This research investigates the experiences of female allies of gay men and lesbians. A naturalistic and grounded theory paradigm is employed in this qualitative study. The participants are five female allies of gay men and lesbians from the Southeastern region of the United States.

The participants share their experiences as allies of gay men and lesbians during two in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interview questions developed by the researcher provide the format for the interviews. Interviews are tape recorded and transcribed. Concepts and themes emerge from initial interviews, which then guide the second set of interviews. Data is coded according to the themes that emerge. Findings reveal the following themes: (1) Way of Being; (2) Awareness; (3) Commitment; and (4) Integration. This study has implications for female allies of gay men and lesbians, and further implications for prejudice reduction and social justice.
Doctor of Philosophy dissertation of Mary Frances Arnold presented on April 13, 2000

APPROVED:

Signature redacted for privacy.  
Major Professor, representing Counseling

Signature redacted for privacy.  
Director of School of Education

Signature redacted for privacy.  
Dean of Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Signature redacted for privacy.  
Mary Frances Arnold, Author
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the women who participated in this study. Their willingness to freely share their experiences with me is an honor for which I will always be grateful. I feel richer for knowing each of them.

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My entire education would not have been possible without the love and support of my mother. Thank you, mom. I could not have done this without you.

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Examining the Experiences of Female Allies of Gay Men and Lesbians

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Framing the Study

Despite challenges and evidence to the contrary, the tradition of pathologizing homosexuality persists (Herek, 1995; Norton, 1995). Over forty years ago, Hooker (1957) demonstrated through empirical research that homosexuality is not a pathological behavior requiring treatment or cure. Further studies corroborated Hooker's findings which led to the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1973 and 1975 respectively (Fassinger, 1991). In 1986, the term "ego-dystonic homosexuality" was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association. Despite tremendous strides forward, homophobia (the fear, hatred, and intolerance of people perceived to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual), heterosexism (the belief that heterosexuality is or should be the only acceptable sexual orientation), and pathologizing of gay, lesbian, and bisexual populations continues (Blumenfeld, 1992; Garnets & D’Augelli, 1994; Greene, 1994; House & Miller, 1997; Obear, 1991). Consequently, it remains true that all Americans are raised with some level of homophobia and heterosexism (Hunt, 1993).
In the shadows of deep-rooted fear and resistance, the norm of heterosexuality is being confronted and questioned in American society today (Singer & Deschamps, 1994). Increasingly, individuals are realizing that all Americans, regardless of sexual orientation, are impacted and negatively affected by widespread homophobia (Blumenfeld, 1992). As a result, heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians are increasingly identifying themselves as such by “coming out” as affirmative of sexual minorities. Washington and Evans (1991) define an ally as: “A person who is a member of the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population” (p.195).

Heterosexual individuals who identify themselves as allies of gay men and lesbians play an integral role in challenging the pathologizing of homosexuality (Barret, 1998). Despite this, little is known about allies of gay men and lesbians.

To date, no empirical literature is available specifically addressing the experiences of heterosexual individuals who identify themselves as allies of gay men and lesbians. One closely related article exists. Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) describe a model of ally identity development that is based on their personal experiences as career counselors. Literature pertaining to attitudes toward homosexuality or homosexual individuals provides the next closest link to this inquiry. Such literature can be found over a three decade time span and covers both general public attitudes and attitudes of specific professionals (e.g., counselors, nurses, medical doctors, graduate students). The vast majority of
research regarding attitudes toward homosexuality or homosexual individuals focuses on negative attitudes (Bowman, 1979; Corley & Pollack, 1996; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Ellis & Vasseur, 1993; Ficarrotto, 1990; Haddock & Zanna, 1998; Herek, 1984; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Kite & Whitely, 1996; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Larsen, Cate & Reed, 1983; Levitt & Klassen, 1974; Millham, San Miguel & Kellogg, 1976; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Pratte, 1993; Seltzer, 1992; Simon, 1995; VanderStoep & Green, 1988; Wells & Franken, 1987; Weis & Dain, 1979; Whitley, 1990) with only a few articles addressing positive attitudes (Rudolph, 1989; Stephan & McMullin, 1982; Stevenson, 1988). Through identification of the processes and functions that prejudice may serve, literature pertaining to the nature of prejudice may inform negative viewpoints of homosexuality (Allport, 1954; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink & Elliot, 1991; Herek, 1984; Monteith, Devine & Zuwerink 1993).


While being informative and useful, the literature regarding attitudes toward gay men and lesbians or the concept of homosexuality in general, the nature of prejudice, and social advocates does not address the specific experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians. Although part of being an ally involves having a
positive attitude toward lesbians and gay men, a positive attitude is not the equivalent of being an ally. House and Holloway (1992) note that being gay and lesbian affirmative means valuing homosexuality and heterosexuality as equally normal and natural. Being an ally, however, also involves working to end oppression in one's personal and professional life through support and advocacy (Washington & Evans, 1991). Empirical investigation into the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians is needed.

The Research Question

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of female adult heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians who themselves are not parents of gay male or lesbian individuals. The study investigated the process and impact of being a heterosexual ally of gay men and lesbians. Common themes and patterns were identified which contribute to understanding the experiences of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians. This study contributes information to an emerging theory base and provides additional knowledge and data for further inquiry and applications (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Themes and patterns that emerged from the data may be quantified for future research.

Some areas which were explored in this study include the following: the process of becoming an ally of gay men and lesbians; the process of being an ally of gay men and lesbians; the impact of homophobia and heterosexism on allies;
the role of region of residence, religiosity, gender role beliefs, education, and familial influences on allies; the importance of known personal contact with gay men and lesbians; the impact that being an ally has on individuals' professional and personal lives; activities of allies; and identity management as an ally of gay men and lesbians. In addition, factors that may be helpful in inspiring others to be allies were examined. Overall, this study acknowledges the experiences of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians and contributes to an emerging theory of allies of homosexual individuals.

The Researcher

In order to add to the trustworthiness of the study, the naturalistic and grounded theory research paradigm calls for the researcher to provide details about herself or himself (Patton, 1990). The researcher is a Caucasian, lesbian female who is completing her doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision at Oregon State University. She is a National Certified Counselor who earned her M.S. and Ed.S. degrees in counseling from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1996. Immediately prior to entering the OSU Ph.D. program, she worked as an assessment counselor for a private psychiatric hospital.

The researcher has been an "out" lesbian during four of her five years of graduate school experience. When seeking to attend a Ph.D. program in counselor education and supervision, she actively sought programs where allies could be identified among the faculty. One of the salient reasons she chose to
attend OSU's Counselor Education and Supervision program was due to the presence of several faculty members who are allies of gay men and lesbians. Her mentors are allies.

Over the past four years, the researcher has worked with allies of gay men and lesbians on a number of scholarly endeavors. She has done extensive research pertaining to gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues in counselor education. Additionally, she has served as a Trustee for the Association of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling. During this service she addressed the need for gay men and lesbians to be more inclusive of heterosexual allies.

The researcher maintains personal friendships and collegial relationships with numerous allies. She has learned through these experiences that allies of gay men and lesbians are invaluable and make massive contributions to a more pleasant and just society.
A Conceptual Framework

The following literature review contributes to defining a theoretical framework of the experiences of adult heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians. Throughout the study, the review of the literature continued to evolve as themes and patterns emerged from the data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Represented in this review are some of the researcher's biases (Patton, 1990).

There is currently no specific empirical literature regarding allies of gay men and lesbians. One article in a professional journal exists that proposes a model of heterosexual ally development that is based on the authors' personal experiences of becoming an ally (Gelberg & Chojnacki, 1995). The next closest link to this topic is found in literature pertaining to heterosexual individuals' attitudes toward homosexuality or homosexual persons. This literature base includes characteristics and/or demographic information about heterosexuals that are correlated with negative and positive attitudes toward homosexuality. Literature addressing heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes is limited (Bowman, 1979; Rudolph, 1989; Stephan & McMullin, 1982; Stevenson, 1988; White, 1979). Rather than developing or extending studies to specifically address positive attitudes, often, assertions about characteristics or demographics that
may correspond to positive attitudes are derived by simply substituting the opposite characteristics of those with negative attitudes, (Kite & Whitely, 1996).

This review of the literature covers the following: 1) literature regarding allies of gay men and lesbians, 2) research addressing positive and negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, 3) the functional nature of prejudice, and 4) literature pertaining to social advocates. By the end of the literature review the reader will have a solid foundation for the basis of this study.

**Allies of Gay Men and Lesbians**

There is currently no empirical research that specifically addresses the experiences of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians. Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) provide a model of identity development for gay, lesbian, and bisexual affirmative career counselors that is solely based on the two authors professional and personal experiences of becoming an ally of gay men and lesbians in their roles as career counselors. Their model focuses on the parallel processes between ally identity development and Cass’s (1979, 1984) model of gay and lesbian identity development.

Like many gay men and lesbians identity development models, Gelberg and Chojnacki’s (1995) model is stage based and hierarchical. The first stage, “awareness,” begins with a need to become more active regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. Specifically, these authors desired to enhance career services
for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons and extracted their own need to become aware as a necessary first step in the ally process. Feelings of confusion, anxiety, low self-esteem, a sense of isolation, and privacy issues surfaced as they adjusted to their new role as ally.

Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) model continues with stage two, "ambivalence." In this stage the authors reported battling internalized homophobia and heterosexism. Incongruency between their objectives and behaviors as allies surfaced. The incongruency led to feelings of depression, anxiety and ambivalence which was somewhat alleviated through the support of colleagues who were either gay, lesbian, bisexual, or self-identified heterosexual allies. Stage three, "empowerment," ensued as they moved through their developmental process of becoming allies. Their commitment to gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues increased as they experienced "self-efficacy" and "self-valuing" in their roles as allies.

Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) continue the model with describing a fourth stage, "activism." During this stage they reported becoming personally, professionally, socially, and politically more active regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. A sense of empowerment, self-esteem, and pride ensued. They described these feelings as naturally progressing to "pride," stage five, during which they reported even greater self-valuing due to increased congruence between their advocacy objectives and behaviors as allies. They also distanced
themselves from individuals who made homophobic or heterosexist statements. The authors reported feeling proud of their efforts.

During the concluding stage of their identity development model, which they labeled "integration," Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) attempt to integrate other aspects of their lives into their work as allies. They reported greater congruence between thoughts and behavior, and increased desire to extend their ally work beyond their initial objective of career services geared toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. Furthermore, the authors stated that they were more sensitive to subtleties of heterosexism.

In conclusion of their article, Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) noted the differences in their ally developmental process as compared with gay men and lesbians identity development (e.g., choice, heterosexual privilege, and severity of struggles). According to the report of Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995), identity development as a heterosexual ally of gay men and lesbians is a process that occurs over time, is cyclical in nature, and partially dependent on professional goals, environment, and personal development.

**Overview of Heterosexuals' Attitudes Toward Homosexuality**

Examination of nearly three decades of literature pertaining to heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men reveals several patterns. Beginning in the 1970’s and continuing through the 1990’s, several characteristics tend to correlate with individuals’ attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. It has been found that
heterosexual individuals who hold negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men tend to share one or more of the following characteristics as compared with those who hold more positive attitudes:

1) no known personal contact with lesbians or gay men (Bowman, 1979; D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Ellis & Vasseur, 1993; Gentry, 1987; Glassner & Owen, 1976; Hansen, 1982; Herek, 1988; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Schneider & Lewis, 1984; Simon, 1995; Weis & Dane, 1979; Whitely, 1990). 2) were raised in areas where antigay sentiment is the norm and/or currently living in such areas (e.g., south, Midwest, small town, and/or rural) (Britton, 1990; Hansen, 1982; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Levitt & Klassen, 1974; Nyberg & Alston, 1977; Pratte, 1993; Seltzer, 1992; Stephan & McMullin, 1982; Turnbull & Brown, 1977; Whitehead & Metzger, 1981). 3) have less education (Bowman, 1979; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Seltzer, 1992; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1976). 4) are older (Bowman, 1979; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Seltzer, 1992; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1976). 5) are male (Kite & Whitley, 1996; Levitt & Klassen, 1974; Millham, SanMiguel & Kellogg, 1976; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Pratte, 1993; Steffensmeir & Steffensmeir, 1974; Seltzer, 1992). 6) describe themselves as religious and/or attend church frequently, and/or maintain conservative ideology (Alston, 1974; Bowman, 1979; Glassner & Owen, 1976; Hansen, 1982; Herek & Glunt, 1993 Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Larsen, Cate & Reed, 1983; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Seltzer, 1992; Weis & Dane, 1979). 7) subscribe to traditional gender roles (MacDonald & Games, 1974; Weinberger
& Millham, 1979; Whitely, 1987; Herek, 1988; Newman, 1989). 8) may be described as authoritarian (Haddock & Zanna, 1998; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980).

These findings have occurred across samples and through almost thirty years of study. It should be noted however, that many studies suffer from methodological problems that hamper the veracity of the results. The most common of these is repeatedly sampling solely Caucasian college educated males, using instruments to measure antigay sentiment that use the word "homosexual" to mean gay men, lesbians, or gay men and lesbians, using attitudinal measures with no documented reliability or validity, and using single items to assess attitudes.

**Known Personal Contact with Lesbians and/or Gay Men**

Sexual minorities have a great deal in common with many other underrepresented populations (e.g. African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Pacific Islanders). Some key differences are also noted. Gay men and lesbians are generally raised by heterosexual parents. Therefore, their socialization process incorporates heterosexual norms as opposed to homosexual culture. As such, when gay men and lesbians "come out" to themselves, they must additionally assimilate to a new culture (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995). Unlike racial and ethnic underrepresented populations, gay men and lesbians have the ability to
hide their minority status if they choose (Hancock, 1995). Consequently, heterosexual individuals may not be aware that they are interacting with gay men or lesbians. It can be assumed that virtually all Americans at one time or another have come in contact with a gay man or lesbian; whether they are aware of it or not is an entirely different matter.

Research indicates that individuals who have not knowingly interacted with lesbians or gay men are less likely to view gay men and/or lesbians positively than heterosexual individuals who have knowingly interacted with sexual minorities (Bowman, 1979; D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Ellis & Vasseur, 1993; Gentry, 1987; Glassner & Owen, 1976; Hansen, 1982; Herek, 1988; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Schneider & Lewis, 1984; Simon, 1995; Weis & Dane, 1979; Whitely, 1990). Theoretical understanding of why this may be the case is not reported in these studies and causation is not determined. Further inquiry regarding the meanings of this repeated finding is needed.

Herek (1993) investigated the association between known interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians and heterosexual individuals' attitudes toward gay men. Using data from a National AIDS telephone survey, Herek found that of the 937 individuals surveyed, "...interpersonal contact predicted attitudes toward gay men better than did any other demographic or social psychological variable included in the equation" (p.239). Unlike previous research in this area, Herek used sampling techniques and attitudinal measures with demonstrated reliability and validity.
Herek (1993) also investigated the association between demographics and interpersonal contact. He found that participants who were female, highly educated, politically liberal, and young were more likely to have contact with gay men and lesbians. Furthermore, “heterosexuals with characteristics commonly associated with positive attitudes are more likely than others to be the recipients of disclosure from gay friends and relatives” (Herek, 1993, p.239). Herek did not determine whether having the characteristics commonly associated with positive attitudes opened the door for gay men and lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to these heterosexual individuals or if the actual interaction(s) led to positive attitudes.

Simon (1995) investigated heterosexual individuals’ attitudes toward lesbians. Utilizing the Attitudes Toward Lesbians Scale (Herek, 1988), Simon found that of the 564 participants, those who had positive contact with lesbians also had positive attitudes toward lesbians. She addressed some of the methodological concerns of previous research in this area by specifying that she was inquiring about lesbians in particular and by utilizing a measure with known reliability and validity. The studies conducted by Herek (1993) and Simon (1995) corroborated previous findings and measured attitudes specifically regarding gay men (Herek, 1993) and lesbians (Simon, 1995). Furthermore, both studies supported the finding that heterosexuals who are female, politically liberal, well educated, young, and less religious are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward gay men or lesbians than their heterosexual counterparts.
Regional Considerations

Empirical research substantiates common knowledge that people within the Southeast, Midwest, and rural areas, are more antigay than people within the Pacific-West, Northeast and urban areas within the United States. A study conducted by Stephan and McMullin (1982) examined the relationship between city size and sexual nonconformity. They operationalized the term “sexual nonconformity” to include homosexuality, extramarital sex, pornography, and premarital sex. National opinion survey data were collected between 1972 and 1976 with four thousand participants. Results indicated that intolerance is strongly related to both the city size in which the participant lived at the time of the survey and to the size of the city the respondent lived in when he/she was sixteen years old. They concluded from their data that “in general, people who come from or live in small cities or rural areas are less tolerant” (Stephan & McMullin, 1982, p. 413).

More recently, Pratte’s (1993) comparative study of attitudes between 1986 and 1991 revealed similar results. Using two samples from the same populations in 1986 and 1991, Pratte (1993) found that participants sampled from rural areas held more negative attitudes than participants sampled from a college campus. It should be noted that this was not a national sample and all participants resided in
the Midwest at the time of the study. In general, attitudes toward homosexuality were more negative in 1986 than in 1991.

The South, Midwest, and rural areas may be among the least gay friendly places to live. Levitt and Klassen (1974) found that individuals who hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals were more likely to be from the rural South or Midwest. According to Nyberg & Alston (1976), people from metropolitan centers are more tolerant of homosexuality. These authors reasoned that this is likely due to greater exposure to diverse lifestyles that is offered by city living. Irwin & Thompson (1976) found that “individuals who lived in the Northeast (New England and Middle Atlantic states) and the Pacific region of the United States during early adolescence are significantly more tolerant of homosexuality than are those from other areas of the country” (p.114). Using a national sample of 2308 participants Seltzer (1992) found that Southerners are the most negative toward homosexuality when compared to individuals from other regions. Political ideology may play a role in this finding as Southerners are more conservative in general (Hulbert, 1989).

Gender-Role, Education, and Age in Heterosexuals’ Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

Sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuality have been studied since the early 1970s and results are consistent with few exceptions (Corley & Pollack, 1996; Kite & Whitely, 1996; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Steffensmeir &
Steffensmeir, 1974). Consistently, males have been found to be generally more negative toward homosexuality than females (Corley & Pollack, 1996; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Herek 1988; Kite & Whitely, 1996; Levitt & Klassen, 1974; Millham, SanMiguel & Kellogg, 1976; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Pratte, 1993; Steffensmeir & Steffensmeir, 1974; Seltzer, 1992). Correlation of sex differences regarding specific aspects of homosexuality such as civil rights for gay men and lesbians and the impact of gender role beliefs have been gathered (Corely & Pollack, 1996; Gillis, 1998; Kite & Whitely, 1996). While little theoretical reasoning for sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuality is provided in these studies, a foundation has been set for theoretical examination.

Kite & Whitely (1996) conducted a meta-analysis comparing women’s and men’s attitudes toward homosexuals, homosexual behavior, and homosexuals’ civil rights. These authors found that: 1) men held more negative attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexual behavior than did women, 2) no sex differences existed regarding homosexuals’ civil rights, 3) men’s attitudes toward gay men and lesbians was notably negative when rating gay men or sex-unspecified homosexual individuals, 4) lesbians were similarly rated by both men and women, 5) sex differences were significantly less pronounced in samples of nonprofessional individuals, and 6) attitudes about sex roles are relevant to sex differences in attitudes regarding homosexuality. Kite and Whitely concluded that much of the sex differences regarding attitudes toward homosexuality are attributed to gender or sex-role beliefs.
The significance of gender-role beliefs in attitudes toward homosexuality has been examined. Herek (1988) maintains that gender-role beliefs contribute to predictions of individuals’ attitudes toward homosexuality. In a substantial review of the literature from 1973 though 1989, Simon (1995) consistently found that individuals who hold positive views toward lesbians and sex-unspecified homosexuals also hold less stringent gender-role beliefs. Other empirical research indicates that individuals who hold traditional sex-role beliefs also tend to have negative attitudes about homosexuality (MacDonald & Games, 1974; Weinberger & Millham, 1979; Whitely, 1987; Herek, 1988; Newman, 1989). Based on this research it appears that gender-role values correlate with attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

In a study regarding heterosexuals’ attitudes toward lesbian couples, Corely and Pollock, (1996) found that women, regardless of sex-role values, and men with traditional sex-role values, held more positive attitudes toward lesbian couples in which both females were more feminine than masculine than if one or both members of the couple had more masculine characteristics. This may contradict the notion that straying from traditional gender roles is more acrimonious for men than for women (Kite & Whitely, 1996). Nevertheless, a substantial research history indicates that, in general, attitudes toward gay men are more negative than for lesbians (Corely & Pollack, 1996; Herek, 1988; MacDonald & Games, 1974; Newman, 1989; Weinberger & Millham, 1979; Whitely, 1987). Further investigation as to why men are more negative, why
attitudes toward gay men are more negative than attitudes toward lesbians, and the impact of socialization processes on men and women's attitudes toward homosexuality is needed.

Education and gender role beliefs may interact in the attitudes men and women have toward male and female homosexuality. Kite & Whitely (1996) found that sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuality were less pronounced among nonprofessionals than professionals. The authors reasoned that educational differences in professionals and nonprofessionals may account for this finding. Irwin & Thompson (1977) reported that

... for most people education is an important determinant in the development of civil libertarian attitudes and values (see Kohn, 1969; Rosenberg, 1957). Education fosters intellectual flexibility and breadth perspective, with toleration of nonconformity requiring a degree of analytic ability that is very difficult to achieve without formal education. (p.119)

It may be argued that along with education that fosters analytic reasoning, comes the ability to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, thereby making individuals with education more willing to accept nonconformity of the status quo.

Education may also provide an opportunity for individuals to stray from traditional thoughts, ways of being, and behavior. Stevenson's (1988) study on promoting tolerance toward homosexuality through education indicates that those who have read about or engaged in formal study (such as taking a course) about homosexuality become less fearful of homosexuals and more tolerant of
homosexuals' social roles and behavior. "For the vast majority of people beliefs and opinions about homosexuals may simply be an unchallenged part of their socialization experiences" (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978, p. 82). Education offers hope for greater acceptance of gay men and lesbians. It should be noted, however, that just ten years ago it was found that the norm in American colleges and universities is that most campuses provide a hostile environment for gay men and lesbians and that men are generally more hostile than women (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Herek, 1989).

Some studies have suggested that younger and more educated individuals hold more positive attitudes toward homosexuality (Bowman, 1979; Corley & Pollack; Whitely, 1979). Pratte's (1993) study comparing samples from 1986 and 1991 found that the most significant changes in attitudes between 1986 and 1991 (more negative to more positive) occurred in college students over the age of 25 and non-students 40 and over. Other studies have consistently found that older individuals hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than those who are younger (Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Seltzer, 1992; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1976). While discussing the results of their study, Irwin & Thompson (1977) stated the following: "the greater the amount of education, the higher the tolerance for homosexuals" (p.114). The exact relationship between gender-role beliefs, age and education in attitudes toward homosexuality is undetermined by these studies.
Religiosity & Political Ideology

Literature has consistently shown that individuals who describe themselves as religious and/or attend church frequently, and/or maintain conservative ideology have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual individuals than those with the opposite characteristics. (Alston, 1974; Bowman, 1979; Glassner & Owen, 1976; Hansen, 1982; Herek & Glunt, 1993 Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Larsen, Cate & Reed, 1983; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Seltzer, 1992; Weis & Dane, 1979). Religiosity and political ideology may also be related to regional considerations as several studies have indicated that individuals from the South are more religious, politically conservative, and are more likely to have negative attitudes regarding homosexuality (Hulbert, 1989; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Seltzer, 1992). D’Augelli & Rose (1990) found that men tend to be more politically conservative and that men are also more likely to hold negative attitudes toward homosexuality. While the exact interrelationship of these characteristics remains unknown, empirical evidence indicates that religiosity and political ideology are correlated with individuals’ attitudes toward homosexuality.

The Bible has long been used to support arguments stating that homosexuality is a sin and unnatural (Helminiak, 1995). It may come as no surprise then that many individuals who maintain negative attitudes toward homosexuality are also likely to be religious. Indicators of religiosity (such as frequency of church attendance, and faith affiliation) are some of the best predictors of attitudes
toward homosexuality (Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Seltzer, 1992). Seltzer (1992) found that among his national random sample of 2308 individuals over the age of 18, Caucasian self-identified reborn Christians and people who attend church frequently are among the most antigay individuals. Interestingly, frequency of church attendance among Black participants was unrelated to attitudes toward homosexuality. Rationale for why this might be the case was not included in Seltzer’s study.

Political ideology may be a strong indicator of attitudes toward homosexuality (Hulbert, 1989; Seltzer, 1992). Seltzer (1992) reported that the greatest predictor of attitudes toward homosexuality are self-identified political viewpoints. Likewise, attitudes regarding homosexuality are an excellent contributor toward explaining individuals’ self-identified political ideology (Seltzer, 1992). VanderStoep & Green (1988) found that religiosity predicts ethical conservatism and that negative attitudes regarding homosexuality can stem from conservative values rather than irrational fears or repressed homosexual desires. Religiosity and political ideology seem to be intertwined regarding attitudes toward homosexuality.

Prejudice: Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Change

It is important to remember that attitudes are developed in social context and that aspects of individuals’ lives impact their attitudes toward diverse populations (Herek, 1984). Categories defining subgroups of people are so ingrained within
cultural context that they may appear to be natural rather than socially constructed (Herek, 1984). The exact interrelationship of age, education, gender, sex-role values, and region of residence to attitudes toward homosexuality is not clear; correlations between characteristics seem certain while causality remains unknown. It is relevant to know what characteristics correlate with negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

But an equally important question is how, despite overwhelming social pressures to the contrary, some heterosexual people manage to develop positive and accepting attitudes. If social scientists are to conduct research relevant to changing public opinion, we must be guided by theory sufficiently broad to explain the psychology of both positive and negative attitudes. (Herek, 1984, p.3)

Qualitative research may advance knowledge and lead to development of theory in this area.

As negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are increasingly being challenged in our culture (Singer & Deschamps, 1994), it is important to consider the function that prejudice serves. Herek (1984) asks a relevant question to this end: "... what individual and situational factors permit some persons to oppose the societal ideology by maintaining tolerant or even favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, while others keep exceptionally hostile attitudes?" (p.4). Herek argues that in order to begin to answer this question it is necessary to understand the function that attitudes serve for the individuals who develop and maintain them.
Based on patterns found in the literature regarding attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, Herek (1984) presents a model of three types of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Each of the three types of attitudes serves a particular psychological function. They are not meant to be exhaustive. The three types defined by Herek include:

1) Experiential, categorizing social reality by one’s past interactions with homosexual persons; 2) defensive, coping with one’s inner conflicts or anxieties by projecting them on to homosexual persons; and 3) symbolic, expressing abstract ideological concepts that are closely linked to one’s notion of self and to one’s social network and reference groups. (Herek, 1984, p.1)

Any one person’s attitudes toward gay men and lesbians may serve one or more functions (Herek, 1984). Since attitudes are functional, discarding them may be challenging. Further research is needed to determine effective strategies in changing attitudes (Herek, 1984).

Changing attitudes toward homosexuality from negative to positive may involve altering the function that negative attitudes serve. Since symbolic attitudes are derived from past and present socialization experiences and express values relevant to individuals’ self-concept, appeals to the values individuals hold may prove beneficial in the change process (Herek, 1984). Overcoming a lifetime of socialization that promotes prejudice is a difficult task that is likely to involve internal conflict (Devine, 1989; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink & Elliot, 1991). “Defeated intellectually, prejudice lingers emotionally” (Allport, 1954, p. 328).
Attitudes that develop from past and present experiences (symbolic attitudes) do not change overnight; therefore, discrepancies between desired reaction and actual reactions take place during a period of time. Monteith, Devine & Zuwerink (1993) reasoned that low prejudiced individuals internalize non-prejudiced standards while high prejudiced people are externally focused. When low prejudiced individuals’ standards are obscured by lingering prejudice, thereby making their actual responses different from how they believe they should respond, feelings of guilt and self-criticism ensue (Allport, 1954; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink & Elliot, 1991). The feelings of compunction that occur during such incongruency may help move individuals closer to responses that are less prejudiced (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink & Elliot, 1991).

Change generally involves several steps and reducing socialized prejudice is no different. Monteith, Devine and Zuwerink (1993) suggest a three step change process for prejudice reduction:

(a) establishing non-prejudiced standards based on one’s personal beliefs for how one ought to respond, (b) internalizing those standards by linking them to the self-concept, defining them as important, and feeling committed to them, and (c) learning how to inhibit stereotypic responses so as to respond consistently with one’s personal standards. (Monteith, Devine & Zuwerink, 1993, p.198)

The work of Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink & Elliot, 1990 suggests that the final step may be the most difficult of the three as socialized automatic prejudiced responses must be replaced by automatic non-prejudiced responses. How allies of gay men and lesbians can get to a place in which they feel and behave in a way
that is different from the cultural norm of heterosexism and homoprejudice (Herek, 1995; House & Holloway, 1992; House & Miller, 1997; Obear, 1991) has not been empirically studied.

Identification as an Ally

Because there is no specific empirical literature about allies of gay men and lesbians, literature derived from other sources has been sought. Gelberg and Chojnacki’s (1995) study regarding identity development as allies of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals reported that their personal process of becoming allies was parallel to gay and lesbian identity development models. Extrapolation from literature that pertains to gay men and lesbians is useful. Some pertinent areas to explore are gay men and lesbians’ identity development and “coming out” issues. It is not the intent of this review to equate being an ally with being gay or lesbian, or being a family member of sexual minorities. Rather, the intent is to use what is available to inform practice while realizing the limitations of such extrapolations.

Since being gay or lesbian is not identified by physical markings, such as color of skin, gay and lesbian individuals have to recognize their sexual orientation to themselves first; subsequently, many decide over time to reveal their orientation to others. This process is referred to as “coming out.” It is a process of developing and expressing one’s identity as a gay or lesbian person, therefore, it is unique to gay men and lesbians. Allies of gay men and lesbians may relate to the process of “coming out” as they must reveal to themselves first and then if
they choose, to others, that they are allies. Without personal disclosure, others would not be aware of such individuals’ status as an ally. The “coming out” processes for allies of gay men and lesbians may share some similarities with homosexual identity development (Gelberg & Chojnacki, 1995). Relative to this author’s study, as themes emerge from the data, review of the literature constricts and expands as necessary.

Several models attempt to explain homosexual identity formation (Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1985; Falco, 1987; Lewis, 1984; Sophie, 1987; Troiden, 1989). Gelberg & Chojnacki (1995) suggest that a similar pattern for allies may exist. Troiden (1993) explained the similarities of homosexual identity developmental models: (1) homosexual identity formation and expression is impacted by stigma, (2) gay identity development is a process that takes place over time; (3) there is increased acceptance of homosexuality; (4) coming out begins with identifying one’s sexual orientation to the self. As the process continues there is increased desire to express one’s identity to others, and this audience expands over time; (5) over the course of the process there is increased contact and intimacy with other gay men and lesbians. The similarity of allies’ identity development (if any) to gay and lesbian identity development remains to be empirically tested, yet this review may serve as a beginning framework.

Most homosexual identity formation theories agree that gay and lesbian identity formation is complex, involving regression, stalling, foreclosure, and incomplete movement through the stages (O’Conner, 1992). They all appear to
culminate with the integration of gay and lesbian identity merging with other aspects of identity. Whether the same is true for allies of gay men and lesbians is unknown at this time.

Issues of family and friends of gay men and lesbians may provide pertinent insight into possible processes of allies. Brown (1989) noted that family and friends of gay and lesbian individuals may experience isolation and/or a fear of isolation as it is difficult to positively “come out” as a friend or relative of a gay man or lesbian. Such difficulty stems from the antigay attitudes that thrive in American society today (Brown, 1989). Gay male and lesbian individuals, their family members, and members of their social network are all victims of homophobia (Brown, 1989). Franke and Leary (1991) argued that “coming out” as a gay man or lesbian requires a willingness to be socially rejected. The same may be true for allies of gay men and lesbians. Gay men and lesbians lose people in their lives due to homoprejudice. Do allies experience similar rejection? Parallel processes are uncertain.

Social Advocates

Being an ally of gay men and lesbians involves advocacy (Washington & Evans, 1991). Allies, then, are also social advocates. Collison et al. (1998) referred to social action as “an individual or collective action taken to right some injustice or to improve some condition for the benefit of an individual or group” (p.266). Advocacy may take many forms and functions though action is a
necessary component (Washington & Evans, 1991). “Advocacy with gay, lesbian, and bisexual people involves acceptance, support, and inclusiveness” (Washington & Evans, 1991, p. 198). Advocacy in action may range from placing books with prominent gay or lesbian words in the title on one’s book shelf to fighting for gay and lesbian rights at a Congressional hearing. Those who become social advocates are, in various forms, pleading for a cause (Lee, 1998).

Decisions about whether to become an advocate for a particular individual or cause are complex. Collison et. al. (1998) provide a framework for personal decision making regarding social activism under the following six dimensions:

(a) being inside or outside the affected system (the system), (b) being in or out of the affected group (the client group), (c) style of intervention (style issues), (d) perceived self-efficacy (self-view), (e) amount and accuracy of information (information), and (f) personal and organizational consequences of the action (consequence). (p.270)

These dimensions do not take place in isolation as numerous external factors such as the law, professional ethics, social contexts, and moral codes, impact individual perception of justice and injustice (Collison, et.al, 1998). Determining how and why individuals wrestle with the complexity of these dimensions and external forces may provide insight into the experiences of social advocates.

The existing body of empirical literature pertaining to activists, is primarily comprised of studies examining individuals who were active regarding social and political issues during the 1960s and 1970s (Noggle, 1997). Perhaps the most comprehensive of these is a study by Frank and Nash (1965) that examines peace
activists. These authors found that peace activists were likely to be highly educated which was defined as having acquired college or graduate degrees. The peace activists studied by Frank and Nash were also likely to have liberal attitudes, be mindful of international relations, dissatisfied with current international relations, and view peace activism as a moral issue. Furthermore, Frank and Nash (1965) found that while they were growing up, the participants in their study believed that their families were somehow different from other families in their immediate area. This sense of difference was not further explained by the authors. The activists generally became involved in the peace movement through personal experiences or personal contact with other peace activists. This finding was also found by Flamenbaum, Hunter, Silverstein and Yatani (1985) and Oskamp, Bordin and Edwards (1991) who studied peace activists.

Oskamp, Bordin and Edwards (1991) attempted to update Frank and Nash’s 1965 study regarding peace activists. These authors examined a broad range of characteristics and personal experiences. Personal interviews were conducted with 21 members of the peace activist organization, Beyond War. Most of the participants were highly educated professionals who were raised by conservative families in a wide geographical range of the United States. Nineteen of the twenty-one respondents indicated that a particular event or personal experience inspired their involvement in the peace movement. Sixteen of the participants identified a particular film or book that contributed to their desire for
involvement. Seven of the twelve women in the study reported that concern for their children's future was a motivating factor. A sense of obligation to society was reported as an overarching reason for contributing to the peace movement.

The activists in the Oskamp, Bordin, and Edwards study (1991) indicated that their involvement in the peace movement was a positive experience. Most stated that they wanted to be more involved but that limitations of personal time and economic realities hindered further work. Similar to other studies, the participants viewed their activism as a moral issue (Frank & Nash, 1965; Gomes, 1992). Social support from family, friends, and the movement itself was reported as important for maintaining their activism. This raises the question, what do activists gain and lose by their involvement in a particular movement?

In a qualitative study, Gomes (1992) examined the rewards and stresses of activism within the peace movement. Gomes stated that her work was inspired by the fact that "little is known about the ongoing rewards and struggles experienced by committed activists" (p.138). Seventy-five current peace activists were asked to list the five most rewarding and five most stressful aspects of being an activist. Gomes found that what participants experienced as both the most stressful and most rewarding components of activism was the community of peace activists. Gomes reasoned that "the realm of interpersonal relationships is very important to one's satisfaction as an activist..." (p.144). Based on this finding, Gomes called for activists to attend to interpersonal relationships in order to sustain satisfaction with involvement and prevent activist burnout.
A sense of meaning has been found to play an important role in the lives of activists (Gomes, 1992; Kanner, Kafry & Pines, 1978). Gomes found that the second most rewarding aspect of activism for the participants in the study was the meaningfulness of their work. Kanner, Kafry and Pines (1978) reported that people are capable of sustaining immense stress as long as they perceive their work to be meaningful. Gomes stated that, “the present study suggests that, although concrete success is certainly important, the concerns of activists more commonly center around relationships within the activist community and the ultimate meaningfulness of their work” (p.145). Whether this is true for allies who serve as activists for gay men and lesbians remains to be determined.

Although specific empirical research regarding the rewards and benefits of being an advocate for gay men and lesbians is not currently available, Washington and Evans (1991) reason that allies’ involvement in gay rights advocacy potentially contains both positive and negative consequences. Some of the benefits may be: (1) making a difference in the lives of younger generations, (2) becoming less bound by sex-role stereotypes, (3) increasing intimacy with same-sex friends, (4) interacting with gay men and lesbians, (5) being supportive to members of a population that is misunderstood and under served. Negative consequences may include: (1) others’ assumption that the ally is gay or lesbian, (2) alienation from unsupportive friends and colleagues, (3) gay or lesbian individuals skepticism of allies’ motives, and (4) experiencing discrimination based on supporting gay men and lesbians (Washington & Evans, 1991).
Despite prevailing heterosexism and homophobia, how and why heterosexual men and women come to be advocates of gay men and lesbians is important to determine. Barret (1998) suggests three steps toward social action regarding gay and lesbian issues. The first of these involves acknowledging that all individuals (including gay men and lesbians) are homo-prejudiced.

A first step toward social action is to become more aware of individual biases and prejudices. The question is not, "Are you homo-prejudiced?" Rather, the proper orientation to this issue is, "How can I become more aware of my homo-prejudices and limit the ways they influence my behavior?" (p.91)

Barret (1998) argues that the second step toward social action in support of gay men and lesbians is to become informed. Finding support for oneself is the third step. Gay and nongay individuals alike can be social advocates for gay and lesbians issues. Perhaps individuals who fight for a cause in which they are not members of the population know that all people are hurt by oppression (Lewis & Arnold, 1998).

We often act as if oppression hurts only the victims of oppression. Therefore, we think that sexism hurts women and not men, that racism wounds people of color and not White people, and that gay oppression has no impact on heterosexuals. It is important to note that victims and oppressors are hurt differently but that each is still hurt. (Arnold, 1997, p.42)

Heterosexual allies who battle injustices related to sexual minorities may understand how everyone is hurt by oppression. The contributions of allies are vital to combating inaccurate knowledge and understanding of sexual minorities (Douce, 1998).
How heterosexual individuals surmount the heterosexism and homophobia that pervades American society in order to become social advocates of gay men and lesbians may be useful for understanding the process of unlearning prejudice. With such knowledge, future social advocates may have advanced tools for making this a more peaceful world.

Summary

Investigating the experiences of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians marks a new frontier in research. No empirical literature specifically examines the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians. It is uncertain whether the themes and patterns in related studies will emerge while examining the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians. Heterosexual individuals' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians is relevant in this exploration as is identity development as an ally; the form and degree of the relevance is unknown at this time. It is possible and likely that previously unidentified patterns and themes will emerge in a study about the experiences of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm and Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of adult heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians who themselves are not parents of gay male or lesbian individuals. The study followed a grounded theory paradigm. Constant comparative methodology provided the format of the study. The design’s basic pattern was interviews, analysis, theory development, further interviews and further analysis until themes and patterns emerged (Bogdon & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By examining participants’ phenomenological experiences and meanings that they construct, an emerging theory of the processes and impact of being an ally of gay men and lesbians emerged.

Grounded theory is based on a naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The term is used to “refer to an inductive process of discovering theory from data” (Rubin & Babbie, 1997, p. 373). Emphasis is placed on inductive processes during which an interactive and inseparable relationship exists between the knower and the known. Naturalistic paradigm emphasizes that multiple realities exist and these realities are constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Inquiry is value bound. All involved entities (including the researcher and participants) simultaneously and mutually influence each other. Consequently, cause and
effect cannot be differentiated and thus remain unknown. Unlike positivist paradigms which may assert generalizations of truth, the naturalistic paradigm postulates time-bound and context-bound hypotheses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The research design of this study followed Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) approach to grounded theory. Their research design is outlined below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Research Design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)**

1. Natural Setting
2. Human Instrument
3. Engagement - Purposive Sampling
4. Qualitative Methods of Data Collection
5. Inductive Analysis (from start to finish)
6. Grounded Theory - Emergent Design

Central to this research design is the notion that all aspects of the model are circular and ongoing throughout the course of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The specific steps employed in this study incorporated the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) provide an overview of the constant comparative method:

1. Begin collecting data.
2. Look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories of focus.

3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus, with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories.

4. Write about the categories you are exploring, attempting to describe and account for all the incidents you have in your data while continually searching for new incidents.

5. Work with the data and emerging model to discover basic social processes and relationships.

6. Engage in sampling, coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories. (p.67)

While the constant comparative method can be outlined into steps, Bogdan and Biklen caution that all of these “steps” may be occurring at the same time.

Accordingly, data was collected until the information obtained became redundant, until saturation was reached.

Review of the literature substantiates the need for a grounded theory research design to explore issues such as the experiences of adult allies of gay men and lesbians. With no empirical literature specifically addressing this inquiry and only one article examining heterosexual allies from two career counselors’ perspectives, and three decades of quantitative exploration of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, it is imperative that research explore allies using a fresh
approach. In utilizing the grounded theory approach, the researcher allows theory to emerge from the data rather than beginning with a specific hypothesis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). This method invites inductively derived grounded theory (Strauss & Glasser, 1990) without imposing investigators' pre-selected responses or researcher-defined variables (Stiles, 1993). Findings from this grounded theory approach lay the foundation for future quantitative and qualitative exploration.

Sample

Participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling procedures. This was done in an effort to obtain cases that are “information rich” and facilitate in-depth understanding (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Patton, 1990). Five participants were utilized in this study, as depth rather than breadth was the goal (Walcott, 1994).

Snowball sampling, a type of purposeful sampling (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996) was utilized in order to find participants for this study. The researcher asked gay male and lesbian individuals known to her to recommend allies of gay men and lesbians from the Southeast region of the country for possible inclusion in the study. Recommended individuals were contacted by the researcher who then explained the study, including the risks and benefits of participation, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and then inquired about interest in participation. In order to be included in the study, participants had to meet the following criteria:
(1) self-identification as heterosexual, (2) self-identification as an ally of gay men and lesbians, (3) being over eighteen years of age, (4) at least once in his or her personal and/or professional life having shown support of gay men and lesbians (e.g., telling a coworker that her antigay joke is offensive, openly socializing with a person known to be gay or lesbian, receiving professional care from a known gay or lesbian individual, participating in a gay pride march), (5) a willingness to participate in the study.

Exclusion criteria were utilized. Criteria for exclusion from this study was as follows: (1) having a child who to one’s knowledge is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, (2) currently or having recently engaged in purposefully antigay behaviors (e.g., verbal or physical assault of an individual because he is gay or she is lesbian), (3) having a current or recent diagnosis of major mental illness, thought disorder, or depressive disorder, and/or (4) current or pending legal action (which may subject the investigator(s) to be required to act as a witness or testify in a court of law).

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Due to the nature of the methodological design, the researcher was the instrument in obtaining data for this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). As such, data were obtained through interview format rather than utilizing a specific questionnaire. Two in-depth face to face interviews with each participant occurred. The first interview began with the investigator asking broad questions of the participants. In order to insure that the basics were covered, the researcher
followed a general interview guide (see Appendix A) with questions derived from the review of the literature (Patton, 1990). Several authors call for the initial interview questions to be broad and flexible in order to examine in-depth experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The second round of interviews also used a semi-structured interview format with the questions derived from the themes that emerged from the first round of interviews (see Appendices B and C).

In-depth interviewing was utilized for the purpose of examining and understanding the meanings participants make of their experiences as allies of gay men and lesbians. “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1990, p.3). Follow-up interview questions were created during and after data analysis and were specific in nature to assist the researcher in identifying relationships and patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data continued to be collected in follow-up interviews until saturation was reached (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Saturation was reached after the second round of interviews.

Rigorous research procedures were attended to in the collection of data. All interviews were audiotaped with two recorders to allow for error. Following each interview the recordings were transcribed. This procedure assisted the researcher with accuracy, contributed to thick description as tone of voice, inflection, and expression of affect was reviewed, and assisted with the constant comparative
methodology. During and immediately following the interview process, the researcher took field notes. While taking field notes the researcher documented thoughts and insights which provide another source of evidence (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). All follow-up interviews included member checks. This procedure consisted of providing participants with copies of the transcripts and the researcher’s initial inductive analysis.

Also contributing to trustworthiness, the researcher kept a reflexive journal throughout the process of data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As suggested by Lincoln and Guba, the reflexive journal consisted of a daily schedule of the study, a methodological log, and a personal diary. The purpose of this journal was to: a) provide a written account of reactions, thoughts, hypotheses, and insights, b) provide a forum for theory development, and c) assist in the researcher’s identification of biases (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

As described previously, the constant comparative method was utilized in the analysis of data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide four steps for the constant comparative method of data analysis: “1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2) integrating categories and their properties, 3) delimiting the theory, and 4) writing the theory” (p.105). In order to facilitate this process, Lincoln and Guba (1985) call for the researcher to organize data in such a way that it can
stand on its own and moves the researcher toward theory. To this end, data were placed on note cards and a color coding scheme was utilized. Comparisons and revisions of categories occurred throughout this process (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Patterns and themes were identified as they emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and analysis was conducted throughout the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

After the first interviews, I reviewed, coded, and recoded data including interview transcripts, my reflexive journal, and field notes. I placed each piece of “evidence” on color coded note cards. I then reviewed the emerging themes and made adjustments to the categories as necessary (see Appendices B and D). Next, Dr. Liz Gray, chair of my doctoral committee, read the transcripts, reviewed my coding schema, complete with evidence from the note cards, and made notes based on her observations. Dr. Gray and I discussed our individual perceptions of the data and emerging themes and agreed upon adjustments to categories and themes were made.

The same process of analysis occurred after the second round of interviews. Questions for the second round of interviews were postulated during and after analysis of the first set of data. I formalized the questions, Dr. Gray reviewed them, and then together we made slight adjustments. Dr. Gray and I agreed that saturation had been reached after the second round of data was analyzed by both of us, and the writing process soon followed. Throughout the research process, I also discussed the project, emerging themes, my biases, and shared my reflexive
journal with Dr. Maura Cullen who is an Educational Consultant and not affiliated with Oregon State University.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility Issues**

Trustworthiness was established by meeting four basic elements: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The degree to which methods within these elements are addressed determines the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a sense, trustworthiness establishes the value and worth of individual naturalistic studies.

**Credibility:** In this study, credibility was established by the use of: a) prolonged engagement, b) persistent observation, (c) triangulation, (d) negative case analysis, and e) member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement was met by conducting two interviews with participants over a period of approximately five weeks. Each interview lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to one hour and thirty minutes. While prolonged engagement addressed the breadth of the study, persistent observation established the depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Persistent observation occurred in this study by conducting in-depth interviews with participants. The researcher spent a sufficient amount of time establishing rapport with participants in order to facilitate in-depth inquiry. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Triangulation further serves the credibility of this study. Triangulation is:
the process of using multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories to check the validity of case study findings. Triangulation helps to eliminate biases that might result from relying exclusively on any one data-collection method, source, analyst or theory (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996, p. 574).

The components of triangulation in this methodology included the constant comparative method of data analysis, member checking, and use of two analysts (myself and Dr. Gray).

Member checking is the process of having participants in the study review the researcher’s analysis and report for accuracy (Gall, Bog & Gall, 1996). This was done during each follow-up interview. Negative case analysis occurred when data emerged that was inconsistent with generated hypotheses. The hypothesis was eliminated or reformulated after scrutinizing all other data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability: Transferability was established by the use of “thick description.” In essence, thick description was used to allow the reader to determine the degree to which the work at hand can be generalized to other contexts and individuals (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Descriptions of the research process and data should be so clear that others can make their own interpretations, judgments, and conclusions regarding the transferability of the findings (Patton, 1990).

Dependability: The dependability of the study is determined by the quality of the materials documenting the research process. In a sense, a paper trail was created to show the step by step process of the study. This is generally referred to
as an audit trail. The audit trail provides clear and meaningful links to the purpose of the research, raw data, and findings (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

Materials comprised in the audit trail for this study include the researcher’s log containing the logistics of the study, a journal of the process, interview transcripts, note cards complete with data and color coding scheme, and field notes.

**Confirmability:** By examining the chain of evidence in the audit trail, confirmability was established. The data collected, process of analysis, and findings of the analysis determines the confirmability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In essence, the veracity of the process of analysis was examined in order to determine the degree to which the findings can be confirmed.

The trustworthiness of the study, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, was enhanced by the researcher’s reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). The reflexive journal consisted of documentation of the process of the study and the investigator’s personal reflections. This process gave the researcher an opportunity to document her relationship to the setting, research design, and analysis, while exploring feelings, problems, hunches, and prejudices (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). As suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), the researcher’s reflexive journal included the following: 1) daily logistics of the study, 2) a methodological log, and 3) a personal diary.
Ethical and Confidentiality Considerations

The researcher received approval for the study from Oregon State University’s Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (See Appendix E). The researcher abided by the ethics of the American Counseling Association (1997) throughout this study. The information obtained through this study will remain confidential. The names of the participants do not appear on any transcripts or data obtained, rather the only link to participants’ names is kept in a file matching their names with numerical codes. All sensitive research materials are kept under lock, and the investigators are the only people who have access. As required by the OSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, all research records will be kept for three years after the conclusion of the study. When three years have passed, all confidential materials that could be linked to participants’ identity will be destroyed.

Limitations and Potential Benefits

This study is considered “first step research” as it contributes to an emerging theory of the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians. It was not intended to be a comprehensive account of the phenomenological experiences of female allies of gay men and lesbians. Rather it was intended to gain foundational knowledge toward an emerging theory of the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians. Its intent was not to completely explain this phenomena or make generalizations to the entire population of allies of gay men and lesbians. The findings are limited to the participants involved in the study.
Another limitation of this study is the biases that I, as the researcher, bring to the process. As a qualitative researcher, I admit that I am biased. As such, this research is skewed by my perceptions and personal filters. Though I made every effort to limit the projection of my biases both in conducting the study and reporting results, it should be noted that this research is not bias free.

The primary contribution of this research is that it is the first of its kind specifically examining the experiences of female allies of gay men and lesbians. It is anticipated that emerging themes, patterns, and categories might highlight issues that may be common to allies of gay men and lesbians. It is hoped that subsequent to this investigation other empirical inquiries would follow. The design provides information which allows for further investigation regarding the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians.

Summary

Chapter 3 described how this exploratory study examined the phenomenological experiences of female allies of gay men and lesbians. The data utilized for this study originated from two rounds of face-to-face interviews with five female allies of gay men and lesbians from the Southeastern region of the United States. The data were analyzed by the constant comparative method of analysis.

A description of the research paradigm and overall design of the study was provided in this Chapter. Information regarding the participants such as methods of recruitment, inclusion and exclusion criteria, informed consent,
ethical/confidentiality considerations was provided. Also presented in this Chapter were instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation procedures. Finally, limitations of the methodology were acknowledged.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

Consistent with the grounded theory and naturalistic paradigm employed in this study, the presentation of the results are done in such a format as to allow the reader to follow the inductive process of discovering theory from the data (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). To this end, direct quotations are presented throughout this chapter. My intent is to preserve the voice of the participants, rather than present solely my interpretation of their experience, while allowing the reader to formulate his or her own conclusions (Wolcott, 1990). My goal in this form of reporting the data is to present the phenomenological experience of the participants as closely as possible to how it was presented to me.

Analysis of the data revealed a multidimensional process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. After the first interviews, I developed coding categories based on the themes that emerged. Initially, I found 23 categories including personal contact, not doing enough/guilt, process, anger, family, components of being an ally, religion, diversity, support from gay men and lesbians, fear of saying the wrong thing, others’ opinions, positives, action, challenges to action, definition, safety/job, think she’s lesbian, gender roles, South, politics, HIV/AIDS, and influential people. I then combined the categories as smaller themes were present within larger themes. By the end of this reworking process, five major categories with multiple sub categories presented
themselves. The major categories included (1) process; (2) passion; (3) downplay contribution; (4) variables of impact; and (5) rewards. The multiple subcategories included: way of being, awareness, personal contact, commitment, action, challenges and responses, risk, fear, triggers, family, feelings and beliefs of not doing enough, support from gay and lesbian community, spectrum of being an ally, religion, South, politics, pride, fulfilling relationships, meeting a sense of duty, and learning.

What became apparent after coding the data from the first interviews is that the themes themselves reflected a larger, umbrella theme, which is an overall process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. I then created semi-structured interview questions for the second round of interviews based on the findings from the first interview. After the second round of interviews, four themes under the umbrella “process” theme presented themselves quite clearly. The themes can be arranged under four rubrics: (1) Way of Being; (2) Awareness; (3) Commitment; and (4) Integration.

The first theme, which I call Way of Being, reflects the initial process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. Subcategories for Way of Being include: (a) just who I am; (b) response to family; (c) beliefs and feelings about diversity and advocacy in general; (d) variables of impact. Encompassed in this theme is the participants’ overall sense that being an ally is just who they are; it is a natural part of who they are as people. Reflections of possible reasons for how they became allies includes a range of reactions to each participant’s family.
of origin, her beliefs and feelings about diversity and advocacy in general, and how religion, living in the Southeastern region of the United States, and gender-role beliefs have impacted her process.

Following an overall way of being, the second theme that emerged from the data is summed up as Awareness. Awareness subcategories include: (a) personal contact; (b) emotions; and (c) education. Comprised under this theme is participants’ process of heightened awareness to gay and lesbian individuals and issues. Participants indicated that awareness was attained through a combination and interchanging cycle of emotional and intellectual elements. Personal contact with gay and/or lesbian individuals marked heightened awareness and stimulated further development as an ally of gay men and lesbians.

I call the third theme that emerged Commitment. The subcategories for Commitment include: (a) action; (b) challenges to speaking out; (c) overcoming stereotypes; and (d) concern about not doing enough. Commitment to being an ally of gay men and lesbians is seen on several dimensions. Participants revealed an immense amount of passion which was reflected in behavioral action. Each individual spoke to the challenges of being an ally and how she faced those challenges. The process of deciding when to actively speak out against antigay sentiments was described. The level of commitment was further revealed in individuals’ analysis of her contribution as an ally, concern that she is not doing enough, and risks she has taken.
The final theme marked Integration. Integration subcategories include: (a) spectrum; (b) relationship with significant other; (c) support from gay men and lesbians; and (d) positive consequences/rewards. A spectrum of integration regarding an ally role emerged from the data. This spectrum reflected various ways of being an ally of gay men and lesbians, including the totality of their experiences, and an activism continuum ranging from quietly supportive to publicly demonstrating one's support of gay men and lesbians. Several positive consequences or rewards of being an ally of gay men and lesbians were revealed. Allies' relationship with their significant other emerged as an important element of their process. The summation of the integration theme is reflected in theme number one, Way of Being. Each ally in this study revealed how being an ally is simply a part of who she is, it is part of her way of being.

Profiles of Allies

Five allies of gay men and lesbians participated in this study. Each is a female. The presentation of the profiles of these five women is done in a manner that honors their privacy and ensures anonymity. To this end, each individual has a pseudonym and some aspects of her background that could link her to the study have been omitted.

General Description. The allies of gay men and lesbians who participated in this study were five women from a wide range of locations in North Carolina. These women were identified as allies of gay men and lesbians by lesbians known
to this author or lesbian friends of this writer’s friends. Additionally, each woman self-identified as heterosexual and as an ally of gay men and lesbians. The participants ranged in age from 29 to 43 at the time of the study. The women identified themselves as Caucasian. Each individual was employed at the time of the study and two of the five were also enrolled in graduate programs. Four of the women were currently married; one had been divorced and characterized her relationship status as having a significant other. One of the participants had one child (age 6), and the other four had no children.

Jackie. Jackie is a thirty year old, heterosexual, Caucasian woman who currently resides in North Carolina. She is employed by an university in North Carolina. Her position is in the student affairs division. She holds a masters degree in a related field and is pursuing her doctorate. Jackie reports being raised in a suburban area of eastern Virginia. She is married and has no children. At the time of the study Jackie stated that she has no religious or spiritual affiliation and does not identify with any particular political party.

Jackie describes her experiences as being raised in a middle class home with parents who were Catholic and traditional in their thinking and behavior. She attended Catholic and Baptist churches during childhood and adolescence. She was raised with a strong work ethic and with the message that as a woman, “I could do whatever I wanted.” She reports that gay and lesbian issues were not directly discussed in her home. “The messages I got were general, and it was
more related to that you shouldn’t say negative things about people. You
shouldn’t be hateful.”

Jackie reports being able to identify herself as an ally of gay men and lesbians
since her senior year in college. She states that being an ally “blossomed out of
friendship and love” for people she knew who were gay or lesbian and “partially
through my role at the university.” Specifically, when her best friend in college
came out to her she noticed in herself marked personal awareness and support of
gay and lesbian individuals and issues. Additionally, she attributes her training as
a college Resident Assistant as contributing to her development of understanding
and support of gay men and lesbians. She indicates that since that time she has
been active as an ally in several forms, from general support of her friends to
formally and informally participating in educating others about gay and lesbian
issues.

Lindsey. Lindsey is a 31 year old, heterosexual, Caucasian woman who
resides in a suburban area of North Carolina. She is employed by an university in
North Carolina where she works in the student affairs division. She is an assistant
to a high ranking official within the university. Lindsey has completed a master’s
degree in a related field and at the time of the study was close to completion of a
doctoral degree. Lindsey has resided in suburban areas of North Carolina all of
her life. She is married and does not have children. At the time of the study she
described herself as a non practicing Baptist and identified herself as a Democrat.
Lindsey was raised in a traditional, religious, middle-class home in North Carolina. She talks about the values espoused at the church she attended during childhood and adolescence and although specific diverse populations were not discussed, “there was always this overriding foundation of being caring and being sensitive.” Lindsey is able to identify subtle antigay messages she received from her parents as a child and a few direct messages as an adult. She states that: “negative attitudes from family and friends, that is something I have had to work hard to overcome...” Lindsey describes her parents as being unsupportive of her brother since he told them that he is gay. Additionally, she indicates that her extended family is also unsupportive of gay and lesbian individuals in general and that the message not to talk about such issues is clear. Lindsey’s dissertation is about gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues and due to her family’s antigay sentiments “seventy percent of my family doesn’t even know what I am studying.”

Lindsey reports a long history of being an ally of gay men and lesbians and states that, “I have always been concerned about issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia. She indicates that “I have been very proactive the last two years” which was spurred by her brother telling her he is gay. Since that time her activism relating to gay and lesbian issues has included general support for gay and lesbian people she knows, confronting individuals on antigay sentiments, marching in a Pride parade, formally training others how to be allies of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, and conducting research on a gay and lesbian issue. Additionally, she attributes informal and formal education about gay, lesbian and
bisexual issues as a key component of her ongoing development as an ally of gay men and lesbians.

Lindsey and Jackie are employed by the same university and work in separate office settings. Additionally, they are both part of a program on the campus that is designed to train people to be allies of gay men and lesbians. Through their work they know each other as acquaintances. Sometime after the first round of interviews and before the second round, Jackie and Lindsey shared with each other that they were participating in this study.

Beth. Beth is a 33 year old, heterosexual, Caucasian woman. She spent her early childhood years in urban areas of Virginia and South Carolina and moved to rural West Virginia as an adolescent. She has lived in suburban areas of North Carolina most of her adult life. Previously married and divorced, Beth currently describes her relationship status as having a significant other. She has a six year old child. She holds an Associates Degree with double majors in nursing and business. At the time of the study she was employed as a Business Manager. Beth reports having no religious or spiritual affiliation or any allegiance to a particular political party.

Beth describes herself as having been an ally of gay men and lesbians all of her life, “even before I knew what gay was.” She attributes this to the values that were instilled in her throughout her life. Both of Beth’s parents are gay though they were married to each other until Beth was six or seven years old. After their divorce, both of Beth’s parents maintained long-term relationships with a person
of the same sex. Beth indicates that a marked difference in her activism as an ally occurred three years ago when she learned of the persecution some of her lesbian friends had faced. She states that she was not aware of the persecution many gay men and lesbians experience because “even though both of my parents were both gay, it was somewhat a sheltered gay life.” Currently, Beth finds herself regularly speaking out against antigay sentiments in both vocational and social settings.

Trisha. Trisha is a 29 year old, heterosexual, Caucasian woman. She resided in eastern Virginia throughout childhood and adolescence. She has lived in North Carolina for six years. Trisha holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in psychology. She is currently employed as a business analyst. She is married and does not have children. Trisha describes herself as having no religious or spiritual affiliation. She identifies herself as a Democrat.

Trisha was raised in eastern Virginia where she reports having a “good strong family background.” Trisha was “raised just to like people for who they were.” She reports that “my parents always had friends of different races and different religions and different sexual orientations, different backgrounds and beliefs, and we were just always exposed to a variety of people.” It was Trisha’s mother who introduced Trisha to a gay male who has been a best friend for a number of years.

Having been raised in an environment that was accepting of many forms of diversity, Trisha indicates that she experienced heightened awareness to gay and lesbian issues during college. It was during this time that she became conscious of having gay and lesbian friends; she learned of their struggles. Trisha notes that
it was probably this time period that marked the beginning of her activism as an ally of gay men and lesbians. Fearful of public speaking, Trisha’s support of gay and lesbian issues is best illustrated by her consistent confrontations of antigay sentiments to individuals and small groups. Additionally, she attends gay and lesbian fund raisers and other events that show her support for gay and lesbian issues and individuals.

Nancy. Nancy is a 43 year old, heterosexual, Caucasian woman. She was born, raised, and at the time of the study resides in rural North Carolina. Nancy is married and does not have children. She holds an Associate’s Degree and is a Registered Nurse. She engages in ongoing education to renew her licensure as an RN. Nancy does not have any religious or spiritual affiliation, and she identifies herself as a Democrat.

Nancy describes her parents as nontraditional for the geographical area in which she was raised. She stated that her parents are “country people.” “Being from around here in the “Bible Belt” I was raised by my parents... to believe that all people are the same regardless of the color of their skin, and this was in the 50’s here in the South. That is unusual.” Nancy reports that, “whether dad and mom wanted me to be that accepting of people who have same-sex sex, you know, I don’t know, I don’t know if they intended it to go that way, but that’s what happens.” She reports that her extended family offers a different view about gay men and lesbians, and “they really think I am weird.”
Nancy also attributes her development as an ally of gay men and lesbians to actively experiencing the culture of the seventies where “it just seemed like acceptance of different lifestyles was part of that whole culture.” Her activism progressed after working with gay men and then again when her best friend told her she is lesbian. Nancy’s active ally behaviors include confronting antigay sentiments in both occupational and social settings, supporting her gay and lesbian friends, and maintaining close relationships only with other individuals who she would identify as allies.

Introduction to the Themes

For Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians contains many caveats. Their experiences are primarily similar and yet also contain unique characteristics. The process for these five women contains both conscious and less conscious elements. As I examined the data, themes emerged clearly and are presented in detail below. The participants described a developmental process revealing a spectrum of ways of being an ally.

In order to fully appreciate the place from which the participants speak of their experiences, it may be helpful to know each individual’s working definition of the term “ally.” The essence of this definition seems to stay true throughout the interviews and, greater detail about the meaning was provided during the course of the interviews. The specifics of what it means to these individuals to become
and be an ally of gay men and lesbians is thoroughly explored throughout the presentation of the themes in this chapter. What follows is each individual’s basic definition of what it means to be an ally of gay men and lesbians.

When asked what it means to be an ally, Jackie reflects what seems to be the sentiment of the other women as well, that “it is hard to define.” Jackie’s definition: “I guess I would consider that somebody that tries to understand, somebody that is supportive. I guess supportive is the best word that I can come up with, the best way to describe it.” Lindsey’s definition is similar: “It means being someone who understands the issues. Understands what the concerns are... I try to be an active ally... I am supportive and do everything I can to move us forward because there is just so much work that needs to be done. So I guess that is what being an ally is.” Beth defines what it means to be an ally as: “I guess I just believe that everybody should have the right to do whatever they want, and [I] try to enable everybody to do that. So, I want them to feel... I want to try to help them to live their life the way they want .... I have friends that I support, you know, wholeheartedly... But so I mean I feel that I fight for their right to do what they want.”

Trisha states that “I had never actually heard the term before” until her lesbian friend recommended her for participation in the study. She reports some level of discomfort at having a “label” put on what comes so naturally to her. Upon reflection, Trisha’s definition of what it means to be an ally is as follows: “... an ally is a person that is supportive of people that they are friends with or people
that they just meet just for who they are and also having, I guess, a little more respect for a lot of the difficulty in being who they are ...” Nancy’s definition of what it means to be an ally: “It means I am supportive of gay men and lesbians, which I am and always have been ... And it means to me, too, that I sort of ... I mean I don’t get out and walk the streets and carry banners and things like that, but when the opportunity presents itself in a situation, I sort of call people on it. I stand up for gay men and lesbians.”

These definitions serve as the basic premise from which the participants reveal their experiences as allies of gay men and lesbians. Next, I present themes as I saw them emerge from the data.

Theme # 1 - Way of Being

Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy struggle with determining how they came to be allies of gay men and lesbians. For each of these women, factors that contributed are identified, yet in their search for pinpointing how, despite the odds, they became allies, each woman indicates that being an ally is simply a part of who she is. It is a way of being. I have divided the Way of Being theme that emerged from these interviews into sub categories that seem to elucidate what this means to the participants. The categories, described below, include: (a) Just who I am; (b) Response to family; (c) Beliefs and feelings about diversity and advocacy in general; and (d) Variables of impact.
Just who I am. Nancy states, “But I don’t know if there was any one particular thing” that led her to become an ally. Nancy summarizes becoming an ally as “it is just a natural response.” “It’s just not in my nature” to be anything but supportive of gay men and lesbians, says Trisha. Jackie reports that “it’s not a thing... you know, it is just a way of being.” Beth indicates that being an ally is just a part of who she is from the time that she was born. And, Lindsey wonders how she “beat the odds” given how she was raised, and rests this struggle with: “I mean I have always been concerned about other people’s feelings. I have been very sensitive.... And so, you know, as I got older it just became more focused, and these issues that I was concerned became more focused. Then in the last couple of years being an ally is a major part of who I am.” Determining how they became allies appears to be elusive to Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy, yet, each is confident that being an ally is a component of herself.

Response to family. With regards to being an ally, the participants are able to reveal their individual reactions to the familial messages they received. The degrees of acceptance by their families of gay men and lesbians, both directly or indirectly, seems to have had an impact on their development as an ally of gay men and lesbians. While variations of messages can be seen in the data, it is apparent that a component of being an ally is in direct reaction to familial messages regarding gay men and lesbians.

Beth describes her development as an ally of gay men and lesbians as a natural outgrowth of having two gay parents. She states that she was raised to be an ally
“because I feel like - even before - even before I knew what gay was, I knew that my parents were different. I knew that they weren’t the same as Billy’s parents, you know? So I think that - I think that it was probably instilled in my upbringing.” As she grew up and became more conscious of her parents being gay, she “realized that that was their lifestyle, and that there was nothing I could do to change it, so I just needed to accept it and I needed to be strong for them...” As an adult, Beth describes how she is more cognizant of the issues her parents face and that increases her desire to be active as an ally.

A lifetime of an accepting environment was also displayed in Trisha’s family of origin. She experienced her family as open minded and extending friendship to many people of diverse cultures including gay men and lesbians. Jackie states that “I was always raised to like people for who they were... just my family, they raised us, it just - it never really made a difference what anybody did or where they came from.” Trisha’s family also provided an educational component as she was exposed to a wide range of diverse people and her family engaged in dialogue about various issues. Trisha considers her “whole family to be allies”. A value of “people are people first” was expressed in her family.

Jackie’s family of origin provided her with both impetus to become an ally and also served to hinder such development. She experienced a foundation of acceptance of difference and also had to overcome lack of discussion of gay and lesbian issues. One message that Jackie received from her family is, “I always grew up knowing that you don’t put people down for those broad range of things,
homosexuality, race, religion, anything.” Also true for Jackie’s family, homosexuality “was never discussed in our house. I know now that if it had been it would not have been, it wouldn’t have been good. But at the time growing up, my family just never even discussed those things. And it was not for good reasons.” Two opposing realities were true in Jackie’s family of origin, and yet she developed to be an ally of gay men and lesbians.

Nancy’s parents seemed to surpass the norm of the conservative environment in which they lived, in that Nancy experienced them as generally accepting of difference. Nancy notes the uniqueness of her parents and states: “it is really surprising to me that my parents were raised in the Bible belt and raised us like that.” Nancy believes that she gets some of her accepting views of diversity from her parents. “My folks are country people. It is surprising to me that they are more accepting, I guess I get some of that from them, I don’t know.” Nancy’s extended family and some of her siblings do not share accepting attitudes of gay and lesbian individuals or any diverse group. “They really think I am weird. They really think that I, I don’t belong to the family at all and be, my point of view, my attitudes about gays and lesbians is just a small part of that.” Nancy is unable to identify why given the same environmental influences as her siblings, she evolved as an ally while their acceptance level of diversity is minimal.

Lindsey’s family of origin provided several subtle and some direct messages against gay and lesbian individuals. She states that “negative attitudes from family and friends, that is certainly something that I have had to overcome...that
is something I continue to have to work through and educate them.” She provides a couple specific incidents that duly indicate to her that gay men and lesbians were not accepted by her parents. “My brother would...something would happen, my dad would call him a big baby or a sissy or you know one time he wanted to get an earring and my dad said, Why do you want to get an earring, that’s girlish?” More recently her mother told her that “it is not right” to be gay or lesbian. Lindsey’s brother came out to his parents as being gay, and Lindsey reports that they are not supportive of him. Some of Lindsey’s development as an ally, she reports, is in direct response to her parents’ antigay sentiments.

**Beliefs and feelings about diversity and advocacy in general.** Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy indicate an appreciation for all forms of diversity. They each seem to value individuals from diverse groups though admit having more knowledge and passion about some groups of people than others. The women mentioned having knowledge and passion about underrepresented groups in addition to gay men and lesbians including, people of color, women, and those with ability issues. Additionally, the most frequent form of activism mentioned other than activism on behalf of gay men and lesbians is race issues in general, and people who are Black specifically. Several participants indicate that they wish they knew more about other populations and had more time to actively attend to other forms of activism.

Beth compares how she feels about homophobia to how she feels about racism and other “isms” when she states that starting in adolescence she “didn’t develop
friendships with people who were openly anti-gay, because I didn’t want to... I just don’t want to associate with those kinds of people. I don’t want to... you know, similar to a race thing. I mean to me, if you are that anti-something, I don’t want to be a part of it. And I didn’t want to associate with it.” She went on to explain that “everybody is different, and it doesn’t make one person bad or one person good. It is we are all different I think.”

Jackie indicates that her interest in advocacy is “more broad in general. While there are issues that I have more knowledge, I am very intolerant of people saying anything about anybody, I mean in terms of whatever the issue is, whether physical condition or weight, or gender, or anything. I mean I just don’t... I am very intolerant of that. And I try to be equally so. So I am definitely general.”

Racial issues are of specific importance. At another time Jackie indicated that:

I have done diversity training and attended some really great diversity training specific to African American, specifically African American-white interactions. I enjoyed that, and that is probably where I do my most confronting because that’s where I hear the most negative things... in terms of me being a white straight person in terms of what people are willing to say to me because of that... I hear more negative things in relationship to race than I do homosexuality. It doesn’t come up as often.

As Jackie spoke of her experience regarding diversity in general and with African American-white relations, her face was animated indicating significant passion and excitement.

Lindsey, too, finds herself interested in many forms of diversity and describes herself as an advocate in general. Like Jackie, Lindsey acknowledges that she has
knowledge about some groups more than others. When asked which issues she was most involved with besides gay and lesbian issues, she responds: “Issues of race, I guess, and gender. I guess those are the three that I am the most passionate about and speak up about. In my work I am exposed a lot to people with disabilities. And so that is something that I try to do more with. And it is not that one group is more or less important, but I am more passionate about other issues.” Interestingly, Lindsey’s thesis for her master’s degree was about African American issues and the topic of her dissertation is a gay, lesbian, and bisexual issue.

Similar to Lindsey, Jackie, and Beth, Nancy and Trisha described themselves as advocates for diverse populations in general, and, in addition to gay and lesbian issues having more to do with advocacy regarding Black individuals than other populations. Nancy reports that she is an advocate in what she calls “general ways.” She states that when she hears “complete and total lack of acceptance of people’s attitudes, points of views, things that people say. I just let them have it. I can’t stand it.” Trisha reports that she is “supportive of the people that I know and care about in general in whatever group they fall in. I accept all of my friends for who they are. To categorize them, I guess my major conflict is that I tend to speak up against is when people have problems with sexual orientation or color more than anything.” Additionally, Trisha describes a situation is which she was the minority, the only heterosexual person and the only Caucasian person at a large party of gay and lesbian people of color. “I look at it
as a great experience for me to kind of see what it was like for other people to be different in a place because in every sense of the word, I was nothing like the rest of the people that were there in the house... we partied the whole night. We had a great time. It was a really cool experience to actually be the different one for once and not the norm.”

Nancy, Trisha, Lindsey, Beth, and Jackie express that they value diversity and are willing to advocate in various ways for “isms” in general and with specific groups. They each articulate interest in diversity and being active with both general and specific issues. All participants shared through words, tone of voice and facial expression regret for limits of time and knowledge; they wish they could do more for underrepresented populations.

Variables of impact: South The influences of being raised or living in the Southeastern region of the United States are mixed among the participants, yet all are able to reflect on some type of impact. Additionally, the effects of rural versus urban environments within the South are telling for some of the women interviewed.

Lindsey reveals that being raised and living in the South has had a significant impact on her development as an ally. When she discussed this impact of region on herself, her tone of voice lowered and her glance drifted to the window as she appeared to be seriously considering the full Southern influence. “Growing up in the South, it is everything that people say it is and worse as far as just no acceptance and tolerance of different sexual orientations. This is just a
heterosexist part of the world, and part of the nation. That has an impact on you.”

Lindsey reports that since, in her opinion, it is not the norm to be an ally of gay men and lesbians in the South, she is aware that she “beat the odds.” She reports considering this repeatedly after our first interview. She revealed that she and her brother had a conversation about the South during which “I asked my brother that, “how do you think I turned out this way?” Her wondering continued as her answers to this question were not clearly identified.

Nancy too believes that living in the South has impacted her process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. “So I think that living in the South is... amongst all these bigoted, rednecked ...I don’t know...I think that has certainly shaped my attitude. And it is just something in me that made it come out that way. I could be just as bad as everybody else.”

Nancy extends her thinking to wondering what it would have been like if she had been raised in another part of the country. She indicates the great need for allies in the South versus other parts of the Western United States has contributed to her being an active ally of gay men and lesbians.

Uh, sometimes I think that if I had been raised someplace like San Francisco or some place on the left coast where the point of view is more open minded, Oregon, say for instance, different places where it seems to be more of an open mind than what we have here in the South, I don’t know if I would have felt as strongly that I have to say anything...So being here, being raised in this area I think has made me more, more vocal. There is just too many that wrong, as far as I am concerned, a wrong attitude. So, I say something about it. And I don’t think that I would have done that. I don’t know if I would have had as much of a, you know, attitude about it, you know.
Comparing parts of the country is also a phenomena shared by Trisha. She questions her ability to understand the Southern influence on her since she has never lived in another part of the country. “I mean this is just the only thing I have ever known is the Southern family upbringing...I don’t know if you can say it has actually had an influence on me...I have no basis for comparison.”

Jackie compares her experiences living in different places in the South. She found that two separate Southern environments had different effects on her as an ally. One area she describes as “not Southern” because “it is like a city,” and the general climate is one of acceptance of diversity in many forms including sexual orientation. The second environment, however, made her acutely aware that it was not safe for her gay friends. She became fearful for the people she knows to be gay due to the antigay sentiments that were the norm of the area. Talking about the safety or lack of safety for her gay friends in that particular part of the South, she states: “I was always aware of that.”

Beth denies that the South had an impact on her as an ally; however, she describes the influence of living in rural versus urban settings. During her late childhood and adolescence, Beth lived in rural West Virginia. She describes the environment as follows: “It is like a mill town, uneducated, West Virginians, you know, kind of red, well, not rednecks but like hill-billy kind of mentality. So, I would say probably it would be a more difficult battle to be an ally at home than it is here [urban North Carolina].” Noting the various challenging natures of
environments, Beth describes the suburban area of North Carolina as being difficult for an ally and notes that the nearby city offers an easier place to be an ally. She believes that the size of the area has an impact on views toward gay men, lesbians, and their allies.

Variables of Impact: Religion. Nancy, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Jackie deny any current religious affiliation. Beth chooses not to discuss religion beyond saying that she is not involved in organized religion. Each of the other women have some negative experiences that spawned her movement away from the church. While the negative religious history is problematic for Lindsey, who would like to be involved with a church, Nancy, Trisha, and Jackie indicate contentment with not being affiliated with a church. Nancy, Lindsey, and Jackie report that anger about hypocrisy in formalized religions is one reason for their lack of involvement in religions. Trisha is unsure how religion impacts her as an ally or how being an ally affects her involvement in religion. She just knows, “I don’t really have any spiritual or religious impact at this point.”

Jackie’s decision not to be involved in organized religions came after vast experience in a variety of churches. She was raised Catholic and attended Catholic, Baptist, and nondenominational churches “for a long time.”

And I have a very bad attitude about religion as an adult... I see so much hypocrisy in it that it makes me sick, and most of it is related actually to homosexuality is a big issue for me in that. I feel like what people do with the Bible is take it and interpret it - they interpret it the way they wanted it. They pick and choose what they want...in terms of their own life. And it makes me angry. I mean that is ridiculous that somebody can say, you know, you
can’t... homosexuality is wrong. It says in the Bible and so is birth control, to have sex, not to conceive a child. But you do that, don’t you? I mean, I just, I can’t stand it. It makes me sick.

Jackie’s religious opinions emerged from a wide range of experiences with organized religions and their response to homosexuality. “I am not an atheist. It is not my belief in God, but it has severely damaged my ability to be in an organized church...”

Similar to Jackie, Lindsey reports having difficulty with “religion and the church” despite having attended church much of her life. The relationship between religion and being an ally “has had a major impact” on Lindsey. Describing her views of the Church she attended, she states:

I don’t agree with their lack of addressing the issues. You know, I don’t think I ever heard the word “gay” said in our church. And to me that is not acceptable because you are denying the existence of my favorite person in the world. So, it has had a huge affect, and I just, I have always been frustrated with fundamentalists and people that kind of preach at you, you know I know it is just almost unbearable the way they use religion to condemn people. It is almost more than I can bear.

Lindsey reports struggling with this as she would like to be involved with an organized religion, but has not found one that is inclusive. “I can’t reconcile my beliefs with religion and the church.” She hopes one day she will find a place of worship that fits with her spirituality.

Nancy is very direct in saying that religion “is not the way it should be.” She too is troubled by people who espouse “Christian beliefs” and then behave in an entirely different manner. “I was just appalled with how many of these God-
fearing, Jesus-loving people don’t like Blacks or don’t like me because I like rock and roll and things like that. They are so judgmental and so unaccepting”. She too has not had religious experiences that were inclusive of diversity and does not want to be a part of what she views as hypocritical religious organizations.

**Variables of impact: Gender roles.** Each of the women ponder how messages about gender roles impacted her development as an ally of gay men and lesbians. They are unable to articulate specifically how their gender-role beliefs impacted them, but noted that their views in general are nontraditional. Each participant’s current views regarding gender roles are modern in scope as Nancy, Beth, Jackie, Trisha, and Lindsey all value equality between men and women. Trisha went so far as to say “I don’t think there are gender roles. I think that people are equal regardless of sex.”

For Lindsey, seeking gender-role equity is a conscious process. The way she lives her life and how she and her husband interact are an outgrowth of not wanting to be like her mother and father regarding gender roles. “By watching my parents and not liking what they did, I thought about that a lot in growing up. And I used to get so angry at my dad. And then I would get angry at my brother because I would be doing the dishes, and he didn’t. And I didn’t understand that. And, so. you know, just even growing up I said, my family is not going to be this way. I am not going to be the sole cleaner, cooker, take care of everything.” Lindsey describes herself as not doing “traditional female things”, she cannot
imagine giving up things such as her career, education, and activities to subscribe to traditional roles.

Jackie received mixed messages about gender roles in her family. She describes herself as being impacted more by her parents' actions than words. Jackie reports feeling most of her life as though she could do or be anything she wanted.

...my mother is very traditional in her thoughts. But she completely financially supported us most of my life that I can remember. And she worked hard and long hours and she kind of did it all. I think I learned more from what she did than what she would have taught me had she done so intentionally. Because even as an adult now if I try to talk with her about some issue, you know her views are just...from the 50's. So I guess I got most of that - my ideas of a role of a woman from that, and that was I could do whatever I wanted.

Beth's parents were "very, very feminist. I mean so I, I, my message from my parents probably my whole life was do what you want to do. You know, if it makes you happy do it." Now a parent herself, Beth raises her daughter with the same convictions. When speaking of her daughter she states, "I try to get her to be kind of outside the box," and reports encouraging non-gender specific play. "I buy her trucks and stuff like that because she wants it, but she does tend to like "girlie-girlie" kind of toys. But not by my design."

Nancy describes a home environment that was encouraging of her development as a person rather than who she was being tied to gender roles. "We were tomboys, and I felt like anything a guy can do I can do. And my parents fostered that, I think. Whether they just stepped back and let it happen or whether
they actually gave me that, whether they actually instilled that feeling in me, I am not sure. But they were always just really supportive of whatever we did. So I think they raised us to think for ourselves too.” Nancy remarks that she is appreciative of this upbringing. She wonders if being raised to think for herself contributed to her thinking differently about gay men and lesbians than the majority of the people in her immediate environment.

Pinpointing what “unfolded” to bring Jackie, Nancy, Beth, Trisha, and Lindsey to be allies of gay men and lesbians is difficult for these women. They each, in their own way, acknowledge that there were elements of impact, such as family, religion, region, and gender role beliefs, yet all believe that becoming an ally is simply a natural outgrowth of who they are; it is a way of being. More components of their process of being an ally are revealed in the second theme that emerged from the data, *Awareness*.

**Theme # 2: Awareness.**

Lindsey, Jackie, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy consistently identify awareness of gay and lesbian individuals and issues as greatly contributing to their development as allies. Three components of awareness emerge as being the most influential for these individuals: (a) personal contact with gay men and/or lesbians; (b) education; and (c) emotion. All of the participants acknowledge that the three components of awareness interrelate and a cyclical relationship is apparent. For example, Jackie states that once she knew a gay man personally,
she became angry about heterosexism and homophobia, she wanted to learn more about the population, and more people came out to her. Each participant identifies knowing someone who is gay or lesbian as marking a shift in her development as an ally. The shift is identified as movement toward action and advocacy regarding gay and lesbian individuals and issues.

**Personal contact.** Jackie discusses at length the significance that her best friend in college had on her development as an ally of gay men and lesbians. She describes her friend coming out to her as “my big movement forward.” It was after her best friend told her that he is gay, that Jackie’s process as an ally gained momentum.

I can’t define the process for you though. It is more that I love George. And it didn’t matter. And through my love for him and watching him struggle with what he was struggling with, it just never had occurred to me to not be positive about that. I can’t formalize the process. I can’t say he, that I went through these stages. I mean I probably did. But I don’t know what they are. I mean it was really initially just my caring for him, and then, you know, that was just the way it was after that ... I wasn’t going to not help or be supportive of somebody else.

Jackie goes on to explain how her awareness was heightened after George came out to her. She identified recognizing gay and lesbian symbols, use of language that indicates sensitivity to the issues, and identification of other gay and lesbian individuals that she already knew. Jackie chuckles out loud as she states that before George came out to her she didn’t even know she knew gay and lesbian individuals despite having gone through training as Resident Assistant to increase sensitivity to gay and lesbian issues.
Jackie’s personal connection to gay and lesbian issues impacts her emotions, which in turn spur her continued ally activities.

It all goes back to the whole way that I became familiar with homosexuality being through friends and people that I love and care about. So, you take that and then you have somebody that you see going through something similar to somebody that you really cared about going through, and in terms of coming out or dealing with a bad situation or the way they were treated, mistreated, or something because of that, then for me it is really hard not to feel that as if I were dealing with my friend going through that.

She later goes on to describe how her personal connections with gay and lesbian friends have impacted her in the work environment when dealing with a gay or lesbian student: “I can’t disconnect my emotions when I’m talking with a student that I don’t even know from my emotions when I’m dealing with one of my good friends who is going through something or has experienced something. I just can’t do it. I can’t separate it. I don’t really want to.”

Lindsey’s experience shows some similarities to Jackie’s. Although Lindsey believes she was always “sensitive to” issues of homophobia, it was not until her brother came out to her that she became active as an ally. When thinking about knowing gay and lesbian individuals, like Jackie, Lindsey notes that “I’m sure I was in contact all my life, but I didn’t know it until, you know, a certain point.” Lindsey reflects that she sees a shift in her development with two simultaneous processes, her involvement in a master’s in counseling program and her brother telling her that he is gay. “I can see a huge difference in my life since he came out to me, and that was in ’97.” During her master’s program “we had to do a lot
of self exploration and so it made me think about my own issues and how I think about things, and also coming into contact with lesbian and bisexual people”.

Lindsey believes that when her brother came out to her, she embarked on her journey of being an active ally of gay men and lesbians. “So it is a... Emotionally it is very personal.” Additionally, Lindsey has had positive experiences with other allies of gay men and lesbians in her work environment and that “has been very positive and influential.” “You know when you actually have friends who are, that makes a big difference... and coworkers.”

Since Beth was a child she has been in contact with gay and lesbian people due to the fact that her parents are gay. However, she also went through a process of becoming aware that her parents are gay. At first “I knew they were different.” Initially she had to realize how her parents differed from her friends’ parents: her parents were gay; her friends’ parents were heterosexual. Once she was aware of the source of the difference, Beth notes that she did not make friends with people who were not accepting of gay men and lesbians. She reveals that although she had been around gay and lesbian people all of her life, it was not until approximately three years ago that she became outspoken about antigay sentiments. This was sparked by learning from two gay people at her place of employment about the persecution many gay men and lesbians experience.

I didn’t realize some of the persecution that they, that they feel and experienced until I actually sat down with them and they said: “Well, look, you know, I have been fired from my job because I was gay. I have not been given a job because I was gay. You know, I have been asked to leave an apartment building. I have a
significant other's mother who won't speak to me because she feels like I made her daughter gay.” And I guess I just didn’t really realize that because even though both of my parents were both gay, it was somewhat of a sheltered gay life... Yeah so probably three years ago or so that I really, I think felt a need to voice my opinion to people that were straight or certainly people that are anti-gay. And I felt the need whether they believed my opinion or wanted to accept my opinion or not, I was going to make my opinion known that, you know, they were closed minded.

Beth’s experience of increased awareness followed by greater activism is similar to Jackie, Lindsey, Nancy, and Trisha’s movement toward advocacy after learning that people they care about are gay and/or lesbian.

Trisha, like Jackie, identifies the time in which she started speaking out against antigay sentiments as occurring directly following the time when her best friend came out to her. She describes her best friend coming out to her as “an avenue” that led her to speak out against antigay sentiments. Additionally, a close relative of hers came out to her as well as several friends around the same time period.

I guess just getting closer with those individuals and getting stronger friendships. I tend to get a little more upset when people make comments that I think are unnecessary and rude. I guess I am a little bit more up in arms about the way people treat other people now than I was before. And that’s just because from growing and acceptance and love for these people, I just won’t tolerate a lot of people that are pigheaded or stupid.

Based on her personal relationships with gay men and lesbians, and her best friend in particular, Trisha feels a sense of duty to “show up” as an ally. “I feel that if I did actually care what other people thought and if I thought they might feel badly about me or not like me because I was an ally and I led them to believe
that I wasn’t, then I wasn’t being true to my friends. And, you know, primarily that would be Scott. I wouldn’t be a very good friend to him if I ever, you know, let it bother me.”

Nancy says that there is not any one point in which she could say she “arrived as an ally.” However, like Trisha, Jackie, and Lindsey, Nancy describes becoming more aware of gay and lesbian issues after she personally became friends with gay men. Her first known contact came with people with whom she worked in the restaurant business. She saw how the patrons criticized the gay men, and her awareness to homophobia was heightened. Like Beth, Nancy noticed a shift in her thinking when her lesbian friend shared with her how difficult life can be for gay men and women. “I mean, I have always known, but until I have had a close friend and talked to her about some of the things that she has experienced I don’t think I realized just how hard it really was, just day to day living.” After her best friend came out to her, Nancy began to think that she should do more to curb homophobia and heterosexism. She found herself personally impacted by the difficulty her friend faces as a lesbian. “I guess I have a lot of emotions tied up with it now because my best friend is gay.” Wanting to make life better for her friend and other gay men and women, Nancy found herself evaluating what she could do to make this world a safer place to be lesbian or gay.

With each woman in the study identifying a shift in themselves after a friend or loved one came out to her, it is clear that knowing gay and lesbian individuals
has had an impact on the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians for these women. The passion, the animation in their faces, the depth of their feelings as are apparent in the quotes, and their stories of change indicate that consciously knowing someone who is gay or lesbian impacts the development of these allies of gay men and lesbians.

**Emotion.** The data reveal that for these women, emotions are part of the driving and maintaining force of the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. Each of these allies describes specific emotional components of their ally process. The emotions they express surrounding being an ally include anger, worry or concern, sadness, and passion. Tending to reflect on gay men and women they care about, Trisha, Nancy, Beth, Jackie, and Lindsey reveal that personalization of the issues is a component of their emotional experiences. Each woman discusses how her feelings impact her as an ally.

**Worry/Concern.** Trisha's worry for her best friend (and gay and lesbian people in general) stems from an experience she witnessed when her gay friend was verbally attacked for being gay when he was walking through a parking lot. After that experience she realized that "I would worry about people hurting my friends for being themselves, that is the thing that concerns me the most...I worry about stupid people hurting him."

Beth's worry came after an incident at a former work environment in which she witnessed "gay bashing." "I think I was more distressed over it because they were my friends. I think I would have been distressed over it period, but it was a
little more heightened because these were my friends you are now talking about, not just gay bashing, you are gay bashing my friends.”

Jackie’s concern is directly linked to her best friend as she finds herself unable to separate her feelings for her friend from her feelings that arise when she is talking with another gay or lesbian individual. “...It all goes back to the whole way that I became familiar with homosexuality being through friends and people I love and care about. So, you take that and then you have somebody that you see going through something similar to somebody that you really cared about...then for me it is really hard not to feel that as if I were dealing with my friend going through that.” Nancy’s experience is similar. “I guess I have a lot of emotions tied up with it now because my best friend is gay. I feel I have a lot of concerns and worries for her, I suppose.”

**Passion.** Feeling passionate about gay and lesbian issues and her role as an ally is central to Lindsey’s experience of being an ally. “I do get very passionate about this.” The passionate responses seem to be a natural outgrowth of loving and caring about gay and/or lesbian individuals as she reports that “it is a, emotionally, it is very personal.” Lindsey’s passion also takes the form of excitement: “So emotionally it makes me excited, and it makes me happy to do what I am doing...I am very excited about what I can do as an ally.” In summarizing her emotional experience as an ally Lindsey stated: “Well I am passionate about these issues, as so the more I can, I can, I mean I am passionate about it so that drives my interest and that drives my continuing to learn more.”

Nancy's anger serves to make her respond quickly when she hears antigay sentiments. "It's that (snaps fingers) instantaneous, you're pissing me off saying stuff like that. I respond and then move on from there." Jackie finds her anger most prevalent when homophobia or heterosexism appears in an unexpected environment. "So that probably drives me even harder. Because there are things in the environment that I think there is no excuse for. So that makes me want to work harder and be more out there and try to be a leader in that regard." Lindsey too is driven to more action as she is angered by unexpected homophobia. When her major professor told her he would not support her dissertation topic which was related to gay and lesbian issues:

I was just so angry. And I just - and I didn't even think to change my subject... I was angry and disappointed. You know it made me disappointed in humanity because you think on a college campus it is a place where you have freedom of ideas and it is a place where - I like to think that we are a little bit ahead of the picture, broader society. So to have that blatant homophobia hit me in the face. I was just so disappointed.

Lindsey went to great lengths to continue her dissertation about her original topic, including replacing her major professor and another committee member. She would not be stopped.

Trisha and Beth both report that their reactions to antigay sentiments move from anger to sadness. Trisha states: "I guess sometimes a little anger at people's
ignorance and the need to openly bash... and sometimes I feel a little sad.” She goes on to explain that her sadness is about what such individuals miss out on by being so negative about gay and lesbian individuals. At the top of this list is fulfilling relationships with gay men and lesbians. Similarly, Beth reports initial anger that is followed by sadness because “they miss out.”

**Response to Ignorance.** Lindsey, Nancy, Beth, and Trisha seem to have an emotional response to ignorance regarding gay and lesbian issues. Lindsey states: “I read more and see a lot of the ignorance out there. It makes me angry. It makes me want to do more.” She goes on to discuss her impatience with others’ ignorance at her place of employment: “… there are some stupid people in Student Affairs, and they have just as many ignorant beliefs and a lot of religious overtones... So that probably drives me even harder. Because there are things in the environment that I think there is no excuse for. So that makes me want to work harder and be more out there and try to be a leader in that regard.” Lindsey reports that she has to keep the degree of frustration she has with others’ ignorance in check so that she can continue to be an ally.

I guess the frustration sometimes of ignorance that is out there. But if I were to let that control how I felt then I wouldn’t be an ally. So, you know, you have to- I have to feel that and respect that I do get angry and frustrated but that’s not - definitely not an emotion that rules me, because if it does I wouldn’t continue to do what I am doing. It would be too frustrating and disappointing. So, I think I tend to focus on the positive side, and I get more positive about what I can do as an ally.
Beth’s reaction to others’ ignorance regarding gay and lesbian issues is a mixture of anger and sadness. Her initial response is that she feels “mostly angry.” Further reflection reveals: “it kind of depends on their age. If I hear like a young person I think how sad that is that they are so young and starting out on a bad pathway. And then if they are older I just think, Oh, how ignorant you are.” Trisha expresses anger and feeling sorry for those who are homoprejudiced. She feels:

A lot of irritation. It just gets on my nerves. And, again, like I said before, you’ve got to feel sorry for those people. They are just so stupid. I mean they really just have no idea what they are talking about. They think they know what they are talking about, but they won’t even, they don’t give people a chance based on something in their past that led them to believe it was wrong, and so they end up missing out on a lot of quality friendships that they might have.

Nancy is direct in her response to others’ homophobia and heterosexism. She states: “I guess first and foremost it gives me an awful lot of anger. It pisses me off...People piss me off.” She explains further that “I mean intellectually I know it is just right [to be supportive of gay men and women]. Emotionally it just pisses me off because other people can’t see it. I mean to me it is pretty simple...It is easy.”

**Education.** Education regarding gay and lesbian issues emerged as a part of the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians for the five participants. Both informal and formal aspects of education were revealed. Each participant expresses that the intellectual knowledge about gay men and lesbians contributes to her activism. Jackie, Lindsey, Trisha, Beth, and Nancy
acknowledged that the emotional and intellectual components of their awareness impact each other in a cyclical fashion; emotions spark the interest to learn and learning fuels further emotions.

Beth describes her education about gay and lesbian issues as occurring throughout her life. She identifies "mine is probably a little bit different than most everybody else because I had longer exposure, probably, a different kind of exposure for a longer period of time." Because her parents are gay, Beth believes that her education occurred naturally over her lifetime. "I think mine was more like just an upbringing, learning from childhood on upward."

Nancy and Trisha describe exposure to gay and lesbian issues and people as a significant component of their education. Being a part of the "whole 70's thing" was important for Nancy. She reports that it taught her to value diversity in general. She also states that "I think the real thing that helped to form my opinion is the times and education. You know education is a big part of it." Trisha has attended a number of "gay events" and believes that her exposure enhanced her knowledge which then led her to be open to learning more.

Jackie and Lindsey describe actively and consciously seeking knowledge. In part, for both women, this occurred in their work environments on a university campus. Additionally, Jackie and Lindsey speak repeatedly about the importance of education in their process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians for themselves and for others. Lindsey goes so far as to say, "I think the very first step is education. Learning about the issues, debunking some of the
myths.” Similarly, Jackie reports that “education is key” to being an ally.

Lindsey continues: “I keep going back to education, but I think that is crucial.”

Lindsey believes her education began when she was a child. “You know, little things like reading Roots when I was in third grade or something. You know that has an impact.”

Jackie and Lindsey share a more formal process in their education. They work on the same university campus and are part of a program on the campus that is designed to train people to be allies of gay men and lesbians. They went through a formal three-hour educational session themselves and, at the time of the study, both had participated as an educator in the trainings. In the workshops, a gay or lesbian individual and a heterosexual ally team up to challenge the participants to be allies. Both women describe this experience as contributing to their education of gay and lesbian issues and individuals.

The women acknowledge that emotional and educational components interact and impact their process. Lindsey reports: “I am passionate about it so that drives my interest and that drives my continuing to learn more....I read more and see a lot of the ignorance and the stupidity out there. It makes me angry. It makes me want to do more. So, yeah, yeah, I think they both impact and interact. I guess I would call it a cycle or a circle.” Similarly, Jackie states: “Well I think the emotional is what sparks me to become involved in the intellectual.” Nancy says, the more she knows the less willing she is to let any antigay sentiments slip by without confronting them. Trisha describes her desire to attend more “gay
events” with her best friend because she can support and learn at the same time. And Beth indicates that emotional and intellectual elements have been such a part of her whole life that they are hard to separate.

Theme # 3: Commitment

Nancy, Jackie, Beth, Lindsey, and Trisha describe a tremendous degree of commitment as part of who they are as allies. Their commitment to being allies emerge in the data through the actions that each describe, the risks that they take, the fear they overcome, and the challenges they face as allies of gay men and lesbians. They question if they are doing enough. Each woman describes a sense of guilt or regret for not doing more as an ally. The data reveal that these women are indeed committed to being allies of gay men and lesbians. Their commitment can be seen in: (a) action, (b) challenges to speaking out, (c) risks at work, (d) others’ opinions, (e) overcoming stereotypes, and (f) concern about not doing enough.

Action. The action component of the commitment theme takes many forms and shapes. It ranges from support of friends to formally training others to be attentive to gay and lesbian issues and individuals. Sometimes it involves significant risk to jobs or relationships; other times the participants indicate minimal risk is involved. Each participant, in her own way, is active as an ally of gay men and lesbians.

Beth prefaces what she does as an ally by evaluating her level of action.
...all that I could do certainly at this - at this point in my life is small pieces, just let anybody know that I talk to that is straight that, you know, there is nothing wrong with it. It's not immoral, it's just the way they are. And I guess just voicing my opinion any time that I feel like there is something inappropriate. So it is small, it is a small piece, but I am just not sure what I could do globally to fix it all. I mean if I could, I think I would.

Beth goes on to describe how she lets others know that she is an ally and how she voices her opinion about anything “inappropriate” related to gay and lesbian issues. “I think I am just vocal about my friendships” with gay and lesbian individuals. She shares how she is inclusive of partners and does not hide that her female friends, for example, are actually a couple and not just two women who she happens to know separately. Additionally, Beth states that she often confronts behavior or comments that she finds to reflect prejudice against gay men and lesbians. “I just set them straight and they usually back off.” She describes her confrontations as questioning and sharing her view of acceptance and support.

Trisha’s action as an ally is similar to Beth’s. She confronts antigay sentiments regularly and shows her support through inclusion, friendship, and attending “gay events.” Trisha describes one way she confronts is through questioning, like Beth. “People make comments and I’ll say things to them, ‘Was that a really necessary point to make’?” She reports that “when somebody says something that I don’t care for, I just speak up for it.” Trisha is of the philosophy “let your actions speak for themselves.” She reports, “I don’t feel like I need to get out there and shout to the roof tops. I just think that the way I carry myself
and the friends that I choose to keep is a reflection in itself.” She regularly attends benefits for gay and lesbian organizations. Additionally, she has offered to testify in court on behalf of a lesbian couple engaged in a custody battle.

Like the other women, Nancy too finds herself consistently speaking out against antigay comments or actions as a part of daily life. She notes that “there is a lot of things, like in everyday life that go on that I don’t, don’t agree with but don’t necessarily say anything about. But gay and lesbian issues is not one of those.” Not wanting to “write speeches,” she chooses to show her action as an ally on a day to day basis, as issues come up. She also advocates for lesbians at her place of work speaking about employment and retention issues. Nancy finds herself “reaching out to those gals who I thought were probably lesbians.”

Nancy’s friendship choices have also been impacted by her status as an ally of gay men and lesbians. She describes choosing not to be friends with a woman whom she cares greatly about because her husband is a “bigot.” “I am talking about redneck and bigot, and I just can’t stand it. And I love his wife to death but I can’t be her friend anymore.” She expresses a sense of loss that accompanies this choice.

Lindsey reports being involved in varied activities as an ally of gay men and lesbian. Her activities include attending gay and lesbian related activities such as a vigil for Mathew Shepard and a Pride march, becoming a facilitator in trainings to encourage people to be allies, confronting heterosexist comments and behaviors, conducting research about gay and lesbian issues, and hanging a
banner in her office that indicates she is an ally. She reports that all of these activities give her a “good feeling”. She states that, “everyone that knows me knows I am an ally.”

Jackie reports showing her support for gay men and lesbians in both professional and social settings. She states that she has difficulty speaking in groups about any issue, but recently found herself confronting a classroom of people who were debating whether gay men and lesbians should be hired as teachers. “I was kind of floored by that”. Jackie was on a steering committee to start a program to encourage people to be allies of gay men and lesbians and has gone through the training herself. Additionally, she, like the other women who participated in this research, often confronts antigay sentiments on a day to day basis.

**Challenges to speaking out.** Jackie, Nancy, Beth, Trisha, and Lindsey express challenges to speaking out against antigay sentiments. Being an ally is not risk free, yet for these women, their commitment surpasses the challenges. This is not to suggest that these women are always outspoken, rather, they are sometimes able to do nothing more than acknowledge that challenges exist. What is maintained, even when they are not able to actively show their support for gay and lesbian issues, is their commitment to being an ally.

Lindsey acknowledges that speaking out against antigay prejudice comes with challenges. “It is always a risk.” Some of the challenges Lindsey experiences include her family of origin and people who use the Bible as a weapon against
homosexuality. The challenges with Lindsey’s family primarily stem from her protectiveness of her gay brother who is only out to his parents and sister. “With family I always think of my brother first. And if a comment I am going to say is going to reflect on him, I don’t say it. So, the main goal is not to out him.” She also experiences challenges with her parents because they are “not rejecting him but not accepting that piece of who he is. And so I stand up for him, so me being an ally for specifically him, that creates tension for me and my parents.” She also does not talk about her dissertation or other gay and lesbian related topics with her family because it is “a hard thing to bring the issues up in my family because we just don’t talk about those things.”

The other challenge with which Lindsey readily identifies is dealing with people who use the Bible to condemn gay men and lesbians. Her difficulty arises because “I don’t think you can argue with people like that... I can’t argue religion with someone because I don’t buy into what they are saying. I don’t buy into their whole belief system. So, if I don’t buy into it, I can’t argue with them.” She acknowledges, however, that people can change and that it just takes some pushing them in their development. No matter what the situation, “when I don’t say something I come away and I am so upset with myself for not saying something, and I am angry because I felt like I let an opportunity go.”

Jackie too says that family can be challenging for her. She has had discussions with her family and is now at a place in which she is more apt to “walk away” when prejudice against gay men and lesbians is exhibited. However, due to the
discussions she has had with them, "they know, and they get quiet" if she leaves
the room. She expresses her belief that the discussions were "not going
anywhere" so walking away is just as effective. Other situations that challenge
Jackie are when "older people" or "other professionals," particularly "upper level
administrators," need to be confronted. She expresses her desire to grow beyond
the difficulty of confronting people who are older than her and other
professionals.

Challenges to speaking out that Beth experiences include confronting large
groups, confronting when it seems like change is unlikely, and confronting when
her daughter may be hurt by her actions. Beth reports that "there have been a
few encounters at work places where there were, I guess, too large an audience to
really get into a heated discussion with one person. There were too many people
around that, you know, and I chose not to at that point. I guess I kind of showed
my frustration." Occasionally Beth has chosen not to say all that she would like to
people who are "elderly" out of a belief that change is unlikely, when "it's like
talking to a brick wall." She explains that it is "not so much that I didn't vocalize
at all, but I guess that I maybe started to and then just dropped and said, 'it's not
worth it,' kind of thing." Another situation that Beth indicates is challenging
relates to her concern for her daughter. She reports limiting speaking out when
she thought her daughter might not be permitted to play with a best friend if Beth
confronted the child's father too hard. "Because it is a small neighborhood, and I
guess I wasn't quiet, but I wasn't as vocal as I wanted to be."
Like Beth, Nancy finds it challenging when confronting someone feels “like you are beating your head against the wall.” Despite this difficulty, also like Beth, Nancy finds that even when she doesn’t believe her words will make a difference, “it still doesn’t matter, I still say something.” She explains that “I can’t keep my mouth shut sometimes,” even in the presence of challenges. She reports that it is important “particularly here in the Bible-belt” to offer a different opinion. Nancy reported that her greatest difficulty in speaking out against antigay prejudice is that:

I know it sort of goes against what I said about standing up and things like that. I don’t like to make people feel terribly uncomfortable. I don’t know. I don’t know. I can’t really say that, that, there is any particular situation where I wouldn’t say something, but I don’t always. I admit that. Like I said maybe it is just not the right situation where it would make everybody feel uncomfortable and it wouldn’t achieve a whole lot.

Like Jackie, Trisha experiences challenges when speaking out with “older people.” She reasons that older people are “not saying it to be mean,” but rather are a product of their times. When talking about a member of her family who she does not confront about racially prejudiced comments, she reports her thinking as follows: “She is just an older woman, that’s the way she was raised.” She goes on to explain that she does not believe that the “older woman” is being “ugly” or “hateful.” With older members of the family in general, Trisha states: “They are all set in their ways and some of them are half senile anyway so it wouldn’t make any difference.” She indicates that she feels sorry for anybody who is not
accepting of gay men and lesbians regardless of their age. Other times that she does not speak out include:

Outside of the family setting I think people that I quite honestly just have no respect for or I don’t actually give a damn about, to put it in a harsher way. I mean if there is somebody just rambling off, spouting about the mouth saying all kinds of stupid things, I just choose to ignore them at some point. You know a context where I might would be with other people around or if I thought, you know, somebody was going to be affected by it. But if I’m just sitting there and hearing a conversation off in another room I wasn’t even a part of anyway, so I am not going to go jump up in there and get in the middle of it. I’ve heard people say things, and I’m just like, “whatever”. Those people don’t matter enough for me to even go in and talk with them. You know, because I don’t think they are worth the conversation. Not that I’m afraid to speak to them or that I might agree with them at any point, I just don’t think they are worth taking the time to talk to.

**Risk at work.** Lindsey, Jackie, Trisha, Nancy, and Beth’s commitment to being allies is displayed in their attitudes about discrimination/nondiscrimination toward gays and lesbians in places of employment. Some of the work environments for these women are more supportive of gay and lesbian issues than others, and yet all of the women share that, at the time of the study, they would be unwilling to work for discriminatory employers. They all acknowledge the realities of needing a job. The five women’s work environments can be broken down into two categories: (1) supportive; and (2) politically correct. Jackie and Lindsey’s workplace is supportive, Trisha, and Nancy’s is politically correct, and Nancy’s is unsupportive regarding gay and lesbian individuals and issues.

Jackie describes her work environment as “a supportive environment to be a homosexual and it is a supportive environment to support homosexuality.” One
reason she believes her place of work is affirmative of gay men and lesbians is because she doesn’t “run into people that I have to confront for negative things in my professional career.” Imagining what it would be like for her to work in a discriminatory environment, Jackie states: “I would not last long, and I wouldn’t care.” However she acknowledges that, “if I were to get fired that is a scary thought.” She notes that she is fortunate that her place of employment is supportive of her as an ally of gay men and lesbians. She was “rewarded” for being on the steering committee to form a group designed to encourage others to be allies.

In that Lindsey and Jackie work on the same campus they share some of the same perceptions of the workplace. Lindsey too perceives her place of employment to be openly supportive of gay men and lesbians and their allies. Discussing her work environment, she states: “It is very safe and comfortable for me to be an ally... My environment here, I mean, it couldn’t be any better as far as being an ally. Starting from support from my boss and his leadership... He is one of the top administrators in the whole university, and he constantly talks about issues related to GLB folks.”

Lindsey also imagines what she would do in an unsupportive job environment: “I think I would push the system as much as I could. I certainly wouldn’t want to lose my job, but I would have to speak out...I have to think that if I was in a work environment where it wasn’t comfortable to be an ally, I still would do as much as I could without losing my job.”
Nancy describes risk taking on the job as a process. She said that there was a time when she first wanted to “cement my position” before being outspoken on controversial issues, but “once I have cemented my position and know that they value me and what I say isn’t going to matter, I don’t, I don’t stop.” Nancy’s work environment contributes to her speaking out as an ally. “I think I started becoming more outspoken when I started working in the medical/clinical setting and saw, as I was telling you before, how many of what I thought were well-educated and in my mind, in my foolish childish mind thought, more educated i.e. more enlightened, not true at all. And I think that just appalled me, you know?” Nancy went on to say how she became more willing to confront her colleagues when she heard antigay comments after she saw the realities of her environment at work. She acknowledges, however, that “I want to work there, yeah, I guess I would have to be careful about it”. She reports that she has been in her job long enough now that she is comfortable confronting others on these issues without fearing that she will lose her job.

Beth reports at the time of the study that her work environment “doesn’t appear to be discriminatory or anything like that...they are politically correct I guess, on everything...so although support probably isn’t the right answer, they’re not non-supportive, I guess, is more like it.” Beth states: “I wouldn’t work at a place that I felt like somebody’s orientation was going to be a factor in them keeping a job. I would leave. I wouldn’t work there...I just wouldn’t be professionally linked with a place where it was a problem.” Trisha states that
there is absolutely no conversation in her office about gay men and lesbians. She states that “most people don’t talk about anything but themselves anyway, and their families.” Trisha, like Beth and Jackie, says she would not work in an environment that was antigay.

Each of the women seem clear about her limits or boundaries in work environments while also appreciating the necessity of being employed. When it comes to being an ally, there seems to be little room for compromise in their values.

**Others’ opinions.** The women address their level of concern about others’ opinions of them for being allies. Jackie, Lindsey, Nancy, Beth, and Trisha directly report lack of concern if others think negatively of them because they are allies. Nancy report that “there is not much room in my life” for people who are antigay. She has chosen not to associate with “bigots” and “it’s okay if they think badly of me” because she does not want to be associated with such individuals. Similarly, Trisha states: “I mean there are always going to be people that would be antigay, and those are the people and those would be the people I would not be able to have a quality friendship with... they are not really worth me spending time with anyway...” Beth describes situations as early as high school in which she originally thought she wanted to be friends with someone and then chose not to be their friend after finding out that they held negative views about homosexuality. She reported this type of situation as “no great loss.”
Lindsey’s statement is direct and to the point: “If people think less of me, then that’s their problem.” Jackie reports not being aware of anyone having a negative opinion of her because she is an ally and states, “I don’t care.” Whether it means loosing friendships or not forming them with certain people, Jackie, Nancy, Lindsey, Beth, and Trisha seem to have no desire to associate with people who hold negative views about gay men and lesbians or their allies.

**Physical safety.** The realities of living in the South and the United States in general include gay and lesbian individuals’ physical safety being compromised by what is commonly called “gay bashing.” Since we cannot look at individuals and determine with certainty whether or not they are gay or lesbian, it is not a stretch to believe that sometimes allies of gay men and women could be in danger. Lindsey and Beth report feeling physically unsafe as an ally at one time or another. Lindsey describes a situation in which she did not confront a group of men who were saying negative things about gay people because “I just felt like it wasn’t safe for me to confront them in that situation because something could happen, and I wouldn’t be able to protect myself. So physical safety is a concern.” Beth describes being fearful for her safety on a couple of occasions while leaving a gay and lesbian club she had attended with some of her gay or lesbian friends. She notes physical attacks of gay people are “too common” when leaving bars.

Jackie, Nancy, and Trisha report never having experienced fear for their physical safety as a result of being allies. Jackie states that if she needed to be
fearful “that would just make me angry.” Trisha explains why she is not afraid of being hurt because she is an ally. “I don’t have any fears for myself... I don’t know if it is just because I am in the norm, I’m white, I’m married, whatever that group of people is. I don’t know. People would just be more willing to allow me to have my own thoughts for a little bit and then they can put that aside because, you know, she is still a normal person.” Nancy indicates that she has not experienced fear for her safety as a result of being an ally and wonders if her fear would stop her from speaking out. Her answer to her own question: “I don’t know, I haven’t been in that situation.”

**Accusations of being lesbian.** Across the board, Nancy, Trisha, Beth, Lindsey, and Jackie report not caring if others think they are lesbian because of their activities as an ally of gay men and lesbians. Beth is the only one who has been directly accused of being lesbian. She reports that it was “a little uncomfortable” but that “I don’t care what they think.” Jackie, Lindsey, and Nancy have all considered if others think they are lesbian. Nancy states: “It doesn’t matter to me what other people think.” Jackie stated, “it doesn’t bother me, but I have wondered.” Lindsey reports: “You know if somebody was to think that I was lesbian or bisexual, then that’s whatever they need to think.”

Trisha’s response to the thought of others thinking she is lesbian: “...it makes no difference to me. I mean if they want to know they can ask me.”

**Overcoming stereotypes.** Jackie, Lindsey, Nancy, Trisha, and Beth’s commitment to being an ally of gay men and lesbians extends to being an ally for
all types of gay men and women. Stereotypes of gay men and women are of little consequence to the women who participated in this study, though they are aware when they notice people who fit stereotypes and make assumptions that these people are gay or lesbian.

Jackie reports that when she sees someone who fits the stereotypes she may immediately think that the person is gay or lesbian. She explains “that is not negative for me,” and says she cautions herself not to make assumptions. It does not affect her ability to be an ally. Lindsey states that, “when you see stereotypical attributes, I am just like anyone else, that comes to mind.” She is “aware that I might do that, I just try not to.” And like Jackie, “as far as me standing up for someone or not, I don’t see any difference.” She considers herself to be an ally for all gay men and lesbians, not just the ones that do not fit the stereotypes.

Nancy, Beth, and Trisha’s support of gay men and lesbians extends through stereotypes as well. Nancy states: “It doesn’t change for me. I don’t have a problem being supportive of anybody who happens to be gay or lesbian. She also adds that she “enjoys” gay men who are flamboyant and that she has many lesbian friends who she describes as “redneck dikes.” Similarly, Trisha reports that, “I have friends who are both flamboyant and not flamboyant men and women. That’s just who they are.” The same is true for Beth. “The majority of my friends are in the stereotypic...” Beth admits that, “I still do fall into some of the same stereotypical gaydar flashes, but I, at no point does it occur to me to think...
that I either do want to be a friend of that person or I don’t want to be a friend of that person because of that orientation.” The women are aware of people fitting stereotypes, and it does not impact their ability to be allies.

Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy report that they do not feel like they have to like all gay and lesbian individuals in order to be an ally. Lindsey states: “I don’t glorify sexual orientation. I don’t put people on a pedestal because of their sexual orientation either way. If I don’t like someone, I just don’t like them.” Jackie states that liking someone or not is unrelated to sexual orientation. “I mean it doesn’t, that doesn’t have anything to do with it.” Beth’s statement: “If I don’t like you, I don’t like you for some other reason. It’s not because you’re Black or you’re gay or, you know, I have another reason that I don’t like you.” Similarly, Trisha reports that “It really wouldn’t matter one way or the other to me whether they were gay or straight, I mean the people I dislike are for many different reasons.” Nancy reports that she has no problem disliking someone who is gay or lesbian if it is warranted, “but I might be a little more accepting of all gays and lesbians... it is more that I want to accept everybody who is gay and lesbian and give them a chance.” She goes on to describe a situation in which she did not like one person in a lesbian couple and how that was difficult on her friendship.

Concern about not doing enough. The women in this study express their belief that they should, could, or would like to do more as allies of gay men and lesbians. Although each participant states that she feels good about herself for
being an ally and the ways she shows her support for gay men and lesbians, she also questions if what she is doing is really enough. Some of the women had specific ideas about what else they could do, others were not sure but had a general sense that they would like to do more, and others did not know how they could fit more into their lives given the realities of time, other commitments, and energy.

Nancy expresses a generalized feeling that, “I could do more.” She went on to state that, “I don’t feel like I have done as much as I could have.” She even questions what she has done as an ally and seems to be unsatisfied with herself. “Here I consider myself to be an ally of gays and lesbians but I don’t do a whole lot about it.” She appears to get a bit down on herself as she ponders her contributions further.

But honestly I don’t know what “more” would be. But it is something that I could explore, obviously, because we do have so many friends now, mostly lesbians.... And so, you know, we absolutely have the avenue or the way that we could learn more what we could do. I haven’t done that. So, makes me feel not really ashamed, but sort of in that direction that I could do more. I’m not really ashamed but I beat myself up a little bit about it.

Nancy reports during the second interview that she had given a lot of thought to her contributions and what more she could do as an ally. She states that she is still pondering it, but wants to do more.

Nancy is not alone in being a bit upset with herself. Jackie’s self-dissatisfaction in her role as an ally comes in the form of how she handles some confrontational situations. She gets upset with herself when she sees her response
as “not quick enough.” She states: “...bad experiences are situations in which people have said something negative and I wasn’t quick enough to come back, and that’s a problem I have... Almost any time you say something that really shocks me, I’m not good. I’m not quick on those things.” Jackie describes this as a problem in many areas of her life and one that she is working to overcome.

Jackie is also afraid that she will “not handle something correctly” and offend someone, particularly someone who is gay or lesbian. She finds herself checking what she has said to make sure “it came across right” and asks herself and sometimes others “Did it come out right?” “Did they understand?” She describes her concern as having “a fear of saying the wrong thing.” She takes on a sense of responsibility for speaking out against homophobia and gets down on herself if she does not grasp opportunities to impact others.

Lindsey describes a couple of situations in which she confronted individuals and thought she could have done more, or said something differently that would have been “more effective.” Lindsey tends to replay confrontations in her mind. She reports one situation when she was in the locker room and confronted two
women who were making derogatory comments about lesbians. "And they just kind of looked at me like why are you butting in our conversation. And I dropped it, and later on I wished I hadn’t, wished I’d done more.” Lindsey seems to have some patience with herself as she conceptualizes being an ally, in part, as a learning process. “So each time it is kind of a learning process, what to say, and you know sometimes it is just a classic, ‘Well, I really shouldn’t have said this,’ or you think later what you should have said. And sometimes I just don’t confront issues, and like I said, that really bothers me because that is incongruent.” Lindsey is aware of her efforts as she is easily able to give examples and still she says: “I think I could do more. You can always do more.”

Beth also conveys that she feels bad about herself in situations when she does not confront. She reports feeling “guilty” and “personalizing” situations in which she does not confront or says less than what she would like. She says her guilt is “specifically because of my friends and family.” She feels like she is letting people she cares about down if she does not do everything she can. She, like the others, evaluates how she is an ally and reports that when she confronts, “I don’t always do it tactfully.” She believes that her worst “infraction” as an ally is sometimes telling “distasteful jokes.” Beth states that she is comfortable with who she is as an ally given the limitations of time and energy, but that she “would like to do more.”

Trisha, rather humbly, wonders what she does at all to be an ally. She mostly sees herself as “supporting my friend” and views her activities more as an
evolution of caring for and loving individuals in her life. She knows that, “I will never give speeches” and states that she is “not as active as I could be.” At the same time, however, she reports being content where she is and not carrying the same degree of the guilt or remorse that the other women in the study discuss. Trisha says that being an ally is “just a part of me” and that is “not going to change.”

Jackie, Trisha, Nancy, Lindsey, and Beth conveyed a great deal of commitment to being an ally throughout the two interviews. By their own acknowledgment they are not perfect allies. There are times when they do not speak out against antigay sentiments and when they may have been able to behave in a more effective manner, and yet, there is no doubt that, regardless of their success, they are steadfast in their commitment to being allies.

Theme # 4: Integration

Spectrum. Jackie, Lindsey, Trisha, Nancy, and Beth reveal that there is a spectrum of being an ally of gay men and lesbians that incorporates the totality of the women’s experiences as allies. The spectrum includes an activism continuum that ranges from people who are supportive and speak out only in private situations about antigay sentiments to those who are continually active in both the private and public sector. Each participant indicates that she values people wherever they are in the spectrum and the hope is that growing and movement
related to degree of activism occurs. Each participant shares where she thinks she is along the activism continuum and the progression of her movement.

Beth believes that there are different ways to be an ally and refers to these as “levels.” She states that allies need to speak out regardless of their level because “if you don’t stand up for it, it is almost like you are condoning it.” While she appreciates allies who speak out in a very public manner she also values those who are active in a quieter manner. For example, when talking about the importance of speaking out against homophobia and heterosexism, Beth states: “I think it is important, but I think there [are] different levels of allies, and I think that those people that feel comfortable getting up in front of a big crowd of people or delivering a speech, I think that is good for them, but everybody doesn’t feel comfortable doing that, and I am probably one of the ones that would not feel comfortable addressing a whole crowd of people.” Beth describes her “level” of being an ally as “on a private individual level or small scale level.” She says that she is “probably mid level... and yeah, I see myself moving...” Retrospectively, Beth identifies age and exposure to gay and lesbian people as factors that have moved her along the activism continuum.

I would say that I was still an ally when I was younger but just quieter about it and not, I was not as vocal. And I don’t know if it has really come with age or with having relationships with people who are closer to my own age as opposed to my parents and their friends. I don’t know if that is kind of how it has come along. I don’t, I’m not really sure but probably those two things, a combination of those two things. With age I have gotten a little more vocal about everything with age. And I guess just more exposure to [gay] people that are my friends, that I have had a
Lindsey also says that there are different ways of being an ally and equates these to "levels." "I mean, everyone is at a different level." She immediately identifies her current level of being an ally as on the active end of the continuum. Like Beth, Lindsey refers to the different levels of being an ally as relating to the degree to which individuals speak out against prejudice toward gay men and lesbians. "It is a continuum, and it ranges from tolerance, which is not really, I don't think a good word but it is a start, all the way up to speaking out and being active and standing up for what you believe in." Lindsey sees being an ally as a process of "...continuing to learn and then slowly but surely putting yourself out there and taking risks and standing up for what you believe, and speaking out. It's not a prerequisite to be an ally, but that is - on a continuum, that's being the thing I see...I don't think acceptance is enough." Lindsey reports that she values all allies and the process of moving through the levels, along the continuum. "I mean it is my hope that they would get comfortable enough that they can [speak out]. But you have to accept people for where they are."

Lindsey identifies factors that have facilitated her movement along the spectrum.

I can definitely see my progression. I can see, I mean it is developmental, and I can see exactly the phases that I went through. Starting out from just being tolerant and being and saying, "Well, people are who they are, and that's fine." It is not an issue to recognizing, recognizing the importance of coming out
as an ally and being more outspoken and, you know in the future I see myself taking a more active public role... So I see myself doing more active things than I am doing now. So I see myself growing.

Lindsey believes that her self-confidence helps her to be more active. “I think you have to be comfortable with who you are... I am confident in who I am and what I believe, and I don’t care what people think. And if they don’t agree with me, hopefully just being who I am and believing what I do will have an impact on them.” She explains why self-confidence is so important to being an active ally: “Because you have to be comfortable with yourself and who you are before you can stand up for someone else and try and make that difference.”

Jackie also sees ways of being an ally as existing along a continuum from support with little speaking out to support with great amount of action to fight against homophobia and heterosexism. She evaluates her place on the continuum as, “I am definitely towards the middle, maybe even closer to the accepting side, because I am just not great at speaking out in any situation.” Jackie states that she is working to move forward on the continuum herself by “forcing myself” to speak out more. She is challenging herself to speak in larger forums than one-on-one situations. “And I work on it. So I believe that I am. I don’t just hope that I am moving. I believe that I am.” She states that what the momentum behind her movement is “frustration and guilt.” Jackie’s frustration is that she wants herself to be more comfortable being outspoken as an ally and her guilt is about not doing as much as possible for the people she cares so much about, such as her
best friend. Jackie attributes her job to helping her move along the ally continuum.

This job that I am in now has really gotten me to the point where I am more all the time, not afraid of being misunderstood, and it has really helped me to decide that everybody doesn’t have to agree with me, and that everybody doesn’t have to like me, and I am much better about that than I used to be. Much less worried about, you know, even casual relationships. If I need to say that she was wrong to do that, you know, that was an inappropriate thing, then, and they don’t like that, well, it wasn’t appropriate. I mean there is no, I have really learned to be able to stand behind exactly what I think without really being too upset.

Like Lindsey and Beth, Jackie values allies wherever they are along the continuum. She states that, “I think that you should accept anybody as an ally for whatever they can give.” She admits that, “I have higher expectations of myself.” She believes that the basic component of being an ally is “support” of gay men and lesbians “in whatever way you can be.” If possible, she encourages people to be “active to really be able to do something significant, but that doesn’t mean that every single person is going to be able to do that.” She goes on to say that “everybody has their own talents” and even quiet allies can do a lot in a one-on-one situation.

Trisha also believes that there are multiple ways to be an ally of gay men and lesbians. She concurs that activism exists along a continuum of quietly supportive individuals to people who are active in a more public forum. She seems to stand up for quieter allies and makes it clear that speaking out, even with just one individual at a time, is necessary. “You know a lot of people aren’t
comfortable about speaking out about anything...and I would not automatically assume that they are not an ally but maybe a little uncomfortable... It would be a problem though if they did not speak at all.” She reports that she used to not confront people, but now it is rare for her to let any antigay comments go by unconfronted. “I used to not say anything back, I would just let people say what they are saying and ignore it, and now I don’t do that so much anymore.”

Reflecting on her developmental process Trisha states:

Well, not having a very well defined beginning. I guess I had decided that if I would put a label on what the beginning would be, it would be just when I became aware of differences. When they are teaching you all that sex education in school, that is when you really start to notice, you know, differences and how people behave. And, I guess, my views just matured as I did. I don’t see any key events that I suddenly said, “Oh, I have to be a supporter,” or “Oh, I wouldn’t.” Just I grew up that’s just the way I was, and I just gained more friends that were straight and gay and learned to respect different sides of things.

Discussing the continuum, especially as it relates to activism, Trisha states: “I am happy where I am. I try to avoid jobs even that require delivering presentations or things. I just get sick. I can’t even do it.” She ties moving forward on the continuum to having to speak out in public forums which is terribly uncomfortable for her.

Nancy’s experience is very similar to Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, and Trisha’s. She too sees different ways of being an ally as existing along a continuum. And like the others, as quickly as she says that the continuum exists, she evaluates her placement along it. “If the continuum was starting at point zero with somebody
who is silent, but supportive, to someone who is very vocal and marches or teaches or whatever, participates very actively, I would say I am right around seven or eight...” Like the other women, Nancy also values people at any place along the continuum. She also believes that those who are more outspoken may produce the most change. “I mean the more people that are supportive even if they are not supportive openly, it is a good thing. It is not a bad thing. But as far as how that would advance any positive feelings elsewhere, I don’t see where that would do a lot.”

Nancy reports that what has helped her move along the continuum is length of time as an ally, self-confidence, and the community becoming more accepting of gay men and lesbians. “Maybe just feeling more confident in myself as I got older and trusting my beliefs,” she reflects. “With maturity, yeah, I think I do speak out more.” Nancy also attributes her development to: “Feeling good about being supportive that made me more willing to speak up. That might be part of it, but I also think it is the dynamics of the acceptance in the community, and, you know, socially it is more accepted now. And I think that has helped to make, make it easier, I guess to speak out about it.”

The women in this study concur that there are multiple ways of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. Furthermore, perhaps at different degrees, they value all places along the activism continuum. Their self-evaluation of where they are along the activism continuum indicates that they represent a fairly wide range although all are above a mid point. Their development appears to be ongoing.
Relationship with significant other. Lindsey, Jackie, Nancy, Trisha, and Beth each talk about the importance of their significant other in terms of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. Being an ally of gay men and lesbians is such an important part of who they are, that it is crucial that their spouse or significant other also be an ally. For Trisha, Nancy, Jackie, and Lindsey, their spouses serve as support and are allies of gay men and lesbians themselves. Beth reports that her relationship with her significant other is “rocky” right now, and his support is not greatly felt or needed at this time. However, she indicates that her ex husband was an ally and that she, like the others, found that to be helpful. The women could not imagine being in a relationship with anyone who was not an ally of gay men and lesbians. Being an ally is so integrated into these women, that it impacts who they choose as partners.

Lindsey states that her husband is “just as big an ally as I am”. She also indicates that his support is helpful in her process of being an ally. “...[H]is own activism, if you will, is very important to me, and it is ‘crucial’ to me being an ally because I have complete support from him. And he does things that I don’t have to ask. He is an ally in ways that I would never, I’ve never asked him to be. It’s important to him just as it is important to me.” Having her husband be an ally and supportive of her activism is crucial to their relationship. She explains just how important it is: “What I am saying is that I don’t take marriage lightly at all. It is the most important thing that I have done. And if my husband was not the way he was, I would not be with him. I would have left him. And that’s very
hard for me to say, but it is that important to me.” Being an ally is integrated not only into Lindsey, but into her relationship as well.

Jackie also describes her husband as supportive of her as an ally. She states that his support is helpful to her process and crucial to their relationship. She reports that she can tell him about any aspect of being an ally “just like with anything in work, life, any part of my life”. She goes on to explain that, “it is supportive in that if he thinks I am overreacting he will tell me that as well. So he is my sounding board for a lot of those things.” Jackie, like Lindsey, sees her husband in a similar place in terms of his status as an ally, and she also indicates that this is crucial to their relationship. She states that if he was not an ally, “We would have a lot of problems because that goes against what I, who I am really. And that would be bad. I doubt we would even be together to be honest with you. I mean I don’t think that we could have made it to the point of being married anyways.” Being an ally is such a part of Jackie that she could not marry a man who was not also an ally of gay men and lesbians.

Nancy describes her husband as “…the most unjudgemental person I have met in my life.” Referring to how her husband views gay men and lesbians she states: “he also is supportive, and for him, it is a lot like me, it is not something that he had to change the way he feels, it just seems ingrained. It’s just the way he is.” She says that not only is his support helpful to her, it serves to facilitate her movement along the spectrum. “I would say Ben has been influential in that he has given me the confidence and the support to express my beliefs the way I do.”
She later reports “I suppose he makes it easier for me to continue to express my views and my point of view and to be supportive, you know.” She states that she could not imagine being in a relationship in which she would have to change being an ally.

Trisha also describes her husband as an ally who actively does things to show support for gay men and lesbians. She says that it is a support to have him be an ally “…especially since my best friend is gay.” She describes how her husband asked her gay best friend to be in their wedding party without her needing to ask. Trisha, like the others, reports that she could not be with a man who was not an ally himself. Being an ally of gay men and lesbians is so integrated into Jackie, Lindsey, Trisha, Beth, and Nancy that it deeply impacts who they choose as spouses or significant others.

Part of what seems to be so important to these women in their relationship with their significant other is the conversations that they engage in, the activities they share, and/or the overall sense of support they derive from their partner related to being an ally. Processing aspects of being an ally with their significant others are important to Jackie and Lindsey. Describing the importance of discussing ally issues with her husband, Jackie states:

We can talk things out no matter what. So if I have a situation in my role, I suppose as an ally, and I tell him about it, we are able to talk about it. Whatever his reaction is, whether he thinks maybe, you know, he may say, “You know I think you are overreacting, I don’t think that person meant that.” You know we can talk about it. Maybe sometimes he’s right, and maybe sometimes he’s not. And when he’s not, I’m able to show him why it is somebody
might feel the way that they did after a certain comment or whatever. You know, and he gives me other perspectives as well. So it’s a good, you know, even when we disagree it is not a negative thing.

Lindsey reports several situations in which she and her husband have discussed aspects of being an ally. One such discussion occurred regarding Lindsey’s brother telling her that he is gay. Her husband’s reaction: “Oh my goodness, thank goodness, I thought you were going to tell me that you were pregnant.” She sums up the importance of being able to process issues with her husband as: “So his support and his understanding and his own activism, if you will, is very important to me, and it is crucial to me being an ally, because I have complete support from him.”

Beth reports that in her longest relationship she was able to “joke around” with her husband about issues related to being an ally of gay men and lesbians, and that was one form of support. Trisha states that, “As far as somebody that I chose to settle down with and spend the rest of my life with, I had to have somebody that felt the same way that I did.” She and her husband often attend “gay events” together. Nancy indicates that her husband facilitates her process as an ally: “I suppose he makes it easier for me to continue to express my views and my point of view and to be supportive.”

Support from gay men and lesbians. When asked how gay men and lesbians could be supportive of her as an ally, Nancy states: “I can’t think of anything, I guess I don’t feel like I need any support”. Lindsey says: “I never really thought
about that. I think that they are, that the people in my life that are gay, lesbian, and bisexual are supportive, and that they are very appreciative of the things I do and the efforts that I make and that is very rewarding.” Trisha reports: “I can’t really think of anything”. She ponders a little while and then says: “I don’t know anything the gay community could do more to support allies than just continually be supportive of people for who they are and be accepting.” She had no idea of how gay and lesbian people could support her directly.

Beth had a similar sentiment as Trisha. She says: “I guess just respect my lifestyle the same as I respect theirs. Then, Beth goes one step further from Trisha’s encouragement of acceptance. Beth has this advice for gay men and women: “Don’t not be friends with me because I am not in the gay community. Don’t ostracize me because I am not in the community with you.” She could think of no other supportive behaviors. Jackie finds it supportive when her gay and lesbian friends let her “bounce” what she has said or could have said off of them. She finds it supportive when they help her process situations, issues, or statements she made or didn’t make, while “...giving me the benefit of the doubt.”

Positive consequences/Rewards. Nancy, Jackie, Beth, Trisha, and Lindsey describe being an ally of gay men and lesbians as enriching their lives. A host of personal rewards seems apparent, as each woman discussed such benefits as increased quality of friendships, “feeling good,” learning, and contributing to making the world a better place for everyone. As I interviewed these women,
positive consequences of being an ally was perhaps the part of the interview they had to think about the least. When I ask about positive outgrowths of being an ally Jackie, Lindsey, Nancy, Trisha, and Beth are immediately able to answer. It is also common for smiles and excited energy to come to their faces as I inquire about benefits of being an ally of gay men and lesbians.

Trisha reports that she believes she is a “better person” as a result of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. “I have had an opportunity to learn a lot just from other people being different from myself. It’s made me a better person and, I think, a better friend by having a chance to meet a lot of different people.” She reports gaining quality friendships by having friends who are gay and lesbian: “The people that I have chosen to become friends with I feel I have a better, stronger, more genuine real friendships with.” One of the aspects of these relationships that she values is her friends’ acceptance of her. “I think just my being accepting I think people are more accepting of you.” She also states that she is “honored” to be recommended for participation in this study. She reports having great respect for the person who recommended her to me and that her recommendation was “flattering.”

Similar to Trisha, Lindsey states that, “I feel like I am a better person for being an ally.” She reports that it has enriched her life. “I love it. It’s great. My life has changed since I have become more active. I am more aware of things than I have ever been. Since I focused and learned more about myself and where I stand and what I believe, everything is different.” Also like Trisha, Lindsey identifies
quality relationships as a positive consequence of being an ally of gay men and
lesbians. “I’ve made a lot of special relationships,” and it has “...improved my
relationship with my brother since I have been active in these issues.” Overall
she has a sense that, “I get to know people better because I am open to
everything.” Being an ally “makes me more accessible and more open and more
able to have real friendships and connections.”

Another rewarding aspect of being an ally, according to Lindsey, is
experiencing a sense of contributing to change. “And the confronting people,
that’s very hard. You know, I’ve talked about confronting comments or beliefs.
It is very hard but when I am finished I just feel really good about, you know; if
you can change one person or make them think, then that is going to - that makes
a difference.” She reports that being an ally is not about her, it is about a
contribution to the world. “What I do, I do because I want this, I want this world
to be a better place. That’s why it is not about me. I get pleasure from it, but it is
not about me.” Lindsey also reports that being recommended for the study “made
me feel really good.”

Beth’s experiences of positive consequences of being an ally of gay men and
lesbians is like those of Lindsey and Trisha. Beth also states: “It just makes me
feel good.” She describes having excellent relationships with gay men and
women and that those relationships are an important part of her life. Beth also
describes feeling as though she is fulfilling a “sense of duty” by being an ally.
She states: “I just feel it is right.” Beth explains that she feels like “it has been
kind of my duty to help and voice my concern.” She also reports being pleased that her daughter is being raised with exposure to gay men and women and an over all value for diverse people. Again, like Trisha and Lindsey, Beth stated that it “...makes me feel good” that her friend recommended her for the study, “…that she would report me as being, I guess, an ally.”

Jackie describes her overall experience as an ally as “It has been wonderful.” She believes knowing and learning about diverse people is one of the positive outgrowths of being an ally. She, like the other women, values the relationships that she has developed with gay men and lesbians and knows she wouldn’t have these relationships if she was not an ally. Additionally, “I’m proud” to be part of a group of people initiating change. Jackie states that it is also rewarding in her job to listen to gay and lesbian students and see their surprise and appreciation that she is so accepting of them; it “…gets me feeling great when I have an experience with a student who thinks I am going to react differently than I do.” Her experience of being recommended for the study: “It makes me feel good” that two gay individuals that she respects consider her to be a strong ally.

When asked what she has found to be rewarding about being an ally, Nancy states: “I guess the most important thing is that I feel good about myself. And I like my attitude. Um, I don’t know. I think I have influenced some people. I think I have changed some people’s minds about the way they feel about it.” She also identifies fulfilling relationships with gay men and women as a positive consequence of being an ally and that it’s a good thing that people can feel
comfortable that they can talk to me about it.” Overall, “I feel good about it, really good about it.”

All of the participants describe being an ally of gay men and lesbians as a positive aspect of their lives. They quickly and easily are able to pinpoint what is rewarding and how being an ally enhances their lives. Each woman speaks with a great deal of passion as she discusses what “feels good” about being an ally of gay men and lesbians.

Being an ally of gay men and lesbians appears to be fully integrated into Jackie, Nancy, Lindsey, Beth, and Trisha. The participants are in both similar and different places in terms of how being an ally takes form and shape, yet each one describes the spectrum of being an ally similarly. Being an ally is integrated into their way of being.

**Telling their story.** Each of the women, in their own way, indicates that participating in this research affords them the opportunity to examine their “story” as an ally of gay men and lesbians. It appears that thinking and talking about their roles as allies of gay men and lesbians is a new experience. Lindsey discusses the impact of the first interview on her: “I really enjoyed our conversation... You raised some issues that I hadn’t thought about.” She reports that she and her brother “...talked at great length about some of the questions that you and I talked about.” Additionally, she processed the experience with her husband. Lindsey says of the interview: “So it raised, it was a very positive
interaction as far as I am concerned in thinking about my own progression as an ally.”

Beth reports that being recommended to participate in the study as well as the interviews contributes to new thoughts about who she is as an ally of gay men and lesbians. She states this is:

...because, I guess I didn’t, although I knew how I felt, I didn’t formally announce myself as an ally. And then after Sally told me that she was going to tell you about me, and I thought, “Oh that kind of makes me feel good that, you know, that she feels that way about me, and she feels that, you know, that she would report me as being, I guess, an ally. Because I - I just never really looked at myself that way, although I mean I have the feeling. I just didn’t, you know, formally attach that title, I guess. So, yeah, I kind of liked it.

Similarly, Trisha reports that participating in the study is causing her to vocalize her process as an ally. “Yeah, I mean things I, I know about but you don’t ever really know how to talk about. You know, how you actually would voice your opinion on things or how you actually feel. I mean because our feelings are not things you actually say. So it was an interesting round of questions, I give you that.”

Nancy indicates that she has been thinking a lot about being an ally since being interviewed for the study. Nancy reveals: “I thought an awful lot about it, everything that we talked about and stuff like that, and I told other people about it... I think it is a good thing that you are doing. I think it is cool to be a part of it.” Additionally, she reports considering what more she can do as an ally of gay men and lesbians. Jackie reveals that she is thinking of new concepts in her role
as an ally. When speaking of the issue of fear in being an ally, Jackie states: "I don't know, I never thought about it before, so I've got to talk it out." For these women the process of participating in this study seems to generate thoughts about understanding being an ally.

Personal Reflections of the Interview Process

As the participant researcher who is a lesbian, I experienced a great deal of satisfaction throughout the interview process. I also faced some self-induced challenges that impacted my process. Initially, I felt a great deal of anxiety about finding people who I did not know to interview. At first, all of my contacts recommended people that I also know in either a personal or professional realm. After five people unknown to me, but highly recommended, agreed to participate, I felt a huge sense of relief.

The first round of interviews left me feeling energized and enthusiastic about the study. I was moved by each woman I interviewed. Not only did I appreciate their participation in the study, but I also appreciated all they do as allies of gay men and lesbians. I left each of the first interviews amazed that these women downplayed their contribution as an ally, focusing on what they could do more rather than what they actually do. I was genuinely grateful to the five women for being such strong allies of gay men and lesbians. Their passion, conviction, and joy about being an ally touched me deeply. As a lesbian, I know first hand the
difference that allies make in this world, and I consider it an honor that these five women shared their experiences with me.

As I was coding and recoding the data, I was impressed with the consistency of the experiences of the five women. They provided such rich information and themes just jumped out at me. However, the coding process was tedious, and I became tired. I was ready to get on to round two with these women to find out in more depth about their process.

During the second round of interviews, I found myself pleased and a little surprised that, after completing all of the member checks, there were only slight alterations to themes. The second round of interviews revealed more depth but no new information. It was clear, even before I coded the data that saturation had been reached. As I left each second interview I wondered if I would see these women ever again. I felt richer for knowing them and greatly appreciative of them. I tried to convey my appreciation, both for their participation in the study and the work they do as allies, though I left wondering how much was heard by the participants.

Summary

This chapter encompassed the results of this study. The profiles of the five women who participated in the study were presented. The themes that emerged from the data were explored through the use of extensive quotations allowing the
reader to make sense of the data for himself or herself. Next, I presented a model that I developed based on the four themes that emerged from the data.

In the next chapter I discuss the results with reference to the literature review presented in Chapter 2. I then critique the methodology of the study. Implications of the study will be presented. Additionally, I make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Interpreting the Data

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the life experiences of adult, female allies of gay men and lesbians who themselves are not parents of gay male or lesbian individuals. The study followed a grounded theory paradigm with the intent of examining participants' phenomenological experiences and meanings regarding the process and impact of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. The data revealed that becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians is a process. Four major themes revealed this process: 1) way of being; 2) awareness; 3) commitment; and 4) integration.

In this chapter, I interpret and discuss the data in Chapter 4. Particular attention is paid to the degree to which the experiences of Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy are consistent or inconsistent with the related literature. The manner in which the data contributes to current understanding of allies of gay men and lesbians is explored and new insights are highlighted. This chapter provides the following: 1) my reflections on four themes including my subjective reactions; 2) the relationship of the findings to existing related literature; 3) introduction of pertinent literature that was not presented in Chapter 2; 4) my model of the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians; 5) methodological considerations; 6) discussion of the limitations of the study; and 7) recommendations for future research.
Definition: What is an Ally?

**Definition: My Reflection.** As I listened to the participants struggle with defining the term, "ally", of gay men and lesbians, I became aware that the women had not thought about what it means to be an ally prior to our conversation. It seems to me that part of what contributed to the participants’ struggle to define an ally of gay men and lesbians is due to their lack of sharing their personal stories of being an ally. Since all of the women tell me that they have not talked about the totality of their experiences as allies prior to being interviewed by me, and that the interviews spawned new thoughts, personal questions, and emotions, it became clear to me that their participation in this study gave them the opportunity to examine and share their stories. I was surprised that the five women had not talked at length about their experiences as allies which lead me to wonder why.

I was not surprised by the definitions they gave for what it means to be an ally of gay men and lesbians. Based on all of their definitions, I see that for these women, an ally of gay men and lesbians, is a heterosexual person who is supportive of gay men and lesbians and works for and with gay men, lesbians, and other allies, on some level, to reduce homophobia and heterosexism. This definition is simple and straightforward, as I believe the allies in this study
Definition: Reference to the Literature. Washington and Evans (1991) define an ally as: "A person who is a member of the 'dominant' or 'majority' group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population" (p.195). Washington and Evans's definition is similar to the definitions provided by the five participants of this study.

Theme # 1: Way of Being

Just who I am: My Reflection. I believe the data suggests that the process of becoming an ally of gay men and lesbians is elusive. Each woman indicates that being an ally is so natural to her, that she cannot separate it from her very being. Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Trisha, and Nancy are able to identify possible contributing factors to their development as allies. In my opinion, even with recognition of these factors, the women maintain a general sense that being an ally is such a part of who they are that its development is undetectable. How does one react to an intangible sense? I believe that people either accept who they are in their very being or reject it. Nancy, Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, and Trisha accept this part of their being; at times they seem to embrace this aspect of themselves.

It seems to me the significance of this finding may be in the degree to which people can be nurtured or taught to be allies. Does there have to be something
indescribable in individuals’ character that allows them to reach out to gay men and lesbians? Is it necessary for individuals to have a proclivity in their very being that leads them to be allies? Or, can we foster this development? I believe we can positively contribute to individuals’ processes of becoming and being allies of gay men and lesbians. However, the answers to these questions cannot be ascertained by the data. As a researcher, it leaves me wondering how, in the future, to investigate this intangible aspect of the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians that the participants were unable to clearly define.

The single greatest surprise to me in this research is the finding that the five allies in this study report never having internalized any negative thoughts or emotions about gay men and lesbians. Given antigay prejudice that pervades society, I believe that no one escapes homophobia (regardless of sexual orientation). Furthermore, I have consistently contended that in order to hold positive views and be supportive of gay men and lesbians, it is necessary to first acknowledge the existence of homophobia and heterosexism and then challenge internalized beliefs. The experiences of these participants leaves me to wonder if they acknowledged and dealt with internalized homophobia in such a gradual manner that they are unaware of their process. Being gay and lesbian affirmative is so natural to them that it is possible that they challenged their own homophobia and heterosexism in an inactive or unconscious level. This finding suggests to me that it is possible that not all individuals need to acknowledge and confront
internalized homoprejudice and/or that some individuals do this so gradually and at an unconscious level that is appears natural.

The above finding challenges beliefs I have held most of my adult life. My beliefs stem from my personal and professional experiences with allies of gay men and lesbians. Over the years, I have engaged in dialogue with allies regarding their processes as allies. Each person who has shared their stories with me has reflected a process of dealing with internalized homophobia and heterosexism. I have yet to hear an ally in my personal or professional life share with me that he or she never had to challenge internalized homoprejudice. In fact, most of the allies with whom I have discussed this topic, have shared with me that their process is ongoing rather than a one time event. It should be noted, that a similar dialogue has occurred with my gay and lesbian friends, as people, including myself, who are gay or lesbian, also need to challenge internalized homophobia and heterosexism.

Just who I am: Reference to the Literature. The literature provides little insight into the finding that being an ally is an intangible component of these women’s way of being. The participants’ report of “always feeling like being an ally was a part of who I am” suggests they are able to overlook antigay messages that pervade American society. Support for this finding can be found in Montaith, Devine and Zuwerink’s (1993) study. These authors reasoned that low prejudiced individuals internalize nonprejudiced standards while high prejudiced people are externally focused (Montaith, Devine & Zuwerink’s 1993). If this is
true, then one might postulate that these allies of gay men and lesbians never had to overcome homophobia and heterosexism because they did not internalize those prejudiced standards.

This is in contradiction to Barret (1998) who argues that all individuals, including gay men and lesbians, are homoprejudiced. As early as 1954 Allport stated that "defeated intellectually, prejudice lingers emotionally" (p.328). The women in this study suggest that antigay prejudice has never been a part of who they are; therefore, the battle that Allport (1954) and Barret (1998) suggests does not directly link to these allies self-report. Several other authors suggest that all Americans experience a lifetime of socialization that promotes prejudice, and that those who overcome this socialization experience a great deal of internal conflict in their process (Devine, 1989; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink & Elliot, 1991). The findings in this study do not indicate such internal conflict.

Herek (1994) posed an important question: "What individual and situational factors permit some persons to oppose the societal ideology by maintaining tolerant or even favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, while others keep exceptionally hostile attitudes?" (p.4) The women in this study are not able to articulate individual factors that create their sense that being an ally is simply a part of them that has always existed. The first part of Herek's question remains unanswered and, thus, its importance appears heightened. Some potential answers to such situational factors are revealed in this paper under the heading "variables of impact." For example, being raised with modern gender-role beliefs
seemed to facilitate Jackie, Nancy, Trisha, and Beth’s ability to think for themselves and form their own opinions about gay men and lesbians. Jackie and Trisha’s report that living in an urban and “city like” area of southeastern Virginia may have contributed to their openness to diversity suggests that place of residence is a situational factor that may contribute to ally development.

Response to Family: My Reflection. I have always believed that family of origin has an impact on development and that the messages we receive during childhood stay with us, in some form, throughout our adult lives. What we do with those messages may take many forms and shapes. It is no surprise to me, then, that the women in this study report that their development as allies of gay men and lesbians was impacted by their families of origin. Each participant describes how being an ally could be an outgrowth of how she was raised, either positively or negatively. Nancy, Beth, and Trisha describe their families as accepting of difference. Beth and Trisha even report that their families value diversity. Jackie experienced mixed messages and chose the ones of valuing all people. And Lindsey learned that she did not want to be like her family with regards to how they view difference, so she went the opposite direction. Having similar and different experiences, how is it that all the women developed into allies of gay men and lesbians?

In my opinion, the foundations of values set by the families seem to spawn at least a component of these women’s development as allies. What is interesting is how these women reworked the messages they received from home into their
adult lives. Nancy extrapolated on her parents’ acceptance of Black people, which went against the norm of their environment, to also be welcoming of gay men and lesbians. Jackie learned not to “put people down,” and she extended that message to be embracing of gay men and lesbians. Beth grew up with homosexual parents and never knew being unsupportive of gay men and women. Trisha had direct exposure to people from diverse populations and watched her parents embrace them. She learned to “like people for who they were.” It never occurred to her not to like gay men and lesbians. Though the messages from home were not always specific to gay men and lesbians, Nancy, Beth, Jackie and Trisha generalized messages from their families of origin into their own value of accepting people, regardless of diversity, and embraced gay men and lesbians specifically.

Questions arise for me when comparing Lindsey’s (whose brother is gay) experience to the other women’s experiences in this study. Though I have thought for a long time that there are many paths to the same destination, it was fascinating to hear how Lindsey’s experience in her family of origin was so different than the other women’s experience. Lindsey did not internalize “negative attitudes” from her family; she just consciously chose not to adopt those messages into her way of being. She went in the opposite direction and found herself open and supportive of gay men and lesbians. So what does this mean in terms of how allies develop? And, can a similar phenomenon happen in the development of highly prejudiced individuals; can such individuals come from a
family of origin that embraces diversity and end up as bigots in their adult lives? I imagine the answer to this question is “yes.”

**Response to Family: Reference to the Literature.** Although over three decades of literature about heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuality exists, there is no empirical literature about how allies’ attitudes are affected by family of origin. The literature regarding regional considerations during childhood and adolescence provides the closest link; this literature is examined in following sections.

**Beliefs and Feelings about Diversity and Advocacy in General: My Reflection.** Given these allies of gay men and lesbians’ sense that being an ally is simply a part of who they are, it is not surprising to me that they are also open to, accepting, and supportive of other forms of diversity. If they described anything differently, I might wonder how they were “naturally” allies of gay men and lesbians specifically and not to other diverse cultures.

I see the finding that these allies’ (all of European-American decent) most frequent form of activism (besides that for and with gay men and lesbians) is about people of color, in part, as the result of being impacted by the region in which they live. The people of color most spoken about were described as “Black.” Given the high density of Black individuals who live in the Southeastern region of the United States, these participants’ frequency of contact and awareness of issues may be heightened. If these particular individuals hear about and see oppression of Black people, it makes sense to me that their activism
might extend to include this area. Furthermore, given their positions as European-American, heterosexual women, it may be, as Jackie indicates, that "...other Caucasians are willing to make racial remarks to them." Consequently, the opportunity to be an ally of Black individuals may present itself frequently.

The finding that Jackie, Nancy, Trisha, Lindsey, and Beth wish they had more time and energy to extend to activism not only regarding gay men and lesbians but also with other diverse populations, is consistent with another finding: they feel that they are not doing enough. These women are so sensitive to prejudice that it is understandable to me that they would like to advocate for and with other groups. Based on this desire, I wonder why a great deal of their activist work is related to gay and lesbian populations rather than other groups. Jackie is the only individual who states that she participates in more activism regarding Black people than gay men and lesbians. I see Lindsey's choice to do her masters thesis about racial issues as a direct reflection of her commitment and interest. I wonder what makes these women direct their energy toward one group more so than another. For Jackie it seems to be frequency of contact for the issues; the reason appears to be unclear for the others. Perhaps it is as simple as limits of time and energy; perhaps it is more complex.

My experience with personal friends and colleagues who are allies of gay men and lesbians informs me that they too wish they had more time and energy to devote to other forms of activism. It seems to me that given the realities of time and energy, picking and choosing which causes to be the most active with is
necessary. Although it may be the desire of some, we cannot be specialists in all forms of oppression. From what my ally friends have shared with me, I believe that activism stems from passion and those issues that individuals are the most passionate about receive the greatest amount of attention.

Beliefs and Feelings about Diversity and Advocacy in General: Reference to the Literature. The literature about heterosexual individuals' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians provides some insight into the finding that these allies of gay men and lesbians are also accepting and supportive of other diverse populations. It should be noted, however, that since the empirical research regarding attitudes toward gay men and lesbians has examined characteristics that are correlated with negative attitudes, no direct studies about the correlation between support of gay men and lesbians and support of other diverse populations has been published. This again identifies the lack of knowledge in the field about allies. Clearly, there is a great deal of work yet to be done.

Extrapolating from the literature about characteristics of heterosexual individuals who have negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians provides the following: if people who are conservative, highly religious, less educated, older, male, and subscribe to traditional gender roles are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, then it may naturally follow that those who are liberal, less religious, educated, female, younger, and subscribe to nontraditional gender roles are more likely to have positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. This latter description seems to fit the participants in this
study. Could this also be true of people who have positive attitudes about diverse populations for which they are not members?

The finding that these allies wish they had more time and energy to be involved in other forms of activism besides gay and lesbian issues echo a finding by Oskamp, Bordin, and Edwards (1991). In their study about peace activism the authors found that some peace activists were frustrated by limitations of personal time and economic realities. Perhaps being involved in one cause heightens individuals’ interest in involvement with other issues.

Variables of Impact: South: My Reflection. It seems to me that Jackie, Nancy, Trisha, Beth, and Lindsey have overcome the geographic environments in which they were raised. For Lindsey this was a conscious process as she reveals that the south is “...everything people say it is and worse.” She does not like the norm of unacceptance of difference and so she actively chose to embrace gay men and lesbians. She still wonders how she was able to make that choice while heterosexism remained the norm. The others seem to go through a less conscious process. Beth says that being raised in the South didn’t have an impact on her. Nancy, like Lindsey, wonders how she beat the odds while Trisha and Jackie report that they are unsure of the impact of the South as they have never known anything different. Reviewing the data leads me to wonder how it is that the norms of the South have not damaged these women’s ability to be allies. I wonder also why they did not need to go through a process of unlearning negative messages that surrounds Southern influences and traditions.
I too was raised in the South, and I have experienced many other geographical environments throughout the nation. It has been my experience that there are indeed fewer allies of gay men and lesbians in the South than in other parts of the country where I have lived or spent a great deal of time, including the Pacific Northwest, Midwest, and Northeast. Given what I see as the norm of prejudicial environments in the South, it is remarkable to me that the women in this study surpassed the norm to become allies of gay men and lesbians.

It appears to me that these women were able to, in a sense, put up walls that did not allow penetration of prejudice. It is almost as if they were immune to societal messages. Having been raised in the South myself, it escapes me as to how they did not need to unlearn "isms." What allows some people to refrain from the bombardment of messages regarding prejudice and others to look past the messages? While it had been my hope that this study might answer some of these questions, it seems instead that more questions have been raised.

Based on the data, I wonder about the impact of population sizes of place of residence on allies' processes. Beth reasons that the population size of the place in which she lived was more important to her than whether it was located in the South. She stated that urban areas were much more welcoming of diversity issues in general than were the rural areas in which she lived. Jackie also reflects this awareness when she reports that one place she lived was "like a city" and required less of her attention to gay and lesbian issues than other places in which diversity was less likely to be accepted. It seems to me these women were aware
of the level of tolerance or acceptance of gay men and lesbians in their places of residence.

Nancy’s wondering about whether she would have been as likely to be an activist about gay and lesbian issues if she had lived in a more accepting part of the country is interesting to me. The following question immediately came to my mind. Does the degree of prejudice exhibited in the environment contribute to a person being an ally? If being an ally is not perceived as needed, is one then less likely to be an ally? What makes one person respond with action to fight against homophobia and heterosexism and another more willing to give in to the norm?

Variables of Impact: South: Reference to the Literature. These Southern women defy the literature. The literature reveals that people who were raised in areas where antigay sentiment is the norm and/or currently living in such areas (e.g., South, Midwest, small town, and/or rural) are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Britton, 1990; Hansen, 1982; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Levitt & Klassen, 1974; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Pratte, 1993; Seltzer, 1992; Stephan & McMullin, 1982; Turnbull & Brown, 1977; Whitehead & Metzger, 1981). If we accept the inverse of this finding, then Beth and Jackie’s identification that urban areas are more accepting of gay men and lesbians is supported. One is left to wonder how it is that all of the participants have positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men despite living in the South, and for some, the rural south.
Variables of Impact: Religion: My Reflection. It is interesting to me to note the reasons behind Jackie, Nancy, Lindsey, and Beth's lack of current religious or spiritual affiliation is consistent with what they espouse about their beliefs, feelings, and reports of their actions. Their reasons reflect congruency between thoughts and behavior. In my opinion, such congruency requires a great deal of internal strength and commitment, which is displayed by the five women in this study. The number one explanation given for not attending an organized religious institution is the hypocrisy they have experienced from members of such institutions.

I am aware that not attending church or religious organizations speaks again to how the women have overcome the pressures of their environment to make their own path. As Nancy reminds us, they all live in the "Bible Belt," and yet, none of them are currently involved with a church. How, then, did they overcome the pressure to be involved in church? Would a welcoming church environment change their minds about involvement? They seem to have had such negative experiences with church members around gay and lesbian issues that it has turned them off from even seeking membership in other churches or religious organizations that are inclusive and welcoming (e.g. some of the metropolitan community churches, Unitarian churches). The magnitude of the hypocrisy seems to be significant to these women. This leads me to question how other allies of gay men and women have incorporated religion and or spirituality into their lives.
Variables of Impact: Religion: Reference to the Literature. The finding that none of the allies of gay men and lesbians who participated in this study are involved in religious organizations is supported by the literature. The literature posits that heterosexual individuals who are highly religious or attend church frequently are more likely to have negative attitudes toward homosexuality or homosexual individuals than those who are less religious (Alston, 1974; Bowman, 1979; Glassner & Owen, 1976; Hansen, 1982; Herek & Glunt, 1993 Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Larsen, Cate & Reed, 1983; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Seltzer, 1992; Weis & Dane, 1979).

Vanderstoep and Green (1988) found that religiosity predicts ethical conservatism and that negative attitudes regarding homosexuality can stem from conservative values. The inverse of the results of Vanderstoep and Green's (1988) study, positive attitudes can stem from liberal values, is relatively consistent with the findings in this research. The women in this study reported having democratic or no political ideology and they do not attend religious organizations. Therefore, the interconnectedness of religion and political values posited by Vanderstoep and Green (1988) seems to be related to the findings of this study.

Variables of impact: Gender roles: My Reflection. The women in this study appear to maintain nontraditional gender roles. I see them as free thinking women who are ambitious and strong willed. I believe their ability to be more internally driven rather than externally focused may contribute to their movement
past the norm of heterosexism and homoprejudice and into the realm of supporting gay and lesbian people, which is shunned by much of society. This piece of their process is logical as it would be hard for me to imagine women who subscribe to traditional gender roles standing and fighting for any oppressed group.

It seems to me the finding that participants’ families who were more accepting of homosexuality also held less traditional views about gender roles gives insight into aspects of development that may foster becoming an ally of gay men and lesbians. Perhaps in more free thinking, less confining, households, individuals are able to develop in a manner that allows for their own thinking about diversity. If this is true, then I encourage education geared toward facilitating individuals’ process of thinking for themselves.

Variables of impact: Gender roles: Reference to the Literature. The literature reflects that heterosexual individuals who subscribe to traditional gender roles are likely to have negative attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual individuals (MacDonald & Games, 1974; Weinberger & Millham, 1979; Whitely, 1987; Herek, 1988; Newman, 1989). Reversing this finding it would seem then, that heterosexual individuals who maintain nontraditional gender roles are likely to have positive attitudes toward homosexuality. If that extrapolation is accepted, then, it calls for the study of this potential dimension of existing theory.
Theme # 2: Awareness

**Personal Contact: My Reflection.** If I had to pick one finding from this study that offers the most important piece of information about ally development, it would be the finding that personal contact with gay men and lesbians contributes greatly to the developmental process of allies. All of the women in this study speak about how they see a shift in themselves after a person that they know came out to them. The shift occurred in the degree of attention they paid to gay and lesbian individuals. Examples of this can be seen in Jackie’s awareness of symbols and language, Lindsey’s immersion in the gay, lesbian, and bisexual related literature, and in all of the women’s actions. It seems crystal clear to me that knowing and caring for someone who is gay or lesbian jump-started these women’s activism.

What struck me deeply is the women’s reflection about the importance of having gay men and lesbians come out to them; it seems to me that without this experience, they may have stayed at a less active place on the ally activism continuum. It is as though their attention was gained from their personal interaction, and all aspects of themselves that contributed to their being allies then came into fruition. I see that their development soared after someone they knew came out to them as gay or lesbian. Furthermore, they report continued reflection on people that they love and care about who are gay and lesbian, which I consider to mean that the impact of knowingly caring about someone who is gay or lesbian remains active throughout allies’ experiences. Jackie states that she is
unable to separate her emotions about her gay best friend when she is talking with other gay men or lesbians who are struggling with some issue. Beth speaks about feeling like she is letting her gay loved ones down if she does not confront antigay sentiments. Therefore, it seems to me, the impact of knowingly knowing someone who is gay or lesbian is felt not just in the immediate, but for the long term.

The implications of this finding are tremendous, impacting gay men and lesbians as well as heterosexual individuals who may become allies. With this finding, it could be argued that it is crucial for gay men and women to come out to the people in their lives in order to promote the developmental process of allies. However, I struggle with this argument due to the harm that gay men and women can and often do experience when they come out. For many gay men and women, the rewards that may be gained by such openness may outweigh the risks to the individual. Of course, that always must be up to the discretion of each gay man and lesbian. Additionally, heterosexual allies can facilitate making it safe for gay men and lesbians to come out. It is my hope that as more people come out, more active allies will emerge, and then in turn create safer places for other gay men and women to be open about their sexual orientation. Of all the findings in this study, this one seems to give the most promise for the future development of allies of gay men and lesbians.

I have experienced first hand the impact that coming out can have on others. An example of this is found in my professional life. Over the years I have shared with colleagues and students, usually during a presentation that I have given about
gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues or through dialogue, that I am lesbian. One of
the most common comments made to me is that individuals are surprised to learn
that I am lesbian because I “don’t look like one.” Some of these same people
have shared how meeting me and hearing me talk about gay, lesbian, and bisexual
issues contributed to their desire to challenge their internalized homophobia.
Having personally witnessed the difference that coming out can make on others’
beliefs and feelings about gay men and lesbians, I believe the finding in this study
about the importance of personal contact with gay men and lesbians holds
promise for the future.

**Personal Contact: Reference to the Literature.** The literature supports that
heterosexual individuals are more likely to have negative attitudes about gay men
and lesbians if they do not personally have contact with gay men and women
(Bowman, 1979; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Ellis & Vasseur, 1993; Gentry, 1987;
Glassner & Owen, 1976; Hansen, 1982; Herek, 1988; Herek & Glunt, 1993;
Schneider & Lewis, 1984; Simon, 1995; Weis & Dane, 1979; Whitely, 1990). If
we take this literature one step further, then it would seem that heterosexual
individuals who knowingly have contact with gay men and lesbians are likely to
have positive attitudes about this population. None of the literature, however,
directly speaks to whether these individuals ever move beyond having positive
attitudes to being allies, and it is unwise to equate the two. Additionally, this
literature fails to look into why known personal contact with gay men and
lesbians may be so important to heterosexuals’ attitudes about this population.
Herek (1993) found that participants who were female, highly educated, politically liberal, and young were more likely to have contact with gay men and lesbians. He further reported that “heterosexuals with characteristics commonly associated with positive attitudes are more likely to be the recipients of disclosure from gay friends and relatives” (Herek, 1993, p.239). The characteristics of participants in this study closely resemble those in Herek’s (1993) research. Since Herek (1993) did not determine whether having characteristics commonly associated with positive attitudes opened the door for gay men and lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation or if the actual interactions heterosexuals had with gay men and lesbians led to positive attitudes, the interrelationship remains in question.

Simon (1995) found that heterosexual participants who had positive contact with lesbians also had positive attitudes toward lesbians. All of the female allies in this study reported having positive contact with gay men and lesbians. Reflecting on Simon’s (1993) research, and the lack of reports of negative interactions with gay men and lesbians by the participants in this study, I wonder if quality of personal contact with gay men and lesbians impacts ally development.

Emotion: My reflection. It is not surprising to me to learn from the women in this study that the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians has a strong emotional element. What is interesting to me is the emotions experienced by Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, Nancy, and Trisha appear to have both a
driving and maintaining force in their process. As the women became aware of the emotions they were experiencing, whether anger, passion, sadness, or worry, their process seemed to accelerate. Based on this information, I contend that the emotions experienced by these women spur them into action. It seems to me that action driven by emotions is in the form of actively seeking more knowledge about the issues, confronting individuals about their displayed homoprejudice, and increasing commitment to being allies of gay men and lesbians.

I see anger as an active emotion, one that often transforms feelings into action; this seems to be true for the women in this study as they report that anger is often followed by action. Their anger most frequently takes the form of confronting individuals about homoprejudice. Additionally, the anger appears to serve another purpose, to ever increase their passion about being allies of gay men and lesbians. Based on the participants' reports of their experiences of anger, I believe that when situations arose that ignite their anger about injustice toward gay men and lesbians, the women realized they are needed. Further fueling their anger, I see these women as personalizing issues about gay men and lesbians. Thinking about the people who they care about in their lives who are gay or lesbian brings the women to make homoprejudice their personal battle. I wonder if this serves to both encourage and maintain one's process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians.

I was glad to hear from Jackie, Nancy, Lindsey, Trisha, and Beth that they feel "good" about being an ally. As a lesbian, I greatly value allies, so it is nice to
know that the allies in this study carry with them a sense of pride for what they do as allies. It seems to me that their pride is not reward based, but rather stems from their belief that they are contributing to a better, more just world. I see this as adding to their overall sense of self worth, which, I imagine, contributes to their continuation as allies of gay men and lesbians.

Allies of gay men and lesbians who are my personal friends and colleagues have indicated to me that they have a tremendous amount of emotion about being allies. In fact, on multiple occasions, I have witnessed allies become upset or angry about homoprejudice even when I seem to be unmoved by the same event. Driven by their emotions, allies in my life have helped me stand up and speak out against antigay prejudice when I might have otherwise remained silent. I believe that without allies feeling so deeply about antigay prejudice and being willing to act to limit it, many of the advances that have been made toward a more just world would not have been possible.

**Emotion: Reference to the Literature.** With the empirical research related to allies of gay men and lesbians being so scant, it is no surprise that emotional elements of being an ally or emotional reports related to holding positive or negative attitudes of gay men and lesbians is minimal in the literature. Gelberg and Chojnacki' (1995) model of identity development for gay and lesbian affirmative career counselors presents emotions as part of the process. Various stages in Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) model comprise a host of negative feelings including, low self-esteem, ambivalence, anxiety, and even depression.
The participants in this study give no hint of feeling any of these emotions. The fifth stage of Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) model is called "pride" and, like its name, reflects that feelings of pride are a part of the identity development of the gay and lesbian affirmative career counselors. Similarly, allies in this study also report experiencing feelings of pride about being an ally.

**Education: My Reflection.** It seems to me that education is central to the process of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. The women discuss both formal and informal aspects of learning as contributing to their overall development as allies of gay men and lesbians. By having gay parents, Beth reports that her education occurred throughout her lifetime. Trisha learned about gay and lesbian issues through her parents' friends and later through interactions with her own friends. Nancy attributes the 70's culture and experiences her gay and lesbian friends shared with her as contributing to her knowledge of gay and lesbian issues. Jackie and Lindsey gained knowledge through formal training and education, which was a component of their graduate work and various jobs within university settings. Each woman describes situations in which increased advocacy occurred after some type of learning. I find it important to note that regardless of the source, as the women's knowledge increased, so too did their action as allies and their emotional involvement in being allies. I encourage education about gay and lesbian issues from both formal and informal venues.

What seems apparent to me is the emotional and intellectual components of the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians are
interconnected in a cyclical fashion for the women in this study. By this, I mean that emotions spark a desire to learn, learning contributes to feelings, these feelings then spur further learning, and the cycle continues. All of the women report that emotions are involved as they learn and that the more they learn the more emotions are fueled. For example, by becoming angry about learning about the persecution of gay men and lesbians, Beth was then less willing to let antigay statements go unchallenged. Her anger about the persecution then contributed to her interest in learning more and increased her activism. I contend, then, that emotions and intellectual processes of these allies are interwoven, rather than occurring in isolation.

**Education: Reference to the Literature.** The literature indicates that heterosexual individuals who have negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians also have less education (usually defined as high school diploma or less) (Bowman, 1979; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Nyberg & Alston, 1976; Seltzer, 1992; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1976). The women in this study are educated with a range of associate degrees to near completion of a doctoral degree. Their education, according to the literature, may contribute to their lack of negative attitudes about gay men and lesbians. Irwin and Thompson (1977) postulate that education fosters analytic ability and tolerance for nonconformity. The education of the women in this study, then, may contribute to their ability to move past societal norms and embrace homosexual individuals.
Stevenson’s (1988) study about promoting tolerance toward homosexuality through education indicates that those who read about or engage in formal study (such as taking a course) about homosexuality become less fearful of homosexuals and more tolerant of homosexuals’ social roles and behavior. The findings in this study support the results of Stevenson’s research. Perhaps concerted efforts to educate individuals about gay and lesbian issues would challenge the norm of homophobia and heterosexism and more allies would emerge. Studies about the interrelationship between emotions and education as related to allies of gay men and lesbians are not available.

Theme # 3: Commitment

Action: My Reflection. Perhaps the easiest way to corroborate the participants’ reports of being allies of gay men and lesbians is to learn about the related behaviors they display as allies. With each of these women, I need not look far. I see Nancy, Jackie, Lindsey, Beth, and Trisha’s commitment to being an ally of gay men and lesbians in their day to day behavior and also in more unique experiences. When asked to describe their actions as allies, the women, without hesitation, described multiple ways that they “stand up” for and with gay men and lesbians. This suggests to me that being an ally, including displaying that they are allies through their action, is such an integral part of them that it takes form and shape each day of their lives. Their commitment appears to me to be unwavering and ever growing.
I contend that the range of activities that the women describe speaks to the reality that there are multiple ways to "show up" as an ally of gay men and lesbians. From hanging an ally banner in one's office, confronting friends, colleagues, and complete strangers about antigay sentiments, to marching in a Pride parade, Nancy, Jackie, Beth, Trisha, and Lindsey show that there are many forms of activities that individuals engage in as allies of gay men and lesbians. Furthermore, the manner in which they describe their activities as a significant component of being an ally suggests to me that regardless of talent, skill or training, individuals who are committed to being allies of gay men and lesbians show their support in a variety of ways. This finding indicates to me that, with their commitment, these women find ways to be active as allies of gay men in lesbians in various forms that work for each of them.

The data matches my personal experiences as a lesbian with allies of gay men and lesbians. I have experienced first hand the impact of multiple forms of "showing up" for gay men and lesbians. I find myself greatly appreciating subtle forms of support, such as using inclusive language, as much as prominent forms of activism, such as marching in a gay pride parade. Having been excluded and shunned by the dominant culture because I am lesbian, any action that is inclusive and/or shows support for gay men and lesbians I see as a gift.

Action: Reference to the Literature. The literature supports that action is a component of being an ally and that increased action is consistent with commitment to activism. Evans and Washington (1991) argue that advocacy may
take many forms and functions ranging from placing a book with prominent gay
and lesbian words in the title on one’s book shelf at work to fighting for gay and
lesbian rights at a congressional hearing. The actions of the women in this study
reflect such a range of activism.

Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) describe that ally identity development includes
activism; however, their data is not empirically based. They report that activism
marks the fourth stage of ally identity development. It is characterized by
individuals becoming personally, professionally, socially, and politically active
regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. The results of this study concur that
as their process unfolds, individuals become more active allies and that activities
encompass a wide range of behaviors.

Challenges to Speaking Out: My Reflection. I am aware that being an ally of
gay men and lesbians does not occur without many challenges. Simply put, it is
not easy to go against the norm. One area in which challenges arise for these
women is related to speaking out against homophobia. This challenge seems
perfectly natural to me as speaking out may make one vulnerable. Each woman
discusses circumstances and/or people with whom she finds speaking out
difficult. Nancy, Jackie, Beth, Lindsey, and Trisha were able to quickly articulate
where or with whom their greatest challenges to speaking out occur. The ease
with which they respond suggests to me that they are keenly aware of this
component of being an ally. Furthermore, each woman speaks of a desire to
overcome such challenges. Allies who I personally know have also shared with
me that they experience similar challenges and desire to confront such obstacles. I admire allies' courage to speak and the ways that they challenge themselves.

It appears to me that the women in this study display their commitment to being an ally of gay men and lesbians by persevering through the challenges in order to continue being supportive of gay men and lesbians. I believe the passion with which they spoke of their challenges, whether that be with colleagues, people who are significantly older, family, large groups, "Bible wielding" individuals, or with their own uncertainty of whether their efforts are making a difference, indicates their commitment to being allies of gay men and lesbians is not threatened by challenge. These women are willing to confront difficult situations, whether internally or externally, and continue in their process of contributing to a more just society. I appreciate their dedication and courage.

I think it is vital that we acknowledge the risks allies of gay men and lesbians take in speaking out and honor their right to silence. In the process of being an ally of gay men and lesbians, individual allies may not always be in a personal place (e.g., low energy, too much risk, feel bad, too afraid, etc.) to be as active as they would like. When challenges arise, sometimes allies may not feel they are able to stand up for gay and lesbian issues. I believe others need to be careful not to judge when such situations occur. In my opinion, perfection as an ally should not be a standard. Such a demand would invalidate the process and discourage individuals from being allies. Rather, it seems crucial to me to recognize that challenges exist and confronting those challenges is in itself a process. By
honoring this process, I argue, allies are free to grow at their pace and personal development continues.

**Challenges to Speaking Out: Reference to the Literature.** The finding that challenges to the ally process exist is not specifically matched to other findings in the literature; however, some indirect links can be made. Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) report some personal battles in the process of ally identity development. They argue that stage two of ally identity development entails personal battles of incongruency between thoughts and behaviors which leaves individuals feeling anxiety, depression, and ambivalence. While these specific feelings are not reported by the participants of the current study, Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) finding suggests that there might be challenges within the process of ally identity development that did not emerge in this study.

Other authors acknowledge that challenges to advocacy in any form exist and call for individuals to find support for themselves (Barret, 1998; Oskamp, Bordin & Edwards, 1991). Barret (1998) identifies three steps to social action regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. The third step calls for individuals to find support for themselves due to the challenges that present themselves when involved in social action. Similarly, Oskamp, Bordin and Edwards (1991) suggest that anyone involved in an activist movement needs support.

**Risk at Work: My Reflection.** I believe that Nancy, Jackie, Lindsey, Trisha, and Beth show their commitment to being an ally of gay men and lesbians by staying true to their process as an ally. It appears to me that the women are clear
about their limits or boundaries in work environments while also appreciating their need for employment. Trisha, Lindsey, Jackie, and Beth report having no fear of showing themselves as allies within their work environment, while Nancy reflects some degree of risk. I find it impressive that each woman reports that even if her job was at stake, she would find some way to be supportive of gay and lesbian individuals and issues within the confines of her job.

Given their level of commitment to being allies of gay men and lesbians, I am not surprised that all the women state they would be unwilling to work in an openly antigay work environment. I contend that this boundary, even when it comes to their very livelihood, underscores the depth of these women's commitment to being allies of gay men and lesbians. Nancy describes how she has worked within the system at her place of employment to confront antigay prejudice, and she believes she has made a difference. When these women’s beliefs are tested in challenging situations, it seems to me that they rise to the challenge and stay true to their commitment of being an ally of gay men and lesbians.

Risk at Work: Reference to the Literature. Published empirical literature does not include studies regarding the lived work experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians. Studies that could be linked are too far removed from this finding to warrant inclusion.

Others’ Opinions: My Reflection Another way that I see the women in this study showing their deep rooted commitment to being an ally of gay men and
lesbians is through their lack of concern for what other people think about them supporting gay and lesbian individuals. It seems to me that these women must believe deeply in what they are doing in order to disregard negativity and potential negativity from others. It is not surprising to me that the women actively choose not to associate with people who show antigay prejudice. For some of the women, this choice has involved a sense of loss while for others it is not associated with loss because they see no gain in having antigay people be a part of their lives. Nancy’s choice to no longer have a friendship with a woman who she cares deeply for because the woman’s husband is a “bigot” is just one example of commitment. As with almost any choice, I acknowledge that both positive and negative consequences can ensue; for these women, not forming some friendships or losing others is a price they pay for being allies.

It seems to me that exceptions to not having antigay people be a part of allies’ lives may be necessary in some situations. For example, all of the women in this study report that there are some antigay members of their family, and yet none of the women report not associating with such family members. Rather, they have mechanisms of coping with or dealing with members of their families who are actively antigay. Allies who I personally know share similar stories. They too make choices to not have antigay people as personal friends and tend not to care what others think about them; and at the same time, they keep homophobic and heterosexist family members a part of their lives. It seems to me that it comes
down to the old adage that "you can’t choose your family" and yet, we can choose our friends.

I am impressed with Jackie, Lindsey, Trisha, Nancy, and Beth’s lack of concern about the possibility that others will think that they are lesbian because they are allies of gay men and lesbians. As I think about persecution that gay men and women experience, I ponder the reality that if others thought them to be gay, then allies too could be harmed in some manner. Despite this possibility, the women in this study are active allies of gay men and lesbians. In my opinion, this is another way that they demonstrate that, despite possible consequences, they are committed to being allies.

It seems to me that physical safety may be an exception to caring about what others think. Trisha, Jackie, and Nancy report that they have never been afraid for their safety. However, Lindsey and Beth describe situations when they feared that they may be hurt. These women’s attention to how others react to them seems to be different when their physical safety may be compromised. I wonder if the others in this study had experienced physical fear, would they too report being physically safe as a factor in determining whether they care what others think?

Others’ Opinions: Reference to the Literature. Empirical literature directly pertaining to how allies of gay men and lesbians view the opinions others have of them is not available. Two related articles provide some insight. Frank and Leary (1991) postulated that in order for gay men and lesbians to come out of the closet,
they must be willing to face social rejection. The findings of this study reflects that these women are willing to be socially rejected for being allies of gay men and lesbians. Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) indicate that during their fourth stage of ally identity development, “activism,” allies distance themselves from individuals who make heterosexist and homophobic statements. The women in this study also distanced themselves from such individuals. Empirical research about the impact of others’ opinions on allies of gay men and lesbians is warranted.

**Overcoming Stereotypes: My Reflection.** I believe the finding that Jackie, Nancy, Lindsey, Trisha, and Beth are only slightly impacted by stereotypes is consistent with their reports of never having to overcome negative feelings or thoughts about gay men and lesbians. With that in mind, their experience of not having a difficult time being an ally for gay men and lesbians who fit the stereotypes, is not surprising to me. I view this as another testament to how committed they are to being allies of gay men and lesbians. However, I remain baffled by their lack of internalization of societal prejudices regarding gay men and lesbians.

Because I have experienced heterosexism and homophobia as the societal norm, I wonder how these women avoid automatic negative responses to individuals who fit the stereotypes of gay men and lesbians. Each woman describes being aware when others, whether they are gay or lesbian or not, fit the stereotypical presentation of gay men and lesbians. They describe this as
“gaydar” and caution themselves not to make assumptions about such individuals’ sexual orientation. Lindsey indicates that she does not like it when her “gaydar” goes off and tries to suppress that within herself. She notes that, it never stimulates in her a negative feeling about the person. It seems to me that the finding that none of the women experienced stereotypical gay men and lesbians as negative is consistent with their indications of valuing all gay men and lesbians. I find it impressive that their commitment to being an ally is not conditional. I wonder if stereotypes hinder other peoples’ advocacy and support of gay men and lesbians, and make it difficult for them to be allies.

Overcoming stereotypes: Reference to the Literature. Literature about how heterosexual individuals’ view of gay men and women is impacted by stereotypical presentation is not available. What does exist is theorizing about the need to reduce one’s own automatic prejudicial responses in order to limit prejudice within the self. In their three step process for changing socialized prejudice, Monteith, Devine and Zuwerink (1993) report the third step as “learning how to inhibit stereotypic responses so as to respond consistently with one’s personal standards” (p.198). Similarly, Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) report that during the second stage of ally identity development, individuals engage in battles with their own heterosexism. This suggests that they must overcome their own internalized homophobia and heterosexism in the process. While offering the closest link, this literature is not consistent with the current
study since the women describe only positive reactions and report that they are
not battling with prejudice when they notice stereotypes in gay men and lesbians.

Concern About Not Doing Enough: My Reflection. One of the reasons I am
impressed with these five women is because they are concerned that they do not
do enough to decrease homoprejudice. It seems to me that they acknowledge that
they make a contribution and then in the same breath downplay their efforts. This
does not appear to stem from humility but rather, I believe, genuine reflection.

How is it that people who make such an important contribution are unaware of
how crucial their contributions are to making this a better place for all people?
The energy they give to advocacy regarding gay and lesbian issues occurs on a
daily basis and yet they want to do more.

It would be interesting to me to know exactly what function their concern
about not doing enough serves and its origins. Is it externally or internally
driven? Do they use this concern about not doing enough to spur them on to do
more? Why do they think they are not doing enough? The contradiction between
being concerned that they are not doing enough coupled with their reports about
"feeling good" about being an ally is also intriguing to me. Perhaps this is not a
contradiction but rather two truths simply co-existing. This finding suggests to
me that it is important for others to tell allies that their support and advocacy is
appreciated.

Concern About Not Doing Enough: Reference to the Literature. Two
previously published articles relate to the finding that these allies are concerned
that they do not do enough to combat homophobia and heterosexism. Oskamp, Bordin and Edwards study (1991) reveals that peace activists also report a desire to be more active. The limits of time and economic realities were reported to be the reasons for individuals not acting on their desire to increase their involvement. Also, Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) argue that in stage five of their model, "integration," allies experience an increased desire to extend their activities beyond the initial objectives. These two pieces of literature suggest that other activists have experienced a similar phenomenon as the women in this study, a desire to do more.

Theme # 4: Integration

Spectrum: My reflection. The women's experiences suggest to me that a wide spectrum of ways of being an ally of gay men and lesbians exists. This spectrum incorporates the totality of their experiences as allies, including their developmental process, feelings, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors. Within this spectrum, I see an activism continuum as encompassing a range of levels of showing support and being active in regards to gay and lesbian issues and individuals. The women in this study eloquently speak about valuing all allies regardless of where they are on the continuum and this finding matches my own beliefs that allies of gay men and lesbians should be valued throughout their ally development process. It is interesting to me that each participant expected higher
levels of activism from herself than from others, and they seem to look forward to moving further along the activism continuum in the future.

It appears to me that a developmental process occurs within the various ways of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. Thus, I find it relevant to look at allies through a developmental lens rather than as finished products. To me, aspects of their own development appears to be within Jackie, Lindsey, Nancy, Beth, and Trisha's consciousness as age, exposure, learning, taking risks, and developing self-confidence were named as some of the factors that facilitated movement along the spectrum. I see the process that they identified as fluid, evolving through time and experience.

It is interesting to me to note that the women equated the spectrum of ways of being an ally with the level or degree to which they themselves engage in certain behaviors (e.g. speaking out) that actively show support of gay men and lesbians. It seems as though they view support, interest, knowledge, care and concern in their role as allies of gay men and lesbians as existing within a spectrum, while also buying into a continuum of ally activism within the spectrum. As quickly as they identify that the spectrum exists, they also evaluate themselves along a continuum of activism. To me it is clear that for these women, the ally actions that they engage in are highly weighted in importance. It is my hope that as more knowledge about, the spectrum, the activism continuum, development of allies, and the overall process is gained, it will be possible to facilitate development of allies in an informed and effective manner.
Spectrum: Reference to the Literature. The literature that is most closely linked to the finding that there is a spectrum of ways of being an ally is the work of Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) and Riddle (1979). I closely examine these models and how they relate to the findings of this study in the section called “My proposed model: Process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians.” Please defer to that section for literature pertaining to the above findings.

Relationship with Significant Other: My reflection. I believe that being an ally of gay men and lesbians is so integrated into the women who participated in this study that it impacts whom they choose for partners and the quality of their relationship. With each woman sharing how she could not imagine being in a relationship with someone who was not also an ally, it becomes clear to me that their values are not compromised by their relationship; they are congruent. It seems to me that these women find it helpful to share some of their experiences as allies with their partners. They gain support from the men they love and that support may facilitate their growth. Nancy directly attributes her husband’s support of her as contributing to her willingness to take risks as an advocate for and with gay men and lesbians. Lindsey indicates that she would not be married to her husband if he was not an ally even though marriage is “the most important thing I’ve done.”

The passion and conviction with which the women in this study seem to integrate being an ally into all aspects of their lives, including their significant
relationships, moves me. Yet, based on how they stand firm in their commitment to being an ally across all other situations, it is no surprise to me that they also incorporate being an ally into their relationships with their significant other. It seems to me that being able to share this aspect of themselves with their partners is not only about support, but also serves as a way to help the women process their experiences as allies. Similarly, allies of gay men and lesbians that I personally know have supportive partners with whom they discuss their experiences as allies.

**Relationship with Significant Other: Reference to the Literature.** Little insight into this finding is provided by the literature. However, one article about peace activism offers a similar result as this study that might be useful to consider. Oskamp, Bordin and Edwards (1991) found that individuals involved in the peace movement indicated that support from family and friends was important to maintaining their activism. In postulating necessary steps for individuals interested in being activists about gay and lesbian issues, Barret (1998) argues that the third step is to find support for oneself. None of the literature specifically spoke about activists' relationship with their significant other. With another gap in the literature identified, it seems that this study has raised further questions about the role and significance of partners of allies of gay men and lesbians.

**Support from Gay Men and Lesbians: My reflection.** It seems to me that Jackie, Lindsey, Trisha, Beth, and Nancy were surprised by my inquiry of what gay men and lesbians could do to be supportive of them. They all thought at
some length as answers to my question did not come quickly. Their responses include: 1) not knowing anything gay men and women could do to support them; 2) suggestions that gay men and lesbians to be inclusive and welcoming of all people; and 3) letting allies conceptualize experiences with them. With their responses being so mixed, it seems to me that more exploration is needed.

Perhaps gay men and women like myself could take a proactive stance and show, through various activities, their support of allies. I see acknowledgment of the challenges allies may encounter as a good place to start. This indicates to me that more communication may be needed between allies and gay men and lesbians. I have personally made a point to let allies in my life know how much I appreciate them, and I would like to know more about how I can support allies in their process.

Support from Gay Men and Lesbians: Reference to the Literature. Literature pertaining to allies receiving or not receiving support from gay men and lesbians is not available.

Positive Consequences/Rewards: My reflection. I was so glad to learn that the allies in this study reap benefits for being allies of gay men and lesbians; they do so much, the totality of their experience should be positive. Jackie, Lindsey, Nancy, Trisha, and Beth report numerous positive consequences throughout their tenure as allies of gay men and lesbians. Being an ally of gay men and lesbians has brought tremendous joy to these women and it seems to me that the rewards, in part, facilitate their process as allies. After all, if it did not feel good, what
would be the impetus to start? I wonder if other allies have had negative consequences that have limited or ceased their ally status.

The allies speak of the rewards of having more fulfilling relationships as a positive outgrowth of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. This finding seems reasonable to me in that when people are open to diversity of any form, the more likely it is that they will let relationships touch them deeply. I believe that letting personal guards down enough to celebrate diversity allows others to share themselves more fully. It seems to me that the acceptance they extend outwardly comes back to them in the form of rich relationships.

Overall, what seems to stand out to me the most is that these experiences of “feeling good” about being an ally, being personally rewarded, and contributing to the creation of a more just world sustain and propel these women in their process of being allies. I believe a sense of personal and global meaning is apparent in each of the allies interviewed. It appears to me that this meaning drives them further in their commitment to being allies and also in their developmental process. As they travel through their process, I believe that they are personally enriched and experience a sense of contribution to society at large. For this I am appreciative.

**Positive Consequences/Rewards: Reference to the Literature.** Some of the findings regarding personal rewards in this study are reflected in the previous work of Gomes (1992). Gomes investigated the rewards and stresses of activism within the peace movement. Participants were asked to list the five most
rewarding aspects of being a peace activist. The first was reported to be the relationships with other peace activists. Interestingly, this was also listed as the most stressful aspect of being a peace activist. Relative to this study, Gomes's finding is not reflected. However, the second most rewarding aspect listed was the meaningfulness of their work and that is consistent with these allies' reports.

Washington and Evans (1991), argued that some of the benefits of involvement in gay rights advocacy include: (1) making a difference in the lives of younger generations; (2) becoming less bound by sex-role stereotypes; (3) increasing intimacy with same-sex friends; (4) interacting with gay men and lesbians; (5) being supportive to members of a population that is misunderstood and under served. Making a difference in the lives of younger generations was not directly reported by the allies in this study; however, it is possible that it was encompassed in the reward of contributing to making the world a better place. Relationships with gay men and lesbians were also reported as being rewarding by the allies in this study. The remaining aspects of advocacy regarding gay and lesbian issues speculated by Washington and Evans were not found in this study.

My Proposed MODEL: Process of Becoming and Being an Ally of Gay Men and Lesbians

Using the themes that emerged from the data, Way of Being, Awareness, Commitment, and Integration, I created a model depicting the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians (see Figure 2). The model is
developmental in nature and directly follows the themes from the data. This model is interactive and cyclical rather than stage based. All components of the process may be occurring at the same time for any given individual. Furthermore, each aspect of the process impacts other parts. The process model of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians for the participants in this study consists of four components: 1) proclivity to being an ally; 2) awareness of gay and lesbian issues and individuals; 3) commitment to being an ally; and 4) being an ally. The intent of this model is to provide a framework from which to understand the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and women for the five allies interviewed in this study. Below, the model is explained in detail. This explanation is then followed by relating my model to relevant literature.

Figure 2
Process of Becoming and Being an Ally of Gay Men and Lesbians

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Proclivity

Being ← ALLY → Awareness

Commitment
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Proclivity to being an ally of gay men and lesbians. This component contains both tangible and intangible elements. It is not exhaustive or definitive, rather it reflects a way of being that is not completely definable. As individuals embark in their process of becoming and being an ally, they have an overall sense that being an ally is a part of who they are. Unable to explain how the totality of this sense derived, individuals may simply accept this aspect of themselves as if it is a knowing deep within their very being. They may not be able to label the sense, but they are aware of its presence. External variables may contribute to the tangible development of this knowing. Individuals may react to aspects of their lives such as messages they receive from their family of origin regarding gay and lesbian issues and diverse populations in general. Feelings of empathy toward the struggles endured by gay men and lesbians may occur. They may acknowledge and challenge their own homoprejudice in an unconscious/inactive level or a conscious/active level. Additionally, such influences as religion, region of residence, and gender role beliefs may impact their process. Personal reactions to external stimuli, whether the stimuli is positive or negative, may serve to contribute to the knowing that being an ally is a part of their reality.

Awareness. The foundational nature of “Proclivity” is brought into action when individuals’ awareness of gay men and lesbians as well as their issues is heightened. Awareness may come in the form of known personal contact with gay men and lesbians, education, or having an emotional experience related to gay men and women or their related issues. Personal contact may include having
a friend, family member, or colleague come out to the individual or meeting someone for the first time and knowing he or she is gay or lesbian. Intellectual learning may be in the form of informal or formal education about the issues facing gay men and lesbians. Examples of informal education include reading a magazine article about gay rights, watching a movie with a gay or lesbian character, attending a party and witnessing a conversation about gay and lesbian issues. Formal education could occur through such avenues as attending diversity training at one’s place of employment, taking a class specifically about gay and lesbian issues, or attending related workshops at a conference. Allies may experience emotions such as anger, concern, compassion relative to gay and lesbian individuals and issues.

One or more of these factors could occur at once. For example, an individual may learn that her best friend is lesbian and was fired from her job because of her employer’s homophobia. The individual may become angry about the injustice and feel tremendous compassion for her friend. The learning she experienced is personal and emotional reactions ensue. Emotional and intellectual factors interact in a cyclical fashion as the individual is propelled further through the process.

**Commitment to being an ally.** Having a proclivity to be an ally followed by heightened awareness, individuals experience a commitment to being an ally of gay men and lesbians. The commitment is not likely to be in the form of a statement, but rather is seen through action. Individuals who commit themselves
to being allies of gay men and lesbians find themselves supporting gay men and lesbians through a host of potential activities. They experience facing challenges that present themselves to allies of this under-represented population. During the commitment component, individual allies may try out different forms of activism such as speaking out against antigay sentiments in personal and/or professional settings, acknowledging and confronting the challenges they face as allies, and taking risks. These factors may involve different forms and shapes as allies gain experience and confidence in their advocacy. Additionally, allies who experience the commitment component are also likely to be unconcerned about the opinions that others have of them for being allies. Despite their efforts, allies in this stage may have a concern that they are not doing enough as advocates for and with gay men and lesbians, and consider engaging in further action.

Being an ally. This component encompasses the totality of the experiences of being an ally of gay men and lesbians including allies’ developmental process, feelings, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors. Individuals recognize that there is a fluid spectrum of ways of being an ally of gay men and lesbians. The spectrum includes an activism continuum ranging from quietly supportive to publicly demonstrating one’s support of gay men and lesbians. Individuals may be aware of their current placement on the activism continuum as well as where they have been and where they would like to be in the future. They may evaluate themselves in terms of the degree to which they speak out against homophobia
and heterosexism as the hallmark of their way of being an ally. Valuing allies throughout the spectrum occurs.

Allies experiencing this component make being an ally of gay men and lesbians a significant part of their lives; their way of being an ally is incorporated into their way of being a person. As such, their relationship with significant others is impacted. Allies choose other allies as partners, engage in discussion about gay and lesbian issues and their advocacy with their partner, and derive support for their activism from their significant other. Additionally, they may choose not to have friendships or personal relationships with individuals who espouse antigay views.

Allies may find that they experience many positive consequences for being an ally. They are likely to report having fulfilling relationships as they are open to diverse individuals. Additionally, they experience enjoyment from their relationships with gay men and lesbians. A sense of contributing to making the world a better place exists as they find meaning in being an ally of gay men and lesbians. Experiences of "feeling good" about themselves and pride for being an ally are common. Being an ally of gay men and lesbians has become such a significant component of their way of being, that allies experiencing this component are unable to imagine being any other way.

The model proposed above contributes to understanding of the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. The intent of the model is to provide a beginning theoretical framework. It is my hope that future research
will expand on the above paradigm and contribute further understanding to the processes of allies of gay men and lesbians. In the next section I examine the most closely related research as it relates to my process model of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians.

My model of becoming and being an ally in relation to the literature. Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) created a model of identity development for gay, lesbian, and bisexual affirmative career counselors based on the two authors' professional and personal experiences of becoming an ally of gay men and lesbians in their role as career counselors. It is a six stage model that is hierarchical in nature. This model is described in detail in Chapter 2, and is presented here only as it relates to my model of ally identity development.

One notable difference is that Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) model is hierarchical and stage based while mine involves four components that are interactive and cyclical. The first component of my process model of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians, Proclivity, is marked by an overall sense that becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians is an intangible aspect of such individuals. Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) model does not include anything that resembles the first stage of my model. Rather, their model begins with "awareness" and skips over the foundational components that emerged from this data.

Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) first stage, "awareness," resembles the second component of my model, which I have also called Awareness; however, there are
some significant differences. The data in this study revealed that allies of gay men and lesbians go through a process of gaining awareness of gay men and lesbians, as well as their issues, through such means as personal contact and education while also experiencing emotions around this awareness. It is during this process that allies experience heightened interest and activism regarding gay men and lesbians. Gelberg and Chojnacki’s model begins with allies being aware of their desire to become more active regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. They identified associated feelings of confusion, anxiety, low self-esteem, a sense of isolation, and privacy issues as also taking place. Not one of these feelings was described by the participants of this study; therefore, the two models have significant differences.

The second stage of Gelberg and Chojnacki’s (1995) model is called “ambivalence.” It is characterized by battling homophobia and heterosexism within the self and incongruency between allies’ objectives and behaviors. This stage does not resemble any part of my model, as the allies studied did not reflect a similar process described by Gelberg and Chojnacki.

The third stage “empowerment” of Gelberg and Chojnacki’s (1995) model does, however, reflect a similar process to the third component of my model, Commitment. Gelberg and Chojnacki report that “empowerment” is marked by increased commitment to gay and lesbian issues as allies experience feelings of self-efficacy and self-valuing in their roles as allies. Their fourth stage, “activism,” is marked by increased activity regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual
issues. Similarly, in the third component of my model, *Commitment*, allies experience commitment to being allies and show this through various forms of activism. Additionally, in my model facing challenges to being allies occurs in many different forms.

The final stages of Gelberg and Chojnacki's (1995) model, “pride” and “integration,” respectively, reflect a similar process to the final component of my model, *Being*. Gelberg and Chojnacki (1995) report that allies experience pride in being an ally and distance themselves from individuals who make homophobic or heterosexist comments. Greater congruence between thoughts and behavior occurs. Furthermore, allies attempt to integrate other aspects of their lives into their work regarding gay and lesbian issues.

Another piece of literature that relates to my process model of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians is Riddle's (1979) homophobia scale. The scale reflects a continuum of negative to positive attitudes toward gay and lesbian relationships and people. Four negative, and four positive levels of attitudes exist along Riddle's (1979) scale. The negative components of the Riddle scale do not match the findings from this study; however, they are presented below to give the reader a complete framework of Riddle's (1979) work. Aspects of the positive end of the Riddle scale are present among the participants of my study and are incorporated into my model of ally development.

The first of Riddle's (1979) negative attitudes is called “repulsion.” It is characterized by believing that gay men and lesbians are sick, immoral, crazy,
etc., and that they engage in "crimes against nature." People at this level advocate for any means necessary to change gay men and lesbians including such methods as prison, hospitalization, electric shock treatment, etc. The next level is not much better, it is called "pity." Reflected in this level are individuals who believe that gay men and lesbians should be pitied because they are inferior to heterosexuals. They view heterosexuality as more mature than homosexuality.

The third level of the Riddle (1979) scale is marked by "tolerance." Individuals who believe that gay men and lesbians are going through a phase and thus should be coddled like a child can be seen at this level. They may believe that gay men and women should not be in positions of authority since they are still going through an adolescent phase. The final negative level of the Riddle scale (1979) is called, "acceptance." People at this level generally, without intention, put gay people down. Statements such as "it’s okay to be gay as long as you don’t flaunt it," "what happens in your bedroom is your business," and "I see you as a person, not as gay" may be heard by individuals in this level. Such statements deny the reality of being gay and lesbian, and inadvertently ask that gay men and lesbians do what they cannot to make others aware of their sexual orientation.

The positive levels of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as reflected in the Riddle Scale (1979) begins with "support." Individuals at this level are aware of the unfairness of societal mistreatment of gay men and lesbians and may engage in work regarding gay men and women's civil rights. They also realize that their
own discomfort with gay men and lesbians is irrational. "Admiration" is the next level. Characteristic of this level are individuals who recognize the strength it takes to be gay or lesbian in a predominantly heterosexist and homophobic society. These individuals actively work on their own homophobia and heterosexism.

"Appreciation" is the fourth level. Individuals in this part of the Riddle scale (1979) recognize and are willing to combat their own and others' homophobia. They value gay men and lesbians and other diverse populations. Nurturance is the final level of the Riddle scale. It comprises individuals who believe that gay men and lesbians are such a valuable part of society that they are indispensable. These individuals genuinely enjoy gay men and women and are willing to advocate regarding gay and lesbian issues.

Jackie, Nancy, Lindsey, Beth, and Trisha's description of their process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians has some similarities to the positive end of the Riddle (1979) scale. At the time of the study, all of the women could be identified as being in the "nurturance" level of the scale. During their process, the women described equivalent ways of being to the "admiration" and "appreciation" levels. Since none of the women ever described being uncomfortable with gay men and lesbians, they were not identified with the "support" level. Again, one of the intriguing aspects of the findings of this study is how, despite overwhelming odds, these women escaped having conscious negative views of gay men and lesbians and buying into homophobia and
heterosexism. Since the women reported that being an ally of gay men and lesbians is integrated into their overall being, it seems that "nurturance" is where they will stay with their attitudes. Perhaps the Riddle scale (1979) needs to be altered for those who report never experiencing negative feelings about gay men and lesbians.

Methodological Considerations

The qualitative methodological approach taken in this study provided ample opportunity to examine the experiences of these five allies of gay men and lesbians. The depth of the exploration of the experiences of these women was made possible by the methodology employed. Traditional forms of research would not have been able to gather the richness of the information uncovered in this study. The methodology employed in this study provided an initial understanding of the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. As often happens in qualitative research, the information uncovered raised numerous questions which need to be addressed in future research.

The depth of information was made possible, in part, by using a semi-structured interview. Interviewing in this format gave me the flexibility to let participants take me through their experiences. If I had been tied down to a rigid structure and not strayed from my ideas of inquiry, a great deal of information would have never been attained. The participants guided me through their
process, using my questions as a springboard rather than an ending point. I support this type of investigation when examining phenomena of this nature.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several implications for understanding of allies of gay men and lesbians and the development of future allies. Gay men and lesbians, allies, educators, researchers, and those working for issues of social justice may be informed by this study.

**Gay Men, Lesbians, and Allies.** The finding that personal contact with gay men and lesbians is a significant contributor to the process of being an ally of gay men and lesbians has implications for gay men and women. Gay men and lesbians who are willing to come out may contribute greatly to increasing the numbers of people who identify themselves as allies of gay men and lesbians. This is a sensitive issue for many gay men and women due to potential negative consequences of coming out. There is a delicate balance between encouraging individuals to come out and respecting their desire and right to protect themselves from potential harm. Perhaps if gay men and women know about this positive implication of coming out, more would be willing to take the risk. Allies can contribute by letting those gay men and lesbians who are out to them, know how important they are to their process as allies. Perhaps a reciprocal relationship would increase a sense of safety and comfort in coming out as gay or lesbian and in coming out as an ally.
**Educators.** This study uncovered the benefits of education in the process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians. Education appears to stimulate the development of allies. Both informal and formal aspects of education were found to be beneficial. This finding suggests that education is critical. I encourage educators to take the opportunity to teach and provide forums of learning about gay and lesbian issues through whatever means possible.

One finding that could be used in the educational process to encourage individuals to be allies is that the women in this study reported many positive consequences as a result of being allies of gay men and lesbians. The message that knowing gay men and lesbians is personally fulfilling, that being open to this diversity enhances quality of life, could be incorporated into various forms of education. This may open individuals' perspectives and give them reason to consider being an ally of gay men and lesbians.

**Advocates for Social Justice.** The finding that there is a spectrum of ways of being an ally of gay men and lesbians calls for individuals working for social justice, including activists, gay men and lesbians, educators, and counselors, to be aware and appreciative of the notion that allies are works in progress. So often, social advocates, from a variety of settings, are impatient with individuals' process and that could hinder the very thing that is desired to be developed. Furthermore, it behooves all individuals who care about justice to embrace individuals at all places along the spectrum. People respond much better to reward than criticism.
Researchers. This research provides foundational knowledge about allies of gay men and lesbians. It serves as a beginning to understanding the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians. While it informs, the study also uncovers many avenues for future empirical investigations.

One of the surprises of the study, that these women reported never battling homophobia and heterosexism within themselves, challenges the notion that in order to become allies individuals must first address their own prejudice. It raises questions about the nature of the allies and how these allies escaped homoprejudice in a society that is full of heterosexism and homophobia. If we can gain further understanding of this notion, then perhaps concerted efforts at contributing to the development of allies could be made.

Further inquiry into the developmental process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians is needed. In particular, research to investigate the processes within the spectrum of ways of being an ally could contribute to further understanding of how movement occurs and what propels people forward along the spectrum. The goal need not be that all allies become highly public activists, rather, further understanding of the process is desired as it may inform methods of encouraging others to be allies of gay men and lesbians.

It is my hope that the process model of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians that I developed based on the results of this study serves as a springboard for further related inquiry. I specifically recommend investigation into the finding that being an ally is an intangible aspect of these women, it is
simply a part of who they are. This finding needs first to be replicated and second to be understood in more tangible means.

Another finding, messages received from family of origin impacts development, warrants further investigation. Breaking down what the impact is and how it evolves, both as a child and as an adult, could provide valuable information about how to educate families about diversity issues in general, and specifically gay and lesbian issues. Additionally, if more is known about why some messages from home are accepted and others rejected, and the assimilation process, then perhaps we would understand more about why individuals, like Lindsey, who received prejudiced messages from her family of origin are able to become allies and vise versa.

Why, despite overwhelming odds, some individuals become allies of gay men and lesbians and others do not, needs further investigation. Given that the majority of literature about heterosexuals attitudes toward gay men and lesbians is about negative attitudes, future research needs to examine those with positive attitudes as well as those who are also allies, and to focus on the difference between the two. With such knowledge, it would be possible to build on the positive in an effort to make this world a safer, more just world for gay men, lesbians, and their allies, as well for all people.

Empirical inquiry into the interrelationship of intellectual and emotional components of being an ally of gay men and lesbians is warranted. The allies in this study clearly revealed that emotional and intellectual factors are crucial in
their process and that these elements engage each other in a cyclical fashion. Additional knowledge about this interrelationship has the potential to inform avenues of social advocacy and facilitation of the development of allies.

I encourage research regarding how gay men and women can support allies. I believe allies are invaluable to the reduction of heterosexism and homophobia, and as such, they should receive support from gay men and lesbians. The allies in this study struggled with the notion of asking for support from gay men and women, and this is curious. It would be helpful to have empirical knowledge about what is supportive to allies and how gay men and lesbians can contribute to allies’ ongoing development.

Limitations

One of the most noticeable limitations of this study is the lack of diversity in the sample. All of the participants are female and of European-American decent. Consequently, the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians who are from various racial groups and those who are men, is unknown. It should be noted that during sampling procedures, I specifically asked for recommendations of allies of color and men. No individuals of color were recommended to me as allies of gay men and lesbians. Two men were identified; however, they did not participate in the study. One did not follow through with scheduled appointments and the second I eliminated after learning that he worked on the same campus and went through similar training as Jackie and Lindsey. I reasoned that three participants
from the same environment would skew the data and since I had already interviewed the two women, I thanked him for his willingness to participate and told him why I could not interview him. I recommend that future research in this area investigate men and women from diverse racial and ethnic groups as well as men who are from European decent.

Another concern with the sample is that two of the women, Jackie and Lindsey, became aware of each others participation during the course of the investigation. After the first round of interviews and just prior to the second round, Jackie reported that through informal conversation, she and Lindsey revealed to one another that they were participants in this study. While Jackie indicated that their interchange was brief, I am not aware of what was said between the two women or what impact their conversation had on the content of the second round of interviews.

Another limitation of this study is that some of the allies knew that the investigator is lesbian before the first interview, while others learned of my sexual orientation by the end of the second interview. Those who did not know up front that I am lesbian, may have assumed or been cautious in their responses until they knew one way or the other. My being lesbian may have played a role in the participants’ willingness to share negative feelings that they have about gay men and lesbians. In order to eliminate this potential bias in the future, it may be helpful to have a heterosexual individual do the study and be up front about his or
her heterosexuality. It is not possible to determine the effect that my lesbianism had on these participants.

Further critiquing my own work, there were inconsistencies in the location in which I interviewed these participants. Two of the women were interviewed in their offices while three were interviewed at home. This raises the question of how, if at all, the two different settings impacted the interviews. I am not sure of the answer to this question. However, I speculate that the home environments allowed the three participants to relax in a different way than the office interviews permitted the other two. Conversely, it may be easier to be formal in an office setting than at home. If that is the case, then I wonder if the information given by the participants who were interviewed in their offices would have been different had the interviews taken place in their residences. Perhaps future research could benefit from conducting interviews in the same type of setting for all of the participants.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of adult allies of gay men and lesbians. The participants were five European-American females who were identified by gay men and lesbians to be allies and who self-identify as allies of gay men and lesbians.

A grounded theory research paradigm was employed. The Constant Comparative method provided the format of the methodology. The design of the
study followed a pattern of interviews, analysis, theory development, further interviews, and further analysis until themes and patterns emerged from the data. The data analysis revealed four themes: (1) way of being; (2) awareness; (3) commitment; (4) integration. These themes revealed a process of becoming and being an ally of gay men and lesbians.

This study provides the foundation for future empirical examination. The need for further research relative to the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians has been established. Immediate next step research could replicate this study and reveal the applicability of the findings. The research that follows needs to incorporate diverse populations and larger sample sizes to determine the degree to which the experiences of this group of allies are shared by other allies of gay men and lesbians.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Initial Interview Questions

Phone:
Address:
Age:
Sex:
Race/Ethnicity:
Highest Education Degree Completed:
Education in Progress (if any):
Employment (position):
Relationship Status:
Religious/Spiritual Affiliation:
Registered Political Party:
State(s) of Residence During Childhood and Adolescence:
Urban/Suburban/Rural Residence During Childhood and Adolescence:
Urban/Suburban/Rural Residence Currently:

MEANING OF BEING AN ALLY

* What does being an ally of gay men and lesbians mean to you?
* How do you know that you are an ally?
* How long have you been an ally?

PROCESS: CONSCIOUSNESS/BEHAVIORAL

* Talk about your process of becoming an ally.
* At what point were you able to say you had “arrived” as an ally?
* Talk about any steps you took backwards in being or becoming an ally.
* To what extent, if any, is it easier or more difficult to be an ally for gay men and lesbians who do not fit the stereotypes?

BARRIERS/AVENUES

* What experiences led you in the direction of becoming an ally?
* Describe any obstacles you faced in your process of becoming an ally?
* Describe any experiences that facilitated you in your process of becoming an ally?
* Who has been influential (positively or negatively) to you being or becoming an ally?
* To what extent, if any, has HIV/AIDS influenced you in becoming or being an ally?

RISK/OUTNESS
* In what types of situations do you share with others that you are an ally of gay men and lesbians?
* In what types of situations do you not share with others that you are an ally of gay men and lesbians?
* Describe as many situations as you can in which you showed support for gay men and/or lesbians
* Has anyone ever thought that you were gay/lesbian because of your support for gay men and lesbians? If so, how did you handle it? How did you feel?

CONSEQUENCES POSITIVE/NEGATIVE
* What have been and what are the positive repercussions of being an ally in your personal life?
* What have been and what are the negative repercussions of being an ally in your personal life?
* What have been and what are the positive consequences of being an ally in your professional life?
* What have been and what are the negative consequences of being an ally in your professional life?
* What are your past and current fears of being an ally?
* How has your ally status impacted (positively or negatively) your relationships with family, partners, friends, and colleagues?

INTERACTIONS WITH GAY MEN & LESBIANS
* As an ally, what could gay and lesbian people do to be supportive of you?
* Have you ever experienced negativity from gay men and/or lesbians for any of your thoughts, behavior, feelings? If so, please describe what happened and how you dealt with it.
* To what extent are you working with gay men and lesbians, other allies?

ADVOCACY
* To what extent, if any, is speaking out personally, professionally, and/or publicly a part of being an ally?
* What are your thoughts about being an ally without speaking out against antigay sentiments or supporting gay and lesbian people?
* What other groups have you advocated for, if any?
* Why are you an ally for gay men and lesbians specifically?

LITERATURE BASED
* Has your spiritual or religious life or affiliation changed in any manner since you became an ally? If so how?
* How does your ally status impact your political affiliation or voting?
* What are your beliefs about sex-roles for men and women?

RECENT/CURRENT EXPERIENCE
* How do you feel about being an ally?
* Are you an ally all the time, part of the time? What impacts or influences this?

CLOSURE
* Please summarize your experience as an ally.
* What would you like to add?
APPENDIX B

Themes After First Round of Interviews

I. Process
   1) Way of Being
      - Just who I am
      - Response to family (both pro and con)
      - Beliefs & Feelings about Diversity/advocacy in general
   2) Awareness
      - education
      - exposure
      - environment
   3) Personal Contact
      - person know coming out to individual
   4) Commitment
      - advocacy in many forms
      - growth of advocacy with personal contact and passion

II. Passion
   1) Action - Forms of Advocacy
   2) Challenges and Responses
   3) Risk
   4) Fear
   5) Triggers (to anger and action)
   6) Family

III. Downplay Contribution
    1) Feelings & Beliefs of Not Doing Enough
    2) Support from GLBT community (e.g. - never considered it)
    3) Spectrum of Being an Ally

IV. Variables of Impact
    1) Religion
    2) South
    3) Politics

V. Rewards
    1) Pride
    2) Fulfilling Relationships
    3) Meeting a Sense of Duty
    4) Learning
APPENDIX C

Second Interview Questions

1) Being an ally seems to have an emotional component that appears to be strongly felt across participants. Please speak a bit more about the emotional elements of being an ally. What drives these emotions?

2) One of the consistencies in experiences across participants is that individual allies have strong relationships with their spouse or significant other. Could you talk a bit about what role the support of your partner plays in you being an ally? To what extent do you believe that your experiences as an ally, both emotional and behavioral, might be different if your partner was less supportive of you being an ally.

3) One of the themes that emerged from the interviews is that there is a spectrum to being an ally. Individuals spoke about the need to speak out or confront as a necessary component of being an ally, yet they also acknowledged that people could be allies without speaking out to a large degree. Though there is respect for the existence of less active allies, each participant seemed to desire that she be more on the active end of the spectrum. Please talk a bit more about the spectrum of speaking out, your place on the spectrum, and if you see yourself moving on it.

4) Related to the spectrum of speaking out, it appears from the data that participants became more comfortable with speaking out or otherwise actively being an ally the longer they considered themselves to be an ally. To what extent do you see being an ally as a developmental process over time for you?
5) Another theme that emerged is that allies believe speaking out is a vital component of being an ally AND that there are times when they do not speak out. One of the common times when individuals do not speak out is when they think their efforts won't make a difference (e.g., family, highly religious people). This contradiction appears striking since it would seem that when change is the least likely to occur may be exactly when ally advocacy is the most needed. Based on your experience, please speak to this contradiction.

6) Two processes of being an ally emerged from the data: a) a personal process comprising emotional experiences; b) an intellectual and in some cases academic process. Please talk some more about these emotional pieces, how they have and how they impact you as an ally.

7) Please describe how your current and past work environments impacted you as an ally.

8) People can have multiple truths and this seems to be the case from the data. One theme that emerged is that allies report not caring about what others think about them being allies, and that there are times when caution is exercised because they do care about possible consequences. Please talk about how these two realities show themselves for you as an ally.

9) In reality, we cannot like everyone we meet no matter what their sexual orientation. To what extent do you feel comfortable/uncomfortable having negative feelings toward gay or lesbian individuals? What about to a group within the G/L community? To what extent do you feel it is okay/not okay to be critical of any G/L individual or small group?
APPENDIX D

Themes After the Second Round of Interviews

Developmental Process of Becoming and Being an Ally of Gay Men and Lesbians

1) Way of Being

(a) Just who I am
(b) Response to family (pos. & neg.)
(c) Beliefs and feelings about diversity and advocacy in general
(d) Variables of impact: Religion
   South
   Gender-roles

2) Awareness

(a) Emotional and intellectual interchange/cycle
(b) Personal contact
(c) Education
(d) Exposure
(e) Triggers

3) Commitment

(a) Passion
(b) Action
(c) Risk
(d) Challenges and responses
(e) Guilt/sense of duty
(f) Speaking out / not speaking out
(g) fear

4) Integration

(a) Spectrum of being an ally
(b) Rewards: Fulfilling relationships
   Pride
   Learning
   Sense of contribution / desire to make change
(c) Part of who I am/ congruency
APPENDIX E

APPLICATION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE OSU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Principal Investigator:* Lizbeth A. Gray, Ph.D. E-mail: grayli@orst.edu

Department: Counselor Education Phone: 737-5972

Project Title: Examining the Experiences of Female Allies of Gay Men and Lesbians.

Present or Proposed Source of Funding: N/A

Type of Project: Faculty Research Project
Student Project or Thesis*: Student’s Name: Mary Frances Arnold
Phone: (336) 286-2734 E-mail: mfarnold@hpe.infi.net
Student’s Mailing Address: 3005 Cottage Place Greensboro, NC 27455

Type of Review Requested: Exempt Expedited Full Board

Description of Significance

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of adult heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians who themselves are not parents of gay male and/or lesbian individuals. The study investigates the process and impact of being a heterosexual ally of gay men and lesbians. Common themes and patterns will be identified which will contribute to understanding of the experiences of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians. There is currently no documented empirical research covering this specific topic.
Description of Methods/Procedures

Heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians will be recruited to participate in the study via purposeful sampling procedures. Five volunteers will be asked to schedule a time and place for a private audiotaped interview to be conducted by Mary Frances Arnold, Ph.D. Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision, School of Education at Oregon State University. The first interview will consist of broad questions focusing on the experiences of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians. It will last approximately one and one half hours in length. Two to three follow-up interviews will be scheduled at the participants’ convenience. The follow-up interviews will last approximately thirty to sixty minutes and the questions will be designed to confirm or add information already obtained in previous interviews. Field notes will be taken during all interviews. Participants will be invited to review the information for accuracy and assurance of anonymity.

Description of Benefits/Risks

The primary benefits for participants in this study is potential increased self-understanding. Participants may also gain a sense of pride for having contributed to increased knowledge about allies of gay men and lesbians and challenging oppressive behavior and attitudes regarding sexual orientation issues. The potential risks of participating in the study include the recollection of events
which may have been emotionally uncomfortable or painful. These memories could lead to similar feelings in the present. As a professional counselor, the researcher adheres to the ethical codes of the American Counseling Association, and as such will make appropriate referrals should any participant be in need of counseling services as a result of participation in this study. Coding procedures will be followed to enhance confidentiality and anonymity of participants and research materials. As required by the OSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, all research records will be kept for three years after the conclusion of the study. These records will remain under lock and the investigators will be the only individuals with access. When three years have passed, all confidential data and information that could be linked to participants’ identity will be destroyed.

Description of Subject Population

The population is comprised of heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians. The following is the criteria for inclusion in this sample: 1) self-identification as heterosexual, 2) self-identification as an ally of gay men and lesbians, 3) being over eighteen years of age, 4) at least three times in personal and/or professional life having shown support of gay men and lesbians (e.g., telling a coworker that her antigay joke is offensive, openly socializing with a person known to be gay or lesbian, receiving professional care from a known gay or lesbian individual, participating in a gay pride march), and 5) a willingness to participate in this study. Criteria for exclusion includes: 1) having a child who to one’s knowledge
is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, 2) current or recent purposely antigay behaviors (e.g., verbal or physical assault on an individual because he/she is gay or lesbian, participation in a political campaign against gay or lesbian civil rights), 2) major mental illness, thought disorder, or depressive disorder, and/or 3) current or pending legal action (which may subject the investigator(s) be required to act as a witness or testify in a court of law).

Recruitment
In this study participants will be selected through purposeful sampling procedures. This will be done in an effort to obtain cases that are “information rich” and can facilitate in-depth understanding (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Five participants will be utilized in this study. If saturation is not achieved with five individuals, an additional five participants may be sought.

Snowball sampling, a type of purposeful sampling (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996), will be utilized in order to find participants for the study. Gay men and lesbians who the investigator(s) knows through personal and professional experiences will be asked to recommend cases for study. Recommended individuals will receive a telephone call from Mary Frances Arnold who will then explain the study including the risks and benefits of participation, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and then inquire about interest in participation.

Copy of Informed Consent
See attached: Appendix F
Description of Methods of Obtaining Consent

Upon initial meeting with the investigator, the nature of the study will be explained to the participants in both a verbal and written manner. The explanation will include potential benefits and risks to the participants, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. The researcher will underscore the participants’ right to terminate their part in the study at any time.

Description of Methods of Anonymity/Confidentiality

The information obtained through this study will remain confidential. The names of the participants will not appear on any transcripts, field notes, or data obtained. Instead, numerical codes will be used to keep track of data over time. Demographic information will be used only to relate this study to existing literature and will not be traceable to participants’ identity. The investigators will be the only people who will have access to the research materials. As required by the OSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, all research records will be kept for three years after the conclusion of the study. These records will remain under lock and the investigators will be the only individuals with access. When three years have passed, all confidential materials that could be linked to participants’ identity will be destroyed.

Copy of Questionnaire/Survey/Testing Instrument/Etc.

See attached: Appendix A (semi-structured interview).
APPENDIX F

Informed Consent Document

A. Title of the Research Project:
   Examining the Experiences of Female Allies of Gay Men and Lesbians

B. Investigators:
Mary Frances Arnold
Ph.D. Candidate, Counselor Education
Education Hall.
Oregon State University
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(336) 286-2734
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Dr. Lizbeth A. Gray
Counselor Education
Education Hall 315 E
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
(541) 737-5972
grayli@orst.edu

C. Purpose of the Research Project:
The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of adult heterosexual allies of gay men and lesbians who themselves are not parents of gay male and/or lesbian individuals. The study investigates the process and impact of being a heterosexual ally of gay men and lesbians. Common themes and patterns will be identified which will contribute to understanding of the experiences of allies of gay men and lesbians.

D. Procedures. I have received an oral and a written explanation of this study and I understand that as a participant in this study the following things will happen:

1. Pre-study Screening: I will meet with the investigator who will describe the nature and purpose of this study. Criteria for inclusion in this sample is as follows: 1) self-identification as heterosexual, 2) self-identification as an ally of gay men and lesbians, 3) being over eighteen years of age, 4) at least once in personal and/or professional life having shown support of gay men and lesbians (e.g., telling a coworker that her antigay joke is offensive, openly socializing with a person known to be gay or lesbian, receiving professional care from a known gay or lesbian individual, participating in a gay pride march), and 5) a willingness to participate in this study. Criteria for exclusion includes: 1) having a child who to one’s knowledge is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, 2) current or recent purposely antigay behaviors (e.g., verbal or physical assault on an individual because he/she is gay or lesbian, participation in a political campaign against gay or lesbian civil rights), 3) major mental illness, thought disorder, or depressive
disorder, and/or 4) current or pending legal action (which may subject the investigator(s) to be required to act as a witness or testify in a court of law). If the inclusion and exclusion criteria are satisfied, I may be asked to participate in the study. If these criteria are not met, I will be excused from the study.

2. What participants will do during the study.
I will be asked to schedule a time and place to meet with the investigator, Mary Frances Arnold, for an audiotaped interview. This first interview will last approximately one and one half hours and consist of broad questions related to my experiences as an ally of gay men and lesbians. I will participate in one to two follow-up interviews that will last thirty to sixty minutes and be scheduled at my convenience. In the follow up interview(s), Mary Frances Arnold will ask me questions that confirm or add to information already obtained in previous interviews. All interviews will be audiotaped and the investigator will take field notes throughout the interviews. I will be invited to review the information obtained from the interviews for accuracy and assurance of anonymity.

3. Foreseeable risks or discomforts.
The potential risks of participating in the study include the recollection of events which may have been emotionally uncomfortable or painful. These memories could lead to similar feelings in the present. As a professional counselor, the researcher adheres to the ethical codes of the American Counseling Association, and as such will make appropriate referrals should I be in need of counseling services as a result of participation in this study. Coding procedures will be followed to enhance confidentiality and anonymity of participants and research materials. My name will not appear on the data.

4. Benefits to be expected from the research.
Although there are no assurances, the primary benefit I may receive for participating in this study is greater self-understanding. I may experience personal satisfaction for having contributed to a knowledge base that may be used to challenge oppressive behavior and attitudes regarding sexual orientation issues. I will receive no financial or material compensation for my participation in this study.

E. Confidentiality.
The information that I provide in this study will be kept confidential. The investigators are the only persons who will have access to specific information linked to me. My name will not appear on data, transcripts, field notes, or be published in any manner. A numerical code will appear on the data, transcripts, and field notes instead of my name. Demographic information that I provide will be used only to relate this study to existing literature. As required by the OSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, all research
records will be kept for three years after the conclusion of the study. These records will remain under lock and the investigators will be the only individuals with access. When three years have passed, all confidential materials that could be linked to my identity will be destroyed.

**F. Voluntary Participation Statement.**

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. I will not be paid or otherwise compensated for my participation in this study. I may refuse to participate, refrain from answering questions, or completely withdraw from the study at any time.

**G. If You Have Any Questions.**

I understand that any questions I have about the research study and/or specific procedures should be directed to Mary Frances Arnold, Education Hall, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, 97331, (336) 286-2734, e-mail: mfarndid@hpe.inf.net, or Mary Frances Arnold’s Doctoral Committee Chair, Lizbeth A. Gray, Ph.D., Education Hall 315 E., Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331, (541) 737-5972, e-mail: grayli@orst.edu. If I have any questions about my rights as a research participant, I should call the IRB Coordinator, OSU Research Office, (541) 737-8008.

**H. Understanding and Compliance.**

My signature below indicates that I have read and that I understand the procedures described above and give my informed and voluntary consent to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant (or participant’s legally authorized representative)  
Name of Participant

Date Signed

Participant’s Present Address  
Participant’s Phone Number