renee is trying to represent the aspect of teamwork that is important in this line of work and to her personally. She told me she likes to use filters or play around with color/B&W, to “just mess with the image”
and see what she can create. For this photograph, she felt that using black and white would enhance the image and best convey the message.

![Teamwork](image)

**Figure 15.** Teamwork

Renee also sent me another award winning photo, this time involving helicopters. “Rescue Flight” (Figure 16) not only won second place at the Medina County Fair, but was also featured in one of the local hospital’s calendars. Through this still photograph, Renee is somehow able to capture the frenetic motion of the helicopter blades. These photographs represent Renee’s identity as a firefighter and photographer. Capturing these moments represent her pride and sense of honor at being involved in such important work, especially since her academic experience was not as successful as she might have hoped it would be.
In addition, Renee uses photography to express her emotions and thoughts away from the fire department. While the wedding and portrait photography was not something she wanted to include for this study, she did send two pictures that she feels represent her as a person. She loves to take nature/photos because being alone with beautiful scenery is her “quiet time.” With “Country Life is Peaceful” (Figure 17), Renee has captured two horses grazing, seemingly oblivious to her presence. This speaks volumes about her comfort in nature and ability to be present without disturbing others.

Figure 16. Rescue Flight

Figure 17. Country Life is Peaceful
In the last photograph, “Freedom and Pride” (Figure 18) the title says it all. Through this photograph of a lone pride flag on a boat sitting in peaceful water, Renee is able to represent the freedom and pride she feels in finally being able to live openly in a community she loves.

Figure 18. Freedom and Pride

**Social media.** As previously mentioned, Renee uses Facebook and Instagram as tools in which to express herself, advocate for, and communicate with, others. Her Instagram account is set to private and is primarily a repository for her vast array of photographs. For those friends she accepts as followers, Instagram does serve as a way Renee can communicate with them through her photos. Also noted earlier is a dedicated professional Facebook page for her fledgling wedding/portrait business. On this page, she shares photo shoots she has done and reminders that she is available for all special occasion photography. Her personal Facebook is what she uses most for a variety of reasons.
Renee used Facebook to come out to a fellow firefighter she discovered was an out lesbian. Renee and this colleague had become friendly over time and Renee gained just enough courage to come out using the private message feature, too insecure to approach her face to face. The friend and her partner were supportive and they were influential in Renee’s initial coming out in 2008. This experience gave her the courage to come out to other friends and some family, but as noted earlier, her mother did not take it well and that impeded her progress for a time.

Renee uses Facebook as most people do, to post random thoughts and what is happening in her day. She sends inspiration to friends who are having troubles and are in need of support and she grumbles when she is having a hard day. Renee also celebrates her own successes and those of her friends and family. She advocates for various groups, especially police and firefighters, and for LGBTQ issues. Since Renee is still not out to all her family and friends, the only LGBTQ related posts she puts up are more supportive of the issues and less about herself as part of that community. She says, “I’ll put some stuff on there, [but] it almost makes me feel like an ally.” When she censors herself in this way, she is conflicted and feels “almost two-faced, almost like I’m two different people, but yet I want to be true to myself and be out in the open.”

When I perused her Facebook page, I noticed that she often posts memes with inspirational messages. Going back through her wall posts I realized the memes reflected three major themes: support (self and others), personal strength and courage, and advocacy. The memes I have chosen to include are a representation of how she finds the perfect image and text combinations to convey her messages. Two memes from April
2015 succinctly demonstrate how she views writing and the benefits it provides. The first one, April 21, 2015 (Figure 19), shares a Lord Byron quote that feels raw and urgent, “If I don’t write to empty my mind, I go mad.”

![Figure 19. Lord Byron quote meme from April 21, 2015](image)

The second, an Anne Frank quote posted on April 22, 2015 (Figure 20), also outlines the benefits of writing, in a softer, more finessed manner, “You can shake off everything as you write; sorrows disappear, your courage is reborn.”

![Figure 20. Anne Frank quote meme from April 22, 2015](image)

By the fall of 2015, the memes Renee was posting dealt with being strong, taking control of your own life, and supporting others. She is a fierce advocate for anti-bullying
organizations and one meme that embodies Renee’s spirit was posted on October 26, 2015 (Figure 21). It reads, “Don’t stand by, stand up, stand strong, stand together.”

![Meme](image)

*Figure 21. Stand strong meme October 26, 2015*

She is also a strong supporter of Project Semi-Colon, an organization that strives to bring awareness to suicide prevention. The semi-colon is a symbol that some suicide survivors choose to wear to remind themselves that their story did not end. Three memes in October 2015 seem to reflect her advice to be strong and be in control of your own life. On October 19, 2015 (Figure 22), she posted, “It is darkness that we find light and in sorrow that we find ourselves.”

She was able to find a meme with a quote that combined writing with taking control of your life and posted on October 22, 2015 (Figure 23). It reads, “When writing the story of your life, don’t let anyone else hold the pen.”
It was very fitting that she chose to post a semi-colon meme on December 29, 2015 (Figure 24), that reads, “This may be the end of a chapter, but this is not the end of
the story.” With this statement, she seems ready to close out one year and look forward to the next.

Figure 24. Semi-colon meme from December 29, 2015

Summary

Renee identifies as a lesbian who is out to many close friends and some family members, but still feels she cannot live the completely authentic life she wishes to have. Her mother was personally supportive, but was concerned with what others would say. At the time of the study, Renee had recently come out to her religious grandparents, but was still not out to her stepfather.

During her K–12 years, Renee had some learning difficulties and was diagnosed with ADD (attention deficit disorder). Her experiences with writing instruction involved a heavy focus on correct spelling and grammar and she did not feel she was given the help she needed. Because of these issues, writing was difficult for her and she avoided it when she could. Renee also experienced additional trauma during these years. Not only
was she harassed for her appearance, even before coming out, but she was raped. Once she discovered journaling quite by accident, she believes writing is one of the things that helped save her, getting her through some very difficult years. She considers it her therapy as she watched her identity emerge through her journal entries. She said without writing, she “would feel stress and not myself.”

Being a visual learner, Renee was drawn to images and found that photography was another way she could express herself. Much like, Ryan, Renee uses various genres and modes of writing/composing to care for herself, but also reaches out to others through social networking sites and through her photography.

View a short multi-media found poem at the following: [https://youtu.be/rKT6wnzncLo](https://youtu.be/rKT6wnzncLo)

**Isobel**

“*Words are Never Enough, and Always My Only Medium*”

Isobel is the pseudonym chosen by my third participant. At the time of our first meeting, she was 24 years old and identified as a lesbian, out since the age of 13. She briefly mentioned using the Internet during that time of realization and this is discussed in a later section. It is interesting to note that Isobel’s mother told her that she knew from the time Isobel was four. She did not go into detail about this revelation, but it reflects the acceptance she experienced early on. As she grew older, Isobel’s family continued to be supportive of her identity and she had a supportive social circle of friends. Clearly, she was comfortable enough to be “way out” in her early teens. Despite this level of acceptance from others, she dealt with other issues that led her to a “compulsion to write” in order to cope. One issue was having a verbally abusive and emotionally manipulative
stepfather for some years and another was having difficulties with a girlfriend’s father who would not allow them to be together. Through writing, Isobel found an outlet that saw her through some dark days, but also allowed her to discover the power of words to express herself, to help her look inward, and to reach out to others.

Isobel attended a suburban high school near a local university and graduated from college with her Bachelor of Science degree in International Studies. At the time of this study, she worked in a legal firm near Cleveland. She was unsure of her future educational plans at the time, but was thinking about possibly attending law school one day.

Like Renee, Isobel found my call for participants on a listserv for an organization that serves the LGBTQ community. Since she is “definitely more drawn towards writing than any other expression,” she was interested in participating in this study. We met twice for one hour each time in a local public library quiet study room and I asked the same semi-structured interview questions that I asked the other participants (see Appendix A).

At our initial interview, Isobel arrived on time, wearing a blazer over a sweater and slacks. Her light blond hair was shorter on the sides and the longer top portion was swept to the right. She had a broad, friendly smile and seemed eager to talk. Isobel was able to discuss her life with deep introspection, while allowing her wonderful sense of humor to shine throughout our conversations. In addition to the two recorded interviews, I collected various artifacts that Isobel chose to share with me, as I had done with both Ryan and Renee. She offered semi-private blog entries, Tumblr posts, images/memes,
and popular song lyrics that speak to her in a meaningful way (see Appendix D). These items are listed and discussed in detail in later sections.

**Research Question 1**

My first research question was, “What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?”

**The K–12 experience.** This section discusses Isobel’s experiences in and out of school during the K–12 years. Please note that all words within quotation marks are direct quotes taken from the interviews conducted with Isobel.

**Earliest memories.** Isobel’s earliest memory related to writing was not related to school, but of writing a persuasive piece to her parents at the ripe old age of five. She desperately wanted a fluffy adorable puppy, although she can no longer recall the specific breed. When she was told she could not have a puppy, she remembers writing what she felt was a “very convincing and well-reasoned letter” complete with the explanation that this was so “important, how could you not?” She says she wrote the letter because she felt she could be a bit more “confrontational than she would be willing to get verbally,” but it was not a successful campaign in the end.

Isobel kept small personal diaries when she was about six or seven years old, but she had not remembered this until she came across them when she was moving out to go to college. She laughed when she recalled them because they contained horrible handwriting and misspellings. These diaries were typical jottings about a young elementary school child’s day, but also contained girls’ names with hearts drawn around them and never any mention of boys. Isobel said that looking back, it was clear that she
was attracted to girls, but she was so young that it “wasn’t on the radar in general” as anything unusual and she did not figure out what those feelings meant until she was about 11 or 12. Clearly, she was expressing herself in writing long before she realized what those doodles signified.

**Difficulties.** Moving into her adolescent years, writing became her “coping mechanism” in dealing with her abusive stepfather. From sixth grade through the beginning of her freshman year of college, Isobel had a verbally abusive and emotionally manipulative stepfather. She said, “Like all teenagers, you don’t feel in control of your own life, [trying] to figure out who you are and what you want,” but that in her situation she found writing was the only way to gain any kind of control over her life. She said, “It’s almost a tool for me to be able to deal with something, so I’m much more drawn to it as an instinct when something negative happens, almost raw emotion on the page.” Isobel speculated that if she mapped out her writings during her whole childhood, the volume of these writings would pick up during those “stepdad years” and “taper off when he was out of the picture.” She began a blog in high school, first housed on Xanga, then moved to Blogger, in which she expressed herself primarily through voluminous free verse and poetic prose pieces. Isobel remembered her therapist describing it as if she was “turning on a spigot.”

Regarding her school life, Isobel had a supportive circle of friends and she felt comfortable enough to be an out lesbian. However, there was still a “self-imposed” reticence to being what she considered “completely authentic.” By this, she meant that she felt comfortable to a point, but always felt guarded depending on the size and makeup
of the group setting. She said, “I would definitely censor what I wrote to best reach the best inclusion with the most people. I absolutely would have written for my audience.”

In middle and high school, Isobel was in the gifted, and then Honors/AP, English track. While most of the writing in her classes was literature-based about the works they were reading, she did have a few opportunities to choose topics for special projects. She recalled one position paper/oral debate assignment during her sophomore year for which she chose to present on the pro side of gay marriage, going head to head against a girl who had chosen the opposing view. For this piece, she kept it strictly third person and academic. She said she felt that decision was appropriate for the assignment, but would not have brought in any personal feelings, even if she could have, since she generally “kept things close to the vest.” One reason for this was that she recognized that her school’s curricula and culture were not particularly inclusive to LGBTQ issues. The students wanted to establish a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), but the administration would only allow a Diversity Club because they did not want any club with the word ‘gay’ in it. Isobel also remembers the curriculum being “very well-planned out” and does not remember being able to choose her own novels to read since grade six. In this way, the literature the students read was well controlled and there were never any representations of LGBTQ characters or issues. She said that at the least, she would have liked to discuss the possibilities of some of the famous authors they read being on the LGBTQ spectrum, but never felt the support in the school culture to bring this up.

Isobel loved her advanced English classes because she loved literature and reading poetry, but lamented the fact that most all of the writing was of an academic,
expository nature and she was not given any real direction in creative writing. Because she loved writing and was using it in her personal life to help her cope, she said she would have loved to have some guidance. She felt she needed

A unit or curriculum, or something that could’ve helped refine or express or give vocabulary and tools to what I was doing, or just develop it, almost. I’ve always been the kind to talk or write a problem out or an issue out, so having a mentor to read and talk with, I postulate my life could be very different.

Through our discussions, Isobel realized that had she been encouraged to pursue more creativity in her writing, she might have chosen a different career path. She said that because of the strong emphasis on academic writing, “the arts became a self-indulgent fantasy and not something to do, devote a life to.” She wondered, “If I could be inspired by other people, what could I inspire?”

**Positives.** As a true lover of reading and writing, being in the gifted/honors classes generally served Isobel well. She said all of her English teachers from grades eight to 12 “shared a strong mix of dedication to excellence and openness to what you had to say, always an emphasis to develop your own thoughts” and she felt fortunate to have so many good teachers in such a short time frame. Cited as the most influential people in her writing life, these five teachers exposed her to different literary movements and poetry, even if they did not provide the opportunity for guidance in the creative writing she so craved. Isobel remembered the emphasis in writing in grades 11 and 12 becoming even more academic as they prepared for the AP (Advanced Placement)
exams, and she felt this gave her the best foundation for being able to analyze and interpret literature and express these ideas in well-crafted pieces of writing.

Interestingly enough, there was a creative writing class available, but it conflicted with her AP classes and she was unable to fit that into her schedule. Luckily for Isobel, she was able to be involved with speech and debate and a drama club, which turned out to be her creative outlets in school, along with singing. She said, “writing was [her own] personal catharsis, while singing and theater [is like] being able to tap into someone else’s catharsis and feel those feelings, almost like empathy.” During the spring of her junior year, she found a way to combine these interests to help her cope with her anger and depression about what was happening to a close friend. Through her work on the play Les Misérables, she discovered the works of Victor Hugo and chose “Hugo’s understanding of the nature of good and evil” as the topic of her English research paper. Isobel feels that reading his words, hearing them spoken, listening to the song lyrics from the play, and writing about all of it helped her. She said, “It took an English class and a play, but it got me out of that funk.”

**Beyond the K–12 experience.** As mentioned, Isobel began an online blog during high school, and this eventually turned into a Tumblr blog as technology changed once she got to college. She said, “I feel much more comfortable at a keyboard than I do with a pen, which I find weird and I don’t like it, but it’s true.” While her early blogging was personal and used as cathartic release, her later postings were much more about advocating for the LGBTQ community and feminist issues, like calling out our country’s rape culture. Her use of this blog hit its peak in 2012 and tapered off until it finally ended
in 2014. She said, “It’s definitely something I let fall by the wayside” because it seems, as her life became increasingly stable and content, her need to write was not as strong. At the time of this study, she found she no longer needed to write as a way to cope because her life is “in a good place” and if something does come up, she “could have conversations and there’s less [stress] being built up.” She focuses on the positives now, using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to stay in touch with friends and share happier moments. All of the genres and modes mentioned in the previous sections are discussed in detail in the next section.

**Research Question 2**

My second research question was, “In what ways are various modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ young adult community?”

As I did with the other participants’ profiles, I use the terms genre and mode to indicate the types of writing/composing Isobel uses and the manner in which she uses them. Like Ryan and Renee, Isobel writes for personal reasons and social justice advocacy. She also cares for herself through writing/composing for personal self-expression, stress relief, and cares for others by reaching out to the LGBTQ community to offer support and hope for the future through her writing/composing. In the recent past, she also used social media to shine a spotlight on the dangers of America’s rape culture and call for a change, but is focusing more on positive aspects of her life at the moment. This section serves to tell Isobel’s story through her words, the words of musicians, and the images she feels are representative of how she uses other media.
Isobel expresses herself through various genres of writing/composing and uses different modes for distinct purposes. For an At-a-Glance comparison of the pieces Isobel submitted for this study, and others I selected, I have included a chart (see Table 6) with each artifact labeled and in the order in which I discuss it in the following section.

Table 6

Isobel’s Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Artifact and Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Now that the ego dies completely</em> Appendix D</td>
<td>Journal entry Jan. 5, 2007</td>
<td>Semi-Private blog (Xanga)</td>
<td>Self-expression/Self-care (reminder that brighter days are ahead)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Liberation</em> Appendix D</td>
<td>Journal entry Jan. 8, 2007</td>
<td>Semi-Private blog (Xanga)</td>
<td>Self-expression/Self-care Care for others (dealing with her feelings about the death of a friend’s father while trying to be strong and supportive for her friend)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Most Not Excellent, Dude</em> Appendix D</td>
<td>Journal entry January 11, 2007</td>
<td>Semi-Private blog (Xanga)</td>
<td>Self-expression/Self-care (reminder to herself that she is worthy)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Oh man . . .</em> Figure 25</td>
<td>Journal entry February 4, 2007</td>
<td>Semi-Private blog (Xanga)</td>
<td>Self-expression/Self-care (reveling in her identity as a lesbian)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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<td><em>Mom, Dad? I’m a . . .</em> Figure 26</td>
<td>Journal entry February 8, 2007</td>
<td>Semi-Private blog (Xanga)</td>
<td>Self-expression/Self-care (having a little fun with words and her identity)</td>
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Table 6 (continued)

Isobel's Artifacts

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<th>Written Artifact and Corresponding Appendix</th>
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<td>Hallelujah Appendix D</td>
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<td>March 26, 2007</td>
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<td>Excerpts referencing nature Figure 27</td>
<td>(3) Journal entries</td>
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<td>Feb-March 2007</td>
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<td>Journal entry</td>
<td>Semi-Private blog (Xanga)</td>
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<td>Sept. 23, 2007</td>
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<td>Untitled entry Appendix D Figure 30</td>
<td>Journal entry</td>
<td>Semi-Private blog (Xanga)</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (crying out to be loved)</td>
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<td>February 7, 2008</td>
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<td>Anagnorises Full text in body of chapter</td>
<td>Journal entry</td>
<td>Semi-private blog (Xanga)</td>
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<td>March 15, 2008</td>
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<td>Semi-private blog (Xanga)</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (reflecting her strong need to write as release)</td>
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<td>July 12, 2008</td>
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<td>The Woes of Atlas Appendix D</td>
<td>Poem</td>
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<td>October 24, 2008</td>
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Table 6 (continued)

*Isobel’s Artifacts*

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<td><em>Rapture</em> - <em>Begin the preparation</em></td>
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<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (reflecting on upcoming journey to India and benefits it will bring) Care for others (reflecting on how to benefit others during/after this experience)</td>
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<td><em>Vertigo</em> - <em>Figure 31</em></td>
<td>Reposted poem By Anne Stevenson</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (sharing of someone else’s words to express how she feels)</td>
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<td><em>Untitled post</em> - <em>Appendix D</em></td>
<td>Original journal post</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (expressing how she feels waiting at the airport and achieving a moment of self-realization)</td>
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<td>Appendix D</td>
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<td><em>Thoughts: From 29 June, 2011</em></td>
<td>Original journal post (essay-diary style)</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (personal growth, feeling powerful)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>August 31, 2011</td>
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<td><em>Culture of Fear: From 30 June, 2011</em></td>
<td>Original journal post</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (Making observations that lead to introspection)</td>
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<td><strong>Be as a Child</strong></td>
<td>Original journal post (essay style) Sept. 6, 2011</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (observations of India and introspection of its influence on her)</td>
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<td><strong>Ethnic Day (From Sept. 8)</strong></td>
<td>Original journal post Sept. 19, 2011</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (observations of India and introspection of its influence on her)</td>
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<td><strong>Welcome . . . Home?</strong></td>
<td>Original journal post Dec. 7, 2011</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (sorting out her feelings of coming back to the states and the culture shock)</td>
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<td><strong>Violation</strong></td>
<td>Journal entry January 2012</td>
<td>Private blog (blogger) via private email to me on Oct. 1, 2014</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (coming to terms with being raped in India)</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
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<td><strong>Vulnerability</strong></td>
<td>Journal entry February 2012</td>
<td>Private blog (blogger) via private email to me on Oct. 1, 2014</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (coping with the rape experience through writing)</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
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<td><strong>Vulnerability &amp; Authenticity &amp; Love</strong></td>
<td>Original journal post August 7, 2012</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care and Care for another (love letter to and about her then girlfriend)</td>
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<td>LEAPIN’ LESBIANS! JOHN FUGELSANG ON WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT GAY WOMEN</td>
<td>Reposted essay via Current May 20, 2013</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (using words for empowerment) Care for Others (advocacy as a feminist and for LGBTQ issues)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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Appendix D

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Images with Corresponding Appendix</th>
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<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
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<td>Traits of Comic Book Heroes and Villains</td>
<td>Reposted meme from ‘pbh3’ June 6, 2012</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care Care for others (combining her interest in comics and social justice to express her idea that people can choose how they react to their situations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judgments</td>
<td>Reposted meme from ‘roseaposey’ January 2013</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (using an image and words for empowerment) Care for others (advocating for women)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When is Rape Ok?</strong></td>
<td>Reposted photo of a poll from ‘bonitabreezy’ via ‘katie-dann’</td>
<td>Online Tumblr blog</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (image/words for empowerment) Care for others (Exposing rape culture attitudes)</td>
<td>Published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Figure 33</td>
<td>April 22, 2013</td>
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| Four related posts: Feminist quotes | Reposted memes with text paragraphs from ‘ohdeargodwhy’ via katie-dann | Online Tumblr blog | Self-expression Self-care (using an image and words for empowerment) Care for others (advocating as a feminist for gender equality) | Published |
| **Sample Figure 34 Appendix D** | April 22, 2013 | | | |

| Post | Reposted meme via ‘katie-dann’ | Online Tumblr blog | Self-expression Self-care (using an image and words for empowerment) Care for others (debunking myths about rape and objectification of men) | Published |
| **Appendix D** | April 22, 2013 | | | |

<table>
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<th>Others’ words with Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<td><strong>Empty Chairs at Empty Tables</strong> lyrics by Herbert Kretzmer</td>
<td>Song referenced in journal entry March 26, 2007</td>
<td>Semi-private blog (blogger)</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (coming out of a dark few months)</td>
<td>Published</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Appendix D</strong></td>
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This section looks at the genres of writing and in which modes Isobel composes by looking at excerpts of various pieces and what benefits they have provided for her in the past and how she benefits today. Isobel primarily uses social media for all of her writing and other forms of expression, although theater and singing were definitely other important outlets at various times in her life.
As early as middle school, the Internet was Isobel’s main source of information when she was discovering her identity as a lesbian and frequented message boards and various websites to help her figure things out. Once she turned to writing as her main coping mechanism, she felt more comfortable at a keyboard and using online journaling, than the traditional pen and notebook. It is important to note that some of the artifacts are included in typed form, while others are shown as scans of original art or handwritten text. I have used these scans whenever the artifacts were submitted that way.

**Social media.** The ways in which Isobel uses social media have changed over time, depending upon her life experiences. I was honored that she allowed me open access to the semi-private writings on her archived Xanga to blogger account, as well as her public Tumblr blog. She pointed out particular pieces she felt were representative of how she used writing for various reasons, but she gave me permission to choose anything I felt should also be included. Isobel was the most prolific writer/poster of the participants, providing me access to more than 70 pieces of original writing on blogger and over 300 original writings, memes, videos, GIFs (Graphic Interchange Format-moving images that loop) and other reposts from which to choose on Tumblr. I read through everything she gave me, and the selections included in this study are representative and reflect how Isobel uses writing to analyze her life and “advance [her] introspection,” while others demonstrate how she reaches out to advocate for social justice for herself and others.

**Semi-private blog (Xanga to blogger).** When Isobel began discussing her writings with me, she said that simply going back into the long archived Xanga and
blogger posts was a cathartic experience for her. She said in her memory, it was “just very personal, but going [back] through, it was actually quite public,” at least to those in her “inner circle” who read and responded. She had forgotten that some of these posts were not totally private and that her friends had responded with overwhelming support for her. This experience brought back good feelings and actually prompted her to reach out and contact a couple people she had not talked to in a while and thank them for their generous support and kindness when she had needed it most.

Isobel said that looking back over her writings “really teleported me back to when [my words] came gushing out of me like I was a sponge being wringed by my life.” As mentioned earlier, she used writing as a coping mechanism from middle school into her freshman year in response to an abusive stepfather. She said through her writings, she

Coped a lot by writing and by internalizing and by analyzing him [stepfather], as why is he doing this, and then, I called it playing the game, like if I knew what made him tick, it would get me in and out of whatever.

Unfortunately, the pieces from this earlier time in her life were not available in the archive due to a glitch in the system. The pieces we were able to access started in the middle of her junior year, but they tell an interesting story about the effects of those years having to deal with her stepfather’s verbal and emotional abuse. Some of the pieces show a delightfully wicked sense of humor, and we laughed often throughout our time together, but a continuous thread connecting many of the posts reflects the thoughts and emotions of a young woman in a constant struggle to rid herself of the feeling that she is “inconsequential, underserving, and mediocre.” Her writings also reveal that to combat
this, she “loves deeply, connects deeply,” and tries to be “as selfless as possible.” Her therapist told her that she is always “giving from an empty glass,” as she tries to give to others before making sure her needs are met.

Looking at these pieces chronologically, the first post we could access was from January 5, 2007, and was entitled, “Now that the ego dies completely” (Appendix D). The entry alluded to feelings of darkness and depression when she wrote, “It feels so weird needing instead of being needed. It feels so weird saddening instead of smiling. It feels so WRONG weeping, but I need it so much.” She ended the piece with this quote from *Les Misérables*, “Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise,” which, she said, “lifted me out” of that place. This entry reflects Isobel’s ability to lay bare her inner emotions through her own words, while also finding inspiration and taking solace through someone else’s.

In a journal entry from January 8, 2007, entitled “Liberation” (Appendix D), Isobel mentions the “week of hell on earth,” in which she was reflecting on how she was trying to stay strong for a close friend whose father had suddenly died. She writes, “In all honesty, I still feel the breath and pain and sorrow on my cheek.” Isobel reflected on this piece being different from all her others because she could write about how terrible her friend’s situation was, a “legitimate reason to be upset and distraught and ask for help,” whereas her writings about her own situations are “layered up” with her struggle to “have a right to her own feelings” and that she is deserving of love. There, again, is the thread of feeling that she does not count, that she is not worthy of having her own feelings. In “Most Not Excellent, Dude,” a journal entry from January 11, 2007 (Appendix D), this
theme continues as she writes, “So, in order to fight the demons of hate, and pain, and sorrow, I must learn to love . . . myself,” even after starting the entry with mentions of her life being generally in an “upward trend with the occasional (and extremely [sic] annoying) pangs of doubt.”

In “Oh man . . .” an entry from February 4, 2007 (Figure 25), she demonstrates that being a lesbian is definitely one of the things she truly loves about herself. In the entry directly following, from February 8, 2007, she plays with words a bit and shows off her keen sense of humor as she reveals more about her identity in, “Mom, Dad? I’m a . . .” (Figure 26). In this piece, she is clearly playing off the idea of “coming out” as a lesbian (or other BGTQ identity) with the revelation of her philosophical belief, or “coming out” as a transcendentalist.

```
Oh man...
04 Feb 2007

I love Women.
Just everything about them. From their fingertips to their emotional mood swings to their hair to their finess to their back to their eyes to their lips to collarbones to ankles to shoulders to legs to ....
Everything,
I'm sooo glad I'm a Lesbian!
♥♥♥♥
♥♥♥
♥
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Figure 25. Journal entry, Oh man . . . February 4, 2007
Figure 26. Journal entry, *Mom, Dad? I’m a . . .* February 8, 2007

Although Isobel did not specifically discuss the connection between this entry and her love of nature, she did specifically make it a point to tell me:

Nature’s always been . . . I guess, like my church, my gateway to a serenity that I never really . . . experienced easily in other places, and so nature and then the artistic and poetic expressions of that, so Whitman, of course is my favorite poet.

Once Isobel made mention of this, I did go back and reread some of her work. Entry after entry made reference to natural elements in some way. Whether she is describing how someone makes her feel, as in “A Requiem of Silence” from February 11, 2007 (Figure 27); writing about wiping our lives clean, as in “Spring Cleaning” from March 7, 2007 (Figure 27); or pondering our existence, as in “Humility” from March 14, 2007 (Figure 27); imagery from nature is present.
Three months after the funeral of her friend’s father, Isobel once again found herself angry and upset upon hearing that this friend had been assaulted at a party. This caused her to lose her once held belief that the “arc of history bends towards justice, or goodness, or equality, and all that stuff” until she heard the song “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables,” during one of her play rehearsals for Les Misérables. In her journal entry, “Hallelujah” (Appendix D), from March 26, 2007, she writes about hearing this line from the song, “My friends, my friends, don’t ask me what your sacrifice was for.” She wrote:

For an instant, for a beauteous moment, time slowed, and the rendition of that line [sung] by [name redacted], brought about a ray of light, a ray of beauty, a ray of truth encompassing all my sense, all my body, all my soul into a single act of greatness! Seemingly insignificant to all other listeners, that Moment reawakened my soul.
Once again, Isobel found comfort and inspiration in the words of another. This experience occurred during her research project and she said it was “like a lightning bolt” that helped her believe that there is a reason for everything. She said she interpreted that to mean: “It’s not about the cards you’re dealt, it’s about how you play them and what the ultimate reward for that is.” This theme is reimagined in the form of a meme Isobel reposted on Tumblr some years later. On June 6, 2012, posts “Traits of Comic Book Heroes and Villains” (see Figure 28 for a sample, and Appendix D for the full image), to combine both her revelation form that day in March 2007, with her ideas of social justice.

![Meme on Tumblr](image)

*Figure 28. Traits of Comic Book Heroes—sample (reposted meme, Tumblr, June 6, 2012)*

Song lyrics again played a major role in Isobel’s use of writing as a way to care for herself. In a journal entry from July 24, 2007, she discusses how the song, “The End of Heartache” (Appendix D), by Killswitch Engage on their 2004 album, “The End of Heartache,” “awoke this desire to finally get over my ex.” Their relationship had been on
again/off again for a while, with this girlfriend always being the one to determine if they were together or not. Isobel said that the two lines and the chorus, included below, were what particularly helped her decide she “didn’t want to be that any more:”

In sorrow I speak your name
And your voice mirrors my torment
(Seek me) For comfort, (Call me) For solace
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart
(Seek me) Completion, (Call me) I'll be waiting
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart

In stark contrast to Isobel’s usually voluminous journal entries, the one on September 23, 2007 (Figure 29), is a bare reminder to herself to “keep going.”

Love > Pain
Hope > Fear

Figure 29. Journal entry from September 23, 2007

Again, it seems that, even when she was moving into her senior year, Isobel was in constant need of reassurance and support. Writing continued to be an outlet that helped her care for herself during these high school years. By February 7, 2008, she is
crying out for love as she still seems to be grappling with someone toying with her
feelings in this untitled entry (Figure 30).

LOVE ME!
she cried out as the rain soaked her hair, curling it into waves of dark amber.
With water drops falling haphazardly into her mouth as she cries out, as though
nature tries vainly to fill the emptiness inside. Her heart beating out of chest,
slamming its way against her chest and throat trying to escape its inhospitable
confines.

*Figure 30. Untitled entry, February 7, 2008*

By March 15, 2008, Isobel seemed to have done some introspection and made a
critical discovery, when the only words in her journal entry entitled, “Anagnorises?”
were, “Perhaps, it is time to stop discovering myself, and start discovering the world.”
However, two entries later, on June 12, 2008, Isobel realized that writing is still what she
needs to take care of herself in the opening line of an untitled entry (Appendix D): “I
need to write, to write I need to write to write I need to release this burning in my soul.”

The rest of the posts from summer and into early fall of 2008 paint a picture of
Isobel’s yearning for a lost love and she uses writing to aid in releasing these feelings, but
moving into fall of that year, she seems to be changing. The last entry from her old blog
is from October 24, 2008, and is the one she told me was her favorite. In “The Woes of
Atlas” (Appendix D), Isobel was aiming to represent a “more adult view, more mature
nature” during her freshman year of college and she felt it was “more verbose and
challenging” than her other writings. She wanted to “accurately represent the struggle
between empathy and self-sufficiency and how that’s kind of coming together in my
life.” Although this entry is long and full of poetic prose, the last three lines are most
revealing and show she is finally giving herself the same allowances she gives everyone else:

I am human.

and I am afraid.

I am human.

There are only three entries in this archive following this one and they are from 2009. In them, she is back to lamenting about love, but not quite in the desperate way she had in earlier years.

**Tumblr.** Beginning in 2011, during her junior year of college, Isobel began a new blog using Tumblr as a space to chronicle her study abroad experience in India. In her first post, “Rapture—Begin the preparation” (Appendix D), from May 13, 2011, she is clearly expecting a life-changing experience, as evidenced by the line: “I know I will return stranger, but not a stranger to myself.” She continues to elaborate with:

I am afraid, but only as an afterthought to my anxious excitement. I am mostly afraid of losing what I have, even though I know in the deepest part of me, that what I have to gain is so great I can not, and will not, let it pass by.

Two days later, on May 15, 2011, Isobel has again found that someone else has written a poem that expresses her feelings better than she could. In this entry, she posts Anne Stevenson’s poem, “Vertigo” (2005; Figure 31), with a one-line commentary at the end. This post echoes her thoughts and feelings from the previous post well and it is clear that she is always striving to figure out the most effective way to communicate her thoughts and feelings, even if it is through the words of another.
Figure 31. Tumblr post, May 15, 2011

Although Isobel’s untitled post from May 30, 2011 (Appendix D), is more of a diary style entry about waiting at the airport during a layover in Toronto, she clearly never stops thinking deeply through her writing. While contemplating the fact this was the first time she had ever traveled alone, she comes to the realization “that my ease at many things people fear comes from my need to be fearless for my loved ones.”

She does not post again until the end of August, but some of her posts were titled with dates that were earlier. She had jotted notes all during the months of June through August, but made a conscious effort to live more in the moment and experience, rather than spend much time on her computer. Once she had the time, she could weave her notes into narratives of her journey, for this was not only a physical journey of place, but her inner journey of self. On August 31, 2011, in her post entitled, “Thoughts: From 29 June, 2011” (Appendix D), Isobel is surprised by her ability to adapt so quickly and asks, “Is my adaptation to a new culture and people a betrayal of my own identity, completed by social and cultural baggage?” Her maturity and deep introspection, as well as her emerging feelings of empowerment, are evident as she answers herself with: “Perhaps I
am beginning to form and develop myself independent of that . . . I am entrusting primary responsibility to myself. How . . . Powerful.”

Another entry posted on August 31, 2011, but reflecting on thoughts from June 30, 2011, reveals that even when she is analyzing the differences between the cultures of the United States and India, she always manages to connect her musings back to herself. In this entry, “Culture of Fear: From 30 June, 2011” (Appendix D), she reflects upon how afraid Americans are “from bugs to rapists to plane crashes and food,” in contrast to “how unafraid Indians are by comparison. Arguably, there is more to fear here, with more people, poverty, etc. and less government agencies and oversight . . . There is little to no fear of nature, be it insects, animals, weather.” Her observations lead her to realize how she has changed in that “I relax here, not to foolishness, but about foolish things.”

The journey into herself is deep as she becomes a part of this culture. In “Be as a Child,” posted on September 6, 2011 (Appendix D), Isobel wrote:

I’ve written far less in this blog than I thought I would. Probably because all my words fall far too short. I want to share with you everything. Because India is everything. That hint of what life is, blowing past you in the breeze/ Magnify that and you have the powerful, the very life-breath of this place. That small feeling of insight and clarity? Here, it drowns you every moment it is alive here . . . how it moves you, changes you.

By September 8, 2011, in a post titled, “Ethnic Day (From September 8)” (Appendix D), but posted on September 19, Isobel has “stopped being a guest. It felt almost like a rite of passage. I can carry a Saree! . . . I feel like I belong here, even
though I never will, fully.” She ends the post with a line that indicates the influence her experiences in India have had on her when she writes: “I accept you, I love you, I challenge you. I accept myself, I love myself, challenge myself.” In many of her previous writings, it has been evident that she has struggled to be able to convince herself that she is human and as worthy of love and acceptance as everyone else. Here she has confidently committed these words to paper. Finally, on December 7, 2011, Isobel posts about the culture shock she experienced upon returning to the states and makes bold statements about herself. In “Welcome . . . Home”? (Appendix D), she writes:

It’s as though we’ve been turned into pillars of chrome and smartphones rather than salt. Not to demonize technology . . . it’s just different. And now my seemingly easy acceptance of Indian life has become a revulsion to a place where I fit in even less. I am a new person . . . I am more . . . me . . . A healthy shift, I feel . . . I know much more of who I am . . . and very proud of who I know I am capable of becoming . . . We are a work in progress.

The next two posts chronologically are from a private blog and Isobel shared them with me via email on October 1, 2014 (Appendix D). Although her Tumblr posts never indicated anything amiss, she was raped in India during her fall summer/fall sojourn of 2011, yet she did not write about the experience until January of 2012. Isobel explained to me that she forced herself to push the experience deep down and not let it mar the wonderful memories she was making. She said that she feels these entries “very well illustrate how writing is so important to me, still. I again don’t think I would have coped as well (at all) without it.” In her email, she wrote:
The following [two emails] are dark and sad and graphic and hard for me to read now . . . long story short, I was raped by a guy I was talking to. I boxed the whole event up neatly and put it aside until I got back home because the rest of India was too wonderful to have it be ruined by a man so crude.

These entries were in a private blog and are dated one month apart. The first one, “Violation” (Appendix D), is dated January 2012, and is cryptic in nature, and more coming to terms with the fact that the rape happened: “I have always felt a disconcertment with our views on nature. Now I feel down right violated by it.” The second, “Vulnerability” (Appendix D), dated February 2012, is more graphic and revealing, and trying to cope with what happened. She wrote: “I am trapped under my skin left with what he left behind.”

Clearly, the experience was traumatic and she needed to care for herself by eventually writing out her feelings. It is interesting to note how she decided not to deal with this trauma until she was home and turned to her writing to cope in the way she felt would provide the most comfort.

Once Isobel returned to the states, she no longer used her Tumblr account as a journal, and it became more of a social media repository for pop culture posts and social justice activism. The only journal-type entry I could find, besides her India posts, was from August 7, 2012, and is a love letter to her girlfriend. In “Vulnerability & Authenticity & Love” (Appendix D), her need to express herself in writing is evident, as are her deep feelings. She wrote: “I can feel something needing to be written slowly bubbling up from my chest, but I am unsure of its sound or shape. Words are never
enough, and always my only medium.” Isobel turned this post into a book as a gift for her girlfriend, complete with illustrations. Unfortunately, she did not share this with me.

As mentioned at the beginning of the social media section, her Tumblr account contained over 300 posts, the vast majority of which are reposted memes, GIFs, and youtube video clips. The shift in focus from her use of this media as a personal written account of her journey to India, to that of an image-based sharing/advocating site is dramatic. This shift is reflected in her earlier statement that once her life was more stable and she was happier, her need to write diminished. It is interesting to note that there were 22 posts in 2011, 13 of which were her journal accounts, and that number skyrockets to 234 in 2012. Only the previously mentioned love letter post is an original during that year and all the others are reposted memes, GIFs, videos, and the musings of other people. The number of posts drops to 79 in 2013 and dwindles to two in 2014.

Interspersed throughout her Tumblr account, Isobel posts images of cats and memes related to her pop culture interests, especially Harry Potter, and Game of Thrones. The vast majority of posts, however, are devoted to advocating for LGBTQ and women’s issues and against our country’s rape culture, which is another way Isobel found to deal with her own personal experience and to help others in the process.

To illustrate this use of her Tumblr account, I have selected to share a few representative posts. The first is an image of a woman’s leg with measured marks running the length to indicate how short/long a skirt should be. This image, entitled Judgments, was reposted from “roseaposey” on January 7, 2013 (Figure 32). Here,
Isobel demonstrates the preconceptions and prejudices society makes about what women choose to wear.

Figure 32. Tumblr repost, Judgments, from “roseaposey,” January 7, 2013

The repost of the image, “When is Rape Okay?” (Figure 33), on April 1, 2013, was originally posted by “bonitabreezy” via “katiedann.” This is a photograph of a high school survey asking under which conditions rape was ok and the poll is broken down by percentages of “yes” responses by males and females. By posting this and the commentary that followed, Isobel is exposing the rape culture attitudes even women hold in this country.
Figure 33. Tumblr repost, When is Rape Ok?, via “katiedann,” April 1, 2013

On April 22, 2013, Isobel posted a set of four memes, each with a photo of a famous actress or musician and a quote advocating for gender equality (Appendix D). I have selected one, attributed to Madonna (and Ian McEwan), to share here (Figure 34).

Figure 34. Tumblr repost, meme, April 22, 2013
Another repost from April 22, 2013, is a little different. This one via “katiedann” (Appendix D) includes an image of never-ending stop signs and various quotes that highlight long-held myths about rape and objectification, but this time, involving men. One quote reads: “It’s ok to objectify guys, they’re guys, they don’t care.” Another states: “Guys can’t get raped, they never don’t want sex.” This demonstrates Isobel’s true belief in gender equality and advocating for all.

The only post in the month of May 2013 is extremely long, but Isobel felt this said exactly what she would say. It was posted on May 20, 2013, and entitled “LEAPIN’ LESBIANS! JOHN FUGELSANG ON WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT GAY WOMEN” (via Current; Appendix D). Because it is long and all in capital letters, it feels like it is being shouted and I think, knowing what I do about Isobel now, that this post reflects her anger and frustration at certain factions of our society who use the Bible as ammunition to support their views on the LGBTQ community in general, and women, in particular. There are far too many lines that can be extracted as examples, but the last line sums up the feeling of the piece and interjects a bit of humor while doing so: “SO REMEMBER—THERE’S ONE OR TWO MENTIONS OF GAY MEN IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE, BUT AT NO POINT DOES THE ALMIGHTY EVER FORBID WOMEN BEING WITH WOMEN. AND I FIN [sic] IT JUST A BIT CUREIOUS [sic] THAT GOD HAS THE SAME POLICY AS VIVID VIDEO.”

There are only two posts in June of 2013, one is a GIF related to changing your image and the other is a Harry Potter meme. After that, there is another Harry Potter
meme in August of 2014, and the Tumblr account ends with a political meme in December of 2014.

**Facebook/Instagram/Twitter.** Since that last post in 2014, Isobel abandoned Tumblr for other social media. She currently has active Instagram and Twitter accounts, and posts on Facebook occasionally. Although she joined Facebook in 2007, she considers it more of a way to keep in touch, saying: “I’m more an observer. I like to be connected.” Joining Instagram in 2013, it is clear she uses this medium to post pictures of times “when I’m doing something really fun, and it was amazing, wonderful.” Most of the images revolve around nature, vacations with her girlfriend, other enjoyable times in her life. Up through this month, she has continued to post on Instagram fairly regularly. Through her Twitter account, she combined text and images to convey messages, similar to Tumblr, but for a different purpose. She created her Twitter account in March of 2011, just a few months before embarking on her journey to India. In the beginning, she used this medium as more of an instant messenger tool to comment to friends and retweet many references to Harry Potter and, to a lesser extent, other pop culture icons. Even during her time in India, her Twitter was used mostly as a messaging tool and pop culture repository.

In early 2012, she posted mostly sports-related retweets and many pictures of her broken ankle (sports injury), the accompanying x-rays, and the culminating boot. Later that year, her social justice advocacy makes an appearance on this site, keeping in line with how active she was on Tumblr during 2012. On September 5, 2012, she retweeted a political/feminist comment from Barack Obama (Figure 35).
Although there is a bit of crossover relating to her activism, her Twitter account did not reflect the heavy volume of social justice advocacy posts that her Tumblr account contained. She was still mostly using Twitter for messaging friends and retweeting favorite popular culture references. In 2013, there was not much change with what she posted, but there are a few mentions of gay marriage issues. By 2014, Isobel began to add a few more references to feminist issues. In 2015, most of Isobel’s tweets reference sports or contain links to her Instagram photos; however, the few non-personal tweets took on a more political tone. On May 23, 2015, she retweeted posts in reference to the Black Lives Matter movement (Figure 36), and on November 24, 2015, she referenced the refugee situation (Figure 37).
Figure 36. Retweet, Black Lives Matter movement, May 23, 2015

Figure 37. Retweet, refugees, November 24, 2015
And with that retweet, her Twitter grew silent. As of this writing, Instagram is the only social/digital media Isobel uses regularly. Although she does have a Facebook page, she is inconsistent in her use of that platform.

**Summary**

Isobel identifies as a lesbian who is out to her family, to her friends, and in her work life. She grew up with supportive parents, but lived with a verbally and emotionally abusive stepfather from ages 12 through 18. Although writing was always something she was drawn to, she turned to online journaling as a way to cope with the abuse and found much solace there. Even after her stepfather was no longer in her life, she had discovered that writing was a way in which she could “self-actualize, incorporate new information into my world views, or continue my most authentic introspection.”

Isobel also gains insight for her own life from the words of others through their poetry, song lyrics, and plays. Much like Ryan and Renee, Isobel used various genres and modes of writing/composing to care for herself, but also reached out to others through social networking sites.

Isobel found written expression to be a comfortable place to land when the stressors of her life overwhelmed her. Writing/composing renewed her strength and helped her work out issues of love, loss, and identity. It was also a powerful force for her when she was dealing with the aftershock of being raped during her trip abroad to India. She eventually added memes and other images to her posts, but it is interesting to note that as her life moved forward and became more positive, the writing decreased and her use of imagery
in the form of personal photographs increased. View a short multi-media found poem:

https://youtu.be/wROVUw94QK4

Holden

“And save myself some awful pain”

My fourth participant chose the pseudonym of Holden, for its obvious connection to the main character in *The Catcher in the Rye*. At the time of this study, he was an 18-year-old freshman at a local Northeast Ohio suburban university, majoring in English with an interest in linguistics. He identified as a gay male, but was questioning this and possibly leaning toward identifying as pansexual (a person who experiences sexual/romantic, physical/spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions), saying, “I’m not really sure what I am.”

Holden said, “Before senior year [high school], I felt very afraid, like if this ever got out, my life would be over. I was scared.” He said by the time he was a senior, he worried about how his friends would react, but decided he needed to be himself and came out to close friends and his mother, but said his father still did not know. He has a close relationship with his mother and a sister who is eight years his senior, but his relationship with his father is more complicated. Holden mentioned his father’s drinking and alluded to possible verbal and emotional abuse, but says there was never any physical abuse and he does love him. He admitted that he has some “Daddy issues” because of this relationship, or lack thereof, and saw a psychologist during his junior year of high school. He did not confide in this psychologist, however, regarding his sexuality.
He attended a Catholic high school in his hometown, a small industrial city on the eastern border of Ohio. Holden was active in playground sports and said he had girlfriends all throughout his school years, but as early as elementary school, he knew he was more strongly attracted to boys. Feeling “no real connection to anyone,” he was a bit confused about how to act, so he emulated typical male characters from TV shows in order to “feel normal.”

Coming from this small town and seeing that the few gay students in his high school were “unattractive, whiny and needy,” and not wanting “to be part of their group at all,” he never thought his future would hold anything differently than marrying a woman and having a traditional family. Even after coming out, he said he does not outwardly express his sexuality in general, he doesn’t “wear rainbow outfits or have pride symbols over me,” but he does attend Pride events and has joined the Pride group on campus.

Holden heard about my study through one of my contacts and was intrigued with the idea of having his voice be heard. We met twice for one hour each time in a meeting room at the university and I asked the same semi-structured interview questions that I asked the other participants (see Appendix A). At our initial interview, Holden seemed a bit shy and nervous. After talking for a short time, he began to relax and open up about his life quite readily.

In addition to the two recorded interviews, I collected various artifacts that Holden chose to share with me, as I had done with Ryan, Renee, and Isobel. The bulk of his offerings was poetry, since that is what he writes most often, but he also provided a
short story, and a piece he described as more of a stream of consciousness (all in Appendix E). These items are listed and discussed in detail in later sections.

Research Question 1

My first research question was, “What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?”

The K–12 experience. This section discusses Holden’s experiences in and out of school during the K–12 years. Please note that all words within quotation marks are direct quotes taken from the interviews conducted with Holden.

Earliest memories. Holden attended Catholic school from Kindergarten through high school. He remembers his Kindergarten teacher being a creative person who allowed the students to write stories for show and tell. Since he loved writing stories for class, he preferred doing that because he found listening to other students talk about personal items to be boring.

During the elementary years, Holden remembers preferring writing realistic fiction as opposed to true personal narratives because he was more “reserved and didn’t like to open up about myself.” When he was asked to write an actual personal narrative, he chose to “always write the same one, but in different ways.” Apparently, Holden was involved in a sledding accident when he was young and must have had a concussion. He said that he always wrote about that incident because “it’s the most interesting to me that I don’t actually know all that happened.” In this way, he could explore what might have happened in a creative way and have an endless array of scenarios from which to choose. This served as an important creative outlet for Holden during these early years, while also
helping provide him with a ‘go to’ prompt when he needed one. He also began writing poetry during elementary school and fell in love with the genre that turned out to be his lifeline in later years.

**Difficulties.** Beginning in elementary school, Holden holds unpleasant memories of being forced to share writing with the whole class. As mentioned earlier, he is reluctant to open up and expose himself in many ways and writing was no exception. He recalled one particular Mother’s Day event in which the students were supposed to read their poems for their mothers out loud in front of everyone, and he was so unnerved that he “faked that I had to puke. I wasn’t actually gonna throw up, but I told my mom I was going to and to get me out of there.” He strongly believes that students should only share pieces of writing that they choose, when they choose to do so, or at the very least, give fair warning. He does not think it is fair to surprise someone with the idea that “you just wrote this, now tell the whole class.”

Continuing into high school, Holden encountered uncomfortable situations, but mostly with inequalities he witnessed. Reading work aloud was not usually the problem at this level since it was often optional, but Holden did not like the way many teachers called out individual papers. He believes that when teachers praise a student’s work in front of their classmates, they run the risk of “making them kind of an outcast” with their peers, creating jealousy or feelings of failure for the students whose work was not singled out. He also noted that in his experience, English was the subject in which it was easier for students to “beg for grades” and be accommodated. He noticed that many teachers changed grades for students who were usually straight A students so they would not
Holden mentioned that teachers steered clear of any talk of sexuality, but remembered one discussion related to their reading of *The Great Gatsby*. He said that some of the students brought up the possibility of the characters Nick and Jay Gatsby being gay and the teacher said, “There’s a good chance of that,” and then moved on. Concerning English curriculum in general, Holden felt that the overall high school writing instruction was too formalized, “like a science where you have to write a certain way, certain format.” His freshman English teacher viewed English as “objective, you couldn’t give a different opinion,” and most of the assignments centered around writing in response to novels. Holden said that had he experienced more experimentation with writing styles, his writing “would’ve been better and I wouldn’t be so hyper-critical of myself. I always felt nervous, like if something was just slightly off from the rubric, I could be wrong.” He said he used to be more of a “literature person,” but as the pressure mounted to focus on science and math, “it disappeared and I slowly stopped caring about reading and writing.”

**Positives.** While much of Holden’s high school experience with writing was formal and caused him anxiety, and he felt pressure to make the grade in the STEM courses, his English teacher during junior year, Miss C., was an inspiration. One day, she stopped class and held a discussion about how important reading and writing were and
this just woke him up and “brought me back to everything in the literary area. She’s the reason why I’m majoring in English now.”

**Beyond the K–12 experience.** At the time of my interviews with Holden, he was only a few weeks into his freshman year in college and majoring in English. Although he had only been in his college English classes for a short time, he said he was already writing more and experimenting since his instructors were much more open to “interesting style, less formal, less strict guidelines, and more personal voice.”

Regarding revealing anything about his sexual identity in his writing, Holden said he was “fairly open in there [one of his English classes] because I know he’s the only one who sees the work, we don’t really share much, if we don’t want to.” He also felt confident enough to enter a scholarship contest for poetry at the university. Holden said that the work he submitted could have been construed as having gay undertones if people were really looking, but he did not think anyone looked that deeply.

**Research Question 2**

My second research question was, “In what ways are various modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ young adult community?”

As I did with the other participants’ profiles, I use the terms genre and mode to indicate the types of writing/composing Holden uses and the manner in which he uses them. Holden writes mostly for personal reasons, unlike the other participants. He has reached out through his writing to offer a cautionary tale to care for others, but most of his focus on caring for himself. He writes/composes for personal growth and self-expression; emotional support and stress relief; and he has used writing in the past to
divert his attention from possible self-harm. He uses social media for communicating with friends and expressing himself through visual images when he feels good about himself. This section serves to tell Holden’s story through his words.

Holden expresses himself through various genres of writing/composing and uses different modes for distinct purposes. He types on his laptop, or by hand in a composition notebook most of the time, but he did say he has even written “some stuff on my phone” for the times when he is in bed and needs to “hurry up and type something out before it just leaves me.” For an at-a-glance comparison of the pieces Holden submitted for this study, I have included a chart (see Table 7) with each artifact labeled and in the order in which I discuss it in the following section.

Table 7

*Holden’s Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Artifact and Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Image Fall 2012 (HS Jr.) Appendix E</td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (writing as a diversion to depression)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirror by Sylvia Plath Appendix E</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Inspiration for his poem, <em>Self/Image</em></td>
<td>Published</td>
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Table 7 (continued)

*Holden’s Artifacts*

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<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>A Reason</em> Spring 2013 (HS Jr.)</td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (getting over a breakup)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Appendix E</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Tragedy of a Star</em> Summer 2013 (prior to Sr. year)</td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care Care for others (cautionary tale for self and others)</td>
<td>Published on Tumblr</td>
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<td>Appendix E</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>A Beautiful Day for a Funeral</em> Fall 2013 (HS Sr.)</td>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (working out self-described “Daddy issues”)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Appendix E</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Beauty and Brain</em> Fall 2013 (HS Sr.)</td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (struggling with vanity and identity issues)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Appendix E</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>To the Wind</em> Fall 2013 (HS Sr.)</td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (struggling with identity and what he wants)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>To the Fire</em> Fall 2013 (HS Sr.)</td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (struggling with identity and what he wants)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Appendix E</td>
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*Holden’s Artifacts*

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<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<td><em>The Wind and the Fire</em></td>
<td>Poem in couplets (part 3 of 4)</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (struggling with identity and what he wants)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Fall 2013 (HS Sr.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>To the Darkness in Me</em></td>
<td>Poem in couplets (part 4 of 4)</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (realization of identity and what he needs)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2013 (HS Sr.)</td>
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<td><em>A Week Later</em></td>
<td>Free Verse (6 verses- Question/Statements)</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (dealing with bad breakup and suicidal thoughts)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2014 (HS Sr.)</td>
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<td>Appendix E</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Baptism in Blood</em></td>
<td>Sonnet</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (experimentation with historical references)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<td>Summer 2014 (prior to college)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Typed out on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (dealing with frustration / trying to get past writer’s block)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 2014 (prior to college)</td>
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<td>Appendix E</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Struggle for Solitude</em></td>
<td>Poem in couplets</td>
<td>Handwritten on notebook paper</td>
<td>Self-expression/ Self-care (dealing with changes due to attending college)</td>
<td>Not published</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2014 (College Freshman)</td>
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<td>Figure 38</td>
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This section looks at the genres of writing and in which modes Holden composes by looking at excerpts of various pieces and what benefits they have provided for him in the past and how he benefits today. Holden composes on the computer or by hand in a notebook, but sometimes types in the notes section of his phone when he feels the urgent need to get thoughts out of his head in a hurry. Writing has been a lifeline for Holden during some difficult times in his life, while social media played a different role. He uses Facebook as a way of keeping in touch, while Instagram photos are for communicating his happier times. It is important to note that some of the artifacts are included in typed form, while others are shown as scans of original art or handwritten text. I have used these scans whenever the artifacts were submitted that way.
Poetry. Although Holden found more pleasure in being able to experiment with style in his essays and other writings for his college classes, he still tends to fall back into the more structured sonnet-like poetry he learned during his high school years. He said he has written some odes and enjoys reading free verse, but much prefers rhyming and writes in couplets most of the time. Poetry was something he enjoyed as far back as elementary school, but became an emotional need for him during his junior year of high school. Holden said poetry is what he goes to “during the bad times.” Writing poetry is raw and emotional for him and is a way he “gets through the grieving process” when something bad happens in his life.

Holden said that he was suicidal for a time during sophomore year, but he did not elaborate and said he was not using writing as emotional release at that time. The first poem he shared with me, “Self Image” (Appendix E), was written during the fall of his junior year in high school (2012). He said that he was depressed and wanted to hurt himself, almost a relapse of his suicidal thoughts from sophomore year, and turned to writing as a diversion. This piece was inspired by Sylvia Plath’s poem, “Mirror” (Appendix E). In Plath’s piece, the narrator is a mirror that watches a woman grow older. Holden uses the idea of the mirror to reflect on his poor self-image:

So why in this mirror do I look so ugly?

That is because I can clearly see me.

At the time, he viewed himself “as a crappy person,” and was getting those thoughts on the page. When he read his poem, he thought it was bad and the more he thought about how much his “writing sucked,” it diverted his attention to be mad about that and “not do
something dangerous.” He thought this was “not exactly normal,” but it helped him get through this phase of his life.

The next poem, “A Reason” (Appendix E), was written in the spring of his junior year in high school (2013). This poem directly followed a breakup and he wanted to express his feelings of depression. Just prior to the breakup, Holden was attempting to experiment with writing for fun, “but then everything happened and I needed to write to get this out. I was upset and really felt hopeless. I contributed so much to a person and they basically were like, oh, I’m bored, goodbye. That hurt a lot.” In this poem, he is holding on to the feelings that he will get through this if he can figure out the reason he is still here, having survived the suicidal tendencies of his recent past:

There’s a reason I’m here
Tell me what I plead

He got through that spring and by the summer of 2013, prior to his senior year of high school, he had transformed himself a bit. He calls this time his “vanity phase” because he was venturing beyond his small parochial high school and meeting other people. He said he was never considered particularly attractive by his classmates of any gender, but suddenly found that he was attractive to both boys and girls outside of his school community. He was also beginning to embrace his “new sexuality” at this time and began “obsessing” over his looks and this newfound popularity and began “struggling with my grades.” His poem entitled, “The Tragedy of a Star” (Appendix E), tells the story of a young woman looking for fame as an actress, resorting to prostitution, and ending up dead:
Spit out your vanity and swallow your pride,
Abandoning her dignity, nightly, she cried.
That very month, in the gutter she died!

Holden is using writing to exaggerate his issues and project them on to a fictional character, almost as a cautionary tale to himself, as a reminder to not get so caught up in his looks. He is caring for himself, but he also decided to post this piece on Tumblr to help others either look at their own lives or not be quick to judge people going through something like this. He said, “I had to write it out and put it on someone else, but also to gain sympathy for those people ’cause they don’t have the best lives.”

Into the fall of his senior year in high school (2013), Holden continued down the path of being more “worried about his looks than trying hard in school.” In the poem, “Beauty and the Brain” (Appendix E), he is exploring his struggle with vanity and wondering if it was better to be smart or attractive. He begins the piece stating, “What man would choose beauty over a brain, no such choice was ever so vain,” admitting the vanity of that choice, but ends with, “I would surely choose beauty over brain, and save myself some awful pain.” Here he has concluded that being attractive is the easier choice, not having to work as hard. It is interesting to note that he wanted to make this a commentary on society because he was taught that writing should have “greater reasons” than just personal release or growth, and yet he was writing from such a personal place.

From that same fall, he wrote four related poems that reflect his struggle with his bisexuality. In this set of poems, Holden agonizes over and scrutinizes his feelings for a long time female friend/girlfriend and his new desire for a man he had recently met. In
the first one, “To the Wind” (Appendix E), he speaks of his love for his female friend and that she eventually turned on him once she learned of the other love in his life. In the companion piece, “To the Fire” (Appendix E), Holden turns his attention to the new, exciting relationship he found with a male, but realizes it may not be a true connection. In the third piece, “The Wind and the Fire” (Appendix E), he compares the two relationships and his inability to choose, which left him alone in the end:

I could not choose and without a doubt,

The Wind has left me, and the Fire burnt out.

After reflecting on his struggle with what he wants, Holden turns to thinking about what he needs. In the fourth and final piece in this set, “To the Darkness in Me” (Appendix E), Holden has realized he should not be in a relationship until he gets himself together and he has an opportunity to do some soul searching:

Neutral at worst, truly misunderstood though.

Darkness is not evil, but good not yet found.

Although he only realized it after reviewing for submission to this study, these four poems helped Holden care for himself through this “struggle of working out my sexuality.” He said, “I matured a lot [since then], ’cause I can observe them [these poems] now and [realize], wow, I was telling myself something and I wasn’t listening.”

There are no other writings offered from that fall, but by the spring of his senior year (2013), Holden has clearly loved and lost again, as evidenced by his free verse poem, “A Week Later” (Appendix E). In this piece, he is once again dealing with a breakup, but this one is after a more serious relationship and his suicidal thoughts
reemerge. Holden experiments with a different format from his usual couplets. He has six verses, each beginning with a question and then he supplies statements that reflect possible answers to those questions. The first verse sets up the rest of the piece:

Why would he say he loved me? It was a blatant lie from the start.

I was too damn desperate to see it. It was probably all my fault.

Oh a text message! Damn . . . just a friend. I just want to be free from all this.

The rest of the poem slowly devolves into a depressed contemplation of himself as a bad person and thoughts of committing suicide by taking pills. Holden said that this was something he “fantasized about, but didn’t do,” and felt that writing this poem, “this pretending, it helped” him play out this scenario without having to actually carry it out.

Spring turned to summer and Holden had successfully survived that breakup, although he was still intrigued with the idea of suicide, only this time in a historical context. In “Baptism of Blood” (Appendix E), Holden writes a sonnet-style poem with references to his learning about the ancient Romans (although he thought it was the Greeks). He was interested in how they would slit their wrists in a warm bath and wrote about an attempted suicide using this method. He said he was not suicidal while writing this poem, but romanticized death as something beautiful. At the end of this poem, however, the narrator rethinks his plan, not yet ready to end his life:

I thought a departure with dignity would lessen the fall.

This was just a baptism in blood; I am not leaving at all.

Holden felt this poem was less emotional since he was not writing it from his own depression, but he was still exploring his thoughts surrounding this topic in a safer way.
During that same summer (2014), prior to beginning college, Holden became frustrated when he developed writer’s block. He decided to turn to nature as an inspiration in an attempt to get past the block. In an untitled poem (Appendix E), he explores death, but this time, he writes about the death of a deer at the hands of a hunter. He said it was a fluke that this poem survived since he usually destroys what he writes for this purpose, thinking they are “trash.”

The final three poems Holden provided for this study were all written within the first month of his freshman year in college. All three share the common theme of reflecting on his observations or feelings about college life. In “Struggle for Solitude” (Figure 38), he is dealing with his inability to find alone time, something he feels is a necessity to be able to “regroup.”

He said, “I wanted to be alone, but I was with my friends at the time, so I felt really bad, ’cause I didn’t mean away from them, I just meant from it all.” Writing this piece “made me realize that I don’t necessarily need to be alone, but it still make me miss it, I still crave solitude, at least.”

While constantly being surrounded by people, Holden began noticing the everyday addictions (e.g., smoking, video games, drinking) people have and decided to not only explore this, but experiment with his writing style. Since he was learning about the stream of consciousness writings of William Faulkner and James Joyce, he wanted to see if he could emulate them. In “Addiction” (Figure 39), Holden writes from the perspective of people who defend their addictions. He mirrors the “endless loop of addiction” by ending the poem with the same line with which it begins.
"Struggle for Solitude"

Please help me find "Alone.
Because without him I can't be me.
He enables me, my skills to hone.
Without him, no one can really see.
With ‘Alone’ I show who I have to be.
‘Alone’ taught me how I could be true.
And revealed that I was lost a gain.
He gave me a chance to live a new.
Without him, the world is full of pain.
With them, I act the part all in pain.
‘Alone’ is the one place I feel alive.
In this environment I can't thrive.

Figure 38. “Struggle for Solitude,” Fall 2014

"Addiction"

I suppose you could call it a nasty habit, but there's a slight inaccuracy in that statement. You see, it's not actually a habit. It is just something I do for fun sometimes. Okay, maybe I do it a lot in a repetitive fashion, but it isn't like I need it. It is definitely nice to have, but not a necessity. I could function perfectly fine without it... for a few days. But why would I and why should I? It is really not that harmful. I might as well do it on a regular basis. I like it so why not?

Correction, I love it. There's no reason you should judge me for it. I wouldn't judge you if you did it. You aren't trying to help me. I don't need help. I swear I don't have a problem. I suppose you could call it a nasty habit, but...

Figure 39. “Addiction,” Fall 2014
He is still using writing to make sense of his world, but it is becoming a bit more sophisticated. This piece reflects how he is turning the mirror around onto society instead of always having it face him.

The final poem, “A Party” (Appendix E), is another study of college life, but harks back to his usual couplet style. This poem seems to be happy and alive with merriment, but it comes with undertones of Holden’s disapproval of this lifestyle due to his religious beliefs. He did not like seeing how so many college students were “treating life like it’s just a fun party, getting drunk all the time.” He believes that “life is the eternal struggle to make it to death . . . you should enjoy it, but work hard and take it seriously [since] life is short compared to eternity.” The poem opens with the lines:

Let’s have a party, let’s sing and let’s dance.

Let’s have a party, and frolic and prance.

He ends the poem alluding to his beliefs:

Shall we be merry, some temporary pleasure.

Shall we be merry, few moments to treasure.

Leaving the gathering, let’s have one last breath.

Leaving the gathering, at least I feel happy in death.

Again, death makes an appearance in his poetry, but this time it is not in reference to suicide. Growing up in a religious household and attending Catholic schools did not quite prepare him for the experiences he would have in college. Writing about the world around him is his way of making sense of what he is feeling about these new experiences. He said that writing about these topics “helped me mature, both in my writing style, also
it helps me grow emotionally. I can process much more rationally. When I’m done writing, I just have a clear head and I can think about things.”

**Short story.** The only non-poem Holden provided for the study was a short story from the fall of his senior year of high school (2013) entitled, “A Beautiful Day for a Funeral” (Appendix E). He said this was purely a piece of fiction, but probably stemmed from his “Daddy issues” and a TV show/movie in which the father was abusive, but the children still loved him. As mentioned earlier, Holden only ever alluded to his father’s alcoholism and possible emotional or verbal abuse, but said that he really is not sure why he has issues with his father. He did say that he “couldn’t relate to him like a parent, I can view him as a friend. I still love him, but it doesn’t feel right, everything doesn’t feel right with us.” This story is told through the memories of an adult narrator attending the funeral of his father when he was just a boy. The narrator remembers the physical beauty of the day and juxtaposes it with the “somber” mood of the event as he reflects on the hurt (physical abuse) his father caused in the family, especially to his younger sister. It is clear that the narrator has not had contact with his sister since that day and carries the emotional scars that are leading him to contemplate suicide:

Darla [sister] slowly fades away daily, though she is the only positive memory I have of the past besides that beautiful day. All I know is she is safe and he can’t hurt her anymore. He still hurts me to this day . . . Death is fair, though . . . I need some more water, too dry to swallow.

Holden again references suicide and romanticizes death in a fictional piece that helps him explore and confront these issues in a way that feels safe for him to do so.
**Social media.** Although Holden has accounts on a few of the social media platforms, his use has dropped off since beginning college. He views it as isolating or combative and does not enjoy it as much as he used to. He said, “I see my friends on their phones on social media when we’re hanging out and it’s just become [isolating], I don’t want to be like this.” He also talked about how “you could post the simplest thing, like a happy little cat, and there will be a fight about it being against feminism or the gay community. It gets so aggressive.”

While Holden has Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram accounts, they all serve different purposes. He used to read “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” fan fiction on Tumblr, because he “didn’t feel closure at the end of it,” but that has died down. The only writing he discussed posting on his Tumblr account was the short story inspired by his relationship with his father. He thought that was the best place to share that so others might benefit from reading it.

Holden’s Facebook page is generally a social space to keep in touch with friends, but sometimes he uses it as a “passive-aggressive, anger management tool.” He finds it difficult to confront people when they have wronged him or ask for help from his friends when something has happened, so he will change the privacy settings on certain posts so certain friends can see it. He does this for two reasons, one is so the person who has done something will know they did something, but he does not want it public. The other reason is in hopes his friends will “just step in. It’s kind of selfish, but I don’t actually want to go to them ever, I feel guilty to go to them and say I have a problem.” He likens it to writing in a journal, only “wanting it out there. If they don’t see it, I don’t mind,
’cause it’s still pleasing ’cause it’s writing in a journal setting anyway.” In this way, he is using writing to call out someone who has wronged him, indirectly call out for help from friends, and get all of his feelings out, regardless if anyone sees the post or not. It should be noted, however, that he does not specifically name the person with whom he is angry. Instead, he discusses the situation and assumes the right person/people will see the post and recognize themselves. By doing it in this way, he is not hurting someone else publicly, as he would not want to be called out in that manner. That is the reason he considers this a “passive-aggressive, anger management tool” for himself. Writing is his emotional support, something he does to “try and keep myself rational. It often does prevent outbursts. If I actually sit down and write, I think about it and it settles me down.”

As discussed in earlier sections, Holden writes when he needs to work out negative experiences in his life, but when he is in a good mood, he takes pictures of himself and posts them. He said he does not use Tumblr anymore, but when he did, he was dreaming of becoming a model and used it primarily to post creative, tasteful photos of himself in his underwear.

Instagram has always been, and continues to be, where Holden turns when he is happy. He takes and posts selfies when he feels “good, confident, and they help me stay in that mood for a bit longer.”

Summary

Holden is a young man who identifies primarily as gay, but at the time of the study, was beginning to think that the label pansexual might fit him best since he thinks
he is capable of being attracted to people who identify anywhere on the LGBTQ spectrum. He grew up in a Catholic household and only attended parochial schools. He grew up knowing he was “not quite like other boys,” but did not come out until his senior year of high school, and only then to his mother, sister, and friends. He had a strained relationship with his father and struggled with many personal issues during his high school years. He was not only struggling with his relationship with his father, his identity as a gay or pansexual male, but had also gone through great upheaval in his young life dealing with loss of love, issues with vanity, and depression/suicidal thoughts. He turned to writing to help make sense of his experiences and directly attributes writing with saving his life because it enables his “mind to focus, to release and engage, making the bad thoughts slowly escape me.” Holden primarily writes poetry to help him through the bad times, but has expressed himself through other genres. He uses selfies as a form of expression during the good times and has, on occasion, used social media to care for others. View a short multi-media found poem: https://youtu.be/PXPj6UGZzH8

John

“Writing allows analysis and synthesis of information, but knowing I helped someone is important to me.”

My final participant chose the pseudonym, John. At the time of our first meeting, he was 22 years old and just beginning a Masters program in Public Health at a nearby Northeast Ohio suburban university. His future plans include earning a PhD in Public Health and becoming a leading researcher in HIV/AIDS prevention. He identified as a gay man, but did not come out until his sophomore year of college, just two years prior.
Growing up in a small industrial city on the eastern border of Ohio, he found himself censoring his words and his actions. He said, “I had to watch what I say, what if people found out, what if my family found out?” John said that his coming out during college was progressive, and only to people he knew he could trust. First he told his best friend, then his mother and sisters. He did not elaborate on his home or social life, but I got the impression that his coming out was a positive experience and he is currently happy living life out and proud.

Like Holden, he heard about my study through one of my contacts and thought it sounded like an interesting topic. We met twice for one hour each time in a meeting room at the university and I asked the same semi-structured interview questions that I asked the other participants (see Appendix A).

At our initial interview, John arrived on time, wearing a suit and tie. His dark blond hair was shorter on the sides and the top portion, a bit longer, was brushed up. He was a bit reserved in the beginning, but eventually relaxed and became eager to talk about his passion for writing informational research pieces about HIV/AIDS. In addition to the two recorded interviews, I collected various artifacts that John chose to share with me, as I had done with the other participants. He offered four academic papers that he felt represented the only genre of writing in which he engages (Appendix F). These items are listed and discussed in detail in later sections.

**Research Question 1**

My first research question was, “What are the experiences of LGBTQ identified young adults with writing/self-expression in and out of the K–12 classroom and beyond?”
The K–12 experience. This section discusses John’s experiences in and out of school during the K–12 years. Please note that all words within quotation marks are direct quotes taken from the interviews conducted with John.

Earliest memories. John had only vague memories of elementary school in general, but for writing, he said he “basically did a couple book reports, and stuff like that.” Writing was not something memorable at this time in his life, except for poetry, which “was terrible for me personally.”

Difficulties. Writing was not particularly difficult for John, but “in high school it was more [creative/fiction] stories and personal narratives and more grammar. I wish they would’ve taught more third person, expository writing so it wasn’t a difficult habit to break [for college].”

Although he was successful, he just never found the types of writing assignments to be that enjoyable or meaningful for him for most of his schooling. John did say that if creative writing had not been so overly emphasized, he “might write more creatively now, I really needed more of a balance.”

Positives. Writing during the last two years of high school were much more enjoyable for John because he had some choices. During their junior year, the students were allowed to select from a list of various English classes and he “chose a specific class because the teacher was harder, and that’s what I wanted, someone to start pushing me a little bit more.” He also found that Journalism class was more in line with his writing interests and joined the high school newspaper.
John spent his senior year in Finland as part of an exchange program. There he found that keeping a journal was a good way to “look back and see all those things I did. Mostly it was like a personal diary, but at times I wrote some deeper reflections.” He said he is happy he kept track of his experiences during that time, but has not felt the need to use journaling since.

**Beyond the K–12 experience.** Prior to college, writing never really held any interest for John, except for his foray into journalism. Once in college, he discovered that he “enjoyed writing, but really found his niche when I started academic writing and everything started clicking with me a little bit more.” It was late in his undergraduate career that writing took on even more meaning when “a professor complimented me on a paper during my senior year of college and that kind of spurred me on.”

**Research Question 2**

My second research question was, “In what ways are various modes and genres of writing used in the LGBTQ young adult community?”

As I did with the other participants’ profiles, I use the terms genre and mode to indicate the types of writing/composing John uses and the manner in which he uses them. Like Ryan, Renee, and Isobel, John writes for social justice advocacy, but does derive personal fulfillment through these writings. He cares for others through his writing/composing to share his research and knowledge related to public health issues, especially as a way to reach out to others in the LGBTQ community to offer important information on prevention of HIV/AIDS. In so doing, his writing serves as a way for him to express himself and what he deems important for himself and this community, a way
to care for himself and others. He has also used social media to shine a spotlight on and disseminate this information. This section serves to tell John’s story through his words.

John expresses himself primarily though his academic articles, but is inspired by song lyrics in his personal life. For an at-a-glance comparison of the pieces John submitted for this study, I have included a chart (see Table 8) with each artifact labeled and in the order in which I discuss it in the following section.

Table 8

*John’s Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Artifact and Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS and the Global Impact Appendix F</td>
<td>Academic Paper Dec. 2013</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Self-care (topic of choice and personal knowledge) Care for others (disseminate information)</td>
<td>Published (turned in to class for a grade)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV Appendix F</td>
<td>Academic Paper Spring 2014</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Self-care (topic of choice and personal knowledge) Care for others (disseminate information)</td>
<td>Published (turned in to class for a grade)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS Among African-American Men ages 20-44 Appendix F</td>
<td>Academic Paper Spring 2014</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Self-care (topic of choice and personal knowledge) Care for others (disseminate information)</td>
<td>Published (turned in to class for a grade)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 8 (continued)

*John’s Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Artifact and Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men Who Have Sex with Men Project Appendix F</td>
<td>Academic Long-term Study Proposal Spring 2014</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Self-care (chose to be part of the study team) Care for others (setting up study in order to help others)</td>
<td>Published (turned in to class for a grade)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Others’ words with Corresponding Appendix</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Published/Not Published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hometown Glory by Adele from the album “19”</td>
<td>Song lyrics</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (reflecting on being from a small town and wanting to make them proud)</td>
<td>Published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any song from Adele’s “21” album</td>
<td>Song lyrics</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (dealing with his breakup from his first boyfriend)</td>
<td>Published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No individual song mentioned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravity by Sara Bareilles</td>
<td>Song lyrics</td>
<td>Typed on paper</td>
<td>Self-expression Self-care (reflecting on the feelings of having something holding him back—fear of coming out)</td>
<td>Published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This section looks at the genres of writing and in which modes John composes by looking at excerpts of various pieces and what benefits they have provided for him in the past and how he benefits today. John only writes academic papers and has found great meaning in writing about LGBTQ issues, especially those related to HIV/AIDS information and prevention. For personal stress release, John turns to music, mediation, and yoga. He mentioned some songs in particular that have inspired him and made him wish he had written them.

**Academic papers.** As discussed earlier, John was not particularly fond of most types of writing during his K–12 years, except for journalism. He felt creative writing instruction was overdone during his schooling and wishes he had had even more journalism classes because he thinks that would have “helped him grow a little bit more.” He seems to have been able to work through what he felt was inadequate instruction and is now writing academic papers with great skill. He changed his major many times throughout his undergraduate education, but once he discovered Public Health, he realized that would be his calling:

The topic [HIV/AIDS] is so relatable, I know people who are HIV positive, like experiences that I’ve had and they have had, it’s very, you know, that could’ve happened to me, and very easily. That’s what really drives me, I don’t want young people to necessarily make the same mistakes, I guess you could say, that I made in my past.

I met with John early in the fall of his first graduate semester. The papers he submitted for inclusion in this study are all from his senior year of undergraduate study,
which is the year he discovered his passion for this subject matter, and that writing about it served as personal and professional fulfillment. The first piece we discussed was from fall 2013, and titled, “HIV/AIDS and The Global Impact” (Appendix F). This was a final paper for the class, Environmental Issues in Low and Middle Income Countries. He was able to choose his topic and he said he always leans more “toward HIV/AIDS because that is what I’m most interested in.” He begins the paper by taking great care in explaining the difference between HIV and AIDS and creating a definition that most people would be able to understand. He then discusses the global situation and breaks down the four risk factors that affect low- and middle-income countries: Environmental, Social and Behavioral, Cultural, and Economic; stressing that it is not only a sexually transmitted disease. The rest of the paper focuses on how “education is the number one strategy to prevent HIV/AIDS” in these countries and some innovative methods for carrying this out. He said that not only did he “learn things I didn’t know about the disease,” he feels that his work will be able to help others.

The second piece, “HIV” (Appendix F), from the spring of 2014, was a paper for his Prevention and Control of Diseases class. This paper served as a reflection on the research he did for this class, relative to various HIV prevention strategies and analyzing their strengths and limitations. He found great personal fulfillment in doing this research, analyzing the various strategies, and having to synthesize the information. During our discussion, he realized that much of the information he has researched and compiled could be incorporated into educational, easy to understand pamphlets for quick dissemination to the populations that need it the most.
For his Health Disparities class in the spring of 2014, his final paper was “HIV/AIDS Among African-American Men ages 20–44” (Appendix F). He said he took this course in conjunction with the AIDS Issues Prevention Education class and they “learned how it disproportionally affect African American men, with the largest risk group being between the ages of 20–44.” Because he felt this population needed help, he chose to further research this topic and said he was “most proud of this paper because I put the most effort in it and I like the way I broke it down into three risk factor groups and came up with a public health intervention.” In this paper, he was beginning to utilize the expertise he was gaining and come up with an original intervention plan. It was during this discussion that he stopped and thought for a minute. He smiled and said, “I think if I condense this one a little, I could turn it into a journal article or I could create a flyer with the main risk factor information.”

The last piece John shared with me was “Men Who Have Sex with Men Project,” (Appendix F), a proposal for a longitudinal study on which he was working with his graduate advisor in the spring of 2014. He said that the project had been put on the back burner until December of 2014 and was looking forward to being a part of this important venture. This study will be an overall health assessment of men who have sex with men in Cleveland and cover the following topics: tobacco, drugs, alcohol, sexual behavior, and overall mental health. Again, he stopped for a moment after outlining the program to me and then said, “I could tie in the African American men piece with this as an offshoot.” It was clear that he was beginning to see how all his work was coming
together and he became excited at the prospect of turning his writings into easily accessible information.

John said that reading was important for gaining knowledge in his subject area, but it was in the “writing of it that allowed the analysis and synthesis” so necessary for being able to create new knowledge and move the field forward. He said he was So passionate about HIV or other LGBTQ issues, that I take more time in the writing of these papers [than other subjects]. I want to help people who don’t have access to all that information and that gives me personal fulfillment.

Knowing that I helped someone and possibly, in a way, could’ve saved someone’s life, is important to me.

Social media. John said that he had a LinkedIn account that he used strictly for professional contact, but also acknowledged that he had a Facebook page. He said it was for personal/social use and he was “more of a lurker, but will share something I find interesting.” He said there had been a slight increase in his Facebook posting during the time of our interviews due to the recent Ebola scare and used his page as more of an informational site dealing with the current health issues. After thinking about it for a minute, John said that he was also a member of a LGBT exchange student group on Facebook. He remembered that one student from Texas posted something about being prescribed Truvada, one of the HIV prevention drugs. John “private messaged him to give him more information than his doctor did. Truvada is only preventative against HIV 1 and not HIV 2 and I wanted him to be informed.” Here, John was worried about someone he did not really know and made sure he had all the facts and even provided
appropriate citations so the student could read up on the drug. John said that student wrote back thanking him because “his doctor never told him any of that.”

John said that another member of this group wrote that he “was afraid to get tested, afraid since he wasn’t out, but I [John] suggested that not only gay people contract HIV and you are just looking out for your health.” Here, again, John is reaching out through social media to help others by offering possible life-saving information gained through his research and writing.

**Yoga/Meditation/Music.** John finds personal meaning through the act of writing and “being able to relay information to other people to help them.” He said that in some ways it also provides him with somewhat of a “personal outlet for his stress.” Other stress relief for John comes in the form of yoga, meditation, and listening to music. Mostly, he enjoys listening and singing along to a variety of music, but he did mention some specific music that holds special meaning for him. When Adele’s second album, “21,” came out in 2011, John had just broken up with his first boyfriend and this entire album is “all about breaking up with someone.” He said, “This was my go-to album, I had it on repeat since the day it came out until, I still play it, you know. It was just one of those that really sparked me.”

While he did not specifically name a song from that album, he did discuss two songs that spoke to him and expressed his feelings better than he ever could. He said that the song, “Hometown Glory” (Appendix F), from Adele’s first album, “19,” was of particular importance to him during his senior year abroad in Finland. He said that it reflected his feelings of wanting to “make his hometown proud.” He said being from a
small town, not many people get an opportunity like the one he had, so “it was huge that someone in my town was actually going away” and this song just made him feel connected to home. The song that he says “really helped” him, was “Gravity,” by Sara Bareilles (Appendix F). John said he wished he “would have written that song because of the symbolism, you know there’s something holding you back and for me, it was the fear of coming out.” He said that song brought things to light for him and he became a little teary-eyed just thinking about it. During the summer just prior to our interview, Sara Bareilles had been in Cleveland and John said he “cried in the middle of the concert” when she sang that song because “it had so much meaning behind it.” John said he knows he reacted to this music but never really thought of how it was other people’s words that had helped him find meaning for his own life until our interviews.

**Summary**

John is an openly gay man from a small Ohio town who did not come out until midway through his undergraduate experience. The only writing he felt drawn to during his K–12 years was journalism, but it was in college, through his passion of researching and disseminating information about HIV/AIDS, that John actually discovered the importance of writing in his own life. Writing helped him find his career path in helping others, which in turn, helped him with his own identity struggles. John also gains insight for his own life from the words of others through their song lyrics. John primarily uses knowledge and information he has gained through his research and academic writing to reach out to others through social networking sites, but also finds personal fulfillment in doing so. View a short multi-media found poem: [https://youtu.be/Ohay6LzoM6E](https://youtu.be/Ohay6LzoM6E)
Cross Case Analysis

Individual cases were analyzed to provide an understanding of the writing practices of five LGBTQ self-identified young adults, aged 18–25. These participants, Ryan, Renee, Isobel, Holden, and John, identified in various ways on the LGBTQ spectrum and incorporated some form of writing/self-expression into their lives at the time of the study. The emergent findings from the five cases were examined for similarities and differences and are discussed in this chapter.

I have compared the participants based on how they identify, their levels of education, what genres and modes of writing and other self-expression they have used in the past and what they use currently, and the purposes these genres and modes serve. As an overview, I include comparison charts for each section I discuss.

Identifying Factors

Since I was interested in the individual experiences of LGBTQ young adults with writing and other forms of expression during the K–12 school years and beyond, it was important to obtain a purposive sample (Merriam, 2002). I hoped to recruit participants who identified across the spectrum and across the stated age band, but I knew this might be a difficult task. Fortunately, the five individuals who responded to my call for participants were diverse in their ages, gender identities, sexual orientations, and levels of education. They did not differ in race, however, since all five participants were Caucasian, and this is addressed in the limitations section of Chapter 5. Table 9 provides an at-a-glance comparison of the participants’ identities regarding age, gender, sexual orientation, level of education and employment.
Table 9

*Participant’s Identities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>At What Age?</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>At What Age?</th>
<th>Level of Education/Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male/Transgender/Queer</td>
<td>15–18 / 19–25</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>11–14</td>
<td>In College (Junior) Working Part Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11–14</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>15–18</td>
<td>High School Employed Full Time (Care industry and Volunteer Fire Fighter and Photographer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isobel</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>11–14</td>
<td>College (BS) Employed Full Time (Law office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holden</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>Gay/Pansexual</td>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>In College (Freshman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0–5</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>6–18</td>
<td>In Graduate School (First year Masters level) Working Part Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gender.* Of the five participants, two identified as male (Holden and John), two as female (Renee and Isobel), and one was a trans*gender male (Ryan) who also identified as queer. Isobel, Holden, and John all said that they were aware of their gender identification early, at least by elementary school, and it matched their sex assigned at birth. Renee had a little more difficulty since she knew she did not like the same things that many of her female identified friends and sisters did and was confused by this, but did firmly identify as a female by middle school age. Ryan also had difficulties figuring out his gender identity from an early age. As a young child, he knew that typical female
clothing, toys, and activities were not of interest, but as he grew older and realized that sexual/romantic attraction was another issue for him, he was afraid to deal with both identities and did not truly acknowledge his trans identity until late high school into college, and even then, he was struggling with telling his mother and other friends and family members.

**Sexual orientation.** Of the five participants, two identified as gay (Holden and John), with Holden also leaning toward identifying as having a pansexual orientation (a person who experiences sexual/romantic, physical/spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions). Two identified as lesbian (Renee and Isobel), and one as bisexual/queer (Ryan). It was due to his realization of his bisexuality that held Ryan back from allowing himself to accept his trans*gender identity. He was afraid to deal with both aspects at once and felt that bisexuality was the most acceptable identity at the time he came out in high school. Renee went through school a bit confused about her sexual orientation since she came from a religious background and was frightened about coming out. It was not until the age of 25 that she found the courage to live openly. Isobel was attracted to girls in elementary school, but was not old enough to realize what that meant at the time. Coming from a supportive family allowed her to openly identify as a lesbian by her early teens. Both Holden and John realized they were gay at an early age, but neither came out until much later, Holden in high school and John in college.

**Age, level of education, employment.** All five participants were of varying ages within the 18–25 year old age band that I had chosen at the outset, situating them in the young adult category, but having completed their K–12 schooling. This was an important
factor because I wanted them to be old enough to be able to recall these years, but still young enough to not be too far removed from that population. Two participants (Ryan and Holden) were in college, working towards a bachelor’s degree. Ryan was in his junior year, whereas Holden had just begun as a freshman. Two were college graduates (Isobel and John), with John being in his first semester of a master’s program. One participant (Renee) graduated from high school and did not attend college; however, she hopes to be accepted in a social work program in the near future. At the time of this study, two were English majors (Ryan and Holden), whereas John was studying Public Health and Isobel had graduated from an international studies program and was working in a law office with her sights set on a possible law career in the future.

**K–12 experiences.** These five individuals, ages 18–25 and identifying somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum, did not know one another or attend the same school system during their K–12 years. Four participants (Ryan, Renee, Holden, John) feared coming out at home and school for various reasons: physical and emotional safety, religion, social status. Only Isobel had a supportive parent early on and came out in middle school, although she was one of two (Isobel and Holden) participants who struggled with depression and low self-worth, as well as a distant and/or abusive father/stepfather. All five participants acknowledged the lack of any inclusive curricula related to LGBTQ issues during these school years, which made them constantly aware of the need to censor their writings or other forms of expression. Four participants (Ryan, Renee, Isobel, Holden) expressed their desire for more creative writing guidance/instruction during their K–12 years, feeling that there was too much emphasis
on expository writing. Conversely, John experienced the opposite. He said that in his school, there was too much focus on creative writing and he was more interested in journalistic/informational writing. Only Renee expressed that she had learning difficulties that contributed to her waning interest in writing during these years.

While they had similar experiences with curricular concerns, their experiences with teachers were more varied. Ryan was the only participant to discuss difficulties with particular teachers not accepting certain genres of work as valid (fan fiction), or creating an uncomfortable atmosphere that was focused on gender-specific practices. They all spoke of at least one teacher who was a positive influence in their writing lives by encouraging them in some way. These experiences are detailed in Chapter 5 in the Role of Teachers section.

**New literacies.** For analysis of the individual cases, I focused on breaking down the genres and modes they used to express themselves because it is important to note that their uses of multimodalities were essential in their choices of what message they wanted to convey and the manner in which they presented it. All of the participants incorporated written text with other artistic forms or multimedia in some way, which Kress (2003) and Hull and Nelson (2005) considered to be part of the new literacies I discussed in Chapter 1. The following sections discuss how each participant used these new literacies.

**Genres of writing/self-expression.** All five participants used writing/composing in some way to express themselves, with some using other forms of expression, as well. Table 10 provides an at-a-glance comparison of the genres that each participant shared during the study, but the individual genres/forms of expression are discussed in detail in
### Table 10

*Genres/Forms of Expression*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Journaling</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Personal Essays / Narratives / Vignettes</th>
<th>Song Lyrics (from others)</th>
<th>Blogging</th>
<th>Stories (Fiction)</th>
<th>Articles (Academic and/or Journalistic)</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>*Sketching or drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Spoken Word Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✗</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Photography</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Memes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isobel</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Memes</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holden</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Selfies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✔</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the Purposes/Themes section in which I discuss each participant and their uses of these forms.

Most participants used three or more genres of writing or other expression (Ryan, Renee, Isobel, and Holden), whereas John wrote primarily academic articles. Ryan, Isobel, and Holden relied heavily on poetry, and Renee found journaling to be her lifeline. Both Isobel and John also found that the words of others, primarily through song lyrics, could be inspirational and life changing. Ryan, Renee, Isobel, and Holden found that self-expression through the visual arts was also something that helped them. Ryan loves to draw, especially characters in the anime style, whereas Renee and Holden both use original photography. Renee takes photos for her job as a fire fighter and also enjoys wedding, portrait, and natural scenic photography. Holden uses self-portraits (selfies) to express his feelings, especially when he is happy. Isobel has gravitated away from writing and more toward the use of personal photographs on Instagram as her mode of expression. Isobel and Renee also found Facebook memes to be helpful forms of expression and these are discussed more in the social media section.

**Social media.** The new literacies of social media that have become ubiquitous in our everyday experiences played a large part in the lives of all five participants, but in varying ways. For most participants, their communication via these sites was multimodal, using imagery and text to express themselves. Table 11 provides an at-a-glance comparison of how each participant incorporates the new literacies of social media and multimodality into their lives.
Table 11

Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Personal Website</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Tumblr</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>Gaming Social Sites</th>
<th>Fan Fiction Sites</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isobel</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holden</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of composing their works, four participants primarily wrote their works online, while Renee found that old-fashioned journaling by hand in homemade books worked best for her. It gave her a way to not only express herself in writing, but also through the ways in which she decorated her journals. Ryan and Isobel both utilized private and public online blogs to compose their poetry and other pieces, while Holden and John simply typed theirs to be printed out. All participants used words to work through their struggles and express themselves. They journaled, wrote poetry, letters, pamphlets, short stories, personal narratives, or academic papers. Equally as important was the multimodality that social networking provides. All five participants utilized social media sites in some way.

*Facebook.* Facebook was the only social media site in which all five participants had accounts. This was most often used to keep in touch socially with their friends and family members. In addition, John belongs to an LGBT exchange student group and he
disseminates health information through that account. Renee and Isobel both expressed themselves through memes they find on Facebook, which combine images and text. These memes were most often representations of advocacy for the LGBTQ community, but Renee also posted memes that were inspirational support and encouragement for people possibly considering suicide. Renee also has created a professional Facebook page for her new photography business.

*Tumblr.* Tumblr is a microblogging site that Ryan used primarily for LGBTQ and Trans* specific advocacy. He posted some of his poetry and Trans* advice, along with an original Trans* problems comic. Isobel used Tumblr frequently in different ways. She originally used it for blogging purposes in which she posted poetry, personal narratives, and reflections. As her life changed, she began using it primarily to repost memes of favorite pop culture references and LGBTQ/woman’s issues advocacy. Isobel is the only participant to mention Twitter and she primarily posted retweets referencing social issues and links to her Instagram pictures. Isobel has now abandoned Tumblr and her Twitter account has also grown silent. Instagram is the only social media site Isobel continues to use with any regularity.

*Instagram.* As mentioned earlier, as Isobel found contentment and happiness in her life, she found the need for writing was not as great and has taken to posting personal photographs to Instagram as her main social media outlet. Renee and Holden also have Instagram accounts for the images they enjoy sharing for varying purposes. Renee posts photographs of all types, mostly those of family and the photographs she takes for the
photography business she is trying to get off the ground. Holden posts the selfies he takes that reflect his happy times.

*Fan fiction.* During his high school years, Ryan enjoyed reading fan fiction on various sites and found that writing fan fiction helped him develop character voice and perspective that he found difficult as he struggled with his own identity. He said he does not spend much time on these sites any more, but they did help him hone his writing craft.

**Purposes and themes.** What has been evident throughout this study is that writing/composing has been an important factor in the lives of these five individuals. Most of the participants also engaged in some other form of expression, like art or photography, but most often it was writing that satisfied some personal need. Table 12 provides an at-a-glance comparison of the purposes writing served each participant in general.

These categories were taken from the original questionnaire and reflect the fact that all participants used writing and other forms of expression in some way for communication, emotional support, self-expression, and personal growth and development. No participant indicated use of writing for face-to-face social interactions or as a money-making endeavor (selling poetry or articles, being paid for blogging). The themes that emerged from the analysis of their writings and other forms of expression did reflect these initial categories for the most part. Social media were primarily used for Communication and Advocacy, personal writings/blogging were most often the vehicle for Self-Care and Personal Growth. The one theme that I did not expect to find was that
Table 12

**Purposes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposes for writing/expression</th>
<th>Ryan</th>
<th>Renee</th>
<th>Isobel</th>
<th>Holden</th>
<th>John</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face to Face Social Interactions</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Social Networking / Communication</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private / Personal Use</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Earnings / Money-Making</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Expression</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Growth and Development</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of Care for Others. Table 13 recaps the findings from each participant profile and breaks down the general categories based on the emergent themes to compare how each participant used the various genres and modes in particular. It should be noted here, however, that the genres of writing/expression and the modes utilized by these five participants were often so intertwined, that it was difficult to analyze them as separate entities and there is some crossover within categories.

**Self-expression/advocacy.** All of their writings and other forms of expression could be viewed as self-expression. It can even be said that most of their artifacts are evidence of self-care because they were serving some inner need. The works I call advocacy relate directly to those pieces that were made public and outwardly support or advocate for social rights. Renee and Isobel chose to repost memes on Facebook/Twitter/Instagram using images and text that spoke about injustices against the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Online Social Networking / Communication and Advocacy</th>
<th>Emotional Support (Self-care)</th>
<th>Self-Expression and Advocacy</th>
<th>Personal Growth and Development (Self-care)</th>
<th>(Care for Others)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Facebook used for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing thoughts / experiences with friends</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tumblr/Facebook used for:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocating for the LGBTQ community in general and the trans* community in particular</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journaling, Poetry, Short story, Essays, Drawings used for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Highlighting daily struggles of the trans*community and what it is like to have gender dysphoria</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Highlighting society’s preoccupation with and normalizing of the binary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Working through personal issues privately</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Exploring his coming out journey</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poetry, Journaling, Essays used for:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Advocating for gender neutral pronouns</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Highlighting the complexity of gender identification</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Social commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Exploring his coming out journey</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poetry, essays, Comic, Facebook, Tumblr used for:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Publicly advocating for the LGBTQ community through various forums; in person panels, through written and spoken word poetry, online text and images</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Highlighting the complexity of gender identification</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
### Table 13 (continued)

**Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Online Social Networking / Communication and Advocacy</th>
<th>Emotional Support (Self-care)</th>
<th>Self-Expression and (Advocacy)</th>
<th>Personal Growth and Development (Self-care)</th>
<th>(Care for Others)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Facebook / Instagram used for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing thoughts / experiences with friends</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook used for:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocating for the LGBTQ community and other</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>individuals in danger of considering suicide</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journaling, Book Chapter, Photography used for:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Using words / phrases and images to convey her</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thoughts through artistic decoration on her</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>handmade journals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Reconciling identity with religious upbringing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Conflicted and fearful about desire to live</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>openly as a lesbian</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Acknowledgement of the organizations that saved</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Decision to come out as a lesbian</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Journaling / Photography used for:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Using words / phrases and images to convey her</td>
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<td></td>
<td>thoughts through artistic decoration on her</td>
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<td></td>
<td>handmade journals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Advocating about LGBTQ issues to other</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>support services</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Feeling pride in her advocacy and helping others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Acknowledgement of the organizations that saved</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journaling / Book Chapter used for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Reconciling identity with religious upbringing</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Feeling pride in her advocacy and helping others</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Acknowledgement of the organizations that saved</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Taking control of her own life and coming out</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as a lesbian (acceptance of self)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Sharing her story in a book chapter to help</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LGBTQ teens know they are not alone</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book Chapter / Facebook used for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Openly advocating for the LGBTQ community through various forums; in person panels, volunteering, online text and images</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Mentoring LGBTQ teens and helping them learn the benefits of journaling</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(table continues)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 13 (continued)

**Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Online Social Networking / Communication and Advocacy</th>
<th>Emotional Support (Self-care)</th>
<th>Self-Expression and Advocacy (Advocacy)</th>
<th>Personal Growth and Development (Self-care)</th>
<th>(Care for Others)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isobel (through various written genres and images)</td>
<td>Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter used for: Sharing thoughts / experiences with friends</td>
<td>6. Reflection of surviving a rape and suicide attempt</td>
<td>5. Photography as a way to express feelings she cannot put into words</td>
<td>5. Showing pride in her strength and courage in surviving a rape and suicide attempt</td>
<td>6. Realizing the benefits of writing in her life and how she can help others through her words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Using journaling and photography as a type of therapy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poetry, Journaling/ Blogging, Song lyrics used for:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Poetry, Journaling, Blogging, Tumblr, Twitter used for:</td>
<td>Poetry, Journaling, Blogging used for:</td>
<td>Poetry, Tumblr, Twitter used for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Reminders to herself of brighter days ahead, to keep going, of her self-worth</td>
<td>1. Reveling in her identity as a lesbian</td>
<td>1. Realization to look outward instead of always inward</td>
<td>1. Desire to use her journey abroad to benefit others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Dealing with feelings related to death of friend’s father while trying to be supportive</td>
<td>2. Playing with words and her identity</td>
<td>2. Recognizing her strong need to write as a release</td>
<td>2. Expressing her love for her girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Openly advocating for feminism and the LGBTQ community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
### Table 13 (continued)

**Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Online Social Networking / Communication and Advocacy</th>
<th>Emotional Support (Self-care)</th>
<th>Self-Expression and Advocacy</th>
<th>Personal Growth and Development (Self-care)</th>
<th>(Care for Others)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocating for feminism and the LGBTQ community</td>
<td>3. Coming out of a dark few months</td>
<td>3. Being able to work through all that she has dealt with through writing</td>
<td>3. Recognizing her struggle with empathy and self-sufficiency / self-sacrifice and how they are starting to come together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Realization to look outward instead of always inward</td>
<td>5. Love letter to girlfriend</td>
<td>5. Making observations that lead to introspection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Recognizing her strong need to write as a release</td>
<td>6. Advocating as a feminist and for LGBTQ issues</td>
<td>6. Realization and discussion of culture shock and learning to not only look inwardly, but outwardly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Recognizing her struggle with empathy and self- sufficiency / self-sacrifice</td>
<td>7. Exposing our country’s rape culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Coping with being raped</td>
<td>8. Debunking myths about rape and objectification of women and men</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Using words for empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Desire to get over a breakup</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13 (continued)

Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Online Social Networking / Communication and Advocacy</th>
<th>Emotional Support (Self-care)</th>
<th>Self-Expression and Advocacy (Self-care)</th>
<th>Personal Growth and Development (Self-care)</th>
<th>(Care for Others)</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Facebook used for:</td>
<td>Academic papers used for:</td>
<td>Academic papers used for:</td>
<td>Academic papers used for:</td>
<td>Academic papers / Facebook used for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing thoughts and experiences with friends</td>
<td>Writing about topics of choice and gaining personal knowledge</td>
<td>Advocating for any population dealing with HIV/AIDS issues</td>
<td>1. Gaining new knowledge</td>
<td>1. Disseminating important health related information, particularly HIV/AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic papers used for:</td>
<td>Song lyrics used for:</td>
<td>Song lyrics used for:</td>
<td>2. Growing as a writer</td>
<td>2. Participating in and writing about an important HIV/AIDS related longitudinal study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disseminating important health related information, particularly HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>1. Reflecting on his thoughts and feelings</td>
<td>Reflecting his thoughts and feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Helping him deal with a breakup</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Helping him recognize what holds him back</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
LGBTQ community, women, or rape culture in general; or attempt to inspire and encourage people who are struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts. Renee even took her personal writings and incorporated her story into a book chapter that was included in a recently published book on bullying in schools.

Ryan wrote poems, wrote personal essays, and drew original comics to advocate for Trans* people on Tumblr. Through these pieces, Ryan often highlighted the complexities of gender identity and society’s preoccupation with normalizing the binary. John researched and wrote about HIV/AIDS health issues for publication and offered information and advice via Facebook. The only participant that did not use writing for advocacy was Holden. He was the youngest of the group, still dealing with his first semester away from home, and seemed to be a bit fragile due to the suicide attempts of his past. Writing for Holden was primarily emotional support at the time of this study.

Self-care. Like Holden, all participants used writing/composing outside of the classroom to help care for themselves as they navigate through various times in their lives. Each one described the need to censor themselves at school, even if they were out to friends and some teachers, due to the non-acceptance of LGBTQ people and issues they felt from the overall school culture. Four of the five participants also felt the need to fully or partially conceal their identities at home. Only Isobel did not feel the need to tread lightly in her home life, having officially come out by the age of 13. Even so, Isobel had other stressful life experiences for which she found herself needing an outlet to help make sense of her life and see her through difficult times. Writing served as a lifeline and major stress relief for all five participants.
Self-care through writing in multimodal ways looked different for all five participants. Ryan uses many forms of poetry to be the primary method of caring for himself. He wrote in spiral notebooks and online privately. When he did share any personal pieces, they were on an anonymous blog. He has become empowered by writing his thoughts and experiences around struggling with his gender identity and eventually became an outspoken advocate for the trans* community. At the time of this study, he was writing spoken word poems about the experience of being trans* and was trying to muster the courage to perform them.

Renee found personal journaling in handmade, self-decorated books to be therapeutic. She discovered how it provided a place for her to speak the words she was not able to speak aloud. Her journals eventually became a personal timeline of her coming out journey. Renee’s use of photography is also a way she expresses herself in ways words do not allow. Both her journal entries and many of her photographs reflect the pride she feels in herself for being strong and learning to accept herself.

Isobel wrote prolifically in many forms, but always online. Her private blog was filled with emotionally wrought prose and poetry about the emotional trauma of her life. She included professionally published poems and song lyrics to which she felt drawn, that she felt spoke her truth better than she could. The photographs she posts are personal and are an outward expression of her happiness now. Her writing was for the emotional trauma she needed to work through and once her life changed, seeing life through the happy photographs is the way she chooses to care for herself now.
Holden needed to write poetry to help him focus on something other than his depression and traumatic life events. He credits writing poetry to virtually saving his life, for giving him something into which to channel that emotion and work out scenarios of suicide about which he fantasized. In so doing, he realized he did not want to carry out those plans. He expresses his happy times through taking selfies and posting those on Instagram. Like Isobel, writing is for the emotional release and photographs are for the happiness.

John writes to inform and educate, and in doing so, derives the self-satisfaction he was missing in his life before he found this calling. Like Isobel, he has found that the words of others, through song lyrics, can help him through tough times by expressing his thoughts and emotions better than he can.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, my recruitment material included a brief questionnaire (Appendix A) asking how they identified and what forms of expression they used. The last question asked, “If it were not possible to use any of your preferred forms of expression, how would this affect you?” Although their in-depth interviews provided detailed insight into their lives, the responses to these questions were their initial thoughts prior to our meeting and are recorded in Table 14.

Basically, all five used writing and other forms of self-expression as stress relief and self-care. It is interesting to note that not one of the participants mentioned their use of any of the expressive genres as a way to care for others in this initial survey, even John, who exclusively writes academic articles.
Table 14

*Participant Response*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>I would have a panic attack, no doubt. I have some issues with anxiety and, without my writing and sketching, I start fiddling and twitching and getting more and more jittery until I would have an attack. I cannot occupy my mind without also occupying my hands, even if it’s just to doodle on the edge of my notebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>I would feel stress and not myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isobel</td>
<td>I would struggle, at times, to cope with the more trying parts of life, including the well-contained but bottomless pit of sadness in my heart. It would also be much more difficult for me to self-actualize, incorporate new information into my world views, or continue my most authentic means of introspection. Ultimately, it would likely dismantle my prized “high functioning adult” status in this world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holden</td>
<td>Without the ability to express myself (even as obnoxious as some of my forms of self-expression are) I think life could have been much shorter. I struggled with depression for a while and don’t know if I could have gotten through the struggle without these things. Specifically, poetry has helped me not completely blow up because it enables my mind to focus on a clear rhythm while letting my thoughts flow free. It releases and engages, making the bad thoughts slowly escape me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>I would be more stressed and would not have a personal outlet for my stress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to taking care of themselves and others, each participant revealed that they experienced personal growth by learning something about themselves through the writing and other expressive forms they utilized. Several also said they felt that they became better writers because of it, honing their skills through experimenting with form and style, something most of the participants did not express about their experiences during their K–12 years, but longed for.

**Care for others.** As mentioned earlier, all five participants reached out to others in some way through their writing, yet some of them did not even realize that is what they
were doing until we began discussing their writings. Ryan and John provided direct information to others through personal social media sites, spoken word poetry, pamphlets, or academic papers. Renee and Isobel used social media for LGBTQ or feminist advocacy using memes and original posts. Although Holden did not specifically advocate for the LGBTQ community, his care for others can be seen in his writing of a fictional cautionary tale through his poetry via a microblog in hopes others would learn from his experiences or fears.

**Advice for teachers.** One of the last questions I asked my participants during their second interviews was, “If you could tell your former teachers anything regarding your needs as a writer, what would you say?” Table 15 shows each participant’s responses, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

**Conclusion**

Overall, this study found that regardless of individual circumstances, all five participants turned to some genre of writing/expression and various modes to help them make meaning of their lives and care for themselves. Whether they were escaping abusive situations, or experiencing the fear of exposing an identity they did not feel would be accepted, writing mattered. While the participants also engaged in other forms of expression, writing provided some level of comfort and care for each one. At the same time, four of the five participants made a point to reach out and care for others through their writing. Yes, writing mattered, but all five participants often felt discouraged during their K–12 years when looking for guidance in finding the writing or other forms of self-expression that eventually helped them. These they had to discover on their own.
Table 15

**Participant Advice to Teachers**

Interview 2, Question 3:
If you could tell your former teachers anything regarding your needs as a writer, what would you say?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ryan | • Find stories that don’t have such stereotypical characters  
      • More contemporary stories  
      • More CHOICE in topics and assignments, freedom to explore: “I think schools . . . knock the creativity out of people right now . . .”  
      • Accept Fan Fiction “good exercise to get into a character’s headspace”  
      • Privacy is an issue  
      • Accept Fan Fiction as a good exercise to get into a character’s headspace |
| Renee | • Reflective writing is important (need more instruction and practice)  
       • Don’t have to turn in everything (keep some things private/personal)  
       • Option to share aloud or not |
| Isobel | • More Guidance/Support/Instruction in refining/developing writing  
      • Use more song lyrics  
      • Stress importance of the Arts as possible career path “If I can be inspired by other people, what could I inspire?”  
      • Importance of writing as emotional outlet (self-care) “I coped a lot by writing” “just gushing out of me, like I was a sponge being wringed by my life” |
| Holden | • Freedom to explore/experiment with style, less formal sometimes—more creative  
       • Don’t have to share everything: “I don’t think it’s ok to surprise someone and be like, hey, you know you just wrote this, tell the whole class”  
       • Essays to explain understandings rather than me, T/F, fill-in because “you can read a question wrong, but if you have an essay, you can explain why you read it that way”  
       • Different types of Rubrics “some people really want a broad rubric, but some people really need the specific or else they aren’t gonna figure out what they’re doing”  
       • Not everything graded or shared  
       • Don’t call out individual papers in front of whole class (positive or negative)  
       • Allow more student interaction with text and have their own interpretations, even if they don’t agree with the teacher, as long as they can give rationale |
| John | • Guidance in academic writing for college (more of a balance between creative and academic writing) |

This brings to a close the findings of this research study. What follows in the next chapter is a discussion of the implications for further research.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides an overview of some conclusions that can be made from the case study findings, as well as the limitations of the study. Possible implications for current practice and future research will also be discussed.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this interpretive/naturalistic qualitative case study was to investigate the ways in which LGBTQ identified young adults use writing in their lives. I sought to understand their experiences with writing/self-expression during their K–12 years, what they are today, and which genres and modes of writing/expression were used. The underlying framework for this study was Nel Noddings’ Ethics of Care.

This study was framed around several assumptions based on the realities of the experiences of LGBTQ identified individuals in and out of school, as discussed in Chapter 2. The first assumption deals with the discomfort many of these students face in the traditional heteronormative culture of our American schools (Albertini, 2008; Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Clark, 2010; Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011; Kilman, 2010; Moje & MuQaribu, 2003; T. A. Savage & Schanding, 2012; Thein, 2013), which may lead to feelings of being uncared for (Noddings, 1984/2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2012a, 2012b). A second assumption is that the American educational curricula are not conducive to addressing the emotional needs of students in general, let alone those of LGBTQ students, and the last assumption sought to determine if LGBTQ young adults turned to writing in some form beyond the classroom in order to express themselves for
purposes of self-care. The literature (Burton & King, 2004; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Singer & Singer, 2008; Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002a, 2002b, see also DeSalvo, 1999) suggests that writing in clinical settings can bring positive, healing results with participants who suffer or have suffered in some physical, psychological, emotional, or social way. Out of the clinical settings and into college classrooms or after school spaces, studies (Blackburn, 2002; DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005; Sycamore, 2004) are emerging that deliberately focus writing instruction with LGBTQ students relating to issues of identity and voice. My study sought to understand both the personal experiences of these five LGBTQ identified individuals and how they utilized writing without using any intervention strategies, and in what genres and modes of writing/expression they engaged in these practices.

Analyzing the data compiled from this study revealed some important insights about the participants as individuals, as well as many similarities across the cases. While this study was intended as a means to understand individual cases in terms of how they use writing and other forms of expression, it raises questions as to current school climates and curricular practices and this may provide “insight that would lead to improvements in practice” (Niesz, 2012) in classroom settings for providing a better carer-cared for environment.

Discussion of Findings

“Never be afraid of the truth”—Ryan

“Life is a book only you can write”—Renee

“Words are never enough, and always my only medium”—Isobel
“And save myself some awful pain”—Holden

“Writing allows analysis and synthesis of information, but knowing I helped someone is important to me”—John

These quotes were the words of each participant, spoken during one of their interviews, that seemed to sum up the essence of writing in their lives. I used these quotes to begin each of the individual case write-ups and I repeat them here. All five participants identified on the LGBTQ spectrum and grew up in some region of Northeast Ohio, although their hometown counties span the farthest eastern and western borders of this region and points in between. Four of the five participants identified as cisgender, and one as trans*gender. Two identified as lesbians, one as gay, one as gay and leaning toward identifying as pansexual, and one identified as bisexual. Isobel was the only participant to come out in middle school, whereas the others came out in high school or college. Although they all have some supportive family members and friends, at the time of this study, Holden, Renee, and Ryan were still not out to one or both parents. Even with this personal support, all five participants indicated that they needed to censor certain things they said, did, or wrote during their K–12 schooling due to the non-inclusive school climate and curricula.

The revelation that all five participants felt unsupported and fearful to be themselves during these years, even the one individual who was officially out, substantiates the first and second assumptions that American school culture and curricula are based in heteronormative traditions which create a sense of discomfort, or worse, for students who do not fit this expectation.
The findings support the assumption that this discomfort leads to a disruption in the carer-cared for relationship that Nel Noddings describes in the Ethics of Care, as discussed in Chapter 2. If the framework of such care is a reciprocal relationship between teacher and student with regard to student needs, the fact that these students are not comfortable expressing themselves authentically in order to have their needs met (as the cared for) contributes to this disruption (Noddings, 2005b). In turn, some teachers are not accepting (as the carer) when students do try to express their needs as someone who identifies outside of the heteronormative traditions and the carer-cared for relationship is also disrupted in this way. What Noddings does not mention is the concept of self-care in terms of the cared-for and that is what this study endeavored to explore in relationship to writing and other forms of expression.

Because all five participants experienced some disruption in this relationship during their K–12 schooling, and despite feeling that their own school writing instruction was lacking in some way, each turned to some form of writing to help them care for their needs of emotional support and expression. Four participants (Ryan, Renee, Isobel, and Holden) felt that the writing curricula in their K–12 school experiences was far too focused on exposition and technical correctness, while John was inundated with creative writing and not enough of the journalistic/informational writing in which he was interested. Renee, dealing with learning disabilities and ADD, became discouraged with writing in school since she experienced great difficulty with the focus on spelling and grammar over ideas and style, yet eventually found a writing genre on her own that became her lifeline.
Additionally, this study found that all five participants engaged in a rich variety of genres and modes in which to express themselves, most of which were not emphasized during their K–12 education. In essence, these five individuals who experienced a disruption of the carer-cared for relationship in their K–12 schooling learned to care for their emotional needs through various forms of writing/expression. Four of the five also used these skills to reach out and become carers to the marginalized community of which they feel a part.

**Themes**

As discussed, all five participants found some form of writing/expression to be essential in their personal lives as they navigated through some internal or external trauma. Some were dealing with acceptance of their gender identity or sexual orientation, both their own acceptance and by family, friends, schools, and the greater community. Others also dealt with some degree of emotional abuse from a parent figure or the devastation of a lost love, and/or physical and emotional trauma inflicted by rape. While identifying as having experienced some form of trauma was not a requirement for inclusion in this study, it does bear out the need for schools to take more consideration in addressing the emotional needs of students and foster a carer-cared for relationship. Whatever the source of the trauma, each participant found some genre and mode of writing/expression he or she considered a vehicle toward helping him or her heal. While they all chose various genres and modes to accomplish this, common themes emerged from this study. These themes dealt more with purposes for writing and how various genres/modes were used for these purposes. One overriding aspect of the findings from
this study was clear. While genre (type of writing/expression) and mode (manner in which it is written/presented) are essentially different, they were inextricably intertwined for these five participants and are discussed within the theme categories of purpose.

**Multimodality.** Before discussing the themes that emerged as to purpose of writing/expression, I must address the fact that this study found that the intersection between message and mode was essential. All five participants gave careful thought to the genres and modes in which they chose to deliver their messages. This is important to note because all participants recollected the emphasis of writing instruction during their K–12 years, whether expository or narrative, being on correct form and on paper (handwritten or typed). When left to their own devices, these individuals all chose to incorporate social media in some way, and four of the five found that images in some form were also important in the conveyance of their expression.

They all gravitated to some written form of expression as a therapeutic tool, but the use of other modalities was important and this is evidenced by the wide variety of artifacts submitted for this study. Three participants wrote mostly poetry, while one concentrated on academic papers and one focused only on personal narratives. Three participants journaled in handmade books or via online microblogs. Sometimes the online blogs were private, and at other times, posts were made public, depending upon the purpose of the post. Two participants found that song lyrics from particular artists spoke to them in a way that helped them, while one participant found drawing and sketching to be another outlet. Three participants used original photographs to express
themselves in some way, privately or publically, and two of those participants also shared memes on social networks as another form of expression.

The fact that the genres and modes each participant used for self-expression were so intermingled speaks to the power and importance of incorporating a variety of genres and modalities in instruction.

Social media platforms were definitely used for personal communication with friends and family. They all kept in touch primarily via Facebook and Isobel also used Twitter for a time. While these platforms served distinct purposes of communication of a social nature, the five participants found uses that went far beyond. John also used Facebook to communicate the HIV/AIDS related information he researched for his academic papers. Ryan, Isobel, and Renee all used various other multimodal forms to express themselves for purposes that serve as self-care and caring for others through advocacy, which are discussed in the following sections.

The sparse literature I found concerning LGBTQ youth writing online included Alexander (2002, 2004), and GLSEN et al. (2013). These studies suggest that this population uses the virtual world to make contact and communicate, to create community, to search for identity and belonging, to tell life stories, to find information and role models for advice, and to foster social activism. While the participants in my study definitely used online platforms to communicate and advocate, they were more inclined to be the role models and offer the advice. Only Isobel mentioned using the Internet during middle school as a means of discovering her identity as a lesbian and frequented message boards and various websites to help her figure things out. Renee said
that school access to certain websites was blocked and her home computer was shared by family members and in a public space in the house. Her mother also checked the browser history, so Renee would never have been able to use the Internet for anything related to LGBTQ issues. However, Renee did communicate her life story through the book chapter she contributed to an edited book on bullying in schools.

**Advocacy.** Advocating for LGBTQ issues and the community was not mentioned as a specific finding in the previous research of LGBTQ youth online (Alexander, 2002, 2004; GLSEN et al., 2013), but it was mentioned in the research on LGBTQ youth and arts-based multiliteracies (Rhoades, 2012) in which LGBTQ students were in a specific program designed to create personal documentaries for outreach and advocacy. This study found advocacy to be an important use of social media for Ryan, Renee, Isobel, and John, in which they discovered and engaged on their own. Written posts were prevalent, but Renee and Isobel also favored using memes combining text with images in conveying a message, while Ryan preferred drawing his own illustrations to create a trans*issues comic. John disseminated health information of all kinds through his personal Facebook page, but information vital to the LGBTQ community also went out through an LGBT exchange student Facebook page of which he is a part. John also advocates for this community by disseminating HIV/AIDS information through his academic articles, bringing awareness of these issues to academia. Holden was the only participant that did not use his writing/expression for LGBTQ advocacy purposes.

**Self-care.** All five participants felt the need to use writing/composing for self-preservation in some way. They used a variety of genres and modes to privately
express inner emotions and to reach out publically. From personal journaling to online blogging, from original photography or artwork to reposted memes, they each managed to find several ways that writing/composing could help them help themselves even though they felt their K–12 experiences did not provide them with these means.

Another aspect related to self-care was the personal growth the participants experienced through their use of writing and other forms of expression. Ryan and Holden mentioned their excitement once they were able to break free of the formulaic structures they were taught in high school. They enjoyed experimenting with style, form, and voice in poetry and fiction and felt their writing improved. The fact that Renee overcame her great fear and dislike for writing by writing is certainly an example of personal growth. Many people tend to avoid something they do not like or in which they feel they lack skill. Renee recognized how beneficial writing could be in learning to accept herself once she broke free of the feeling she had to produce writing with perfect spelling and grammar. Isobel was already a bit comfortable with experimentation in writing due to her involvement in advanced placement and honor English classes, even though she felt the instruction was still lacking. Her personal growth can be seen in the fact that her writings evolve from not only looking inward to better understand herself, but in the realization that looking outward can also be beneficial to better understand others. John grew on a personal level as he used writing to gain knowledge and to better understand himself. All five participants also showed personal growth through their writing as they learned to accept themselves.
**Care for others.** Using their words and other forms of expression to advocate for the LGBTQ community is one way four participants demonstrated their care for others. As mentioned earlier, reaching out to offer advice and care in the community on their own was not a finding in any of the previous research. Ryan, Renee, Isobel, and John actively offered advice and/or shared links and memes via social media that were directly related to LGBTQ issues and activism. All five participants also publicly shared more personal stories (both true and fictional) via creative writing/drawing or exposition (poetry—written and spoken, short story, book chapter, illustration, academic papers/articles). Ryan and John also had plans to turn some of their advice/factual information into pamphlets for dissemination wherever LGBTQ individuals might be inclined to see them (e.g., doctors’ offices, homeless shelters). Reaching out in this way, on their own, was not mentioned in any of the literature I found.

**Power of the research experience.** Being a novice researcher, I was amazed at the power the qualitative research experience had on my participants. Ryan was already quite self-aware, but mentioned during our interviews how he had not realized until our discussions the important role fan fiction writing played in his ability to hone his skill at writing from various points of view, even if his teachers did not accept those pieces in the classroom. Another very self-aware individual, Isobel, found the experience of participating in this study to be quite eye-opening for her. She talked about how the act of reviewing her work for possible submission “really teleported me back to when [my words] came gushing out of me like I was a sponge being wringed by my life.” She then reflected on the realization that her current personal contentment had decreased her need
to write. This experience also led her to see how supportive certain people had been to her during some of her darkest times and she reached out to thank them. One other major realization for Isobel came when she said that looking back, had she been more encouraged in her creative writing pursuits, she may have gone down a different career path.

Holden reviewed his work prior to meeting with me for the second interview for the precise purpose of analysis. He was able to articulate exactly why he wrote certain pieces as we discussed them, but it was not until the end of our discussion that he came to the realization of how he had matured in such a short time. I realized that in a few pieces, he was subtly trying to tell himself something that he “wasn’t listening.” John knew from the start that his academic writing was meant to provide information, thus caring for others, but he did not realize the personal fulfillment and care he was receiving until we began discussing his experiences and work.

Renee was the one participant who actually used the word *therapeutic* to describe the effect writing had for her. She knew that just getting her words on paper or decorating her journals was helpful, but did not realize the extent to which she was caring for herself until we talked. In an interesting twist, she was the most nervous to share her writings with me, but decided she would read them aloud. She told me afterward that the act of doing this was also therapeutic for her because she felt safe with me. Additionally, the realization that her journals were creating a timeline of her life and coming out journey surprised and delighted her and they actually enabled her to write her book chapter.
Limitations

Since I planned the study to be a small qualitative case study of LGBTQ identified individuals, I did want to try and recruit participants who were as diverse as possible in regard to their ages (within the 18–25 year old young adult age band), gender identities, and sexual orientations. My initial plan was to use the recruitment survey as a device to help me choose the five participants who represented across the age band and LGBTQ spectrum. While I received exactly five inquiries via the recruitment tools, it just so happened that they did identify across the age band. Two of the five identified as gay, cisgender males, although one did say he was leaning toward identifying as pansexual. Two of the five identified as cisgender lesbians, and one participant identified as a bisexual trans*gender male. Basically, I think there was enough of a diverse representation for age, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The limitations I see with their identities lies more in the realm of racial diversity since they were all Caucasian.

Another limitation would be that there was not much variation in the types of schooling they experienced at the K–12 level. One participant did attend parochial school, whereas the others attended public school, but they all hailed from suburban Northeast Ohio.

Third, I had to rely on the honesty of their responses during the interviews and four of the five participants chose the writings/other forms of expression they wanted to include in the study. Only one participant offered her entire archive of online journal entries, even the private ones. I do believe, however, that each participant was
forthcoming because some of the experiences they shared were extremely personal and some seemed a little nervous and/or embarrassed at first.

**Implications**

While this study sought to understand the experiences of five individuals, their stories were similar enough to indicate that their experiences were not isolated incidents. The findings speak clearly to the benefits of writing and other forms of expression to help students care for their emotional needs. The most important take away from this study was that writing matters. In some form, in some way, writing matters. All five participants turned to some form of writing in order to heal from some emotional and/or social trauma they experienced in and out of school. Whether they experienced harassment or just needed to explore and discover their identities, they found that some form of written expression helped them through particular times or situations.

Although each participant used writing in different ways, they all felt that their school experiences with writing instruction were not sufficient enough to provide what they needed and had to discover what worked for them on their own. The following section breaks down the implications for current school practice and suggestions for further research that this study may provide in hopes of improving the carer-cared for environment in schools.

**Current Practice**

As noted throughout this study, and highlighted in Table 14 in Chapter 4, the participants all had advice for teachers about their needs in the classroom regarding writing. This advice is detailed in this section.
Ethics of care. The participants discussed particular curricular items and teacher strategies, but before any discussion of curricula, we must discuss the concept of care. If we believe, as Nel Noddings does, that teachers and students, and in the broader sense of schools and students, are inherently in a carer-cared for relationship, more needs to be done to address the disruption that occurs in this relationship when students do not fit the heteronormative expectations that are now embedded into the school climate. In the heteronormative environment, schools treat all students as if they are cisgender and heterosexual. This is evidenced not only throughout the curriculum, but also through language (use of only binary pronouns—he and she, or insistence on using the incorrect pronoun when specifically asked not to by a trans*gender student to), policies (only allowing same sex dates to functions, dress codes that only reflect male/female identities which force a trans*gender or gender non-conforming student to dress in an uncomfortable way), and a general lack of inclusion, inferring what students need (male and female, cisgender). As Nodding noted (2005b), “in trying to meet inferred needs, we often neglect the expressed needs of our students” (p. 147). In addition, there are students who are not comfortable expressing their needs and feel the need to hide their identities. These students are often the ones who identify on the LGBTQ spectrum and whose fear and worry about their identity and spend much time and energy “enduring, worrying, and covering up” (Noddings, 2005b, p. 151) personal or social issues during school. This interferes with their ability to attend the lesson or write honestly (Albertini, 2008). There can be no real carer-cared for relationship in these situations, and without
this relationship, marginalized students do not feel they are truly a valued part of the class or school.

**Role of teachers.** In keeping with the notion of teachers and students being in a carer-cared for relationship, it is important to recap the experiences of the participants in relation to their teachers. All five participants mentioned restrictive writing instruction during their K–12 experiences. Ryan discussed at length the heteronormative gendering he had to endure, while all five mentioned some aspect of heteronormative readings of novels and related classroom dialogue, adherence to strict formulaic guidelines, and emphasis on “correct” interpretations of material. Conversely, all five participants did name at least one teacher during K–12 or college that they considered to be positive influences in their writing lives. They all mentioned different aspects as to why they felt this way, but the recurring themes were that these teachers encouraged original thought and interpretation, choice in topic and form, and exposed them to more diverse genres of writing. Ryan was also influenced to explore another modality—that of the spoken word poem.

These teachers, and in one case a school psychologist, encouraged students to think and explore, and did not demand they share everything they wrote. Ryan, Renee, and Holden all mentioned that was important to them and made them feel much more comfortable. This demonstrates caring behavior on the part of a teacher who can home in on the needs of their students, whether or not they are specifically spoken since some students find that a difficult task.
Curricula. While the ethics of care refers more to the overall climate of the school and the attitudes of the adults in the carer roles, providing inclusive curricula and forms of representation in all subject areas is one way that schools can begin to make changes revolving around these issues; but that however, is a broader conversation best discussed for future research. My study examined these experiences on a more personal level involving the role of writing and other forms of expression for these participants. For the purposes of this study, I discuss the possible implications for those classes in which writing is emphasized.

Variety in writing. The first implication from this data is for schools to offer instruction in a variety of writing genres and modes. This study found that writing mattered to these students, but not as a one size fits all type of instruction. They all found their “fit,” but not as a result of what was offered in school. Even Renee, who became disillusioned with writing, stumbled upon a form that worked well for her. As I noted in Chapter 4, all five participants felt that their school instruction in writing was devoid of variety and most often, exposition with a heavy focus on mechanics and form was emphasized and expected to be done exclusively in analog formats. This rigidity of form had implications for the resulting messages. Even when other, more creative/expressive genres of writing were introduced, they were taught with structured rules. For example, both Ryan and Holden specifically discussed teachers who believed in one correct interpretation when reading poetry, and having to adhere to strict formulaic patterns when writing it. The over emphasis on spelling and mechanics turned Renee away from writing almost completely when her learning disabilities and ADD issues impeded her
progress and she was always being corrected instead of encouraged. Both Isobel and John longed for more guidance in the type of writing that spoke to them, but their curricula were too focused on the opposite. While none of the participants said these patterns, rules, and structures should not be taught, they did say that having specific mentoring, guidance, and instruction in many different genres of writing and having more of a balance would be beneficial. All of the participants ended up either finding the writing genre that fit their needs best on their own or once they entered college.

The variety the participants mentioned they used outside of school went beyond written text. All five mentioned their use of images or songs as a way to express themselves and felt that incorporating other media was an important consideration. Their use of new literacies (blogs, online journals, photography, memes on social networks, songs) was an essential part of how they used forms of expression as a means of self-care and/or care for others. With the rise of multimedia in today’s society, schools need to revisit their use of new literacies and make sure they are incorporating various modalities.

**Experimentation/Exploration.** Ryan, Isobel, and Holden all discussed how much they enjoyed experimentation with style and form once they entered college and were given more freedom. Renee found that she was drawn more to reflective writing when it was briefly used in a health class, but was never really given much instruction in how to use it effectively. Holden and Ryan felt their creativity was stifled by teachers’ insistence on strict adherence to rules without making time for any exploration. Ryan said, “I think schools . . . knock the creativity out of people right now,” in reference to his teacher’s disparaging remarks about his use of fan fiction, saying it was a lazy way to write.
Ryan, who was struggling with his trans*gender identity and having difficulty writing from other perspectives, writing fan fiction was helpful. He felt that having to write from a well-established character’s point of view in a world he did not create and keep it true to that world was an exercise deserving of the same treatment given to other classroom writing strategies, for example, writing in another author’s style

**Choice in topics/presentation (encouragement, find a passion).** Another aspect to writing instruction the participants mentioned throughout their interviews was the lack of topic choice in schools, including the existence of some taboo subjects. Most of the participants revealed that their curricula and materials used were very specific and did not leave much room for choice of what to read or write about. Also, most of the participants said that they did not feel that a queer reading of any text would be welcomed, nor would LGBTQ issues or characters in writing. When the question was raised in Holden’s English class about the possibility of the characters of Nick and Jay in *The Great Gatsby* being gay, the teacher quickly glossed over it and moved on. Isobel was able to present the pro marriage equality side of a debate, but felt the need to keep it factual. Although this was appropriate for a persuasive debate piece, she said she would not have felt comfortable ever including personal references if she could because she knew her school climate was not conducive to these topics and always felt the need to “keep things close to the vest,” even though she was out at school.

Being able to choose topics of interest was important for these participants. Isobel gained valuable personal insight into her own identity and found a way to cope with what was happening in her life when she was able to combine her interest in
performing in *Les Misérables* with writing a research paper based on Victor Hugo’s works. She was in advanced English classes and these choices seemed to be reserved for those students, however. All participants personally turned to writing openly about LGBTQ themes and issues in their lives outside of school, so being able to do this in school may have great benefit for students who identify on this spectrum.

Isobel went so far as to say that she felt that her passion for writing was encouraged only as a hobby and was discouraged from pursuing any arts related careers. She thinks that the power she discovered through writing and performing may have led to a different career path had she been encouraged in that direction. She said, “If I can be inspired by other people, what could I inspire?”

**Privacy/anonymity.** Although the participants longed to be able to write more authentically and freely discuss some of these issues, they all felt the need to hold back. For Isobel, she recognized that her school climate was not accepting of these issues in the curriculum, even though she was out and accepted for who she was. The other four participants did not come out until late in high school or after and felt the need to censor their work, afraid to reveal their true identities. In this way, they recognized that their writing was not as authentic as it might have been. Even after coming out to close friends and some family members, and advocating on social media for the LGBTQ community, Ryan blocked certain posts on Facebook and made his Tumblr site anonymous. The fear of outing himself to certain family members was too great for him to take a chance.

While not out at school, Holden and Renee felt that they would have liked to be able to write about more personal issues (not LGBTQ related) if they were not required to
share these aloud, which they were so often made to do. The fear of the possibility of having to share their work stifled what they wrote about and fostered great anxiety at times.

**LGBTQ inclusion.** Several of the participants mentioned that the inclusion of LGBTQ related themes in reading material and possible topics to write about would have made them feel more comfortable since they all felt the need to self-censor their writing or book choices at times. Ryan, in particular, had a difficult time with non-inclusive curricula since he was not only struggling with issues of sexual orientation, but also his gender identity. He felt completely alone in the classroom, not only by the lack of LGBTQ characters and issues reflected in the curricula, but also by the gender biased teaching strategies he experienced. As noted in The 2013 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al., 2014), students in schools with LGBTQ inclusive curricula hear less anti-LGBTQ remarks and feel safer than do students in schools without such curricula in place. These incidents are not yet eradicated, but the more we welcome all diversity and allow LGBTQ students to see themselves reflected in the curricula and write personally and in ways that help them, the more we are fostering the carer-cared for relationship in our classrooms.

Unfortunately, there exists reluctance on the part of teachers who might be willing to incorporate this inclusive curricula approach due to lack of administrative support and/or parental pushback (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015). While LGBTQ advocates keep trying to introduce change in this area, teachers could at least concentrate on finding material that does not include “such stereotypical characters,” and by fostering writing as
a way to help all students on a personal/emotional level, which brings us to the final implication.

**Specific Teacher Instruction/Professional development.** As several studies have shown (Burton & King, 2004; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Pennebaker, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Singer & Singer, 2008; Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002a, 2002b, see also DeSalvo, 1999), writing can provide positive healing results for anyone suffering from some type of trauma. All of these participants experienced some emotional trauma during these K–12 years in dealing with issues related to their identities and the social repercussions, and some participants were grappling with issues in their home lives. Both Renee and Isobel also suffered emotional and physical trauma after being raped. Isobel said she, “coped a lot by writing.” All five participants shared that writing and other forms of expression have helped relieve stress and express themselves in ways nothing else allowed.

I know from personal experience in the classroom, as discussed in Chapter 1, that allowing students to explore their world through writing and experiment with various genres and modes increases the possibility they will find a way to relieve stress in their lives and even call out for help, sometimes when they do not realize they need it. I believe that teachers need specific instruction or professional development in learning to utilize writing in this way in order to help students “get well and realize their deepest being” (Moffett, 1994b, p. 261) and overcome their hidden silences (M. Greene, 1995).

**Future Research**

A number of future studies might complement and develop from this study. Future research is needed in the area of diversity. It would be interesting to compare the
findings from this study with one that has recruited more racially diverse participants, as well as participants from other regions of the country, and/or participants hailing from different types of school districts.

A researcher might conduct a comparative study with a school/classroom that does provide some of the suggestions/strategies recommended by my participants (either ones that already do or with the intervention of professional development) with one that does not. Additionally, I can see the need for research with teacher education and how helping preservice teachers learn to utilize writing in ways more conducive to helping students emotionally might bring about change in the classroom.

Since the biennial GLSEN school climate survey research has supported the fact that students in schools with LGBTQ inclusive curricula hear less anti-LGBTQ remarks and feel safer, future research related to my study would be to examine the effect of inclusive curricula on the opportunities for students to write more authentically and to help with their emotional needs.

**Conclusion**

Although four of the five participants (all but Renee) enjoyed writing during their K–12 school years, they were not satisfied with the instruction they received. Each participant felt the need to seek out other forms of writing/composing in order to work out problems or discover some personal meaning in their lives, in other words, to care for themselves and for others. Even Renee, who did not enjoy writing much beyond the early elementary years due to her learning difficulties and ADD, managed to find a few forms of writing/composing that became an important lifeline for her. All five felt they
could have used more guidance in order to gain even more from their writing. Even with this lack of instructional variety, these participants not only found some genre and mode that helped them, they reached out to help others via these tools. Because all five participants needed to turn to writing and other forms of expression on their own during times of stress, it is important that schools examine how they utilize writing and other forms of expression in the classroom because, in some form, writing matters.

View a short multi-media found poem: https://youtu.be/jagdz12kg2c
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS, CONSENT FORMS, AND QUESTIONNAIRES
Appendix A

Recruitment Materials, Consent Forms, and Questionnaires

Initial Contact for Recruitment via email

Hi, __________! My name is Karen Tollafield and I am a doctoral candidate at Kent State University. I talked with __________ (liaison for organization), who gave me your name as someone who may be interested in becoming a participant in my research.

I am a retired teacher (and long time ally), a safe space trainer with GLSEN, LGBTQ liaison for the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (OCTELA), and am now focusing my Ph.D. research on how LGBTQ young adults (ages 18–25) express themselves through writing and other forms of self-expression (art, music, etc.). I am beginning my research and need to find participants for my study and wondered if you would be interested and/or able to help me find other possible nominees. Basically the participants will meet with me for two interviews for about one hour each time. I will be asking about their memories of writing, both in school and out, and what types of writing (and other expressive forms) in which they engage today. I will be asking about their experiences with writing environments and how they feel about writing, as well as other ways in which they choose to express themselves. I will also be asking for them to share examples of their writing (or other forms of self-expression).

I'd be happy to meet with you if you'd like to learn more about me, or my study. Please let me know either way if you may be interested in participating or are able to help locate other possible participants. I certainly understand if you'd prefer to pass.

Right now I'm simply looking for possible nominees to fill out a brief questionnaire in order to choose a small pool of participants.

Many thanks!

Karen Andrus Tollafield, M.Ed.
ktollafi@kent.edu
(440) 382-8060
Identity and Forms of Self-Expression of LGBTQ-Identified Young Adults

This questionnaire of identity and self-expression will take between 5-10 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions regarding your K–12 school experiences, your ways of writing, your use of social media, social networking, digital media, and other forms of self-expression (that may include art, music, dance, etc.).

The questions will be used to explore how individuals use forms of self-expression related to their identity and to gather basic demographic information.

1. If asked about your gender identity, how would you respond?
   Gay
   Lesbian
   Bisexual
   Pansexual
   Questioning
   Other: __________________

2. If asked about your sexual orientation, how would you respond?
   Female
   Male
   Intersex
   Trans*gender
   Queer
   Fluid
   Other: __________________

3. What is your age? _____________

4. Around what age did you begin to identify your gender identity?
   0–5 (Preschool-Kindergarten)
   6–10 (Elementary)
   11–14 (Middle School)
   15–18 (High School)
   19–25

5. Around what age did you begin to identify your sexual orientation?
   0–5 (Preschool-Kindergarten)
   6–10 (Elementary)
   11–14 (Middle School)
   15–18 (High School)
   19–25
6. What is the highest level of education you have earned?
   High School Diploma
   Technical/Professional School Certificate/Diploma
   College/University Diploma
   Post graduate

7. How would you describe your current work/educational status?
   Currently enrolled student
   Currently enrolled student and working
   Employed / non-student
   Unemployed / non-student

The following brief questions will ask you about your forms of self-expression.

8. From the following list of types of writing, check all that you use.
   Journaling
   Poetry
   Personal essays/Narratives/Vignettes
   Song lyrics
   Blogging
   Stories (Fiction)
   Articles (Academic and/or Journalistic)

9. From the following list of social and digital media, check all that you use.
   Personal website
   Facebook
   Tumblr
   Twitter
   Google+
   Gaming Social Sites
   Fan Fiction Sites
   Other: ____________________________

10. From the following list of visual and performing arts, check all that you use to express yourself.
    Sketching
    Drawing
    Painting
    Crafting
    Knitting
    Sewing
    Sculpting
Singing  
Playing an instrument  
Writing music  
Dance performance  
Social dancing  
Theater/Dramatic arts

11. In terms of time, how often do you write, perform, or engage in an act of self-expression in a week?  
   1-5 hours  
   6-10 hours  
   11-15 hours  
   15-20 hours  
   21 or more hours

12. Complete this statement (choose all that apply): I use writing and/or art for . . . .  
   face-to-face social interactions (parties, gatherings, clubs, celebrations)  
   online social networking and communication  
   private/personal use  
   personal earnings/money-making  
   emotional support  
   self-expression  
   personal growth and development

13. If it were not possible to use any of your preferred forms of self-expression in your daily life, how would this affect you? (short response)
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Understanding the Writing Practices of Five Young Adults Self-Identifying on the LGBTQ Spectrum

Principal Investigator: William Kist, Ph.D.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research is to explore how a young adult who self-identifies on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) spectrum perceives the use of writing in academic, personal, and social settings. Writing is a powerful medium for self-expression, reflection, and empowerment, but LGBTQ identified young adults may experience incomplete opportunities for true expression, especially within school settings. This research focuses on past experiences with writing (primarily) and other forms of self-expression, and current practices in hopes of understanding the implications for personal care. This insight may also help educators improve practices in this area.

Procedures
You will be interviewed twice at your convenience. Each interview will last approximately one hour. You will be interviewed about your experiences with writing and other forms of self-expression during your schooling, for personal use, and socially (including social media) and ways in which you make sense of those experiences. The only data that will be collected will be the digitally recorded responses to questions pertaining specifically to the research questions and any documents, drawings, music, etc. you wish to share. I will ask you to bring those artifacts to our second interview. No other data will be collected and there will be no further requirements outside of the interviews. There will be an option to meet for a third time in order to review my summary write-ups/analysis of the interviews and artifacts, which will give you the opportunity to read over my impressions and let me know if I have captured your thoughts accurately. If you do not wish to meet in person, you may opt to review the material via email. Please be aware that I will use pseudonyms for all correspondence in order to maintain confidentiality.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography
Digital audio recordings will be made of the interviews for transcription and data collection. Some data may be used for educational presentations or programs to
demonstrate data collection in Kent State University research and educational courses. The voice recordings will not have identifying information and will be disposed of after the study completion, transcription process, and if not used for educational purposes immediately following the study. Participants do have the option to listen to recordings and to see transcripts.

**Benefits**
The potential benefits of participating in this study may include a better understanding of your own meaning making through writing and other forms of self-expression, or how you may use these forms to your advantage. Your participation in this study will also help us to better understand how educators may improve their practices concerning student expression.

**Risks and Discomforts**
There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life. Questions will ask that you reflect on and recall your experiences. You will provide information that you feel best describes your experiences.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**
Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the elimination of other identifying information from transcripts. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you. After the audio recordings are transcribed, the transcripts are verified, and they are no longer useful for purposes of educational presentation, the audio recordings will be deleted and their deletion will be witnessed by the Advisor.

Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used.

Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or others.

**Voluntary Participation**
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.
Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Karen Andrus Tollafield at 440-382-8060 or William Kist, PhD at 330-672-5839. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

________________________________  __________________
Participant Signature               Date
Audiotape/Video Consent Form

Study Title: Understanding the Writing Practices of Five Young Adults Self-Identifying on the LGBTQ Spectrum

William Kist, Ph.D.

I agree to participate in an audio-taped/video taped interview about my experiences with writing as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Karen Andrus Tollafield may audio-tape/video tape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

_________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature                                      Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to listen to the recording   _____ do not want to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Karen Andrus Tollafield may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes/video tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____ this research project   _____ publication   _____ presentation at professional meetings

_________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature                                      Date
Initial Interview Questions (Interview 1)

(Before asking the interview questions, I will review the answers given on the questionnaire that was completed prior to being selected as a participant in this study)

1. What are your earliest memories of writing?

2. When you have a life experience, good or bad, does how you reflect or experience it involve any type of writing? How?

3. Does writing have value to you in your life now? Would you please discuss this?

4. Thinking back, will you please trace your memories regarding writing experiences through your school years including expressive and creative opportunities?

5. Now, can you tell me about how you have used writing for your own personal enjoyment? If you don’t write personally, what do you do to express yourself?

6. What technology do you use when you write? Do you ever publish this work for others to see? Why or why not?

7. Have the ways in which you write changed over time? If so, in what ways?

8. What about writing in social ways? Can you describe what types of social media you use and how you use them?

9. Was there anyone who influenced you regarding your writing experiences, either at school or at home? Can you tell me about this?

10. What would you like to tell me about your experiences that I haven’t asked?

11. Would it be possible for you to bring any examples of your expressive work to our next interview so you can tell me about these specific examples? If you do not write, what about bringing song lyrics or other forms of writing that speak to what
you would write if you could? You could also bring any examples of other ways
you may express yourself like art or pieces of music you’ve created, or video of you
dancing, etc.
Follow-up Interview Questions (Interview 2)

1. I’d like to revisit some of the topics we discussed last time. You talked about what it was like expressing yourself through writing in school. Is there anything you’d like to add now that you’ve had time to reflect about that?

2. We also talked about how you used writing to express yourself in personal and social ways. What would you like to add regarding those topics?

3. If you could tell your former teachers anything regarding your needs as a writer, what would you say?

4. I’d like to take a look at the examples you’ve brought with you. Can you tell me about them?

5. What was the last form of expression that you created? Would you describe it as private or something you would share? Would you be willing to share this writing for the study without your identity being revealed but explain it to me for the purpose of understanding the use of writing by LGBTQ youth?

6. Is there anything else you’d like to discuss related to this study?
Appendix B

Ryan

Journal Entry: Problems with being a Trans*male (Ryan)

Problems with Being a Trans-Male

- Asking someone if they've seen your binder is unnecessarily complicated. "Paper binder or chest binder?"
- No trash cans in the stalls of guys' bathrooms.
- If you don't look 100% male, people just assume you're a butch lesbian.
- "But you were such a pretty girl."
- Neither gay men, straight men, gay women or straight women will look at you. Neither will most bisexual people.
Journal Entry: It’s a Girl (Ryan)

When my mother got an ultrasound in late 1991, the technician smiled and told her, “it’s a girl.” Not even born and already I was having the binary of gender imposed upon me. In 1997 she begged my mother to be a Power Ranger for Halloween instead of the fairies or princesses from years before. We agreed and I returned home from shopping in a flimsy cotton suit and plastic mask, both a striking shade of pink. All attempts at escaping my feminity were blocked, though that hardly mattered to me. Though I was given a small stuffed Batman instead of an action figure for Christmas, it became the moniker that forever fell Batman, only to die by Robin’s hand 3 games later when I was given a Batman, to cut his hair and take his clothes for the one that was worn by the old GI Joe that my brother never played with anyway.
Persuasive Speech/Poem: Gender Neutral Pronouns (Ryan)

How can you answer
when someone asks, “Are you a girl or a guy?”
How can you take something so complex
and whittle it down into something that will fit into one of two categories?
And what happens
when it is the scraps that have been chipped away
and now lie on the dirty floor
that hold all the most important parts of who we are?

The English language does neither describe, nor define the world,
it traps it
And it is only once we free our language
that we can free ourselves.
Neutrality implies being on neither side of the battle,
but now we can use neutrality to wage our war.
War against the “this” or “that” of our language
and through that language on our society.
Poem: Dysphoria (Ryan)

Dysphoria, it’s like waking up from a dream that felt real,  
From a body that felt real, and realizing that it was nothing more than wishful thinking.

It is seeing a woman in the mirror who mimics your every move,  
even going so far as to start to sob and to scream with you

It is a nude self-shot with, like, some 50s porno mag,  
it has censor bars over the chest and groin,  
under which your mind fills in things which are not there.

It is being kicked in the groin and feeling just as much pain,  
though of a different sort  
as you would  
had your body been right.

Dysphoria is not something you just get over,  
or something that can be wished away,  
or cured.  
You can’t just ignore it for once,  
damn it,  
you don’t realize you’re ruining everything.

It’s not some psychological fuck-up  
born out of some childhood trauma  
caused by the way you were raised,  
or by anything anyone did wrong.

And most of all,  
my dysphoria is not me.  
It is not who I am,  
but merely a symptom of what I am.  
Transgender
Poem: Word Pool (Ryan)

I deeply believe that poetry is an art
And that not all trains of thought
Full of rhymes
And onomatopoeia
And heart
Are poems.
This is not to say
That the barely-men in gray turtlenecks
In the back of cool coffee shops
Who speak as though it is only the poetry
That laments life
While praising its wonders
In some sort of two-faced riddle
Is the only poetry with merit
And that to be a poet means being lonely,
And speaking only of the enigmas of the world
And the hellish nature of humanity
are right.
For maybe poetry is many things
A crack in a pitcher full of melting ice
That drips water
Into a tiny river across the landscape of a wooden table
The tingle you feel
Crawling down the back of your neck
When you know
Just know
Your beloved is watching from across the room
A story made up as you sit on the heath
In a moment of pure catharsis
When, in a burst of creativity
You imagine a sloth with a translucent pelt
Through which you can see all that he is
And he is vile
And dainty
And so terrifyingly wonderful
All at once
That you find yourself suddenly bang-smack
Back in the natural realm
Writhing on the floor
Like the snake with his stolen legs
Who has not yet learned to slither
And maybe it can be

The thing that drives you onwards
In the face of horrors that you might otherwise hide from
Or the thing that pummels your heart
And boils your blood
Into a coagulated mess
While you, enraptured,
Pull your own ribs open
To welcome more
And maybe it can still be the sort of thing
That you see in a hallmark card
All honey and cheese
So sickeningly sweet
That it sets your teeth on edge
And maybe sometimes
Poetry can be born from a list of pre-chosen words
That would otherwise result in a shrill mess of chatter
And people blathering like infants trying to convey their thoughts
With only the meager repertoire of words
They’ve so far learned from books with cardboard pages
But only maybe
Poem: To All You Pity Seekers (Ryan)

Do you remember that girl
with the dark hair
and dark frames who sat in the back of the class
and sharpie'd murals on her jeans

Do you remember how
She always sat in the corner of the cafeteria
Surrounded in the chatter of students
and leaned back in her seat
closed her eyes, and listened
or how one day
she opened the huge, first floor window
climbed out as the teacher watched
and skipped the rest of the day
On nothing but a whim

Do you remember?
Of course not.

And yet, when the teacher comes in
and tells you she’s gone now
taken last night
by some disease
that even she can’t pronounce
you give a sad sigh
and say
“That’s too bad.
I really liked her.”
But how can that be true
when you haven’t even noticed
She’s been absent
all week
Poem: Let Them Go (Ryan)

We lie together hand in hand
And you smile
And I fear
Because we are together
We are in love
And it is perfect
And it is temporary

Love is not a permanent state
But a rapidly shifting
And fading state of mind
Love is a field sliding through seasons
Which could so easily become
The victim of good intentions
turned into a parking lot
Because we thought it would be better this way
When in reality, all we were doing
Was damaging it

Why should we allow our bond to fade
From love to less
And then nothing at all
Or maybe something worse
Would it not be better to part now
And leave the field as it is
A place to which we can return
In moments of nostalgia [sic]
Without having to witness
The damage we will surely do
Short Story: What it Takes to be a Man (Ryan)

I haven't been to a church since I was twelve, when my mother got remarried and threw a fit when I came out with the legs of my ratty blue jeans sticking out from under the frilly hem of my flower girl dress. I ripped that thing off the first chance I got, and nothing my mother said could get me back into it. I still have a framed copy of one of the pictures, the one of the whole wedding party standing together under that big old maple tree, with the seeds helicoptering down around us, all the men in suits, all the girls in these pale bluish-green dresses (my mother called it “sea foam”, but I know for a fact that sea foam is actually a pale, sick looking shade of brownish yellow, so I don't know what she's talking about) with frills and lace and skirts that bulged out into a bloated bell shape when they spun, and me, right next to my mother, wearing a baggy sweatshirt and jeans with holes and Sharpie marks and black platform heels that made my ankles turn out until I stood there looking like a gangly little giraffe.

For a long time, my mum kept her copy hidden away in a photo album, tucked away in her closet with boxes of old baby clothes and the tiny shoes my brother and I had grown out of in a week and the hand-knitted purple blankie I had carried with me until long after such things were appropriate. It wasn't until years later that she finally put it in a frame and set it on one of the long shelves that trailed down the hallway between the sitting room and the kitchen.

I remember coming home for Christmas for the first time in three years - I’d been out of contact ever since the day I started going by “Emmet” instead of “Emily” and my mother started crying and asking what she had done wrong - and seeing it set out among snapshots of me and my brother playing in leaves, dressed up for trick-or-treat or playing around on the floor among the pile of puppies that our Australian shepherd, Cassy, had somehow managed to spawn despite the fact that we had gotten her 'fixed' years before. We had the whole family over that Christmas, as we had decided to blend the years family reunion with the holidays to cut out on traveling costs, which meant seeing not just my mother and siblings, but my extended family as well. Unfortunately, this included my grandmother on my late father's side, who was heavily religious and not in a good way. She ended up sitting across from me at the table and ended up glaring and fingering her cross everytime our eyes met.

My cousin Sam had gotten married that year to a woman named Mary whose name you could never forget because of her love of wearing her name on necklaces and
embroidering it on her bags -- I didn't know Sam well enough to have gotten invited to
the tiny service they had, and

wouldn't have gone even if I had been -- and after dinner my mum took his new wife
down the hall and pointed out each and every picture to her so she could coo and aw at it
like women like to do.

When they got to that photo, the one from the wedding, my mother pointed out each
person in turn to high pitched murmurs of 'he looks so handsome' and 'she's so pretty',
and when she got to me, she said “and here's my son, Emmet” in such a cheerful voice
that I had to excuse myself from the kitchen where I was helping clean and hide away in
the back bedroom so I could break down in private, relief washing over me until I was
laughing through my tears.

I wish I could excuse myself now, go hide away in my car or maybe at home, under my
bed, but I can't, so instead I square my shoulders and lift my chin and trot up the steps as
quick as I can without somehow looking excited despite the tightness of my expression,
because maybe if I get inside quickly, it'll somehow be easier to get through this.

The church smells like stale books, burning candles and old people. It’s quiet despite
being packed with people my mum was the sort to make friends with everyone she met.
Among those I recognize are her old friends from her work and her knitting club, all four
members. My brother stands at the head of the casket, talking with people and putting on
the good-little-son act despite having fallen apart with my mother years before. People
filed into the pews and settled down while others walked up to the casket or stood talking
around the edges of the room. A babies sob carried over the low murmurs like a siren
wail in a ghost town, and I looked over to see Mary trying to quiet her newest infant.
She and Sam are apparently working towards the world record for children, with four kids in
as many years and another one on the way.

I can’t help the spark of jealousy as I watch my cousin lift and toss a toddler in the air,
her brown curls flying, her mouth smiling, her giggles loud in the heavy air. (I’m pretty
sure that’s Annya, but it’s hard to keep track when I only see them twice a year.) She’s
too young to understand that she’s supposed to be sad, too young to care about the
watery-eyed scowls tossed her way, but Sam notices, Sam cares, and so when she giggles
and grins and asks for “again, Daddy, again!” he gives her a hug and sets her on her feet instead.

I find my way to one of the back rooms of the church, where a few padded benches line the walls and table holds a few containers of black coffee or hot water for tea. There’s also a selection of cookies that are obviously dry, even from across the room, and have been painted with some sort of white frosting that doesn’t seem to want to harden despite the fact that they have been out since the morning, if not longer.

I take some hot water in a paper cup, plain white like everything else. It’s like they were scared that the mournful air might be ruined by even the barest hint of color. I can’t help but see the irony in it if my mother had chosen the paperware, there would no doubt be cartoon animals on each cup and colorful flower prints on every napkin and plate. I can’t help the moment of anger that flashes needlessly through me it just doesn’t do her justice.

I drop a tea bag into my cup and let it sit, staring down at it as the barest hint of brown leaks from the herbs. People come and go for a few minutes, taking drinks and leaving the cookies largely untouched, unspeaking while I back myself into a corner and close my eyes. People move around me, giving me strange stares, but I don’t notice. In fact, I don’t notice anyone around me until there is a hand on my back, one on my arm and I am being led to one of the benches. They are large hands, thick, and could easily sit heavy, but the touch is surprisingly gentle, barely leaking warmth through my layers of suit jacket, vest and button up. I sit, catching sight of my guides shoes, and don’t need to look up to know who it is. I would recognize those ridiculous black and white loafers anywhere.

“Hey boy-o. How have you been doing?” My uncle’s voice is gravelly and rough, more so than it was last time I saw him, though if that’s from emotion or chain smoking, I’m not sure. His beard is longer and greyer too, brushed neatly for once. He was the first person in my family I ever came out to about being trans*, and he’s called me “boy-o” ever since.

I swallow once before telling him, “I’m alright.” He nods once even though we both know it’s a blatant lie and he leaves me to it. That’s what I like about Uncle Max he knows when you need to be left alone and when you need to talk, even if you don’t know it yourself.
I twisted around nervously in my chair, looking over my shoulder at Uncle Max, who grinned at me and waved the hair clippers menacingly. I laughed in reply, turned back and tugged the towel tighter around my shoulders. He didn’t bother to ask if I was sure about this he knew me well enough to know without me telling him. I was nearly vibrating with excitement as clumps of hair fell around me and picked up one in my hand, tossing it into the air like confetti and laughing until Uncle Max scolded me to “sit still or I’ll have to cut you bald.”

The next time I looked in the mirror, I felt a hundred pounds lighter despite the fact that I knew my mum would pitch a fit next time I saw her. The weekend of grounding I ended up with had been well worth it every time some waitress or street goer called me ‘little boy’.

The white string of the tea bag is damp when I lift it, and the movement stirs the water, a sudden bloom of tan flooding the small cup. I drop the bag back in and do it again, but it doesn’t have the same effect, only mixes the water to one solid, pastel tan. My stomach churns at the thought of drinking it. I’m not even sure why I took it. It was probably to keep my hands from shaking, but I’m too out of it to really think, which is very weird for me. Normally I think too much.

I don’t know how much time has passed when Sam, Mary and their small clan join me in the small room, but it can’t have been long, because the tea is still leaking heat through the thin paper cup. I listen to them bustle, the oldest two, twins that looked like anything but, begging for coffee because “we’re big kids now”. Sam hands them each a cup with half an inch of black liquid at the bottom despite Mary’s scowl, humouring them. At the first sip, both kids mirror their mothers scowl, and though Andy passes his cup back to Sam, Ryan powers through the rest of his and then proceeds to proudly show off his empty cup to anyone who will listen.

I find myself watching them and placing a hand flat on my own stomach, wishing that I could have a child some day. Hormone treatments and surgery took away my ability to carry a child without giving me the ability to create one and, for a moment, I hate Sam
and every other man on earth who was born right. It goes away quickly I’ve all but exhausted my supply of mass hatred over the past few decades.

When Annya starts to cry about whatever it is that children cry about, I toss my untouched tea into the trash and slip back out into the sanctuary. There are quite a few more people here now, the pews already filling up despite the fact that we’ve got a while left to wait. An older woman wearing feathers in her ears and a stripe of bright pink in her graying hair spots me, pats her eyes with a checkered handkerchief and hobbles her way over. To anyone else it might seem like she’s simply hit her midlife crisis a few decades late, but the fact is that she’s always been a bit odd. No surprise, then, that Uncle Max is her (much) younger brother. (Half brother, actually, by a different and much younger mother that their father traded in for when he managed to make some money off of the invention of a type of cloth that cleans the lenses of glasses and microscopes and other such things.) Even when I was young, she always told me to call her “Sid” instead of “Aunt Sidney”.

Her touch is much rougher than her brother’s despite her much smaller hands, and she pulls me with her to the front pew without a word. I go without protest she’s a woman to be listened to. I recall the day I came out to her and have to smile. The first thing she had done was pitch a fit, not over my gender, but over my clothing. I had been wearing the most boyish things I could find in the girls section of the store, but one trip to the mall with Sid had fixed that. Even my mother hadn’t had the gall to protest when I returned home with my arms laden with bags and Sid’s hands on my shoulders.

Finally the service begins, and Sid sniffles her way through it by my side, and I pat her hand a few times, mostly to distract myself. I watch as the priest says a prayer and keep my lips still when it comes time to chime in ‘amen’. I’ve never really agreed with religion. It isn’t the idea of a God that I do not like, only the idea of organized religion. Besides, it’s a bit hard to agree with something that is constantly used to attack you and belittle your very existence.

My brother gets up to give a speech, talking about my mothers love and her smile and her strength when our father passed. He’s the sort of man who still wears his high school letterman’s jacket and clothing that makes him look like he has a good deal more money than he really does, a trend that hasn’t changed for today, though the letterman’s
jacket has at least been left over the back of a pew where he had been seated. His eyes trail over the crowd but never once land on me. He tells stories about our childhood -- about visiting the beach and having picnics in the back of the van on rainy days and the day we all went to the city and she ended up befriending a young cabbie and becoming pen pals with him -- and every time he refers to me, I am Emily, his sister, and it makes me want to either throw up or break down. In the end, I do neither. This time it is my aunts hand patting mine, and then squeezing it, and I focus on my breathing instead of his words, free hand coming to pluck nervously at the button of my suit jacket.

I think back to when I first came out to him. I’d sat them - my brother, mother and step-father - all down in our living room and come out with it slowly, like my therapist had advised. I explained about gender disphoria, about hormone therapy and about surgery, then finally ended the speech with “I’m still the same person I’ve always been. The only thing changing is that I’m finally going to be on the outside who I’ve always been on the inside.”

My brother broke the silence, hissing out, “You’re not telling me I’m actually related to a fucking tranny. More than my step-father’s scolding that I was too old to be going through these childish phases, more than my mother’s shaky sobs and distraught question of ‘what did I do wrong’, more than anything, my brother’s words had hurt the worst. They still do, and probably always will.

A sharp poke to my ribs draws me out of my memories and I glance over at my aunt. She motions towards the podium, which is now empty, my brother already seated and scowling. It is my turn.

I take a deep breath, bite the inside of my lip and stand. They always seem to say that when a situation like this happens, the walk feels like it takes forever, but it doesn’t. Not for me. Instead, I’m behind the podium before I even realize I’ve moved and am suddenly and wholly unprepared.
I don’t know what my brother said and suddenly find myself terrified that I might repeat the same stories. I twist my jacket button nervously and swallow, glancing over at the casket, thankful it is closed. I had a speech planned out, but now I’ve forgotten it completely.

I let my eyes scan the crowd, suddenly struck by how many people there are, people from all walks of life, from different cultures, different backgrounds and beliefs. Some stare blankly or smile encouragingly, while others narrow their eyes and look me up and down as though trying to figure me out. My voice hitches in my throat as I start. “It seems like my mother’s always been the one who can bring everyone together. I guess it makes sense that that wouldn’t end with her death.”

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I have been asked to help bear the casket, a request left in my mother’s will, and do my best to keep the box steady as we walk ten minutes down a packed-dirt trail between stone statues and mossy headstones. There is a fresh hole up ahead, a perfect rectangle of dirt taken out of the ground, as if some great being had taken a cookie cutter and sliced it out. We set the casket on the ground beside it and the priest speaks again. This time, I echo back with everyone else, because if there really is something listening, I don’t want to be the one to hurt mum’s chances of getting into heaven or paradise or whatever else comes after this life ends.

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Later, once the casket has been lowered into the ground with a pile of lilies atop it and we’ve headed to my mothers now empty house, as per her wishes, and most everyone has run out of stories and tears and things to say, everyone heads out. I stand near the door, accepting hugs and condolences and promising people that I’ll call if I ever need anything despite the fact that I haven’t even spoken to half of them before, much less have their number. My brother remains in the kitchen, leaning against the counter and sipping at some wine only because it’s not really acceptable to be drinking anything stronger at the moment.

I’ve been staying with Aunt Sidney while in town, since a week long stay in a hotel is expensive on a teacher’s salary and she has a guest room that is unused other than by her Saint Bernard, Sebastian, who likes to sleep under, not on, the bed. Since her eyesight is
going now and she stubbornly refuses to wear glasses, it’s up to me to drive, so she gives me her keys and I go to start the car and give it a moment to warm up. She had taken the bus earlier to help set up the church, though I think it was probably more to give me time alone on the way there than anything else.

I roll down the window to escape the overwhelming scent of dog and pine air freshener, then look up to see Sid and my brother standing a few feet away, talking. I can hear him clearly. “Do me a favour and remind my sister that the final reading of Mother’s will is on Friday. I really don’t want to postpone it my flight leaves on Sunday.”

It seems to hurt worse every time he does it and I suddenly wish I had let the foul scented air suffocate me, because at least if I had been passed out, I wouldn’t have been able to hear him. I resist the urge to get out of the car to go scream at him, but it’s not the time or the place for our feud and my mum deserves better than that. I wish he thought so as well.

Sid, though, doesn’t miss a beat, and she gives him a confused look, tilting her head and rubbing her earring between two fingers as she replies, “I didn’t know you had a sister. I’ll be sure to tell Emmett, though, and maybe he can pass it on to whoever you’re talking about.”

Tonight, we’ll drink and watch home videos and cry ourselves to sleep, and despite everything that’s happened and is going to happen, I can’t help but flash Sid a smile through the glass.
Essay: Trans*ition (Ryan)

I was born in 1992, a year that can boast nothing more memorable than President Clinton's election and riots in LA. Compared to that, my birth was nothing extraordinary. I was born on February 16, exactly when the doctors expected me. My family sometimes jokes that I was on time for my due date and have been late for everything since. Everything including the realization of who, and what, I am.

I was starting my sophomore year of University before I realized I am transgender. While that certainly doesn’t seem old, compared to the stories of three year olds who was to be a princess instead of a prince or who ask their mummy “when will I get a peepee too?” I ran very late. This is partly because I was in denial for years.

When I was in high school, I was self-diagnosed bipolar, properly diagnosed ADHD. I often found myself growing suddenly depressed when, I thought, there had been no cause. I might just be sitting in class or walking down the hall and suddenly I would be upset, sometimes to the point of wanting to cry. I tried therapy, or what they call therapy these days. The ‘teen therapy’ I went to consisted of sticking 10-15 girls in a small room in some clinics basement and going around in a circle, rating your week from one to ten and then explaining why. It was useless I only went to 3 sessions before dropping out and felt worse after each one.

Slowly, I began to realize my moments of depression tended to coincide with something gender related: being split up girls/guys in gym or for a class debate, being called ‘the girls’ when with some of my friends, even having a door held open for me by a classmate could sometimes trigger me and send me into depression.

I began to gender-related depression, and eventually came upon gender dysphoria in relation to being transgender. I looked up news stories about transgender people and instantly decided I never wanted to be like that. I couldn’t be trans, couldn’t put myself through that. I went into denial, tried to make myself as feminine as possible. It was skirts and heels and makeup and a whole load of unnecessary anguish.
Eventually, in my Senior year, I basically said ‘fuck it’ and stopped trying so hard. I would still wear the occasional skirt, but skirts in themselves don’t bother me. No clothing does, because I don’t understand why any type of clothing is only for girls or only for guys anyways. What about kilts? And after all, heels were originally for men. It’s not the clothing, but the resulting assumptions people make that hurts.

By the time I got to university, I stopped caring about clothing and wore what I liked. It was t-shirts and jeans most days, my hair cut short, and though I still wore makeup occasionally, it didn’t hurt. When I was doing it because I wanted to, instead of because I felt I had to, I was comfortable in it. I started thinking of it like going in drag, though I didn’t realize it at the time.

I’ve said before that, if I was born in the right body, I would be a flamboyantly bisexual guy who occasionally goes in drag. Because fuck binary, that’s why.

Then, my closest friend since pretty much ever, Kyle, came out as a transman, and I started to see how much happier he was once he accepted himself. I asked him a lot of questions and, by the start of Junior year, I was out and proud and, most importantly, happy as a transman.

It’s almost the end of my junior year now, and I’ve got an awesome, accepting boyfriend, am out and loud in the community and have reopened and am leading an on-campus trans* group. I’m starting gender therapy and for once, the future is looking bright.

We’ll see if it stays that way.
APPENDIX C

RENEE
Appendix C

Renee

Journal Entry: 3.23.14 (Renee)

to see her again soon and not be so shy in front of her.

9/23/14

What a Friday went to Cloverleaf High School and talk to
Shawnee. Which is a part of high
school counselor and health & legit
people and Judges that I work with
Gay teens. I went with
and it went great
and it went great
told them about PFLAG and
Teen Pride. A woman came up
to me after the meeting and
told me that my
Mom & Dad will come around
in time and I told her I
hope so and thank you. It
was great.

I know I could of never done this

a yr ago
Journal Entry: 4.2014 (Renee)

He started lol (I did it twice), I went bowling with her and had a great time getting to know her. We talked about being with her. I can say it's a big thing for me because I did it all the time, and it sucks. I did a suicide walk with some other members from my group. I raised $130 for the walk. I can't believe it's been a year that I have been out. I love my life and family and friends that support me every day. I own my life to New Pride and support because without them I would be dead. ♥
Today was great. Support meeting and work. You know my hometown county that I thought was so liberal change right in front of my eyes. I may of not seen it a yr ago but I see it now seen. 
I came out and help start out support, and I love it and also living in it. I love what support is doing like going to Sharecroster and all the hospital information fair, and we are going to the GG9 Education Conf. Can wait for the GG9 Sunday. I want and pass out soap for human trafficking, we did it in the area and all the hotel took the soap, with is great. We pass out 1500 bars of soap, I hope a victim finds it and calls the hotline #. To think I saved a life.
thanks
4 messages

Sat, Sep 13, 2014 at 11:01 AM

To: Karen Andrus Tollisfeld

Karen,

Hi, want to thank you for interview me for your project. Attach below is the rest of my story I wrote for book (you whatever you need of it).
Also I would also like to read part of my journal I wrote last night when I got home from are interview (yes if you can use it).

Had my 2nd interview for the LGBT journal; I was so nervous for her to see my journal to let her into my life that I close off to the world and just wrote in my journal. It was therapy for me to read my story to her even though I was shy and nervous and somewhat didn’t want to tell her my story but I did for some reason I think it was because I knew in the end she was helping LGBT people like me and to do something to get our voice hear.
She ask me all kind of questions that I never would of thought to ask myself and it shock me that I have found a new me that likes to write and tell my stories on page. Only you hold the pen that writes the book of life.

Thanks again and if you need help with anything else let me know.

From, (AKA Renee)
“Renee”
As a young 25 yr old Lesbian born in a very conservative, backward thinking town in Ohio is difficult. A lot of people say you choose to be gay, but I can say now as an out lesbian for a couple years that I was born this way. At a early age I knew I was different then other girls; and I didn’t know how to take it or what to do; I just knew I would wake up every morning and wish I didn’t exist and I also knew my family and society wouldn’t accept it. To my family and society I was not normal. I want to school every day and put a fake smile on and was made fun of because of who I was; I was a tomboy, I wore boy blue jeans and t-shirts and I love getting dirty. I was called fag or dyke, you name it I was probably called it; all this bullying hurt me so much that a couple of time I thought of ending my life, but I put that fake smile on and pretended like it didn’t bother me because I was to chicken to end my life. In 8th grade to be normal I dated my first guy, it was so weird because we both didn’t know what we want. We would talk on the phone and not talk because we didn’t know what to say or talk about. During the same time my uncle was diagnose with cancer in Feb 2004 and died in June of the same year. I became more depressed and somewhat suicidal because of all the bottle up emotions that I had. I saw a school counselor and talked to her about my uncle; parts of me want to scream out to her I’m gay and I need help, but I didn’t because I was afraid of her judgment and all I knew was I had to act normal. I start high school with the same emotions and with the same boy friend. We broke it off my freshman year after I found out he was cheating on me with my best friend. I graduate in 2008 and join my local town Fire dept as a Firefighter/Photographer; and I love every min of being a Firefighter/Photographer, helping people in the time of need. My mom was an EMT and my Grandpa on my Dad side was a Firefighter when I was growing up, so I knew it was in my blood to help people. As a women Firefighter I got a lot of shit; the guys would telling me that a woman doesn’t belong in a man job, that I was not strong or smart enough. I took this bullying and let it push me to approve them wrong. With the help of my other sisters and brothers on the fire dept that believe in me I work my tail off and got off probation and got my yellow helmet, it was the proud day of my life. I was not out to anyone at the fire dept at the time and I decide that I would let a couple people know so I Facebook message one of the girls on the fire dept that I knew was lesbian because her partner was on the fire dept too. I love them both and knew they would be support of me. I message her and she told me she never knew and that she was 100% support of me and if I need help she was here for me. I feel good that I had come out; it felt like I at least kick the closet door open to what I was. I decide at the same time to come out to my ex boyfriend that I still talk to every now again because he was in the Army. I told him in a text and he call me and said I knew there was something up when we were dating and I just couldn’t put my finger on it; I support you and I am here for you and I know a girl for you, she in my unit. He gave me the girl number and I text her and we start talking and then we date it was long distance; she was my first girlfriend. I was so nervous and scary. Our relationship last a couple months and then I broke up with her because I found out on Facebook that she
was cheating on me and was getting married to this girl that was in the Army with her. It sucks because I loved this girl and I trust her enough to spill my emotions to her. After this relationship I decide to come out to my mom, I message her on Facebook and told her that I was gay and how I was feeling. The next morning she called me down stair and told me I had no clue what I was talking about and that I was confused. She asked me if I ever had sex with either sex and I told her no and she told me your confused and to stop thinking like this and not to tell anyone. I had so much emotion after that day that I decide to go back in the closet; in till 2013 when I decide as a 25 year old that it was time to grow up and put my big girl pants on and come out again to everyone that would hear me. I started by looking up a local support group and found one in the XXXXX area close to where I live. I went to the meetings and start to open up little by little even though it was really hard for me. For the first time in my life I felt support and I felt like I had enough courage and info to step out in the world as a lesbian. My best friend XXXXXXXX at work, one day ask me if I want to go to Columbus Pride with XX and XXX and her and I told her yes I would love to go and she ask me if I had a problem with hang out with gays and I told her no I don’t; I want to tell her right there and then no I don’t have a problem because I’m gay myself, but I didn’t because I was scary so I wait till that night after work to text both her and Tony and tell them. I first text XXXXX and he text me back and told me he never knew and that he would always be there for me and then I was going to text XXXXXXXX but she text me and told me that she didn’t know and that she loves me and that she was here for me and that she was glad that I came out to her and that she was more excited for me now than ever because this would be my first pride as a out lesbian. I was excited for my first pride because I never been to one, but I was also scary a little; but I knew my friends would be there for me and wouldn’t let anything happen to me. We leaved Fri after work and got a hotel; and the next day was the parade we leaved the hotel and head up to the parade spot and on the way XXXX gave me advice saying I would see a lot that I probably haven’t seen before and that he was here if it got overwhelming. We walked a couple of blocks and then ran in to the protesters right by the capital building; they had signs that I didn’t bother reading because they were full of hate. We walked by and found a spot to sit and have a drink; the parade start and my friend XXXXXXXX came up to me and hug me and said I love you girl and I told her I love her too. The parade ended and we went to the festival with was so big and full of people; that we decide together that we would go back to the hotel and take a nap before bars hoping that night. We went back to the hotel and took a nap and got ready for the bars; we went to a couple local bars and got some drinks and then we decide to hit the hay, so we took a cab back to the hotel and I will always remember this cab ride because the cab driver had the radio going and the song on the radio was it raining men by the weather girls and we all broke out singing it, we got back to the hotel and went to bed and got up the next day and head home. I had the time of my life because for one weekend I got to be myself and be around friends that support me for me; they don’t know it but they saved my life with this trip. I decide the following weekend I would go with one of my best friend from work XXXXX who partner is in the Navy as a MP to Cleveland pride we drove up and park and walk and just as Columbus we walk in to the protesters with had signs and were handing out the orange Bible. One of the protesters try to hand
A Bible; but XXXX told him not to reach for us and the protester told us to reach for the hands of God he will save you and I will always remember XXXX come back to him, I don’t need saving I’m already in his arms and he doesn’t hate me for being gay, he made me gay and he also help me find the man of my dreams so fuck you. I came back home from both of the prides with the courage of a lion I told a couple of my other friends and one of my triple sisters. I then decide to come out to my mom again because it had been a couple of years and I thought she needed to hear it again. I didn’t have to wait long because the next day she came to me and said are you gay and I told her yes I am, and she said that I was confused and that I was Bi and I told her no mom I am gay and she then ask me if I ever had sex with a either sex and I told her no and she said in till you have sex you wouldn’t know what you are. I then told her I know who I am and that is XXXXX your lesbian daughter and she said no and I said yes just like you knew you were straight without have sex I know I’m a lesbian without having sex. She told me ok I still think your bi and I told her ok well you think that. She then ask me why I didn’t come to her sooner and I told her because I was afraid I would get kick out of the house and she then told me I would never do that to you I love you and support you I just think you’re confused a little. I told her I love her and we hug. I want to a couple more support meeting and then decided I would start going to PFlag meetings, I went and love it and found more support and decide to become the public relations officer for PFlag. A couple month pass and my other triple sister got married and when we were at the wedding my mom came up to me and hug me and told me she love me for who I was and went to know when I was going to find a wife to marry and I told her when I find her mom I will let you know; she told me cool because I want to plan the wedding, I start to cry because my mom now accept me for her gay daughter. Even though my life continues and I know that I am bound to have more struggles as a young lesbian I remind myself that it will get better that it will only takes time and to keep my head up and be strong like God would want me to be.
APPENDIX D

ISOBEL
Blog Post: Now That the Ego Dies Completely (Isobel)

05 Jan 2007

So... now that I'm done being selfish.... well, I'm still a liar!

“Something's gotta go wrong ‘cause I'm feeling way too damn good” figures... I'm so fucking depressing and I HATE it.

It feels so weird needing instead of being needed. It feels so weird saddening instead of smiling. It feels so WRONG weeping, but I need it so much.

I need to stop being emo...

I'm only this way when I'm alone... so I can realistically hope that I'm not annoying my companions ‘cause I'm sure as hell annoying myself.

I lay myself bare for the first time... I honestly think that we were meant to be this close, this fast, right now.

I need to NOT do that again. I need to NEVER do that again. I need to never do that. I need to never do. I need to never I need to never never never do it again.

New Year's Resolution... I finally found it.

“Come with me where chains will never bind you
All your greif at last, at last behind you
Lord in heaven, look down on him in mercy.
Forgive me all my tresspasses and give me to your glory.
Take my hand and lead me to salvation.
Take my love for love is everlasting.
And remember the truth that once was spoken;
To love another person is to see the face of God.

... 
Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.”

“I love the wretched”
Blog Post: Liberation (Isobel)

08 Jan 2007

So... I fell asleep around 3:30, 4:00 this morning... and inspite of two simultaneous alarms, awoke at 8:30... to the sound of the school asking where I was. I couldn't go to school because my brother is sick and we can't take him in the car. I feel bad cause I generally like being at school...

But I also feel a sense of liberation. Which is quite wonderful because I'm slowly getting my work ethic back after it practically died this break. I feel impowered. It's nice. I feel liberated from the bonds which held me in constant turmoil.

I'm going to register for the SAT and Driving school, get my liscence, move on in life...

yeah.

After all the plays I'll probably get a job.

mmmm L'vie.

It's amazing that I feel this way less than a week after hell on earth. In all honesty I still feel the breath of pain and sorrow on my cheek. The floodwaters of emotion, however ebbed for the time being present a formidable opponent. I go forth as a brave soldier hoping for salvation and redemption.

Salvation and Redemption.

We're schedualing... Juniors, we. for the seniors we are to become. Oh God fear the loss more than the gain.

We are growing beyond High School.

We are growing.

This is growth.

There is NO finality.

Only in death are we denied the chance to grow.

I hope no one meets that roadblock.

Perhaps death is not the impenitrible wall... but to over come it one must shed all forms of existence as we know it.

Death is the final immunity challenge.

I still feel a twinge of doubt in those statements. Oh woe. There is the hurt. My soul laid bare exposes all I wish to hide... and yet I still find those who love me in spite of it all. I am dumbfounded.

The shock and awe of love is not fireworks and ball-game proposals...

It is a hand to hold.

It is a smile where there is only sadness.

It is a human connection where all pretense falls and bare bone fuses to create a greatness closer to God than anyone could ever know.

Souls merge, and God sees that it is good. for that is a part of God.
Unconditional Love from those who have no hidden agenda, no other motivation, they're not even family members.
So that's what it feels like.
That's why people cling to me everlastingly... because I love unconditionally (as well as I can).
So that's what it feels like.

For speech and debate, I'm going to spend an entire day as each one of my characters... so don't be alarmed... lol. *open to suggestions from people who actually know what's going on...*

So that's what it feels like.
Blog Post: Most Not Excellent Dude (Isobel)

11 Jan 2007

Woah...
ok.
sorry about that.
Random (extreamly strong though) bout of self-loathing.

Damn.

So...
Anyways
Life is generally good.
I feel WAY more productive than I have in a while.
I feel WAY more loved than... ever?
I found a college I REALLY like. (Waren Wilson... it's in North Carolina)
I don't have to get a D in history anymore
which means i can do musical! ::joy!!:

Life is in a general upward trend with the occaisional (and extreamly annoying) pangs of
doubt which say something like, “you don't deserve this! how can you live up to that?
you have deceived them! You are a horrible person and always will be. Why do you
even try?”

Which naturally hurts, especially since it's coming from you, you're more inclined to
believe yourself...
But i'm beginning to see the complete idiocy of such concepts. Those are the EXACT
same thoughts and self-depreaciations that I battle every day for the happiness of those I
love.
So, in order to fight the demons of hate and pain and sorrow, I must learn to love
...Myself.

I formidable task it will be... But if so many people seem convinced that I am worthy of
their love... I suppose it's a truth I ought to accept eventually... like the world being
round.
*not to be presumptious, saying that I deserve love is a fact for all... but I feel I deserve
some. (I have far more than enough... I just have to jump on that bandwagon) lol.

Go forth do I, a brave soldier. Jacob struggling with G-d from dusk 'till dawn.
Blog Post: Hallelujah! (Isobel)

26 Mar 2007

Ah! the sanctity, the holiness of God! I feel you once more in my bones! The glory days are upon me! ponders, you? Ponder how I came upon such a turnabout? I would too, could I not pinpoint the moment when Beauty and Truth shattered my hardened soul! Tyler Ellis, as Marius of Victor Hugo's Les Misérables, sang the song, “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables”. Within that bless'ed song lies the lines, “My friends! My friends, don't ask me what your sacrifice was for!” For an instant, for a beauteous moment, time slowed, and the rendition of the aforementioned line by the aforementioned bearer, brought about a ray of light, a ray of beauty, a ray of truth encompassing all my sense, all my body, all my soul into a single act of greatness! Seemingly insignificant to all other listeners, that Moment reawakened my soul by crying out from the mountain tops and whispering from the bottom of the sea, “There is still beauty in this world to be found! There is still beauty to be seen! There is beauty all around! Do not let it go in vain!” With that utterance I heard the chorus of man replicating the glory of heaven and my soul did awake and my sorrow was banish'ed! Banish'ed I say! For all the glory of my life came back and the joy of today stretched forth into tomorrow, and the next day, and the next! Hallelujah, I cry out to you now! Hallelujah! for God's work is not done, Man's beauty is not all exhausted! Nature feeds our souls still, and God may bestow greatness yet! Hallelujah!
I need to write, to write i need to write to write
I need to release this burning in my soul

I wonder what dreams have left me thrashing into my waking hours, taking me in violently and thrusting me out once the deed is done.

What violence racks my body into noon time that I can not know?

What fires eat away my insides... I feed on dinner mints and water to quell its raptures

what brings my heart to trembling just sitting alone? Why can i not stay still? Why do my hands, my mouth, my mind Move with such grace and freedom?

I am without control and I am so far blinded by this breath that brings me to life

I feel as though I am inhaling for the first time a clean breath of air that my blood is clearing out the pollutants of a life long ago

that the stars pierce my skin with every glance that the winds ripple my muscles that the leaves soothe the fear

I am turning free of my body I am not here

My spirit climbs to my throat, choking on insufficient words and an apathetic language I sing songs of a long-forgotten tongue I speak sounds of rhymes without any rhythm

I sing, sing sing all day long not knowing the story of the song
I feel its pull and its push
I am its tool for expression
too ignorant and blind and coarse for its truth

My soul

Oh god my soul convulses within this shell
I need to run under the moonlight
and sing with the wind
and serenade the stars in my eye

Speak to me! See me! know me! please god, know me.

Why now do I need you to love me like you do?
How can I stay in your arms?
Ask for it and it is yours.

The cold sets in without your touch

I sing!

I sing the songs of our ancient dance
our bodies lithe and limber, contorting to the drum beats of our hearts
fires burning our skin and sweat steaming with each heavy, knotted, deepening breath
we dance without consciousness to guide us, only our bodies seem to know the moves...

and so we must follow
as the night, the day
the moon, the sun
the rain, the harvest

We are natures own path
we are merely here upon her good graces
Gaia takes our spirits up and allows them to mingle while our bodies bind forever.

oh, how I sing!

I'll sing you this song
for as long
as you can bear the whisper of the trees
as the gossip of our romance unfolding
in the tender hands of Gaia's embrace.
Blog Post: The Woes of Atlas (Isobel)

The woes of Atlas
24 Oct 2008

breathing insufficiently
I escape with long faces
in forgotten places
this world that knows such sorrow
that breeds such ignorance
that cries tears of hatred
and lonlyness in the night
stars fall black upon my face and hands
I am not moved by the pain of man
who are we to demand
action or cause
do we pause for our death when we change the channel
on the soon-forgotten chattle begging for food
for a helping hand?
do we mourn the loss of ourselves as we ought to mourn this fellow man?

Who's to say you deserve as much as I?
And what if what you want
would take away mine?

Do you have the right to demand survival?
Do you have the right to demand community?
Do you have the right to demand that which you need?

Do I have the right to give it to you?
Do I have the right to take it from you?
Do I have the right to give you what I want to give
what I think you need?

Is it mine to give
Do I truly have the audacity to presume that I know more than you?
That my race or my color or my education or my home make me better than you?
Does my love and my passion for life make me any more than you?
It's time I start remembering that I'm human just like you.
That I would want some one to feed me if I were hungry
to clothe me if I were cold
to hold me if I were alone
to miss me when I'm gone
to love me even when I'm human.
I'd say I'd do the same in return
but experience shows
that the current state of apathy is at an all time high
and the flowing rate of empathy might as well be dry
the responsibility for this universe
I hold I carry on my back
hoping one day I'll just grow old
and die before it can haunt me with the nightmares of what I should have done
for my brother and my sister
for my mother and my father
for my friends and my lovers
for my man and woman and child
for the life that I have on my back.

I am atlas, trying to ignore the world I carry on my shoulders
because I am overwhelmed
I am cynical and judgmental
I am hopeless and jealous
I am angry with out cause
drowning in disillusionment
ignoring the world I carry on my shoulders...
I am disgusting.

What refuge is there for a soul whose eyes opened so wide so that they might see the glory of God... and saw instead the insurmountable tasks placed before her.
Without idea or direction hope or inspiration,
I quell the fire of urgency in my belly
for fear of failure. For fear of ....
everything.
I am afraid.
I wake up and I am afraid
I sleep and I am afraid
I love and I am afraid
I am angry and I am afraid
I am afraid of myself, of who I am becoming of who I was, of the world I am growing into.
I am afraid of this world on my shoulders, getting heavier as I open my eyes.

So I shut them with tears streaming down. Hoping that it's all a terrible dream. That I'm not responsible for this world, that I have no place in this scheme. I am afraid of that as well. That in this bigger world, there is no place for me. For my dreams, for my wordless songs, for my visions of sun and water, for my love of life. For my drive for a better world on my shoulders. I am afraid.
I am human.
and I am afraid.
I am human.
Rapture. rapture. rapture, it whispers to me. I hear it coming on the wings of rain drops as they cascade down my window panes. I am awoken with a start to discover that my blood runs warmer each day. It is neigh sunrise and yet I can feel its evanescent rays coalescing upon the air, drifting into my lungs and striking my skin. I have become eroded. With the soft tread of time my edges worn, my eccentricities bound, my internal monologues hindered by... everything. I write in a backwards fashion now. Rather than following the flow to my hands, I strike my hands with a hopes of rekindling the flow.

With each moment I draw closer to this precipice over looking an abyss into which I will soon jump. I know I will return stranger, but not a stranger to myself. I have been grooming my latent wings for some time now, and yet still feel so unprepared. I have but weeks, days, hours, until my departure and I will once again set my faith upon my muscles, hoping they are not too atrophied to work once more.

My life is about to change.

I am afraid, but only as an afterthought to my anxious excitement. I am mostly afraid of losing what I have, even though I know in the deepest part of me, that what I have to gain is so great I can not, and will not, let it pass by.

I have displayed a reluctance to allow my heart its own wanderings in the forested night. I have only allowed glances out of a window, or a solitary moment in an idle car. I do not know why I limit myself thus. Perhaps I feel as a foreigner where I was once home. I feel unworthy or too far removed to remember the wind ebbing around my flesh. And yet I can feel it now, mimicking the oceans steady heartbeat echoing all around my being.

I will soon alight though the wind and rain to seek my own rapture, slow and unannounced in a strange world, which I can already feel is much like my own.

Whispers of who I might become slide past my ear, almost inaudible through the commonplace din of our world.
I see clouded pathways to whom I might become.

The question I seek most is this:

How can I best repay my debt to the universe?

I have come from less than promising histories and yet I am so capable. I do not know why I have been spared, but I know that I must give back that unanswerable gift. There is something within me worth guarding, and I seek the best means to unleash it.

Perhaps it is my words, but have I anything to say?

Perhaps it is my actions, but what have I to do?

Perhaps it is my being, my pulsating life, but to what use do I put it?

How do I take the treasures buried deep within and make as much good as I can?
Alright. Here we go folks! Day 1, the beginning, Genesis, ground zero. As of right now, I have flown 1 hour and waited to fly for 5 hours. The flight was on a little baby plane called a Dash something-something or other. Let’s just say it was a glorified station wagon with wings. If I wasn’t already sleep-deprived from anxiety and last minute preparations, I certainly am now.

I have another 5 hours in Toronto, and I don’t think I can leave the airport. =[
Even if I could, there’s no one here to say that it’s ok or not. And I’d rather risk not seeing the city than missing my flight. I am convinced no one actually works for the airlines here.

The Toronto airport is very nice though. Artsy-Canadian-y. There’s a life-size Moose with a uniform on. He’s now my iPod’s background. Go Canada.

However, whatever cute charm I had at Cleveland Hopkins, is gone now. Maybe it’s because I’m obviously American, or most people I see here are foreign themselves. Regardless, they are far less likely to humor me for whatever reason.

There is a flight leaving from my gate before me for Beijing. I’m trying to remember the little Chinese I’ve learned to listen in. So far here’s what I’ve gathered: Teen girl: “I don’t have……” ?????? I know, definitely putting those 4 semesters of Chinese to use.

This is a very unorganized and random post.

Blaerrgghhhha!

What is weirdest for me in all of this so far is the alone part of it. I don’t have anyone to talk to or explore with. I don’t know how many more times I can pace around the airport before someone calls security. I’ve never really traveled alone before, let alone flown. I realized that my ease at many things people fear comes from my need to be fearless for my loved ones. Weird. And so I find myself hosting a number of fascinating dialogues in my head as I attempt to entertain myself through the forced solitude found in crowds of strangers, self-imposed and enforced, of course.

Why can I be mere feet from you, for hours, and we’ll never make eye contact,
acknowledge the other is there, except to perhaps corral our baggage more closely. So strange, yet so familiar.

I want to see the city, but I don’t think I can leave. And I definitely had deja vu about this moment, and my regret at not seeing Toronto. Alas.

I am truly exhausted and can’t wait to sleep on the plane.

Love.
THOUGHTS: FROM 29 JUNE, 2011

What is perhaps more remarkable than anything I had prepared for is how I might change. It is still considerably early, but I failed to anticipate the freedom offered by coming to a brand new place, with without any other person to really know me before hand. I have been given the opportunity to truly sculpt myself without others to offer opinions or ideas of my own history.

Here I am left with interesting consequences. Is my adaptation to a new culture and people a betrayal of my own identity, completed by social and cultural baggage?

Perhaps I am beginning to form and develop myself independent of that. I am my own self, separate from my various paradigms acquired throughout my short life.

For perhaps the first time in my life, I am trusting the development of my selfhood (which, of course, is ever changing) to myself. That is not to say, that I am without influence, remaining baggage (however light), or new guidance and affirmations. It is more correct to say that I am entrusting primary responsibility to myself. How.... powerful.

So perhaps that is the reason for my almost reluctance to reveal or indulge in conversations of and meanderings into my past. I don’t want to color the now blank slate with out-of-date dyes and patterns, however instrumental in my own design process.

.....I don’t really like that metaphor but hey, cut a girl some slack.
I never really realized how much fear of different things is a part of our culture. We’re afraid of everything. From bugs to rapists to plane crashes and food. Perhaps that’s a side effect of our social problems cycle (Shout out to Dr. SOC 201D), or our ideas of perfectibility. In order for a framing to achieve the desired outrage, it must tap into our fear.

The reason I note this now is because of how un-afraid Indians are by comparison. Arguably, there is more to fear here, with more people, poverty, etc. and less government agencies and oversight. People of means have the means to protect their things, privately.

There is little to no fear of nature, be it insects, animals, or weather. Maybe it is related to the short amount of time that Bangalore has been developing. Perhaps the bigger problems like poverty and pollution and corruption take all the time to handle.

Something else which might affect the social-problem process is the clause in the constitution that a threat to the Unity of India will be dealt with swiftly and severely, without any requirement for legislation. I am still fascinated by this clause.

It’s interesting to be without the urban myths about razorblades in candy or GHB in your drink.

I relax more here, not to foolishness, but about foolish things.
Blog Post: Be as a Child (Isobel)

I seek to experience. My answer to most propositions was, “why not?”. Now, that does make for a very interesting time, but it is in fact incomplete.

I wish to be a s a child in this new world. To keep my eyes wide open, with mouth always asking, ‘why’. Learning to live this different life is such a physical adventure, words fail me. It starts by opening yourself to these experiences, and to simply let them wash over you. India is not an intellectual experience. India is not an emotional experience. It is an ancient, powerful, everlasting physical experience. India is what is human. What is raw, what is real. Highlighted and accepted as all part of the same flowing, rhythm of life and death. India is a feeling, a smell, a sound, all jumbled together and magnified. It is color, all colors. Spices, dyes, trash, smog, and neon lights.

I’ve written far less in this blog than I thought I would. Probably because all my words fall far too short.

I want to share with you everything. Because India is everything.

That hint of what life is, blowing past you in the breeze? Magnify that and you have the powerful, the very life-breath of this place. That small feeling of insight and clarity? Here, it drowns you every moment it is alive here.

I can only describe to you what is physical and base. You can’t know what it means, how it moves you, changes you. I am just beginning to come to terms with it I feel rubbed raw, and can feel a new flesh begin to prickle its way into being.

I breathe in deeply, this same collection of atoms we all share. I can taste the rich history, the terrifying future, the technology, the ancient, the rich, the poor. I can taste the life that has and always will flourish here.

I am but a child, and it makes all the difference.
Blog Post: Ethnic Day from September 8, 2011 (Isobel)

ETHNIC DAY (FROM SEPTEMBER 8)

I WAS NOT PREPARED.

-For how amazing this was. For the first time, I feel like I might fit in, just a little bit, here. Like I’ve stopped being a guest. It felt almost like a rite of passage. I can carry a Saree!

I do still need to learn to dance like an Indian. At all.

Today, my motto was “Firangi Nahi!” (read: Not a foreigner). I so do not want this day to end. I feel like I belong here, even though I never will, fully.

I am like a child, trying to learn the intricate do’s and don’ts of a culture, language and tradition, all in an estuary of globalization and history.

I LOVE IT.

I’m basically on my way to being pseudo-adopted by my best friend’s family. The are such an amazing group of people. I already feel a sense of... duty to them all. If luck or circumstance would have my life to be full of bounty, I would instantly make sure to share it with them.

I am here to learn what it means to be Indian, right here, right now. So far, it’s ... fascinating and so rewarding. I don’t want this to end.

This experience has already been so rewarding. I know I have made life-long friends here. Even if everything else were terrible, they would have made it all worth it.

I’m trying to work on making certain that people in my life are ends unto themselves. Not a means to any end (shout out to Dr. and ). Including myself. This has really changed the way I view my relationships with others.

I am to your friend because of what you can do for me, or what I can do for you. I am beside you for this stretch of Life’s journey because simply your company is pleasing to my very spirit. There is no duty, no prerequisite, no obligation. We
are here because we want to be, and it gives me insurmountable joy to see you happy. Nothing more is required.

I accept you, I love you, I challenge you. I accept myself, love myself, challenge myself.
Blog Post: (Isobel)

WELCOME... HOME?

Well, hello all.

I know I haven’t kept up with this too much, and for that I am quite sorry. Except not really. Ok a little bit...More on that later.

So, I am back in Ohio. Back in the United States, and back in North America.

Basically, I feel like I’m riding this tumultuous sea of feelings and experiences. I have yet to see the sun since my return a week ago, on account of the terrible, gray, Ohio weather. And on the figurative end, the sun comes out intermittently, usually pasted on the faces of my friends and family.

The biggest thing I’m having a hard time dealing with is... how life .... is. Especially by comparison. Life in India was so, pulsating, so guttural, so alive with this rhythm that existed outside of and at the very core of life. It wasn’t just humans and everything else. It was people as a part of this bigger creature, this bigger earthly .... aliveness. Whereas here, everything feels so boxed, packaged, shined, metallic, orderly.

It’s as though we’ve been turned into pillars of chrome and smartphones rather than salt. Not to demonize technology and our more, planned and orderly style of life. It’s just different. And now my seemingly easy acceptance of Indian life has become a revulsion to a place where I fit in even less.

I am a new person.
The energies which power me have a different source than before.
The more I interact with people from before, the more I realize my changes. I know it will take more time to really know how I’ve changed, and how it all fits into where I want to go from here.

And that I think is the biggest change. I am more... me. I am defined by my experiences and thoughts more than I am defined by my relations to others. A healthy shift, I feel. I am far more assured of myself than I once was. Which is very funny, really. Because overall, India was such a humbling experience. I grew to rely on others and they on me. I forged connections I will never ever
forget, and always nurture.

I know much more of who I am. And what I uncovered was not always good, but I am proud of it, and very proud of who I know I am capable of becoming.

Well, let me say that I miss India. So much.
I miss the color, the sound, the smells, the uneven pavement, the traffic, the animals, the masses of people on busy streets. I miss the tastes, I miss the people. I miss the weather. I miss my people (which once used to mean firangis, but now means my desi boys and girls =P). I miss the music, the street food, the strangers, the stares, the buses, the disparate cultures all somehow put together into a country looking toward the future. I miss the way I could walk outside and never feel more alive. I miss the exhilaration and terror of crossing the street. I miss the painful awareness of mortality, suffering, and poverty. I miss the reality of existence being so plain, so present with you.

I miss the … awareness, that nothing is perfect. That we, as human beings, are not perfect. We are not the pinnacles of creation. We are a work in progress. Like everyone, every thing else.

Now, I know I should have blogged more, it would have helped me remember. Also, I can not begin to tell you how terrifying it is to me that I will forget things. But it was for the same reason I did not always want to take pictures. Because it put distance between me and my subject. It put distance between me and India. And I didn’t and still don’t want that. I am too good and putting distance between me and my negative feelings. I can intellectualize anything. Which can be good. But I didn’t want that with India. I wanted to feel it, I wanted it to get way under my skin and become a part of me. It did. I don’t regret it for a second.
Blog Post: Email October 1, 2014

including two blog posts: Violation and Vulnerability (Isobel)

From Email to me on October 1, 2014:

WARNING: The following is dark and sad and graphic and hard for me to read now, and you are under no requirement to read it. These were written January 2012 and February 2012, respectively. The first is really the first sign of me coming to terms with the darker side of my experience in India. Long story short, I was raped by a guy I was talking to. I boxed the whole event up neatly and put it aside until I got back home because the rest of India was too wonderful to have it be ruined by a man so crude. The second is far more to the point, and rough to read. But it very well illustrates how writing is so important to me, still. I again don't think I would have coped as well (at all) without it. We can certainly talk about it, I am in a significantly better place now thanks to my support system and therapy. Everything I share is open to discussion with you and in your dissertation.

They are both private online, so I have provided the text here. I can also add them to the Blogger you already have access to if that would make it easier.

“Violation” January 2012

Today is a melancholy kind of day. The sun hidden behind opacity, my humors imbalanced. Remnants of the familiar flit past with gusts of wind. The old fading to new. Superimposed to trick the senses, but not convince the soul. I look up, breathe, and descend into my toes. They ache on the flat, hardness of concrete. It's not right, to walk on pavement all day long. It gives us the wrong idea of the world and how it works. From our first steps we're trained in the art of control and mastery. We fail to notice that we are not in control, nor masters of anything. We are parts, pieces, individual and collective. We are not an apex, there is no pyramid. I have always felt a disconcertment with our views on nature. Now I feel down right violated by it.

Violation.

There's a topic I've tried to avoid.

“Vulnerability” February 2012

I am so trapped and so far away. I am a bird in a cage, and lost at sea. I am not in my body, and yet I am lost within the sinews of my muscles, aching, fighting, flinching. I am violated and broken. Torn asunder. Plundered. From the outside in. I let him in and can not force him out. I purge and purge and purge and still it remains, knotting, twisting turning, driving, drilling past my organs, through my diaphragm, into my lungs, circumcising my heart and piercing my spine. I have a virus, a tumor. My body is no longer safe, not even to visit.

I talk of letting others in, what a foolhardy goal when I refuse even myself access. I am outside my flesh, outside my tears and my aches and itches. They are nothing to me, and I to them. I am trapped, trying to find a way out. Leaking through tears, resonating through moans and whispered sobs. I am flooding out, in blood and sweat and tears and cum. I am trapped under my skin left with what he left behind.

I am living proof of the dichotomous nature of atoms. I am the smallest, most fragile piece clawing at the walls of this death chamber known as my flesh, and I am high above, confused as to what could possibly be going on down there, turning away so as not to see.

Sex is nothing to me. It is as winter. The beautiful colors of fall turned to barrenness, meaninglessness, sharp, frozen branches. Even in masturbation I am the male, filling, conquering, penetrating. I can’t get off, I can’t finish any other way. As the user, the conqueror. I have no vagina. I have an open wound between my legs I would rather stitch up than let another near again. Cauterize my cunt so it will stop bleeding. So I can heal. Feeling is more painful than it ever was, if I ever felt it at all.

I miss feeling safe in my body, even for a moment. I miss feeling safe alone with myself. Instead I self-sabotage. Ruminate, deviate. I can not be left alone.

Now that I see this in me, can anyone see otherwise? I can hardly face myself, how could I face another? I dream of commitment, trust. I preach of love and vulnerability. I am a false prophet. I have destroyed that which I yearn for. I have allowed the monster inside to cling to my bones. I am not in control.

I am so scared.
It hurts so much.”
VULNERABILITY & AUTHENTICITY & LOVE

I feel in my mind these thoughts from my heart bubbling up like molten metal. Transformations have already begun to melt down my separate parts. The fires are hot and the night is long. Is there an equation here, summations and divisions creating equalities where the total is greater than the sum of the parts? I am content and confounded. Aching and relaxed. Blue hot and red cold. I can feel the sun rising and setting past me day after day like an indie film montage, highlighting my single-tripod-on-a-low-budget narrative.

(I can feel something needing to be written slowly bubbling up from my chest but I am unsure of its sound or shape. Words are never enough, and always my only medium.)

Close your eyes and imagine long right strokes bending in a way fibonacci knew well. Undulate these curves to the rhythm of your own heart beat. Feel your beating heart and tell me: Does it jump out of your chest, a mad hatter imprisoned behind your ribs? Does it guide blood throughout your veins with the steady precision of a native rower, each pump a stroke propelling your life’s canoe up the river? Does it possess you, like a demure whisper playing coyly with your life, always a difficult pulse to find?

It fails to matter in the least to me. Your heart is my heart. I have taken you to be free. Each violent electrocution sends blood cascading like rapids through a course rushing to fill the void in our capillaries. Suddenly with drums to keep our time, we embark across a great ocean, the ominous rhythm echoing throughout our bodies, jarring marrow loose, we crumble from the inside out.

A great wind gusts to regroup our sails upon this choppy sea. Again, with great effort a pause, and then release. Pupils dilated, the sun breaks through, or did we break through to it? It seems as though we have always been upon this new shore. Never gone, and never lost. No possessions, no transgressions, no deceptions. Eden is alive and well, drowning within the chambers of our heart.
"CARLA HALE IS A TEACHER — OR WAS, BEFORE SHE LOST HER JOB AT BISHOP WATTERSON CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL IN COLUMBUS, OHIO. SEE, WHEN MS. HALE’S MOTHER DIED, THE OBITUARY MENTIONED ALL THE SURVIVORS — AND IT INCLUDED THE NAME OF HER LONGTIME PARTNER. NOW, ONE OF THE PARENTS OF A STUDENT AT THE SCHOOL READ THIS OBITUARY AND SENT AN ANONYMOUS LETTER — ‘CAUSE THAT’S WHAT COWARDS DO — TO THE SCHOOL, CALLING THE DIOCESE DISGRACEFUL FOR EMPLOYING A LESBIAN AS A GYM TEACHER. NOW, IF THEY CALLED HAVING A LESBIAN GYM TEACHER “CLICHÉD,” THEY MIGHT HAVE HAD A POINT. BUT BIGOTS DON’T LIKE POINTS UNLESS THEY CAN STAB SOMEBODY IN THE BACK WITH THEM. AS SOON AS SHE RETURNED TO HER JOB AFTER TAKING A FEW DAYS OFF TO BURY HER MOM,
Ms. Hale was called into a meeting with administrators. They showed her the anonymous letter — and fired her. Now, this story is more depressing and ridiculous than that last season of “The L Word.” But here’s the worst part: Ms. Hale’s termination letter actually said, “Your written spousal relationship violates the moral laws of the Catholic Church.”

So here’s the good news — because the “Moral laws of the Catholic Church” actually violate the laws of the Bible. There’s only one single passage of the entire Bible that homophobic Christians really use to condemn lesbians. From St. Paul’s letter to the Romans: “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change their natural use into that which is against nature.”

That’s it. The only reference to lesbians in the entire Bible. And, just like Hillary
SWANK AND CHLOE SEVIGNY IN “BOYS DON’T CRY,” IT’S NOT EVEN REALLY ABOUT LESBIANS. SEE, ONCE YOU GET PAST THE FACT THAT THIS WAS WRITTEN BY A GUY WHO NEVER MET JESUS AND THE GREAT BIBLICAL TENDENCY TO REFER TO WOMEN AS SEXUAL OBJECTS — “WOMEN CHANGED THEIR NATURAL USE” — WHICH KINDA MAKES IT ALL SOUND LIKE THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO IKE TURNER — ALL IT SAYS IS THAT ROMAN WOMEN ONCE DID “THAT WHICH IS AGAINST NATURE.” WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY WHERE YOU CAN INJECT BOTULISM IN YOUR FOREHEAD — BUT ELLEN’S AGAINST NATURE? THE ONLY KIND OF SEXUALITY, MY FRIENDS, AGAINST NATURE IS PRETENDING TO BE STRAIGHT WHEN YOU’RE NOT.

WHAT PAUL’S REALLY TALKING ABOUT THERE IN THAT PART OF THE LETTER ARE ANCIENT ROMAN TEMPLE PRACTICES OF WORSHIPING GODS THAT WERE MOSTLY HUMAN/ANIMAL HYBRIDS. GOD TURNED HIS BACK ON THOSE ROMANS AND THEN THEY GOT ALL KINKY.
MANY THEOLOGIANS BELIEVE PAUL’S REALLY TALKING ABOUT RITUAL BESTIALITY OF THE ROMANS. IT’S ANOTHER CASE OF CHRISTIANS WHO DON’T KNOW THE BIBLE, BUT USE IT TO JUSTIFY THEIR HATE — AND THAT’S A BIGGER CLICHÉ THAN ANY GROUP OF FLANNEL-WEARING, SOFTBALL-PLAYING, MEN-HATING SAPPHOS DRIVING PICKUPS TO A WELLESLEY REUNION AT LILITH FAIR.

NOW, MS. HALE HAS FILED A COMPLAINT WITH THE CITY OF COLUMBUS, WHICH PROHIBITS FIRING EMPLOYEES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION — AND HER LOCAL TEACHER’S UNION HAS CHOSEN NOT TO SUPPORT HER. BUT WE DO. BECAUSE IN THAT SAME LETTER TO THE ROMANS, CHAPTER 2, VERSES 1 THROUGH 3, PAUL ALSO SAYS:

“THEREFORE YOU HAVE NO EXCUSE OR DEFENSE OR JUSTIFICATION, O MAN, WHOEVER YOU ARE WHO JUDGES AND CONDEMNS ANOTHER. FOR IN POSING AS JUDGE AND PASSING YOUR SENTENCE ON ANOTHER, YOU CONDEMN YOURSELF.”
OOPS. TURNS OUT THE HOMOPHOBES ARE THE ONES VIOLATING THE MORAL LAWS. AND IF YOU STILL WANT TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST AMERICANS BASED ON SOMETHING THAT’S NOT EVEN IN YOUR HOLY BOOK — WELL, GUESS WHAT, REVEREND — YOU CAN START PAYING YOUR TAXES LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.

ONE FINAL BIBLE QUOTE FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH:

“WHERE YOU GO, I WILL GO; WHERE YOU LODGE I WILL LODGE; YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD MY GOD. WHERE YOU DIE, I WILL DIE — THERE WILL I BE BURIED.”

BUT IT’S A PASSAGE ABOUT TWO WOMEN — RUTH AND NAOMI. THE BIBLE NEVER CALLS THEM LESBIAN, BUT IT CELEBRATES THEIR LOVE AND USES THE SAME HEBREW WORD USED TO DESCRIBE HOW ADAM FELT ABOUT EVE.

SO REMEMBER — THERE’S ONE OR TWO MENTIONS OF GAY MEN IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE, BUT AT NO POINT DOES THE ALMIGHTY EVER FORBID WOMEN BEING WITH WOMEN. AND I
FIND IT JUST A BIT CURIOUS THAT GOD HAS THE SAME POLICY AS VIVID VIDEO.
Blog Post: Comic Traits (Isobel)

- Went insane. Helps people.
- Went insane. Hurts people.
- Patriotism protects the weak.
- Nationalism dominates the weak.
- Response to persecution: nobility.
- Response to persecution: rage.
- Seeks knowledge for its own sake.
- Seeks knowledge for power.
- Uses power for the greater good.
- Uses power for himself.
Blog Post: Four Feminist Quotes (Isobel)

"I call myself a feminist when people ask me if I am, and of course I am 'cause it's about equality, so I hope everyone is. You know you're working in a patriarchal society when the word feminist has a weird connotation.”  - Ellen Page

Girls can wear jeans
And cut their hair short
Wear shirts and boots
Cause it's okay to be a boy
But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading
Cause you think being a girl is degrading

- Madonna ‘What It Feels Like For A Girl’
(Quoting from Ian McEwan’s ‘Cement Garden’)
“I’d like every man who doesn’t call himself a feminist to explain to the women in his life why he doesn’t believe in equality for women.”
- Louise Brealey

“FEMINISM is not a dirty word. It does not mean you hate men, it does not mean you hate girls that have nice legs and a tan, and it does not mean you are a ‘bitch’ or ‘dyke’; it means you believe in equality”
- Kate Nash
Blog Post: Stop Signs (Isobel)

“It’s ok to objectify guys, they’re guys, they don’t care.”

“Guys can’t get raped, they never don’t want sex.”

“Men should be the ones to do the asking.”
“Men should always pay on a date.”

“It’s okay for me to be sexually attracted to watching two gay men have sex, but not for men to be attracted to lesbians.”

“It’s impossible for men to be victims of domestic violence, they’re bigger and stronger than women!”

“Sexual predators are always men.”
Song Lyrics: Empty Chairs at Empty Tables from *Les Misérables* (Isobel)

There's a grief that can't be spoken
There's a pain goes on and on
Empty chairs at empty tables
Now my friends are dead and gone

Here they talked of revolution
Here it was they lit the flame
Here they sang about tomorrow
And tomorrow never came.

From the table in the corner
They could see a world reborn
And they rose with voices ringing
I can hear them now!
The very words that they had sung
Became their last communion
On the lowly barricade..
At dawn.

Oh my friends, my friends forgive me.

That I live and you are gone
There's a grief that can't be spoken
There's a pain goes on and on

Phantom faces at the window
Phantom shadows on the floor
Empty chairs at empty tables
Where my friends will meet no more.

Oh my friends, my friends, don't ask me
What your sacrifice was for
Empty chairs at empty tables
Where my friends will sing no more...
Song Lyrics: End of Heartache by Killswitch Engage (Isobel)

Seek me, call me
I'll be waiting

This distance, this dissolution
I cling to memories while falling
Sleep brings release, and the hope of a new day
Waking the misery of being without you

Surrender, I give in
Another moment is another eternity

(Seek me) For comfort, (Call me) For solace
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart
(Seek me) Completion, (Call me) I'll be waiting
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart

You know me, you know me all too well
My only desire - to bridge our division

In sorrow I speak your name
And my voice mirrors my torment

(Seek me) For comfort, (Call me) For solace
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart
(Seek me) Completion, (Call me) I'll be waiting
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart

Am I breathing?
My strength fails me
Your picture, a bitter memory

For comfort, for solace
(Seek me) For comfort, (Call me) For solace
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart
(Seek me) Completion, (Call me) I'll be waiting
(I'll be waiting) For the end of my broken heart
Appendix E

Holden

Poem: Self Image (Holden)

Look into the mirror, and what do I see?
That hideous person, a pitiful me.
Those bruises, that scar, and this scratch
Are all invisible to my eye’s catch.
Those horribly ugly painful damages
Are invisible, I have no bandages.
So why in this mirror do I look so ugly?
That is because I can clearly see me.
Poem: Mirror by Sylvia Plath (Holden)

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
What ever you see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful---
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.
Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.
Poem: A Reason (Holden)

There’s a reason I’m here,
There’ something indeed.
Don’t know it I fear,
Guidance I may need.
Depression is near,
Despair it will feed.
It needs made clear,
I must know what deed.
There’s a reason I’m here,
Tell me what I plead!
Poem: The Tragedy of a Star (Holden)

A little bug alive in the shutter,
Soon found herself cold, dead in the gutter.
Told once by a loved one famous she’d be,
Has done nothing but made baron her legacy.
A lead in the play she had desired,
Could only be hers if she acquired,
The director’s heart on a platter,
But sadly that did not matter.
So she became a star at night,
With a camera her career took flight.
At once, the actress became viral,
But her beauty took a downward spiral.
To the streets she took to find shelter,
And soon her attraction employed her.
“Spit out your vanity and swallow your pride,”
Abandoning her dignity, nightly she cried.
That very month, in the gutter she died!
Short Story: A Beautiful Day for a Funeral (Holden)

It was such a beautiful day for a funeral.

At the time I was either 9 or 10, I am not quite sure as I have blocked out most of my memories from that time. This was my first funeral and it was a somber day, but the sky was bright, the birds were chirping, and the smaller children with a lack of understanding were joyous. We were burying my father that day. He was a fairly good father I guess, but I had blocked him out too. Maybe, I enjoy blocking people out in general. Maybe that’s why I am where I am now.

Anyhow, the funeral was pretty alright. The old man’s eulogy was not so eloquently spoken, but then again he wouldn’t want it that way. I recall my little sister Darla crying so hard that day. I never quite understood crying. It was a hard emotion to muster up for the old man. I must have already begun blocking him out at that point. Well, like I said Darla was crying so hard and the eulogy was pretty pathetic but it was gorgeous outside. An absolutely beautiful day.

As the funeral ended, my Aunt Jan confronted me and told me I was doing a good job staying strong for little sis. I didn’t quite understand as I wasn’t staying strong, I just didn’t want to cry. When we entered the parking lot Darla jumped up into my arms. Her damn bruises were showing. I told her to make sure she covered it up at the burial because as I said it was a nice day and the bruises could be easily seen in the sunlight. That’s how the old man would have wanted it.

Anyways, we arrived at the cemetery and were all given some scarlet roses to place on the coffin. Well the important ones of us were given them anyhow. Well we got to the part where we put the roses on the coffin. The funny thing was that Darla’s rose had a thorn on it. That thorn cut her real well. Guess the old man couldn’t leave her alone even in the afterlife.

There we were putting our roses down when out of nowhere this impulse popped in my head. I lost complete control and just started balling. You know crying ugly and all that. I couldn’t believe all that had happened. She was only trying to protect Darla. I am not sure what that means as I don’t remember everything but I know that means something. Life was so unfair because a pure saint like Darla was harassed by this ugly old bastard even as he died. He made her bleed again. Life isn’t fair. Death is the only thing I find fair and never did anything suit the old man better.

Like I said I was completely crying, and then I realized that Mom wasn’t there. Why wasn’t she there? I don’t remember so well. I blocked her out like I did everything else besides the fact that she loved us way more than that old man could even fathom. She would do anything for us, even die for us. I am glad he did instead of her.

Finally, I remember Aunt Jan taking us home except I don’t remember what happened to Darla after that. She went away some place, like a special school or something. As for my Mom, I don’t know anything besides that she is gone now, probably rotting away like that bastard I once knew. All I seem to remember was that beautiful funeral and the first time I took pills. Darla slowly fades away daily, though she is the only positive memory I have of the past besides that beautiful day. All I know is
she is safe and he can’t hurt her anymore. He still hurts me to this day. Every time I get a glass of water and waste away a little he comes to mind. He should be the one dead. Life isn’t fair.

Death is fair, though. Saturday was supposed to be a beautiful day. Perhaps there will be another funeral. This time I may actually be free of the bastard. Maybe my sister, what was her name will be the “strong” one and not cry for some other little sweetheart of a girl. I need some more water, to dry to swallow. What was I saying again. Oh. The weathers suppost tobe [sic] beautiful Sa . . .
Poem: Beauty and the Brain (Holden)

What man would choose beauty over a brain,
   No such choice was ever so vain.
He would never have an original thought,
   Nor hath the ability to be taught.
Though that man may have not a strong mind,
A small workload would not be a difficult bind.
   Though his thought be ignorant and few,
What a glory would shine through.
I would surely choose beauty over brain,
   And save myself some awful pain.
Poem: Related Poems (Holden)

“To the Wind”

Dear Wind, if only you could see,
This damn dark thing you’re doing to me.
This forbidden love to me it is different and strong,
Has gone unnoticed by you, so cold and wrong.
If only you could see that it’s you I desire,
Your love story has scorned me as much as the Fire.
I only have words that are one longer than two,
Let me be your one because “I love you.”

“To the Fire”

Dear Fire, my long and dear friend,
This love started early and has yet to end.
You grow so hot until I have hurt,
Then you grow soft turn to ash and to dirt.
These mind games have hurt me just like the Wind,
And you made me do harm, for you I have sinned.
Although our love life is a deep shade of blue,
You damnéd flirtatious harlot, “I love you.”
“The Wind and the Fire”

In life only two things I ever desired,
To be with the Wind and the Fire.
However, due to justice I was forced one to choose.
This fight I was certain to lose.
The Fire was thrilling, passionate, a real good time,
Although it would burn me without reason or rhyme.
The Wind was safe, protective, kind,
But it could not stay with me for my needy mind.
The Fire unpredictable searched for many to burn,
The Wind had another which caused my great spurn.
I could not choose and without a doubt,
The Wind has left me, and the Fire burnt out.

“To the Darkness in Me”

Dear Darkness, that enthralls me,
Your nature is soon to be
Revealed to a tee.
 Darkness wants you to find him a foe;
However, it is where light there is no.
Neutral at worst, truly misunderstood though.
Darkness is not evil, but good not yet found,
If not one discovers its virtue, to hell it is bound.
Free Verse: A Week Later (Holden)

Why would he say he loved me? It was a blatant lie from the start. I was too
damn desperate to see it. It was probably all my fault. Oh a text message! Damn . . . =
just a friend. I just want to be free from all this.

Why do men always lie for no gain? He clearly didn’t love me. I need some
standards. I can’t figure out what I did besides love him. I gave up so much friend time
for him. I need to forget all that miserable waste.

Why do people always let me down? Maybe it was just that I loved him so much
that he knew he could use me. He lied so often it hurts even now that we are done. It
must have been something small I didn’t even notice. My friends don’t want to hear
about this now; I shut them out too much. I am going to do something bad if I keep
thinking about this.

What did I do to the world to deserve this pain? I can’t ever love anyone is all. I
lied to myself to keep this train wreck going. I just get too dependent when I latch myself
onto others because I let them in. I have done too much to my friends, and they don’t
deserve what I have done to them. There is always a better way, that is never the best
case . . . or so they say and they are liars.

Why won’t any of my friends answer my texts or phone calls? Maybe I
accidentally loved them too, which would be why they left. I must have lied in telling
them I was their friend because I abandoned them so much. I am not worthy of them;
they are way too good for me. I was his friend too so I must have hurt him enough to
have earned this weight on my shoulder. I think it is time to finish off the accident that
was created seventeen years ago two days from now.

Should I finally do it and save the world from the horror I have added to it? I
obviously was never capable of love so I didn’t deserve it back. I avoided the truth so
much that I may not even exist in this reality. I can’t undo all the evils I have brought
into this world, but I can stop them from continuing. I no longer have any friends who
want to be around me so this would be a favor to all those I have hurt.

Happy birthday to me I suppose. Five should be enough, right?
Poem: Baptism in Blood (Holden)

To the bath tub I start,  
A second baptism is planned.  
Due to the breaking of my heart,  
Due to the loss of a dearly departed friend.  
To the bath tub I go  
Giving thanks to the Greek.  
My head will not hang very low.  
Death’s smell fills the room, a proud reek.  
To the bath tub I begin.  
A preference to end in water  
Slowly beckons me to my coffin.  
I am but a lamb, sulking to my own slaughter.  
To the bath tub I take rest.  
The sharp pain does not give ease.  
Doubt begins to grow, my final test.  
The water turns crimson up to my knees.  
I thought a departure with dignity would lessen the fall.  
This was just a baptism in blood; I am not leaving at all.
I am like the deer, the innocent who runs free.
When happy I had no fear, I was safely let be.
One day the leaves rustled, the hunter then came.
The other deer hustled, they weren’t playing his game.
I was ignorant of his foul snare, I did not know of his quest.
Hurt me? Would he dare? I stayed still my best.
The hunter looked glorious, he seemed so fair and good.
With one blow he was victorious, he shot as he could.
This hunter was no friend indeed, how could I have trusted him.
He just stood and watched me bleed, he enjoyed this most grim.
“Foul hunter please end me, save me this despair!”
He gazed into my eyes, my soul he had seen.
He would not kill quickly, he had not a care.
The hunter was just a good guise, he was just a sadist most mean.
I bled out, death came at last, I was free once again.
The hunter downcast, his next victim this paper and pen.
Poem: A Party (Holden)

Let’s have a party, let’s sing and let’s dance.
Let’s have a party, and frolic and prance.
Invite your friends, it’s pleasant with more.
Invite your friends, don’t let me soon bore.
Shall we be merry, can we have some fun,
Shall we be merry, soon it will be done.
Leaving the gathering, for many is sad.
Leaving the gathering, for me t’won’t feel bad.
Let’s have a party, hey let’s name it life.
Let’s have a party, and fill it with much strife.
Invite your friends, they’d enjoy it too.
Invite your friends, we can all cry boohoo.
Shall we be merry, some temporary pleasure.
Shall we be merry, few moments to treasure.
Leaving the gathering, let’s have one last breath.
Leaving the gathering, at least I feel happy in death.
APPENDIX F

JOHN
Appendix F

John


HIV/AIDS is has one of the highest morbidity rates, mortality rates, and economic burdens of all diseases in world. It impacts anyone anywhere at anytime. HIV and AIDS are diseases, which can be devastating to someone and their friends and families. Low- and Middle-Income countries have been used in sample prevention programs to see how they work and to see how they save money. But, also how it affects the people in those countries.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus, HIV, is considered a sexually transmitted disease, which leads to Acquired Immunodeficiency or AIDS. (CDC, 2013) HIV is transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids, (such as semen, blood, vaginal fluid and breast milk) during sexual intercourse, sharing needles, or breastfeeding. The HIV virus attacks T-cells that are part of the white blood cell, which is required to maintain a healthy immune system. A person who is not infected with the virus has about 800-1,200 T cells/ millimeters. And someone who is infected with HIV and it progressed into AIDS has fewer than 50 T cells in their entire body. (NIH, 2012) HIV and AIDS is believed to have been started from a human coming in contact with a type of chimpanzee, that is infected with simian immunodeficiency virus, where it mutated into human immunodeficiency virus. (CDC, 2013)
People of all walks of life are currently affected by HIV/AIDS. Currently HIV and AIDS is most prevalent in Low- and Middle- Income countries. According to the CIA’s adult prevalence rate with HIV is highest in Africa and the Caribbean. In Africa it is believed to hold 70% of the total number of HIV/AIDS patients. (Morison, 2001) According to the World Health Organization, in 2011, 34 million people in the world live with HIV/AIDS, 1.7 million people died of AIDS adding on to the 35 million people who have already died of the disease. In the United States we spend about $568 Billion on HIV/AIDS alone. (Kaiser, 2013)

HIV/AIDS in Low- and Middle- Income countries has many risk factors that contribute to the disease; environmental, social and behavioral, cultural and economic factors are all included when looking at the HIV/AIDS disease. Environmentally HIV/AIDS has many factors. In the movie “Yesterday” by Darrell Roodt, is about a mother named “Yesterday” who is HIV+ and contracted it from her husband to got the disease in the mines while working. During the movie they show the character working in the field, having to walk a distance to get water as well as cutting wood. And while she is doing all of that she is feeling sick and tired while working. The environment took a toll on her. Having to constantly work and go get things she gets tired and gets sicker and sicker. I think that a major risk factor for her is that she has to do all of this work just so her daughter can survive.

Social and Behavioral are the most important risk factors for HIV/AIDS in my opinion. Sexual activity is one behavior, which is important to the AIDS epidemic. Not necessarily the factor of if you have sex or not, but the factor of sexual behavior. Since
HIV is transmitted by bodily fluids then practicing safe sex is going to be the best way to prevent HIV from transmitting. Another risk factor for HIV is if you use injecting drugs or not. Since needles go into your skin and come in contact with blood streams it is an important risk factor to think about. In all, social and behavior factors are possibly the most important factors to consider. Since HIV/AIDS is an communicable infectious disease, I think that thinking about what you are doing and thinking about if it puts you at risk is the most important factors to the disease.

Cultural is an important factor as well. In 2009 a report came out in IRIN News, which stated that in Swaziland they encourage HIV/AIDS transmission. The reason is that their culture doesn’t believe in the use of condoms, or having a monogamous lifestyle. After reading that article I believe that they live in a masculine society and they focus of gender roles and ambition, materialism, and independence. (Martin, 2013) I think that this is an example of a culture that is a risk factor. If you were to grow up in that culture then you are automatically put at risk. Because it is taboo to practice safe sex and have a monogamous relationships in their culture.

The economy is a factor of HIV/AIDS because it is now becoming a “disease of the poor.” I believe that this disease has an economic factor because in some counties the cost of antiretroviral medicine is too expensive to purchase so people keep spreading the disease. I also think that it has an economic factor because some countries have a high sex worker rate, where they keep passing on the disease. But that is the only way that the family can make money so they are left with a choice. Die of starvation and poverty, or die of HIV/AIDS and allow your family a chance of survival.
Education is currently the number one strategy to prevent HIV/AIDS in Low- and Middle- Income Countries. However, as with all strategies it has strengths and limitations. Strengths to using education as a strategy are that you would be able to provide someone with education, which then would empower them to do something about this epidemic. Another reason that empowering someone to do something is, the fact that a lot of things happen due to word of mouth. It can travel faster than a lot of other things and can affect a community quickly if they know how to prevent the disease. A limitation to this strategy is that women in a lot of low- and middle- income countries are not allowed to attend school. This is a major limitation because the majority of HIV/AIDS cases in those countries are women. Therefore, they would have an issue learning about prevention strategies and methods. That is the main issue as to why this method is not working in the countries. They cannot attend school since they have to stay in the home and take care of children and the man when he is back from work. Another limitation is that education alone cannot stop the epidemic of HIV/AIDS as it is.

I attended a talk provided by Dr. Dianne Kerr on December 2nd, 2013. I asked her in her opinion what prevention method would work best in a low- and middle-income country. She told me that a new method called the “Three Prong Approach” would work best in her opinion. This approach is a new and innovative method that can be put into place so that the spread of HIV/AIDS is decreased. The three “prongs” are first, the mother to child transmission rate, second, male circumcision, and third is to get people to go and receive earlier treatments. I think that by implementing this method that the rates of HIV/AIDS will decrease significantly. First preventing mother to child
transmission is a simple step. By informing women that the transmission is from breastfeeding, then providing them with a proper nutrition supplement to replace the breast milk, and prevent the transmission of HIV. The second “prong” is male circumcision. By providing male circumcision in countries with high HIV rates then it has been shown that there was a 60% reduction in rates with those who have been circumcised rather than those who are not. (Kerr, 2013) And thirdly, earlier treatments. If you were to have someone educate people on the early signs and symptoms then you would be able to get them on medications sooner and decrease their viral loads. I believe that if you were to implement this method into countries where the epidemic is hitting it’s hardest that you would be able to decrease rates significantly.

The article that I chose looks into the costs of HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and costs. They believe that if we were to spend more on prevention programs, research, and current treatment in Low-Middle income countries that we could reduce the epidemic by 50%. They believe that by creating a treatment plan costing $784 per infection that we could achieve this 50% deduction. I believe that it is an inexpensive way to achieve this and if you were to tie in the “Three Prong Approach” as Dr. Kerr mentioned then, it would be an extraordinary way to combat this disease epidemic.

In conclusion, I believe that with the right methods and education HIV/AIDS is a disease that could easily be defeated. The costs of treatment upfront would be expensive, but the impact that it could have is worth more than the cost. I think that this specific disease is too popular in Low-and Middle- Income countries that if we were to find an
implementation that would work, that this disease could be a thing of the past and a thing we learn from to prevent other infectious diseases.
Human immunodeficiency virus, or commonly known as HIV, is the virus that causes AIDS; it infects lymphocytes and destroys them at a rate that exceeds the ability to replace them. (Hart, 2012) HIV is a STI that is contracted by the swapping of bodily fluids with a person who is previously infected. Bodily fluids include semen, blood, vaginal fluids and even breast milk. Sex is the most common form of transmission. However using an infected needle or syringe, being born to an infected mother, or as a health professional being stuck with an infected needle or scalpel, can also transmit HIV. (CDC, 2013) There are different forms of being diagnosed. The most common form of the test is the antibody-screening test. This test checks for the antibodies that fight against HIV. It is preformed both orally and taking a sample of blood. After the initial test, if you are tested positive you need to complete a follow-up test to determine whether you are negative or which stage of HIV you have. (CDC, 2013)

Now that we know a bit more about HIV, how to diagnose it and the causes let’s look at the numbers. First, the incidence rate, which is the number of new cases. In 2012, there were 47,500 new cases of HIV. (Kaiser Foundation, 2013) The number of people living with the virus is 1.1 million persons in the U.S. That is more than 23 times the number of new cases. In 2012 according to the CDC there were 15,529 deaths due to HIV. In 2012 the Federal Funding for HIV was a staggering $27.7 million dollars. That amount is broken down into separate categories. Medical Care for HIV took up 53% of the funding, which is $14,681,000,000. Research for HIV was $2,770,000,000 or 10%.
Prevention took up the least amount at 3% or $810,000,000. And the rest was spent on the international epidemic. (Kaiser Foundation, 2013)

HIV is a public health concern because of its epidemic proportions. One reason I notice is that the number of new cases is exceeding the number of deaths. Part of that may be due to medication, but it is also due to the increase in transmission. Another reason is because of the epidemic proportions in the minority populations. Specifically in the population Men who have sex with Men. (MSM or YMSM) Because YMSM accounted for 69% of the new cases of HIV between 2006 and 2009 according to IMPACT, a part of the Healthy Chicago movement, from the Chicago Health Department.

Overall, HIV is one of the many STI’s in the US, which is contributing to the STI epidemic. All STI’s can be prevented. Prevention strategies can be implemented to reduce the epidemic. But, for this disease/infection/virus, a prevention strategy could decrease the incidence rate, and more importantly save lives to that the mortality of HIV is less than the 15,529.

There are many risk factors that contribute to HIV. On an individual level the main risk factor is if you are sexually active mainly because the type of transmission is the exchange of bodily fluids. Another individual risk factor is the person’s sexual orientation, since the highest rate of HIV is within the MSM demographic. There are also different socioeconomic factors that involve the virus. One is if you exchange sex for drugs or money. (NIH, 2009) I believe that fits in the socioeconomic factor because that would indicate those who are below the poverty line are included in this risk factor.
Community factors are if you are within a community where the presence of HIV is high, or within urban areas. Another community factor is language barriers. If you are in a community where they speak a different language there is going to be a possibility of miscommunication or misunderstanding of statements. (CDC, 2013)

One prevention strategy to address HIV is to increase the number of people who know their serostatus. In this strategy you test the high-risk individuals, learn their HIV status then you have a program for if they test for HIV- or HIV+. If they are HIV- you teach them different prevention strategies as well as ways to adopt and maintain innovative prevention steps, EX: using a condom, asking, and getting to know their partner. If they are HIV+ you enter them into a Care Services Program and treat them immediately. While doing that you teach them to follow therapies, as well as teaching them ways to maintain their own prevention steps. Such as condom usage, counseling, and ways to cope. (Janssen, 2001) The reason I selected this innovate strategy is because it places emphasis on early intervention and treatment. This strategy is broken into different steps for people who are having risky acts, as well as helping the overall population of people who are already infected because you are teaching them different strategies to cope, medicate, and prevent.

With any prevention strategy there are strengths and limitations. An obvious limitation is that if found HIV+ then the knowledge you learn may be too complex or too much to handle. Meaning that for them the steps of prevention may be too hard for them to understand, since it means more than just putting on a condom. There are different steps incase they are cut or someone becomes in contact with their bodily fluid. Another
limitation to this is that it would be hard to implement if you do not have enough people to complete the strategy. If you only have a couple people it will not have a great enough effect unlike if you had many. Another reason is confidentiality. Since many HIV screenings are confidential it is a scary process for many. Since there is a chance that someone would find out or that they do not was people to know.

However, I believe that the strengths outweigh the limitations. If implemented correctly data collection could be quick since the HIV rapid test is available they would be able to teach the right prevention strategy. Another is that the strategy could be replicated in other places in an easy format. Since it is a step-by-step process other places could follow the same and reduce infection rates. Also, while using the Serostatus strategy it may influence the cause and effect relationship. Since you will be educating the people on HIV it may reduce their risky behavior causing rates to go down.

Overall I believe that this innovative strategy would benefit the fight against HIV and other STI’s because you will be finding out the HIV status of a person and then implement a strategy and plan in order to combat the virus, in hopes to reduce the death rates and infected population. While doing it in a promotional manner in order to get people to go get tested and get educated.
The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), epidemic started in 1981 in the United States. And since then the epidemic has grown more and more. In 2010 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, estimated that there were 47,500 new cases of HIV/AIDS in the United States. (CDC, 2012) Of that 47,500 new cases within the population 20,550 were African-American. And 14,440 of the 20,550 new cases of the African-American population are among men. This is an issue that while it does affect everyone, it disproportionally affects African-American Men. Even though the majority of new cases are Men-who have sex with- Men (MSM) there are still people who contract HIV from Heterosexual sex and Injection drug users (IDU).

This health disparity exists because of many factors. Since health disparities refer to the disadvantages that negatively impact someone’s life, there could be many different reasons. Some of those include the stigma that it presents with HIV, discrimination, negative health, and legal actions. Other factors that may be included are some that are social environmental factors, psychological factors, as well as biological factors.

**Social Environment Factors**

Social Environmental Factors refers to factors that influence behaviors or in which individual health and illness behavior occurs. (LaViest, 2005) These could be due to their cultural beliefs, societal influences, socioeconomic status (SES), and their social groups. In certain cultures it is a belief that men have to have sex. It is part of their
masculinity, they believe. It is also perceived that they should not use condoms either. (Kerr, 2014)

Along with cultural beliefs, societal influences have a strong impact as well. (Kerr, 2014) Within the African-American society, there is a “man shortage.” This is associated with the high rate of African-American men being incarcerated, or dying prematurely due to violence. Recent studies have found that the number to sexual partners and sexually transmitted infection rates could be associated with incarceration rates in the African American society. (Pouget, 2014) Incarceration rates could be associated with the socioeconomic status, SES, of the person. An article by Joan Smith discussed that HIV/AIDS has “mutated into a disease of the poor.” (Smith, 2013) While her article discusses HIV/AIDS globally, it does bring up an argument about SES and HIV.

Lack of resources in the SES in the African-American community may lead to men practicing risky behaviors because they cannot afford condoms, which are the number one preventative measure. (Adler, 2006) Along with lack of resources men may not be able to receive treatment which could help them live a healthy lifestyle along with reduce their infectivity level because treatment may reduce their viral load. Along with SES, whom they associate with or their social group has influence on the social environment factors.

HIV/AIDS disproportionally affects African-American men as discussed before. But, it even more affects Men who have sex with Men and are African-American. According to the CDC, young African-American men bear the hardest burden, with
YAAMSM, or young African-American men who have sex with men, being 55% of new infections in the MSM group. (CDC, 2013) This could be because of the “down-low” factor. In the African-American society, being gay is not socially acceptable. It could be because of religious factors, or it even could be socially unacceptable. Due to those factors many African-American men go on the “down-low” so that they are not known or discriminated against for having sex with men. (Kerr, 2014) This would cause them not to go get tested for HIV, and they would not know their HIV status, and because of that they could transmit the disease to their wives, partners and others. This could increase rates of HIV dramatically if more and more people do not learn their status. Therefore, social influence in the African-American society is highly important.

The risk exposure theory states that there is a high prevalence of social or environmental health risks in predominantly minority communities that leads to a higher prevalence of disease and death. (LaViest, 2005) This theory is applicable to HIV/AIDS among African-American males because within a minority community is typically a lower SES. Which as stated before according to Adler (2006), could lead persons to partake in risky behaviors. Also, because of the stigma, homophobia, and discrimination of being gay or bisexual in the African-American society, this puts them at risk because they will not want to learn their HIV status because of fear. (CDC, 2014) Therefore, they are being exposed to more people who are unaware of their status within their society, which would lead them to higher rates of STI’s especially HIV.

The entire social environment is possibly the most influential. Because with a combination of cultural beliefs, society influences, SES, and their social group it
encompasses a person’s life as a whole, because family, media, friends, and money, are all things that someone deals with and something that could strong influence in their life. However, the social environment is not the only influence, there is also a psychological influence.

**Psychological Factors**

According to LaViest (2005), psychological factors refer to factors that are mediated by individuals; such as health behavior. (LaViest, 2005) Some psychological factors that are associated with HIV among African-American men are condom use and mental health stability.

Condom use is the most influential psychological factor out of the two. Since HIV/AIDS is a communicable disease, using condoms is a prevention method that comes down to the persons use. A 2004 study looking at AAMSM found that 26.5% of the 758 participants had unprotected intercourse, and 18.6% of them were receptive during intercourse. (Hart, 2004) This statistic shows that AAMAM are partaking in risky behavior at a high rate. This could be associated with many factors such as men’s Body Mass Index (BMI), depression and other mental health issues.

BMI, depression and other mental health issues are risk factors for unprotected anal intercourse. A 2013 study by Aaron Blashill, found that depression was associated with a decrease in condom use in normal weight and obese persons infected with HIV. (Blashill, 2013) This study shows that depression and obesity are risk factors for HIV, because of self-image. Also, a 2001 study found that people living with mental health illnesses have an increased risk at being exposed to HIV 8 times the overall prevalence.
It was also found that people with severe mental illnesses are more likely to participate in high-risk behaviors. (Rosenberg, 2001) Mental Health stability plays a key role in the psychological factor, because having poor mental health puts you at risk for contracting HIV and other diseases.

In Minority Populations and Health by LaViest, a theory that applies to psychological factors is the Racial Discrimination: The Racism Bio-psychosocial Model. This model could apply to psychological factors because of previous racism to African American from the Tuskegee Syphilis Study Era, and because of the trust lost in that study because of the researchers failing to help after a cure was found it is harder to regain the trust of African Americans post Tuskegee Syphilis Study. And because of that many African-American believe that AIDS is a form of genocide arise. (Thomas, 1991) This would fulfill the bio-psychosocial model because since many African-Americans believe that AIDS is a form of genocide, they are exposed to racism, then it becomes a stressor and depending on how they respond positively or negatively, it could lead to them partaking in risky behaviors and contracting HIV.

**Bio-physiological Factors**

Bio-physiological factors are the biological mechanisms that produce ill health. (LaViest, 2005) Since HIV is a communicable disease, which is passed from person to person, there are no bio-physiological factors associated with it regarding the minority, of African-American males. However, in approximately 10% of whites, with decedents from Northern Europe, may have the R-5 gene, which is a genetic mutation, which the R-5 receptors block the HIV envelope from bonding with macrophage and preventing
entrance into the cell. (Stine, 2013) Also Stine states that, “Scientists speculate that the mutant form of R-5 protected against some disease that afflicted Europeans but not Africans” (Stine, 2013) This means since African-Americans are not “White”, the R-5 mutation is not found in their population, it makes African-Americans susceptible for HIV infection.

**Public Health Interventions**

One public health intervention that could be put in place for African-American men ages 20-44 is the use of a “Social-Media based HIV prevention using peer leaders.” (Young, 2013) This intervention used peer leaders to try and reduce HIV transmission. After finding out that people who use the Internet to seek potential sexual partners have a higher risk of contracting HIV. This specific study looked at African-American MSM’s along with Latino MSM’s who were recruited to be a peer-leader for the intervention. The researchers recruited peers who were over 18 years of age, were popular leaders, who were interested in educating others, are male, are MSM, were the same ethnicity as the target population, lived in Los Angeles, California, and were experienced on social media. (Young, 2013) The peer leaders went to 3 training sessions for HIV training and 3 sessions for general health. And they also were given a survey to complete to ensure that they all had the skills that they needed to be a peer educator. It was found that out of the 15 subjects that completed the survey 100% of them used social media networks to communicate with others about their health within the last 3 months. (Young, 2013) Showing that with those who finished the survey, it had a high success rate.
The second intervention that could be implemented is “The effectiveness of Individual-, Group-, and Community level HIV behavioral Risk-Reduction Interventions for Adult Men who have Sex with Men. A systematic Review” (Herbst, 2007) This study looked at how effective and cost efficient the programs were. Regarding the effectiveness of the study it was found to reduce the odds of Unprotected Anal Intercourse by 27%-43%, and increase condom use at the group level by 81%. (Herbst, 2007) While the program looks at different reviews it has one thing that was interesting overall, the success rates of the groups. At the individual-level the studies had a 43% reduction in the odds of participating in unprotected anal intercourse. (Herbst, 2007) At the group-level, there was a 27% reduction in the odds of not using condoms and an 81% increase of using condoms from the sample. (Herbst, 2007) The community-level of the review found studies had a 59% increase of condom use. (Herbst, 2007) All the interventions had positive responses in the study; this shows that implementations on all levels could decrease HIV rates in MSM’s.

Comparison of Interventions

In summary, the two articles have many similarities and differences. Some similarities are that even though Herbst’s article is a systematic review of multiple articles it gives many options, similar and different. One similarity between the articles is that they focus on individual, and group interventions. They do this because in the social-media has peer leaders who talk to individuals on their Facebook account, and in individual levels in the systematic review the articles have one-on-one meetings with professionals. And on the group-intervention level, the social-media article where the
peer leaders discussed general health and sexual health on their Facebook, which would target groups of people on their friends list. And the review looked at interventions that were used at the group level during meetings and group discussions that were lead by peers. And since they were lead by another peer, as was the social media campaign, it shows that all interventions have successful chances using peers.

A difference in the articles was that on the social-media article it could not reach entire communities. Because your Facebook account reaches only people who are involved in your group. And the community level intervention review looked at changing beliefs of the community rather than starting from the bottom and looking at individuals.

Some different barriers that are involved in the implementations are under the personal/family level are the cultural, attitudes, beliefs, and education/income. These barriers are present because of many reasons. One barrier that ties in the cultural and attitude/belief barriers are that black YMSM are less “out” than other youth MSM. (Mustanski, 2013) This is attributed to the fact that men who have sex with men within the African American society have a harder time coming out. This could be contributed to the fact that in the African-American society masculinity is important in their culture. And the other barrier is education/income. This is could be associated with the 35% of African-Americans living under the poverty level. (Kaiser Foundation, 2014) With these two barriers it could limit the understanding of HIV and the importance of knowing your status.
Healthcare and The Affordable Care Act

Since 35% of African-Americans live under the poverty level, it could mean that the majority of African-Americans could be uninsured. According to Yvette Lanier, “...black and Hispanic young men are more likely to be uninsured compared with White male peers.” (Lanier, 2013) Lanier discusses that to decrease the barrier for young African-Americans, then you have to reframe the view on sexual health and make it part of routine screenings. (Lanier, 2013) This ties into The Affordable Care Act because if sexual health was part of basic routine health screenings then those who have access to healthcare could discuss their sexual health with their doctors. It also benefits some African-American males because under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, young adults can stay on their parent’s health insurance plans until they are 26, (Lanier, 2013), this would decrease the disparity because young African-Americans can visit healthcare providers longer than before.

However, for those African-American males whose parents do not have health care and they cannot stay on their parents insurance, the Affordable Care Act has increased access to care to approximately 7.3 million uninsured African-Americans. (HHS, 2013) With 7.3 million African-Americans gaining access to healthcare services routine examinations could include sexual health discussions, which could lead to discussions on HIV/AIDS and other sexual infections. Since “Knowledge is power.” (Annan, 1997), teaching HIV knowledge and empowering the minority of African-American men, this could increase HIV education and knowledge, and possibly decrease HIV rates among African-American men ages 20-44.
Conclusion

HIV among African-American men ages 20-44, is an issue that could be easily avoided and prevented. With psychological factors and social-environment factors in mind and knowing how much influence comes from the social-environment, from friends and family, and how much of your own knowledge influences your decision making on if you use condoms or not. And knowing the Peer-Lead education has influences on levels such as individual-, group-, and community for risk-reduction, makes it known that having a peer lead the educational influence, you could make this a disease that may no longer be a disease of the poor, or a disease that disproportionally affects African-Americans.
Academic Paper: Men Who Have Sex With Men Project (John)

Cleveland, Ohio
2014

Introduction

Men who have sex with Men are disproportionately affected by human immunodeficiency virus, HIV, which currently has an approximated incidence rate of 50,000 new cases per year. (CDC, 2013) This is adding to the current number of 1.1 million people who are living with HIV/AIDS in the United States. (AIDS, 2012) Of those 1.1 million the most severely affected are gay and bisexual men, as well as men who have sex with men, MSM. Recent studies have been utilized to complete a general understanding of the behaviors of MSM’s. Health topics such as Tobacco use and MSM’s, Alcohol use and MSM’s, Drug Use and MSM’s, STD’s and MSM’s, and Mental Health and Illnesses and MSM’s have all been analyzed.

Tobacco Use

A 2011 study conducted in New Orleans, looked at 879 individuals who have engaged in MSM behavior and their smoking patterns. It was found that two-thirds of the sample had ever smoked and that 50% of their participants were current smokers. (Robinson, 2011) Previously HIV positive men were most likely to be current smokers, and that the odds of an HIV positive MSM to be a current smoker were 2.92 times greater than those who were negative. (Robinson, 2011)

Another study that was assessed was a 2005 study of Tobacco use and MSM’s. Greenwood’s study looked at the tobacco use among MSM living in an urban setting. The results of this study were that smoking rates were 31.4% higher for urban MSM
compared to the male living in the general population at 24.7%. (Greenwood, 2005) It also found that 27% of the MSM’s were former smokers. The study provided support of beliefs that the MSM population has a higher smoking rate compared to the general male population.

**Alcohol Use**

Regarding Alcohol use and MSM’s, a 2013 study found that almost half of their sample in Baltimore, Maryland reported a hazardous or high-risk consumption of alcohol. This could be attributed to depression, lower socio-economic status, history of incarceration, and frequency of attending gay bars. (Tobin, 2013). Since alcohol impairs your judgment and increases your risky behavior practices it could lead to an increased number of sexual partners as well as an increase in unprotected sex. Tobin’s study sampled 142 MSM’s and found that the majority of their sample, 57%, reported little to no alcohol use, and was the results were broken down into 4 categories, no use of alcohol (20%), low-risk (37%), hazardous risk (22%), and high-risk/likely dependent (21%). (Tobin, 2013)

A 2010 study found that Alcohol use has a negative impact on HIV via several mechanisms. (Pandrea, 2010) This study found that there is scientific evidence on the consequences of alcohol abuse and HIV. The ethanol in alcohol has effects on behavioral, virologic, pharmacologic and immunologic systems and causes HIV to reproduce more rapidly. (Pandrea, 2010)
Drug Use

Drug use is another topic that has been looked at, a study found that MSM’s have a high rate of drug use, one “sex drugs” and one polydrug class were both used in this study. (McCarthy-Caplan, 2013) The study had 943 participants and those were assessed by being given a survey where they completed information on substance use, HIV-status, and psychological symptom information. The drugs that they reported on were alcohol, marijuana, “poppers”, methamphetamine, erectile dysfunction drugs, cocaine, and other drugs. It was found that 88% of the participants used alcohol in the past 6 months and 58% reported weekly use. 26% of participants reported use of marijuana in the past 6 months, and 12% reported weekly use of marijuana. 26% reported the use of poppers, 25% reported the use of erectile dysfunction drugs, and 20% reported the use of methamphetamine. And of the other drugs less than 20% reported using the other drugs, such as cocaine. (McCarthy-Caplan, 2013)

Sexually Transmitted Infections

The next behavior that has been analyzed is Sexually Transmitted Infections and MSM’s. In Baltimore, Maryland a 2010-2011 a CDC “Notes from the field” looked at Syphilis Infection and HIV Co-infection, the report showed that among MSM’s syphilis rates jumped from 3.0 cases per 100,000 to 8.2 cases per 100,000 in 10 years. (CDC, 2013) In Baltimore, syphilis cases among MSM’s were very apparent. It was found that one in five MSM’s with syphilis had a repeat infection. (CDC, 2013)

Also another STD study that was focused on MSM’s was HIV, rectal chlamydia, and rectal gonorrhea in a STD clinic in a Midwestern US city. This study was to look at
the prevalence of rectal gonorrhea and rectal chlamydia, as well as their association with HIV. The reports show that 88% of the participants have had sex without a condom within the past year, (Turner, 2013) as well as one-third of the men reported having sex while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In their study, the researchers found a high prevalence of rectal gonorrhea and rectal chlamydia. They also found a significant association with HIV-positive status and rectal chlamydia. (Turner, 2013)

**Mental Health**

Mental Health is MSM’s is an issue that is not looked at too often. An analysis looking at Body Mass Index, Depression, and Condom Use among HIV-positive MSM’s was conducted in 2012. The study looked at 490 men where 48% of them were normal weight 40% were overweight and 12% were obese. The min finding was that over time, depression was associated with decreased condom use for normal weight and obese HIV+ participants. It found that “Obesity, in the context of depression, is a risk factor for unprotected anal intercourse among HIV-Infected MSM.”(Blashill,2013)

A study conducted by Hugh Klein looked at “Early life emotional neglect and HIV risk taking among men using the Internet to find other men for unprotected sex.” The study questions came from the questionnaire “Childhood Trauma Questionnaire.” (Klein, 2013) They were paired up with questions about the participant’s sexual experiences in the past 30-days. The study it was found that men with childhood experiences that were involved in emotional negligence are relevant to understanding HIV risky behavior. (Klein, 2013)
A 2001 study looked at HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C rates in people with severe mental illness. (Rosenberg, 2001) It looked at 931 people receiving treatment in Connecticut, Maryland, New Hampshire, or North Carolina. HIV was prevalent at 3.1% of the sample and it was 8 times higher than estimated US population, but lower than other studies have concluded. Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C were both 5 and 11 times greater in this study compared to the overall population rates. They discovered that there were elevated rates of HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C in their population.

**Cleveland Data**

Throughout all of the research that is being done on MSM’s in Cleveland the only articles that were found is one that studies HIV risk behavior among African American MSM’s, and an HIV/AIDS case study of one community.

HIV risk behaviors among African-American MSM’s had a total of 209 total participants, and looked at four factors, the demographic and health history, and knowledge of HIV risk, psychological variables, and substance abuse. (Kelly, 2013) The study looked at the 209 participants from 3 different cities including Cleveland. The men in Cleveland during this study were found to most likely be in school. (Kelly, 2013) The report found that 45.9% of men in the study had unprotected anal intercourse with a man in the previous 3 months to the survey. This project discussed that while “no recent injection drug use was reported, other types of substance abuse, especially alcohol, marijuana, crack or cocaine, ecstasy, poppers, and prescription opiate use.” (Kelly, 2013)

The report of HIV/AIDS case study of one community by David Bruckman, discussed the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Cleveland since the beginning in the 1980’s. In this
paper, it stated that African American have accounted for a constant 60%-65% of incident HIV/AIDS reports, with males representing 40-48%, and females 11-24%. (Bruckman, 2013) More and more younger and older adult African Americans since 2004 have been appearing as the incidence of new HIV/AIDS cases. Of the older population many of the men have reported a high rate of risky heterosexual behavior with an occasional MSM encounter and less IDU use. (Bruckman, 2013) However, more research needs to be conducted to see whether the increase in incidence is because of more screening being done, awareness is raised, availability of drugs for erectile dysfunction, or by random chance. (Bruckman, 2013)

**What we don’t know, what we need to know, how we are going to do it?**

In 2012, there were 3,235 cases of HIV in Cleveland, Ohio. Of that total there were 1,044 cases reported were from men who have sex with men, MSM, within the city. And 36 cases were reported from MSM’s who are injecting drug users, IDU. But, other than HIV there are very little studies that are related to MSM’s and their overall health. The sensations such as tobacco use, alcohol use, drug use and mental health of those included in this population are not focused on. What we don’t know is the overall health of the MSM’s in Cleveland. We do not know anything about their health status other than HIV rates in the City and Cuyahoga County. What we need to know is the overall health status of the MSM population in Cleveland. We need to know this because in order to protect the MSM public population we need to know and understand their behaviors, whether they are risky or not. We plan on going out into the MSM population mainly “Gay Bars” and conducting voluntary surveys and observing their behaviors such
as tobacco use, alcohol use, drug use, sexual behaviors, and observing their overall mental health. With this information we plan on gaining knowledge on the MSM population in Cleveland and hopefully improve the overall health status of the MSM’s.
Hometown Glory by Adele (John)

I've been walking in the same way as I did
Missing out the cracks in the pavement
And tutting my heel and strutting my feet
“Is there anything I can do for you dear? Is there anyone I could call?”
“No and thank you, please Madam. I ain't lost, just wandering.”

Round my hometown
Memories are fresh
Round my hometown
Ooh the people I've met
Are the wonders of my world
Are the wonders of my world
Are the wonders of this world
Are the wonders of my world
I like it in the city when the air is so thick and opaque
I love to see everybody in short skirts, shorts and shades
I like it in the city when two worlds collide
You get the people and the government
Everybody taking different sides
Shows that we ain't gonna stand shit
Shows that we are united
Shows that we ain't gonna take it
Shows that we ain't gonna stand shit
Shows that we are united
Round my hometown
Memories are fresh
Round my hometown
Ooh the people I've met
(Do da di di da da da do do do do oh oh oh yaaaaa yaa aye)
Are the wonders of my world
Are the wonders of my world
Are the wonders of this world
Are the wonders of my world
Of my world
Yeah
Of my world
Of my world yeah
Song Lyrics: Gravity by Sara Bareillis (John)

Something always brings me back to you.
It never takes too long.
No matter what I say or do I'll still feel you here 'til the moment I'm gone.
You hold me without touch.
You keep me without chains.
I never wanted anything so much than to drown in your love and not feel your reign.
Set me free, leave me be. I don't want to fall another moment into your gravity.
Here I am and I stand so tall, just the way I'm supposed to be.
But you're on to me and all over me.
You loved me 'cause I'm fragile.
When I thought that I was strong.
But you touch me for a little while and all my fragile strength is gone.
Set me free, leave me be. I don't want to fall another moment into your gravity.
Here I am and I stand so tall, just the way I'm supposed to be.
But you're on to me and all over me.
I live here on my knees as I try to make you see that you're everything I think I need here on the ground.
But you're neither friend nor foe though I can't seem to let you go.
The one thing that I still know is that you're keeping me down.
You're keeping me down, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
You're on to me, on to me, and all over...
Something always brings me back to you.
It never takes too long.
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