Communicating “Out” at Work: Exploring Co-cultural Theory in the Context of Organizational Socialization

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This dissertation titled
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in the Context of Organizational Socialization

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Communicating “Out” at Work: Exploring Co-cultural Theory in the Context of Organizational Socialization

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Sexual orientation/identity is unique in comparison to other forms of difference within organizations in that it is not visibly apparent. Thus, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian have the ability to negotiate their differentness in distinct ways. Grounded in co-cultural theory (CCT) and organizational socialization I examine how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian “negotiate their cultural differentness” during the process of joining, participating in, and exiting organizations (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 174). Drawing on forty-two semi-structured interviews with individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, I explore how individuals navigate and story their experience in the workplace. The data was analyzed through constant comparative thematic analysis which had overarching influence on each of the three research questions. I report the findings in three chapters. First, I used a thematic analysis to uncover the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively navigate and experience the workplace: personally, organizationally, and relationally. Then, I offer six narrative cases to magnify the heteronormative discourse in the workplace as storied through my participants’ voices. Finally, I highlight the intersection of privilege and marginalization using poetic sensibilities. By providing varied representations of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the context of the workplace, I strive to contribute meaningfully to complicating and extending our understanding of difference in the workplace.
PREFACE

Throughout this dissertation I take moments to reflect on my own experience (italicized) in hopes to reflexively contribute to the challenges and complexities individuals who identify as gay or lesbian face in the workplace.
DEDICATION

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”

-T.S. Elliot

To the people that encouraged me. To the people that took their time to share their story. To the people that find themselves in these stories. Thank you for supporting, inspiring, and joining me on this journey. Without you I would not be where I am today reflecting on my exploration as if I was looking at it for the first time.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to first thank the individuals who shared their stories with me. This dissertation would not have reached the depth and perspective that I desired without the openness of the participants who are represented in this dissertation. Their voices helped me reflect on my own experience and my privilege as a young academic scholar. And as I laughed, cried, and listened to each of them I was grateful to have been given the opportunity to talk with them and for them to feel comfortable enough to share their story with me. I can only hope that this dissertation will influence changes in the workplace, but at the very least I hope someone will see themselves in the pages of this dissertation and know they are not alone, so thank you for openly and graciously joining me on this journey.

I cannot move forward without acknowledging my advisor, Brittany Peterson. She has played various roles in my life in the past four years, and for that I am truly appreciative. She has not only been my teacher and mentor in this process, but she has also been a cheerleader, therapist, and drill sergeant. A cheerleader when I needed a pep back in my step, a therapist when I saw the walls crumbling around me, and a drill sergeant when things just needed to get done. Her guidance made the ever-daunting task of finishing a dissertation seem reasonable, and I guess what I am most thankful for is that she never gave up on me. She has truly helped me develop into the teacher-scholar I am today, and for that I am grateful. I am also indebted to the other members of my dissertation committee. I am thankful to Lynn Harter for supporting my creative sensibilities and drawing that out in my scholarship as a strength, something I have previously seen as a weakness. Her wisdom is unmatched by many, and she is someone I
not only look up to as a scholar but as a whole person. I thank Laura Black for always encouraging me. I do not know if she knows it or not, but she has been a strong advocate and ally, and her presence in these roles does not go unnoticed. I also want to thank her and her children for providing some humor (via Facebook) to some of my long dissertation writing days; the posts often brought a smile and a laugh just when I needed them. Finally, I want to thank Risa Whitson for challenging me to think about my research in different ways. She opened my eyes to the limitless possibilities of this research that I look forward to exploring as I continue this research journey.

Alongside my dissertation committee, I have gained the most incredible group of friends, mentors, and colleagues during my time at Ohio University. If I had a question there was always someone I could go to ask, and I am forever grateful for that. Although many people influenced my time at OU, there are a few that particularly deserve recognition. I shared my first year with two people by my side: Stephanie Ruhl and Nathaniel Simmons. We laughed, we vented, and we stared into the distance together often asking ourselves what we got ourselves into, thanks for being my “go-to” people. Laura Russell and Abbey Wojno are two incredible women that I get to call my mentors and friends. Laura was my “official” mentor, and I am forever thankful for her open door, even if that has turned into an open e-mail or a phone call nowadays. Her calm demeanor and ability to always be able to provide me helpful advice served me well as I navigated the trials and tribulations of grad school. Abbey was more of my “unofficial” mentor but someone I truly value for her ability to listen and care. She sent me encouraging messages, mailed me books that I should read in my “down time,” and she was just that wise grad school friend that knew what I was going through but also knew that I would
persevere. On that note, I also need to thank Anna Wiederhold. As my mentors graduated, she seemed to fill their shoes, and I am forever thankful for her continued support and encouragement. A special thanks to Stevie Munz and Sara Baker. Stevie has been my breath of fresh air; when I needed to remember I had a life outside of my office, she was there to join me for a drink. When I needed to vent, she was there to listen and agree. And when I needed to laugh, all she needed to do was give me the “are you kidding me” look. I hope that we continue to grow as friends and scholars and that our journey together never ends. In addition, Sara, my academic life partner was with me through the ups and downs of this dissertation. Although we were miles apart and in two different Ph.D. programs, nothing held us back from helping each other through the daunting process. She has been with me through everything, including standing beside me and officiating my wedding, and I thank her graciously for this kinship. Finally, I cannot help but thank the people that I call friends that are ingrained in this process: Daniel Almanza, Katie Johnson, Sara Landis, and Cody Phillips you have each contributed to my life in meaningful ways during my dissertation and I want each of you to know how much you are valued in my life.

I need to thank my mother, father, and husband for indulging me on this journey. In many ways, you are as much invested in this dissertation and my education as I am. I am thankful that I have been given many opportunities to continue my education and that each of you has supported me and cheered me on through the milestones. I thank my mother for always reminding me of where I am heading. I thank my father for being proud of me and where I am. And I thank my husband for joining me on this journey; I bet he had no idea what he was signing on to when he started dating me. We have been
through a lot together, and I am thankful to call him my husband and to be able to graduate with his last name by mine on this document. I thank each one of you for your continued support and for believing in me as I chased my dream. I love you all so much.

On one final note, I would like to briefly thank the Graduate College at Ohio University for your financial support this year. The Claude E. Kantner Fellowship afforded me the opportunity to focus exclusively on my research and give it my undivided attention. For that, I am forever grateful.
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PROLOGUE

The first day of class is always the worst. No matter how many classrooms I enter or how many students I teach, I still get butterflies in my stomach. Some may think that all good teachers have those feelings, the anticipation or the excitement that is building up to the start of the new term, but those invisible butterflies in my stomach are different. When I look in the mirror that morning I wonder, if I tell them who I am, will they accept me or drop my class? Am I sharing too much information, or am I simply setting the classroom climate?

One day while observing one of my mentors I noticed she started her first day of the course talking about her husband and what he does for a living; it was in that moment that I realized I had treated part of my identity as a teacher and as an individual like a penny that gets left behind on the sidewalk. You see, in the past on that first day of class I did not mention my husband because that exposed my sexual orientation/identity, and moreover I did not know whether or not it was important to tell my students “I’m gay.” Yet, when I chose to conceal that aspect of my identity, it was as if my students did not know the real me. I left part of my identity behind when I unlocked that classroom door, locked in the confines of fear. I remember a few years back, one of my students asked me if I wanted to get married, and I told him “of course.” Afterwards I wondered, was that my chance to tell him I legally cannot? Yet in the exact same moment, I also took a deep sigh of relief... I had once again escaped my lived reality.

And while I am happily “out” I have learned to interrogate myself whenever I enter a classroom or conversation. I ask myself, how do I come “out” or more importantly, how do I not? And although my sexual orientation/identity may not have a
lot to do with all of the course concepts I teach, it does influence who I am as a teacher.
Nowadays, more often than not, I pick that penny up, and my students learn a little bit more about my family and me. Although I still wrestle with what to share, these little moments of exposure provide me space to break down the barriers that are cemented in my brain, to release the fear, and to just be myself as teacher. And in reflecting on the ever-evolving journey in the workplace, I recognize that as I negotiate my identity around the possibility of coming “out,” I negotiate my ability and potential in the workplace.

As I share my journey with you, I cannot help but reflect on the experiences that define my scholarship. These experiences are the turning points that have constrained my identity and awakened my passion for researching what I believe matters most. Just like many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, I did not come out of the closet at a young age. I started shedding and sharing my insecurities as a white gay male when I began my career in the academy.

My experiences highlight the struggles I personally navigate in the classroom and open a shared space between my story and my participants’ lived experiences. The individuals I interviewed have their own unique stories to tell about the workplace. Many of them have endured their own challenges and have had moments of clarity as they navigated and negotiated their sexual orientation/identity. As I move towards understanding the intricacies of sexual orientation/identity in the workplace, I want to first explain my role as author of this dissertation.

Scholars need to acknowledge the role they play in the research process and monitor their own biases. As such, I believe it is important to acknowledge from the start of this dissertation that I am currently navigating my own “outness” at work and identify
as a white gay male. My personal experiences have both inspired and shaped the passion behind my research. And as Krizek (2003) explained personal experiences and connections “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the cultural event, place, or practice” (p. 149). Gergen (1999) suggested, “To admit one’s passions is to see through a glass darkly” (p. 76). Thus, if it were not for my past experiences I would not be exploring what I am today as I understand the subjective nature that blurs this research. As such, this is why I take moments at various stages in this dissertation to reflect on my own journey, to share examples, and further highlight how my sexual orientation/identity has been created and constrained in the workplace. My positionality builds common ground and trust with my participants who might otherwise be suspicious of my motivations in the current project. Finally, Ellingson’s (2009) claim that “positioning has the potential to strengthen our accounts significantly because doing so provides another layer to our analysis, enriching the account by grounding it clearly in our particular perspective” resonates with me (p. 159). Hence, I weave my own story and journey throughout the pages of this dissertation.

With a more nuanced understanding of my author positionality, I will move forward with the first chapter of this dissertation that explains the central aims and rationale of this dissertation.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Central Aims

The central aim of this study is two-fold. First, I juxtapose co-cultural theory (CCT) with organizational socialization to reenvision our understanding of marginalized and underrepresented individuals in the workplace. Second, I further investigate the enactment of identity as gay or lesbian\(^1\) by exploring the heteronormative discourse in organizations. I address these two central aims through three primary research questions articulated in Chapter Three. Most fundamentally, my goal is to illuminate the voices of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Rationale

This study is justified for three primary reasons: (1) it is positioned during a pivotal moment in U.S. history; (2) it attends to limitations and gaps in current research and theorizing; and (3) it highlights the lived communicative experience of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian.

First, the present study is positioned during a pivotal moment in U.S. history. In 2010 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that nearly three million individuals in the U.S. are in a same-sex relationship; however, the census survey did not account for individuals who were not in a relationship. Perhaps an even bigger challenge is that, if I ask people to report their sexual orientation on a government document, individuals may hide their sexual orientation/identity because it is legal in 29 states to discriminate based on sexual orientation and legal in 34 states to discriminate based on gender identity in the workplace (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). This inconsistency in current federal

\(^1\) Gay describes men attracted to other men; Lesbian describes women attracted to other women for the entirety of this dissertation these terms will delineate and identify each of these groups individually.
workplace protections is concerning. Many other marginalized groups have been protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which was designed to protect most U.S. employees from employment discrimination based upon an employee’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (EEOC, Overview, 2013). Although other marginalized groups have been added as “protected classes” (i.e. age, disability), only 12 states and the District of Columbia have passed statutes that forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (HRC, Resources–Workplace, 2013).

In 1994 the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) was introduced to the U.S. Congress to add protections for sexual orientation and gender identity (Wendland, 2007). However, like many proposed changes in the legal system at large, it has made little progress. As a result in 2012 President Barack Obama brought the act back into the attention of his fellow lawmakers as he voiced his support for the bill (Jarrett, 2013). Although the bill still remains on the desks of our fellow lawmakers, this showcases the current political and societal landscape and overall importance of the current dissertation.

Second, the study addresses the limitations and gaps of previous research in relation to individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Specifically, I am interested in addressing issues of: sexual orientation/identity as diversity, as “other,” and the intersections of marginalized voices in the workplace. To begin, perhaps ironically, our understanding of diversity in research is often extremely narrow (Mumby, 2011). Specifically, many scholars critique the organizational socialization framework for its linear and universal trajectory and the exclusion of marginalized groups (Allen, 1996; Bullis & Stout, 2000; Clair, 1999; Smith & Turner, 1995; Turner, 1999). As a result, many gay and lesbian individuals are perpetually excluded from understandings of
diversity as sexual orientation/identity is discounted by the heteronormative discourse. In exploring those whom are excluded in the workplace from an organizational socialization perspective, I highlight sexual orientation/identity as a vital component of diversity in the workplace. This gap is important to explore because it provides a new understanding of organizational socialization, as individuals who identify as gay or lesbian simply do not move through the traditional organizational socialization phases; they move through an organizational socialization process that is marked by their sexual orientation/identity (Bullis & Stout, 2000).

An additional gap in the literature focuses on the fact that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may not always be marked as “other” as their sexual orientation/identity can remain (in)visible. While the stigma associated with sexual orientation/identity is often masked by individuals, it still remains. Stigmas are “discursively constructed based on perceptions of both non-stigmatized and stigmatized individuals” (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 271). It is essential to understand individuals who identify as gay and lesbian as they navigate and negotiate being marked as “other” in the workplace. Little research on co-cultural theory has addressed the complicated nature of the implications of hidden or (in)visible co-cultural identities (see Gates, 2003; Orbe, 1996). Hence, although the “other” status is not typically desired by stigmatized and marginalized groups, it is inherent in our everyday life. And, if individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are not being acknowledged as “other” in the workplace, protections and benefits remain unchanged. In other words, the stigma faced by individuals who identify as gay and lesbian in the workplace and perceived by their colleagues, depends on how they manage their (in)visibility at work. This gap is important to address because
in order for acknowledgement to be present in the workplace individuals who identify as gay or lesbian must be vulnerable and “othered.” As such, this exploration could further enhance our understanding of co-cultural (in)visibility.

Additionally, to date there is not much published scholarship that highlights the stories of both individuals who identify as gay and lesbian (see Spradlin, 1998). In past research, a lot of focus has been segmented towards gay men (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009). In gaining the lived experiences of gay men and lesbian women, I seek to broaden our understanding of the intricate experiences of sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. As Collins (2005) explained “not only are gender, sexuality, and class critical for internal politics, developing a more complex analysis creates possibilities for coalitions with other groups who are engaged in similar social justice projects” (p. 49). In essence, the intersections of these individuals’ experiences will further highlight and complicate understanding individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

To address all of these gaps, I use co-cultural theory (CCT) as the theoretical framework within the context of organizational socialization to help understand how individuals who are marginalized “negotiate their cultural differentness” as part of the dominant society (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 174). For instance, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may proactively seek out information to understand the organizational culture and adapt as they find new information. Allen (2000) suggested that diverse individuals may be treated differently and experience work in unique ways when compared to other more normatively classed individuals. This dissertation addresses these limitations and gaps in current research by developing a greater understanding of
the complicated intricacies individuals who identify as gay or lesbian face in the workplace.

Third and finally, this research is justified as it helps us understand how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian *communicatively* navigate their identity in the workplace. CCT suggests marginalized group members use communicative practices when interacting within the dominant society. As such, Spradlin (1998) explained that as a lesbian in the work environment she used communication “passing” strategies to remain (in)visible and pass as a heterosexual woman within the workplace. Orbe (1998a) argued that marginalized individuals often “describe their interactions with dominant group members as ‘cautious,’ ‘guarded,’ ‘fearful,’ ‘quiet,’ ‘uncomfortable’” just to name a few (p. 52). Therefore, communication is central to individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the organization as they regain some control over their marginalization. Ultimately, understanding how these individuals communicatively negotiate the workplace could establish more successful organizational socialization for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian.

In sum, this research is warranted as it is positioned during a pivotal moment in US history, attends to limitations and gaps in current research and theorizing, and highlights the lived communicative experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. With a clear understanding of the rationale for this research, I now turn to discuss the theoretical significance of the current project.

**Theoretical Significance**

The primary goal of this project is to juxtapose CCT in the context of organizational socialization to reenvision our understanding of individuals who identify
as gay or lesbian in the workplace. In problematizing the ideological nature of organizational socialization with the theoretical perspective of CCT, I am able to review and address the theoretical assumptions and advance the theoretical significance of this dissertation.

Organizational Socialization

Deconstructing the basic assumptions of organizational socialization can illuminate gaps in the current research that exclude marginalized groups experiences in the workplace. Van Maanen (1978) explained organizational socialization as the process by which individuals learn “the values, norms, and required behaviors that allow them to participate as members of organizations” (p. 27). Over the years organizational socialization, or more specifically Jablin’s (1987, 2001) framework of organizational assimilation, has been critiqued by several scholars for its stage model approach (e.g. Bullis, 1999; Clair, 1999; Turner, 1999). Smith and Turner (1995) argued that stage models of organizational socialization are “more likely to disable than enable efforts to generate understandings” (p. 173). Clair (1996) argued that the stage model “fails to provide the full picture” of socialization (p. 265). Although Jablin (2001) initially noted the fluidity, most early research conceptualized the phases in a more punctuated manner. One of the foundational scholars in organizational behavior Feldman (1976a) recognized the important notion that phases overlap and fluctuate as different individuals’ experience quite different organizational socialization experiences.

In fact, Allen (2000) explained that due to factors including race, gender, sexual orientation, and social class, some individuals’ may be treated differently and experience organizational socialization in unique ways. Nonetheless, research on organizational
socialization is incomplete in providing alternative stories of organizational socialization. Accordingly, Bullis and Stout (2000) argued that phases are overly abstract and do not derive from the experiences of others in the organization (p. 63). In essence, not all individuals, especially those marked as “other,” move through a continuous process of organizational socialization as the traditional model suggests. Additionally, the underlying assumption of neutrality strikes another point of contention. Bullis and Stout (2000) argued “presumed neutrality serves to mask the preservation of masculine, patriarchal” or heteronormative assumptions (p. 65). As such, they have critiqued the work in two ways, first in relation to the exclusions in the current research and second in relation to the universal patterns in the current model. As a result, they have called on scholars to consider several questions that allow space for marginalized and excluded group’s representation in the organizational socialization framework (see Bullis and Stout, 2000, p. 73). In this dissertation I answer their call by providing a vivid representation of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace.

By exploring organizational socialization from individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, I deconstruct the assumption of the universality of organizational socialization process. My work in this dissertation challenges the underlying assumption that most employees experience the organizational socialization in similar ways and illuminates the value-laden nature of the process (Allen, 2000). On the whole, CCT helps us expose some of the underlying assumption that undergrid the organizational socialization framework.
Co-cultural Theory

Orbe and Spellers’ (2005) call for research addressing the complexities of co-cultural theory (CCT) in varied contexts. As such, I chose to focus on the organizational socialization process to illuminate the context within which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian negotiate and communicatively navigate their sexual orientation/identity. The primary assumptions of CCT are embedded in the hierarchy, privilege, power, and structure of dominant society, thus context of the heteronormative workplace needs an in-depth exploration (Orbe, 1998a). Yep (2003) furthered that we live in a heteronormative society where individuals freely partake in their own domination and perpetuate what it means to be normal. Essentially, this project seeks to elevate the voices of individuals who identify as gay and lesbian to address the communicative intricacies and heteronormative discourse surrounding sexual orientation/identity in the workplace.

Orbe and Spellers (2005) explained that “as the complexities of identity become more visible, the task of defining co-cultural communication becomes more complex” (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 188). Therefore, I focus on the additional complexity of sexual orientation/identity as (in)visible, which further complicates and challenges current research on the co-cultural theoretical perspective. Overall, by juxtaposing the co-cultural theoretical perspective in the context of organizational socialization, I add to the growing and incomplete research on the application of CCT in varied contexts. Beyond these contributions to this project, the practical significance also advances the prominence of the current project.
Practical Significance

The practical significance of this project is two-fold: (1) reenvision workplace diversity and equality; and (2) explore how sharing and telling stories can enhance visibility of sexual orientation/identity.

First, research about individuals who identify as gay or lesbian helps us reenvision workplace diversity and equality. Through this dissertation I not only address the complexity of the issues but also identify the challenges that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian face and negotiate in the workplace. These challenges may be similar issues to what other marginalized groups in the organizations face, or they may be different. In identifying these issues, I am broadening the current scope of workplace diversity and equality in an effort to move toward an all-inclusive outlook on difference. Diversity is typically viewed from a surface level. We need to move beyond that and recognize “that it is only through difference that a meaningful world becomes possible” (Mumby, 2011, vii). I argue that this type of change is only possible if we consider invisible differences as well. It could be powerful for organizations to move away from the typical office of diversity towards an office of difference, recognizing the inclusivity and acceptance of many visible and invisible differences in the organization, including sexual orientation/identity. Additionally, in recognizing these challenges, more people come together as they represent the “outsider[’s] within” an organization (Collins, 1986). In essence, as stigmatized or marginalized individuals recognize that they are not alone, or that they are not the only individual who identifies as gay or lesbian in the workplace, they can band together as “outsiders” striving to make effective changes and creating inclusive work environments.
More recently, organizations have started moving towards protecting sexual orientation/identity even in the absence of a federal mandate (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). This marks the beginning of the transformation in workplace equality. However, in order to continue moving forward organizations and individuals need to recognize the challenges and struggles present for the marginalized and excluded “others” in organizations with or without the protections. In essence, although many organizations are starting to protect sexual orientation/identity against discrimination it is important to recognize that people do not always follow workplace policies (Kirby & Krone, 2002). In recognizing the ability for this individual tension in the workplace, individuals are better able to address the complexity of the current issue. Currently, the fight for equality is centered on the issue of marriage. Although this is one way to challenge the heteronormative workplace, the fact that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian can be legally married but also legally discriminated against in the workplace for his/her sexual orientation/identity is counter-productive and needs increased attention. Thus, I hope to illustrate the importance of reenvisioning workplace diversity and equality to include sexual orientation/identity which will assist in strengthening the arguments for the legislation, like ENDA, that promotes workplace equality.

Second, it is imperative for the practicality of this research to showcase how sharing stories can enhance visibility and lead towards the acknowledgement of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. The fact that individuals were open to sharing their stories with me might inspire others to share their stories with their companies or colleagues. These stories from the workplace could potentially influence, change, or transform others thoughts in their organization. They could change
colleagues’ perspectives or could empower someone else that was “closeted” in the workplace to share his or her story knowing they are no longer alone. In fact, Morgan, a 53-year-old market research coordinator, told me, “I really appreciated this opportunity to share my story. It was almost therapeutic. Just thanks for listening.” Whatever the outcome, I strongly believe that as difficult as it is in sharing lived experiences that may put people in a vulnerable place, the outcome of sharing could make all the difference in the workplace (Weiss, 1994). And, if individuals want to see change, it may need to happen from the inside out (see Raeburn. 2004). Overall, I argue the practical implications of this research provide strong support for why this research matters and needs to be conducted.

Chapter Summary

In sum, the primary focus of this study is to juxtapose CCT in the context of organizational socialization to reenvision our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. I aim to tease out our normative understanding of organizational socialization through a co-cultural theoretical framework to better recognize sexual orientation/identity as a vital component to diversity in the workplace. Additionally, I challenge our conceptions of the (in)visibility, specifically by complicating the universal patterns of organizational socialization in the heteronormative workplace. Moreover, results from this study have practical implications for workplace diversity and equality within organizations. On the whole, my goal is to illuminate the voices of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.
Dissertation Overview

First, in response to the pivotal moment in history this research is surrounding, I took a step back to provide an overview of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). My goal for Chapter Two is to provide the historical context and current state of discriminating in the workplace. The current political and historical context is important to the content in this dissertation; accordingly, I wanted to provide my readers with a brief background of ENDA.

In Chapter Three, I underscore the basic assumptions and foundations of both CCT and organizational socialization and juxtapose these perspectives together. This juxtaposition provides a pathway for exploring marginalized and potentially stigmatized identities in the workplace.

In Chapter Four, I explain my methodological choices. Through interviews, observations, and documents, I provide a representation of the lived experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Guided by Orbe’s (1998a) phenomenological approach, I seek to provide varied representations of my participants’ unique lived experiences. Additionally, I was inspired by the importance Ellingson (2009) placed on providing varied representations of the discourse. As such, I describe my thematic analysis and also describe the three distinct representation of data in the results chapters: thematic analysis, narrative cases, and poetic interpretations.

As a result, the next four chapters present and discuss the findings of each of these varied ways of representing the data. In Chapter Five, I use thematic analysis to distill the most compelling ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate and experience the heteronormative workplace. I pause briefly in Chapter Six to discuss the
theoretical contributions of the thematic analysis that extend and complement our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. In Chapter Seven I offer representative narrative cases, which highlight six stories that describe the ways in which the heteronormative discourse in the workplace enables and/or constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. In Chapter Eight, I extract participant voices to underscore the intersection of privilege and marginalization using poetic interpretations.

And finally, in Chapter Nine I discuss the process of crystallization and close with limitations, opportunities for future research, and concluding remarks. My final offering in this dissertation is an epilogue where I reflect on my experience and bring closure to this dissertation.

As I begin this exploration of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace it is important to note that I am guided by the following broad questions. In what ways do individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate, negotiate, manage, or experience the heteronormative workplace? What role does (in)visibility play for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace? What obstacles do individuals who identify as gay or lesbian encounter in the heteronormative workplace? How do individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience the workplace in similar, incongruent, and intricate ways? Although these are not my research questions they inspired my understanding of the current dissertation. Overall, by opening spaces for these conversations, this study strives to immerse organizational communication scholars more deeply in understanding varied and intricate ways individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience in the workplace.
CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of the political foundation of lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) equality in the United States. I begin by highlighting the significance the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had on workplace discrimination. Following that, I outline the current journey ENDA has taken to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in the workplace. Finally, I situate this research in the broader LGBTQ equality movement and advance issues that are important to consider.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the legislation in the United States that outlawed discrimination against racial, ethnic, national, and religious minorities, and women (Wright, 2005). The legislation was introduced by President John F. Kennedy in 1963, however the initial support behind the bill was weak as previous iterations of a civil rights bill had ended without success (Golway & Krantz, 2010). Although the bill was initially intended to fight against segregation, many lawmakers believed they needed to strengthen the act by adding provisions. These provisions specifically banned discrimination in the workplace and segregation in schools, as well as added authorization for the Attorney General to file lawsuits if any of the protected classes’ rights as citizens were violated (Loevy, 1997). With these added provisions many more legislators saw the value in the act. And after moving beyond many legislative hurdles including a 54-day filibuster in the senate and the assassination of President Kennedy, the bill passed in 1964, with amendments, in both the house and the senate (Wright, 2005).
On July 2nd, 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law acknowledging what an honor this moment would be to President Kennedy’s memory (Johnson, 1965). Overall, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal for unequal treatment of voter registration, segregation in schools, and discrimination in the workplace. It did not only further address women’s rights and condemn segregation for many minorities, but it started conversations about workplace discrimination.

**Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**

As a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established to enforce these laws. In essence, the commission was established to investigate workplace discrimination complaints based on an individual's race, color, national origin, religion, sex, and was later expanded to include age, disability, and genetic information (EEOC, Discrimination by Type, 2013). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also set the foundation for the following legislation: the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA); the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990; and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (EEOC, Overview, 2013).

In the last five years the commission has started to investigate discrimination based on sexual orientation, transgender status, and gender identity. However, they can only investigate these classes if they are linked to one of the protected classes listed above since sexual orientation and gender identity are not currently federally protected classes (EEOC, Other Protections, 2013). For example, in 2011 a complaint was filed in Veretto v. U.S. Postal Service alleging sex discrimination because the woman was verbally discriminated against as a lesbian in the workplace (see Veretto v. U.S. Postal
This complainant alleged discrimination based on sex and the issue was pursued as a sex discrimination complaint. For the following reasons, the EEOC has found claims by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals alleging sex-stereotyping a sex discrimination claim. Next, I turn my attention to present-day and review the current movement for LGBTQ equality and the pivotal milestones that situate this research in a pivotal moment in history.

**LGBTQ Equality Movement**

To better understand the fight against workplace discrimination for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian it is important that I highlight some significant events in the last five years. Although a lot has been done to get the LGBTQ community to where they are today, I have selected two key events that I believe have significant implications for the current state of the workplace. I will begin by overviewing the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) policy in the armed services. Then will discuss the Supreme Court decision against DOMA. Finally, I will outline the current state of the workplace for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and provide overview and implications of the current ENDA legislation.

**Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell**

Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) was a policy that prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual service members, with the overarching goal to ban gay and lesbian individuals from the military service (Department of Defense Directive, 1304.26, 1993). The law stated that you could be gay or lesbian in the military as long as you were in the closet and did not talk about it. Anyone who talked about it or had a relationship with someone of the same-sex as an
active service member could be dishonorably discharged from the armed services. In December 2010, a bill was proposed to repeal DADT for its discriminatory foundation against individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, and within the month it was approved by both house and senate members (Hulse, 2010). In response to the potential to delay the end of DADT, in July 2011 a federal appeals court ruled to end continued enforcement of the ban on openly gay and lesbian service members immediately. After gaining the appropriate signatures the end of DADT became official on September 20th, 2011 (Stolberg, 2010). This was a significant moment for gay and lesbian U.S. service members as they could be “out” without the fear of being reprimanded in the armed services and most importantly for the broader implications for policy reform in the United States.

On a much larger scale, the repeal of DADT was the first approved legislation that directly addressed workplace discrimination for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. As a result, this repeal has been used to make cases that extend beyond active service members, to support individuals who identify as gay or lesbian that have been discriminated against in the workplace. Finally, 2013 proved to be another pivotal year for the LGBTQ community as United States v. Windsor reached the United States Supreme Court. Just like the repeal of DADT started to refocus conversations about LGBTQ in the armed services, the unconstitutionality of DOMA started to shift federal laws and regulations in regards to LGBTQ personal rights. To gain a better understanding of DOMA I will provide an overview of the law that was initially signed in 1996.
Defense of Marriage Act

The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was enacted in 1996 and allowed states to refuse recognition of same-sex marriages that were performed in other states (Defense of Marriage Act, 1996). At the time, lawmakers argued it was to deter states from legalizing same-sex marriages or civil unions. Even so, in 2003 Massachusetts became the first state in which same-sex couples could get legally married making it the only state where a same-sex couple would be recognized as a married couple by the state government (Belluck, 2004). A same-sex couple would still not receive federal benefits like those received by married heterosexual couples. And should a same-sex couple move or live outside of Massachusetts their marriage license would no longer be valid. In 2011, the Obama administration declared that they would no longer enforce the regulations of DOMA or defend it in court. Although this declaration outraged some, it was a major step towards gaining recognition by the federal government (Raghavan, 2013).

As such, in 2013 United States v. Windsor reached the Supreme Court to debate the constitutionality of DOMA and whether or not the federal government would recognize same-sex marriages legalized in states that pass the necessary legislation. When this case was heard on March 27th, 2013 eleven states had passed legislation legalizing same-sex marriages in their states. With the Supreme Court decision nearing and a lot of media attention covering this case, I remember what I was doing, what I was thinking, and what I was feeling on the day the decision finally came down.

*There are those moments that are ingrained in our minds for the rest of our lives.*

*For me, one of those moments happened while writing this dissertation. On June 26th, 2013 as I sat down to work on my dissertation, I turned on the television. I knew the*
Supreme Court would be making a decision about United States v. Windsor. But as much as I wanted to hear that decision, I did not want my fate to be defined by someone else. As I watched every minute of every interview waiting desperately for the news to break, news that we were told “we will have, right after this break,” I turned off the television. I prepared myself. I asked myself, “What if the news that broke relegated my sexual identity as unworthy? What if the Supreme Court defined my marriage as unjust?” All of these “what if” questions that would significantly influence what I believed to be the validity of my sexual orientation/identity as reality. I could not stop worrying, but I also could not focus, and with the click of the remote control “we are back live” and I watched the breaking news coverage of the Supreme Court decision.

It was almost as if I was there. As they focused in on the interns running down the stairs and around the building with papers tightly held like a baton in a big Olympic track race, I held my breath, closed my eyes, and I said a little prayer that no matter what the outcome was I would continue to have a voice. I switched stations to see who would report the information first, and then the announcement came and everything paused...

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a 5–4 decision declaring DOMA to be unconstitutional "as a deprivation of the liberty of the person protected by the Fifth Amendment” (United States v. Windsor, 2013). And as I smiled and cried, I posted the following status on Facebook:

As the tears run down my face, I'm smiling. I am blessed and supported by so many, and although I dreamed of a day like today I never wanted to get my hopes up. I like many of you witnessed history today and think we all need to look around and remember that. #loveislove #SCOTUS
This sentiment recognizes the influence this piece of legislation had not only on my own life but also on my research. This decision came while I was editing my dissertation; in fact while I was setting up interviews, and I share this reflection in hopes that its influence and the influence of DADT do not get lost in the pages of this dissertation. Although more recently the focus LGBTQ has been on marriage equality, each and every one of these milestones (i.e. DADT, DOMA) act as pillars strengthening the foundation on which ENDA will be grounded. Next, I provide an overview of the current legislation of ENDA which would include sexual orientation and gender identity as federally protected classes supported by the EEOC.

Employment Non-Discrimination Act

In 1974, legislation on this workplace discrimination for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian emerged after the Stonewall Rebellion when many gay and lesbian activists started to band together to fight against discrimination. This initial legislation was an extension of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include sexual orientation as a protected class (Equality Act, 1974). The goal was to prohibit discrimination in employment and access to public accommodations and facilities. However, as was consistent with the times, the bill was considered ‘radical’ and died before it was ever considered for a vote.

It was not until 1994 when lawmakers started to focus solely on employment discrimination that ENDA was established (Wendland, 2007). The legislation received more support than was initially expected; nonetheless, in 1996 the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) passed and was signed into law which prohibited the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages. Although the push for equality in the workplace
was gaining traction, the societal views on individuals who identify as gay or lesbian were not gaining the same support. As a result, DOMA played a significant role in diminishing any substantial legislative movement for ENDA, and although it was introduced to each congress since 1994, it never passed in either the house or the senate (see S. 2056, 1996; S. 1284, 2001).

It was not until the 110th congress in 2007 when ENDA started to make progress. This was the first year that gender identity was included, alongside sexual orientation, within ENDA protections. Not long after the bill was introduced it died in the house and senate committees. However, Barney Frank (D-MA) used this to his advantage because many lawmakers were conflicted about the gender identity addition, and so he introduced a revised ENDA bill that same year, which did not include gender identity (Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2007, 2007). Although this caused some frustration for gay and lesbian advocates as they refused to support a bill that compromised on LGBTQ discrimination legislation, the bill passed in the House of Representatives with a 235-184 vote only to die in the senate later that year (Schindler, 2007; Wendland, 2007). The spark of support in the House of Representatives kept the ENDA moving forward, and future iterations of the legislation reintroduced the gender identity piece to appease the LGBTQ advocacy groups.

As it stands now, 21 states and the District of Columbia already have workplace protections for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, however these protections are not federally mandated. With states starting to react to the pending legislation ENDA gained even more traction in 2013 when President Obama shared his support for the bill (Jarrett, 2013). Until this announcement, no former president had made a formal
declaration about supporting the movement of the act into policy. The current legislation that is proposed in the United States Congress would prohibit discrimination in hiring and employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity by employers with at least 15 employees (Wendland, 2007). Accordingly, in 2013 the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee approved ENDA by a 15-7 vote (Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2013, 2013). And on November 7th, 2013, after accepting an amendment that would prevent government retaliation against religious institutions, the Senate approved ENDA with a 64-32 vote that had bi-partisan support. This was the first time that the Senate had passed ENDA since its inception in 1994. As of early 2014, ENDA is awaiting a vote in the House of Representatives; however the current Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) has suggested that he will not bring it to the floor for a vote as he states, “People are already protected in the workplace” (Benen, 2014).

However, as we know and as it is apparent with the brief outline of the legislation, sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected classes supported by the EEOC, and it remains a contentious issue that is ever-present in the current legislative assembly.

Implications

There are three main reasons why this legislation is important to the current state of the workplace. First, legislation like EDNA would set a standard in recognizing individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as a protected class in the workplace supported by the EEOC. Second, it would not matter where if an individual lives in the United States to be federally protected as an individual who identifies as gay or lesbian in the workplace. And finally, the legislation would provide consistency and accountability for organizations on a federal, instead of organizational, level to ensure these workplace
discrimination protections are enforced. Each of these reasons will be explained and justified in the current context of the workplace.

Currently, if an individual comes out in the workplace they can be legally fired, and there are no federal repercussions as long as the person was fired on the basis of being gay and/or lesbian (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). Although this is a startling fact, there are two main arguments that are often claimed whenever conversations emerge surrounding the addition of sexual orientation/identity as a protected class supported by the EEOC. The first argument is that there is not enough sexual orientation/identity discrimination to warrant protection. The second argument is that the sexual orientation/identity complaints will overwhelm government agencies because too many states do not provide protections.

First, the number of complaints filed is comparable to other protected classes. Ramos (2007) found that in the 21 states where individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are protected under state or local legislature, complaints are closely equivalent to the number of complaints filed based on sex and fewer than the number of complaints filed based on race (Ramos, 2007). The average number of complaints based on sexual orientation/gender identity is close to that of complaints filed regarding both sex and race. This is one of the reasons why sexual orientation/identity should be recognized as a protected class under the EEOC.

In regards to the second argument, adding sexual orientation/identity to protected classes of the EEOC will not over burden the commission. Currently in the 21 states that protect individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, only 1,200 complaints are filed every year compared to 11,500 for race and 13,800 for sex. It is important to note this
difference is derived from the difference in the size of these populations (Ramos, 2007). Complaints are estimated to be substantially smaller compared to sex and race, thus it will not overburden the EEOC either. This is yet another reason sexual orientation/identity should be a protected class supported by the EEOC. Being that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are: (1) filing complaints in states that protect them, and (2) this is not causing an influx of workplace discrimination complaints, it is essential that ENDA move forward in recognizing these individuals as a protected group in the workplace.

Second, it is important to consider the number of individuals who reside in places where sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected. Currently, 21 states and the District of Columbia are the only states that have workplace protections for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian; thus, in 29 states these individuals remain unprotected by state or federal law. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) estimates that 172 million of the 281 million individuals in the U.S. live in jurisdictions that do not provide such protections in the workplace. That means three out of every five LGBTQ citizens in the U.S. live in a place where you can be fired for coming out as gay or lesbian. In essence, there is a substantial amount of our U.S. population that is not protected by the EEOC. Additionally, if you live in one of the 21 states or over 100 cities and counties that has outlawed employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, the rules and protections vary markedly based on where you live (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). This is yet another justification in the fight for the continued legislative pressure for ENDA as it would provide consistency in protections for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian no matter where they live/work.
Beyond the statistics, it is important to consider the ideological differences between some states, specifically looking at politically progressive versus conservative states. One can reasonably assume that some states will not pass sexual orientation and/or gender identity employment non-discrimination legislation locally, however with ENDA in place at the federal level, states will have the support on a national level. If an individual who identifies as gay or lesbian would like to file a workplace discrimination complaint in Burbank, California or Decatur, Georgia they could contact the EEOC and they would be afforded the same protections, no matter where they lived, under ENDA legislation. Essentially, we need legislation that protects sexual orientation and gender identity on a larger geographical scale, as one should not let state lines define discrimination in the workplace.

Third and finally, as suggested in Chapter One some organizations have started moving towards protecting sexual orientation and gender identity even in the absence of a federal mandate (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). In fact, 61% of Fortune 100 businesses and 21% of Fortune 1000 businesses have workplace protections for individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). However, while many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are pleased with these growing numbers what is important to note is that the policies surrounding non-discrimination vary based on the organization. Without ENDA there is less room to hold the organization accountable for discriminatory actions. In essence, if the policies remain in the organization they are handled within the organization. Hypothetically, this is fine if it is one situation that needs addressed, but what happens when the organization as a whole is actively discriminatory in their hiring processes. Although they may have a
policy, there are no federal regulations that would uphold that policy as the EEOC cannot get involved in these matters.

The last point of contention is that having an inclusive policy does not guarantee that all workers and managers will understand the policy and its implications. The existence of workplace policies and provisions does not always equate to the use of such policies (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Although individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are not suggesting to do away with these sexual orientation and/or gender identity inclusive policies in organizations, they are suggesting that the enforcement of ENDA would provide federal accountability in these organizations. That is, organizations would not be making their own policies surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity, but they would be federally mandated and regulated consistent with the other protected classes.

These are the three main reasons why ENDA legislation is an important issue to consider and address in the United States. First, this legislation will set a standard in recognizing individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as a protected class in the workplace. Second, it will not matter where you live in the United States to be federally protected in the workplace. And finally, it will provide consistency and accountability for organizations on a federal level. On the whole, ENDA remains an important issue regarding workplace discrimination, and we need to focus on it federally instead of relegating it under the patchwork of state and local employment laws.

Chapter Summary

On the whole, this chapter outlines the shifting political and societal landscape for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the United States, specifically in relation to workplace discrimination. Many changes have been pressed forward by the repeal of
DADT and the unconstitutionality of DOMA; however, there remains a gap in current workplace protections for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Although many lawmakers are supportive of ENDA legislature, it remains a stagnant issue on the desk of the current Speaker of the House, John Boehner (R-OH). Nonetheless, it is important to note if ENDA passes not everything for LGBTQ employees will immediately change. The stories shared in this dissertation provide representations into not only the changing nature of the workplace but the varying and intricate experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. In what follows, I review the literature on co-cultural theory in the context of organizational socialization and advance several arguments centered on the importance of why sexual orientation/identity matters in the workplace.
CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I provide an extensive review of the literature for the current project. I begin by situating the dissertation in the larger framework of organizational socialization and continue by drawing on CCT to highlight the nuances of marginalized individuals in the workplace. Next, I outline queer theory and explore the significance of studying sexual orientation/identity for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Finally, I advance several research questions that I will be explored in this dissertation.

Organizational Socialization

In Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) ground-breaking work on organizational socialization they argue that “organizations offer a person far more than merely a job” they act as a site of teaching and learning (p. 210). Van Maanen (1978) explained organizational socialization as the process by which individuals learn “the values, norms, and required behaviors that allow them to participate as members of organizations” (p. 27). Jablin (1987) used the term organizational assimilation to further the framework not only focusing on organizations attempts to socialize individuals but also how individuals attempt to shape the organization. He argued that assimilation is central to how well individuals function in an organization. Although Jablin defined this process as organizational assimilation, the term has often been contested (see Kramer, 2010; Moreland & Levine, 2001). Thus, I have opted to maintain the original term embraced by some of the foundational scholars (Feldman, 1976a, 1976b; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) agreeing that the term organizational socialization best exemplifies the process,
whereas the term assimilation may suggest conformity (see Turner, 1999). Additionally, this term will clearly distinguish this framework from the theoretical perspective of CCT which uses the word assimilation to denote an entirely different process than Jablin describes in his work (1987, 2001). Overall, organizational socialization will be advanced for understanding how individuals join, participate in, and exit organizations (Jablin, 1987; 2001, Kramer, 2010, Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In order to address the extensive research on organizational socialization, I will first provide a review of the traditional model of organizational socialization, then critique the traditional, linear understanding of the model, and finally challenge some underlying assumptions of universality that permeate organizational socialization to further frame the current project.

To begin, Kramer (2010) suggested that although there are many models of organizational socialization, most have three similar phases in common. These include a time period before joining an organization, known as *anticipatory socialization*; a time period as a new member within the organization typically referred to as *encounter or entry*; and, a time period that represents when individuals are active, established, full members within the organization, referred to as *metamorphosis or role management* (Feldman, 1976a, 1976b; Jablin, 1987, 2001; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Waldeck & Myers, 2008). Additionally, some models have a fourth phase referred to as *disengagement or exit* (Jablin, 1987, 2001). These phases represent the way “by which one is taught and learns ‘the ropes’ of a particular organizational role” or organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211).
However, marginalized populations (and non-marginalized) may not simply move through the traditional organizational socialization phases, instead they move through a process of being excluded (Bullis & Stout, 2000). Below I detail each phase in the organizational socialization framework to highlight how marginalized populations might experience these phases in different ways than other normatively classed individuals.

**Anticipatory Socialization**

Jablin (1987) divided anticipatory socialization into two processes. First, vocational anticipatory socialization is the process when generally gaining an understanding of work. As individuals mature from childhood to young adulthood, they are intentionally and unintentionally gathering and comparing occupational information against their own experiences (Jablin, 1987, 2001). Van Maanen (1975) suggested that children and young adults inherently “weigh the factors and alternatives involved in choosing an occupation” (p. 82). Information acquired during vocational anticipatory socialization comes from several different sources: parents, educational institutions, job experiences, friends and peers, and the mass media (Jablin, 2001).

*I must have been about nine years old, and I remember my parents talking about my mother’s boss who was “different.” They never said how exactly she was different, but it was because she was different that she would not give my mother a raise, or at least that is what I remember the issue surrounded. This was the first time I heard the word lesbian. The first time I knew gayness was something you should not ever wish upon your worst enemy. The first time I prayed to God to make me not gay.*

This experience is one that stands out in my memory where I learned about norms in the workplace. Individuals who identify as gay or lesbian likely gain a lot of their
information about the workplace from all of the sources listed above. However, this phase is complexified for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian because they often do not see people “like them” growing up. Hence, they often seek out examples and representations of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace (Allen, 2010). Additionally, individuals who identify as gay and lesbian are socialized into a heteronormative society, which further obscures their understanding of work (Yep, 2003). They negotiate the differences in their identity as they grow up, and these initial anticipatory socialization experiences play a significant role in furthering their understanding of not only what work is, but what it means to be out in the workplace.

Second, organizational anticipatory socialization is the process of selecting and learning about an organization to join. This is often a much shorter process but a more memorable experience. Individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may use their networks to learn about the culture of the organization they anticipate joining. They may also ask friends who work for the organization or reach out to the human resources office. However, beyond personal and professional social networks, the information sought by individuals who identify as gay or lesbian (i.e. acceptance) is often difficult to capture (Jablin, 2001). Thus, many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian enter the workplace with little knowledge of the organizational culture or acceptance related to their sexual orientation/identity. On the whole, during the anticipatory socialization phase individuals who identify as gay or lesbian develop meaningful initial perceptions and experiences of work. However, these perceptions may be marked by their understanding of their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. The encounter phase will contribute to our
understanding of the complications individuals who identify as gay or lesbian face once they enter the workplace.

Encounter

Jablin (2001) argued that there are two dynamic interrelated processes that individuals experience as they enter an organization. The first are the “planned, as well as unintentional, efforts by the organization to “socialize” the organizational members, and the second are when the organizational members attempt to “individualize” the work culture to adapt to their values and needs (Jablin, 1987, p. 755). Van Maanen (1975) explained that in the initial process of encounter individuals attempt to quickly absorb what the “normal” patterns of thinking and behaving are as well as what it means to be a part of the organization’s culture. For Jablin this is an integral process. On one hand, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian initially are socialized by organizational members into “normal” (heteronormative) patterns of thinking and behaving in the organization (Yep, 2003). On the other hand, their expectations evolve as they individualize and reshape the organization to fit someone who identifies as gay or lesbian. However, they might not be able to individualize to the extent that other employees in the workplace as their sexual orientation/identity does not fit within the confines of the heteronormative discourse in the workplace.

When I started my doctoral program it was important for me to start “out.” I remember in an introduction essay I wrote about how this was the first time I had lived with my boyfriend and how he had made the trek with me to Athens. I remember starting conversations with my new colleagues by basically saying “Hi, my name is Tim and I’m gay.” However, what strikes me about this experience is that while I started “out” to
faculty, staff, and my colleagues. I was not “out” in my classroom as a teacher. I had negotiated my “outness” to individualize my needs in my workplace.

This brief example showcases the complexity of the encounter phase for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Although this phase is often conceptualized as a “breaking-in period,” at the end of which employees are supposed to have a functional understanding of the organization and the people they work with (Jablin, 2001, p. 758), individuals who identify as gay or lesbian will encounter different individuals throughout their time in the organization that they negotiate and/or individualize their roles in different ways with different individuals. On this note, the encounter phase does not account for a continuous negotiation of organizational socialization which would acknowledge varied experiences of different members in the workplace (Clair, 1996, 1999).

Additionally, in the encounter phase employees “often experience surprises…we know little of how they talk to others about these incongruences in their efforts to resolve or manage them” (Jablin, 2001, p. 757). This statement is particularly true for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. In essence, how does someone who is gay or lesbian talk about LGBTQ issues in the workplace without “outing” themselves. Or maybe more importantly, how do they manage the surprises that arise when they come out in the workplace. Being that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are socialized into “normal” patterns of behaving and those patterns are based on heteronormative ideals, anything that is questioned isolates them as different. Overall, the encounter phase of organizational socialization is complicated by the constant negotiation and incongruent
experiences individuals who identify as gay or lesbian face in the workplace, and I seek to understand how they communicatively navigate the inconsistencies they encounter.

Metamorphosis

During the metamorphosis phase, “the individual sees what the organization is actually like and attempts to become a participating member” (Feldman, 1976a, p. 435). This phase may be difficult, challenging or near impossible for someone who identifies as gay or lesbian because of the exclusionary nature (Bullis & Stout, 2000). In essence, for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian this phase represents the “outsider within” the organization because although they be a member within, they still may feel excluded and on the outside (Collins, 2005). Jablin (2001) suggested “that although members can actively attempt to ‘individualize’ their roles to better satisfy their own needs, values, and beliefs at any time, for most this will not occur until they have reached a threshold level of adaptation” (p. 789). Thus, individualization may not always occur until the metamorphosis phase for employees. Moreover, for individuals who identify as gay lesbian, it is possible they may never reach a point in which they become full participating members who can “satisfy their own needs, values, and beliefs” in the organizational culture (Jablin, 2001, p. 789). In essence, the experiences in this phase may come down to whether an individual who identifies as gay or lesbian feels accepted and/or comfortable in the workplace versus excluded and uncomfortable.

In the metamorphosis phase, a member must have the ability to negotiate their roles with leaders and co-workers to meet their own needs and organizational requirements (Jablin, 2001). This addresses the overall challenge in the metamorphosis phase for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. As they negotiate their identity to
meet organizational requirements in the heteronormative workplace, they are negotiating their own needs and identity as an individual. This follows the previous statement that if individuals who identify as gay or lesbian feel excluded or uncomfortable they are not going to feel as if they have the power to negotiate their roles to meet their needs. Hence, the important role acceptance plays in the workplace in order to foster successful integration into the workplace for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. This brief overview of the metamorphosis phase further challenges our understanding but represents the potential for organizational transformation around inclusion versus exclusion in organizational practices.

Exit

The final phase that has been explored in the organizational socialization process is organizational exit or disengagement. Organizational disengagement, “involves both an individual’s decreased affiliation with a group, and the group’s decreased demands on and involvement with the individual” (Jablin, 2001, p. 785). Typically, individuals who disengage ultimately exit, voluntarily or involuntarily, and part ways with their former employers. Voluntary exit might be in the form of a planned exit, quitting, or gradual disenchantment (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, Fireman, 1996). If someone who identifies as gay or lesbian does not feel accepted in the organization they may seek an organization that is more accepting and plan their exit, or they may more spontaneously quit the organization.

Involuntary exit, on the other hand, often occurs during planned organizational change like organizational mergers or acquisitions and layoffs or reductions-in-force (Kramer, 2010). However, being that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are not a federally protected class, they could be fired for being gay or being “out” in the
workplace (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). Unlike other diverse groups (e.g.,
individuals with disabilities, individuals of different races/ethnicities, pregnant woman,
older adults), individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are not protected by federal laws
(e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964; ADA). Instead, they can legally be fired with no federal
or legal protections. The complicated nature of exit in organizational socialization for
individuals who identify as gay or lesbian challenges initial conceptions of organizational
socialization.

With a deeper understanding of how each phase of the organizational
socialization process might function for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, I
move to discuss the common critiques of organizational socialization and explain how
this dissertation will speak to some of these critiques.

**Critiques**

The organizational socialization framework is critiqued by scholars primarily for
its linear model and universal trajectory/exclusion of marginalized groups (Allen, 1996;
Bullis, 1993; Bullis & Stout, 2000; Clair, 1999; Smith & Turner, 1995; Turner, 1999).
Consequently, Bullis and Stout (2000) called on scholars to consider the following
questions: “How does socialization function to marginalize as well as socialize? Exclude
as well as include? Create and maintain ‘others’ such as outsiders and ‘outsiders within’
as well as insiders? What processes, roles, and groups are made (in)visible and how?”(p.
73). To answer their call I provide a brief review of how the main critiques will be
addressed in the current project
Linear Model

The linearity of the organizational socialization process is the one of the critiques that has been furthered by many scholars as suggested above. Smith and Turner (1995) argued that the traditional models of organizational socialization are “more likely to disable than enable efforts to generate understandings” (1995, p. 173). As a result, Lois (1999) suggested it may be useful to view the process as involving layered intersecting phases of development. Feldman (1976a) explained different phases overlap and fluctuate as different individuals’ experience unique organizational socialization processes. Although these distinct phases may represent unique turning points for individuals in the workplace, they do not provide the full picture of the layered intersections (Lois, 1999) in the organizational socialization process. Allen (2000) furthered this argument by explaining that due to factors including race, gender, sexual orientation, and social class some individuals’ might be treated differently and experience organizational socialization differently. Hence, this dissertation addresses how socialization functions to socialize, specifically those who identify as gay or lesbian, as well as marginalize. Through this dissertation individuals will gain a better understanding of the layered intersections (Lois, 1999) that these individuals encounter in organizational socialization process. Not only is the linear model of organizational socialization often under critique, but it is also important to consider the pervasiveness of a “universal trajectory” in socialization research.

Universal Trajectory

Following the complications with the linear model of thinking about organizational socialization it is also essential to critique the universal trajectory as
suggested by Jablin (1987, 2001). In essence, scholars argued that the organizational socialization process is “not derived directly from the lived experiences of marginalized others” and more could be gained by further exploration into diverse experiences (Bullis & Stout, 2000, p. 63). Clair (1996) explained that the phase model “fails to provide the full picture” of organizational socialization (p. 265). As such the experiences of marginalized individuals, specifically those who identify as gay or lesbian, are omitted. Marginalized populations may not simply move through the phases, instead they may be moving through a process of being excluded (Allen, 2000, Bullis & Stout, 2000).

To address this and shed light on diverse experiences, I sought to provide varied representations of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as they navigate organizational socialization in the workplace. Being that coming “out” in one organizational industry may vary drastically in comparison to another industry (i.e. professional football player vs. medical doctor); it is important to represent the different experiences individuals who identify as gay or lesbian have in the workplace. The focus in this dissertation is on individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in white collar professional or managerial careers. This provides some consistency in that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian who work in white collar positions are often well educated and middle class, but it leaves room for variations in experience. It ultimately broadens our understanding and breaks down the universal assumptions of the organizational socialization process by recognizing the intricate and unique experiences individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate in the workplace.

Additionally, it is important to note that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may not always be identifiable or marked as “other,” since their sexual
orientation/identity is often invisible. Although, marginalized groups do not typically desire the “other” status, it is a way to acknowledge individual differences that might vary the universal trajectory of the organizational socialization perspective. In other words, this constant negotiation sheds light on the fact that the organizational socialization process is not entirely uniform for everyone, especially when examining diverse experiences. This is important because, “presumed neutrality serves to mask the preservation of masculine, patriarchal assumptions” (Bullis & Stout, 2000, p. 65) which fundamentally preserves the heteronormative workplace and constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in navigating the workplace. On the whole, exploring these critiques enables an understanding of the ways in which non-heteronormative individuals may experience the organizational socialization process in different ways.

Summary of Organizational Socialization.

In sum, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian might experience organizational socialization in nuanced and unique ways thus necessitating scholarly inquiry. Being that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian do not necessarily move through the phases in sequential order, it is essential to examine the turning points that present the layered intersections in the organizational socialization process. Additionally, the varied and unique experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian need to be highlighted as this begins to break down the universal assumptions of the organizational socialization process. In order to get a better understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian it is important to juxtapose the organizational socialization framework with the co-cultural theoretical perspective.
Co-cultural Theory

Bullis and Stout (2000) argued the need to extend organizational socialization to include the lived experiences of “others,” and to exemplify this, I have chosen to utilize CCT which further problematizes the ideological nature of organizational socialization. Additionally, Orbe and Spellers (2005) argued for more research focusing on the context of CCT (i.e., organizational context). In order to highlight the extensive research on CCT I will first provide an overview of the central assumptions, next explore the communicative practices that influence co-cultural communication, and finally juxtapose CCT and organizational socialization.

Assumptions

Grounded in muted group (Kramarae, 1981), standpoint theories (Smith, 1987) and cultural phenomenology (Husserl, 1964; Orbe, 2000), CCT embraces the lived experiences of many “nondominant” co-cultural groups (i.e. people of color, women, lower socioeconomic status, LGBTQ) (Orbe, 1998b). This theory rests on five underlying assumptions. First, on the assumption that the recognition of a societal hierarchy that privileges certain groups over others. In the United States, the dominant groups include men, European Americans, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, the middle and upper socioeconomic classes (Orbe, 1998a). In this dissertation, the primary non-dominant group is sexual orientation/identity, specifically homosexuals; however, women are also considered a co-cultural group, thus there will be some intersectionality in co-cultural group representations (i.e., lesbians). The second assumption is that dominant groups possess power to create and maintain communication systems that express, reinforce, and
promote particular experiences. Although non-dominant groups possess influence their communication often seeks to resist, defy, and challenge the power of dominant society.

*We have all heard it. Some people stop. Some people cringe. Some people don’t do anything at all. What do you do when one of your student’s says “that’s gay?” Or what about one of your colleagues? I rarely speak up because I don’t know how to verbalize what that truly means to me. The fact that you are using a defining element of my identity, as an insult, is beyond me. It especially hurts when they know I’m gay. Every time I hear it, it catches me off guard. And every time, I stop, I cringe, and I don’t say anything.*

As shared above, the assumption that gay has a negative connotation is engrained in the heteronormative discourse of everyday life. The dominant group possesses the power and control to constrain individuals who identify as gay or lesbian by the definition of terms like “gay” to reflect the communication systems of their experiences (Orbe, 1998a). Although individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may seek to resist or challenge, dominant, and heteronormative, discourse is embedded in the communication system. Third, the presence of dominant group communication systems hinders the non-dominant culture from being heard. In essence, dominate group communication systems reinforce heteronormative patterns of behavior in the workplace and prevent alternate perspectives from individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, from being voiced and heard. The fourth assumption is the acknowledgement that different co-cultural group members will have varied communicative experiences as they each have lived unique lives. Orbe (1998a) recognized that non-dominant individuals might share similar experiences of being marginalized and underrepresented; however, it is important to
recognize the uniqueness that makes the story their own. And fifth, co-cultural group members use specific communicative tactics to navigate the dominant structures that are oppressive. In order to navigate the workplace, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian must use communicative tactics to make sense of the workplace. Given that these five assumptions highlight the intricacies of CCT it is important to clarify the communicative factors that influence the theoretical perspective.

Influential Factors

Orbe and Spellers (2005) described six components that set a basis for understanding individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as co-cultural group in the workplace: preferred methods, field of experience, abilities, situational context, costs and rewards, and communication approaches. The first component that affects interactions between co-cultural group members and dominant group members, is the “preferred method” that group members consciously or unconsciously choose during communication interactions (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 175). An individual that identifies as gay or lesbian might ask themselves: What communication behavior will lead to the effect I desire? Orbe (1998a) described the “preferred methods” that emerge for marginalized group members as assimilation, accommodation, and separation.

Assimilation

Notably, Orbe (1998a) defined the term assimilation much differently than Jablin (1987, 2001). Where Jablin (1987) viewed the assimilation process in a positive light as a mutual negotiation, Orbe (1998a) viewed it as an attempt to eliminate cultural differences in an effort to be more like the dominant culture (i.e., one culture subsumes the other). The basis of this communication behavior is that in order to participate in the
heteronormative workplace one must conform to dominant society. This might be accomplished by emphasizing commonalities, censoring self, manipulating stereotypes, or even mirroring to name a few (e.g. talking about a heterosexual relationship, derogatory language, or wearing similar clothing). For instance, a lesbian woman may talk about her divorce when at work to eliminate any differentness or question of her sexual orientation/identity in the dominant society. Additionally, gay and lesbian individuals may make fun of other gay employees in the organizational socialization process in hopes to address the stigma before someone questions their sexuality. On the whole, assimilation is used when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian feel it best to conform to dominant society, whatever that may be in their workplace.

Accommodation

Accommodation involves retaining some cultural uniqueness while acknowledging commonalities with the dominant society. The goal of this preferred method is to live within the dominant structures but to become more reflective of co-cultural lived experiences (Orbe, 1998b). A few examples of this method include dispelling stereotypes, educating others, or confrontation (e.g. speaking up when someone says something derogatory, telling others about your partner). For instance, someone may confront a colleague when they make a gay joke and tell them they “do not appreciate the vulgarity in the workplace.” Furthermore, if someone is already “out” or is considering coming “out” at work they may make efforts toward recognizing the commonalities they have with other colleagues such as having a spouse, children, or favorite sports team to develop a conversation around the fact that they may be gay, but they are not that different after all. In a sense, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian
gain a sense of control in this preferred method as they are integrating into the dominant society. The accommodation method may be best when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian have workplace protections, but might not have co-workers that understand or acknowledge individuals who identify as gay or lesbian.

Separation

Separation involves rejecting the notion of establishing a common bond with the dominant culture. Individuals who choose this method of interaction do not see the necessity of blending in with other dominant group members (Orbe, 1998b). This “preferred method” is interesting in that it can be enacted in two very different extremes. As such it might be accomplished by avoiding interaction entirely (e.g., not addressing gay comments) or attacking or confronting aggressors (e.g. starting a fight). For example, a gay individual may maintain their distance and not participate in social events in the organization. Conversely, they may exemplify strength and be proud of the accomplishments in the gay community by displaying LGBTQ artifacts on their desk even when they know that is not the “norm” in the organization. The goal of individuals who prefer the separation method is to join with other members of co-cultural groups to recognize the varied lived experiences, often like them, in the workplace (Orbe, 1998b).

As I reflect on each of this “preferred methods” I question where I fit. I would like to say I accommodate as I like to highlight that I have a lot in common with my heterosexual colleagues, but I also recognize my identity as a gay male as a unique contribution in the workplace. Yet, in reality, the variations in my experiences reflect each of these preferred communicative methods. I remember making fun of the “gay” kid in high school. Yes, there was only one out high school student (assimilation). And at the
time in my life I assimilated into the heteronormative culture that surrounded me. I remember not saying a word when I overheard some of my colleagues making a gay joke (separation). I separated myself from the context as I didn’t know how to start/enter that conversation. And maybe most importantly, all of these interactions are vivid and clear in my mind as they all have made a lasting impression on me. Thus, I propose a question to you, to the reader of this paper, when was the last time you negotiated your communication to protect/reflect/redirect your identity?

With the first component of “preferred methods” encompassing assimilation, accommodation, and separation explained it is important to move on to the second component of field of experience. Orbe and Spellers (2005) explained this as “the influence of one’s past experiences” and how that influences co-cultural group member’s communication in different situations they may encounter (p. 178). Employees who identify as gay or lesbian might utilize certain communicative practices based upon positive or negative past interactions in the workplace. This reiterates some of the research on organizational socialization that suggested individuals who identify as gay or lesbian use their past experiences to influence their communication in the workplace (Jablin, 1987). In essence, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian who have previously made fun of in the workplace learn how to deal with those situations, which might include joining in the joke and laughing at themselves even as demeaning as that might be. Or take for instance, if someone was fired or treated differently in the organizational socialization process because they came out. This might greatly influence these individuals decision to come “out” in the next organization or position they join. Both of these examples reflect the importance of thinking about, selecting, and then evaluating
co-cultural communication practices based on the past experiences that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian have encountered in the workplace (Orbe, 1998b).

The third component is the co-cultural group member’s abilities (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). This is the idea that these marginalized individuals communication must be given some “thoughtfulness, rehearsal, and motivation, as the ability to use some practices may vary greatly depending on the individual” (p. 178). This communicative practice recognizes that not all individuals can engage in all of the communicative behaviors. Many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may not have the power/abilities in the organizational socialization process (Jablin, 1987) and may feel uncomfortable engaging in verbal attacks; however, they do have the ability to confide in an individual to make sure their concerns are addressed in the workplace. Additionally, it is interesting to consider whether or not individuals who identify as gay or lesbian have contemplated how they “negotiate their cultural differentness” within the structures of dominant heteronormative society (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 174). Orbe (1998b) suggested that it is important not to assume that all co-cultural group members have total abilities to employ all of the practices. However, it is also important to note that many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian plan and rehearse coming “out” to their family, friends, and colleagues and this highlights some of the control they have in communicating about their marginalization.

The fourth component is the situational context, which includes “where the interaction occurs, who is present, and the particular circumstances that facilitate the interaction” (Orbe, 1998a). Interactions and communicative practices might change depending on if individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are within or outside of the
workplace as well as how long an individual has worked for the organization or the organization’s view towards workplace equality or the LGBTQ community. For example, an individual may not be “out” at work, but may freely hold hands with their partner in public and in this situational context unknowingly “out” themselves at work when a colleague sees them out shopping. Additionally, as they have been socialized within the organizational space they find places where it is okay to talk freely (i.e. the water cooler, human resources office) whereas other spaces may be off limits (i.e. their workspace, the boardroom). On the whole, the situational context greatly influences the communicative practices of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian.

The fifth component, Orbe and Spellers (2005) recognized is that certain costs and rewards might be associated with different communication practices. This is an important component to consider when trying to understand individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, especially in the workplace. The costs for these individuals could result in verbal abuse, harassment, and most significantly loss of job since individuals can be legally fired for being gay in 29 states (HRC, Resources-Workplace, 2013). However, as times change many rewards may also emerge in organizations such as equal spousal benefits and places to express marginalized perspectives and concerns in the workplace. Additionally, Orbe (1998b) noted that specific advantages and disadvantages are not perceived as the same for all co-cultural group members. In essence, although same-sex spousal benefits acknowledge the relationship, it may force some individuals to define their relationship and as a result out themselves in the workplace. Yet, beyond that what benefit are same-sex spousal benefits to single individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Overall, this is another communicative practice that recognizes the
importance of the lived experiences as they may not be the same for everyone. And as a result, it is crucial to understand how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicate and experience organizational socialization in the workplace.

And finally, Orbe and Spellers (2005) introduced the sixth component which includes three specific communication approaches that are related to each of these “preferred methods” from component one: nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive. Although these communication approaches are part of Orbe and Speller’s (2005) presentation of CCT, they were not part of Orbe’s (1998a) initial conception of CCT. In fact, to examine these communication approaches an in depth content analysis of the findings would need to be conducted and that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Briefly, scholars examined the communication approach (nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive) that marginalized individuals took in relation to the preferred method (assimilation, accommodation, separation).

Taken together, these six communicative practices illuminate the intricacy of CCT. In the following section, I further juxtapose the theoretical and contextual frameworks of this study by explicating the CCT communicative practices within the organizational socialization framework.

**Juxtaposition**

In synthesizing the theoretical perspective of CCT in the context of organizational socialization I argue that we need to consider a process I have coined co-cultural organizational socialization, which I define as the process by which marginalized and underrepresented individuals (co-cultural) join, participate in, and exit organizations (organizational socialization). This term addresses the oversights in current published
scholarship in two ways. First, the term provides space for the often forgotten voices of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace that are traditionally marginalized and underrepresented in dominant society. Second, both the theoretical perspective and the framework focus on the communicative practices of these members as they interact with individuals in the workplace (Cohen & Avanzino, 2010). Thus, in juxtaposing the theoretical framework within the context of organizational socialization researchers are able to recognize not only the voices of gay and lesbian individuals but also the communication that is enabled and/or constrained by the heteronormative environment in the workplace. The development of this term begins to evolve theoretical conceptualizations about the intersections of CCT and organizational socialization.

Primarily, I explore how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience the workplace and what past experiences, abilities, situational contexts, and/or costs/rewards have influenced their communication as they experience organizational socialization in the workplace. Kramer (2010) explained that joining an organization is “much like the newcomer experience, filled with stress, uncertainty, and ambiguity” (p. 156). I argue that if we examine these lived experiences we will not only begin to uncover the layered intersections of the organizational socialization process, but we will also enhance our understanding of the experiences of exclusion faced by individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Additionally, it is imperative to examine the similar, incongruent, and intricate experiences that individuals who are gay or lesbian face in the organizational socialization process. More specifically, we need to explore what preferred methods individuals who identify as gay or lesbian use in various conversations when
they feel excluded and/or included in the organizational socialization process (Bullis & Stout, 2000; Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

It is important to note that both the CCT theoretical perspective and the organizational socialization framework draw on ideas related to conformity. The heteronormative discourse highlights this conformity and is being challenged in this dissertation to begin to eliminate these co-cultural incongruences. Moreover, Jablin (2001) explained “we know little of how they [employees] talk to others about these incongruences in their efforts to resolve or manage them” (p. 757). In essence, little has been done to examine the varied ways in which individuals not only conform to but confront or contribute to dominant discourse. Co-cultural organizational socialization recognizes the communicative methods of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian by recognizing how they resolve or manage communication during the organizational socialization process. Co-culture organizational socialization embraces how the preferred communicative methods influence individuals who identify as gay and lesbian in the workplace and expands our understanding of heteronormativity in the workplace.

Although these connections are not exhaustive, they highlight the relationship between the co-cultural theoretical perspective and the organizational socialization framework. As I move forward with this project I advance this juxtaposition as a way of understanding how marginalized and underrepresented individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience and communicatively navigate organizational socialization.

Summary of Co-cultural Theory

CCT recognizes that gay and lesbian individuals manage and negotiate their communication in the organizational socialization process in varied ways. This
theoretical perspective problematizes the power and privilege of dominant society which is perpetuated into the heteronormative workplace, specifically organizational socialization. Additionally, the juxtaposition of this theoretical perspective within the organizational socialization framework provides space to explore the incongruent experiences, as well as the silenced voices that have faced exclusion in the universal trajectories. Given that existing CCT research on gay and lesbian individuals is dated and does not address current workplace issues, I argue that this research gives individuals who identify as gay or lesbian a voice in the workplace (Orbe & Spellers, 2005; Orbe, 1996). With the larger framework and the theoretical contribution examined, I will focus on the ways being “out” will be further explored in this dissertation.

Being “Out” in the Workplace Matters

Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) argued that the field of communication studies has traditionally overlooked the gay and lesbian experience. And as a result, research has reproduced and normalized the heteronormative discourse and experience in the workplace. Yep and colleagues (2003) advanced two goals for research in queer theory and communication: 1) “the rejection of the minoritizing views in favor of universality,” and 2) “shifting the approach to sexual identities as multiple, unstable, and fluid social constructions intersecting with race, class, and gender, among others, as opposed to a singular” (pp. 3-4). The first goal draws attention to the organizational socialization critique of universal trajectory that was previously articulated. Yep and colleagues do not want research to present a universal understanding; instead they seek various renderings of individual experience. Additionally, the second goal recognizes sexual orientation/identity as co-constructed identities that fluctuate and intersect with other
identities. With these goals in mind, my aim for the dissertation is to further investigate the communicative enactment of identity as gay or lesbian by exploring the heteronormative discourse in organizations that may normalize experiences. As such, I first briefly touch on the history of sexuality in communication studies to highlight the significance of this dissertation. Next, I explore the understandings of the heteronormative workplace to continue to frame the discourse individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are embedded in the workplace. Following that, I magnify the multidimensionality and complexity of sexual orientation/identity to illuminate the intricacies of these individuals co-cultural organizational socialization. Finally, I conclude by advancing several research questions to guide this dissertation.

History of Sexuality in Communication Studies.

Slagle (1995) noted “scholars have been reluctant to address the issues that affect the lives of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community” in communication studies (p. 85). Although several reviews of literature has been published (Henderson, 2000; Fejes & Petrich, 1993; Smith & Windes, 2000), I highlight Yep’s (2003) more recent scholarship on the three issues surrounding current research in communication studies. First, for over 60 years scholars were silent on issues of sexuality. This silence perpetuated ignorance and perhaps even intolerance in the communication studies academic community (Yep, 2003). This dissertation moves us forward in giving a voice to individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in communication studies. Second, the research that has been conducted has explored individuals who identify as gay or lesbian with, as Sedgwick (1990) explained, a minoritizing view. In essence, the gay and lesbian individuals are viewed as a “small, discrete, and fairly fixed homosexual minority” (p. 17). This study exposes the
variations in how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience the workplace in that some individuals come out in the workplace, while others remain invisible. It is through the excerpts and stories layered in this study that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are no longer a discrete and fairly fixed marginalized minority but are vibrant and equally diverse group of individuals who may be your next colleague. Finally, research has started to critique our universal conceptions and expose incoherencies in communication studies (i.e. what organizational socialization means by “normal” behaviors). Following Bullis and Stout’s (2000) call to question the universal trajectory of organizational socialization, queer theory scholars are interested in how these universal ideals reproduce heteronormativity. These three issues address the significance of this dissertation in the field of communication studies as they lead us to understand the significance in providing vivid and varied representations of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Additionally, it is important to note that very few scholars in communication studies have focused on individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Instead scholars have focused on AIDS activism (Dow, 1994), pro-gay and anti-gay rhetoric (Smith & Windes, 2000), performance of sexuality (Corey & Nakayama, 1997), expression of affection in same-sex interpersonal relations (Floyd & Morman, 2000), and others (e.g. activism, rhetoric, performance, interpersonal). The few that have explored the workplace in communication studies have examined family expectations in the workplace (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014) and have taken more of an autoethnographic approach to sharing their experiences in and outside of the workplace (Fox, 2013; Spradlin, 1998). On the whole, the history of sexuality in communication studies is
important, yet incomplete. As such, I would like to augment the current scholarship by exploring the lived experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace. Because heteronormativity is a key assumption that undergirds this entire dissertation, I will explore this next.

**Heteronormative Workplace**

Yep (2003) argued “heteronormativity, the (in)visible center and the presumed bedrock of society, is the quintessential force creating, sustaining, and perpetuating the erasure, marginalization, disempowerment, and oppression of sexual others” (p. 18). Society is fundamentally structured around a heteronormative discourse. People typically think that gender falls into two distinct yet complimentary categories (men and women) and define relationships as being between one man and one woman (RMA, 2013). Wittig (1992) suggested that, “[t]o live in society is to live in heterosexuality” (p. 40) and that “heterosexuality is always already there within all mental categories” (p. 43). We have been socialized to think about gender from a young age from a heterosexual standpoint because it is seen as “normal.” In essence, Yep (2003) argued we live in a hegemonic society where individuals freely partake in their own “domination” and perpetuate what it means to be “normal.” Thus, the influence of heteronormativity “is its (in)visibility disguised as ‘natural,’ ‘normal,’ ‘universal,’ ‘it-goes-without saying’ character” (Yep, 2002, p. 168). The workplace is an exemplar of a heteronormative environment in our daily lives.

*When I walked into the office to make copies I noticed that the new office assistant had started, and I thought it only proper to introduce myself. I mean the fact of the matter is that I practically live in that office making copies, getting supplies, and*
dropping off a mix of registration slips and grade change forms. As I introduced myself another colleague asked me how my wedding planning was going, and as I answered with “it’s hectic,” the office assistant asked, “what is your bride’s name?” I chuckled (as this was not the first time this had happened), I told her, “no bride in this wedding, but instead another groom.” As I turned around to avoid her reaction and not make her feel like she offended me; she apologized and asked more questions about the wedding. As I walked away I started thinking about the heteronormativity that is masked as “normal” until it is challenged and exposed in the workplace.

As this brief story illuminates, the embedded nature of heteronormativity forces many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian to deal with unique tensions in the workplace. The challenge to heteronormativity is what Butler (2004) calls “distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate that conditions of life itself” (p. 8). Thus, for the context of this study, I view all workplaces as heteronormative. I argue the heteronormative workplace is not something that we can just change; but in identifying heteronormative policies, practices and behaviors in the workplace we recognize the pervasiveness of heteronormativity. Following Butler’s (2004) sentiments, the importance of exploring the workplace through a heteronormative lens is about creating more livable conditions for people whose existence is not fully recognized within an exclusive “it-goes-without saying” discourse (Yep, 2002, p. 168). Although some may argue this creates a false binary (i.e. the workplace is either heteronormative or it is not), I contend scholars should identify the complexities and variants of heteronormativity across workplaces in order to move beyond binary
assumptions. Alvesson and Willmott (1992) explained “the liberation of people from unnecessarily restrictive traditions, ideologies, assumptions, power relations, identity formations, and so forth inhibit or distort opportunities for autonomy, clarification of genuine needs and wants, and thus greater and lasting satisfaction” (p. 425). This liberation can take two different forms, which include: “bloody revolution” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) or emerging awareness through communicative action. In this dissertation, I strive to contribute to the emerging awareness through communication action. Ultimately, I explore the pervasive nature of heteronormativity in the workplace in an effort to magnify and subsequently break down the restrictive norms and binary assumptions.

In sum, society is fundamentally structured around a heteronormative discourse and in problematizing the universal trajectory of organizational socialization for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian I complicate the assumptions of heteronormativity and (re)present or emancipate the unique lived experiences in the workplace. In what follows, I magnify the multidimensionality and complexity of sexual orientation/identity through intersectionality.

*Intersectionality*

Although some might argue that sexual orientation/identity does not matter or have a place in the workplace, I follow Acker (1990), who suggested “the absence of sexuality …in organizational logic and organizational theory is an additional element that both obscures and helps to reproduce the underlying gender relations” (p. 151). In other words, the lack of recognition about sexual orientation/identity further entrenches the heteronormative discourse on the individual and institutional level. Therefore, to move
beyond heteronormative patriarchy (Yep, 2003) scholars must not only recognize and
challenge the discourse, but they must also understand the multidimensionality of sexual
orientation/identity for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

To better frame sexual orientation/identity for individuals who identify as gay or
lesbian, I introduce intersectionality which focuses on the complexity of human
experience. Collins (2000) defined intersectionality as “particular forms of intersecting
oppressions” (p. 18). In essence, it refers “to the multidimensionality and complexity of
human experience and describes the place where multiple identities come together or
intersect” (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009, p. 42). Ultimately, intersectionality avoids seeing
sexual orientation/identity on the basis of a single socially constructed identity and
instead encourages scholars to represent the complexity of marginalized individuals.
Intersectionality recognizes the varying and competing identities that individuals who
identify as gay or lesbian navigate during co-cultural organizational socialization.

Take for example the intersections of sex and sexual orientation/identity which
represent two marginalized groups. A white woman who identifies as a lesbian may
reflect on the struggles she has faced as a lesbian woman during co-cultural
organizational socialization. However, in recognizing her intersectionality she cannot
negate her privilege as someone whose race is in the dominant. Crisp (2014) clearly
explained that although one may not intend to harm and oppress others that denial of
privilege creates obstacles towards understanding others experiences. In essence, I as a
white gay male need to recognize the privileges I have been afforded as “white” and
“male” in order to understand my experience as “gay” and marginalized in the workplace.
Ultimately, what I appreciate about intersectionality is that it recognizes not only the
complexity of sexual orientation/identity, but it also provides room for understanding how multiple identities come together for a marginalized individual in the workplace.

On the whole, intersectionality is integral in understanding the multidimensionality and complexity that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate during organizational socialization. Nonetheless, sexual orientation/identity is further nuanced by three interrelated ideas: constant negotiation, (in)visibility, acknowledgement.

**Constant Negotiation**

Being “out” is not a one-time event; it is a constant negotiation individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate on a daily basis. Someone who identifies as gay or lesbian does not just “come out” of the closet once. Rather, sexual orientation/identity is negotiated and managed at the grocery store, when going out to eat, when buying a car, when heading to work, when at home, and during many other every day, taken-for-granted experiences (Adams, 2011). For example, a gay individual may be “out” to a few colleagues, perceived as gay by other colleagues, and “closeted” to others. This fluidity and complexity of “out-ness” is a tension that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian manage in and outside of the workplace. Unfortunately, few organizational scholars have recognized the nuances of understanding individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

In fact, current research and theorizing on sexual orientation/identity is currently extensive and incomplete. Most published research focuses on “coming out” and emphasizes the significance of the event and the importance of expression/performance of sexual orientation/identity. However, this research is often scrutinized by queer and
gender scholars as it looks at “coming out” as an event and not a process. As such, several scholars have started reframing the construct as a continual process as opposed to a complete or incomplete activity (e.g., Adams, 2010; Dindia, 2000). Although this emerges methodological concerns for representing sexual orientation/identity as a process, I argue that scholars need to give more attention to understanding the process and constant negotiations individuals who identify has gay or lesbian have experienced in their lifetime. In the dissertation I examine representations of the process in understanding not only their initial coming out story, but the varying ways they have negotiated their sexual orientation/identity during organizational socialization. Moreover, the organizational element is notably missing from the literature. And although organizations may claim to be “gay friendly,” individuals who identify as gay or lesbian constantly negotiate their sexual orientation identity during interactions in the workplace.

Finally, one of the constant negotiation tensions individuals who identify as gay or lesbian often face in the workplace that has been explored is the performance of professionalism. Rumens and Kerfoot (2009) found that gay men benefit from being successful and open about their sexuality; however much of the discourse surrounding professionalism was shaped by narrow [heteronormative] ideals about what it means to be professional (p. 782). In essence, gay men felt as if they still needed to be dominant, assertive, and showcase hegemonic masculine traits in order to be a professional employee. Interestingly, they expressed control over their professionalism in relation to their clothes and bodies. They could dress in high-end suits and designer clothes, and this did not change their level of professionalism. And as one individual explained his “toned body projected ‘a straight acting version of masculinity,’” and thus this did not change is
level of professionalism” (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009, p. 780). These findings suggest that in “gay friendly” organizations “successful” gay males are still bound by the heteronormative workplace. Nonetheless, lesbian women may experience quite similar things to gay men as if they feel they need to be dominant and assertive in order to be a professional employee. Overall, I argue that we need to give more attention to the process and constant negotiation of sexual orientation/identity to better understand the professional tensions they face, specifically in white collar professional and managerial positions. Not only do individuals who identify as gay and lesbian constantly negotiate their sexual orientation/identity, their sexual orientation/identity often remains (in)visible in the workplace.

(In)visibility

As has been stated throughout this dissertation one of the unique aspects of the co-cultural nature of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian is that their sexual orientation/identity is not visibly apparent when compared to other diversity categories (such as gender, disability, and often race) on the surface level. Often, gay and lesbian individuals have the ability to negotiate whether or not they want to share their sexual orientation/identity with their colleagues. Hence, “passing” often occurs as a means to conform to the dominant heteronormative society where an individual chooses to “pass” as a heterosexual in order separate their personal and professional lives and/or to be considered “normal” by society (Spradlin, 1998). Spradlin (1998) explained that as a lesbian in the work environment she used “passing” strategies to remain (in)visible and pass as a heterosexual woman within the workplace.
When I started my masters I was not “out.” Not to anyone, not even to myself. I had a girlfriend and had come to the realization that is how I was supposed to live my life. There really was no choice to live any other way. But deep down I knew I was gay. In the months to come I further accepted my sexual orientation/identity as gay. However, I did not know how to navigate my identity when I was at school with my professors and students, so I ignored it and passed as “straight.” I talked about girlfriends and acted homophobic. I do not know if it was exactly convincing; however, it was not until my thesis defense that I came “out” to my advisor and committee. I do not know if they were surprised or already knew, but for me this is when I unmasked the (in)visible nature of my sexual orientation/identity.

Following Spradlin’s (1998) experiences in the workplace I, like her, not only negotiated the presentation of my sexual orientation/identity, but also determined that my sexual orientation/identity was not a social orientation/identity I wanted to share in the workplace. I wanted it to be (in)visible. This follows the co-cultural theoretical perspective in relation to communicative perspectives, but even more so, it addresses the perceived heteronormativity in the workplace. Although research on the (in)visibility of identity is sparse, some social identities, like youth homelessness, are often kept (in)visible due to the discursive construction of stigma (see Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005). Sexual orientation/identity presumably functions in a similar way and as a result it is essential to understand individuals who identify as gay and lesbian as they navigate and negotiate (in)visibility on the basis of being stigmatized in the workplace.
Additionally, in the organizational context (in)visibility might both enable and constrain individuals who identify as gay or lesbian to “negotiate their cultural differentness” and manage their sexual orientation/identity in the dominant heteronormative society (Orbe, 1998a). (In)visibility is essential to furthering our understanding of diversity in the workplace and exposing the embedded heteronormative structures embedded therein. Snyder argued (2003) that, “[w]hen an organization values people for themselves, you do not need to be anyone other than yourself” (p. 20). That is, if an organization acknowledges sexual orientation/identity differences, and if an individual is able to be him or herself in the organization, then he/she is much more likely to be satisfied as an employee (Snyder, 2003). This further complicates the constant negotiation that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience in the workplace. Arguably, as the quote above suggested, being “out” in the workplace is complexified not only by issues of sexual orientation/identity but also by acknowledgement (Hyde, 2006).

**Acknowledgement**

Hyde (2006) explained “acknowledgement provides an opening out of such a distressful situation, for the act of acknowledging is a communicative behavior that grants attention to others and thereby makes room for them in our lives” (p. 1). In other words, acknowledgement creates space in a potentially vulnerable situation (such as being out at work) which grants attention to individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Acknowledgement should be viewed from two perspectives: individual and organization. First and foremost, we need to understand acknowledgement from the individual perspective. Allport (1954) positioned, interpersonal contact as an important way to reduce prejudice or discrimination between a majority and minority group. It is
Hyde’s intention (2006) to frame acknowledgement around reciprocity and as such, sharing your story leads to increased interactions and understanding.

One day at the end of class a student came up to me and asked if they could go back to my office to talk to me about his grades. I had a long day and was behind in reading for a class I had that night, and I was beyond overwhelmed. As I hurriedly packed up all my teaching supplies, putting dry erase markers in their special bag, and wiping down the board I asked, “is it something we can talk about now or do I need to pull up the gradebook?” He hesitantly responded, “Can we wait until we go to your office?” I nodded my head and as we walked over to my office I could tell something just wasn’t right. As he sat down he told me, “I know I can trust you and you’ll understand” and he further explained how over spring break he was kicked out of his house because he came out to his parents. He left to avoid a physical fight with his father and came back to two trash bags of his things on the lawn. He did not know what to do or where to go, but as I fought back the influx of emotions I was feeling for this young man (as I have been blessed with parents that have supported me) I was glad that for the first time in my academic career I had decided embrace my sexual orientation/identity in the classroom.

As the above story illustrated, the fact that I had acknowledged my sexual orientation/identity in my workplace opened up a space for discussion and acceptance that this student so desperately needed. Acknowledgement allows space for reciprocity and encourages colleagues to gain a new appreciation for, and understanding of, workplace diversity. Acknowledgement, then, will likely reduce prejudice towards the marginalized in the workplace (Whitley & Kite, 2010). Additionally, when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian acknowledge and accept their identity they open doors to
not just be recognized but to be acknowledged (Arnett, 2008). This leads to the second perspective that acknowledgement should also be viewed from the organizational perspective, as it focuses attention on and opens up space for marginalized individuals in the workplace.

Winfeld (2005) suggested that organizations themselves must come out acknowledging workplace diversity and promoting inclusion. Organizations are a unique space that is “more than a place; it is communicative ground for the calling of acknowledgement, a space where one finds identity and happiness” (p. 24). As a result, acknowledging individuals who identify as gay or lesbian is essential to furthering our understanding of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Raeburn (2004) suggested if we hope to change corporate America we need to start from the inside out. In sum, acknowledgement grants individuals who identify as gay or lesbian authority in their lived experience, and this is fostered not only by an individual accepting and sharing their sexual orientation/identity but also by organizations stepping out to acknowledge them.

To close, in juxtaposing the CCT framework within the context of organizational socialization researchers are able to recognize not only the voices of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian but also the communication that is enabled and/or constrained by the heteronormative environment in the workplace. As such, scholars need to work towards further understanding sexual orientation/identity in the workplace and acknowledging individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as these components are integral in furthering our understanding of the heteronormative discourse in organizations. Based off of the extensive review of literature juxtaposing the organizational socialization framework within the co-cultural theoretical perspective to
explore individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, I pose the following three research questions:

RQ1: How do individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively navigate and/or experience the heteronormative workplace?

RQ2: In what ways does the heteronormative discourse enable and/or constrain individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace?

RQ3: How do individuals who identify as gay and lesbian communicatively (re)present their marginalization?

Chapter Summary

Overall, the juxtaposition of co-cultural theory and organizational socialization provides space to explore the experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace. CCT problematizes the power and privilege of dominant society which is perpetuated into the heteronormative workplace, specifically organizational socialization. As a result, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian do not necessarily experience organizational socialization in traditional ways, hence the importance of examining the turning points that present the layered intersections of organizational socialization. Moreover, this dissertation seeks to complicate the reality of heteronormativity and (re)present or emancipate the unique lived experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. In the next chapter, I further develop and frame the data collection and analysis procedures.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I explain and provide justification for the methodological decisions I made in the dissertation. I will first explore the suitability of a qualitative approach. I then outline my approaches to data collection: interviews, observations, and organizational documents. Subsequently, I explain my data analysis procedures. Finally, I discuss the journey I took to ensure crystallization and analytic rigor.

Suitability of Qualitative Approach

Orbe (1998a) framed CCT from a phenomenological perspective; he argued it is essential to recognize how individuals experience their “world” and explain it as co-researchers (p. 36). Qualitative methods provide the opportunity for a rich, descriptive, and valuable understanding of individuals’ lived experiences. As such, I argued that qualitative methods were best suited for studying how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience their “world.” The qualitative approach provided space for the researcher to be the instrument (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). And more importantly, the participants’ voices were just as important as the researcher’s questions. Accordingly, my research was driven by the intricate details and unique experiences my participants shared which were best obtained through an interpretive, qualitative approach.

With this approach, I aimed to provide space for the intricacies and nuances of these individuals’ experiences as opposed to striving for generalization (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I focused on exploring the lived experiences of my participants and strove to understand their unique stories. Additionally, since the qualitative approach provided flexibility, I was able to explicate and further explore the unique stories in each of my
participants’ lived experiences without being confined by my questions. Taken as a whole, these reasons led to my decision to use the qualitative methodology to provide insight into the lived experiences of my participants.

Data Collection

To begin, I describe the criteria that were used when selecting interview participants and participant demographics. And then I explain the varied ways in which I collected data for the project which included: interviews, observations, and organizational documents.

Participant Demographics

I conducted interviews with two different groups within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or ally (LGBTQA) population: gay men and lesbian women. My decision to interview individuals who identify as gay or lesbian was due to the lack of current research that provides a representation of both of the intersections of these populations as much of the research provides separate representations (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009; Spradlin, 1998). This provided opportunities to explore the intersections of sexual orientation/identity and gender. As a result 61% of participants I interviewed in this study were gay men (n = 26) and 38% identified as lesbian women (n = 16). I believe the stories shared from each of these populations added richness to the data collection as it did not minimize the representation but recognized the intersections of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Although I would have liked to have more women who identify as lesbian I had to individually seek out many of the women that participated, as one of my participants explained “I identify with you as being gay, but the fact you are a gay white male gives you way more power than I and that’s power I
struggle to gain as a lesbian woman in the workplace.” The ages of participants ranged from 26 years old to 64 years old, with an average age of 38 years old. When I refocused my interview questions I recognized the more intricate stories being told by older generations so I made a conscious effort to attempt to recruit older participants. Finally, being that geography can play an important role in the potential discrimination for gay and lesbian employees, it is important to acknowledge that 60% of the participants ($n = 25$) resided in the central region of the United States, whereas 26% ($n = 11$) resided in the western region, 7% ($n = 3$) in the southern region, and 7% ($n = 3$) in the eastern region at the time of the study. With that said, 48% of the participants ($n = 20$) resided and worked in states in which they could legally be fired for being gay or lesbian in the workplace (see Appendix A).

Notably, I was able to interview three couples, and although I interviewed these individuals separately, it was interesting how they drew on each other’s stories and their partner’s work experiences to story their own experiences in the workplace. Lastly, I interviewed several participants from the same three organizations ($n = 7$). This provided me an opportunity to cross-check the information and highlighted different aspects of the structure and culture in each of these organizations (Johnson, 1999). With this overview of the participants’ demographics, I next turn to the data collection procedures.

*Interviews*

I conducted a total of 42 interviews ($N=42$). Each of the participants was assigned a pseudonym to protect individual identities (see Appendix A). Following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines granted for conducting research with this population (see Appendix B). The interviews ranged in duration from 16 minutes to 1
hour and 15 minutes with the average interview lasting 45 minutes. I logged a total of 31 hours and 39 minutes interviewing. There were two main criteria that participants needed to meet in order to be considered for this study: first, the individual had to identify as gay or lesbian; second, the individual had to be employed or previously employed in a professional or managerial role in an organization. The second criterion was created to establish a focus on white collar workers. I made this decision because individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and work in white collar positions are often well educated and middle class and navigate their own “privilege” in the heteronormative workplace. When compared to blue collar work, white collar work is marked by “privilege,” and privilege is an important intersection to understand when exploring marginalized individuals (see Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004 on blue collar work).

Participants were recruited using network and snowball sampling procedures (Creswell, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). First, a network sample of professionals were recruited by e-mail from a list of individuals in my own personal network. The participants were recruited primarily using an e-mail sent by myself and/or forwarded by an associate and/or friend. The e-mail offered information about the purpose of the project and contained an invitation to contact the researcher if they met the criteria and were interested in participating in the project (see Appendix C). Second, I utilized snowball sampling technique by asking my contacts to pass on the information to any individuals they knew that identify as gay or lesbian who might be interested in participating. This was primarily organized around a post that was distributed via Facebook which provided an opportunity to network and have interested participants make direct contact with the researcher (see Appendix C).
Participants had several options available for participating in this study including: a face-to-face interview, an online computer mediated interview using Skype, or a telephone interview. A majority of my participants selected the telephone interview \((n = 29)\) as it worked well with a hectic work schedule and the fact that the participants were geographically distributed. Followed by Skype interviews \((n = 11)\). Although Skype interviews were my preferred method, some individuals participated in the interviews while at work and did not feel comfortable video conferencing. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) appreciate the synchronous nature of computer mediated interviews as they allow “participants to ask and answer questions efficiently, and contribute to a climate of intimacy in which understandings can be carefully developed and explored” (p. 267). However, with the benefits associated with computer mediated interviews also came weaknesses. As just one example, during one of my interviews my computer had a mandatory automatic update and restart. I was fortunate to get a warning and inform my participant (which allowed her time to warm up her coffee), but it was a moment of stress during a pivotal moment in the interview. Finally, two of the participants conducted their interviews face-to-face \((n = 2)\) as their location was conducive to an in-person interview. Altogether, I appreciated the varied ways in which I conducted interviews as I was provided an opportunity to meet some my interviewees but also allowed them anonymity and space to feel comfortable in sharing their stories.

All of the interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. Per human subject guidelines each of my participants was asked for permission to record the conversation (digitally) and provided (via e-mail) with informed consent documents (24 hours prior to their interview). At the beginning of each of the interviews I explained that
all identifying information, including names and organizations, would be kept confidential. Additionally, all participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any point in time and did not have to answer any questions if they felt uncomfortable. Moreover, if the uncomfortableness was caused by being recorded I told them I could turn off the recorder and take notes by hand to attempt to capture the same information. All but three of the participants verbally agreed ($N=39$) to be recorded, the three that did not want to be recorded agreed to allow me to take notes during their interview. These three participants were all via phone and they were quite skeptical of the entire interview process, although I reiterated my confidentiality of their stories it was apparent they were hesitant. As a result, these participants did not share much during the interview process, in fact these three interviews were the three shortest interviews all lasting around 16 minutes. No participants declined to continue the interview after reviewing the consent forms.

The interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide with fourteen open-ended questions. I took a grounded approach to research protocol (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in that I initially interviewed ten participants and then refocused my interview questions. At this point I cut some interview questions (e.g. Is there a difference between coming out and being out in the workplace?; How would you describe your organization as “out” to others?) and added interview questions that were more specific to what I was interested in understanding (e.g. How was your experience joining the workplace similar or different than others experiences?; Have you ever felt excluded or uncomfortable in the workplace because of your sexual orientation/identity? see Appendix D). For instance, I started using some of the terminology that I noticed
reoccurring during my interviews. In the latter half of my interviews I started asking my participants if they felt uncomfortable or guarded in the workplace as several of my initial interviewee’s used these terms. Additionally, interviewing is not a straightforward process, and as I reflected on the phenomenological process that Orbe (1998b) suggested I recognized the importance of allowing my participants more space to share stories that may not fit in the borders of my interview questions. This provided many unique conversations that extended into relationships and family experiences in coming out and truly allowed me to build rapport with most of my participants with the goal being to actively incite, open up, and elaborate these individuals’ stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009).

Throughout the interview process I continuously took field notes following Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw’s (2011) suggestion that researchers write immediately or soon after returning from the site. It was important that I “clearly and vividly create[d] an image on the page” of all of my interviews in order to best represent and remember my experiences in the research process (Emerson et al. 2011, p. 58). As such, while interviewing each of my participants I took notes, and I would often go back to the notes to reflect and refocus my interview questions. In hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the data in the interviews, I collected two additional sources as secondary methods of data collection. I used both observation and organizational documents to help clarify the emerging categories throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

**Observations**

A secondary method of data collection was observation. I attended, observed, and participated in the LGBTQ Young Professional’s conference. I was a full-participant, but
logged 9 hours and 30 minutes of observations over the three-day conference in October 2013. This conference had been organized for the past nine years to link college students to employers and this was my second year in attendance. This conference afforded me an opportunity to observe how individuals talk about being out at work and how they talk to recruiters and diversity managers about their current organizational policies and procedures for gay and lesbian employees. Both years the conference began with three questions:

     Raise your hand if you would not work for an organization that you could not be out in? Raise your hand if you believe it depends on the employer? Raise your hand if you don’t think it matters?

Although the students just raised their hands, I was shocked by how many students attending this conference raised their hand for the last question. There were side conversations that erupted and this incited an interesting and chaotic beginning to the conference. It also helped me refocus some of my interview questions to ask my participants. For example, how important was it for you to be “out” in the workplace when you first entered? In what ways, have you felt embraced and/or excluded by your organization? In essence, my observations of this conference inspired and informed my interview questions and my overall analysis of the discourse collected.

     Just like during interviews, throughout the observation process I continuously took field notes following Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw’s (2011) suggestion. As such, while attending the conference I took notes and in the evening I would transcribe and reflect on my field notes; this process yielded a total of 36 pages of single-spaced text.
Organizational Documents

My third and final source of data collection for this study were organizational documents. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explained “many companies create ‘documents’ of some sort for public consumption…their relevance and value as data depend on the researcher’s purposes” (p. 233). While at the LGBTQ Young Professional’s conference I attended the job fair and collected 14 unique documents used to recruit individuals at the fair. These documents outline policies, procedures, and diversity initiatives of the organizations and truly supported to the data collection as they depicted the lived experience within the organization as they were “contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 277). For example, in one the pamphlets it states: “Here you’re respected for who you are and what you bring to the table, diversity works here.” However, in fine print it states: “All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to sex, race, color, religion, national origin, protected veteran status, or disability status.” It is important to recognize that they are not acknowledging sexual orientation or gender identity in this statement even if “diversity works here.” As this example illustrated, these organizational documents were used to help clarify the emergent themes (i.e. complicated nature of policies) in my other means of data collection.

Additionally, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggested “official documents are a site of claims to power, legitimacy, and reality” (p. 232). At the conclusion of each of my interviews I asked participants if they would be interested in providing additional information regarding things they referenced in the interview. All of my participants agreed, however upon sending participants an e-mail thanking them for participating in
the study and asking for additional documents suggested, only about a third of my participants \((n = 14)\) forwarded additional documents. Of the participants that continued communication I gained an additional 26 documents which included everything from links to their employee resource group webpage \((n = 8)\), employee manuals/handbooks \((n = 4)\), popular press articles written about their organizations and LGBTQ issues \((n = 4)\) as well as many other brochures or links to organizational or popular press specific content.

For instance, one of my participants forwarded an article that was written about his superior, the article was titled: Make it Work: How being able to come out LGBTQ on the job leads to better career and life. This article helped me understand the organizational culture in his workplace and reflect on how big of a deal it was for him to have his superior’s support and acceptance in being out in the workplace. These documents were used to clarify participant descriptions. Overall, I used these organizational documents to provide context and further develop and clarify themes that emerged during data analysis.

Data Analysis

All of the interviews in this study were transcribed verbatim. I had two separate individuals transcribe the data including myself. After the audio files were uploaded to my computer all of the participants and organizations mentioned by participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms to protect organizational and individual identities. One individual completed a majority of the transcriptions \((n = 32)\). I transcribed 5 of the interviews \((n = 5)\). The remaining interviews were either not recorded \((n = 3)\) or the audio was not recognizable \((n = 2)\), an additional 38 pages of field notes were included for these interviews during analysis. The two interviews that were not recognizable were due
to the bad connection with the technology. In those instances I analyzed field notes taken during the interview. I provided my transcriptionist with a transcript word document template, and transcription instructions (e.g., highlight areas in which language was inaudible or unclear). The transcriptionist was not instructed to capture changes in vocal tone or vocal non-verbals, however on occasion these vocal inflections were noted in brackets in the transcripts. Additionally, the transcripts were transcribed over a four month period in hopes to not delay the initial analysis process. The transcription process yielded 520 pages of single-spaced data (222,031 words).

After receiving the transcripts and checking for errors, I read through each of the transcripts once and noted any highlighted moments the transcriber was not able to decipher. I then listened to each of the digital recordings with any notes taken during the interview and to fill in any missing words and to mark any specific passages I found interesting during the interview. This initial step was key to the data immersion process as it was the first time I was reading and listening to everything. Additionally, it gave me an opportunity to memo emerging intricacies and unique experiences in the data. In hindsight this also provided me with an opportunity to think about the representation of the data and the important role crystallization would play in recognizing varied representations of the data. In what follows, I briefly talk about crystallization and expound on all of the data analysis procedures.

**Crystallization**

Ellingson (2009) suggested “juxtaposing different ways of knowing through crystallization reveals subtleties in data that remain masked when researchers use only one genre to report findings” (p. 11). The data was analyzed through constant
comparative thematic analysis but was presented with three different representations to highlight different ways of seeing the data. “Unlike triangulation, crystallization is informed by postmodernism, meaning that it presupposes that no truth exist ‘out there’ to discover or get close to, but only multiple partial truths that researchers (and others) co-construct” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 22). As such the varied representations illustrated the lived experiences and showcased renderings of the data. But even more so, crystallization provided space to “reflect externalities and refract within themselves” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). In essence, the beauty in crystallization is that it gave me an opportunity to answer the research questions in different ways that showcased the findings with unique subtleties. In sum, crystallization provided freedom in representing the data in unique and elusive ways that illuminate the complexities of these individuals’ experiences.

Below I describe my data analysis process in sequential order. With this said, it is important to note that a lot of the analysis occurred at the same time and overlapped throughout the data collection and data analysis processes. To begin, I talk about the constant comparative method of analysis which had an overarching influence on each of the representations used in the dissertation, but specifically was utilized to explore how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate and experience the workplace. Next, I highlight how the narrative cases were crafted to illustrate six stories that provide a representation of the heteronormative discourse in the workplace. And finally, I explain how I (re)present the participants notion of marginalization with poetic sensibilities.

**Constant Comparative Method**

Consistent with constant comparative method of analysis, I took a grounded approach to the data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although the aim of the study is
not to produce a grounded theory, per se, my analysis procedures were consistent with a grounded theory methodology as data was under constant comparison, reflexively analyzed, and revised as the discourse was accumulated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, this is not a grounded theory analysis as CCT and organizational socialization providing a sensitizing frame for which I understood my data. As transcripts were created, I read through them and continued to take notes of initial thoughts and reactions. I noted any interesting comments and began initial coding. To organize this process I used the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10.0. Charmaz (2006) explained, “Initial codes are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (p. 48). As such, through this process “researchers adapt language and meanings as they record and adjust the discourse collection methods as necessary” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 40). Although I had already listened and read through many of the transcripts as I revised my interview questions, I completed initial coding process by reviewing fifteen percent of the transcripts ($n = 6$) and as a result I established 243 open codes. These codes ranged from action words (i.e. watching, disguising, exploiting) to codes that came from participants phrasing or “in vivo” codes (i.e. testing the waters, falling into a trap, leap of faith). Although more codes emerged than were originally expected, it opened my eyes to more possibilities with the data. For instance, I was not aware of the different ways visibility played in these individuals navigation of the workplace until they emerged in this process (i.e. educating, advocating).

After these initial codes were created, I started to pull out the codes that I found most prevalent among my participants. For example, all six of transcripts emerged open codes surrounding comfortability, openness, and acceptance and because of that these
The most significant and frequent initial codes were arranged through a process Charmaz (2006) called focused coding. This is the process when individuals begin to “compare data to data… and then we compare data to these codes, which helps to refine them” (Charmaz, 2006, p 60). Ultimately the constant comparative thematic analysis permeated the findings for all three research questions.

Most fundamentally, however, the constant comparative thematic analysis answered the first research question (RQ1) regarding how gay and lesbian individuals navigate and experience the heteronormative workplace. It was through these focus codes when the themes for the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate the workplace emerged (i.e. heightened awareness, (in)visibility) and additional themes were organized as subcategories (i.e. caution, comfortability, passing, educating) underneath each of these categories.

At the conclusion of this process I ended up with 30 focused codes, 23 of the codes emerged in relation the first research question (RQ1) regarding how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate and experience the workplace, six emerged in relation to the second research question (RQ2), and one is highlighted in relation to the third research question (RQ3), the last two research questions will be explained later. In sum, the constant comparative method of analysis provides credibility as it presents enough evidence for a reader to form an independent assessment of the claims as well as establish originality in providing a fresh, original, and insightful depiction of the research (Charmaz, 2006). To provide a different representation of the data I used narrative cases to illustrate six stories that provide a representation of the heteronormative discourse in the workplace.
Motivated by the thematic findings, I represented the data with narrative cases. Reissman (1993) explained that since we often do not have direct access to experience, our sense of self is constructed by formulating our lived experiences into stories. The phenomenological underpinnings of this research coupled with my desire to hear the stories of participants led me to embrace this narrative representation (Reissman, 2008). My goal was to represent the discourse that emerged in the thematic analysis by selecting several “intact” narratives that were representative of those discourses (Reissman, 2008, p. 53). This method of analysis spoke to the second research question (RQ2), which sought to explore how the heteronormative discourse in the workplace enables and/or constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Gubrium and Holstein (2009) explained that our “jobs not only share our lives, but offer platforms from which to story experience. They provide recognized means of characterizing and making sense of things, including important ways of accounting for oneself and others” (p. 161). Thus, to highlight the heteronormative discourse I examined six themes that emerged in relation to the second research question (RQ2). For each one of the themes a narrative was chosen to present the theme. Each of the narratives are presented in their entirety as I did not want to cut the narratives into separate pieces and disperse the meaning of the story. The stories were not selected to be representative statistically but instead to showcase how the heteronormative discourse creates and/or constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace (Reissman, 2008). For example, Lisa, a 55-year-old retail vice president, shared a story of when she was exposed for the first time as a lesbian women an incident that ended in a federal lawsuit.
The details of this story the emotions that gave me chills cannot be broken apart instead they must be presented as “intact” as it was shared. This method of analysis was chosen because it provided an opportunity to represent the “intact” stories and magnify specific details of heteronormative discourse that may be lost in the excerpts in the thematic analysis. Additionally, this method provided “resonance” by “promoting empathy, identification, and reverberation of the research by the readers who have no direct experience with the topic being discussed” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). The final representation of the data was undertaken by (re)presenting the participants notion of marginalization with poetic sensibilities.

Poetic Interpretations

To take a step back from the data, I ventured in a less traditional methodological direction with poetic interpretations to answer the third research question (RQ3): How do individuals who identify as gay or lesbian (re)present their marginalization in the workplace? Ellingson (2009) explained, “Poetry and poetic forms offer rich opportunities for highlighting larger segments of participants’ words” (p. 65). Typically, scholars work with an entire story (narrative case) or distill the story into its most compelling parts (thematic analysis) (Ellingson, 2009). In the poetic interpretations chapter, I extracted some particular voices that were most moving, striking, and shocking in the data collection, to represent marginalization through poetic sensibilities. Marginalization is both a complex and intricate component to the gay or lesbian experience in the workplace and I believe poetic interpretations best magnify these representations across individuals’ experiences.
Although, voices and experiences may be partially or totally silenced with an academic gaze (Bhattacharya, 2008), poetry is a way to (re)present the data. In essence, my hope was to creatively clarify and magnify the how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively represent marginalization in the workplace (Hirschfield, 1997). In an effort to distill and capture the spirit of the story, I “highlighted participants’ exact words and language from the interview transcripts, cutting and pasting the essential elements of in an effort to reveal the essence of a participant’s lived experience” (Faulkner, 2009, p. 31). This method of analysis provided a different way of seeing marginalization in the workplace and in the discourse and allowed me an opportunity to explore my research with aesthetic potential. On the whole, poetic interpretations “offer a depth of understanding, and a language adequate to the visions they summon” (Parini, 2008, p. 116).

In representing my data around constant comparative thematic analysis, narrative cases, and poetic interpretations it was my goal to achieve crystallization in my research. Tracy (2010) explained “the goal is not to provide a more valuable single truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (p. 844). Ellingson (2009) furthered “these ideas serve to widen our methodological and epistemological horizons, enriching understanding of the breadth and depth of qualitative methodology” (p. 4). As such, these methodological commitments inspired me and challenged me to think in new ways, and that is what I strive to illustrate to my readers. The unique methods of data collection/analysis illustrated the complexity that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian faced in the workplace. And as a result we
transcend the “rigid, fixed, two dimensional” triangle to create the breadth and depth of qualitative methodology (Richardson, 2000, p.94).

Analytic Rigor

To ensure qualitative analytic rigor, I employed several strategies to ensure the analytic rigor in my research including: reflexivity, peer review, and crystallization (Ellingson, 2009; Johnson, 1999; Tracy, 2010). First, throughout my data collection and analysis, I made every effort to be self-reflexive and share my own story as part of my research process (italics). Johnson (1999) explains “through reflexivity, researchers become more self-aware, and they monitor and attempt to control their biases” (p. 160). After conducting interviews, I created reflexive memos and journaled about my experiences to recognize the joys and mistakes of the research process and to become more aware of my preconceptions. For example, I remember getting frustrated when interviewing some of my participants when they would say things about their sexual orientation/identity not playing any role in their career or workplace. However, it was in these moments that I directly recognized my influence in the research process. Reflexively speaking, these moments of frustration help me reflect on my role as the researcher. I was able to step back and see their view on the role their sexual orientation/identity played in their workplace. Overall, I reflected on the challenges while in the field not only to be transparent but also to remind myself of the journey I took and how it transformed over time (Tracy, 2010).

Second, I utilized the peer review process. I had my advisor as well as colleagues examine drafts of my research to help identify confusing claims and concepts in the literature and analysis. I wanted to explain, critique, and use extant theories so that
readers who do not necessarily share the same knowledge as I do can understand the theoretical and practical explanations (Charmaz, 2006, p. 171). Through the process of peer review, at multiple times in the research writing process, I gained a better perspective on how to move forward in conceptualizing this research project. For example, when in an initial stage of writing Chapter Eight, I had a conversation with one of my colleagues about intersectionality and privilege, and that is when Chapter Eight started to fall into place. It was through this conversation with my colleague that I started to recognize the important role intersectionality had on my dissertation and ultimately addressed previous concerns that I had been grappling with in the literature review. Additionally, my advisor and I had several coding meetings, went through numerous rounds of editing chapters, and had countless phone conversations to discuss the best ways to revise and organize different chapters. For instance, before I started writing the findings we talked through what I was seeing and different ways I could frame my analysis. In fact, she is the one who helped me develop a graphic that outlined and collapsed all of themes that were emerged. That process was integral to the development of the analysis chapters. Additionally, I would often go to my advisor and tell her what I was thinking for the organization of a chapter and we would sit down and discuss what would be in the best interest of the reader.

Finally, bringing this chapter full circle Ellingson (2009) explained, “The goal is to reveal crystalized projects as embodied, imperfect, insightful constructions rather than immaculate end products” (p. 120). Hence, by using three complementary representations of the data in this dissertation, I produced multiple renderings of the varied ways in which this data can be understood. I recognize the complicated and embodied nature of
qualitative methods and feel as if crystallization was a way for me as the researcher to appreciate different ways of inquiry. In sum, these strategies contribute to the research process and ensure ethical responsibility as the sole researcher and author of this dissertation (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011, Guba & Lincoln, 2005, Creswell, 2007).

Chapter Summary and Preview

On the whole, the qualitative approach was chosen as it provided a rich, descriptive, and valuable understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. I collected data by conducting 42 interviews, making observations, and gathering over unique organizational documents. Ultimately, I analyzed the data through constant comparative thematic analysis and presented the findings by providing three different representations (thematic analysis, narrative cases, and poetic interpretations) in order to crystalize the varied ways of understanding and knowing. As such the varied representations showcased different sides of the findings in other forms of representations, but even more so provided space to “reflect externalities and refract within themselves” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). With the theoretical contributions and the methodological framework examined, I will now preview the next four chapters that present and discuss the varied ways in which the data was analyzed for the dissertation.

In Chapter Five I utilize the constant comparative thematic analysis, to distill the most compelling ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace. In Chapter Six I pause briefly to discuss the theoretical contributions of the thematic analysis that extend and complement our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. In Chapter Seven I illuminate the narrative cases, which highlight six narratives that describe the
ways in which the heteronormative discourse in the workplace enables and/or constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. And finally, in Chapter Eight I extract some particular voices to understand the intersection of privilege and marginalization using poetic interpretations.
CHAPTER 5: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Chapter Overview

The first research question (RQ1) that I will address in this dissertation explores the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate and experience the heteronormative workplace. The data suggested that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace in three primary ways: personally, organizationally, and relationally. That is, individuals are socialized on a personal level as they process their own experiences and make sense of their interactions, on an organizational level as they figure out how to navigate the (un)spoken policies and organizational culture, and on a relational level as they communicatively negotiate relationships with others in the organization. For each of these three levels, I will discuss the themes that emerged for how individuals a) navigated and b) experienced the workplace as individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. In Chapter Six, I will return to reflect on the theoretical contributions of these findings.

Personally

To begin, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian personally navigated the workplace through heightened awareness and (in)visibility. These individuals’ heightened awareness is surrounded by caution, (lack of)safety, and (un)comfortability. And their invisibility is surrounded by passing, hiding, and testing the waters and visibility through educating and advocating.

Moreover, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian personally experienced the heteronormative workplace through adversity and professionalism. In recognizing the intricacies that emerged surrounding how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian
personally navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace it is essential we understand with the participants’ words.

**Heightened Awareness**

First, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are not only made aware of the traditional nuances of work from an early age, but they also have a heightened awareness surrounding their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. Many of my participants talked about their general awareness in conversations and how this heightened sense of awareness contributed to the ways in which they communicated about their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. Kai, a 28-year-old human resources executive, explained:

When I say the gender of the person that I'm dating, I'm aware of the person's response, and I think that's important, because I don't think that will ever go away. I don't think I'll ever not subconsciously or consciously be not aware of how a person responds. Do they get a shocked look on their face? Do they suddenly get quiet? How do they respond, and what does that mean?

Kai spent a lot of time sharing with me the positive times he has had with his current employer and workplace. Still, these positive experiences did not dull the heightened sense of awareness he navigated when he communicates about his sexual orientation/identity. Similarly, Amelia, a 30-year-old retail sales supervisor, shared a past experience in which her awareness of her sexual orientation/identity was highlighted by the heteronormative ideals of the workplace.

There's the Christmas party, you know, where you introduce so and so, or your boss is introducing you. “This is my customer accounts manager John and his
This heightened awareness for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian is marked by three sub-themes that emerged: caution, (lack of) safety, and (un)comfortability. For Kai his heightened awareness was centered on caution with the individuals he is talking with and what their reaction will be; whereas Amelia was more concerned with the level of comfort “that shouldn’t be a struggle.” Each of these sub-themes will be examined in turn to provide a better representation of how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the heteronormative workplace through heightened awareness.

Caution

Several of my participants mentioned that they were cautious when coming out in the workplace as they were concerned with the consequences that may emerge after they disclosed their sexual orientation/identity to others. Tammy, a 48-year-old sales supervisor, explained “being a lesbian field hockey player gave me every indication that you needed to be very cautious and somewhat afraid to be out at work.” For Tammy her cautionary heightened awareness came from a younger age when she played sports in college:

I wasn’t going to go play sports. I found out later [after playing two years], that in the initiation process the upper classmen give the freshmen, they tell them [certain
girls] who they could associate with and who they couldn't associate with based on sexual orientation. I wasn’t included in all of that, I missed all that. Which is probably a good thing looking back on it, because in my time in life, had I gone through that, I know I would have quit. I would have never come back. But it also caused a ton of controversy in the couple years that I played, because there was such a division where the straight women wouldn’t pass the ball to the gay women and because you didn’t want to be associated, they didn’t want to be associated with us. And it got to the point where we ended up having to have group psychology sessions. They brought in a psychologist and all this happy stuff to try to get the team to come together. So, I had a lot of experiences that were like that.

Because of this experience and others Tammy explained, “At work, what I tend to do is, I just sit back and watch and listen for people’s cues.” Her heightened awareness was surrounded by the caution of what others might do or think when they know about her sexual orientation/identity. This was not uncommon among the participants in fact Peter, a 39-year-old hotel executive, commented on the fact that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are often socialized to be cautious towards coming out in the workplace. He explained, “Through my adolescence coming out was something that I thought about on a daily basis; being gay and how am I going to be able to make it through a work day.” This heightened awareness that instilled caution in him from a young age was something that many participants shared because they feared the consequences of what others would think or say if they were out in the workplace. Unlike Tammy and Peter who were
cautious upon entering the workplace, Max, a 25-year-old event coordinator, shared a different story:

I never really thought about it until I came out, and the moment I came out, I was at the bank which was a very conservative bank, I was so afraid. The first person that knew was like ‘well you probably shouldn’t say that to too many people,’ so I didn't. I retreated back into my cubicle.

Although Max was not initially cautious about coming out in the workplace, as soon as he disclosed his sexual orientation/identity, his heightened awareness emerged as to what other people would do or say if the information became public. Although he did not encounter any issues or consequences with coming out at the bank, he did second-guess his decision and became very cautious and fearful of his interactions with others in the workplace. In fact, he “ended up actually calling the HR department and asking, ‘If I come out, what’s going to happen,’ because I was really worried because there are no laws against firing because of your sexuality.” This heightened awareness surrounded by caution was something that individuals constantly navigated as they were cautious of the consequences of coming “out” in the workplace. However, many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian shared when they felt safe or comfortable the caution subsided, and it was easier to communicatively navigate the heteronormative workplace.

*(lack of) Safety*

In contrast to the previous sub-theme, many of my participants talked how their heightened awareness of their sexual orientation/identity led them to feel safe coming out in the workplace. Eli, a 28-year-old social work supervisor, best explained this as, “I think just right away, I could sense the kind of atmosphere was friendly. I knew it was a
safe place to be out. I guess to put it in other words, it was just from what I saw and heard.” Similarly, Alyssa, a 27-year-old non-profit administrator, spoke to the fact that her workplace created an event which heightened her awareness in her workplace and instilled in her a sense of safety:

I really like that people were able to share their stories and it was a really safe space for people as well. There were a lot of people that I didn’t even know were gay or lesbian and they were working in the building with me. So, the building isn’t huge. I think there was maybe 300 employees, but there were a lot more people there than I expected to come.

This event highlighted her sense of safety around sexual orientation/identity in her workplace and showcased that it was safe to be out in the workplace. When the conversations that emerged provide individuals who identify as gay or lesbian with this sense of safety or security they were able to put down their guard a little; however it is important to note that in this process they remained aware of their surroundings. For instance, Jack, a 35-year-old customer service manager, explained, “I can safely talk about my relationship and I don't have to lie and say I'm with a woman, however I always know who I am talking to.”

Nonetheless, not all of my participants shared stories in which their heightened awareness led to feelings of safety. Instead Jesse, a 55-year-old union vice president, explained his awareness of the lack of safety in his career: “I think by the time I started teaching, I had a pretty good sense of what it was like to be a gay public school teacher and it was just something you didn’t do, because it was not safe.” He shared the following story:
Well, I was teaching in the same conservative school district where I had attended school. And well, for example, a gentleman who had been a teacher, and he’s now long retired, he came out late in life and I always assumed that his marriage was a marriage of convenience, but after he came out, the local community started harassing him and his ex-wife, it got so bad that they eventually could not take it anymore.

Although his career moved him beyond teaching in the classroom, this story provided another example of the heightened awareness that emerged surrounding safety. Very few of my participants ever feared for their physical safety in the workplace; however, many individuals had a heightened awareness when positive or negative issues regarding their financial or emotional safety in the workplace emerged. Beyond the element of heightened awareness surrounded by safety or lack thereof, several individuals who identify as gay or lesbian also had a heightened awareness towards the (un)comfortability of the heteronormative workplace.

(un)Comfortability

For many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian feeling comfortable in their work environment was important to their success in the organization. In essence, they had a heightened awareness when conversations or actions made them feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the heteronormative workplace. Brice, a 32-year-old computer software engineer, shared one of his first experiences of being out in the workplace, “My first boss that hired me was a very open gay guy with a partner. He hired me and because he was out and comfortable I was comfortable.” This experience was common for many of my participants in that they had an awareness of how others navigated their outness and their
degree of comfortability. In essence, if others experienced greater degrees of comfort, my participants also expressed higher levels of comfort in their surroundings. Additionally, April, a 56-year-old technology supervisor, talked about how her comfortability in the workplace influenced her coming out process:

I'd been with the company for so long that I felt very comfortable coming out at work as well. It was just little by little. It took me two or three months to come out to different people starting with my family and then talking with the people I was close within the organization.

In this process April highlighted her heightened awareness in coming out little by little depending on her level of comfort with people. However, in some situations my gay or lesbian felt participants shared that they were almost pushed back into the closet, so to speak. Dirk, a 52-year-old insurance administrator, talked about uncomfortable situations, “When people tell jokes, I typically wouldn't respond when people were around and degrading queers, fags, whatever, dykes. Not being in a position to effectively shut them up, that was very uncomfortable.” Or as Jesse, a 55-year-old union vice president, who previously expressed his lack of safety explained it depends on the context, “I just transferred to a new location so I’ve gone back to the gender neutral terms about what we did over the weekend type of things until I develop and feel more comfortable.” These individuals had this a heightened awareness as to whether or not they could be themselves and comfortable in the organization. Keith, a 28-year-old television producer, explained, “I think it's healthy to be able to talk openly and feel comfortable, and safe to be able to talk openly about your significant other. I think that's appropriate and I think it's healthy.” In sum, these excerpts highlighted how (un)comfortability in the workplace
increases awareness for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as they communicatively navigated the heteronormative workplace. Overall, the heightened awareness is typified by caution, (lack of) safety, and (un)comfortability as individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the heteronormative workplace. In addition to heightened awareness, another way in which individuals navigated the heteronormative workplace was through (in)visibility.

(in)Visibility

One of the unique aspects about individuals who identify as gay or lesbian is that their sexual orientation/identity is typically not apparent on the surface level. This provides individuals who identify as gay or lesbian with an opportunity to communicatively navigate their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace through performances of visibility and invisibility. For example, Dale, a 38-year-old public relations executive, explained the paradox of (in)visibility for individuals who identify as gay:

For the first however many years, the early 80s or whatever, being gay was a career killer. So, one tried to do good work. Usually, one tried to do exceptional work to make up for the fact that one was gay without promoting that one was gay. The paradox of that is that the “gayer” you are, the more visible you become, and the more visible you become, the harder it is to try to hide something about yourself, especially something like having no wife or no husband.

This tension emerged several times across participants’ stories. The only thing that changed was whether individuals felt like they had flexibility to negotiate their (in)visibility or if it was a “career killer.” In that, some individuals, like Dale, did not feel
like they had flexibility to come out in the workplace, while others communicatively navigated the degree to which they were out in the workplace. Eliza, a 29-year-old managing news editor, explained:

I mean, I’m sure that if I dressed more masculine and had a shaved head or something and just like looked like a stereotypical queer person than maybe I would be perceived differently. And I feel like one of my co-workers who really doesn’t get along with the lesbian editor on the west coast, she said to me, “Yeah, but you look like a girl when you come to work”. I know that it kind of makes me uncomfortable by itself, but you know, I think it’s not something I wear on my sleeve, quite literally, and I don’t know if that’s benefited me in any way or been a determent. I don’t know.

This invisibility that she wears on her sleeve provided her the ability to come out, but also the ability to pass as more feminine because she does not look like a “stereotypical queer person.” (In)visibility provided some individuals who identify as gay or lesbian not only flexibility, but it also challenges others’ visibility. Margie, a 33-year-old retail general manager, shared her story and her decision to become more visible:

I had enough situations in high school that were bad. I went through some really bad stuff. I had people write me death threats. I had people do things to my car. I feel like I think it actually almost liberated me more because I was like, okay I don’t have to put up with this shit because there were enough other people who stood up for me during that time that were just like, “Come on. Give it a rest”. And then after high school, one of the particular guys that was the worst, he became a cop, which is terrible in general. However, he actually told me that he
was sorry. He came up to me and he said, “You know, I’m sorry I was an idiot. I was close-minded and in this little school. You were the first person I had really seen do that, and I actually think it was quite amazing”. After that, I kind of was like, maybe if I can be the one to kind of open people’s eyes a little bit and show them that it’s normal or that it isn’t all that different. I kind of thought, maybe if I can go out at work and just be like, “This is such a normal everyday thing. We have families. We have jobs,” that maybe it will help other people accept the situation. I have just kind of lived by that.

Margie, like many others, spoke to the important role visibility played in her workplace.

On the whole, my participants talked about five ways in which they navigated (in)visibility in the workplace. The sub-themes include: passing, hiding, testing the waters, educating, and advocating. For Dale his (in)visibility was marked by hiding, whereas Eliza addressed her ability to pass, and Margie speaks to the power of visibility in educating others. These sub-themes will be explored to provide a better representation of the (in)visibility individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated in the heteronormative workplace.

*Passing*

Several participants explained their strategy for navigating the heteronormative workplace was through passing as heterosexual. Spradlin (1998) explained “passing is how someone conceals normal information about oneself to preserve, sustain, and encourage others’ predisposed assumptions” (see also, Griffin, 1992; Wood & Harbeck, 1992). Julie, a 34-year-old pharmaceutical sales representative, spoke about not only her
ability to pass, but she also talked about the importance her invisibility played in her workplace:

I don't necessarily look like a stereotypical, what I think a lot of straight people think of when they think of a lesbian. I don't look like that and it's definitely something that usually when I tell people that I'm gay, it's usually like – “oh, I couldn't tell.” I don't know how you usually tell with people, but I wouldn't say until I came out to people that they would know that either. I looked just like all those other robotic pharmaceutical reps where we all kind of look the same. We all dress and look and speak the same. So, I definitely, unfortunately, have fallen into that trap.

Julie’s experiences are not uncommon, and just like Eliza, she did not look like the “stereotypical” lesbian that “a lot of straight people think of.” However, Julie was aware of the flexibility she garnered because she was able to remain invisible. In other words, when Julie entered a doctor’s office and she turned into the “robotic” sales rep, she was drawing on her ability to pass. Eli, a 29-year-old social work supervisor, had similar sentiments:

I think there are times I’ve kind of passed with the straight role, especially working with clients and stuff that have asked if I’m with someone or if I have kids or things like that. And you definitely kind of have to be very careful with what you say with clients, especially with this topic. I never really had it come up so much here [in current workplace], but especially back in my past job, I always tried to come off as straight with my clients.
Eli navigated the fine line of invisibility as he negotiated his sexual orientation/identity and consciously chose to say certain things that led others to believe he was heterosexual. Interestingly, Eli discussed feeling completely comfortable being out in his workplace, but conversely, he enacted passing technique and strategies of invisibility when he interacted with others outside of his immediate organization. For instance, Eli talked about working with teenagers on probation and how he was not necessarily afraid to tell them. But he did not want it to become an issue, so it became easier to simply pass. This example alludes to another important way individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated (in)visibility and that is by hiding in the heteronormative workplace.

**Hiding**

When my participants talked about hiding it was not that they were actively passing in any way as heterosexual, however when confronted with the heteronormative workplace they would remain silent and would hide behind their invisibility. Morgan, a 53-year-old market research coordinator, told me:

I kept quiet and I didn’t, I found it and I still do, it’s very hard to socialize, because events where people would bring their spouses or family events where they would bring kids, I always hesitated going and in most times, I would not stay very long. I would make the excuse that I had to get back to work or something like that.

For Morgan, and many of my participants, it was easier to hide behind their work because that is what they were supposed to be doing in the workplace. Joe, a 31-year-old, admissions counselor, explained “it became a distraction, because here, rather than focusing on my work, I was focusing sometimes on these comments I was getting from
colleagues [about not having a girlfriend, or what I was doing on the weekends].” Or as Jordan, a 25-year-old teacher, explained, “I feel like even just doing simple things at work, knowing that I’m holding this big secret to myself and I’m hiding about a big part of me just hinders my ability to feel and interact freely at all levels.” Hiding begins to complicate the notion of invisibility as my participants expressed hiding as a means to cope with comments in the workplace but also acknowledged the emotional weight omitting their sexual orientation/identity added to their navigation of the workplace. In hindsight, Joe who talked about the distraction of omitting his sexual orientation/identity in the workplace told me:

You know, now if I was in a position that someone asked me, I’d probably say something right back and say, “why do you care so much about my boyfriend.” And I’d probably walk in to wherever they were at and talk with them directly. And I think that approach would probably have been far more effective than, you know, just kind of hiding and letting the rumors soar in the workplace.

Although many of my participants did not want to hide or omit their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace, nor did they want to be invisible, hiding and omitting their sexual orientation/identity was the best way to avoid those conversations in the workplace.

Dale, a 38-year-old public relations executive, shared not only the complicated nature of hiding in the workplace but also the challenges individuals who identify as gay or lesbian face regarding their invisibility:

I don’t proactively talk about my relationships. Does that mean I’m hiding? No, I don’t think at all. Anyone who wants to know can know. I just don’t lead with
that sort of information, but others do, so to some extent am I hiding? And again, it might be part of my background – conservative, discrete, that sort of thing. However, I think hiding is incredibly damaging. I think it’s the saddest thing in the world when someone tries to hide themselves. And you know, I see that time and time again with certain friends. It’s so clear that they’re struggling and that there’s things that they want to share and talk about, but they’re not willing to and it just breaks my heart, because I was them at one time.

Perhaps one of the most interesting elements of the above quote is that, to some extent, hiding is separating your personal and professional lives and keeping some of it private, unlike passing where individuals are intentionally omitting their sexual orientation to integrate in to dominant society. As Dale complicates, or maybe challenges hiding as a form of invisibility he also suggested another way in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated invisibility and that is by testing the waters.

*Testing the Waters*

Some individuals navigated their invisibility by testing the waters. In fact, because of their invisibility, they had more freedom to ask questions and get people’s reactions before they decided how they were going to approach the situation. Unlike passing where individuals tend to assimilate into the heteronormative culture or hiding where individuals separate from the dominant discourse, testing the waters leaves room for accommodation in the workplace. Allison, a 28-year-old office manager, told me the questions that circled in her mind on a daily basis as she tested the waters and tried to decipher where her sexual orientation/identity fit into her workplace:
In my current job, when I interviewed and even in the first few months of having this job, I didn’t say anything about my sexuality. I didn’t let it out and I kind of tested the waters, more or less. Will it be okay? Should I talk about it or should I avoid it? It was kind of funny, because one of the ladies in the office made reference to if I was dating or do I know any guys or something, and I just could not hold it in any longer and I said, “Actually, I’m in a relationship with a girl.”

For several of the participants testing the waters built up this weight or pressure to disclose because in this process an individual who identifies as gay or lesbian can remain invisible and continue to navigate the workplace until they can “not hold it in any longer.” Scott, a 25-year-old marketing director, shared “it’s really difficult to talk about, I remember, because when I first started my job, it was that idea that I don’t know how these people feel about me being gay. I don’t know how my supervisors feel about [me] being gay.” He, like Allison, started to question how to navigate the process of invisibility in the workplace. And as he further explained, “Those first few months I tested the waters, I specifically remember saying partner and seeing my co-workers responses and that is how I tested to know who would be cool and who I needed to keep a professional relationship with.” Both of them specifically mentioned asking themselves questions about the best way to remain invisible and test the waters. In brief, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate invisibility in the heteronormative workplace by passing, hiding, and/or testing the waters. With all of this said, there are moments when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated visibility in the workplace, and my participants navigated visibility to educate and advocate.
Many of my participants talked about the important role they felt their visibility played in the heteronormative workplace. Some individuals navigated their visibility by using it as a way to educate others about sexual orientation/identity. Dwight, a 39-year-old public relations consultant, explained, “I think it’s extremely important [to be out in the workplace] and that’s a really big reason why I decided to make it less hidden in the workplace, because I feel that visibility is the number one way we can educate others.” He specifically talked about the process of navigation many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience in the workplace as they transition to being more visible and “less hidden” in an effort to provide some representation of different sexual orientations/identities in the workplace. Similarly, participants talked about when they were asked questions or solicited for advice. Allison, a 28-year-old office manager, who expressed how she tested the waters also talked about the rural region in which she lives and how she educated others in order to navigate her visibility in the workplace:

Oh, yeah. They’ve confronted me, not confronted me, but they like to ask questions, and several times we’ve sat down to have lunch and they’ve asked me lots of questions about how can I do this and how is this okay in my mind. Quoted scripture to me and told me that they think it’s wrong, and told me that they don’t understand, that they like me as a person, but they’ll never be okay with who I am. It’s funny, because in general, I tell people. They’re like, “Can I ask you a question?” And I always say yes. The truth of it is, if it’s respectful and if the question comes from a place of love, then I’ll answer that question. Because sometimes people just need to know. Sometimes, people don’t get it, but they
want to. They’re looking for that information. They want to know. They want to be able to understand and maybe they’re sheltered. So, as long as they ask me a respectful question, I’ll answer it. I don’t get frustrated, because it’s, you know, these people come from rural farming communities. They’ve been raised in a church. They’ve been raised to believe things. I’d like to dispel some of those beliefs or preoccupations, especially when they ask me questions to understand.

Allison faced some difficult situations in her workplace when the co-workers did not respect her visibility nor give her a chance. However, “sometimes, people don’t get it, but they want to” and she wanted to be there to educate those people. This follows similar sentiments as shared by Jack, a 35-year-old customer service manager, who furthered this conversation:

I think you need to be open and willing to answer questions of people who want to understand more about you, like whether it's your ethnicity, whether it's your sexual orientation, people have conceptions and some of them are misconceptions. I think being a good resource and another perspective. My perspective of being out at work isn't going to be the same as the next person, but it's nice to be able to share that perspective with people who aren't gay, but who want to know more about what it's like. It's kind of a responsibility, but at the same time, it is nice to share your experience in life with someone else, who you go to work with every single day and it's almost like a second family, whether you like them or not.

Jack echoes the important role his visibility in the workplace plays with his role to educate these conceptions that may be misconceptions. Or to speak about his experience
and “what it’s like.” Both Allison and Jack recognized that it is important to appreciate the “responsibility” to not only be visible but to educate and share your story.

When Julie, the 34-year-old pharmaceutical sales representative, was asked about the role her sexual orientation/identity played in the workplace she answered simply, “The only thing I can see it playing a role as is more of an educational role for people that haven't been exposed to gay people before, that we're not any different, except for the people we come home to.” For her, the visibility of sexual orientation/identity was centered on educational value. She further explained, “Other than that, it doesn't change my performance. It doesn't change my personality. It doesn't change anything. It is a part of me and it's a huge part of me, but it's not a part that matters to the core of my work.” Julie explored tensions that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced as they navigated visibility: the power to educate and be oneself in the workplace versus their sexual orientation/identity not being central to their career. That said, several of my participants spoke about the way in which they navigated visibility around education, and whether they saw it as creating respectful environments, their responsibility, or providing representation of others in their workplace. Alongside educating, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated their visibility in the workplace by advocating.

Advocating

Several of my participants explained the importance of standing up and advocating for the LGBTQ community in the workplace. In fact, the Young LGBTQ Professionals conference was centered on the important role visibility can play in making necessary changes in the workplace. A presenter at this conference suggested, “If we are not seen or heard we cannot expect to see change.” Advocating was a way individuals
who identify as gay or lesbian navigated their visibility in the workplace. Dirk, a 52-year-old insurance administrator, shared:

Well, when they asked me to be in an interview [about being gay in the workplace], that was a good sign, but they also took some extraordinary steps around this topic. Every member of management and systems team was required to go through a couple of classes talking about sexual orientation. They were also told that this interview was going to happen, almost all. There were one or two people that didn't get to those meetings or didn't get the memo and they caused some problems after the interview came out in the monthly newsletter. But for me, after reading the interview and being out, it's almost as if I was providing a voice for the LGBTQ community in my workplace. I got many emails of support and “good job,” but I also got a lot of nothings and that's okay. Work kept going on and I still need to get my job done and so did everybody else. The lack of impact was anti-climactic, but at the same time, it did make an impact. I know it did. It had to have.

Although he was soft-spoken about his visibility centered on advocating, he was the first leader in his organization to be openly out in the workplace. The interview was conducted to provide a voice for diverse individuals in the workplace, and since this interview, many other leaders and employees stepped forward to advocate for changes in the workplace. Similarly, Jesse, the 55-year-old union vice president, explained his role as an advocate in the organizational diversity training that his workplace organized:

Well, I have become something of an advocate. I was a part of a national training dealing with diversity issues. It was probably seven or eight years ago. And one of
the activities we engaged in was one where we asked the group to separate by if you’re left-handed or right-handed. And then we had more substantive issues up to the point of if you’re gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, go stand here. If you have a friend who is or if you have a family member who is. And if you’re comfortable identifying yourself, stand here. I was the only one in my group and this African American woman and we talked about feelings that these partitions generate. And there’s this African American woman that says, “I don’t know what difference it makes that he’s gay” and I said, “Well, what difference does it make if you’re black?” She said, “Well, it’s who I am. It’s my heritage, my culture.” And I said, “Exactly. That’s why I should be able to be out at the workplace, just like you are obviously black in the workplace.” And she acknowledged later on that changed her thinking about gays in the workplace.

Similar to Dirk, Jesse had these moments where he realized how his visibility could help advocate for change. The question of whether or not it mattered often emerged, in part, because of their (in)visibility. So when their sexual orientation was questioned, visibility was a way for advocacy to emerge and evolve in the workplace.

Alyssa, a 27-year-old non-profit administrator, had a different perspective:

I like to think I come out in different ways to advocate for change. In like my office in particular, I have a LGBTQ flag or I’ve got stuff that the government has released to non-profit employees about LGBTQ related issues. Although she took a nonverbal approach, she still marked her visibility through advocacy. She also told me, “Because of different rules that we have, we can’t get too political, so I only print things that have been released through work. I just want to do
what I can to create a culture for me in the workplace.” Like many individuals, Alyssa advocated for a place in which her identity as a lesbian was valued and respected. Although the ways she advocated for change were not always by telling her story, she provided enough visibility for those that sought her attention. Contrary to having people coming to you, Lisa, a 55-year-old retail vice president, explained her role in advocating and creating change in the workplace through visibility:

When I married my wife, the company has for a long time had same-sex partner benefits, but of course, there were things attached to them. And one of the rules that was attached to it was that you needed to be residing together for a year and that you had to have joint finances. And then the next time that your benefits come up, then you could put them in as same-sex partner benefits and then they'd be covered. But my wife didn't have insurance. She was working in a family business with no insurance. We weren't living together for a year, because quite frankly, I didn't want to represent like that to her young daughters. I wanted them to see the same values I grew up with. So, when we got married, I sent a note to our head of human resources, and three days later, the company's policy was changed. So, that's how we show up from an action perspective. I called out the need and it's there.

Although this example showcased the status and power that Lisa held in her organization, it also illustrated the ability for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian to navigate their visibility in varied ways. This is complicated by the nature that not all individuals who identify as gay or lesbian have this power in the workplace; yet it remains an essential consideration when understanding visibility for these participants. Lisa added to
the complexity of (in)visibility for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as they navigated the workplace as she explained, “It's not just a lack of integrity [to not come out], but you're not believing in yourself. You're not vulnerable. And until you're fully vulnerable with who you are, people have to guess.” Although individuals navigated (in)visibility by passing, hiding, testing the waters, educating, and advocating, we need not forget the vulnerability that emerges with (in)visibility. It is this ever-present negotiation for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian that helps us better understand how these individuals navigated the heteronormative workplace.

On the whole, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian personally navigated the workplace through heightened awareness and (in)visibility. The individuals heightened awareness was surrounded by caution, (lack of) safety, and (un)comfortability. Whereas they navigated invisibility by passing, hiding, and testing the waters and visibility through educating and advocating. Moving beyond the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the heteronormative workplace, the ways in which they personally experienced adversity and professionalism in the heteronormative workplace will be explored.

Adversity

Individuals who identify as gay or lesbian often personally experience a level of adversity in the heteronormative workplace. In essence, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are primed for and may (over)compensate in situations where they feel as if they may experience difficulty. Many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian shared this sense of adversity as they experienced the heteronormative workplace. For example, Anthony, a 28 year-old retail manager, pointed out “I look at gay people who are so super
successful as indicative of, man, like you really wanted to prove it to the world that you can do it despite being gay.” Or as Tammy, a 48-year-old sales supervisor, explained:

For me, I’ve always felt, not only being a woman, but also being a lesbian, that you had to go and prove yourself at work in order to show people that you were qualified and right for that job position. And then worry about who you were working with to try and gain acceptance.

Irrespective of their experiences, both Anthony and Tammy were primed with this understanding that they had to “prove” something in order to be successful in the workplace. Additionally, Tammy explained the need to be “qualified” and “right” for the position which underscores the pressure individuals who identify as gay or lesbian that is apparent when entering the heteronormative workplace. Randy, a 56-year-old vice president of financial services, shared:

Know me for the work that I do. Not who I am as a person, but for the work that I do and provide. I think that’s what made it easier for me personally to come out to people at work, because they knew me and knew the work that I could bring and then they would accept me.

Like many of these participants’ experiences Randy felt the need to prove himself in spite of the adversity he may face. In a sense Randy compensated for his sexual orientation/identity to prove his capabilities. Several individuals who identify as gay or lesbian explained this sense of (over)compensation like Lyndsey, a 33-year-old public relations strategist shared:

I would say that my hunch would be that as in many other journeys of life, gays and lesbians probably work a little bit harder, whether you’re out or you’re not. If
you're out, I feel like you have maybe an extra spotlight, because you never know. Even if someone’s nice to your face, you never know what’s going on behind the scenes, and so you want to do everything you can just to make sure your sexuality isn’t the reason for any negative thing happening to you whether that’s being denied a raise, being denied a promotion, having your work looked at differently than if you were straight. I think that, yeah, often times I see gay people working a little bit harder to make sure that their work and what they’re doing is valued based on that, not based on their sexuality. I would say that definitely. I still feel that way about myself, even now being so gay. I mean, I’m out. And so, yeah. I do work harder.

Lyndsey shared this extra “spotlight,” although invisible, is perceived to be pointed directly at individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as they experienced adversity in the workplace.

Unlike many of my participants, Amelia, a 30-year-old retail sales supervisor, expressed the power surrounding adversity:

Being gay, I feel that I have a... I don't know if the word is responsibility, but I feel it's important to show and to say, yeah, I'm a lesbian. And I think that it's important as homosexuals to go out and excel in what we do to prove that we're still people and we're still very well educated and we're good people and we go out and we kick butt at what we do. It doesn't matter who we go home with.

Amelia moved beyond just proving something and opened up the conversation for the “responsibility” and power individuals who identify as gay or lesbian gain as they communicatively experienced adversity. The risk in all of this is that adversity is often
perceived and is not always present. For many of my participants, they described feeling that they needed to put their sexual orientation/identity to the side so they did not have to experience adversity in the heteronormative workplace. All of these examples speak to how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced a level of adversity in the heteronormative workplace. These individuals are primed and (over)compensate for situations in which they may experience adversity in the workplace. Individuals who identify as gay or lesbian not only personally experienced this level of adversity, but also they personally encountered experiences centered on professionalism in the heteronormative workplace.

*Professionalism*

Many of my participants spoke to the complicated nature of professionalism that they personally experienced in the heteronormative workplace. These individuals expressed experiencing this divide between personal and professional life and the regulation of professionalism in the heteronormative life. Tyler, a 29-year-old higher education administrator, provided a definition of how he sees professionalism for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace, “It means a lot of things. So, I think one is just your presentation of self, meaning that you are well-dressed or look nice, put together.” He furthered, “It also means the way you act and behave. The way you carry yourself as a gay individual has something to do with professionalism.” In essence, how individuals who are gay or lesbian “carry” themselves reflects how they experienced professionalism in the workplace. As Tyler alluded, these individuals experienced the heteronormative understanding of professionalism which complicates
their experiences in the workplace. This is best illustrated by Zander, a 37-year-old
customer service supervisor:

I just try to go with what I deem as professional, just as far as something, for
example, like an interview. I don't go in there trying to be extremely gay, I try to
be personable, but I kind of do [come out] in my personality. I try to just kind of
go more middle of the road. I don't try to butch myself up and act like someone
I'm not completely, but I do feel like there's less of that talkativeness and less of
that, I guess, just more emotionally connected side. I just try to come off as short
and to the point and I kind of do that in a professional sense.

As is evident in this excerpt Tyler experienced this negotiation surrounding
professionalism in the workplace as he does not “try to butch myself up,” but tries to
behave in the “middle of the road.” These experiences have complicated his
understanding in exhibiting professionalism, in that he cannot just be himself but has to
negotiate his depiction of professionalism. Whereas Eliza, a 29-year-old managing editor,
shared:

I definitely sort of subscribe to keeping my personal life and professional life
separate and I don’t know if that stems from the fact that I’m a lesbian or I’m just
sort of like that in general. But I definitely feel like there’s a line for me between
personal [and professional]. Don’t bring your personal issues into the workplace, I
sort of feel like.

Although Eliza’s approach makes a much clearer line regarding personal and professional
conversations in the workplace, it highlighted the dilemma related to professionalism
individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced in the workplace. However, even
though Zander and Eliza took different approaches and experienced professionalism in unique ways, they both negotiated their professionalism in order to be perceived as “professional.”

Contrary to those experiences, Kurtis, a 62-year-old nurse, explained that his personality may not seem professional as he shared:

There was one episode that I recall that a family requested that I not take care of their father. They didn't say it was because I was gay, so I really can't say that was the reason, but the wife had come out. She said, “You know, I'm sure you're a very nice person. You're a very good nurse, but we really prefer someone more professional.” And I was like, okay. It was like, I mean, I suppose if that happened to me repeatedly, I would say, you know, what's happening? Maybe it was a personality conflict, I'm not sure. But their rationale was not, oh, you're gay and I don't want you in the room. So, there's so much that I feel it's really how you present yourself.

Unlike some of the other excerpts shared Kurtis experienced professionalism as regulated by others. For him, professionalism is performed through strong work ethic, and he does not suggest changing who you are or minimizing your personality as a gay professional.

On this note, a few of my participants were very interested in commenting on others performances of professionalism in the workplace. This emerged an interesting dynamic of the regulation of professionalism in the workplace. In essence, they personally experienced noting when other individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are not acting, behaving, or performing professionalism “appropriately” in the heteronormative workplace. Kacey, a 42-year-old corporate scientist, explained:
I think there are some people who are gay or lesbian, in my opinion, that act or dress unprofessional at work. And I actually think that they use their status as a shield and here's my example. We have a guy who works for the company and he has earrings all down his ears. In the lunchroom, he talks like...if there's a guy who walks by that's really good looking, he might comment like, “oh, he's eye candy.” To me, I think that I wouldn't like that even for a heterosexual. But I think that he knows nobody's going to say anything because if they said something, it's going to look like they have an issue with his sexual orientation and not with his actions.

This example illustrated the regulation of professionalism for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian by individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. And even beyond that the “shield” that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian expressed others hide behind to be who they are in the workplace. Additionally, Kai, a 28-year-old human resources executive, shared:

There is this one guy I have thought about how to have a conversation with him, because I'm very aware of how he comes off in the group and I'm aware of how other people perceive him as unprofessional. The air around him that comes off, there's certainly a group of people that come together. They seem to accept him for who he is and then there are those people that are meeting him for the first time. And they think he's kind of rude. I feel as a leader of the group, as well as the LGBTQ person that can offer him some advice to talk to him and see if he is able to recognize that putting off that amount of attitude is actually a negative. I get it. I get it that it is part of who he thinks he is, so this thing is complicated, but
I think it's still able to start to realize or at least be aware of that. I think that it would help him out so much, definitely in the professional would, but also just in his personal life.

Both Kacey and Kai shared similar stories of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in their organizations that are not meeting their standards of professionalism. In fact, it is as if they are struggling to figure out what their role is in protecting their own professionalism as individuals who identifies as gay or lesbian and their role in advising others. As such, Kai expressed feeling as if he should take it on himself to regulate this individual’s understanding of professionalism. Each of these examples recognized the complicated nature of professionalism for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, because even when they were themselves they were being questioned. All of these individuals provided a depiction of the complicated nature of professionalism for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace. On the whole, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian personally experienced professionalism in unique and complicated ways that are often regulated by the heteronormative workplace that they are ingrained within.

Overall, on a personal level, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the workplace through heightened awareness and (in)visibility. And personally experienced the heteronormative workplace through adversity and professionalism. Many of the aspects that emerged through these excerpts and examples begin meaningful conversations towards understanding the unique and complicated personal dimensions. However, it is essential to understand how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian both navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace on an organizational level as
these individuals not only sensemake the workplace internally and personally, but they also encounter the organizational environment which influences their understanding.

**Organizationally**

Four themes emerged for how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are simultaneously organizationally socialized in the heteronormative workplace. These individuals organizationally navigated the workplace around policies and politics. The structure in which these individuals were ingrained was often controlled by policies and procedures that helped individuals who identify as gay or lesbian make sense of the heteronormative workplace. They also sought to discern and perhaps abide by the political norms in order to better navigate the workplace. Furthermore, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian organizationally experienced the heteronormative workplace through acknowledgement and obscurity. It is when these individuals felt acknowledged as equal that they were better able to integrate and become part of the organization. Yet, when acknowledgment was absent, their presence was obscured and unknown in the heteronormative workplace. Overall, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian organizationally navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace in distinct ways that are marked by policies, politics, acknowledgement, and obscurity.

**Policies**

For many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian their understanding of the role their sexual orientation/identity plays in the workplace was heavily influenced by policies and procedures. These written documents and spoken guidelines provided a glimpse into the organization and how LGBTQ employees should navigate the
heteronormative workplace. Dirk, a 52-year-old insurance administrator, contextualized the changes in policy through societal shifts since he first entered the workplace:

When I first started with the company, it was 1982. It was the start of the Reagan administration. The United States was not necessarily LGBTQ friendly even though it was nearly more than a decade after Stonewall. The country itself was kind of coming to terms with educating itself about LGBTQ folks, but what they were hearing was they’re diseased and dying and stay away from them. Our company is a fiscally conservative company and it's also large enough to secure representation of just across society as a whole. So, starting in the 80’s, side jokes were not uncommon, but in the late 90’s, there was a big jump. In the late 90’s, the company added sexual orientation to its employment policy. So, that happened, but it did not necessarily put the things in place behind those words to make them true, meaning that we didn't have the quality of benefits for same-sex families that heterosexual families freely enjoyed.

This broad overview of how Dirk’s organization had changed since he first entered highlighted the complications that emerged when the policies and procedures were set in place. He expressed that his navigation of the workplace has shifted alongside the societal changes. Where Dirk watched as society changed, others like Taylor, a 54-year-old vice president of human resources, took an active role in the changing environment:

When I came on board, we didn’t have same-sex benefits, from a policy standpoint, and it was a great opportunity for me to move forward with those and say: “You know, I can’t believe the organization doesn’t have this. Do we want them?” And then they go, “oh yeah, absolutely. We don’t know why we haven’t.
We just haven’t gotten around to it yet. Yeah, you go for it. You do it.” And I think, you know, so as the policies have changed the number of gay and lesbian employees have changed. There’s more of us now.

Taylor navigated the policies in his organization by being the change he wanted to see in the organization. The policy was met with little resistance and created space for other individuals who identify as gay or lesbian to enter the workplace. The importance of these policies for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as they navigated the workplace was best explained by Keith, a 28-year-old assistant television producer, who expressed:

Just by including sexual orientation in the non-discrimination clause, that trickles down and frees up so much, it just kind of trickles all the way down to the bottom and the amount of energy employees keep, or the amount of energy that employees use in hiding themselves, how much of that energy can be directed towards their work and their activities and how much they, and also the corporation as a whole, would benefit just by having that. I didn't understand that completely, again, like in a real world sense, until I moved. So, I know how much I was hiding and how much energy that took me, and here it's just kind of became such a non-issue.

This trickle-down effect really spoke to the power in the policies and the role these policies played as individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the workplace. In essence, Keith suggested “just by including sexual orientation” in the policy individuals were able to let down their guard, and it was easier to navigate the workplace. As both
Taylor and Keith have shared, the inclusion of policies opened up spaces and provided room for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Additionally, several of my participants spoke to the ways in which they navigated the workplace around their sexual orientation/identity from their initial encounter with the organization, their interview. For example, Kai, a 28-year-old human resources supervisor explained, “It was important for me to ask the interviewer. I would ask the standard question of what is their company's policy on domestic partner benefits. It wouldn't necessarily out me, but in some terms I guess it probably would.” Kai explained that he did this on several occasions, and he knew that when the interviewer was prepared and comfortable in answering the question that it was the organization he would want to join. Kai navigated his sexual orientation/identity in the workplace by not necessarily “outing” himself but by inquiring about the policies in place. Allison, a 28-year-old office manager, also shared an example when she was interviewing:

Interestingly enough though, when I interviewed for a teaching job this summer, I thought, this was like a final interview, I was meeting the superintendent and meeting the principal, it was far away. I didn’t really want this job. But I said, let’s just see what happens and in my interview I said, “Just so you know, I’m openly gay and how’s that going to play in your school district?” And it was just met with awe. I have no response and then they kind of choked and said, “I don’t think that would be a problem, we don’t have any policies against it, and it’s totally fine, we have an inclusive community”. And then I never got a phone call. I was their only candidate and I was overly qualified. I got an email three weeks later stating that they decided to move forward with another candidate.
As much as the presence of a policy matters, the absence of a policy was magnified in the
eyes of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Even though Allison explained that
she did not want the job, it is possible that she did not want to have to navigate her sexual
orientation/identity in the workplace. She asked the question because it mattered to her,
and even though she did not receive a response for three weeks, it was answered before
she even finished asking. Both Kai and Allison navigated their sexual orientation/identity
around the policies and procedures in which they encountered as they entered the
heteronormative workplace. And as a result, neither of them negotiated their sexual
orientation/identity on the basis of non-existent policies in the organization.

Finally, it is essential to understand the complicated nature of these policies. For
example, Eli, a 28-year-old social work supervisor explained:

I guess I was just kind of always indirectly told that if that actually happened
[harassment], even though there was a policy, there wasn’t really a procedure to
follow and employers don’t really have to do anything. Even if there was a policy,
or wasn’t a policy, that if somebody did harass me, it’s like you could go to the
media or talk about it. It would have definitely looked bad for an employer, but
the company wouldn’t do anything about it.

This is where the navigation of these policies became challenging for individuals who
identify as gay or lesbian. As Eli stated, “there wasn’t really a procedure.” In essence, the
organization created the policy to cover sexual orientation/identity, however it did not
have the federal support to follow through with the consequences. For Eli and many more
of my participants, they found this to be true; as they navigated the workplace, they had
to recognize the policies may not always be the best answer to discrimination and
harassment in the workplace. All of these individuals shared a unique perspective on the shifting and uncertain nature of policies and procedures in the heteronormative workplace, however it is also important to recognize the politics that emerged.

_Politics_

Several participants explained the ways in which they navigated the politics in the heteronormative workplace. These politics are often embedded in the organizational culture of the workplace and often have real consequences for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. These individuals expressed the ways they discern information from others to help them navigate this allusive political environment. For example, April, a 56-year-old technology supervisor, explained the influence politics had on her navigation of the workplace:

Well, I think I was a little naive initially when I came out at my previous company, the company I used to work for until just recently. I thought it's not going to make a difference. I was a pretty outspoken person, a pretty assertive person anyhow. So, I mean, I'd say I was real naive and thinking that it ultimately wouldn't impact anything, and it did. It impacted a promotion, and that was very difficult on me emotionally. I think it wasn't just about being a lesbian. I think it was also about being female, so the politics in the company. For women and even more so gay people, it's difficult to maneuver around in large corporations, in many of them. At least the ones I've worked for. So, my current job is probably the best company I've ever worked with in those terms. And our executives are still male dominated, but obviously I'm in a leadership role, so that makes it a little bit easier. I mean, I think that demonstrates that they're pretty open.
April specifically explained the difficulty in navigating the heteronormative workplace, in that “it’s difficult to maneuver” and you have to take that into account when understanding the work environment. Additionally, she recognized the politics and consequences of coming out in an organization that is not supportive; it cost her a job promotion, one that was promised to her a year before she decided to come out in the organization.

In addition, Lyndsay, a 33-year-old public relations strategist, talked about how the political nature of her company shifted while she was in her position. “There were no rainbow flags anywhere or people talking about their sexuality, but I felt comfortable coming out. Definitely.” She started to paint the picture that although there were no outward displays of acceptance she still felt comfortable and expressed that she could be herself. However she further explained, “When we were acquired, we got a very conservative white religious man sent to our office who had no problem hitting on and flirting with female employees, but if anyone talked about their sexuality that was going to be a problem.” The acquisition totally shifted the company culture from a small start-up to a Fortune 500 company which was imbued with heteronormative politics. Specifically, she mentioned, “There were two gay men in the office, and they had a very different experiences once this manager came aboard, in fact to some extent they went back into the closet.” This example illustrated the influence politics had on individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as they navigated the workplace and how these individuals navigated the ever-evolving culture within the organizational structure.
Each of these individuals shared the complicated nature of navigating the politics, however for other participants like Peter, a 39 year-old training and development manager it was more of a non-issue. He explained:

A lot of people say, “Oh, it’s a religious company”. But maybe his [the owner’s] personal beliefs are religious, but he has made it very evident that he did not support anti-marriage legislature. He knows that the majority or a lot of his workers are gay or lesbian. He definitely supports all of us. We’ve had domestic partner benefits for forever. It’s been part of our anti-discrimination clause for our organization since forever. It’s always, it’s never been an issue that’s not a thing. So, it’s a very comfortable work environment. It’s very inviting. It’s very inclusive….I can tell you that since starting to work here, it’s part of who I am. But I never have to feel cautious about using pronouns when I’m talking about my partner. It’s never part of that. It’s more just this is what it is.

Peter shared how outsiders have influenced the politics within his workplace where he typically felt valued and appreciated. In essence, he navigated the workplace by recognizing that it was “inviting” and that his sexual orientation/identity was “part of who I am” and most importantly it was not a political issue within his organization.

On the whole, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian organizationally navigated the workplace around policies and politics. The policies assisted in helping individuals make sense of the rules that were outlined or non-existent in the heteronormative workplace. Politics, on the other hand, informed the ways in which individuals navigated the values and attitudes of the organization that were often not readily defined. Moving beyond the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or
lesbian organizationally *navigated* the workplace, I shift my attention to the ways in which these individuals organizationally *experienced* acknowledgement and obscurity in the workplace.

**Acknowledgement**

Many individuals expressed that as they navigated the policies and politics in the organization they experienced a sense of acknowledgement. These experiences were marked by moments in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian were recognized as a diverse and valuable individuals within their respective organizations. In fact, Nathaniel, a 30-year-old non-profit administrator, explained:

> What’s really important! When you feel like you have that backing from your employer, I feel like it helps me to be able to do a better job and enjoy my work and want to come into work every day and not feel like I’m upset or scared or anxious because somebody might find out. The world might end. So, it relieves a lot of pressure. Work has enough stress. I can’t deal with having all of the stress of wondering if I’ll be fired if they knew I was a homosexual, in addition to all that other work stress. So, it really helps me to do a better job and focus and be successful.

Nathaniel expressed acknowledgement as being supported and valued in the organization. As he explained it is when “you have the backing” that one has the support and does not need to worry about the “stress” surrounding experiences of sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. Additionally, Taylor a 54-year-old vice president of human resources shared:
Yeah, you know what? It’s really through the policies and procedures. We don’t have a resource group, but we have same-sex benefits. We have a lot of company events and Randy has always, or partners and husbands and wives are always welcome to come. When Randy goes to the events for me, it’s very normal. It’s very comfortable. It’s expected. If he weren’t there, people would say, “Where is he? Why isn’t he here? What’s he doing tonight?” It’s just a very opening and accepting environment.

Taylor’s experiences in the workplace were shrouded in organizational acknowledgment. His partner Randy was always welcomed and recognized just like everyone else in the organization, even though he did not work for the same company. Taylor expressed this sense of recognition not only from the policies and procedures in the workplace but the inclusive culture with the organization. Dale, a 38-year-old public relations executive, explained the ways in which he experienced acknowledgment in his workplace:

I mean, the one thing that comes to mind for sure is just having announcements about certain meetings for the employee resource groups or pride groups. There is certainly no hiding the fact that the corporation is inclusive. So, I guess those things come to mind. And certainly some of the training that I went through, that was also the period of time when I moved into management. So, I went through a number of different management training programs and it never felt like it was a tag on to talk about diversity. And diversity was truly inclusive. It covered age. It covered socioeconomic status, as well as sexual orientation and some of those other matters, too.
Dale’s experiences in the workplace illustrated the various ways in which his organization acknowledged sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. In that there was “no hiding” the fact they were acknowledging individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. And they kept open communication between individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace through announcements and training which fostered a sense of acknowledgment for these employees. In many respects, some organizations create a culture of inclusivity due, in large part, to organizational policies and norms.

Lisa, a 55-year-old retail vice president shared similar sentiments, “They [the company] show[s] up from a values perspective in the community in every step of the way, but also one of the values really is around diversity.” She experienced acknowledgment surrounded by the values of her workplace. As she further explained, “And not just saying that it's okay, but really going out of your way to bring diversity in, because the more diverse you are, the stronger the company's going to be and that's what we value.” In essence, the focus on diversity and recognition of difference illustrated the acknowledgment of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in her workplace.

Finally, Tyler, a 29-year old higher education administrator, recognized his privilege within the organization:

Well, so, we can't discriminate or make any hiring decisions or any kind of employment decision based on someone's sexual orientation, which is again a privilege, because I understand not all people have that. It's something that you don't really think about when it is there for you. I get all the same benefits. Like I said, so when we relocated [for career], the relocation was taken care of for me and my partner. I'm able to have my partner and our daughter, who I have no legal
relationship with, on my health insurance. So, really, I receive a lot of the same
benefits that everyone else does in the workplace.

In many ways, Tyler was acknowledged in the workplace. Interestingly, he identified that
it was a privilege to be acknowledged complicating our understanding of
acknowledgment. In one sense acknowledgement provided space for these individuals in
the workplace, however naming acknowledgement as privilege comes with added
nuances. On the whole, whether it is the inclusive nature of the policies or the
organizational environment individuals who identify as gay or lesbian tended to seek
and/or experience a sense of acknowledgement in the heteronormative workplace.

_Obscurity_

Another way in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced the
workplace was through obscurity or the state of being unknown, insignificant, or
forgotten in the workplace. For example, Anthony, a 28-year-old retail manager,
explained, “You know what, politically, I would say that [the organization] they're not
moving mountains, but they're not horrible.” This excerpt highlights his disconnect with
the organization. He continued, “I just wish that they would start providing benefits for
my family, they talk about their diverse values and I know they would never fire me, but
I still don’t have the same benefits as my straight colleagues.” Anthony’s example spoke
directly to experiencing obscurity in his organization as his organization “values”
diversity, however those same values were not translated into the benefits for individuals
who identify as gay or lesbian. And as a result, the policies were not only difficult to
understand, but those individuals remained unknown and insignificant in the
organizational policies and structure. Anthony was not the only participant that talked about experiencing obscurity. In fact, Joe, a 31-year-old admissions counselor, explained:

I wish I would have known that truly there are no real protections for you. You are on your own. There may be laws and policies in place, but you know what? When it comes down to it, they don’t count and you’re on your own as far as how… you can’t count on human resources. You can’t count on other people to stop the harassment. It’s something that has to be managed, I think, on an individual basis.

This frustration that Joe expressed described how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian continuously experience obscurity in the workplace as there is no one to “count on.” Additionally, Joe explained that even if inclusive policies existed the enforcement of these policies was difficult to understand and managed “on an individual basis.”

Obscurity was also experienced in the policies created to protect them from harassment and discrimination. Smith, a 41-year-old medical director, addressed an issue that many of my participants talked about regarding benefits offered to same-sex couples:

The only issue that I find, there’s probably an issue throughout the United States, benefits, domestic partner benefits for insurance purposes. My employer, if I wanted to add my boyfriend on, I would have to pay the full premium and, versus, heterosexual, if they get married, their spouse gets the discount. It only adds a few more dollars to what they pay a month. I would have to pay full premiums.

Smith shared these frustrations in that even though these individuals receive benefits they are not the “same” benefits as their colleagues. Much like Anthony, these individuals experienced obscurity, as they moved one step forward in gaining benefits and took two
steps back upon realizing the benefits were not equal. All in all, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced obscurity when their value as employees was compromised.

Finally, several of my participants shared sentiments like Amelia, a 30-year-old retail sales supervisor, who explained the lack of recognition in the workplace:

I would say we are not really recognized. The company I work for kind of lacks in LGBTQ specifications in say things like domestic partnership insurance, we don’t have that, and things like that, and the actual location I work at it’s like different sexualities don’t even exist. We are just this unknown group or people within the organization. And I don’t know why that is, I often think about how we could change that, but it would have to come from the higher ups.

Amelia expressed her frustration specifically noting the lack of recognition organizationally. And for her, like many of my participants recognition was expressed through the organizational policies. When policies were not present, these individuals expressed feeling unknown or insignificant within the organization. On the whole, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian organizationally experienced the heteronormative workplace around acknowledgement and obscurity.

Overall, on an organizational level, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the workplace around policies and politics. And, they organizationally experienced the heteronormative workplace through acknowledgement and obscurity. As was evident throughout these themes many of the excerpts began to overlap with the personal level, however the various degrees to which these findings magnify the intricacies of the workplace critically examine what often goes unnoticed. With a rich
understanding of the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian organizationally navigated and experienced the workplace, I now shift my attention to the relational level.

Relationally

Four themes emerged for how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace relationally. These individuals relationally *navigated* the workplace through community and around stereotypes. The communities inside and outside of the workplace offered individuals who identify as gay or lesbian advice and mentorship and helped guide their navigation of the workplace. Conversely, others relationally navigated and combated stereotypes. Furthermore, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian relationally *experienced* the heteronormative workplace through acceptance and/or marginalization. It is when these individuals experienced acceptance by others in the workplace that felt as if they could be themselves within the workplace. However, when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced marginalization they experienced being othered and excluded relationally in the workplace. Below I explicate how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian relationally navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace in unique ways that were magnified by community, stereotypes, acceptance, and marginalization.

*Community*

One unique aspect that emerged and contributed to how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the workplace was through LGBTQ communities or networks inside and outside of the organization. For many of my participants this network was
fostered through an employee resource group. For example, Max, a 25-year-old events coordinator, shared:

We have a group. We have organizations throughout, just different kinds of associate organizations like this one for the African Americans, the African American Resource Network. There's a Latino Resource Group and there's also Evolve, which is the LGBTQ kind of resource group and we get together once a month to talk about what we are experiencing in the organization... Like we meet with key LGBTQ leaders that are out at work and kind of get to know them and ask questions. So, it's kind of new. It's just about a year old. We marched in the Pride Parade, so it's definitely a way open company.

This group acted as a way for Max to learn how to navigate the workplace as he was able to ask questions and to hear from other key LGBTQ leaders in the organization. And as a result, it helped him discern different ways in which individuals navigated the workplace. Additionally, he spoke to the fact that this network of individuals illustrated the open and accepting nature of diverse individuals within the company. Victoria, a 64-year-old non-profit administrator, shared similar experiences:

We have an LGBTQ group and tell employees you don’t need to be afraid to not come to our meetings for fear of being ridiculed. We have forty people in our little [LGBTQ] organization. We send out emails all the time, telling people, “Hey, don’t forget we’re here if you need to discuss something in private. We’re here to talk about whatever.”

Victoria explained that her co-workers had no need to be afraid or fearful any consequences as it was a place in which they could discuss things in “private.” In many
cases, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the workplace through these communities which acted as safe places to build relationships with others within the workplace. On this note, several of the recruiters that I spoke with at the Young LGBTQ Professionals conference talked about the ways in which they attempted to create awareness of the LGBTQ communities within the organization. For example, one of the recruiters at this conference suggested that if you were a member of the employee resource group you were given a coffee cup to display on your desk to alert others to your membership. This coffee cup not only established visibility to individuals outside of the resource group, but it also acted as a symbol of acceptance and inclusivity within the organization. Another recruiter mentioned the creation of rainbow colored lanyards that would help individuals who identify as gay or lesbian discern individuals in the workplace that they could reach out to if they had questions or wanted to talk about something privately or LGBTQ related. Essentially, many of my participants sought to build relationships with other like-minded individuals as they navigated LGBTQ communities that were created and fostered within the organization.

Taylor, a 54-year-old vice president of human resources expressed how the navigation gets complicated when these groups are not set in place by the organization:

You know, I mentioned that we don’t have a resource group and one of the gay employees who is from another country and was really repressed and he’s just like blossomed when he got here, because I think he felt like I can be gay for the first time in my life, I just feel like it took this load off of him. So, he went a little overboard, I would say, and took some liberties and sent a message to all the gay and lesbian employees that he knew of at the company, and said, “As gay and
lesbian employees, let’s all get together and blah, blah, blah, blah” He didn’t ask anyone. He didn’t blind carbon copy. And some employees were upset that their names went out on this message because some of them obviously didn’t feel comfortable with it. So, that was one issue that I dealt with.

This story that Taylor shared underscores the complicated nature some individuals faced as they navigated and created community within the workplace. For instance, this individual sought a community within the organization; however through the process, he “outed” employees within the organization complicating the safe place that many of these communities foster. Taylor explained this individual’s intentions were not to “out” anyone but more so to foster a LGBTQ friendly relationships within the organization, but it was a community some colleagues did not seek. In brief, communities may assist individuals in the navigation of the workplace; however, when the structure is not set in place by the organization, establishing these safe relationships can become more complicated. Still, some individuals like Tyler, a 29-year-old higher education supervisor, managed to find a family of colleagues even in the absences of an official employee resource group:

I have a lot of gay colleagues. We also just for whatever reason, I don't know what the reason, but we also seem to hire a lot of gay people. I don't know what it is. But whenever I see gay people coming into the organization, it feels more, to me anyway, like a family kind of thing. It's a good thing, we get together, we can talk, we relate to workplace dilemmas.

Both Tyler and Taylor pursued community relationships with their peers without the structure set in place by the organization. Whereas Taylor’s subordinate experienced
some challenges as he sought community, Tyler organically found a community that provided him support in the organization.

However, as is evident in previous excerpts some individuals who identify as gay or lesbian did not seek communities within the workplace, instead they gained this community from outside the organization. For instance, Kai, a 28-year-old human resources executive, explained:

I think in the LGBTQ community, the circles that you run in outside of the workplace can be helpful. I think that has been a positive on a few different occasions, not only are some of the people fairly successful and fairly tenured, but they do not directly work with me. And so being able to approach them with what's going on in my life and what's going on in theirs, gives you some perspective, it’s like a professional relationship or a mentorship where, for me, it's a friend. It's somebody that you care for and can get advice from. I think that's an interesting kind of component and I've been noticing it a lot more in the LGBTQ community, but it does not exist as commonly as it does in the straight community.

Kai sought out relationships with other gay and lesbian individuals outside the organization. This network of individuals afforded him the opportunity to gain advice from outsiders on navigating the workplace. Moreover, Jason, a 30-year-old retail manager, shared similar sentiments:

I have friends that I talk to about things. When I have issues at work I usually reach out to them. I would feel comfortable just calling the president of our
committee and be like, “Hey, this is what’s going on?” But I prefer to talk first with people outside of the company so it doesn’t come back to bite me in the ass. Jason reached out to an exterior community when navigating the workplace. He gained insight from this community in an effort to avoid any unintended consequences or politics when talking to colleagues within the organization. On the whole, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian relationally navigated community to provide safe places, to build relationships, and to gain advice from other likeminded individuals. This understanding exemplified one way in which individuals relationally navigated the workplace; however individuals who identify as gay or lesbian also relationally navigated stereotypes.

**Stereotypes**

Individuals who identify as gay or lesbian sought out community in the workplace in part, because, they desired support in order to combat stereotypes from their colleagues within the organization. For instance, Dale, a 38-year-old public relations executive, shared a recent experience he had when training with outside of his company:

On the very first day they walked me around and introduced me to a number of different executives and that sort of thing. As I was being introduced to the Chief Marketing Officer, and mind you this is a Fortune 500 company, she had said to me, “That must be really difficult to spend two weeks away from your…well do you have a family?” And the person introducing me interjected and said, “Oh no, he’s a dandy,” which I’ve not heard the word “dandy” probably ever in my life, because that’s a really old term, but it was his way of noting I guess, that I’m a
gay man and that in some way, he perceived me as being potentially frivolous or not being in a committed relationship. That’s what I inferred from it.

Dale navigated this stereotype that surrounded his sexual orientation/identity as he was introduced to individuals he would be working with in the future. He specifically noted that he did not feel like it was the right time to say something, and although he expressed using the term “dandy” was inappropriate, he navigated these stereotypes by not saying anything at all. Additionally, Joe, a 31-year-old admissions counselor, expressed:

I think that probably the biggest thing is that it’s dealing with stereotypes, because I think that even though nowadays, at least in this area [western U.S.], people don’t… they’re not going to come out directly and say something directly and I think there’s a perception that especially gay males are maybe weaker in the workforce. And in my last job that’s where I was getting the feedback of, “Well, that’s why we think that you’ll be a pushover.” And I think maybe the dynamic where some people are just uncomfortable being managed by a gay man, for whatever reason. They don’t recognize the authority or education or whatever. That’s probably the biggest thing that I think gay people are facing right now from my experience and from talking with my colleagues.

Joe explained that the stereotype of being weaker was the biggest concern for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace, as these stereotypes were often difficult to navigate and challenge in the heteronormative workplace. Ultimately, the stereotypes that my participants faced in the workplace influenced their relationships with colleagues and their perceived leadership potential within the heteronormative organization.
Even so, Taylor, a 54-year-old vice president of human resources, shared how a lot of individuals reached out to him because he is gay. For Taylor, the stereotypes have actually helped him in his career. He shared, “I don’t know if this is stereotypical or what, but a lot of people come to me with their problems and their issues because they know I’ll listen and they know I’ll care.” Taylor expressed that he is probably one of the most sought out members on the leadership team because people know he will care about their concerns. He furthered, “I don’t know if that’s a gay trait or not, but I’m not afraid to get emotional with them and I think people know that and they like that and they appreciate that.” Thus, these stereotypes might have helped Taylor foster relationships with his employees. Finally, he said, “I’ve had meetings where I’m just sitting there crying along with them and I think that they think…. He listens. He cares. He hears, so I think in that regard, yeah, I think that helps me in my job.” This example illustrated not only how Taylor utilized what may have been perceived as a downfall in being out at work as a benefit, but it showcased that not all individuals respond to stereotypes in the same way. Finally, Lisa, a 55-year-old retail vice president, explained:

I realized a long time ago that when you're not out at work, it really came to a thought process of the media was focusing in on the stereotypes, because there really wasn't enough people who didn't fit the stereotypes that were out. And so in order to change people’s perception or the prejudice or the stereotype, it took people to be courageous to break the stereotype. And I realized that until I did or until other people did, then we would just really... we're part of the problem and I wanted to be part of the solution.
Lisa explained the important realization she had in combatting the media stereotypes for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. For her, it was essential to be out in the workplace so people could build open relationships and challenge the stereotypes and labels. With all of this said, it is evident that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the assumptions and potential benefits that stereotypes created in the workplace as they built and fostered relationships.

In sum, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian relationally navigated the workplace around community and stereotypes. This sense of community provided individuals who identify as gay or lesbian with safe places where they built relationships and gained advice from like-minded individuals as they navigated the workplace. Stereotypes, on the other hand, were most often navigated as individuals recognized the labels that were being placed on them for being gay or lesbian. In recognizing the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian relationally navigated the workplace, it is important to examine the ways in which these individuals relationally experienced acceptance and marginalization.

Acceptance

One aspect that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian relationally experienced in the workplace was acceptance. For example, Jordan, a 25-year-old elementary school teacher, described his experience surrounding acceptance in the workplace:

“Oh, you have a boyfriend? That’s really cool.” And so it was just a very, very accepting environment, where I felt incredibly free to be able to talk about my boyfriend without having to get that precursor of, “oh, hey, by the way, I’m gay,
just to let you know.” Just from the beginning, I felt like the school was super open-minded. Or at least they had dealt with it before.

As is evident in this excerpt, the accepting nature of the workplace influenced Jordan’s initial experience at work. It was through these casual conversations that he really experienced this sense of being accepted within the organization. Aric, a 41-year-old higher education administrator, shared similar sentiments:

It’s the first time I worked in an organization where people talked openly about being gay and lesbian or bisexual or questioning or any of those things. And I remember multiple instances early on where I thought “wow, this is amazing.” People were talking openly about this and I had these private conversations with people because I’m not quite out yet, but they were all very understanding. These people are open at work and it was really, really empowering for me.

Aric expressed feelings of empowerment as he experienced acceptance in the workplace. Both Aric and Jordan explained that talking with others helped them opened spaces to build relationships with other likeminded individuals. More specifically, Randy, a 56-year-old vice president of financial services, shared a particular campaign his company established to build relationships and foster acceptance in the workplace:

Last year our big campaign was “I’m an Ally, Too.” So, we had the CEO and high level executives do an “I’m an Ally” campaign. They did this video and they showed it to the whole company. Even today, people still have these little posters that state “I’m an Ally.” This year’s program is to build upon that, not to lose those people that are supportive and to keep that momentum.
This campaign promoted a culture of acceptance within the workplace that moved toward bringing “outsiders” into the LGBTQ community within the organization (i.e., non-LGBTQ executives) to open up the possibilities for acceptance in the organization.

Additionally, many participants expressed how the inclusive and comfortable nature of the workplace fostered acceptance in the heteronormative workplace. For example, Melissa, a 52-year-old retail sales supervisor, shared, “I think acceptance is something we need to talk about because I know how it makes everybody feel. I mean, knowing that everyone is comfortable, no matter their race, no matter their religious beliefs, no matter their sexual orientation.” She furthered, “It just makes it a great place to work and become friends with the people you work with. At the end of the day we try to make sure everyone feels included and comfortable.” Like many of my participants, Melissa talked about the great place her organization was to work for because they have this level of acceptance that was enacted by making everyone feel included and comfortable in the workplace. Beyond that, acceptance was often expressed not only within the LGBTQ community but also across other diverse groups in the organization as mutual acceptance was a common goal. Moreover, Nathaniel, a 30-year-old non-profit administrator, explained his experience, “Everyone seems very warm and open, and accepting. I’ve never had anybody say, ‘I’m uncomfortable with you because of this, that, or the other.’ No one’s ever said anything like that. I’ve never felt that way from anybody.” Nathaniel enjoyed this sense of acceptance that was created by his colleagues which ultimately illuminated the relational dimension of acceptance.

Finally, Jason, a 30-year-old retail manager, talked about the individualized and relational nature of acceptance in the workplace:
I think my company is extremely accepting. However, I have one co-worker, a heterosexual. He has a young daughter. He admitted to me that he is a little homophobic, but he's getting to know another co-worker that is gay, and because of that he's opened up more to it and felt less threatened by the presence of one in the workplace. He has started to ask regularly about how my relationship is going, and although at first I was caught off-guard, he has made me feel more welcomed and comfortable in our organization.

Jason shared that even though this colleague was homophobic, he opened up to build relationships which could create a level of acceptance in the workplace. It was when individuals sought out and shared information about sexual orientation/identity that a common understanding of acceptance was extended. Jason’s experience magnified the important role understanding plays in fostering acceptance and building relationships in the workplace. Overall, these individuals explained how they relationally experienced acceptance typified by openness, inclusivity, and comfort in the heteronormative workplace. Still, not all of the individuals talked about acceptance; instead, they spoke about the marginalization that framed their professional lives in the workplace.

Marginalization

Finally, this research recognized the marginalized status of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. What emerged was how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian were relationally marked as other and often excluded in the workplace. Jack, a 35-year-old customer service manager, explained his co-workers as being “standoff-ish”:

I think it's depending on the people in the organization. Some of the people at work, I wouldn't say they come off as not accepting, but they come off as a little
standoffish sometimes. I try to position myself. I want to go into training. I want to position myself as a resource for people, new hires especially, who come in the same way I did from a temp agency and I will introduce myself as someone they can come to when they have questions. And I don’t understand why they [certain co-workers] are standoffish if it is because of my sexuality, but there is just a certain way that they act that they don't really respond. They don't say anything. It could be... It's almost like I'm not sure what it is, but I do think it might be part of the reason. Maybe I'm not someone they connect with or maybe they feel like they don't have much in common with me. I don't know.

Jack expressed this adverse feeling from many of his co-workers in the organization, and although he was not excluded, it was clear that he was not being included. In one sense, he was an outsider when he started as a temp. Still, he wanted to be an insider as he did not want to be marginalized in the workplace. All of this said, Jack’s feelings of marginalization in the organization left little room for his sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. Additionally, Eli, a 28-year old social work supervisor, explained:

You’d hear a lot of people… well, I don’t want to say a lot of people, but there were kind of groups of guys that would make kind of homophobic remarks about “oh, that’s gay” or using the word faggot or using words like that in a derogatory manner. I can’t say I’ve experienced any of that in my current job. I just know it’s just not tolerated and socially accepted here, but that wasn’t even close to the case at my previous job.

It was almost as if Eli’s past experiences of being marginalized in the workplace highlighted the current level of acceptance in his current organization. However, these
experiences also magnify the derogatory nature and marginalization that was tolerated in this previous position. Although these remarks from colleagues may have not been made directly at Eli, they created a harmful environment that diminished his sexual orientation/identity in the heteronormative workplace.

Whereas, Jack and Eli experienced this marginalization that downgraded their sexual orientation/identity, other individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced exclusion in the workplace. For instance, Kurtis, a 62-year-old nurse, explained, “Well, it's interesting. The male nurses in the ER, they'll have all weekend getaways with the boys and this type of thing. I'm never invited to those. Everyone's invited, but I’m not.” Kurtis’ example highlighted relational disconnect between him and everyone else in the office. He furthered, “It is absolutely fine with me because I doubt that I would attend anyway. I just find it interesting that I never get an invitation.” Taken together, these examples magnified the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced exclusion based on their marginalization. Kacey, a 42-year-old corporate scientist, explained a similar experience when she talked about why she did not feel comfortable coming out in her previous workplace:

Well, I know we had an employee who, another employee who was openly gay, and when they would bring their partner to events, the staff would kind of laugh about them behind their backs and not include them in things. I remember one time when he was not invited to a party one of the supervisor’s was hosting and when he found out it was mere disappointment. It’s just they weren't comfortable and I didn't think that they went out of their way to help that employee in any
way, meaning if he needed copies...you know what I mean. In daily items, I think they made his job more difficult than it needed to be.

These experiences elucidated how individuals who were different in this organization were excluded, marginalized, and laughed about behind their backs. Kacey shared that this was one of the main reasons she did not feel comfortable in sharing her sexual orientation/identity with her colleagues in the workplace; she wanted to avoid being excluded.

Finally, other individuals who identify as gay or lesbian like Smith, a 41-year-old medical director, explained that they were not necessarily overtly excluded, but instead they were merely tolerated: “You know, I worked with gay administrators and administrative staff and physicians and, I mean, there's not hugging and hand holding and that kind of thing going on, but I just... I think it [being gay] is something that's merely tolerated.” Notably, the word tolerated was spoken with a negative connotation that conveyed underlying feelings of being less than and marginalized. Smith did not view tolerance as a form of acceptance. Lastly, Margie, a 33-year-old retail general manager, shared advice that many of my participants echoed:

I guess the only thing I would say would be that sometimes you have to accept the fact that not everybody is going to agree with you and there’s nothing you can do to change that. Because it will be about fifty people that love me and accept me and that one person that doesn’t, and it will drive me nuts. It’s one of those, no matter who you are in the world, gay, straight, whatever, you can’t make everybody like you.
Margie recognized that there were always going to be people that would not accept you for who you are. She experienced this in her workplace but was optimistic that even though she was marginalized there were more people that loved and accepted her for her for who she was. Whether it was being viewed as lesser than, excluded from workplace activities, or merely tolerated, many of the participants’ shared how they relationally experienced marginalization in the heteronormative workplace. Thus, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian relationally experienced the heteronormative workplace around acceptance and marginalization.

Overall, on a relational level, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated the workplace through community and around stereotypes. And relationally experienced the heteronormative workplace through acceptance and marginalization.

Chapter Summary

In sum, the data suggested that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace in three primary ways: personally, organizationally, and relationally. That is, individuals were socialized on a personal level as they navigated (a) heightened awareness and (b) (in)visibility, and as they experienced (a) adversity and (b) professionalism to make sense of their interactions. On an organizational level they navigated (a) policies and (b) politics, and they experienced (a) acknowledgement and (b) obscurity. And finally on a relational level as they communicatively navigated (a) community and (b) stereotypes, and they experienced (a) acceptance and (b) marginalization with others in the organization. In order to make sense of these themes in the next chapter I highlight the interrelated nature of the three levels: personal, organizational, and relational. Moreover, I present two
primary ways in which the thematic findings contribute to and extend on co-cultural
theory in the context of organizational socialization.
CHAPTER SIX: THEMATIC DISCUSSION

Chapter Overview

I begin this chapter by providing an illustration of the thematic findings of this study. Next, I provide an overview of the findings and draw on two specific examples to illustrate the interrelated nature of the three levels: personal, organizational, and relational. Finally, I offer two primary theoretical contributions that extend and complement our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Diagram of Thematic Findings

The thematic findings of this dissertation provide a way for scholars to understand how marginalized and underrepresented individuals communicatively navigate and experience the workplace (see Appendix E for definitions). Accordingly, I have included a diagram of the thematic findings (see Figure 1). The diagram illustrates that although my participants navigated and experienced the workplace on three different levels (i.e. personal, organizational, and relational) these levels often overlapped and the boundaries between them were not rigid. In what follows, I briefly define each level of the diagram and examine two themes that cut across all three levels prior to exploring the specific theoretical contributions.
Overview of Thematic Findings

Individuals who identify as gay or lesbian talked about their communicative experience in the workplace across three interrelated levels: personal, organizational, and relational. The personal level was the place where individuals who identify as gay or lesbian made sense of their standing in the organization. These individuals personally recognized their difference from others in their respective organizations (i.e. heightened awareness, (in)visibility, adversity, and professionalism). The organizational level represented the space where individuals who identify as gay or lesbian recognized the
(un)spoken organizational culture of the workplace. In other words, these individuals recognized the visible and invisible organizational structures and recourses that shaped their experiences with their sexual orientation/identity (i.e. policies, politics, acknowledgement, and obscurity). The relational level was the place where individuals who identify as gay or lesbian created and navigated relationships with others inside and outside of the organization as they negotiated their understanding of their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace (i.e. community, stereotypes, acceptance, and marginalization). In an effort to better explicate the overlapping nature of these three levels, below I take two different themes from the data and trace through how each theme is relevant personally, organizationally, and relationally.

**Connections between Personal, Organizational, and Relational**

As the diagram illustrates, many of the themes cut across all three levels and the boundaries between the levels are not rigid. Thus, I offer two thematic examples to highlight the intersecting nature of the lived experiences at the personal, organizational, and relational levels.

First, the theme *heightened awareness* initially emerged in the personal level, yet it was also present in both the organizational and relational levels. Heightened awareness refers to individuals being constantly mindful of their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. Amelia, a 30-year-old retail sales supervisor, talked about the Christmas party and her responses when a “person has a conscious pause.” She said: “I don't know if I notice it because I identify as a lesbian, but there's that struggle of ‘do I introduce them in person as their girlfriend, partner, friend.’ And there's that struggle there that shouldn't be a struggle.” In this scenario, the personal level of “I notice it because I identify”
heightened Amelia’s awareness of her sexual orientation/identity, but it also illustrated the relational negotiation of how “do I introduce” my partner to my boss and even beyond that, it exemplifies the organizational expectation for procedural fairness where there’s a “struggle there that shouldn’t be a struggle.” In other words, not only was Amelia more aware of her sexual orientation/identity personally, but she also became more aware of her boss as he negotiated their relationship relationally. And, she reflected on the embeddedness of her organizational “struggle.” Thus, heightened awareness resonated with all three levels of how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated and experienced the heteronormative workplace.

Second, the theme community initially emerged at the relational level yet like heightened awareness, it also extended across the other two levels. Community referred to the LGBTQ networks inside and outside of the organization that individuals went to for advice or information about the workplace. The community that was present in an organization not only fostered relationships within or outside of the organization, but also complicated the personal and organizational levels as individuals navigated the workplace. An example will better clarify this point, Dale, a 38-year-old public relations executive, said,

In my current organization, I helped create an alliance on the corporate campus. We jokingly call ourselves the Pink Mafia, we are actually running the company [chuckles]. Nobody knows it, but jokingly, that’s sort of my support group if you will. The people that I really rely on. A couple of months after we started, I reached out to HR and just said, you know, I wanted to let you know that I started this informal alliance. If you could include us in the orientation packet for new
employees, that would be terrific. It was just sort of a cold response and we have never been included in those materials.

In this example, the relational level of, “The people I really rely on” fostered this community or alliance for Dale, but the excerpt also illustrated the organizational exclusion; “we have never been included.” Beyond that, the quote touched on the personal “cold response” from the HR professional. In other words, not only was Dale in need of a community within his workplace relationally, but the community was never organizationally included in the company’s documents, and as a result the “cold response” made him personally aware of the community’s invisibility. Thus, this example exemplified the ways in which the thematic findings extended across all three of the overarching levels.

Overall, I argue that the interconnectedness of heightened awareness and community are illustrative of the fluid nature of many of the thematic findings in this dissertation. In other words, these two themes are the best exemplars that highlight the interrelated ways in which individuals navigated and experienced their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. They also begin to illuminate the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in the workplace, whether it be through the introduction at a Christmas party or not being included in company resources, the discourse pervades the personal, organizational, and relational levels these individuals navigate and experience in the workplace.

In what follows, I introduce the theoretical contributions that extend and complement our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. My goal at the outset of this dissertation was to provide a way for others to
understand individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace. As such, I draw on the findings that emerged in this dissertation to extend theory in two specific ways that complement our understanding of varied and diverse lived experiences in the workplace.

Theoretical Contributions

The thematic findings in this dissertation contribute to theory in two ways. First, one of the central aims of this dissertation was to juxtapose co-cultural theory (CCT) with organizational socialization to reenvision our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Accordingly, I coined the term co-cultural organizational socialization, and I articulate its contributions to the literature below. The second theoretical contribution speaks directly to the preferred communicative methods of CCT. In brief, I argue that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian not only assimilate, accommodate, or separate when communicating with dominant group members (Orbe & Spellers, 2005), they also complement dominant group members as they navigate and experience the workplace. I will address each theoretical contribution in turn with examples from the findings.

Co-cultural Organizational Socialization

To begin, CCT focuses on the communication interactions between individuals who are traditionally marginalized and underrepresented in the dominant culture (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). And Jablin (1987) explained organizational socialization as the communicative process of joining, participating in, and exiting organizations. Synthesizing these two frameworks improves our understanding of the experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace by recognizing the various
layers that marginalized or underrepresented individuals encounter as they navigate and experience organizational socialization.

*Organizational Socialization*

Scholars traditionally view organizational socialization as the process by which individuals gain information about work from a young age and then encounter the organization and make sense of the workplace which ultimately results in integration into the workplace (Jablin, 2001). For example, at a young age some children view work as an opportunity to earn money and increase their purchasing power, just like their parents. And as they get older their views and attitudes may change toward work, but that initial understanding is important as it was centered on the financial aspect of work. Hence, organizational socialization is traditionally viewed through phases, and it is through these phases “by which one is taught and learns ‘the ropes’ of a particular organizational role” or organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211).

Consistent with our traditional understanding of anticipatory socialization many of the participants talked about how they valued the work ethic that they learned from their family. Individuals seek information from several sources including: parents, educational institutions, job experiences, friends and peers, and the media (Jablin, 2001). Additionally, individuals use their networks to learn about the organizational culture of the organization they are anticipating joining. As such, the participants often spoke about asking others about particular organizations and gaining more information on specific careers from friends.

Moreover, Van Maanen (1975) explained that in the initial phase of *encounter* individuals attempt to quickly absorb what the “normal” patterns of thinking and
behaving are as well as what it means to be a part of the organization’s culture. This phase was also consistent with my participants as they often spoke about learning the norms within the organization and understanding the varying policies and procedures within the organization. Additionally, during the metamorphosis phase, “the individual sees what the organization is actually like and attempts to become a participating member” (Feldman, 1976a, p. 435). Although this phase was not as actively described by many participants some alluded to reaching points in their careers that they felt ingrained in the workplace. Although, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced these phases in ways that were consistent with past research, they also experienced an additional layer based on their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace.

Lois (1999) suggested that it may be useful to view the organizational socialization process through layered, intersecting phases of development. Moreover, he explained that although the distinct phases (i.e. anticipatory socialization, encounter) may represent unique turning points for individuals in the workplace, they may not provide the full picture of the layered intersections. Consequently, I argue co-cultural organizational socialization is an embodiment of Lois’ (1999) theoretical distinctions. That is, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experienced turning points where they started to reflect on their sexual orientation/identity, and it is in these moments that they experienced an additional, co-cultural, layer of the organizational socialization.

Thus, co-cultural organizational socialization does not discount the socialization process, but rather it augments the traditional phasic model to include others that are often excluded in the traditional understanding of organizational socialization. Moreover, these layered intersections answer Bullis and Stout’s (2000) call on scholars to consider
the following questions: “How does socialization function to marginalize as well as socialize? Exclude as well as include? Create and maintain ‘others’ such as outsiders and ‘outsiders within’ as well as insiders? What processes, roles, and groups are made (in)visible and how?” (p. 73). Below I explain the co-cultural layer that emerged in this dissertation.

**Co-cultural Layer**

The co-cultural layer of organizational socialization addresses the varied and unique experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Organizational socialization process begins at an early age (Jablin, 1987), and marginalized individuals are not only made aware of the nuances of work but they also experience turning points when the meaningfulness of their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace becomes more apparent (i.e. personally, organizationally, relationally). Thus, marginalized individuals have similar socialization experiences to non-marginalized individuals in the workplace; yet their experiences are layered (Lois, 1999) by the turning points surrounding their sexual orientation/identity in the heteronormative discourse of the workplace.

Primarily, the co-cultural layer of organizational socialization is marked by an awareness of past experiences and expectations of the workplace. In addition to the traditional understanding of anticipatory socialization in which past work experiences influence understandings of work, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may also encounter past experiences related to their sexual orientation/identity that influence their understanding of work, thus the layering effect. Essentially, past experiences in the co-cultural layer may not emerge from a previous employer, per se, but instead from an
everyday occurrence. Yet, these seemingly benign happenings still affect individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. For instance, April, a 56-year-old technology supervisor, shared not only her initial expectations of the workplace but also how that was influenced when she accepted her identity as a lesbian:

I thought I was going to work an 8-5 job. I just was raised with a pretty strong work ethic. You worked hard to earn your money and if you were responsible you could be successful in life… I always knew I was gay from quite an early age, but in my generation, it was a little bit harder to come out and be successful. Also, because I wanted children, and gay people didn't have children back in my day. It was rare. So, I married. I had three biological children. I was married for fourteen years and I divorced. Probably about a year after I separated from him and I came out. And it was liberating. So, I didn't hesitate at all. I'd been with the company for so long that I felt very comfortable coming out at work as well. It was just little by little.

This example highlights the co-cultural layer of organizational socialization. April was initially influenced by the intersections of her upbringing with a strong work ethic and the generation she grew up during. Then, when she accepted her sexual orientation/identity, the co-cultural layer emerged as something new that she needed to navigate in the workplace. April navigated the personal level of (in)visibility by hiding her sexual orientation/identity within the organization but later had a “liberating” experience when her sexual orientation/identity was visible in the organization. Ultimately, this excerpt illuminated this additional co-cultural layer that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate and experience in the workplace.
Additionally, Tammy, a 48-year-old sales supervisor, provided a clear representation of the layering effect: “being a lesbian field hockey player gave me every indication that you needed to be very cautious and somewhat afraid to be out at work.” In her past, Tammy experienced marginalization on the relational level, and this had significant consequences for the way in which she enacted her sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. Thus, Tammy’s past experiences from a non-work interaction contributed to the layering effect of her co-cultural organizational socialization.

Or take for example, Joe, a 31-year-old admissions counselor that talked about the co-cultural layer of organizational socialization by highlighting his awareness:

You are on your own. There may be laws and policies in place, but you know what? When it comes down to it, they don’t count and you’re on your own. You can’t count on other people. It’s something that has to be managed, I think, on an individual basis. You think you’re going to be valued based on your merits and your work and what you bring to the table, and you’re really not. It’s much more a matter of perception and, so even being gay and being out, there are other things associated with that. And I think that it’s my responsibility to kind of manage how people react to that.

Joe’s excerpt provides a clear illustration of the heteronormative discourse in the co-cultural layer of organizational socialization for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Joe said, “You think you’re going to be valued based on your merits and your work and what you bring to the table, and you’re really not.” In this instance, the co-cultural level must be explicitly managed through the organizational obscurity.
Finally, Kai, a 28-year-old human resources supervisor, illustrated his awareness of co-cultural layer upon encountering the organization. He explained, “It was important for me to ask the interviewer. I would ask the standard question of “What is the company's policy on domestic partner benefits?” It wouldn't necessarily out me, but in some terms I guess it probably would.” This question delves deeper into this co-cultural layer in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian seek information organizationally to validate their presence (i.e. acknowledgement, obscurity) in the workplace. Accordingly, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian often seek signs within the organization that magnify inclusion or exclusion or at the very least identify the presence/absence of space for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian within the organization.

Ultimately, this co-cultural layer augments our traditional understanding of organizational socialization as it richly illuminates that marginalized and underrepresented individuals’ experience organizational socialization differently. Particularly, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience a layering effect throughout the socialization process. This layer is marked by the heteronormative discourse that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate and experience in the workplace. The pervasiveness of heteronormativity is vividly apparent in Joe’s excerpt with the control and power the dominant discourse has on the policies and politics in the workplace. Or the mere fact that Tammy expressed the need to be cautious about her sexual orientation/identity speaks to the power she believed others had over her identity in the workplace. In sum, Wittig (1992) suggested that “heterosexuality is always already there within all mental categories” (p. 43). Hence, it is essential to recognize the inherent
heteronormativity in the workplace that these individuals navigated and experienced personally, organizationally, and relationally through co-cultural organizational socialization.

Furthermore, the intersectionality between and among marginalized and underrepresented individuals in the workplace further extends and contributes to the co-cultural organizational socialization framework. Whether it be the generational intersection that April reflected on or the intersections of sex or race with marginalized status, co-cultural organizational socialization provides space for multiple and/or overlapping identities that are navigated in the workplace. Which provides CCT with a framework towards exploring these competing and overlapping identities in the context of the workplace. On this note, this framework of co-cultural organizational socialization could be easily extended to other marginalized and underrepresented individuals in the workplace (i.e. people of color, women, those from a lower socioeconomic status, disabled, former felons, and first generation college students). Many of these groups have been explored through CCT, and they may also experience co-cultural organizational socialization (i.e. personally, organizationally, and relationally). Although they may navigate and experience it differently due to the intersectionality of their differentness this provides a way to acknowledge the varied ways in which the meaningfulness of their identity is socialized into the workplace. Take for example, individuals who are disabled and bound to a wheelchair. These individuals learn about work from a young age, but their understanding of work may be marked by intersections of their (dis)ability, whether positively or negatively. Hence the additional co-cultural layer they experience upon joining an organization highlights their unique experiences navigating organizational
socialization (see Cohen & Avanzino 2010). In what follows, I will address the second theoretical contribution by briefly describing each of the existing preferred communicative methods of CCT (Orbe, 1998a) and then presenting the addition of complementary as a communicative method that enhances the co-cultural theoretical framework.

**Preferred Communicative Methods**

Orbe and Spellers (2005) explained that interactions between co-cultural group members and dominant group members are often influenced by what is explained as the “preferred method” that group members intentionally or unintentionally choose during communication interactions (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 175). As a result, Orbe (1998a) described three “preferred methods” that emerge for marginalized group members as assimilation, accommodation, and separation. Each of these methods necessitates a change in behavior on the part of the marginalized individual, perhaps to their detriment. In other words, each method requires that the individual restrains his/her behavior or removes him/herself from the communication interactions. I suggest that in addition to these previously established methods, that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively complement dominant discourse in the workplace. As a result, individuals are not expected to modify their interactions to fit within the heteronormative dominant discursive frame instead they meaningfully contribute to the heteronormative discourse.

In the following section, I provide examples from the data to illustrate each of the “preferred methods” and then offer examples of how individuals who identify as gay or
lesbian communicatively complement the heteronormative discourse without minimizing their sexual orientation/identity.

Assimilate

Orbe (1998a) viewed assimilation as an attempt to eliminate cultural differences in an effort to be more like the dominant culture (i.e., one culture subsumes the other). In one example, Kacey, a 42-year-old corporate scientist, said:

I had to totally hide. I had no pictures up on my desk other than my child. And people would ask, “Why aren't you dating?” I mean, you know, because they knew that my husband had left and I was divorced. I could never really escape that, nor did I want to because that helped me fit in.

The basis of Kacey’s communication behavior was that in order to participate in the heteronormative workplace she had to conform to dominant heteronormative discourse. And she did this by acknowledging her divorce and letting her colleagues assume that was the reason she was not dating. This is one of the ways individuals who identify as gay or lesbian illustrated intentionally or unintentionally choosing during interactions with dominant society.

Accommodate

The preferred method of accommodation is when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian do not hide their sexual orientation/identity, however they attempt to integrate into dominant society. An example that illustrated this “preferred method” was Jack, a 35-year-old customer service manager, as he said:

I think you need to be open and willing to answer questions from people who want to understand more about you, like whether it's your ethnicity, whether it's
your sexual orientation, people have conceptions and some of them are misconceptions.

This excerpt of Jack’s communication behavior was that in order to integrate into the heteronormative workplace he had to be open and willing to answer questions about his sexual orientation/identity, he had to explain it to others in the heteronormative workplace. And Jack did this by recognizing that some individuals in the workplace just want to know more about him and in answering questions he was combating potential misconceptions. This is the second way that Orbe (1998a) outlined for the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively integrate into dominant society, yet these individuals are still confined by the heteronormative dominant structure in the workplace.

Separate

Separation involves refusing the notion of establishing a common bond with other people in the dominant heteronormative discourse. In essence, this is when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian recognized their differences and rejected to give up any individuality as they integrated into the dominant structure (Orbe, 1998b). This “preferred method” is typically enacted by avoiding or ignoring situations. For example, Eli, a 28-year old social work supervisor, said, “…there were kind of groups of guys that would make kind of homophobic remarks about “oh, that’s gay” or using the word “faggot” or using words like that in a derogatory manner. And you just have to ignore it.” In this example, Eli avoided and ignored the interactions without trying to assimilate in the dominant culture. Eli recognized his sexual orientation/identity as vital to his individuality and he did not see the value in confronting others ignorance. On the whole,
individuals who identify as gay or lesbian who communicatively separate often go unheard and this restricts them within dominant society. This is the last way in which Orbe (1998a) argued marginalized individuals communicatively choose interactions with individuals. However, I argue that there is a another way in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively complement dominant heteronormative discourse and this provides a positive lens in which to understand marginalized individuals communicative interactions in the workplace.

Complement

This preferred communicative method is highlighted when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively contribute to the dominant discourse in meaningful ways. Unlike the “preferred methods” described above that individuals intentionally or unintentionally choose when communicating with dominant society, this method showcased how these individuals choose to communicatively complement the dominant discourse. In essence, this is optimistically reframing the “preferred methods” by viewing it from a positive lens as many of my participants viewed their sexual orientation/identity. Being that this method emerged out of the findings it is important to share an excerpt. Take for example, Zander, a 37-year-old customer service supervisor shared, “I provide a different experience, a different viewpoint, one in which they may have never thought about. That is how I add to the company. That is why I am valued in the organization.” In this excerpt Zander specifically points to the unique and different experiences he is bringing to the workplace and how that is complementing the customers he serves and colleagues he works with on a daily basis.

Additionally, Lisa, a 55-year-old retail vice president, explained:
I think sending the message that when you become happy with who you are, other people are happy with who you are. If you deliver it as a non-issue, more often than not, it is a non-issue. When you talk about it, don't talk about it as if it was an event. It's just a fact.

This example also highlighted how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian complement the dominant discourse in the organization. Unlike the other preferred methods, Lisa is not discounting her sexual orientation/identity, instead she is contributing to the conversation that she should be valued for who she is as an individual which includes her sexual orientation/identity. In contrast, the other three preferred methods Orbe (1998a) identified integrate into the dominant and lessen sexual orientation/identity thereby allowing the dominant discourse to maintain power and control over the marginalized individuals. However, when others see that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are happy and that their sexual orientation/identity is a non-issue, the interactions begin to complement the discourse and open up understandings of acceptance and acknowledgement in the workplace. This method of choosing to communicatively complement the heteronormative discourse recognized how marginalized individuals contribute to shaping the dominant heteronormative discourse in the workplace.

Finally, Victoria, a 64-year-old non-profit administrator, shared how being herself in the workplace complements the dominant heteronormative discourse in her organization, “I'm accepted, I know that I am valued and my experience is unique and important to the company. When you work for a company that talks about values you are, without a doubt, valued, I believe my contributions matter.” The following is yet another
example that points to how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian choose to complement the dominant discourse in the workplace.

To close, these findings draw and extend the assumptions of CCT. Essentially, the dominant heteronormative discourse possess power to create and maintain communication systems that express, reinforce, and promote particular experiences. Although non-dominant groups possess influence, their communication often reflects the tendency to resist, defy, and challenge the power of dominant society (Orbe, 1998a). However, the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian choose to complement the dominant discourse begin to break down the false binary assumptions that the workplace is either heteronormative (resist and/or defy) or non-heteronormative (challenge). That is, complementing acknowledges the ability of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian to exist and contribute which moves scholars towards further understanding the complexity of heteronormativity in the workplace on a continuum. Fundamentally, it challenges the power and control that the dominant heteronormative discourse maintains over individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and provides space for alternative discourses to interact with the dominant heteronormative discourse. In essence, it moves us beyond the binary assumptions that the workplace is either heteronormative or not and magnifies the alternative and/or complementing discourses that entangle the workplace. Ultimately, it is when scholars recognize individuals who identify as gay or lesbian complementing the dominant discourse that we begin to breakdown normative assumptions of heteronormativity. To increase the understanding of these four preferred communicative methods I draw on a previous reflection.
When I initially reflected on the notion of the preferred methods I posed the following question: When was the last time that you negotiated your communication to protect/reflect/redirect your identity? As I return to this question the variations in my experiences reflect each of the preferred communicative methods, including complementary. And I believe that is an important thing to take away. In different situations and with different people marginalized individuals choose different preferred communicative methods. It is sometimes just easier for me to assimilate into the dominant discourse in the workplace. For example, when I mark single on a W-2 when that technically does not define my marital status. However, there are moments when I accommodate to make my sexual orientation/identity known in the sea of heteronormativity in the workplace. For instance, when discussing diversity in the workplace with my students and they question why it is important to understand. And then again there are times when I separate from the world around me into the confines of my own home. Such as events when my husband and I are both not invited.

Nonetheless, in looking back on this reflection I believe my question was inspired by not seeing room for valuing and generally accepting differences as contributing meaningfully. Hence, in many ways I believe I meaningfully complement the dominant discourse. When I challenge my students to recognize the homophobic remarks in their favorite television shows and they respond by telling me how this was the first time they recognized homophobia in media. When I ask questions about my husband’s benefits, questions that have gone unasked previously. It is in these moments when I provide a different viewpoint that complements their understanding that I believe I have meaningfully contributed to the dominant discourse. Instead of always looking at the
ways in which we obey, integrate, and conform, it is important to step back and understand how marginalized individuals contribute and add to the dominant heteronormative discourse in meaningful ways.

In sum, the findings of this dissertation confirmed Orbe’s (1998a) claims that interactions between marginalized individuals and dominant group members are often influenced by the preferred methods of assimilation, accommodation, and separation. However, I claim that we need to look for other preferred methods to start to recognize the varied ways marginalized and underrepresented individuals contribute to the dominant, in this case heteronormative, discourse and ultimately make room for additional possibilities. I recognize that this notion will be critiqued by scholars who will argue that marginalized individuals must always integrate into the dominant (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). However, I saw many of my participants conflicted with the idea that they integrated into the dominant society, or even challenged the dominant heteronormative structure. As a result, these findings represent the perspective of individuals who are marginalized and who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace and instead of feeling restricted or disempowered, the ways in which they choose to complement the dominant heteronormative discourse through their communicative experience.

Chapter Summary

On the whole, this chapter outlines the interconnectedness and fluid nature of many of the thematic findings in this dissertation and discusses two theoretical contributions that extend and complement our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Co-cultural organizational socialization extends
organizational socialization to recognize marginalized and underrepresented individuals’ experiences in the workplace. This not only helps scholars recognize individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace, but acknowledges the layered intersections of organizational socialization for other marginalized and underrepresented individuals in the workplace. Additionally, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian do not only assimilate, accommodate, or separate when communicating with dominant group members, but may choose to communicatively complement dominant discourse in the workplace. Overall, I argue these contributions provide new and insightful ways to understanding the organizational experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace. In what follows, I will share six narratives that represent the ways in which the heteronormative discourse in the workplace creates and/or constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian.
CHAPTER SEVEN: NARRATIVE CASES

Chapter Overview

We’ve all had different experiences. And so I think it is important to introduce that to anything we do, to remind people that it’s not all “one” story.

– Dwight, 39-year-old public relations consultant

The second research question (RQ2) that I examined in this dissertation addressed the ways in which heteronormative discourse in the workplace created and/or constrained the lived experience of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Yep (2003) explained “heteronormativity, the (in)visible center and the presumed bedrock of society, is the quintessential force creating, sustaining, and perpetuating the erasure, marginalization, disempowerment, and oppression of sexual others” (p. 18). To illustrate the “bedrock of society” I identified six poignant cases in response to this research question. And, in the spirit of Dwight’s reflection, each one offers a unique glimpse into the life of a particular individual who identifies as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace.

Each of the narratives presented in this chapter were noted during the constant comparative thematic analysis; however, it was not until a cumulative reflection of the entire dissertation coding process that they emerged as representative of the overarching heteronormative discourse in the workplace. In part, I made a conscious choice to extract whole narratives as I did not want to cut the narratives into separate pieces and lose the implicit emotion. The stories were not selected to be representative statistically, but instead they were chosen to showcase the overarching heteronormative discourse that is pervasive in the workplace (Reissman, 2008). Ultimately, each narrative represents a memorable moment and/or turning point in the participants’ lives.
In the following pages, the stories and transitions of participant’s are marked by asterisks. Three (***); asterisks mark the beginning and ending of a case (i.e., introduction, story, and discussion). Whereas, two (**) asterisks indicate the places where the voice shifts from my voice to the participants’ and back again. And one (*) asterisk marks a shift or break in the participant’s story (e.g., different time/place in the interview, additional example of the heteronormative workplace). My hope is to guide the reader through these six stories, one-by-one. Each narrative begins by providing an overview of the individual’s work background. Then the narrative is titled with one of six heteronormative discourses that emerged through the careful analysis of the data (e.g. exposure, exploitation, exclusion, ignorance, embracement, and elevation). It is important to note that these heteronormative discourses often emerged through my participants words (i.e. Kai stated that he talked about being elevated in his workplace as a gay employee). After the title I continue by sharing their story (held intact with their words). And, I end by offering a brief discussion on the reflections of heteronormative discourse. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a holistic discussion that extends our understanding of heteronormativity in the workplace.

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Lisa, a 55-year-old retail vice president, shared a brief work history:

I graduated from college in 1984, high school actually in ‘76, but I didn’t go straight through. I became a state trooper in 1981 and then left there, went back to school, finished college, majoring in criminal justice, and from there, I actually got into retail and was the brand executive for loss prevention for a major retailer. So, I went to the top of the loss prevention line and decided to change careers
altogether. Went into store operations and I managed a retail store, and now I manage real estate execution for North America for that same retailer.

Lisa’s experiences in the workplace extend far beyond her age as evidenced in the many stories she shared. However, there was one story that stuck out, one memorable message that changed her life forever. The story shared below highlighted the heteronormative discourse of exposure.

**

*Don’t Be – Exposed*

When I decided to join the state police, I was very much, asking the questions. By then, I had somewhat accepted it, I had relationships with women, so when I marked ‘single’ and ‘heterosexual’ on the application I was blatantly lying. The state police, at that point in time, didn’t even have any women, so they were heavily recruiting. This wasn’t something that I had a desire to do, but I’m so competitive, and they were creating a class for women for the first time. So, they came to me. I was actually an athlete and they recruited a lot of athletes in college to do that, but you had to lie. There was no way about it. You weren’t allowed to be gay. So, answering the questions was the first time in my life I had to lie about it. Before this, when I went to the Air Force I didn’t lie because I wasn’t out, but there was no even such thing as ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’ It was like ‘Don’t Be.’ So, when I answered the questions for the state police application and interview, I had accepted it, but I still had to lie. It just really compounded that thought that I had to lie to live this dual life.

The truth was they really didn’t want women; although they were recruiting women, they were under a federal order to recruit women because they had none. But
they really didn’t want them; so in the police academy, they were targeting the women to try to get women to quit. And so they started out with, I don’t know, maybe 60 women in the class, and it was down to the last three when I was still there. So, they kept making me box men, bigger men, and for longer amounts of time. And I ended up, I had eleven different matches, I ended up breaking my nose, breaking my jaw, and was in and out of the hospital a couple of times. It got brutal. And then ultimately, I had a serious concussion and was medically dismissed, but invited to return back, which was total crap because I wasn’t wanted back.

As a result I got into a lawsuit with them. I actually was done... I just didn’t want to be there anymore, but I didn’t want anyone to tell me I couldn’t. So they would knock me down; I would stand back up. There was one other woman in there [supervised the women] at the time that said this to me – “Lisa, you just have to say to yourself any broken bones can be fixed, but don’t let them break you.” And I took that very seriously. That’s not the advice I would give to a 21-year-old now, that’s quite stubborn to say the least. I refused to quit, but it ended up in a lawsuit, and I sued the state police because what they were doing was ridiculous. Most men had one or two boxing matches with someone your own height and weight. Troopers don’t box. It was just to see if you have an aversion to physical contact. So, they were using it really to beat me up, to get me out. I ended up winning the lawsuit, but it wasn’t for monetary reasons. It was to put those rules in place, to put the policies in place. I felt very disillusioned in the end because there were a few male troopers that this was their way of pushing people out, and they just reassigned them. Nothing serious became of them, [pause] and they almost killed me.

*
About eight years after that, that woman trooper who gave me that advice about “don’t let them break you,” she sued the state police, and she testified in court that the reason that I was targeted was because they knew I was gay. [deep breath] I did not know that at the time, eight years and my own lawsuit later, and I found this out while reading it in the newspaper. It was [pause] I was, for one, at a totally different place in my life. I was open; I was out but I was just so disgusted. In the article, she said that they were hiding. They [her superiors] made her hide. They put in a peep hole into the showers to watch us, to watch me in the shower to see if anybody else was joining me in the shower because the actual three people that were left (before she was medically discharged) were all gay. And we weren’t out, because we couldn’t have been out. Can you imagine if we would have been out and what they would have done to us? But somehow people knew we were gay. It had been reported. So, her job was to watch us take showers. She ended up winning her lawsuit as well…but I had no idea this was even going on. She was talking about me in that courtroom and I read it in a newspaper. It was just total nonsense to find out eight years later that the primary reason I was dismissed was because I was gay, it was a bit of a stunner.

**

Lisa was not just fighting for her own equal rights in the workplace; she was literally boxing the heteronormativity in the workplace. When her supervisor said, “Lisa, you just have to say to yourself any broken bones can be fixed, but don’t let them break you;” she was already embedded in the heteronormative discourse in the workplace. Yep (2002) argued the influence of heteronormativity “is its (in)visibility” (p. 168). Although it can be argued that Lisa attempted to stand up and challenge the heteronormative
discourse these actions ultimately further highlighted the intersections of her marginalization as a female lesbian. Which eventually led to being exposed on the basis of her sexual orientation/identity. *Exposure* occurs when the heteronormative discourse reveals marginalized individuals’ private information to (re)gain power or control; for instance, it might reveal their previously invisible sexual orientation/identity. For Lisa this control compounded when she found out reading the newspaper that it was not only her gender, but also her sexual orientation/identity that was under attack. Although her sexual orientation/identity was something in which she thought she was hiding, she was ultimately exposed, and as a result she had lost all control in the heteronormative discourse. As is evident in her work background Lisa moved on and has had a successful career, but that career is marked by this narrative and the memorable messages ingrained in this story that influenced her experience. Ultimately, this narrative illustrates the ever-present heteronormative discourse of *exposure* for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

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Joe, a 31-year-old admissions counselor, explained how he got to where he is today:

After college, I worked for a major airline for a few years and I was laid off. I went to graduate school and earned an MBA and then started working in education. Since recruiting in education, I’ve moved to local recruiting and back with my current university. In all actuality, it is kind of a fluke actually. I never expected to get into education. I mean, it just happened out of the blue when I was looking for a job. And when I interviewed I was kind of surprised by the offer and I just took it.
Like Lisa, Joe’s career decisions were heavily influenced by his past experiences that were ingrained in the heteronormative discourse. In this story, he talked about his time working with a major airline and noted the memorable messages that impacted his story. The narrative presented below showcases the heteronormative discourse of exploitation.

**

*Deal With It - Exploitation*

I have always been a little worried about coming out because the aviation industry is a very conservative industry, and even while I was in school, my [LGBTQ] classmates and I received a lot of harassment, by the instructors. So, it was kind of worrying. The instructors would say things like, “oh, well, the gays will be flying in the back.” Here we are in a flight school and they’re essentially telling us that we should be flight attendants. We had some students, even for projects, would put on… I don’t remember the details because it was 10 years ago, but we had to do skits for class, and they did the same thing, they would constantly make fun of gay pilots. Fortunately, the university was very supportive and crushed all of that and followed up. But it was still kind ominous looking at going into this industry, because you knew there was a difference between being in the university environment and one in the workplace; where in the workplace, you’re going to have to just deal with it.

*

I always thought people just think of me as Joe, just from talking with me. I don’t know if people can tell [I’m gay]. And so, I never came out to anyone, but I didn’t deny it and I didn’t really care. You know, it was [pause] I would just hear remarks from people here and there who knew. Sometimes, well often very inappropriate, but I just let it go. In
fact most of the time until it became really bad I didn’t acknowledge it. It started out as they would call me “slippers.” That was the nickname [deep sigh], and I didn’t understand it at first, but it’s because I’m gay and that is equated with being light in the loafers. Then, one of my colleagues would sing a song, like there was a Flipper song, I don’t know it, but instead of that, she actually said “Slippers” and changed the song. And so then, what would happen is when I would walk by, I would have people whistle the song. And it was just it’s kind of people knew that they couldn’t be direct about it. It’s not like you can make fun of someone directly for being gay, because that would be harassment, whereas this, it was something like the company would tell me, “Oh, well, they’re just… maybe you just slipped on the ice or something,” and I’m like, “no, I don’t think so.” And it was just a lot of comments, even from a colleague of mine on the walkie, who was undermining what I was trying to do. So, it became an issue where someone was impacting my performance, because they were making inappropriate remarks on the radio and in the building that all my employees could hear.

I was actually flown out to headquarters because the harassment got really bad at this point. The employees were whistling at me, and it was distracting people at work, and the management agreed to stop it. I got called to headquarters and human resources actually told me that they thought it was inappropriate that I allowed people to “speculate” on my sexual orientation. That was the term that they used. And, you know, of course I fired back and I said, “I think it’s inappropriate for you to even tell me that.” I’m not sure if they were trying to tell me that I needed to tell other people that I’m straight or maybe they were telling me that I need to come out. And to tell me that I shouldn’t allow people to speculate, I didn’t have any control over it, so I wasn’t sure of
the message. I actually ended up leaving early, I said “I don’t think this is getting anywhere, is there anything else I can do for you?” and just left and took the next flight home. And just kind of left it at that.

These issues kept arising [pause] during holidays; they told me that I should work because I don’t have a family. So, I had to work holidays. It even came to a pay issue. It was like, “oh, your time’s not worth as much, so we’re not paying you overtime because you don’t have a family. We’re paying them overtime because they’re missing time away from their kids and their family and people love them.” So, it was actually shocking. It was shocking because it’s like, you don’t know what my family is. And to tell me that I don’t have people who want to spend time with me on holidays, it’s just absolutely insulting. When it comes down to vacation or holiday time, in terms of that, or just where my time is valued, because people assume that I don’t have a family or people that care about me that I want to spend time with, but guess what, I do. But you know, it’s just kind of like your time is just valued less, because people don’t think you have anyone caring about you outside of work. So, I think that the work-life balance when people in management use that term, I don’t think it’s as valued for gay people.

**

Joe’s story was marked by the vivid recollections of his experiences in the workplace. When I asked Joe questions, it seemed like he was reliving these experiences. The wounds were still evident on the surface. Several moments emerged that illuminated the exploitation of the heteronormative discourse in the workplace. For instance, Joe said, “It’s not like you can make fun of someone directly for being gay.” Not only did his co-workers maintain their heteronormative power, but they hid their harassment behind their
everyday interactions. As a result, the exploitation cut deeper because the harassment was accepted as “normal, it-goes-without saying character” (Yep, 2002, p. 168). It is this “bedrock of society” that Joe felt ingrained within, one in which he should not let others speculate on his sexual orientation, one that he could not even escape, but which ultimately led to the heteronormative discourse of exploitation (Yep, 2003, p. 18).

*Exploitation* occurs when the heteronormative discourse manipulates marginalized individuals' experiences and allows the dominant society to mistreat these individuals in the workplace. It is evident in Joe’s story that he was not only exploited as a co-worker but also as a human being. The fact that he was mistreated for not having a “family” illustrated the disempowerment he experienced because of his marginalization; moreover, this exploitation was directly related to his sexual orientation/identity in the heteronormative discourse. His employers and colleagues presumed Joe could work on holidays and work longer hours because of his sexual orientation/identity. Thus, Joe’s past experiences highlight the heteronormative discourse of *exploitation*.

***

Julie, a 34-year-old, pharmaceutical sales representative, provided this brief background:

When I graduated, I started at a car rental business, and I went through their management program and became a manager. I stayed there for close to four years. That was in California. That was when I was engaged to a man. Then I broke off our engagement and fled to Hawaii, and I worked for a company doing payroll, HR, benefits, outsourcing solutions for mid-sized companies. And then when I had finally accepted that I was a lesbian and wanted to share that with people I moved back to California, and I got into the medical field. I worked at
one company and then I went into the pharmaceutical sales business. I have done that for the last five years.

As is evident in the brief background above Julie navigated the process of coming out around her work experiences. The next story highlights this navigation and showcases her vulnerability in the workplace. Julie’s story is illustrative of the heteronormative discourse of exclusion.

**

*Always in My Head - Excluded*

During training you have to introduce yourself, what state you’re going to be selling in, and the products that you’ll need training in. It was a small training class. And for that reason, I’d kind of thought about coming out from the beginning. When I came out to my training class, we were at a restaurant and, like, one of the girls had said that her brother’s gay. And then a lady has a friend who’s gay. And then another girl had a brother that was gay. And then Paul, he’s this guy I know, and he has a lot of gay and lesbian friends. So, after hearing them just openly talk about that and it being kind of out of the blue conversation they did not seem to care, so I told them I was not even thinking about it. They were all kind of shocked, but they said they were glad that I realized I could be myself around them, because they understand why I never necessarily came out at my other companies because everyone came from different companies when they started that position and knew the pharmaceutical sales culture was not very accepting.

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It was the second day of training. There’s kind of a... we were at the headquarters and there was a seating area while we were on a break and whatever, getting water or
coffee and whatnot. And the head of training, you could tell he wasn’t going to be a very kind or supportive person. There was a television broadcasting I don’t remember what it was on. It was probably something to do with Proposition 8 or something in regards to gay legislation. And as soon as it came on, he was sitting right next to me. And he said what did he say I don’t know the exact words, but it was something like “it’s awful that our country wastes our time with whether or not they should have rights, because they shouldn’t have rights, and if they would just all die, things would be better.” It felt like a punch in the face. Who talks like that? Especially at training with new employees, so I just got up and walked away. And eventually, everyone in the class walked away, too, because it was just so uncomfortable and what are you supposed to say? It wasn’t just myself being gay, but it was everyone that was around him had either a son or a brother or a sister that was gay, and it was just awful.

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I recently took a leave of absence because I had to have surgery. Paul called me checking in the other day, and you know, said that he was so glad I was out on disability at this point, because there was another trainer, and he made similar statements to what the one trainer had said. He said, “That all gay people should be rounded up and killed and that it would be a much better place and a much better city if that happened.” So, yeah. It’s just [pause] hearing that, I don’t want to come back. I never want to go back to that company. In fact, if someone said that to me now, like the trainer said that to me or I was in a car with somebody, my reaction would probably not be professional at all, because it’s so personal with what they say. I just feel like, yes, there are certain people definitely at the corporate headquarters setting that I would not actively engage in
conversation about my engagement to Lyndsay or about my life. But some of my co-
workers and whatnot that I interact with on a regular basis, I don’t hide anything from
them. They know pretty much everything about my relationship. So, it’s not something I
have to deal with on a regular basis, but it’s still in your head and in your mind just
thinking that, “does this person feel the same way as the other people that I’ve interacted
with?” And is this a corporate culture and mentality that they just, you know, they don’t
care and they don’t want you there no matter how well you perform? So, that’s definitely
always in my head.

**

Julie spent her career entrenched in the heteronormative discourse of exclusion.
There were several moments in her story where she did not fit in or where her leaders
isolated her. When Julie, shared, “It felt like a punch in the face,” it was as if all of her
fears flashed before her eyes. Although she had just had these memorable moments with
her colleagues, the human resource professional shocked her back into reality.
Accordingly, the exclusion was embedded and regulated by the heteronormative
organizational structure.

Exclusion occurs when the heteronormative discourse diminishes marginalized
individuals voices in a way that expressly denies the value of their experiences in the
workplace. Thankfully Julie found inclusive spaces with her co-workers; however, this
heteronormative discourse of exclusion still pervaded her story as these messages
remained “always in [her] head.” Bullis & Stout (2000) argued that the exclusionary
nature of marginalized individuals often leads to them being dominated in the workplace.
The fact that Julie was always thinking about being “less than” spoke to the exclusionary
heteronormative nature of her workplace or the fact that “heterosexuality is always already there within all mental categories” (Wittig, 1992, p. 43). Currently, Julie is in the process of changing careers in an attempt to escape the heteronormative discourse of exclusion that her story illuminates.

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Dwight, a 39-year-old, public relations consultant, explained his work history:

I worked for about 10 years before getting into academia and the corporate world. I spent two years at a consulting firm, doing business process analytics and then I worked on the acquisition team for a national bank as they acquired other banks. And then I left there, and I spent about five or six years on the corporate side of things in Atlanta. I started out in the foreign exchange in the treasury department there and then transitioned a little bit into the marketing and then worked on various corporate accounts at the end. And after all of that I decided the corporate world wasn’t for me, and I went back and got my PhD. And I’ve been teaching for four years at a public university.

Dwight’s experiences in the workplace proved to be interesting and insightful due to his vast experience in different industries. The next story highlights one specific experience with a Fortune 500 company and illuminates the heteronormative discourse of ignorance.

**

*Point Taken - Ignorance*

I worked there for five and a half years or so. And they were coming around then. For a short term before I left, I was on the North American LGBTQ Task Force Board. Actually, it was the advisory committee to the president of the company in North
America. It was a new group, a small group, and they [the company] had a bad discrimination lawsuit. It was a discrimination lawsuit, and with that lawsuit, they were like “we need to start developing what are now know as affinity groups for all the different minorities. We need to have support groups and advisory groups for all different types of minorities within the company.” So, they named February - Black History Month and things like that. And we asked for them to name June - LGBTQ Pride Month obviously. They said, “Okay, that’s great. We’ll do that.”

Each of the groups planned for their events and brought in speakers and really just had fun with it. Ellen DeGeneres’ mother was going to come speak. We had all these different things lined up, and we were super excited. And as it got closer to the date, we put up a sign saying, “Everybody get excited about Gay and LGBTQ Pride Month.”

Suddenly, we got an email from one of the executive staff members in the president’s office saying – To everybody on the LGBTQ Advisory Committee:

Just to let you know, we’ve had some complaints that people are uncomfortable with the word ‘gay’ and ‘LGBTQ.’ So, we are actually going to change the title of it. We’re just going to call this Pride Month and take off the word gay and LGBTQ, because people are uncomfortable with it.

And I replied to somebody. I just couldn’t help myself, I mean I replied without thinking probably less than a few minutes after I got the e-mail. I have no idea how it got up to the executives, but I replied to somebody and said:

Okay, that’s fine. I completely understand people being uncomfortable, but this is the South and people are also uncomfortable with black people. So, from now on,
I would expect February to be Heritage Month, not Black Pride or Black Heritage month.

And I got a note back saying “point taken.” And then they kept the gay and LGBTQ on all of the signs and posters. So, they learned, but I think there were some growing pains there. I do think that they were very open in sort of learning, because they had realized with this discrimination lawsuit that they had to have a diversity training, but there were still things they needed to get their hands around. It was just like five or six of us e-mailing back and forth about changing the event name, and then it found its way to the higher ups, and they ended up keeping it. And so, there was nothing ever official, but the rumors, hearsay, behind the scenes and stuff, like just from what I had heard. In a company like that, you never get the full picture really. But what they have done, since then, I think in the last 10 years, they’ve done a ton in terms of stepping up to their inclusive policy, even campaigning marketing with the LGBTQ community. I think they went through a period of awakening of needing to really think about this.

**

Unlike many of these stories, Dwight was one of the first participants that talked about challenging the heteronormative discourse that was pervasive in his workplace. Dwight sent the email, in spite of the risk, and his actions ultimately illuminated the ignorance in his current organization. Ignorance occurs when the people ingrained in the heteronormative discourse are unaware and/or unwilling to learn the varied experiences of marginalized individuals in the workplace. The moment that stuck out and permeated this story for me was the fact that comfort trumped diversity for this executive. In essence, the fact that people were uncomfortable was more of a pressing issue than
recognizing different experiences in the workplace. Although this is marked in my memory it highlights “to live in society is to live in heterosexuality” (Wittig, 1992, p. 40). It is as if the employee who sent the email did not consider the implications of changing the sign verbiage from Gay and LGBTQ Pride Month to Pride Month (e.g., erasing visibility, encouraging homophobia, hiding acceptance and/or acknowledgment). Instead, s/he made a decision without having a conversation with the individuals in charge of the event. Arguably, this example fell in the heteronormative discourse of ignorance because the organization was attempting to make positive changes to support diversity efforts; however, they were not fully invested in learning about the varied experiences of marginalized individuals. Essentially, the organization did not know what it was doing as it was trying to appease one audience and by doing so offended another. On the whole, Dwight classified this experience in the category of “growing pains” as the organization was making strides to acknowledge diverse perspectives, but the changes were often riddled with naïve understandings. Overall, the narrative presented above showcased the heteronormative discourse of ignorance.

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Kacey, a 42-year-old, corporate scientist, shared how she got to where she is today:

I graduated from college in '93 with a degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and I started working at a Children's Hospital as a scientist in the research and development lab. And then I took a position at a university in the Science and Nutrition department. I worked there for probably right at about 10 years. I was the lead scientist in the human clinical trials in that department until I decided I couldn’t hide any longer. And then I came to where I am today, where
I'm a staff scientist in the research and development department, and I run human clinical trials in support of new products.

To this point, the stories I have shared highlight the struggles associated with heteronormative discourse. Kacey’s narrative, on the other hand, illustrates acceptance. After leaving the Science and Nutrition department at a University, Kacey has moved on to take a job at a more inclusive organization. The narrative below illuminates the heteronormative discourse of being embraced.

**

*Good for Me, Good for Us - Embracement*

When I started my work at the lab, I was married and my life situation changed in the time I was there. I had a baby and my husband left when my child was two. And then, probably about two to three years after he left, I just decided that I was going to date women. It wasn’t just a shift like that, but I met Deb, who’s my partner now. And so, I think my colleagues all kind of put me in one divorced box, and I knew the front office staff was very, very conservative. And I just knew from previous things that were said about other people in the department who were assumed to be gay that they weren’t really very nice to them. And so I just decided I didn’t want to deal with it. It was kind of a stressful time in my life anyway, and I just didn’t want to have to deal with that.

Then a new opportunity became available. The gentleman that recruited me knew of my personal situation. Even though the people at the lab did not know, he did. And so when I decided I was going to [pause] when I decided I wanted to interview at this new company, I just decided that if I was going to make a really large transition, I wanted it to be [pause] I don’t know how to phrase it. I wanted it to be a really big change. I just
wanted to be up front from the beginning and so when I was recruited to interview and they said I could bring my family, I explained that my family was somewhat non-traditional. And could I bring my partner? And they said, “Absolutely, no problem.” And they treated us just like, in my opinion, they would treat any other couple coming to interview and I just felt from the very beginning that it was a non-issue.

* 

I kind of thought it was funny because they have a mentoring program here, and they put me with a lesbian. That was my mentor. And I kind of laughed. I mean, it was fine, and it was great, but, I mean, I think that they assumed that just because we were lesbians, we’d have lots in common. And we didn’t really have anything in common. So it was just kind of funny. Her partner played on a women’s football team. And so she had pictures of her partner dressed up in her football gear with the helmet and all this stuff, and she was just very excited about it. And then she was talking all about her dog and all this and her dog was like her baby. And I love my dog, don’t get me wrong. I have two of them. She was just in a totally different stage of life. I probably would have been better mentored by somebody else who maybe had kids. We just didn’t have anything in common. I mean, I looked at the pictures of her partner and that’s just not my role. And so, anyway, that’s neither here nor there, but at least I knew there were lots of people who were out. I have to say, there are some people that are out at the company. I mean, they don’t at all hide. We have a lot of I don’t know how to say it politically correct, but men who are very “effeminate” or women who are really “butchy,” and they are just who they are and it’s just pretty obvious. So they’re comfortable with it, and it’s not a problem for anybody. It was just really clear. I mean, you know, I think I’m still cautious. Like when I
have pictures up at my desk, I’m sensitive to the fact that not everybody might be comfortable, but for the most part, I’ve felt very, I don’t know what the word I embraced. And so, I think when I came to this company, I just decided that my family just needed to be out. It was not only good for me, but it was good for us.

**

Kacey’s narrative highlights the transition from an organization she typified by their exclusionary practices to one that exemplified being embraced. In Kacey’s previous organization, she felt the need to stay closeted in the heteronormative workplace. This circumstance played an important role in her decision to join the new organization that claimed to be more inviting of non-traditional families. In fact, one of the memorable moments in her story occurred when Kacey detailed the story of how her “non-traditional” family was treated just like anyone else’s family in the organization. This excerpt began to depict the ways in which Kacey was embraced by the heteronormative workplace. Embracement occurs when the heteronormative discourse creates space for marginalized individuals where they are accepted and/or acknowledged; however they maintain control over the acceptance and/or acknowledgement. Kacey’s family’s ability to remain intact and visible within the workplace showcased this heteronormative discourse.

It is important to note that even though Kacey was embraced, not all marginalized individuals share the same experience. For instance, the organization chose to match Kacey with a mentor who had the same sexual orientation/identity as herself. The organization may have viewed this matching as a positive acknowledgement of her presence, of their control, in the workplace but they failed to recognize other important
factors in the pairing including: life stage (i.e., kids), job similarity (i.e., mentor worked in a different department), and common interests. The organization essentialized Kacey to her sexual orientation/identity. Even though individuals who identify as gay or lesbian seek acknowledgment in the workplace, they do not necessarily want to be only acknowledged based on their sexual orientation/identity. This ultimately magnifies how the heteronormative discourse perpetuates what it means to be “normal” and in this example they maintained the power and control over how she was embraced in the workplace (Yep, 2003). Through Kacey’s story and her experience in the workplace it is quite evident that although the heteronormative discourse is dominant, there can be space for others to be embraced and accepted in the workplace. Overall, this narrative exemplified the heteronormative discourse of embracement.

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Kai, a 28-year-old, human resources supervisor, shared his work experiences:

I graduated from a state university in 2008 and was hired directly by my current company as an analyst and development program administrator and ended up working with them for the past five years. However, I just transitioned, and I'm now in HR and campus recruiting. I'm managing a team of recruiters to go out to universities and talk about the same path as I had and work with them as they're graduating from college and transitioning into the full-time workforce.

As is evident in this brief background, Kai’s story highlights his experience in joining and integrating into the organization. His story, shared below, illuminates the heteronormative discourse of elevation.

**
Early on, I think I was a little hesitant to tell people, to just be gay. I had a hard time kind of being [pause] meaning I didn't like to surprise people and say, “oh, my boyfriend and I are going to go to the movies.” I always felt like I had to have more of a sit down conversation with folks before I was able to insert it into my daily life. For example, with my manager, I actually had a sit down conversation where, you know, “hey, Kyle, I want to tell you something.” And then I walked through that kind of process. As I continue to work and kind of continue to mature, I've realized that was my own need and certainly wasn't a cultural thing from where I worked.

By and large, I think there are some unique components to coming out that I see in the work atmosphere, but I really see it as a beneficial piece. And what I'm talking about here is within the LGBTQ network, I reached out [pause] the company has an LGBTQ network, and I reached out early on, probably within my first month of being at the company. It was actually my second week, and I wanted to get involved. So, I ended up meeting with the network lead, who at the time, was a senior manager. And we talked through what the network does and how I could contribute. The way he identified me was being a recent grad and a recent recruit that I should join the recruiting component of our network. And so after a few months of kind of working behind the scenes for the person that was running that work stream, that person ended up getting hauled into another role, and they really didn't have the time to focus. And given that I was already experienced, I was elevated to the role on the leadership team. I think where it became unique is that I began to work with the leadership team of the LGBTQ network on a weekly or biweekly basis, and these were folks that were levels higher than myself, by probably six to seven
layers above me. But we were working with each other in a peer capacity. And so I think early on, I was able to learn and observe how communication happens at that level and how to work with them at that level. But no, it was interesting to have fun and be comfortable at that level.

At times I do feel like the “token” gay male in the company. To the point where a couple years ago, there was a poster made. There were four posters made for our LGBTQ team during Pride month. I was one of the features. It was me as the network lead and then two vice presidents and those were posted around campus, and so I mean, that's definitely token. And then most recently, we started to do diversity campaigns where someone from each of our networks was nominated and selected to represent the networks in features. So if we go to a sponsorship, our photo would be used along with whatever verbiage the brand folks came up with. And through that, I'm in the LGBTQ Network's diversity ad.

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In the above narrative, it was evident that Kai was determined to succeed in the workplace and that his experiences were shaped by the heteronormative discourse of elevation. In fact, as Kai shared his experiences I could not help but think about the manager who nurtured Kai leadership abilities so he could be promoted in the LGBTQ network. The conversations he had with key leaders in the organization were moments in which he felt elevated by the heteronormative discourse (those in power) within the organization. *Elevation* occurs when marginalized individuals are deliberately promoted and nurtured by people that embrace the heteronormative discourse. Kai expressed feeling like the “token” gay male; his picture was placed in every building at the
headquarters as a marker of diversity in the organization. Kai was promoted and nurtured as a young gay professional in the organization, and it was badge of honor he wore proudly. Yet, Kai’s elevation was promoted and “token-ized” as a representation of the diversity initiatives in the organization. Overall, Yep (2003) argued we live in a hegemonic society where individuals freely partake in their own “domination” and these messages ingrained in Kai’s experiences influenced the ways in which he saw success as an individual who identifies as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Kai’s narrative illustrated the heteronormative discourse of *elevation* for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

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Discussion

To begin, it is important to discuss how the heteronormative discourses of exposure, exploitation, exclusion, ignorance, embracement, and elevation help scholars extend and understand heteronormativity in the workplace (see Appendix F for definitions). Bullis and Stout (2000) called on researchers to explore the organizational socialization experiences of marginalized individuals and posed multiple questions to more deeply understand organizational socialization including: How does socialization function to exclude as well as include? The narratives in this chapter offer an answer to this question; they tell us how heteronormativity during organizational socialization functions to exclude as well as include.

In this section I introduce a continuum of heteronormativity in the workplace (see Figure 2) to help scholars better understand the heteronormative discourse in the workplace. In an effort to explicate this continuum, I draw on narrative examples to show
how heteronormativity during organizational socialization functions to include as well as exclude. And finally I conclude by explaining how this conceptualization adds to our understanding of how the heteronormative discourse creates and/or constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as they experience co-cultural organizational socialization.

Inclusion         Exclusion

Figure 2. Continuum of Heteronormativity in the Workplace

The continuum of heteronormativity in the workplace ranges from inclusion to exclusion. The expanse of this continuum acknowledges the unsettled nature of the heteronormative discourse in the workplace and highlights the insider/outsider mentality. Typically, while the narratives of embracement and elevation are often more inclusive, the narratives of exposure, exploitation, exclusion, and ignorance are generally more exclusionary or restrictive. Still, any of the six discourses can fall in multiple places along the continuum. Drawing on the thematic analysis chapter, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian can move along the continuum based on their personal experiences, their relational experiences or their organizational experiences in the workplace. As a result, each of the discourses of heteronormativity can both constrain and enable marginalized individuals in the workplace. For instance, elevation might actually work to exclude some individuals because it separates them from other organizational members. Nonetheless, it may be more inclusive as it provides room for marginalized voices in the dominant heteronormative discourse.
To begin, inclusion occurs when non-dominant members feel supported and involved in the dominant society. Take for example, Kacey’s narrative that exemplified that heteronormativity is not something that individuals can just change; however, the recognition of heteronormativity enables emancipation (Butler, 2004). Kacey moved into a workplace that was inclusive of her non-traditional family with her partner and was fully embraced. Although the heteronormative discourse of heterosexuality was ever-present in Kacey’s narrative, she still found space where she was acknowledged and included.

Conversely, exclusion occurs when non-dominant members feel discounted or ignored by the dominant society. Joe’s narrative of working with the major airline exemplifies exclusion, particularly, in regards to having to work on holidays and work longer hours than his heterosexual colleagues. Thus, Joe’s sexual orientation/identity was marked by the heteronormative discourse of exploitation, and even though he sought to challenge the discourse in his workplace, he was ultimately ignored and silenced by the ever-present power and control emitted by the heteronormative discourse in the workplace.

Interestingly, many times participants in the study experienced both inclusion and exclusion concurrently. Take for example, Kai’s story about his promotion and elevation in the workplace which exemplified both inclusion and exclusion. Kai felt like a part of the team (included). Still, although the posters plastered with Kai’s face certainly increased his feelings of inclusion, they also made him feel somewhat isolated (excluded) as the literal “poster child” for marginalization. Or consider the struggles Lisa faced when she was training to become a state trooper. Although her narrative was ultimately marked
by exposure as she was essentially “outed” and ousted from the organization, she was initially invited to be one of the first women to become a state trooper (included), but later mistreated (excluded) in a workplace that was unwilling to learn accept her sexual orientation/identity. Hence, Lisa experienced these heteronormative discourses that moved from inclusion (when she joined the organization) one in which was attempting to be more inclusive of women, to exploitation (when she was mistreated), and finally to exposure (when she was “outed”) for her sexual orientation/identity. These examples highlight a basic understanding of the continuum of heteronormativity in the workplace.

Ultimately, I argue this conceptualization of the continuum of heteronormativity in the workplace adds to our understanding of how the heteronormative discourse enables and/or constrains individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. The flexibility in the continuum adds “to the multidimensionality and complexity of human experience” (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009, p. 42) as it provides space for recognizing the intersections between multiple identities and how those intersections further complexify the range of exclusion to inclusion that is experienced in the heteronormative workplace. Take for example, Lisa who was included based on her sex, yet was excluded based on her sexual orientation/identity versus Kacey who was included based on her marital status as divorced, yet was excluded based on her sexual orientation/identity at her previous employer. These intersections manifest in different ways in the heteronormative workplace, however in order to critique the discourse it is essential the collisions of these intersections do not go unnoticed. The ways in which these intersections can be better understood is through co-cultural organizational socialization.
In the context of co-cultural organizational socialization these discourses function as ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are marked by the power and control of the heteronormative workplace. In essence, it is almost as if they are under the guise of the heteronormative discourse as they navigate and experience the workplace personally, organizationally, and relationally. For example, individuals who are personally navigating their heightened awareness surrounding their sexual orientation/identity might experience a sense of exclusion in the workplace. Whereas someone who is organizationally experiencing acknowledgement might be experiencing inclusion. Moreover, Yep (2002) argued the influence of heteronormativity “is its (in)visibility disguised as ‘natural,’ ‘normal,’ ‘universal,’ ‘it-goes-without saying’ character” and as a result individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are constrained by the discourse as they make sense of the workplace through co-cultural organizational socialization (p. 168).

On the whole, the challenge to heteronormativity is what Butler (2004) calls “distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate that conditions of life itself” (p. 8). Thus, in recognizing heteronormativity in the workplace on a continuum I illustrate the complexity of the ever-changing (and intersecting) nature of heteronormativity in the workplace. In essence, the unsettled nature of the discourse can fall in multiple places between inclusive to exclusive and this underscores how heteronormativity permeates individual’s experiences of co-cultural organizational socialization.
Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed how the heteronormative discourses of exposure, exploitation, exclusion, ignorance, embracement, and elevation enable and/or constrain the lived experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Six poignant cases were extracted to highlight the memorable moments that these individuals encountered in the heteronormative workplace. These narratives not only contributed in a meaningful way to understanding the heteronormative discourse, but also further complicated the way heteronormativity functions to include as well as exclude. Ultimately, the narratives in this chapter contributed to examining the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in co-cultural organizational socialization and the ways heteronormativity enables and/or constrains marginalized individuals in the workplace.
CHAPTER EIGHT: POETIC SENSIBILITIES

Chapter Overview

The third and final research question (RQ3) that I will explore in this dissertation examines how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian (re)present their marginalization. Contrary to my expectations, the participants often talked about being “lucky” or “fortunate” in their organizations. And after further analysis, the ubiquitous theme of privilege emerged in the data. Being that privilege is not something we typically consider in relation to marginalization, I sought to represent these counter narratives using poetic sensibilities and focused on the point at which privilege and marginalization intersected with and influenced one another.

Voices and experiences may be partially or totally silenced with an academic gaze through other means of representation (Bhattacharya, 2008). Thus, Leggo (2008) argued the intersection of poetry and social science research offers an avenue for challenging the dominant discourses. As a result, this chapter was constructed to provide a new representation of the findings and to challenge the data presented in previous chapters (see Ellingson, 2011, Faulkner, 2006).

In many ways, poetic interpretations are a way to enter into the world of the storyteller by preserving their words and capturing the spirit to portray the variations in meanings (Carr, 2003; Madison, 1994). As a result, I applied my creative mindfulness by selecting, interpreting, and representing twelve individuals’ experiences in poetic form (Faulkner, 2007). All of the words presented are the exact words of my participants that have been cut and shaped into poetic stanzas. For instance, each indentation is a continuation of a single participant’s words, but when the line breaks back to the initial
indentation, a new voice is represented. As a result, some of the stanzas are marked by one individual and other stanzas are marked by two or three individuals’ words. As Faulkner (2007) shared, poems teach us to (re)imagine something familiar in new ways, and through these poems, I (re)envision how some individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience the intersections of marginalization and privilege in the heteronormative workplace.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion about the contributions of understanding the intersection of privilege and marginalization. Then I move back and forth between relevant literature, poetry, and discussion to fully address the intricate nature of (re)presenting privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the pervasive heteronormativity in the workplace. To close, I pose several questions that problematize the poetics of privilege and will present my own poetic rendering to become more aware of my own privilege (Krizek, 2013).

Intersectionality of Marginalization and Privilege

The poetic renderings that will be shared below highlight the intersections of marginalization and privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. According to McIntosh (1989) “when entitlements are limited to certain groups, it becomes a form of privilege; these are defined as unearned advantages” (McIntosh, 1989). In essence, when individuals gain some advantage based on their sex, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation/identity that they did not have to earn, this is a form of privilege. Taking my own intersectionality for example, it is not something I, as a white man, see as having been granted upon me, but something that is simply part of me (Wildman, 1996). However, as a white gay male, the intersectionality among these identities begin to
complicate my privilege. Hence, in this section, I will first speak to the intersecting and provisional nature of privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, then examine the taken for granted implications of privilege in the heteronormative workplace, and finally discuss how the intersections of marginalization and privilege collide during co-cultural organizational socialization.

A broader definition of intersectionality refers “to the multidimensionality and complexity of the human experience and describes the places where multiple identities come together and intersect” (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009, p. 42). Accordingly, some individuals, like myself, who identify as gay or lesbian may recognize that although they are marginalized, they also experience privilege in the workplace. My identity as a white gay male recognizes the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and gender. My privileged status as a white male affords me some unearned advantages in the workplace. For instance, I do not worry about being judged or stereotyped based on my race. Additionally, my marginalized status as gay may also reflect privilege because I work in an accepting and inclusive workplace within the ivory towers of the academy. As such, the intersectionality of my gender and race afford me privileges that an African American female who identifies as a lesbian may not experience. Hence, it is important that these intersections do not go unnoticed, as it is when they are magnified that scholars are able to recognize the varied experiences. The poems in this chapter begin to illustrate these intersections as the individuals who identify as gay or lesbian often unconsciously recognize that their marginalization is marked by privilege.

Additionally, privilege is experienced in a unique way by individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. As often when they experience privilege it manifests as being fortunate
when compared to the prevailing heteronormative discourses of being marked as less than. As such, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and who experience privilege are not oblivious to the fact that they are one of the lucky ones. For example, as one participant will share below, “I really had it pretty easy compared to other stories.” Still, many of the individuals who identify as gay or lesbian alluded to the provisional or temporary nature of this privilege, which is unlike that of white privilege. In that, these individuals recognize that their fortune and luck may be conditional depending on the work environment. This is essential to acknowledge when understanding privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as it represents the varying degrees to which these individuals are socialized into the heteronormative workplace. In essence, it is as if they may always have one foot in and fit in with the workplace and one foot out where they experience not belonging or fitting into the workplace.

Second, it is important to briefly note that privilege is often taken for granted. When individuals who identify as gay or lesbian do not experience overt marginalization in the workplace, or if they have been comfortable in an organization for a long time, they can experience something quite similar to white privilege. Their identity “simply [becomes] part of the landscape, part of the fabric of [their] life” (Crisp, 2014, p. 107), and as a result, they become oblivious to their privilege. This is in large part due to the pervasiveness of the heteronormativity in the workplace. The discourses that were elaborated on in the previous chapters highlight the control and power of heteronormativity. And essentially how that control is sometimes hidden or disguised under good intentions however the dominant heteronormative discourse still maintains the power in the heteronormative workplace. All in all, it is important to understand the
moments when individuals who identify as gay or lesbian become embedded in the heteronormative discourse as it highlights the intersection of marginalization and privilege that is enacted through co-cultural organizational socialization.

Finally, the intersections between privilege and marginalization collide during co-cultural organizational socialization. Not only are individuals who identify as gay or lesbian under the guise of the pervasive heteronormativity in the workplace, but these intersections pervade their understanding of the workplace. Take for example, the individual who said, “I really haven’t had any negatives, knock on wood.” This individual may be experiencing organizational acknowledgement or relational acceptance, however the relational stereotypes or personal adversity is harnessing their ability to integrate, and highlights the provisional nature of their privilege. Additionally, as individuals who identify as gay or lesbian personally, organizationally, and relationally navigate and experience co-cultural organizational socialization they may also recognize the overlapping and competing identities that influence their experience in the workplace. Ultimately, co-cultural organizational socialization does not just apply to individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, hence these intersections (beyond sexuality) further entrench these individuals intersectionality between marginalization and privilege. Finally, the individual who said, “I don’t think about it” experiences the organizational policies and politics much differently because he takes his privilege for granted. However, it is in these moments of reflection that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian recognize their competing and/or contrasting intersections that influence their co-cultural organizational socialization. On the whole, co-cultural organizational socialization provides a means for highlighting not only the pervasive nature of heteronormativity in
the workplace, but magnifying the intersections that collide to (re)present marginalization in the heteronormative workplace. In the next section, I move back and forth between poetry and discussion to fully illustrate the intricate nature of (re)presenting privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Privilege(d)

Marginalization silences individuals who identify as gay or lesbian and often denies them an opportunity to fully integrate into society or in this case the workplace (Sisneros et al., 2008). As is presented in the stanza below one of my participants reflected on her two lives:

*It's exciting to be in your twenties
and gay at this point in time.*

*It's like, in my twenties
I had two lives.*

*They were both great, but...
I wonder what my life
would have been like
if it started now.*

These two lives, or the dual life, that individuals experienced was clearly marked by marginalization in the workplace. In order to thrive in the workplace, gay and lesbian individuals had to separate their work life from their personal life. Yet, where marginalization silences differed, privilege offered unearned entitlements.

*I haven’t had to do
much juggling*
with how I present myself.

I feel fortunate about that.

I kind of landed

on my two feet,

compared to others

and a lot of other stories.

As I know that not everyone

has my experience.

I wish more people could say

“P.S., I’m gay.”

Each of these stanzas represents the sense of privilege that my participants experienced feeling in the workplace. As they remarked, to some extent the provisional thought they would have to negotiate and “juggle” their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. However, upon reflection they expressed feeling fortunate for their unearned circumstances because that was not consistent with the grand narrative. In recognizing the ways in which they were privileged, they become more aware of that privilege.

I'm sure there are horror stories

So, I just feel that in my career

I've been very fortunate,

and very blessed.

I've had an easy go of it.

But if I look back on it and

I often ask myself
why my journey has been so easy.

And I realize that

I’m completely

fortunate

and lucky.

These individuals were not oblivious to their privilege. In fact, it is as if the intersections between privilege and marginalization collided through awareness in these passages. Whether it was questioning the horror stories or why they had it so easy, these individuals were made aware of how their marginalization had been taken for granted by privilege. In fact, for many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian their privileged status was often brought to their attention by other individuals.

“Gosh, you’re so lucky
to be able to work for a
company like that.”

I think those are rewards,

the acknowledgement that

I receive from other people.

They know how they treat me

I think that’s a reward.

In this stanza one of the participants speaks to the how others recognize his privilege in the workplace. In a sense, realization comes when an outsider points out another’s privilege. This poem ultimately is another example of how privilege is often taken for
granted and may not be recognized until one becomes more aware of the colliding intersections.

Essentially individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are not only mitigated by their marginalization, but also by their privilege. Or in Crisp’s (2014) words, “our privilege may be mitigated or reduced by an oppressed identity and conversely, our oppression may be mitigated or reduced by our privilege” (p. 109). This perspective is reflected in the stanzas below:

*I haven’t had any issues.
*I really haven’t had
*any negatives
*knock on wood.

*I really had it pretty easy
*compared to other stories
*I mean, every day somebody
*is being fired.

They speak to the complicated nature of privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. In fact, they reflect the ways that marginalization obscures privilege and privilege obscures marginalization. Additionally, the poems reflect the provisional nature of privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Others spoke to the fact that the workplace was shifting and there was a need for moments of reflection:

*I take it for
*granted now,
*it’s like...
I don’t think about it.

I've never felt threatened.

I've never felt that there was a cost.

There’s just so many people that are gay,

you can't really.

In a reflective moment, these participants realized through the interview process that they had started to take their privilege for granted. The fact that they don’t think about it in the workplace or more so the lack of acknowledgment of others experiences magnifies the importance of awareness of these intersections. In sum, the poetic interpretations in this chapter provided a clear depiction of the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience the intersection of marginalization and privilege in the workplace.

Johnson (2006) argued that scholars need to move from the dichotomous thinking that people are either privileged or marginalized; as the reality is that most of us are both. As one participant shared, “I’ve had an easy go of it, but if I look back on it I often ask myself why my journey has been so easy.” The fact that this individual has had an “easy go of it” is marked by privilege, but asking “why” is marked by marginalization. Recognizing the intersectionality of privilege and marginalization helps scholars move beyond the dichotomy of identities because the reality is most individuals are both. Ultimately, I argue that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian must become aware of their privilege as they have an opportunity to use it to address the marginalization, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace (Crisp, 2014).
To close, of all of the poetic stanzas noted above, one excerpt stood out above the others: “And I realize that I’m completely fortunate and lucky.” As I heard this passage, I found myself asking: What are the implications of feeling “lucky” in the workplace? As if your work experiences were just encountered by chance, can individuals who identify as gay or lesbian ever fully integrate into an organization? Or is the provisional nature of privilege being dominated by the heteronormative discourse? Or maybe most importantly, how do we become more aware of our own privilege? All of these questions emerge by (re)presenting privilege poetically, and I also believe they bring the three chapters of analysis back together to highlight the unique and complex experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Accordingly, I (re)frame my own italicized reflections drawn from sections throughout this dissertation to (re)present the intersections of my privilege (noted on the left) and my marginalization (noted on the right) in the workplace. They can be read separately or together, but fundamentally they collide to highlight the multiple overlapping layers of my sexual orientation/identity.

*Raise your hand*

*Some people cringe.*

*I know you’ll understand*

*Some people don’t do anything at all.*

*I know I can trust you*

*I still get butterflies*

*I have been blessed*

*Like a penny that gets left behind on the sidewalk*
It was important for me to start “out”

I ignored it and passed

with support

Chapter Summary

On the whole, this chapter (re)presents partially or totally silenced voices and counter narratives that may have been missed in the other chapters of this dissertation. I choose to magnify the poetics of privilege that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience in the workplace. These poetic interpretations not only contributed to understanding the reflective and provisional nature of privilege, but they also further complicated the intersectionality of privilege and marginalization for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. In sum, I argue that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian must become aware of their privilege as they have an opportunity to use it to address the marginalization, discrimination, and harassment of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace (Crisp, 2014).
CHAPTER NINE: CRYSTALIZED THOUGHTS

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I begin by summarizing crystallization drawing on the three distinct data presentations: thematic analysis, narrative cases, and poetic interpretations. Next, I provide some practical implications for human resource and business professionals, as well as individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Following that I explain four limitations in the current study that deserve attention. Then, I explore four distinct opportunities for future research utilizing the current dissertation as a foundation. Finally, I conclude the dissertation and provide an epilogue to reflect on my experience and bring closure to the dissertation.

Crystallization

I began this dissertation wanting to use crystallization to represent the data in three different ways, because ultimately, “the use of different modes of writing calls attention to the constructed nature of all writing” (Ellingson, 2004, p. 168). And, crystallization truly serves “to widen our methodological and epistemological horizons, enriching understanding of the breadth and depth of qualitative methodology” for all readers (Ellingson, 2009, p. 4). Thus, I embraced a crystallized view of my data and offered three unique reflections on the experiences of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Each method and representation revealed different findings. Moreover, this methodology afforded me the opportunity to weave my own stories throughout.

Perhaps most importantly, though, crystallization as a method provided space to “reflect externalities and refract within themselves” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). In other
words, as I moved back and forth between the thematic analysis chapter, the narrative chapter, and poetic chapter I started to see how each approach was inspired and shaped by each other. Thus, each chapter inspired different ways of knowing, understanding, and appreciating individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Following Ellingson (2005), I started to consider how “to put the modes of thinking and writing into a conversation with one another.” (p. 167). The narrative case presentation and poetic interpretations were informed by my constant comparative thematic analysis. In fact, many of the themes that are present in the latter chapters emerged when developing initial codes in the former chapter, and without this process, I do not believe the same data would be represented in this dissertation. For instance, the narrative cases emerged by noting powerful moments in thematic analysis process. Whenever I heard powerful and poignant stories that provided a varied or unique experience in the workplace, I flagged the story. Although I did not know these stories would represent the heteronormative discourse in the workplace, I knew these narratives would help address one of the research questions of this dissertation. Moreover, the poetics of privilege materialized as something intriguing by during the thematic analysis. Privilege did not fit well within the predominant focused codes in response to RQ1. Yet, the excerpts provided a critical examination of the data. Accordingly, the poetic interpretation chapter afforded me the opportunity to illuminate the voices and experiences that were silenced by an academic gaze (Bhattacharya, 2008).

On the whole, “the challenge is to make each piece speak on its own and in harmony (and/or counter harmony) with its neighboring representations” (Ellingson, 2011, p. 111). Hence, my goal in the thematic analysis chapter was to step back from the
data and look at from above to understand the ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigated and experienced the workplace. I wanted to understand the experiences by looking across my participants’ stories to recognize and highlight the unique intricacies of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Whereas, my goal for the narrative chapter and poetic chapter was for my readers to be able step into the story of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. My focus in the narrative chapter was to unveil particular stories that help the reader empathize with the participants. And my goal with the poetic interpretations chapter was to distill the participants’ words which magnified the counter-narratives of these individuals’ experiences. These varied methods and representations of analysis were shaped and inspired by one another and hopefully contributed in meaningful ways to conversations about gay and lesbian individuals in the heteronormative workplace. Next, I discuss the practical implications of these varied representations of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Practical Implications

There are two main practical implications of this dissertation: (1) organizations should elevate the visibility of their LGBTQ acceptance efforts; and (2) individuals who identify as gay or lesbian need to recognize the power of sharing their story. First, it is important for human resource directors and diversity managers to recognize that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian navigate and experience the workplace not only organizationally but also personally and relationally. This dissertation provides ample support for the varied ways in which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian anticipate, participate, and join the workplace in unique ways that are magnified by their
sexual orientation/identity. In essence, these individuals have a heightened awareness of their sexual orientation and organizational members who are attempting to create a more equitable work environment need to be aware of this in many aspects of the workplace. Ultimately, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian may continue to experience exclusion in the workplace if their varied and unique experiences remains unnoticed.

In particular, many of my participants talked about the lack of resources available as they anticipate entering the workplace regarding LGBTQ issues/questions. I advocate that organizations need to make space on their websites and in human resource materials to discuss diversity issues and concerns regarding sexual orientation/identity. For instance, these materials might cover the availability of same-sex benefits (still keeping in mind that offering same-sex benefits is not sufficient to fully address the LGBTQ community). The availability of this information is a starting point; however, just because an organization provides same-sex benefits, is not always indicative of an accepting and affirming culture. As a result, I suggest organizations employ a human resource representative who is comfortable discussing LGBTQ issues with potential employees. This representative can be the point person to talk with individuals should they raise specific LGBTQ related questions. Following this suggestion, it is important for organizations to provide spaces for current employees’ stories and testimonials to be told on the website and in diversity/marketing materials. Many organizations have accomplished this through an “It Gets Better” Campaign video. No matter how these stories are disseminated, it is important that organizations elevate the visibility of LGBTQ acceptance efforts as it begins to paint a picture of the organizational culture on
the inside beyond merely stating sexual orientation/identity in the diversity mission statement as so many organizations do.

An additional aspect of elevating the visibility of LGBTQ acceptance efforts comes from within organizations during the *encounter* phase. I would recommend that organizations provide and/or support LGBTQ communities or groups within or outside of the organization. For instance, some organizations offer employee resource or affinity groups devoted to LGBTQ individuals in the organization. It is important for these communities or groups to be available because it creates awareness and a culture of acceptance within the organization. Additionally, non-marginalized organizational members can participate in these groups to help raise awareness of the issues and concerns facing individuals who identify as LGBTQ in their respective organizations. For instance, many organizations have policies in place regarding sexual orientation/identity discrimination. Although these policies are important to elevating the visibility of the LGBTQ acceptance efforts, there need to be places in which these policies can be talked about, and perhaps critiqued, to stay current with cultural changes. Essentially, these policies outline the organizational values, and they need to not only be looked at by organizational leaders, but understood by organizational, specifically LGBTQ, members. Ultimately, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace may have questions, and this is why it is essential that organizational leaders are a part of these employee resources groups so they can answer questions, or find the answers to questions. Some potential questions LGBTQ members may have include: What does one do when they have a sexual orientation/identity discrimination claim, how serious will they be taken by the organization, what counts and what doesn’t count as sexual
orientation/identity discrimination? Often times, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian view the policies as obscure, but when they are able to ask questions and have someone willing to address potential frustrations it creates a much more equitable and accepting workplace. This brings me to my final point regarding elevating the visibility of LGBTQ acceptance efforts within the organization: the importance of LGBTQ allies and advocates. The reality is that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian need straight allies in order to create an accepting and affirming work environment. It will be through this increased and growing support that organizations will be able to successfully embrace their LGBTQ visibility.

Second, I believe there are practical implications on an individual level. This dissertation showcases the varied and unique stories that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience in the workplace. Although some are heart-breaking, others are heart-warming, and it is essential to continue sharing these stories. One of the practical goals of this dissertation was to show how sharing stories can enhance the acknowledgement of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Hence, I encourage individuals who identify as gay or lesbian to share their stories, as they are able, with others in or outside of the workplace, on a blog, in a letter, during an employee resource group meeting, or emerging awareness through communicative action through whatever media they feel most comfortable.

Ultimately, I argue stories have the ability to shed light on issues that might inspire others to share their stories with their companies or colleagues. The more aware that individuals are about their potential LGBTQ colleagues will create a more accepting and affirming organizational culture for LGBTQ individuals in the workplace. I believe
in the power of stories and argue that the more attention these LGBTQ stories get could potentially influence, change, or transform not only others’ thoughts in the workplace, but current organizational, local, and federal protections. Take for example, the stories presented in this dissertation I hope they begin to change individuals’ perspectives and/or empower someone that was “closeted” in the workplace to share his or her story. But beyond all of that I believe it is important for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian to share their stories in the workplace as it begins to foster change in their colleagues from the inside out (see Raeburn. 2004). I recognize that not everyone will be able to share their story in the workplace however this is what I believe is ideal to strive toward fostering acceptance for LGBTQ in the workplace. Overall, I argue the practical implications of this research provide opportunities for organizations and individuals to learn from this research and to continue creating space for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. In what follows I will discuss the limitations in this study that should be addressed in future research that explores individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Limitations

Overall this dissertation was successful in providing an understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the heteronormative workplace. However, as with any study there are limitations that deserve attention.

First, most of the individuals I spoke to were out in the workplace. Although I attempted to gain a broad representation of lived experiences, reaching individuals who were not “out” in the workplace proved to be difficult. Often times, individuals who are not out at work are fearful of losing their jobs, and thus, they are much less likely to share
their story in an interview. In fact one of my participants had a colleague who was only “out” to her, and she encouraged me to contact her colleague to gain a different perspective. However, after the participant shared my contact information with the colleague and encouraged her to reach out, the colleague refused for fear that it would impact her employment just six months prior to her retirement. Plainly, the stories of those who are not currently “out” at work are much more difficult to access and would add insightfully to the richness of understanding individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. As a result, many of the difficult experiences that my participants discussed were based on previous work experiences.

The second limitation in this study addresses the generational gap of the participants. My middle-aged participants (40 years old and up) in many cases lived a dual life. This was most notable in Lisa’s interview, the 55-year-old, retail vice president, who trained to be a state trooper. She explained that after her experience with the state troopers, she made a conscious decision not to live a dual life. In contrast to Lisa, my younger participants that were in their twenties grew up during a shifting political and societal movement for gay and lesbian individuals. As a result, unlike Lisa who accepted her sexual orientation/identity later in life, my younger participants often came to terms with their sexual orientation/identity well before entering the workplace. In many cases they considered what it would be like to be out at work; whereas Lisa did not consider that until after she had entered the workforce. In fact, many of my younger participants felt like they did not have a story to tell because they had not had negative experiences in the workplace.
Overall, my participants navigated different personal, political, and societal circumstances. For example, many of the middle-aged participants were born in a different era, and at one point in their lives were in a heterosexual marriage. As a result, they often came out at different and later stages in their careers. Whereas, participants in their twenties and thirties identified as gay or lesbian in high school or college and consciously navigated their sexual orientation/identity in the workplace upon entry. Moreover, the generational gap across the participants is expansive. Some individuals experienced the Stonewall Rebellion and the 1980’s AIDS/HIV epidemic and others were born into the generation where Marriage Equality and Proposition 8 were part of the societal conversation. Ultimately, these consequential personal and socio-political differences were not fully realized in this dissertation.

The third limitation of this dissertation is also perhaps its greatest strength. In preparing this dissertation, I deliberately chose to study gay and lesbian white-collar workers in professional and managerial roles. There are a few limitations in this decision that I want to identify. To begin, white-collar workers are typically privileged individuals in the workplace. They make above average salaries and reside in well-populated areas around the country. Accordingly, many of my participants had healthy full-time careers and were not concerned about finances. Differing degrees of financial (in)security could have greatly affected the findings of this study. For example, if an individual had a less stable career, whether that be temporary or part-time, s/he may be more cautious about coming “out” in the workplace for fear of losing his/her position. Other scholars have studied the unique attributes of blue-collar workers (Lucas, 2011; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Gibson & Papa, 2000) and pink-collar workers (Meisenbach, Remke, Buzzanell,
Liu, 2008). Essentially, these studies claim that the ways in which the media portrays white collar work have largely unattainable ideals for the vast majority of Americans (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Hence, these unattainable ideals shaped and limited the findings in this study.

On that note, it is important to recognize that there may be elements that are unique to certain career paths and to acknowledge that there are varying degrees of power based on one’s position. The participants in this study worked in several different organizations, at different levels within the organization, and at different types of organizations. For example, unlike most of the study participants, Jesse, Lisa, and Taylor all held vice president roles in their respective organizations. Positions like these come with a degree of power and authority not afforded to those in lower ranks. Although these vast experiences provide varied representations this is a challenge to transfer the findings from this dissertation to respective studies that explore individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

Lastly, I choose to study only gay men and lesbian women in the workplace. Typically, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) individuals are all included in employee resource or affinity groups. This dissertation, then, does not account for the breadth of experience across the LGBTQ community. While the bisexual or transgender experience has some commonalities with individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, I believe that their experiences can markedly vary, and I did not want to misrepresent or underrepresent a queer population within this dissertation. One of my goals was to showcase the findings of both as gay or lesbian individuals; however, in that I silenced voices of the LGBTQ community that may provide insightful depictions of the
heteronormative workplace. In the next section of the dissertation, I offer several future research directions that arose based on the findings of this study.

Future Directions

The findings of this study provide us with a better understanding of how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian experience the workplace. Still, there is much work to be done. Below I outline four areas of potential research that could contribute in meaningful ways to the discipline.

First, future research should parse out the similarities and differences across LGBTQ individuals in the workplace. As previously stated, these individuals are often lumped into one group; however, they all experience and navigate the workplace in different ways. These intricacies could be better understood through co-cultural organizational socialization. For example, in this dissertation several lesbian women talked about passing in the workplace, yet when I looked for instances of gay men, none existed. Essentially, what needs to be examined is the various communicative strategies that lesbian women use compared to gay men and how that is influenced by past experiences or work expectations inferred during co-cultural organizational socialization. Is it because lesbian women are “allowed” to pass whereas gay men are more scrutinized for their sexual orientation/identity, or do they have more abilities to pass in the workplace. On this note, parsing out these differences would further detail the performance of self and body in the workplace that undergirds the intersectionality of LGBTQ individuals (see Rumens & Broomfield, 2014).

In a similar vein, individuals who identify as bisexual have a fluctuating experience in the workplace as they move from insider/normal to outsider.” Eliza, a 29-
year-old managing editor, talked with me about when she entered her current organization she identified as bisexual; however, she now identifies as a lesbian. She explained to me that it was easier for her to come out in the workplace as bisexual because it was not as far from the norm. Thus, bisexuality would be a unique case for the application of co-cultural organizational socialization. Bisexuality complicates the framework of (in)visibility and moves away from understanding sexual orientation/identity as a dichotomous framework that is either black or white. Additionally, although bisexuality is often viewed as more accepted by the heterosexual community, many individuals who identify as gay or lesbian reject it as a valid sexual orientation/identity. Hence, bisexuals’ co-cultural organizational socialization is increasingly marked by the combating and contesting dichotomy of their sexual orientation/identity and would be a rich case for future study.

Finally, individuals who identify as transgender often experience a transition while they are in the workplace. Kai, a 28-year-old human resources executive, shared one of the ways his company has worked to make the transition easier for individuals who identify as transgender. He said, “They [my company] would actually provide a role in another location if that is what the individual desired, so that way the person could establish themselves as the gender that they were potentially adopting.” Individuals who identify as transgender move through a process of navigating their physical differences in the workplace to adopting their gender which magnifies unique intricacies in the co-cultural layer. They often have to (re)integrate or transition not only the performance of body but also learn new way of being (a gendered) professional.
Building on these examples, future research needs to explore the differences between LGBTQ individuals in the workplace. As these individuals are not always recognized as different in the workplace, but the differences between them may have significant implications for the ways in which they experience the workplace. Whether it is the intersectionality that undergirds the performance of self and body, the combating and contesting dichotomy of sexual orientation/identity, or the physical transition to realized gender, each of these complement and extend understandings of the LGBTQ community. Additionally, extending research on these individuals will begin to deepen our understanding of the complexity of co-cultural organizational socialization.

The second area I see for future research is the transferability of these findings to other contexts. Ultimately, there is a need to study co-cultural organizational socialization with other marginalized and underrepresented groups in the workplace. The framework developed in this dissertation recognizes the co-cultural layer of organizational socialization. This adds another dimension that needs to be considered when answering Bullis and Stout’s (2000) call on scholars to consider the challenges of organizational socialization for marginalized individuals in the workplace. Particularly, future research should explore other populations of individuals who have been investigated using CCT (i.e. people of color, women, those from a lower socioeconomic status, disabled, first generation college students). Each of these groups is marked by not being part of dominant society and may face unique challenges when entering the workplace as they experience varied levels of organizational socialization, or as I argue co-cultural organizational socialization. On the whole, it is important that co-cultural organizational socialization be transferred to other contexts to expand this conceptualization and to
further utilize the framework to provide diverse representation of marginalized and underrepresented individuals within the organizational context.

Third, future studies should further explore what Jablin (2001) terms as individualization or when an individual attempts to change or personalize the organization to meet his or her needs. Kramer (2010) argued that socialization and individualization are in a constant tension with each other. Co-cultural organizational socialization has the potential to extend this conversation. Several of my participants personalized their workplaces and addressed concerns in policies that were not inclusive of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Scholars need to take one step further and understand how organizations are socializing the workplace to better suit individuals who identify as gay or lesbian. Moreover, future research can also explore the ways in which these individuals are able to personalize their work spaces.

Studies on socialization and individualization would dovetail nicely with the preferred communication methods advanced by CCT. Being that the current research on CCT frames co-cultural groups as integrating into the dominant society (socialized) by accommodating, assimilating, or separating, I argue scholars need to critique this structure to further understand how marginalized groups complement the dominant discourse in the workplace (individualized). In essence, future research could explore how people individualize the workplace to meet his or her needs.

Finally, the fourth opportunity I see for future research is coupling these findings with other theoretical frameworks like organizational identification or intergroup contact theory. Organizational identification is typically described as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in
individuals likely identify more strongly with an organization when they experience similarities between the organizational identity and their own personal identity and when they feel acknowledged or valued as a member (Scott, Corman and Cheney, 1998). Combining co-cultural organizational socialization with organizational identification could contribute in other meaningful ways to understanding how identification functions to include as well as exclude. Additionally, it could help elucidate understanding how similarities between organizational and personal identity, or lack thereof, surrounding sexual orientation/identity influence organizational identification. Ultimately, it would be intriguing to explore similarities that extend beyond the workplace, like marriage equality influence organizational identification.

Additionally, intergroup contact theory is another framework that would extend our understanding of co-cultural organizational socialization. Allport (1954) explained intergroup contact theory as an important way to reduce prejudice or discrimination between a majority and minority group. In essence, when dominant groups encounter individuals who identify as gay or lesbian their discrimination or prejudice towards that group is likely to decrease. There were glimpses of this throughout my findings. For instance, Jason, a 30-year-old retail manager, shared:

I have one co-worker, a heterosexual. He has a young daughter. He admitted to me that he is a little homophobic, but he's getting to know another co-worker that is gay, and because of that he's opened up more to it and felt less threatened by the presence of one in the workplace. He has started to ask regularly about how
my relationship is going, and although at first I was caught off-guard, he has made me feel more welcomed and comfortable in our organization.

In this excerpt Jason’s colleague who admitted to being homophobic begins to highlight the importance of researching how if at all perceptions towards individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are influenced in the workplace. On the whole, both organizational identification and intergroup contact theory are areas for future research that would extend our understanding of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace.

In sum, there are four areas for potential research that could contribute in meaningful ways to the discipline. First, research should parse out the similarities and difference in the LGBTQ community to magnify the dichotomy of heteronormativity. Second, it would be beneficial to transfer the findings of co-cultural organizational socialization to other contexts to represent other marginalized and underrepresented individuals’ experiences. Third, future research needs to recognize the ways in which individuals whom identify as gay or lesbian complement the dominant structure through individualization and personalization. And finally, research should explore the ways in which organizational identification and intergroup contact theory can contribute and extend the theoretical contributions and findings of this dissertation.

Conclusion

To conclude, this dissertation contributes in meaningful ways to communication research and theorizing. It offers a way of understanding how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively experience the workplace and provides varied representations of these individuals’ experiences within the workplace. Most fundamentally, it extends prior theorizing to create the framework of co-cultural
organizational socialization which can be utilized to understand other marginalized and underrepresented individuals in the workplace. Moreover, this dissertation was successful in shedding light on the enactment of identity as gay or lesbian by exploring the heteronormative discourse in organizations. And lastly, it poetically (re)presents the intersections of marginalization and privilege for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian in the workplace. Ultimately, I encourage scholars to seek to understand the complexity of marginalized and underrepresented individuals in the workplace, as well as, explore non-marginalized employees that are speaking out to make meaningful changes in the workplace.

To bring this dissertation full circle, I reflect on the moments that entangle my life, my heart, and my passion with my scholarship.
EPILOGUE

When I think about it, I actually started this dissertation many years ago. Unbeknownst to me, my life has always been ingrained in this project because my journey through this dissertation has in part been my journey through coming out in the workplace. As I stated in the beginning, when I started my doctoral program I was not necessarily out in the classroom, but this dissertation has strengthened my mindset about not only the importance of visibility but also the beauty of vulnerability. Those moments when you question whether you should bring your whole self into the workplace. Those moments when you need to stand up and say something to your students. Those moments when you realize that you sexual orientation/identity makes you unique. This is the beauty in vulnerability, and I learned that time and time again through the process of writing this dissertation.

Through the conversations, laughter, and tears with my participants I gained a new understanding of my experience. In fact, I remember the moment when my research came full circle. It was during an interview with Kacey, a 42-year-old corporate scientist who shared:

I don't know that there's anything particularly unique about my story. But when I decided I was going to make the change, I decided that I was going to be out, and I did take that risk, and I think it was well worth it. It really benefited my family as a whole. I have a son who's a sophomore in high school and somebody came up to him the other day. He was sitting outside of school waiting for me to pick him up and somebody came up to him and sat down next to him, someone he didn't even know. And they were like, “so, are you the kid with two moms?” And
he's like, “yeah.” And he's like, “oh, okay.” I mean, I just think that if I was going to instill in him that it was okay to be in a household with two moms, I had to be willing to take that risk [in the workplace] myself. So, I think that's maybe what it is. Lots of gay people have kids, but to me, it was really important to me that he was okay with it. Maybe this is funny. You'll kind of like it. But when I told him how I felt about Deborah, because I told Deborah from the very onset that if he’s not comfortable with this, I can't. He's my number one priority. And I asked him. I said, “This is how I feel about Deborah and how would you feel if she became a member of our family?” And he was like, “Well, one mom has been working real good for me, so two moms is going to be even better.” I think that you have to be able to take a risk in order to see the benefit.

When Kacey shared the above stories I found myself tearing up; in fact a tear fell. But it was the way in which she shared this story, the reflective nature was almost as if she was sharing it for the first time with herself. And it was in this moment that I saw its influence on me...reflected in my hope for my future children. The whole reason I am doing this research is to work towards creating more equitable workplaces and a world less demarcated by sexual orientation/identity. Through her story I saw the master narrative shifting; a story in which difference was normal and normal was different. One in which we need to cherish the people that stand beside us on our journey if they are willing to follow us, we need “to be willing to take that risk ourselves.” And in the end, we have to take a risk to be vulnerable, because ultimately what I learned is beauty is vulnerability.

So in the words of Kacey “I think that’s maybe what it is, ” that is the importance of
sharing our stories and those are the intersections that entangle my life with my scholarship.

And as I write these final words in this dissertation I reflect on my experiences and hesitate to take my fingers off of the keyboard. All of these questions are still circling in my head with every comma, period, and citation, I take a second glance. Did I insert all of the voices? Did I accomplish what I set out to do? But then I am reminded of the words of a great mentor “a lot of things will catch your breath, but only a few will catch your heart.” The voices, excerpts, stories, and lived experiences presented in this dissertation all caught my heart. In fact, it is not just my life that is ingrained in the pages of this dissertation but my heart. In many ways this dissertation will never end as I hope the stories will leave a lasting impression. Although this is the closing sentence, may the voices within these pages never be locked within the confines of my research but be shared to contribute to meaningful conversations.
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## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYMS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

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The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

7

**Project Title:** Communicating “Out” at Work: Exploring Co-Cultural Theory in the Context of Organizational Socialization

**Primary Investigator:** Timothy Paul McKenna

**Co-Investigator(s):**

**Faculty Advisor:** Brittany Peterson

**Department:** Communication Studies

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Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP  
Office of Research Compliance

06/28/13  
Approval Date

06/27/14  
Expiration Date

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT MESSAGES

E-mail

My name is Tim McKenna and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University. As a gay man myself, I've experienced some unique and interesting experiences in the workplace and it made me wonder how others navigate the workplace and figure out whether or not it is okay to be out in the workplace. As such I am working on a study for my doctoral dissertation that seeks to explore how individuals who identify as gay or lesbian communicatively navigate/negotiate/manage the workplace. I am interested in hearing your stories and experiences in the workplace.

In order to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:
(1) Identify as gay or lesbian individual living in the United States
(2) Currently, or within the last five years, employed in a full-time professional or managerial position
(3) Be available to conduct a 30-60 minute interview (via phone or Skype) before November 1st.

If you know any possible participants who identify as gay or lesbian and are employed full-time that are interested in being interviewed please send an e-mail to me at timothy.p.mckenna.1@ohio.edu and I can arrange a time to speak with them and arrange for an interview face-to-face, via Skype, or phone. Thank you in advance for your time and participation and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Social Media Posting

Hi, my name is Tim McKenna and I am working on my dissertation which explores gay and lesbian experiences in the workplace. I am currently looking for people who identify as gay or lesbian and are employed full-time in a professional or managerial position. If you, or someone you know, may be interested in being interviewed please send an e-mail to me at timothy.p.mckenna.1@ohio.edu (or message me) and I can arrange a time to speak you. Thanks in advance for your time and participation.
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Information
1. How old are you?
2. Please share with me your work history.
3. Who do you currently work for, and how did you get to where you are today?
4. How many years have you worked for your current employer?
5. What state are you currently working/living in?

General Work
6. Growing up what did you think work was going to be like?
   a. Was it what you expected it to be?
   b. Tell me about a time when it was what you expected.
   c. Tell me about a time when it was not what you expected.
   d. What did you parents do, and how did that influence your work decisions?
   e. Did you ever wonder what it would be like to be “out” at work?
7. How would you describe your organization as LGBTQ friendly?
   a. How does your organization acknowledge the LGBTQ employees?
   b. What does acknowledgement of LGBTQ look life?
   c. Do feel like you are acknowledged as an LGBTQ employee?

Socialization
8. What do you remember about your first day at work?
9. What was your experience like in joining the workforce? Or organization?
   a. Do you think anything was different because you identify as gay or lesbian?
   b. How was your experience similar or different than others experiences?
10. How did you figure out if it was okay, or not, to be “out” in the workplace?
    a. Tell me about a time when you first talked about being gay in the workplace?
    b. How do you think new employees figure this out?
11. Have any of your past experiences influenced your decision to be “out” or not in the workplace?
12. What do you wish you would have known about being “out” at work before you joined the workforce? Or this organization?

13. We work in pretty heteronormative workplace, how do you think this has impacted you as a gay or lesbian individual in the workplace?

“Out” at Work

14. Do you consider yourself “out” at work? If no, why not? If yes, how so?
   a. What does it mean for you to be “out” at work?
   b. Is there a difference between “coming out” at work and “being out” at work?

15. Has there ever been a time when you have felt uncomfortable or guarded?
   a. Have you ever confronted anyone that has said something that offended you?

16. What informed your decision to be “out” or not in the workplace? Was it a decision?
   a. If you did come “out” at work, how did you and to whom?
      i. Did you prepare or practice for these interactions?
      ii. Who did you tell first? Did everyone find out? In what context?
   b. If you did not come “out” at work, is there anyone you work with that knows?

17. How, if at all, do you think you are perceived as an “out” employee?
   a. Have you ever felt excluded from something because of your sexual identity in the workplace? Tell me about that experience.
   b. Have you ever felt like you were treated differently in the workplace compared to your straight colleagues? Tell me a specific experience.

18. What role do you think your sexual identity plays in your work?
   a. Do you ever feel like your negotiate your sexual identity in the workplace?
   b. What role, if any, does the (in)visibility of your sexual identity play at work?

19. When did you have to pay the costs of being out in the workplace?
20. What, if any, rewards or benefits do you see for individuals being “out” at work?
   a. What role, if any, do you think personal life should play in the workplace?
21. Is there someone you confide in when you want advice about LGBTQ issues?
   a. What are the types of things you talk about, or want to talk about?
   b. Is there a place for these conversations at work?
   c. Is there anything you are uncomfortable talking about at work?

Closing Questions

22. What does it mean to you to be professional?
   a. Does this change, at all, because you are out in the workplace? How so?
23. If an “out” individual were considering joining your current organization what advice would you share with them about your journey?
24. What does workplace equality look like in an organization?
25. I developed all of these questions, but I am just trying to guess at what might be unique and interesting about your experience. So is there anything I’ve missed or left out?
### APPENDIX E: DEFINITIONS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition/Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HeightenedAwareness</td>
<td>The increased mindfulness surrounding sexual orientation/identity in the workplace. Marked by caution, (lack of) safety, and (un)comfortability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in)Visibility</td>
<td>The fact that sexual orientation/identity is typically not apparent on the surface level. Marked by passing, hiding, testing the waters, educating, and advocating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversity</td>
<td>The preparedness individuals experience as they are primed for and may (over)compensate in situations where they feel as if they may experience difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>The divide between personal and professional life and the regulation of professionalism in heteronormative life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>The written documents and spoken guidelines which provide a glimpse into the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>The values and attitudes of the organization that are not often readily defined to employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment</td>
<td>The recognition of individuals who identify as gay or lesbian as a diverse and valuable individuals within the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscurity</td>
<td>The state of being unknown, insignificant, or not readily understood or clearly expressed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>The individuals inside or outside of the organization that foster support and guidance for individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>The preconceived notions of sexual orientation/identity that individuals who identify as gay or lesbian combat or discern in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>The act of being included and supported by others in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>The point at which individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are relegated to an unimportance and powerless position</td>
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### APPENDIX F: DEFINITIONS OF HETERONORMATIVE DISCOUSES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example²</th>
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<td>Exposure</td>
<td>Occurs when the heteronormative discourse reveals marginalized individuals’ private information; for instance, it might reveal their previously invisible sexual orientation/identity</td>
<td>When individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are fired on the basis of your sexual orientation/identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploitation</td>
<td>Occurs when the heteronormative discourse manipulates marginalized individuals' experiences and allows the dominant society to mistreat these individuals in the workplace</td>
<td>When individuals who identify as gay or lesbian do not receive the same benefits as their heterosexual colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Occurs when the heteronormative discourse diminishes marginalized individuals' voices in a way that expressly denies the value of their experiences in the workplace</td>
<td>When individuals who identify as gay or lesbian spouses/partners are not invited to a company event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Occurs when the people ingrained in the heteronormative discourse are unaware and/or unwilling to learn the varied experiences of marginalized individuals in the workplace</td>
<td>When individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are allowed to create an alliance within the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embracement</td>
<td>Occurs when the heteronormative discourse creates space for marginalized individuals where they are accepted and acknowledged</td>
<td>The creation of an employee resource or affinity groups for individuals who identify as gay or lesbian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevation</td>
<td>Occurs when marginalized individuals are deliberately promoted and nurtured by people that embrace the heteronormative discourse</td>
<td>When someone who identifies as gay or lesbian is promoted as “the” LGBTQ example of diversity in the workplace.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

² These examples are based off of the dissertation findings surrounding individuals who identify as gay or lesbian, however it is my hope that this frameworks can be used to understand other marginalized and underrepresented individuals in the heteronormative workplace.
APPENDIX G: VITA

Timothy Paul McKenna was born in Chino, California and grew up in the suburban mecca of Parker, Colorado. He graduated from Chaparral High School in Parker, Colorado in 2004. And went on to Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska and graduated magna cum laude with high honors in major in May 2008 with a Bachelor of Science in Speech Communication with an emphasis in Organizational Leadership and Public Relations and a minor in Advertising. Upon graduating from WSC Tim continued his studies at Illinois State University and earned his Master of Science in Communication Studies in August 2010. Not long after receiving his diploma Tim moved to Athens, Ohio so he could begin his studies at Ohio University. In May 2013, Tim was married to Joshua Michael Buchanan and hyphenated his name to McKenna-Buchanan to reflect the marriage. Tim has accepted a position as an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Manchester University in North Manchester, Indiana and will begin his career there in the Fall of 2014. His life goal is to continue providing spaces for marginalized and underrepresented individuals to share their stories in hopes that these stories start conversations that move change forward.

Institution Address: 604 E. College Ave., North Manchester, IN 46962

This manuscript was typed by the author.