The purpose of this phenomenological research is to deepen understanding of the interrelationship between being lesbian and community college leadership experiences, values, priorities, practices, and identity negotiation. The following outlines thematic research findings.

1. Lesbian community college administrators’ have experiences in:
   - Anti-lesbian work environments that exposed them to homophobic jokes and statements and excluded them from formal and informal college structures. These environments left the women feeling depleted of energy and commitment and fearful of retaliation and job loss.
   - Lesbian supported work environments had openly gay and lesbian faculty, staff, and administrators in the college community; integrated sexual orientation in non-discrimination clauses; supported gay and
lesbian relationships as a valued part of the institutional diversity; and included gay and lesbian issues as part of the curriculum. These environments led to liberation and full participation in the community college mission.

2. Leadership values, priorities, and practices linked directly to lesbianism include:
   - Mentorship of others, particularly other lesbians.
   - Commitment to multiculturalism, equity, and fairness.
   - Education of others about lesbian issues and lifestyles.

3. Lesbian identity negotiations in the workplace involved:
   - Relentless decisions about when, where, and how to disclose sexual orientation to others. Factors considered by the women included reception by others, the level of trust with a colleague or supervisor, the degree to which the women perceive they could be hurt by the other, and a desire to be authentic and to have integrity.
   - Relationship building to increase personal and professional acceptance in the workplace and mitigate stereotyping and negative reactions to their lesbianism.

An informal network was used to find research participants who were current lesbian community college administrators in Washington State. Participants included two Women of Color and three European Americans, one of whom belongs to a religiously oppressed group. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on two separate occasions with each participant.
The findings suggest that lesbian community college administrators possess many of the necessary values, priorities, and practices identified for a new generation of community college leaders specifically because they are lesbians and belong to an oppressed group in American society.
The Interrelationship Between Being Lesbian And Its Impact on Community College Leadership

by
Michelle Andreas

A DISSERTATION

submitted to
Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing Education

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Dean of the School of Education

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.

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Michelle R. Andreas, Author
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this doctoral program and research process I have discovered that I am a social learner who needs the involvement of others to acquire the full excitement and richness of learning experiences. As such, I would like to express deep appreciation and thanks to all of those who helped me increase my understanding of community college leadership and find necessary strength to conduct this research.

First, I would like to express my gratitude, appreciation, and deep respect to the five courageous women who were willing to share experiences, stories, perceptions, and vulnerabilities with me and you so that we may acquire a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and act more consciously and thoughtfully with our lesbian colleagues.

I thank colleagues, friends, and team members at Olympic College who were willing to try my new found leadership ideas, were patient with less than desirable outcomes of my learning, and always present to cheer me on to be the kind of leader I hoped that I could be.

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I am so fortunate to have had a major professor like Dr. George Copa who gently, but firmly, coached me to reach a level of scholarship and writing beyond
my wildest dreams. I am a better leader and person because of his facilitation of my learning.

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Of course there must be humor that encompasses every doctoral student’s journey through graduate school and the dissertation process. The story among my friends and family members is that my cat, Ceily McCroskey, will receive her doctorate and participate in the spring 2005 graduation ceremony because she faithfully curled up next to me every time I read, wrote, listened to interview tapes, or cursed the computer for shutting down.
And every day of this learning journey I gave quiet thanks to my partner of 17 years. From the moment I whispered that I was interested in pursuing a doctorate program she cleared the way for me to have the most incredible, focused, meaningful, and self-indulgent learning experience of my life!
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The Interrelationship Between Being Lesbian And Its Impact on Community College Leadership

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history gay and lesbian issues have risen to the pinnacle of political and social debate. Those debates have created momentum for gays and lesbians seeking equal protections and rights; caused a backlash of hatred and negativity resulting in increased violence toward gays and lesbians; and generated conversations among friends, family members, and colleagues that may bring people together or divide them forever (Coon, 2001; Fone, 2000). During the research and writing of this dissertation, gay and lesbian issues became a primary political agenda beginning with the landmark Supreme Court decision in July 2003 striking down sodomy laws in Texas and continuing with a national debate to amend the United States Constitution to ban gay and lesbian marriage. And while progress has been made toward gay rights in the United States, gays and lesbians still undergo hate, oppression, and discrimination that is publicly, legally, and politically supported (Fone, 2000). In many states gays and lesbians are denied employment and promotional opportunities, terminated from employment, refused housing, lose child custody rights, and killed. These acts are acknowledged and supported specifically because victims are gay or lesbian (Coon, 2001; Fone, 2000). In higher education gays and lesbians are subjected to anti-gay violence, harassment, and death threats creating hostile and unwelcoming campus climates (Gierach, 2002; Leider, 2001). Institutional oppression and discrimination create
daily fear for gays and lesbians forcing them to hide their sexual orientation and
limiting their ability to fully participate as organizational members and to access
professional opportunities (Fassinger, 1995).

While both gays and lesbians fear oppression, discrimination, and violence,
lesbians are uniquely vulnerable in our educational institutions because they
occupy, at a minimum, double minority status of female and lesbian. This double
minority status substantially reduces competent lesbian leaders’ access to top
leadership positions at a time when new community college leadership is needed
(Coon, 2001; Ridgeway, 2001).

The Importance of this Study

A community college presidential survey sparked concern that community
colleges face a leadership crisis due to the retirement of a large number of
administrative and faculty leaders (Shults, 2001). While the anticipated retirement
of community college leaders may be viewed as a crisis to some, others view it as
an opportunity for a new generation of leaders.

Need for a New Generation of Leaders

Gibson-Benninger, Radcliff, and Rhoads (1996) state that community
college leadership must depart from the traditional paradigm where power and
influence are held in the president’s office. They believe that successful
community colleges of the future will embrace a multicultural democratic view of
leadership. Successful community college leadership skills and abilities listed by
Gibson-Benninger et al. include the ability to:
• Provide opportunities for every community college member to help shape the direction, goals, mission, and vision of the organization.

• Have a dialogic and relational leadership style.

• Empower others.

• Harness potential talents and leadership in all.

• View differences as a way to propel organizational change.

• Collaborate.

• Negotiate diverse views, interests, and needs of a system of shared meaning.

• Challenge the educational structure.

• Create opportunities for all organizational members to participate in decision-making.

• Create opportunities for women and underrepresented minorities.

• Develop sensitivity and embrace different people's sense-making styles and decision-making strategies.

Gibson-Benning er et al. (1996) suggest that people from traditionally oppressed groups may offer an alternative to the traditional style of leader-follower leadership seen in the past. They propose that people from traditionally oppressed groups may broaden the talent pool by offering alternative perspectives, imagination, innovation, energy, new ideas, and the necessary skills and abilities needed for the new democratic community college of the future.
Coon (2001), Odom, (1993), and Cryton-Hysom (1991) studied the leadership of openly gay men and lesbians in mainstream organizations. All found that gay men and lesbians possess leadership qualities of care, interdependence, empowerment, diversity, integrity, and social justice associated with the “new leader.” Coon (2001) also found that gay and lesbian leaders were highly competent as demonstrated through “educational preparation, ability, professional experience and accomplishment, and maintaining a position that has the potential to make an impact” (p. 133). Coon, like Cryton-Hysom concluded that leadership characteristics found in gay and lesbian research participants were fostered because of their membership in a marginalized group. Despite the fact that gay men and lesbians possess many of the qualities necessary for our future leaders, the women and men in Coon, Odom, and Cryton-Hysom’s studies experienced discrimination, oppression, and lack of inclusion in informal networks hampering full expression of their leadership and stopping professional promotions due to heterosexism and homophobia.

**Need for Equity**

The opportunity for lesbians to reach top leadership roles is problematic because of their dual minority status of female and lesbian or triple minority status of being a lesbian woman of color during a time when white, heterosexual men control the majority of traditional leadership roles and set the standards and styles against which others are judged (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Shults,
2001). In the lesbian culture this is known as a “lavendar ceiling”\textsuperscript{1} equated with the common term “glass ceiling” that connotes a lack of professional opportunities in top organizational positions. Some believe the demographic make-up of top leadership is not likely to change. Ridgeway (2001) explains that white, heterosexual, male domination is maintained through a hierarchy of influence, power, and inequity established when a dominant group (in this case heterosexual men) determines beliefs toward a group of people they view distinct from themselves (lesbians). The dominant group views the distinct group as inferior and quickly stereotypes lower status group members as incompetent and lacking necessary leadership skills and abilities. The stereotypes become the dominant group’s expectations about the inferiority and low competence levels of lower status group. Lower status group members are then held to higher standards of performance to prove competence and are systematically denied full opportunity for success.

Stereotypes associated with women imply that they are emotional, indecisive, and too nice (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Stereotypes associated with lesbians suggest that they are man hating, manly, perverted, and immoral (Fone, 2000; Sang, 1989). These stereotypes are used to demean and stigmatize lesbians, creating oppression and a devaluing of lesbian’s contribution to their organizations (Inness, 1997; Ridgeway, 2001). As a result, the stereotypes and labels can be professional death.

\textsuperscript{1}The lavender color may be associated with lesbians through the play \textit{The Captive} in which a woman sends violets to another (Faderman, 1991).
It is tragic that lesbians are stereotyped and often barred from access into top leadership positions when research suggests that they are able to bring a new multicultural democratic leadership style equated with future successful community colleges. This study, focusing on lesbian community college administrators’ perceptions of their lived experiences, struggles, and organizational contributions, will advance understanding—and understanding is the first step toward an equitable, affirming, and inclusive institutional environments for lesbian leaders so that their natural leadership talents can emerge.

The Heart of My Research

Given that many students, faculty, staff, and administrators believe that higher education is heterosexist and homophobic (Conley & Hyer, 1999; Metzger, 1998), how do lesbian community college administrators negotiate and manage their sexual orientation in a way that allows them to emerge as an organizational leader amidst a homophobic culture? How do lesbian administrators connect their lesbianism to their leadership contributions in higher education? And how do lesbian administrators perceive their past career experiences and potential for future leadership advancement in relation to their lesbianism? I was drawn to answers those questions in this study.

The purpose of my research was to discover the histories and stories of lesbian leaders on their journey to and in occupancy of administrative leadership roles in community colleges. Through the narrative voices of participants, I sought to describe: (1) the interrelationship between being lesbian and its impact
on community college leadership and (2) how lesbian community college administrators have negotiated (i.e., bargained, maneuvered, managed, and navigated) their lesbian identity throughout their careers. My specific research questions were:

1. What are lesbian community college administrators’ experiences on their journey to and in occupancy of their current leadership role?

2. How does lesbianism influence leadership values, priorities, and practices?

3. How do lesbian community college administrators negotiate their lesbian identity to emerge as community college leaders?

These areas framed the direction of the research study, allowing participants’ voices to emerge and guide the research.

This study is the first research specifically devoted to lesbian community college administrative leadership and one of few studies conducted on lesbian and gay leadership in general. I believe this study gives recognition to professional contributions and leadership experiences of lesbian community college administrators, revealing lesbian leadership qualities that match the new generation of leaders needed for future successful community colleges. This study describes lesbian community college administrative leaders who may offer guidance and role modeling through their personal stories. This study may also help minimize discrimination and violence associated with lesbians and gays on
college campuses by dispelling myths and stereotypes; enhance multicultural campus initiatives; and provide lesbians an opportunity to fully participate in educational leadership and advancement.

Summary

Future successful community college leaders will need to be caring, creative, collaborative, able to challenge the status quo, and able to welcome and support the institutional benefits that arrive from diversity of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Research suggests that lesbians may possess these leadership qualities because of their lesbian status; however, they may not have full access to top leadership positions due to oppression fostered from myths and stereotypes. This study adds to the literature and helps create an understanding of daily lived experiences of lesbian community college administrative leaders. I believe this study also has the potential to deepen understanding of lesbians' contributions to educational leadership. And as a result of deepened understanding, I hope that this study will ultimately allow lesbians to thrive in their administrative leadership and gain access to top leadership positions.

My Interest and Passion

"If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people.”

Virginia Woolf

Behind every research study are values, beliefs, and experiences that influence the researcher’s approach to an issue or question. In phenomenological research it is critical for the researcher to maintain reflective awareness of her
perceptions and experiences so that she may use this personal awareness as a means to orient herself to the phenomenon and focus on the lived experiences of others (Patton, 1990; Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, disclosure of my interests, identity, values, experiences, and belief systems related to my dissertation topic are essential as part of the research process and my personal reflective awareness.

As a young woman I first became interested in issues related to inclusion and multiculturalism while working in Alaska and serving diverse populations related to child welfare. I was astonished to discover how my culture differed from others and how my culture, values, and experiences impacted my decision-making about others who were different from me. It was at that time that I began my personal journey and professional work to help end oppression.

I, like many others, occupy dual status of privilege and oppression. I come from an upper middle class, white, and mostly privileged background. My privilege includes that I have a strong educational background and work as an administrator in a community college system. My economic and professional status allows many benefits and freedoms. I also have the privilege of "still together" parents, brothers, sisters-in-laws, nieces and nephews that are active in my life, and an extended family that has included great-grandparents, grandparents, great aunts and great uncles, aunts and uncles, cousins, and a network of life-long friends. I have neither feared for nor been a victim of sexual abuse, drug or alcohol abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse: issues that deplete many people's energy, spirit, self-esteem, and self-confidence.
While I continue to grow in my consciousness about my privilege, I am also keenly aware of the stigma, stereotypes, and injustice related to my sexual orientation as a lesbian. I experience daily oppression by a culture that is heterosexist in its assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual. I struggle to navigate my personal and professional life that has been, at times, filled with pain and fear because I am a lesbian. I have become aware that being a lesbian in a leadership position impacts every professional decision that I make.

The Struggle to Pursue a Lesbian Topic

From the beginning I struggled with pursuing a topic related to lesbian community college leadership. The struggle consisted of vacillating between my heart-felt belief that lesbian leaders in higher education have a unique and important story to tell to aid in the fight to eliminate oppression and affirm their contributions, and fear for my future career. My journal entry dated December 13, 2002 illustrates my beginning struggle.

I'm sitting in a parking garage at the University of Washington because I have arrived at a workshop early. Traffic was good. I continue to be haunted by the notion that lesbian leaders' voices need to be heard. We are such an invisible population in education and yet we occupy positions of power and leadership. Many of us are dedicated and passionate about the community college system as the great equalizer. I wonder, what are the working conditions of lesbian leaders? How do they perceive their role on their campuses? How would they describe their experiences? How have their experiences as lesbians impacted their leadership? What actions could improve their experiences if they feel oppressed or excluded? People, mostly my [lesbian] friends, are silent in their response to my proposed topic, offering alternatives instead of support. I just keep coming back to their statement to me, "You could ruin your career if you proceed with this
topic." Surely I’m not the only one who sees the irony of that statement. If I’m truly at risk, then shouldn’t that prompt me to give voice to whatever is behind their statements?

For months I pursued the topic of marginalized women’s issues because of my unwillingness to trust my values and beliefs, focusing instead on a fear for my future career. Five months after my initial writing about a research topic, I realized that I was disguising my true interest. I felt like an imposter without integrity. I determined that following my heart and maintaining my own integrity was more important than any fear of future career repercussions related to a lesbian topic.

Throughout this research study I worked hard to be consciously aware of values, experiences, and beliefs that form my perspectives. I used this dedicated consciousness and awareness as a means to strengthen my ability to listen with openness and heart to other lesbian administrative leaders’ stories so that I could give voice to their lived experiences: experiences that may empower lesbians, expose the special leadership contributions and struggles of lesbians in community college administration, and reduce the myths and stereotypes associated with lesbians so that they may fully participate in our educational institutions.
CHAPTER 2

PREVIOUS WORK: A CONTEXT FOR THIS STUDY

This chapter provides a summary of literature that supports the need for a study of lived experiences of lesbian community college administrative leaders. The writing will be organized in three major areas: (1) Lesbians in Society, (2) Lesbians in Higher Education, and (3) Lesbians as Leaders. "Lesbians in Society" provides a chronological history of events and movements related to lesbianism in the United States. Lesbian history is important because most research, writing, and common assumptions about homosexuality focuses on gay men and only marginally applies to lesbians. Providing a historical context will help inform understanding of current lesbian reactions and experiences. Readers who have a strong understanding of lesbian history may want to skim this section for reference rather than read it in its entirety. "Lesbians in Higher Education," summarizes lesbian and gay curricular and climate issues in higher education today. This area addresses issues related to self-disclosure of one’s sexual orientation to colleagues and students: a major concern for most gays and lesbians in higher education. This area also addresses some of the issues facing lesbians in higher education and opens the door for areas of exploration related to lesbian community college administrators. "Lesbians as Leaders" focuses on three studies written to date addressing lesbian leadership in mainstream organizations. The three studies provided a launching point for my research.
Lesbians in Society: Her story

Lesbian and gay history is a history of categories that don’t fit, of labels that do not and cannot encompass the complexity of many people’s lives in the past, or for that matter, in the present. What we are left with are fragments of letters, some old photographs, and archives filled with documents that offer glimpses into a not simply visible or always legible past. (McBarry & Wasserman, 1998, p. 54)

Controversy related to homosexuality, centrally male homosexuality, has been in existence since Greco-Roman period and continues today (Fone, 2000). Throughout time, people and their belief systems have aligned in polar opposition. On the one side, conservatives and those labeled homophobic have fought to portray lesbians and gays as sick, perverted, unnatural, unfit, and in need of a cure. Justification for these views of homosexuality are rooted in Judeo-Christian beliefs and writings in the Old Testament, beginning with the story of the destruction of Sodom and continuing with the New Testament citations in St. Paul’s letters (Fone, 2000). On the other side, liberals and those labeled lesbian and gay activists and supporters have fought for equal protection, equal rights, and recognition of the natural sexual orientation of gays and lesbians (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). What follows is a chronological summary of major eras related to events, political and social movements, and changes in lesbian history impacting “herstory.” I begin herstory with the 1800s, not because lesbianism began in the 1800s, but because lesbianism wasn’t socially recognized until the 1800s. I follow with groupings of time periods that have common themes that emerged from the literature. You will notice that the 1970s are discussed as a single time frame. I chose to write about the 1970s as a single time frame because
the 1970s is established as the beginning of gay and lesbian liberation in the United States.

The 1800s

The 1800s brought lesbian relationships to modern print even though the earliest documented existence of lesbianism can be found in Sappho's poetry on Lesbos in 600 B.C. and Hebrew writings pre-800 B.C. (Cavin, 1985). Modern lesbian recognition began in 1843 when William Cullen Bryant wrote the first story in the *Evening Post* describing a "special" female relationship (Faderman, 1991). Ellis and Symond followed in 1897 with a series of professional essays and histories on the perversion of homosexuality, merely mentioning the lesbian relationship (Fone, 2000).

It wasn't until the development of the first women's colleges in the 1860s that lesbianism began to flourish as young, middle-class women went off to find their independence and seek an education (Faderman, 1991). These college-attending women caused much fear for those seeking to maintain the traditional role of woman in society. These fears were realized as women who graduated from college were much less likely to marry than non-college attending women. Perhaps many of the women graduates did not marry because men were afraid of educated women; however, others clearly did not marry because they simply preferred to continue the same-sex relationships born out of the college experience (Faderman, 1991).
The 1900s—1940s

The 1920s and 30s brought a smattering of lesbian novels and plays representing lesbian relationships as an alternative to the traditional male-female relationship (Inness, 1997). European authors like Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, and Radclyffe Hall were among the most famous women of this period who wrote about lesbian relationships, reinforcing the idea that lesbianism could be both “sophisticated and a viable option to heterosexuality” (Inness, 1997, p. 37).

Edouard Bourdet created the play, *The Captive*, portraying the first feminine lesbian as a central character (Inness, 1997). Bourdet’s *The Captive* was followed by Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* published in 1928, a lesbian classic featuring a masculine woman as the heroine (Inness, 1997). It is interesting to note that Bourdet’s *The Captive* fell into oblivion while *The Well of Loneliness* became popular. According to Inness (1997) *The Well of Loneliness* became popular because the leading character matched the stereotypical mannish lesbian and posed no threat to heterosexuals. *The Captive*, on the other hand, created confusion and threatened images of femininity for heterosexual women by blurring the boundaries between lesbians and heterosexual women.

On the social scene during this time period, lesbians were flourishing and creating their own cultures in Greenwich Village and Harlem. In addition, lesbians had their day on Broadway with plays like, Nathan’s *Design for Loving*, Hellman’s *The Children’s Hour*, and Winsloe’s German play *Girls in Uniform* that momentarily intrigued the public about lesbianism (Faderman, 1991; McGarry...
During World War II lesbians were freer to meet in public because they were able to blend into the many women's groups who were meeting to socialize while their men were at war (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

In the world of medicine lesbianism was considered an illness and treated with aversion therapy, shock treatments, lobotomies, and forcible incarceration in mental hospitals as means to cure homosexuality. These treatments were actively used until the late 1900s (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

The 1950s-1960s

The 1950s brought the emergence of lesbian pulp cultural novels such as *Twilight Tales, Odd Girls Out, and Strangers on Lesbos* to lesbians seeking information about themselves (Faderman, 1991). The novels were termed "pulp" after the cheap, wood pulp paper they were printed on. Pulp, which served to orient lesbians to aspects of lesbian life and describe lesbian customs, dress codes, terminology, and etiquette, became very popular for women who were isolated in discovering their lesbian orientation during a time when there were few if any public or familial lesbian role models amidst a heterosexual world. Pulp also helped to establish new lesbian networks as writings were passed from friend to friend (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

While pulp novels introduced lesbians to the world of lesbian culture, a division began to emerge between working class lesbians and middle to upper class lesbians. The specific division centered on butch (masculine) and femme (feminine) roles in lesbian relationships. Many working class lesbians transferred
the only intimate relationship model available to them: a heterosexual model with clearly defined role distinctions between men and women. The butch-femme role distinction between lesbian partners operated as a kind of membership into the world of working class lesbian subculture (Faderman, 1991).

Middle to upper class lesbians rejected the butch-femme dichotomy for two reasons. First, many of these women found the dress and role categorization used by working class lesbians repulsive. Second, middle to upper class lesbians were exposed, through travel abroad, to a more worldly view of homosexuality defined as elegant and suave and so they preferred to maintain their feminine dress and characteristics to fit within the larger heterosexual social structure (Faderman, 1991).

At the same time lesbians were forming informal networks, they were also fighting political wars. They were accosted by McCarthyism: a time when lesbians were sought out and investigated for anti-American activities (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). They were also fighting their feminist sisters for recognition of lesbian issues in the woman’s movement. Although many lesbians were early beginners of National Organization for Women (NOW), during the 1960s NOW leaders became fearful of a “lavender [lesbian] menace” that would tarnish the movement’s image (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). This was the first step toward a split between the women’s feminist movement and the establishment of lesbian feminism in the 1970s.
The 1970s

The 1970's was a time of uprising and turmoil for lesbians. The birth of "gay liberation" began June 28, 1969 at New York's Greenwich Village Stonewall Inn (Faderman, 1991; McGarry & Wasserman, 1998; Fone, 2000). The infamous Stonewall events began with a routine police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar. Many gay men were assembled at the bar consoling each other over the death and funeral of Judy Garland, an icon to gay men. New York police officers, attempting to crack down on unlicensed gay bars that were tied to organized crime, of which Stonewall was one, moved patrons into patrol cars. The distraught gay men became disorderly. Mobs of gays and lesbians filled the streets. A riot ensued and people protested for a week. "In the days and weeks that followed, a rash of meetings were held where the radical concepts of gay liberation and gay power took center stage, challenging the more moderate homophile aim of seeking social tolerance" (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998, p. 16). Today, Stonewall is considered the preeminent symbol of gay and lesbian resistance and liberation. Unfortunately, by marking Stonewall the beginning of gay and lesbian liberation, the value and efforts of lesbian and gay activists prior to Stonewall virtually disappeared from history (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

Gay liberation allowed lesbians opportunities to bring their issues, separate and apart from gay males, to the public as they struggled to find their identities in the homosexual communities, specifically, and in society, in general (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). Politically active lesbians appeared to take one of three paths.
Either they completely removed themselves from all heterosexuals, including feminists, and all men, including gay men, becoming separatists; or continued their work with other feminists and gay men within mainstream societal structures; or formed their own group to respond to issues impacting their status as lesbians of color (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

For those who chose the separatist pathway, they “ceased to call themselves gay and embraced the word lesbian. ‘We are angry, not gay!’ they proclaimed” (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998, p. 186). Lesbian feminists formed separate communes, often in rural communities, and refused to interact or purchase products or services from heterosexual or homosexual men. The lesbian feminist movement focused its attention toward dual oppression issues related to sexism and homophobia that were not addressed in mainstream feminism. For many, separatist lesbianism was viewed as a political act, independent of sexuality.

In all its manifestations – political as well as cultural – lesbian feminism offered a new generation a radically different positive and empowering way of being lesbian. These women built long-standing communities, institutions, and ideas that continue to play a vital role in the lives of lesbians today. (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998, p. 196)

Lesbians who chose the mainstream pathway often did so because their lives were inextricably linked to the larger society and they were unable or unwilling to participate in separatism. They continued their work as open lesbians in areas of rape crisis, peace, disarmament, antiracism, antiapartheid, prisoner’s rights, and equal rights and protections for gays and lesbians. The work of these lesbians, in collaboration with their gay brothers, led to the formation of
professional organizations such as National Gay Task Force, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Gay Rights National Lobby. (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

Lesbians of color, fed up with their gay and lesbian brothers and sisters’ focus on white, middle class homosexual issues, began forming their own lesbian networks and organizations to advance their issues related to triple oppressive status experiences in the United States (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

With the advent of gay and lesbian liberation, the 1970s saw the first passage of anti-discrimination legislation. In 1976 Pennsylvania was the first state to pass an anti-discrimination law prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. By 1977 more than forty cities and counties had adopted protection for gays and lesbians (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). However, with all of this progress came a backlash of homophobia and increased violence toward gays and lesbians. In 1977, Anita Bryant, famous spokesperson for Florida orange juice, led an anti-gay, anti-lesbian movement titled “Save Our Children” that fed on the fear of homophobes. Bryant’s campaign ultimately led to the repeal of many gay and lesbian protections (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).

The 1970s ended with the devastating assassination of gay San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone by homophobic rightwing Supervisor Dan White. Gay and lesbian marginalization in society was confirmed when Dan White served a sentence of seven years and eight months for a capital death penalty crime (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998).
The 1980s-1990s

The 1980s marked the development of social and religious group formation for lesbians and gays. Lesbian music became widely known through the annual Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival and Olivia Records gave birth to women’s recorded music, featuring household lesbian names like Holly Near, Cris Williamson, and Meg Christian (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). In addition, religious organizations like the Metropolitan Community Church; Dignity, a Catholic affiliate; Integrity, an Episcopalian affiliate; and Gay and Lesbian Jewish synagogues formed to support the spiritual and social needs of gays and lesbians (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). Lesbian and gays developed numerous organizations to address issues of equal rights and equal protections including the Human Rights Campaign Fund for equal protections and equal rights of gays and lesbians, Queer Nation sustaining general issues of gays and lesbians, Act Up (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) fighting the federal government’s slow response to AIDS, and Lesbian Avengers promoting lesbian survival and visibility (Faderman, 1991; McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). Political efforts in the 1980s resulted in the creation of domestic partnership registries in approximately 24 cities and the granting of domestic partner health benefits to gays and lesbians working within major corporations, colleges, universities, and labor unions (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). In addition, during the 1990s there was a surge of articles in women’s magazines like Vogue, Cosmopolitan, and Mademoiselle normalizing lesbianism.
“assuring heterosexual readers that lesbians are, indeed, very much like heterosexuals . . .” (Inness, 1997, p. 53).

Although gay and lesbian activists celebrated their accomplishments, they also faced strong resistance to political and social gains made in the 1980s and early 1990s. The religious right, joined by mainstream politicians, created a platform supporting “family values” as traditional American values. Once again gays and lesbians were characterized as perverse, child abusers seeking “special rights” (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). In the middle to late 1990s more than half the state legislatures introduced bills prohibiting same-sex marriages. In 1996 President Clinton signed the “Defense of Marriage Act” which essentially turned heterosexuality into law (Fone, 2000).

In addition to political turbulence, hate crimes continued to rise and in the mid-1990s the lesbian community was reminded of the cultural hate associated with their sexual orientation. The first reminder was the “execution style” murders of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill of Medford, Oregon. Both women were found with their bodies bound and gagged in a pick-up truck in December 1995 (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1996). The second reminder came just six months later when Julianne Williams and Lollie Winans also of Medford, Oregon were murdered “execution style” with their throats slashed and bodies bound and gagged at a campsite June 1996. Convicted murderers of both crimes stated that they killed the women because they were lesbians (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1996). It is interesting that the slayings of these women received little
public attention or outcry but the tragic death of Mathew Shepard, just two years later, was widely acknowledged. The difference in media and public responses to the slayings of Roxanne Ellis, Michelle Abdill, Julianne Williams and Lollie Winans versus the slaying of Mathew Shepard reinforces the historic and ongoing preoccupation with gay males and the invisibility of lesbians in our culture.

The 20th Century ended in a disappointing compromise for gays and lesbians who had long fought to eliminate the ban on gays and lesbians in the military when President Clinton initiated the military policy of "don't ask-don't tell" forcing military gays and lesbians to hide if they want to remain in service (Fone, 2000).

Throughout history and into the 1990s, lesbians and gay men have exhibited extraordinary vitality and endurance. Growing from a small band of homophiles in the fifties, to an army of queers in the nineties, they have built a mass movement for political and social change. And while the other progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s have waned, the gay [and lesbian] rights movement has flourished. In the three decades since Stonewall, queers have become an increasingly visible -- and vocal -- force to be reckoned with, challenging and changing America. (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998, p. 252)

**Today**

As we enter the first part of the 21st Century, lesbians continue their struggle for equal protections and equal rights while attempting to increase public visibility about their presence and provide supportive cultural experiences for one another. Organizations originating in the 1900s like the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Lambda Legal Defense, and the Human Rights Campaign continue to support equal rights initiatives for gays and lesbians. Popular mainstream
television shows like *Ellen, The L Word, All My Children,* and *ER* and movies like *Kissing Jessica Stein* feature lesbian characters and storylines that increase visibility of lesbians in America. Popular gay and lesbian cultural magazines like *The Advocate* celebrate the accomplishments and challenges of gays and lesbians. And *Olivia,* once a popular lesbian music and recording company, has transitioned into the largest lesbian travel corporation in America offering lesbian-only cruises, resort vacations, and travel opportunities.

**Researcher’s Insights**

Lesbian history is “herstory” about a search for self identity and cultural identity, a quest for equal protection and equal rights, a way to develop social and spiritual support systems, and an effort to publicize accomplishments and contributions. Herstory acknowledges the pain and turmoil associated with oppression, not just by heterosexuals, but also by gay men who are viewed as sexist and other lesbians who form subcultures and a hierarchy of acceptance within the lesbian culture. Herstory defends the nature of lesbian relationships as part of human diversity. And herstory celebrates the contributions of lesbians involved in establishing independence, women’s rights, equal protections, and a fight for equality. The quest for a place and space “to be” has been a hallmark of lesbian past.

As I considered lesbian history and its connection to my study I was prompted with more questions than answers. I wondered how herstory impacts current leadership values, principles, and practices related to equity and justice.
How does the current age of a lesbian and the time frame in which she grew up impact her feelings, perceptions, and experience of being a lesbian community college leader? And do lesbian community college administrators, consciously or subconsciously, act upon their history and lessons of others to negotiate their lesbian identity throughout their careers?

**Lesbians in Higher Education**

Herstory creates a foundation for understanding lesbians today. Historical experiences dealing with hope, uncertainty, courage, independence, survival, oppression, and violence serve as a collective memory for lesbians and are at the center of difficulty in studying lesbian administrators in community colleges. Fear of oppression, discrimination, ostracism, stigmatization, and violence creates difficulty in finding willing participants; poses complexity to ensure confidentiality to minimize or eliminate any potential emotional, physical, and career damage; and prompts researchers to question their willingness to be associated with a lesbian topic (Leider, 2001). The following will outline three literature focus areas related to lesbians in higher education: Gay and lesbian studies, campus climate surveys, and personal experiences.

**Gay and Lesbian Studies**

The largest portion of literature related to gays and lesbians in higher education focuses on Gay and Lesbian Studies Programs, the first of which was offered at San Francisco City College in 1989 (Metzger, 1998). Clearly, Gay and Lesbian Studies Programs, and now degree options, have been monumental in
efforts to include gay and lesbian issues in academics. In addition, faculty members, both homosexual and heterosexual, have included gay and lesbian issues across the curriculum through class assignments, gay and lesbian literature, and discussions (Myrick & Brown, 1997). Academic exposure to gay and lesbian history, topics, and people offer students an opportunity to confront and explore social attitudes and values toward gays and lesbians and unique issues facing gay and lesbian culture.

**Campus Climate**

Campus climate surveys also contribute to gay and lesbian literature and seek answers to the level of inclusion felt by gay and lesbian faculty (Conley & Hyer, 1999; Metzger, 1998). Survey results are thematic and reveal that (1) mostly gay men respond and (2) feelings of inclusion and social acceptance for gay and lesbian faculty members is greatest at the discipline level, moving to feelings of less inclusion and social acceptance at the division level, and feelings of exclusion and overt hostility at the campus level (Conley & Hyer, 1999; Myrick & Brown, 1997; Metzger, 1998).

There are clearly no simple answers to the question of how higher education can enhance lesbian... inclusiveness in colleges and universities: however, such inclusion, education about, and sensitivity to lesbian... issues and concerns are necessary for educational organizations if they are to create balanced, equitable, and affirming classroom and organizational experiences for students, faculty, staff, and administrators. (Myrick & Brown, 1997, p. 6)

Lesbians, through their personal stories, identify the following as evidence of an inclusive academic climate: recruiting openly gay or lesbian faculty, staff,
and administrators; providing domestic partnership benefits; including sexual orientation in the non-discrimination clause of the college or university; and supporting gay and lesbian organizations (Metzger, 1998; Mooney, 1992).

Disclosure of Sexual Orientation to Others

Personal experiences are a third area of literature related to lesbians in higher education. At the core of personal experience stories is the decision regarding self-disclosure of sexual orientation. In fact, as I perused book stores in search of lesbian literature I was overwhelmed by the countless numbers of books dealing with “coming out.” It appears that issues of self-disclosure of sexual orientation occupy a great deal of time and energy for lesbians. In relation to the academic world Mooney (1992) suggests that issues of whether to be openly lesbian may be what divide lesbians in higher education. Specifically those who are out believe there is strength in numbers and are hopeful that progress toward equality will result when more lesbians come out and dispel myths and stereotypes. Those who are closeted or not open about their sexual orientation express personal and professional fear supported by a history of experiences and stories of past discrimination (Mooney, 1992). For many, the struggle over self disclosure is deeply rooted in a quest for personal authenticity. A participant in Metzger’s study (1998) of communication practices of lesbian administrators in higher education states this eloquently.

My identity as a lesbian is not related to only my sexual practice. It has to do with my ability to form intimate relationships, my ability to have really authentic relationships. And that means... with people who are lesbian, ... gay,
bisexual, and heterosexual. So it’s a core value in terms of getting to the integrity of being a human being. It is not distinct and discrete and separate, and it doesn’t have to do with the bedroom. It has to do with my identity as a human being. And therefore it connects with everything else that I do. (p. 60)

If a lesbian develops the courage to share her identity she must decide with whom? When? Where? And how? The decision to come out on campus is influenced by a lesbian’s institutional status, like her tenure status; her associated discipline; the type of institution, religious or conservative institutions being a greater risk for self disclosure; and the culture of the general community in which the institution resides (Mooney, 1992). The decision is also influenced by internal factors such as a lesbian’s perception of how she will be received once she self discloses her sexual orientation; the level of trust she has toward the person or persons with whom she wishes to tell; her desire to have a stronger friendship or working relationship with the individual(s); and the degree to which she perceives she will be hurt emotionally, physically, or within her career (Wells & Kline, 2001; Metzger, 1998). The decision to self-disclose sexual orientation is complicated by the fact that a lesbian can never be confident about the response she may get from one to whom she discloses. As cited in Fone (2000), “Most intelligent heterosexuals reject, intellectually, their hostility to homosexuals, while unable to conquer their emotional repugnance” (p. 419). While tolerance may be an outward appearance it in no way implies acceptance. This mask of tolerance can quickly move to anger or rage when a heterosexual encounters two lesbians holding hands or kissing, or a lesbian who decides to come out in the workplace
(Fone, 2000). The apprehension of self disclosure impacts lesbian higher education administrators as many hear continual comments and see evidence reinforcing the notion that silence about sexual orientation is the best practice in higher education (Metzger, 1998).

Lesbians who are not open about their sexual orientation also experience risks. “All passing [not being open about one’s sexual orientation, thus passing as heterosexual] is marked by the double bind that opens the discrepancy between what one professes to be and how one is culturally positioned in a society or institution” (Inness, 1997, p.160). The passer always runs the risk of self-betrayal in any situation. Risks for remaining closeted are personal and include self shame, a cultural identity crisis by distancing or not affiliating with one’s culture, and ostracism from other lesbians who perceive a cultural hierarchy in which those who are open about their sexual orientation occupy top positions (Inness, 1997).

**Researcher’s Insights**

Themes of hope, courage, fear, uncertainty, and identity follow lesbians from history into higher education. Lesbians in higher education are able to celebrate the creation of programs, degrees, and curricular changes that include lesbian issues that inform and sensitize others. Lesbians remain hopeful that education will lead to understanding and understanding will lead to political and social change.

In campus climate inventories, lesbian faculty members expressed mixed emotions related to campus inclusion, feeling most included at the discipline level
and least included and welcomed at the campus level. Because surveys reveal that lesbian faculty members feel excluded and experience a hostile work environment at the campus level, I wondered about the experiences of lesbian community college administrators who function largely at the campus level.

Lesbians also struggle over whether to disclose their sexual orientation to colleagues and students, not ever certain of the response. This struggle surfaces in a desire to be authentic and to have integrity. At core of the struggle is historical knowledge and personal experiences demonstrating that disclosure may help break stereotypes and add a personal sense of integrity to relationships; this is coupled with profound fear that disclosure may result in personal rejection, loss of relationships, ostracism, discrimination, and violence. In this section of the literature I was haunted by the quote from Fone (2000) regarding his belief that many heterosexuals have an intellectual acceptance of the concept of lesbianism yet experience an emotional rage when confronted with lesbian behaviors and affections. Why? Some may say that this response is because humans fear what they do not know or understand. That doesn’t make sense to me. If it were true, curiosity would cease to exist. Perhaps the hateful responses discussed by Fone (2000) harkens back to historical roots and are grounded, not in what is unknown, but rather what one believes he or she knows about lesbianism. So, what do lesbian community college administrators think influences the continued homophobic responses to self-disclosure of sexual identity in today’s diverse world? How do lesbian community college administrators handle self-disclosure of
their sexual orientation in their organizations? And how do their decisions about self-disclosure impact their day-to-day professional lives and leadership?

It is evident from the literature on lesbians in higher education that little is known about lesbian administrators, in general, and nothing is known about lesbian community college administrators and their leadership, specifically. This large void in the literature on lesbians in higher education supported the need for this research study. However, literature on lesbians in higher education suggests that studying lesbians is risky for both participant and researcher. I studied and accepted these risks for myself as a researcher. Likewise, I created a research design and process that was sensitive and responsive to risk factors associated with participation in this study, allowing each participant an opportunity to fully explore risks before agreeing to take part in the study.

Lesbians as Leaders

There are no statistics that identify how many lesbian administrative leaders exist in higher education and as mentioned previously there is no research on leadership related to lesbian community college administrators. To provide context for understanding lesbian community college administrative leaders' experiences, we can look to studies of women's leadership in general, and gay and lesbian leadership within mainstream organizations more specifically. I have chosen not to include literature on general leadership or male leadership, both using the male model as a foundation for leadership because too often women's leadership ways, lesbian leadership ways, or any other leadership ways expressed
by oppressed group members are only understood in comparison to the traditionally dominant white male leadership ways.

**Women's Ways of Leading**

Research reveals that women often lead in ways that differ from men. Some of the language used to describe these leadership differences include core/connected mode versus justice/rights mode (Giannini, 2001), private sphere versus public sphere (Harris, Smith & Hale, 2002), service oriented versus achievement oriented (Heilman, 2001), communal versus agentic (Heilman, 2001), and relational versus competitive (Offermann & Beil, 1992). The former in each category is most often attributed to women leaders while the latter is most often attributed to male leaders. Those attributes associated with women's ways of leading include consideration of others, relationship building, empathy, interdependence, collaborative communication and support, participative decision-making, nurturing, and caring. Attributes associated with men's ways of leading include hierarchies, structure, autonomy, strength, self-efficacy, control, directness, assertiveness, independence, risk taking, rationality, and intelligence (Giannini, 2001; Harris et al., 2002; Heilman, 2001; Offermann & Beil, 1992).

But where do lesbian leaders fit in the dynamics between women's ways of leading and men's ways of leading?

**A Search for Studies on Lesbian Leadership**

The dearth of literature regarding lesbian leadership is no surprise given that homosexual literature, beginning in Greco-Roman period and continuing
today, has focused on gay men with only a modicum of references, novels, and professional writings about lesbians (Fone, 2000). Specifically it has only been in the last twenty years that lesbians have had the opportunity to find "meaningful information about themselves, their lifestyles, their needs, and their problems" (Sang, 1987 p. 92). Unfortunately most lesbian research has nothing to do with leadership. After extensive literature searches through libraries, websites, dissertation and thesis abstracts, education journals, social sciences journals, psychology journals, behavioral sciences journals, and gay and lesbian literature, I was only able to find two studies focusing on gay and lesbian leaders in mainstream organizations and one study focusing on lesbian leadership in mainstream organizations. I provide an overview of each study so that I may specifically highlight its relationship to the focus of my study.

The First Research on Gay and Lesbian Leaders

The first research was a master's thesis conducted by Cryton-Hysom (1991). Cryton-Hysom explored the relationship of marginality and leadership in the context of eleven openly gay and lesbian leaders in mainstream organizations. He defined marginality as "existing on the fringes of society because of gender, racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, age, disability, or other minority status" (p. 4). Cryton-Hysom interviewed participants for 45 minutes or less and found that participants made significant organizational contributions as a result of their sexual orientation. Self-reported benefits of sexual orientation which positively impacted work included the ability to be inclusive, sensitive to diversity, empathetic, build
coalitions, clever, playful, creative, prepared to debate, come to terms with own humanity and thus become better leaders, devoted to work, and able to survive and change as a result of living in a homophobic world. In addition, participants felt that being open about their sexual orientation at work provided a better place for other gay and lesbian employees and an opportunity for them to act as role models for others. On the other hand, participants viewed their own internalized homophobia as negative in a work environment. The process of internalized homophobia development can be seen in Figure 1. Participants often found

Figure 1. The cyclical development of internalized homophobia.
themselves censoring their behaviors and conversations and looking over their shoulders as a result of fear related to their sexual orientation. They also felt excluded from informal power networks associated with their workplaces.

The strength of Cryton-Hysom’s work is that it offers the beginning of research related to lesbian and gay leadership. The shortcoming of Cryton-Hysom’s research is that I was unable to get anything more than a list of participants’ traits and characteristics. As I read the research, I wondered about the participants’ leadership experiences beyond the list of self-identified traits. What is it really like, on a daily basis, to be a gay or lesbian leader in the workplace? What would these leaders identify as their experiences that helped them to understand the benefits, opportunities, and struggles associated with being gay or lesbian in the workplace? And how did they negotiate and manage their sexual orientation in a way that allowed them to emerge as an organizational leader amidst a homophobic world?

A Study Devoted to Lesbian Leadership

The second research study was also a master’s thesis conducted by Odom (1993). Odom’s research is the only one found dealing exclusively with lesbian leadership. Odom examined the characteristics, perceptions, and experiences of twelve nationally recognized open lesbian leaders in mainstream organizations. Like many of the leaders in Cryton-Hysom’s (1991) study, participants in Odom’s study self-reported, through interviews lasting approximately one and one-half hours, the following leadership characteristics: empower others, strong
communication skills, relational, sensitivity toward other marginalized group members, inclusive, and able to fight battles for those issues that are at the margins. The lesbian leaders also stated their comfort in non-traditional careers and their passion for social justice.

The strength of Odom’s study is that she is the first to begin research specifically related to lesbian leaders. The unfortunate weakness of her study is that she lost focus on the connection between lesbianism and leadership. Her research considered issues potentially impacting any leader’s career like general family history, geographical moves, meeting influential people, educational background, and loss of family members. The only issue specifically addressed in her research relating to lesbianism was “coming out.” She also seemed to make claims in her research that were not supported by the text. For instance, she writes that the lesbians in her study “have mature and integrated identities” (p. 49). Yet, there is no evidence in the study that supports such a conclusion. Odom’s (1993) study compelled me to maintain my focus on the interrelationship between being lesbian and its impact on leadership which I believe illuminates the essence of lesbian administrators’ lives and offers insights to the lesbian experience; at least as it relates to lesbian community college administrative leaders. Focusing on one population of lesbian leaders, separate and apart from gay male leaders, allowed for depth and richness that may be used as a catalyst for future studies dealing with the interrelationship between lesbianism and leadership.
The Second Research on Gay and Lesbian Leaders

Coon (2001) conducted, what I believe to be, the most comprehensive of the three studies on gay and lesbian leadership. His study was a qualitative cross-sectional study to identify the leadership characteristics and values common to openly gay men and lesbians in high profile positions of leadership. One hundred gay men and 85 lesbians in high profile positions of leadership were invited to participate. Of those invited, 29 gay males and 21 lesbians completed an open-ended questionnaire and Leadership Practices Inventory designed by the researcher and tested for reliability and validity. Based on the survey results, the researcher made inferences regarding characteristics, behaviors, values, and attitudes from a sample population about the gay and lesbian community.

Coon identified the following unique aspects of researching gays and lesbians. First, because little research has been conducted about gay and lesbian leaders he believes that gay and lesbian leaders “do not understand enough about themselves as leaders—enough to be truly effective leaders with the ability to successfully overcome homophobia and heterosexism and champion the gay and lesbian social and political agenda” (p. 5). Second, gays and lesbians live in a world of heterosexism which he defines as that “which prohibits gays and lesbians from enjoying the same basic rights, freedoms, and protections as other citizens” (p. 26). Third, unlike other marginalized or minority groups, gays and lesbians are socialized in their youth as members of the heterosexual majority. Therefore, at some point in life, gay men and lesbians must come to terms with their sexual
orientation. Because of the lack of gay and lesbian role models and the stereotypes associated with homosexuality, this is often done in isolation affecting self-esteem and community identification.

Coon reported that "coming out" at work significantly impacted the gay and lesbian participants' leadership experiences allowing them to be liberated and personally empowered. Sexual orientation positively impacted their leadership by contributing to "trust, authenticity, compassion, understanding, sensitivity, tolerance, empathy, courage, focus, and integrity" (p. 133). The men and women in the study lead from a foundation of care, interdependence, empowerment, diversity, integrity, and social justice. Coon believes that these characteristics are fostered in these individuals through their membership in a marginalized group. Gay and lesbian leaders were also highly competent as demonstrated through "educational preparation, ability, professional experience and accomplishment, and maintaining a position that has the potential to make an impact" (p. 133). However, despite progress, the women and men in the study still viewed multiple limitations for professional growth and development due to heterosexism and homophobia.

Strengths of the study include the advancement of knowledge about gay and lesbian leaders amidst the scarcity of research and the ability to specifically identify (1) unique aspects to researching gays and lesbians, (2) gay and lesbian issues impacting leadership, and (3) leadership qualities and characteristics common among gay and lesbian research participants based on results from the
Leadership Practice Inventory. Shortcomings of the research included the reliance of information gathered from material written by participants as opposed to or in combination with interviews. Coon stated that the written data was dependent upon the writing skills of respondents which eliminated the ability to probe into responses to acquire deeper understanding. There was also no indication of follow-up regarding individuals who were invited to participate and chose not to respond. Because Coon surveyed such a wide range of gays and lesbians and found common leadership strengths and concerns, I wondered how lesbians in higher education may share or differ in the characteristics and issues found in Coon’s participants.

Researcher’s Insights

All three research studies provided a foundation and launching point for my study on lesbian administrative leaders in community colleges. It was exciting to discover that Cryton-Hysom (1991), Odom (1993), and Coon (2001) share findings that gay and lesbian leadership styles and qualities match the multicultural democratic leader identified by Gibson-Benninger, Radcliff, and Rhoads (1996) necessary for future successful community colleges. Table 1 outlines the common themes among the three lesbian and gay leadership studies presented in this proposal and the connection to qualities necessary for successful community college leadership espoused by Gibson-Benninger, et al.
Table 1

Relationship Between Gibson-Benninger et al. Leadership Qualities and the Three Studies on Gay and Lesbian Leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership qualities espoused by Gibson-Benninger, et al.</th>
<th>Cryton-Hysom’s study</th>
<th>Odom’s study</th>
<th>Coon’s study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of others</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensitivity toward diversity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Empathy for others</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Builds coalitions</td>
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<td>Empowers others</td>
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<td>Social justice oriented</td>
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<td>Integrity</td>
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<td>Able to adapt and change</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clever and creative</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly competent</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. An “X” signifies that the leadership quality espoused by Gibson-Benninger et al. is identified in the study. An “O” symbolizes that the Gibson-Benninger et al. leadership quality was not mentioned in the study.

While each study has its own strengths, none of them provided a research focus or method to fully explore lived experiences of lesbian leaders in a way that allows readers to understand what is invisibly common and yet substantially unique to lesbian administrators in community colleges. The strengths and challenges faced in the previous studies challenged me to address unanswered questions related to the interrelationship between being lesbian and its impact on
community college leadership and how lesbian administrators navigate their identity throughout their career.

**Summary of Lesbians in Society, Higher Education, and as Leaders**

Lesbians have undergone a history of oppression, accomplishment, and survival. Beginning in the mid-1800s, lesbian relationships appeared to the public as an alternative to male-female relationships. Throughout history, lesbians struggled to find their individual and collective identities. In their efforts to seek justice, equal rights, and equal protections, lesbians helped form professional organizations that lead major causes today. They have written curriculum, composed music, and written books and articles that aid in understanding issues and concerns related to their individual and collective lives. And they have emerged as organizational leaders who promote relationships, empower others, respond to social justice issues, and remain connected to their own sense of humanity.

In herstory I became aware that there may be generational differences that shape a lesbian's world view. Therefore, I paid close attention to the age of each research participant and how her time of growing-up may have influenced her feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in her leadership. In learning about lesbians in higher education, I was reminded about personal and professional risks associated with researching lesbian issues, like loss of employment and emotional and physical injury. Therefore, confidentiality and protection of research participants was paramount in my study. In reviewing the literature on lesbian
leadership, I was delighted to find research that formed a beginning for this study. I was also made aware, by example, of the need to stay focused on my research issues to maintain the integrity of the research. As questions emerged for me throughout the literature review, I was drawn to find answers. I believed that this research on lesbian community college leaders would create the necessary focus, time, and depth, to allow individual voices to emerge and the essence of lived experiences to be revealed is the best way to provide answers to these questions.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter provides an overview of qualitative research, phenomenology as a research tradition, information related to study participants, information collection and analysis procedures, methods to ensure research integrity, and strategies for protection of human subjects. The design will assist the reader in understanding my efforts to maintain research integrity as I pursued the discovery of lived experiences of lesbian community college administrative leaders.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is concerned with capturing and discovering meaning in natural settings. Widely used textbooks on research methods identify the following features and assumptions of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen 1998; Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Patton, 1990):

1. Humans are active participants in creating and constructing meaning in their world. Therefore, "human beings can and must be understood in a manner different from other objects of study because humans have purposes and emotions; they make plans, construct cultures, and hold values that affect behavior" (Patton, 1990, p. 56).

2. The researcher is concerned with the research process as much, if not more, than the research product.

3. Research is conducted in natural settings through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and supporting written documents.
4. The research data is descriptive in the form of words and pictures.

5. The researcher analyzes data through a process of induction where theory or meaning is derived from the evidence and data as it is collected and interconnected.

6. Qualitative research is captured in the form of chunks of meaning, themes, and dynamics.

7. Research credibility is derived from the rigor associated with processes, techniques, and decision making used by the researcher.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a research tradition within qualitative research with assumptions and methods originated in the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl, known as the father of phenomenology. Husserl believed that “we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness” (Patton, 1990, p. 69). Specifically, Husserl believed that experiences are captured in visual imagery, retained in a person’s memory, and easily reproduced with great accuracy and detail (Van Manen, 1996). Consequently, Husserl’s phenomenological inquiry involved delving into the experiential memories of others. According to Husserl, while individual truths and realities exist, he believed that there also exists commonality within a phenomenon. Therefore, true phenomenologist are driven to discover the substance, characteristics, and features of a given human experience through a process known as “bracketing” where the researcher evokes, suspends, identifies,
and classifies the essence of the phenomenon before analyzing and describing those elements common to all who have experienced it (Patton, 1990). This requires a researcher to continually reflect on the content of her mind before any supposition or assumption is made and to strip away extemporaneous theories and biases that may distract from finding the true essence of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1996). This intense reflection is known as reduction (Van Manen, 1996).

Phenomenologists that followed Husserl believed that his phenomenology was too abstract and that the world was more common and ordinary. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, believed that phenomenology is a study of the nature of being in the common world (Van Manen, 1990). Unlike Husserl who believed that phenomenological text must be purely descriptive without interpretation, Heidegger insisted that the researcher is inextricably linked to the research and by its nature the research experience. As a result of this natural link, essences are interpreted through the senses of the researcher (Johnson, 2000). Heidegger also introduced the critical importance of language, even poetry, in describing phenomenon under study so that a reader could be drawn into the experience, as if he or she was experiencing the phenomenon her or himself. (Sadala & de Camargo Ferreira Adorno, 2002).

Merleau-Ponty, also a phenomenologist that followed Husserl, believed that meaning comes to exist when we reflect on our experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Merleau-Ponty affirmed that a researcher is inextricably linked to her research and that the phenomenon’s structure is conceived through the researcher
after participants have described, from their perspective, the phenomenon under study (Sadala & de Camargo Ferreira Adorno, 2002). Like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty also believed that attention must be given to language used to describe a lived experience so that a researcher could “authentically speak the world” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 13).

As a new researcher, I have come to know phenomenology through the teachings of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty as an attempt to find and illuminate the richness and value in the ordinary, that which is absolutely common but hidden in every day life. Finding and illuminating this hidden richness was both my mindset and my focus throughout my study. I approached my research study from the following phenomenological assumptions.

- Human perception is the reference for our way of knowing and being in the world (Sadala & de Camargo Ferreira Adorno, 2002).

- Phenomenological research answers the question “What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (Patton, 1990, p. 69).

- Phenomenology both describes the meaning of a lived experience and interprets that meaning through the researcher (Van Manen, 1990).

- The purpose of phenomenological research is to provide deep understanding so that one may act “more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations” (Van Manen, 1990 p. 23).
phenomenology assumes that the research project is personal to the researcher as she must "meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it" (Van Manen, 1990 p. 153).

A phenomenological researcher must engage in "bracketing," throughout the study, in two ways. First she must bracket the phenomenon under study to analyze, compare, and discover the essence or commonality and themes experienced by participants (Patton, 1990). Second, she must bracket her personal assumptions and beliefs through the process of reduction so that she may engage in a continual reflection, returning to the phenomenon to uncover its inner structure and meaning (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

A phenomenological researcher must engage in "horizontalization" which is the process of exposing all the data and treating it with equal weight and value in the initial stages of data analysis (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Phenomenological research cannot be generalized to another situation because no two contexts are identical and it is the purpose of a phenomenological study to describe the unique context of a lived experience. This descriptive context has the power for great understanding as it places the reader in a vicarious situation (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

Phenomenological research is credible when the researcher strongly adheres to thoughtful consideration of the research process and its impact.
on individuals and organizations through ethical behaviors and practices (Van Manen 1990).

Phenomenology provided a theoretical base and process to give voice and integrity to the experiences and perceptions of lesbian administrators on their journey to and occupancy in community college leadership roles.

Participants

Five Washington State lesbian community college administrators participated in this study. The lesbian participants had permanent community college administrative positions as associate dean, dean, or vice president and each participant was an excited and willing volunteer for the research. Initially I vacillated about whether to include lesbians of color in the study. This vacillation was the result of my sensitivity to the cultural dynamic that often places lesbians of color in a position to “choose” their cultural identity as either a person of color or a lesbian, not both. I was also concerned that involving lesbians of color could blur the ability to capture the full essence of lesbianism, separate from ethnic experiences. However, after a great deal of thought, reflection, and reading, I was excited to be able to include two lesbians of color in the study and found that the lesbians of color were clear about their different life experiences related to ethnicity and sexual orientation. In addition to potential differences between lesbians of color and white lesbians, I was fortunate to have participants with an age range from late twenties to mid-fifties adding generational differences that
were influenced by changing social and political attitudes and events. The participants also ranged in career progression from beginning to near retirement.

Because I am a lesbian I was able to use an informal network to find research participants who met the criteria for this study. All of the participants identified themselves as “out” at work which means that they perceived that colleagues and supervisors were aware of their sexual orientation. However, the degree of “outness” varied among participants.

**Information Collection and Analysis Procedures**

In phenomenological studies the primary instrument of information collection is the researcher. As such, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with participants to gather descriptions of their professional lives and experiences as lesbian community college administrators. I met with each participant at least twice and each interview lasted between two to three hours in length. The average time spent with participants was five-and-a-half hours. The women seemed hungry to tell their story as evidenced by the fact that their voice could be heard approximately 97 percent of the time on the tape with infrequent and short paraphrasing and transitional questions from me.

I maintained a reflective journal of my reactions, feelings, and impressions throughout the research process to help suspend my perceptions and allow participant voices to emerge and expose the essence of their experiences.

The writing process served as a means for my reflection, learning, and thought. As I grew in my consciousness about the essence of the phenomenon
experienced by lesbian administrative leaders, I refined written words and phrases to bring readers "vicariously into the setting...and thereby pave the way for shared construction" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 24). The limitation of using written communication is that it "cannot communicate everything about anything" (Erlandson et al., p. 24). Therefore, I chose language and narrative stories that I hope invites readers to find meaning and significance in the lived experiences of participants so that readers may be transformed (Van Manen, 1990).

Information collection procedures involved the use of an interview guide (Patton, 1990). Specifically, I identified general topics that allowed each participant to share her perception of how her lesbianism influences her community college leadership. Topics included past and current community college experiences directly related to lesbianism; risks and challenges related to lesbianism; connection between lesbianism and leadership priorities, values, beliefs, and practices; ways participants have negotiated their lesbian identities as community college administrators; and ways lesbian community college administrators can leverage their collective experiences to improve the community college mission. I used these predetermined topics and issues to assist in facilitating the interview, allowing me to determine exact question sequence and wording as the interview unfolded (Patton, 1990). I chose this method because I wanted each interview to be relaxed and natural, allowing participants' thoughts and stories to surface, and yet I understood that I needed some direction to maintain focus as a novice researcher.
Interviews were conducted at a place and time selected by each research participant. I met with each participant twice and had e-mail interactions with some participants beyond the interviews. The first interview involved a review of the research focus, confidentiality issues, ways to ensure research accuracy, and getting-to-know-you time. Participants were eager to help with this study so the first interview launched into the topics associated with the interview guide. The second interview and subsequent contact involved follow-up questions related to stories and perceptions shared in the first interview, and continuation of interview guide topics not covered in the first interview.

Analysis began during the data collection phase as I started processing information the moment I met each participant. Information analysis mixed a strong phenomenological approach (Patton, 1990) with a constant comparison process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that is best demonstrated in Figure 2. This figure shows the interrelatedness of all components of the phenomenological research process that I used during my data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing processes. While moving through the research process displayed on the outer side of the diagram, I remained mindful of and participated in those aspects of the research delineated in the center of the diagram.
Figure 2. The constant comparison process used in this study.

The process was iterative and multidimensional involving the following:

- I bracketed my personal bias, experiences, and beliefs so that I was able to remain open to participants’ experiences. Specifically I recorded my reactions, thoughts, and experiences in a journal after each interview and throughout the analysis process.

- I transcribed all interviews so that I could reflect on interview stories and understand more deeply what it was like for each of the women to be a lesbian community college leader.
I sent the transcribed interviews to each participant for her review and correction to ensure accuracy. Once the reviewed transcripts were returned, I made necessary corrections.

I color coded each participant’s interview transcript and labeled transcript sections according to interview guide topic, the participant’s initials, and start and stop time on the tape recorder. I was then able to cut-up the transcribed material, grouping like responses and recurring themes without losing the author of a statement or the place I could find a statement on the transcribed tape.

I compared and contrasted individual statements and stories to allow for the discovery of themes common to all participants. This process was ongoing and dynamic throughout the writing process.

As I wrote about, reflected on, and refined emerging themes I was able to extract what I believe to be the meaning and essence of these five women’s experiences as lesbian community college administrators.

Once I had a strong draft of the research findings, I sent the draft to participants for their review to ensure accuracy.

Strategies to Ensure Research Integrity

As I grew in my learning about scholarly research, I pondered ways to ensure that I would give honor and integrity to participants’ experiences, even when those experiences differed from mine. I took the following actions to
maximize my ability to be open, conscious, thoughtful, reflective, empathetic, understanding, and to ensure research integrity throughout the process:

- I engaged in in-depth individual interviews that lasted long enough to collect sufficient data and to understand the nuances and cultural meanings of participant’s messages. During the interviews I remained open and curious, asking each participant to clarify the meaning of words and how the experiences came to have meaning for her.

- During the interviews I periodically summarized information and my understanding of what participants were expressing. If I was unclear about meaning I asked for clarification and participants corrected me. I also checked with participants for their perception of our interaction to ensure that I was thoughtful and sensitive, giving attention to every participant’s feelings, senses, thoughts, and actions.

- Each interview was taped, reviewed, and significant sections related to the research topic and questions were transcribed verbatim by me. Tapes were stored in a secured cabinet in my home. Multiple transcript copies were made on discs to ensure that original data was kept.

- Participants reviewed the transcribed taped interviews and a final draft of research findings for accuracy. Changes were made as necessary.

- In my writing I tried to create thick, rich, and meaningful descriptions of participants’ lived experiences. I was often challenged with the need to balance the depth of descriptions and the need to ensure confidentiality, as
going too far in-depth would have inadvertently exposed the participant and violated her confidentiality.

- I maintained a journal of my reflections, perceptions, and interpretations so that I could set aside my views to let the voices of the participants be heard.
- I have made my research process evident to others by documenting my methods, procedures, and decisions throughout the research process. I have also written in the first voice to illuminate my voice and interpretations in this writing.

**Strategies for Protection of Participants**

Confidentiality and protection of research participants was paramount in this study due to its sensitive nature. To protect research participants I followed the guidelines and policies established by the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board and the processes outlined in the previous section. The data in the research was written using fictitious names associated with each participant. I consciously shared little background information on participants for fear that someone may identify them. I was diligent to write descriptions of experiences that did not connect a participant with any specific college. All transcribed and recorded information will be destroyed one year after completion of my dissertation.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

"The most I want to ask from you and the most I want you to ask of me is for us to respect one another and treat each other with kindness. Not that I'm going to celebrate your life or expect you to celebrate my life but I really want to live pluralistically."

Jessica

This chapter focuses on the findings and analysis of interviews with five lesbian community and technical college administrators willing to share private stories and thoughts to help understand how lesbianism shapes their leadership experiences, values, priorities, practices, and identity negotiation. My specific research questions related to the interrelationship between being lesbian and community college leadership were:

1. What are lesbian community college administrators' experiences on their journey to and in occupancy of their current leadership role?
2. How does lesbianism influence leadership values, priorities, and practices?
3. How do lesbian community college administrators negotiate their lesbian identity to emerge as community college leaders?

While potentially evident in the narratives of the women, this research did not attempt to gather information regarding lesbian leadership styles, personalities, or characteristics but rather to uncover themes that assist in understanding how lesbianism shapes leadership for lesbian community college administrators.

I present the research findings in themes assigned to one of three research questions. A theme is a repetitive and common concept that emerges from the data.
(Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). By presenting data thematically I am able to describe the core meaning of the interrelationship between being lesbian and community college leadership (Van Manen, 1990).

I was humbled by the task of selecting themes that honor the stories, experiences, passions, perceptions, and beliefs of participants. Like most qualitative researchers, I spent hours sifting through transcribed interview tapes, writing, and reflecting until repetition of the women’s stories began to formulate themes associated with my research questions. The task of linking themes to a question area was sometimes difficult, especially since themes that emerged from stories and statements could fall under the heading of several questions. In the end, I matched themes to a corresponding research question that I felt created the best understanding of the women’s perception of lesbianism and leadership. Each question is listed below with its corresponding themes.

1. What are lesbian community college administrators’ experiences on their journey to and in occupancy of their current leadership role?
   - Anti-lesbian work environments.
   - Lesbian supported work environments.

2. How does lesbianism influence leadership values, priorities, and practices?
   - Mentorship
   - Commitment to multiculturalism, equity, and fairness.
   - Educating others about lesbian issues and lifestyles.
3. How do lesbian community college administrators negotiated their lesbian identity to emerge as community college leaders?

- Decisions related to disclosing sexual orientation to others in the workplace
- Relationship building as a way to increase personal and professional acceptance in the workplace.

While the themes can be linked to a designated research question, the women's experiences values, priorities, practices, and ways of negotiating their lesbianism in the workplace are unquestionably interconnected and inseparable in their lives as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The interconnectedness of focus areas related to participants' lives.
Introduction of the Participants

This study involved five lesbian community colleges administrators from Washington State. Their diversity included two Women of Color and three European Americans, one of whom has experienced religious oppression. The women vary in their stage of career from beginning to end and differ in age from late twenties to late fifties. The women hold administrative titles from associate dean to vice president and have related administrative positions in Student Services, Instruction, Economic Development, and Technology. While all five of the women are extremely credentialed and have strong work experiences, I have chosen not to reveal the women’s education and work experience in order to preserve their anonymity. Therefore, the best way to introduce the women while maintaining confidentiality is to describe my perception of each woman’s spirit that impacted me during our time together.

Ethel epitomizes determination. When we met she gave me a warm welcome. She was dressed casually and had beautiful earrings that caught my immediate attention; a combination of silver and gold in a simple contemporary style. The combination of silver and gold in Ethel’s earrings, two opposing metals, describes the essence of Ethel to me. She is brilliant, strong willed, opinionated by her own admission, and big hearted focusing throughout our time together on the need to build relationships to overcome prejudice and homophobic bigotry.
Jessica conveys a spirit of self awareness, insight, and reflection. When we met she was friendly and engaging. I noticed the strength of her voice right away: a strength that one might find in a wise older soul. Jessica is at the beginning of her community college administrative career and describes herself as an overachiever. Throughout the interviews she would stop, think for a second, and then respond with understanding, insight, and hope for the future.

Kelly projects a spirit of freedom; freedom of no longer needing to hide her sexual orientation; a condition present during the majority of her career in community colleges. Kelly and I met at her new home. The atmosphere was relaxing, comfortable, and serene. Kelly is in the final stages of her career and finds that her choices for “coming out” have increased since she has successfully raised her child and feels that the political climate, while not fully accepting of gays and lesbians, is more tolerant today as opposed to the era in which she experienced the majority of her career.

The first thing I noticed about Theresa was her calm, soft actions and tone of voice. Her gestures and vocal qualities showed me the first glimpses of her gentle, kind, and thoughtful spirit. Theresa is in the middle stages of her career, now contemplating the impact of her lesbianism on future career opportunities. Throughout the interviews Theresa emphasized her desire to balance her integrity and safety associated with being a lesbian while not overwhelming or making others uncomfortable with her sexual orientation.
Victoria is bouncing with lesbian pride; so much so that it was contagious and I left the first interview consciously proud to be a lesbian as well. She is in the middle stages of her career and “very married” which impacts her future career decisions. Through the sparkle in her eyes and her dramatic gestures when she talked, it was apparent that Victoria is happy and positive about her life.

The women, different in age, ethnicity, religion, personal experiences, educational accomplishments, and life stories, bring to light the rich diversity represented in the greater lesbian community. But it was the discovery of commonness among the women’s community college leadership experiences, values, priorities, practices, and identity negotiation that form the basis of this writing and my reflections of them as a collective.

**Research Findings and Analysis**

In this section I will share thematic findings associated with five community college administrators’ leadership experiences, values, priorities, practices, and identity negotiation linked to lesbianism. I gathered information from the women through individual interviews that were conducted at a time and place of their choosing to maximize comfort. I began each interview by reminding the participant that my research focus was to capture her perspective on the interrelationship between her lesbianism and leadership. I then asked each to describe her journey to community college administration. That request opened a stream of stories and personal insights that comprised the heart of the interviews. In their storytelling, the women spoke candidly about the leadership impact of
experiences in anti-lesbian and lesbian supportive work places. They discussed their leadership values, priorities, and practices connected with their lesbianism. And finally they shared very personal information about how they negotiate their sexual identity to meet the needs of the college, maintain personal and professional safety against homophobic responses, and ensure personal integrity. I crafted this section around each research question and its corresponding themes.

Research Question 1: What Are Lesbian Community College Administrators' Experiences On Their Journey To And In Occupancy Of Their Current Leadership Role?

Two major themes emerged as the women shared experiences associated with their journey to and in occupancy of their current leadership role: experiences in anti-lesbian work environments that were unwelcoming and at times hostile; and experiences in lesbian supported environments that were welcoming and inclusive.

Anti-lesbian Work Environments

Each of the women divulged a myriad of experiences associated with working in anti-lesbian work places; situations that, whether intentional or not, were painful and left the women feeling fearful, excluded, and like second class citizens. Even when colleagues didn’t make direct anti-lesbian statements to the women, they said things that quickly alerted the women that they were in unsafe territory. “So without saying I don’t approve of you or like you and all of those things, they were very clear to discuss their affection for people like Jerry Fallwell. So I’ve been in those situations and I’m not willing to go back there (Jessica).”
These types of situations set in motion a continual environmental scanning process used by the women to determine levels of lesbian tolerance by asking themselves “Who are the allies? Are people out? …Where are my support systems? Where are the safety niches for me? (Victoria)”

In addition to indirect statements, the women described overt situations and circumstances that created unsafe work environments. “An unsafe environment is …where you are shut down or someone says don’t bring your partner because it would be uncomfortable for other people (Theresa).” “People not being out, people using homophobic or hate language, people telling gay jokes, and not having any type of symbolism that promotes [gay and lesbian] diversity (Victoria).” Anti-lesbian environments encountered during the women’s careers ranged from hurtful interactions with supervisors, to colleagues’ attempts to be funny, to non verbal interactions where what was not said created an atmosphere of exclusion. For example,

I went to my boss, and I went over it with him, the fact that I was gay. I was r-e-a-l-l-y disappointed because his reaction was something to the effect of, well I’m a Christian man and I think that is wrong but that is your life and I think you need to keep it out of the job situation (Theresa).

And while colleagues tried to be funny, their comments could be very hurtful.

Most of the things I would call disrespectful people have done out of an attempt to be funny…For example they might ask me, do you have a flannel shirt? Or when I used to drive a truck some of the guys might say, oh, that is a pretty butch truck…. What drives people to want to say those things? (Jessica).

And what was not said could be as powerful and hurtful as what was said.
I got these non-verbals and I never felt like my partner was included in events where others might bring their spouses or [they never asked], do you want to bring a partner or do you want to bring somebody to the events? It was always that I was invited but other people had their spouses invited at events... I felt like a second class citizen because it was very obvious to me that it was okay if you were married or heterosexual living with someone to talk about that person but it wasn’t okay to talk about your partner if you were gay (Theresa).

Anti-lesbian work experiences resulted in the women feeling afraid that they may lose a job. And though all of the women expressed a strong level of lesbian safety in their current work environments, they expressed skepticism about future opportunities for fair and open professional advancement; fearing that homophobia could overcome even the greatest allies.

I do think that [my lesbianism] could hurt or impact me...I mean when you look at executive teams they hire people that look like themselves and they continue to replicate that...even though they say that they want their executive teams to mirror our students. Well I don’t know that I completely buy that (Victoria).

Coupled with personal discrimination experiences, are stories of other gays and lesbians who lost a job or job promotion opportunity. Stories of other gay and lesbian workplace struggles can spread through small lesbian networks and penetrate the spirit of those who are usually optimistic about career opportunities.

...I do think there is always that little bit of fear that if somebody really wanted to be mean they could find a way to discredit you and kick you out...When I was just coming out my peers and friends would say “I would n-e-v-e-r come out. Did you hear about so and so who lost their job? Or did you know so and so who talked about their girlfriend and the next thing you know three days later she lost her job?” ...When
you hear those kinds of stories you say to yourself, wow that could happen to me (Theresa).

Reflecting upon interviews, I was overcome by recognition of the amount of time and energy used by the women to scan their environment for safety to protect them from homophobia. The women clearly stated that unsafe work environments leave them feeling less than whole and lacking commitment and passion.

[When I’m in an unsafe environment] I am not fully who I am. I don’t think I’m at my best... When I am able to share all of me you get a 100% of me... and the college gets the better parts of me because I’m not holding back and I’m not afraid... When I’m not in a safe place ... I don’t have as much energy toward my job and I don’t go at it with as much enthusiasm... (Ethel).

The women also commented about how often they did not take risks believed necessary in leadership because they felt that their lesbianism may be used as retaliation.

[When I have felt unsafe at work] I might not have taken on something or I might not have taken on a battle... I’d think of just taking it to a point and saying I better not push it anymore because of [my lesbianism] hanging in the background. I was thinking that [my sexual orientation] would become an issue and be brought out and targeted (Kelly).

I found myself troubled by the potential consequences to a community college and to the lesbian leader when she is stifled and held back from presenting a different perspective, sharing a new opportunity, and challenging the status quo because she fears retaliation due to her sexual orientation.
Existing in an anti-lesbian workplace impacts the leadership abilities of
lesbian administrators and the success of the community college. When
colleagues say things that are anti-gay or homophobic, explicitly or implicitly, and
exclude lesbian partnerships in social work settings, the women feel like second
class citizens and become preoccupied with surveying their environment to find
allies and safety in their work world. Feeling excluded and unsafe at work
equates to reduced energy, spirit, commitment, and risk taking necessary to be full
participating community college leaders that create vision and promote change for
organizational success.

Lesbian Supported Work Environments

The women generously shared their perceptions and experiences associated
with positive work experiences and lesbian supported environments. One factor
that defines a lesbian supported work environment for the women is

...an environment where people feel like they can express an
opinion and you are not ostracized for what you say but that a
conversation occurs and people feel comfortable having a
conversation...It is not only a safe place for a lesbian or gay
person to say something about their relationship but it is also a
safe place when somebody who is white can say, I don't think
I understand why you have that perspective without being
labeled a racist or homophobic (Ethel).

Ethel points out the women's shared perception that safety in the workplace only
occurs when all cultures, perceptions, and experiences are included, heard,
discussed, and explored. Therefore, the women not only scan their environment
for homophobia, but they also scan their environment for clues indicating cultural
inclusion; recognizing that cultural inclusion of any kind may open the door for
lesbian inclusion.

A second factor influencing the perception of lesbian acceptance on a
campus is the presence or absences of visual displays that signify cultural
inclusion.

Visually I think people need to feel comfortable. They need
to see things that represent who they are. I walk around on
college campuses and I see examples like...beautiful African
art. I think that people make a connection with that ...I have
yet to ever see anything visually that would welcome our[gay and lesbian] community; that would say that we are here
and we acknowledge and celebrate this as the collective
diversity of our campus (Jessica).

Like African art that symbolizes African American's inclusion on a campus, the
rainbow flag symbolizes gay and lesbian pride, "Safe Zone" stickers indicate
places and people supporting gays and lesbians on campuses, and gay and lesbian
books on a faculty, staff, or administrator's office bookshelf are visual displays
that signal to gays and lesbians that they are welcome on campus.

Other elements critical to lesbians feeling supported in a work environment
include

...people use[ing] inclusive language, for example, we're
going to have a reception and you are welcome to bring your
spouses or partners or friend... [It is safe if] in our
publications it is stated that sexual orientation is included.
[And] offering classes or having faculty members that are out
talking about lesbian lives or integrating gay, lesbian, and
bisexual programming into our full array of offerings and
having a gay student organization on campus (Victoria).

It is also important to have sexual orientation
...embedded in the non-discrimination statement... The culture [can] support the non-discrimination statement by having ... people out and ... valued for their contribution... There has to be an institutional commitment to it not being an issue; that the institution welcomes people from a-l-l w-a-l-k-s of life (Kelly).

Use of language like partner or significant other as opposed to spouse or wife/husband reveals to lesbians that people are open to different types of relationships and that their personal partnership may be included in workplace discussions and events. Inclusion of sexual orientation in classroom curriculum, college publications, and college policies makes public the conscious organizational thought given to address lesbian issues as part of the campus diversity.

The ultimate lesbian supported environment is, perhaps not surprisingly, when heterosexuals openly advocate for gay and lesbian issues. Theresa explains this very well.

I think the extreme where I would feel most safe is with co-workers, gay or straight, and I look even more to the [straight] allies than I do the gay person because allies bring a lot more strength to the situation and they don’t feel as vulnerable... So one example of safety for me is the individual on this campus who did actually bring [a lesbian singing group to the campus] and who was actually a heterosexual woman but her daughter is a lesbian... I feel very comfortable with this individual in the sense that I feel like she really does accept me for who I am. And I have seen her initiate and really try to educate others about gay lifestyles being normal and okay. So that is one thing I look for is others advocating and trying to build awareness (Theresa).

These types of lesbian supported experiences create liberation: the exact opposite of being in an environment that is anti-lesbian, unwelcoming, and unsafe.
As the women talked about their experiences in lesbian supported environments and their ability to be themselves at work, I heard lightness in their voices that showed itself in their upbeat tone and hopeful language in their stories.

When I am in a safe environment I am at my best. When the environment is safe you are able to bring out the best in everybody and it doesn’t matter who it is (Ethel).

I can do my job. I can go about doing what I need to do to reach the goals of the college and my department. It has been so many years in the back of my mind thinking about will this decision or will this approach to getting this problem solved be a factor [connected to my lesbianism] (Kelly).

When the workplace is supportive of lesbians as demonstrated through open expression of differences; visual displays that welcome gays and lesbians; inclusive language and policies; curriculum that contains gay and lesbian issues; and straight people advocating for gay rights-- the women feel uninhibited and fully able to concentrate on their jobs to further the mission of the college.

Research Question 2: How Does Lesbianism Influence Leadership Values, Priorities, and Practices?

Central to my research purpose was discovering how participants connect their lesbianism to their leadership values, priorities, and practices. Interestingly, the women did not distinguish between values, priorities, and practices but rather used the words interchangeably to describe how lesbianism impacts their leadership. Figure 4 depicts the relationship among the women’s leadership values, priorities, and practices.
There were three common leadership values, priorities, and practices associated with lesbianism: (1) mentorship, (2) commitment to multiculturalism, fairness, and equity for all, and (3) educating others about lesbian issues and lifestyles.

**Mentorship**

Several women expressed gratitude for the mentorship and support they received from other men and women, straight and gay, throughout their careers. As I listened to the women during our conversations and later read and reread their transcripts I was reminded of the powerful dynamic that occurs when a person from an oppressed group who reaches a power and privileged role, “reaches back” to take the hand of another who is trying to overcome the same or similar barriers. When I think of this dynamic, I’m able to visualize the lesbian leader like a lead mountain climber who carefully maneuvers and finds safe footing on the rocks as she reaches back to take the hand of her mountain climbing partner to help her find
the same or similar safe footing to continue the climb. Ethel’s words capture the sense of duty apparent as the women talked about mentoring. “I believe it is my role to be a mentor to young women and reach out to young lesbians...I had women who did that for me and now it is my responsibility to do that for others.”

The duty to mentor originated from gratitude associated with those who mentored the women well and from being exposed to role models who were hurtful, exclusive, and poor leaders.

I have come up against queen bees and I didn’t like being treated [poorly] by other women...I decided a long time ago that I was not going to be that way. In fact a long time ago I decided I was going to overcompensate...encourage [women] to step out and step up (Kelly).

Mentorship is one way the women use their experiences and acquired wisdom to help other marginalized cultural group members navigate potentially dangerous terrain of barriers and glass ceilings that hinder a climb to top ranking community college positions.

*Commitment to Multiculturalism, Equity, and Fairness*

Personal experiences are a sturdy foundation upon which to base one’s leadership values, priorities, and practices. The women reinforced that their lesbianism raised their commitment to multiculturalism, equity, and fairness, in the workplace.

[Being a lesbian] has made me a much stronger advocate on campus for people from marginalized groups...Knowing the discrimination I have faced and the discrimination that I could still face and that it is out there makes me a strong advocate and committed to diversity issues (Ethel).
While occupying an oppressed status in the United States of America has many disadvantages, there are times that it can be worn like a badge of honor, providing credibility to others when advocating for multiculturalism and diversity. “Experiencing discrimination myself has given me a sense of credibility and pride about the work that I do in promoting diversity issues across the board, be it religious diversity, gender equity, students with disabilities... (Victoria).”

Lesbianism also shapes the way the women perceive the world, thus creating an understanding that like themselves; others see the world through their personal differences. Understanding that differences exist among all people ignites these women’s desire to accept different ways of being and thinking.

Because I recognized that I was different early in my life, I think I was sensitive to other people’s feelings. Because when you stand on the outside of that fishbowl and nobody knows that you are feeling something, I started to ask myself, are other people feeling things too that I don’t know about? ... I view the world with the perception of being a person in a minority group...And as I filter things, I filter it from the eyes and the ears of somebody who is sensitive to the underdog, the little guy. And I bring that to my leadership all day, every day (Jessica).

The women’s passion toward leveling the playing field for disadvantaged and oppressed group members drew them to work in community colleges. “If you think about equity and access from the perspective of the mission of the community college, that to me is what [lesbians] are all about (Theresa).”

The women talked about how their lesbianism almost requires them to be more aware and insightful about their behavior toward others. ...”Because of my experience in seeing ... subtleties that are discriminatory, I am probably more
sensitive to being fair and equitable ...regardless of whether it is an age issue, gender issue, or ethnicity issue. (Theresa).

The women believe that their lesbianism creates a special sensitivity toward cultural differences and the need for equity and fairness; a high leadership value, priority, and practice. They believe that their values, priorities, and practices to strengthen multiculturalism and respond to people and situations with an eye on fairness and equity unites with the community college mission making them a complimentary leadership fit during a time when community colleges are facing an administrative shortage crisis.

*Educating others about Lesbian Issues and Lifestyles*

Lesbian community college administrators understand that they are the “face” of lesbianism to everyone with whom they come in contact through their professional roles. As a result, the women take opportunities to educate others about lesbianism and consciously project themselves in ways that counter lesbian stereotypes.

Being a leader and a lesbian provides an opportunity to educate others in a tacit, very quiet way. To gain comfort people need exposure. They aren’t going to come to us or find it at a gay pride parade so we need to go to them, at least initially. So being in a position of leadership, a lot of people see me...So they have an opportunity to watch me and to learn from that and to compare their stereotypes to what they see. Maybe for some of those folks they will develop a better understanding that the stereotypes don’t necessarily fit (Jessica).
In a quest to help others learn about lesbianism, the women seize “teachable moments” and ask critical questions to influence attitude change without confrontation.

For example, if a parent came to me and said my son or daughter is learning all about gays and lesbians in the classroom and that is really offensive because we are good Christians—I don’t think I would shy away from sitting down and saying, let’s talk about that. Why is that such a concern for you? What are the fears for you? Just have a dialogue about it and try to help increase their awareness and maybe or maybe not choosing to come out, depending on the situation, using it as an opportunity to push harder (Theresa).

Sometimes the women find a situation so ripe with opportunity to help others learn about power, privilege, and oppression, they risk using themselves as a platform for educating others. Victoria provides an emotional description of using herself as a platform for educating others.

I was in a really difficult meeting with the vice president and a couple of administrators. We were talking about some students of color who got into a racial interaction with a staff member...One of the administrators in the room said maybe if the [students of color] acted different or looked different they may not be treated poorly. I took that opportunity, because they were all straight white administrators, to use myself as an example and a platform to look straight at the high level administrators and I said, “That is like telling me if I lived a straight life and married a man that I wouldn’t face the discrimination that I might face as a lesbian. You are also telling me that if I didn’t look this way or act that way I might be more welcomed.” ... And all three of you as privileged, white, married, straight professionals can sit here in entitled chairs and don’t think about people like me who have to earn the right to sit at the table with you as a woman of color, a woman with an advanced degree, as a lesbian, as a person promoting diversity issues.” I basically wanted to say to them that this work is tough; that I have had to go through the
training to learn how to speak your language in order to be at this table with you

When Victoria recounted this story I could feel her passion and emotion. She became animated, her voice was intense, and she talked about the emotional drain and tears that followed the exchange. I realized that each time the women step out to educate others about lesbianism and discrimination they must first weigh professional costs and benefits. Will they be ostracized and retaliated against or will they deepen understanding of oppression and maintain personal integrity? This type of decision-making and risk taking requires great strength of conviction and character.

The women also expressed a desire to educate the community and technical college membership as a whole and suggested ways to harness their collective voices to benefit the community college system. “...If we said to the Association that we’d like to do a panel, people would come and if we afforded other colleges the opportunity for us to come and talk, they would accept (Jessica).” “What about a future symposium or summit for lesbian leaders? ... [Sharing] how ... [you] advance and progress when you have your first lady by your side as opposed to living [a heterosexual life] (Victoria).”

The women are determined, in their professional role, to educate others about lesbianism beyond myths and stereotypes because they view themselves as the face of lesbianism to their colleagues and greater community members. They attempt to present themselves in ways that are counter to stereotypes; they ask critical questions as a way to sway other’s belief systems; they use themselves as a
platform to deepen understanding; and they imagine ways that they can come
together, supporting one another as a collective voice to make system change.

Research Question 3: How Do Lesbian Community College Administrators
Negotiate Their Lesbian Identity To Emerge As Community College Leaders?

The most prevailing theme linking lesbianism to leadership for all
participants was the unrelenting and daily decisions of when, where, how, and with
whom to disclose their sexual orientation and the impact of that disclosure on work
affiliated relationships, job security, and promotional opportunities. The topic of
“coming out” or disclosing one’s sexual orientation surfaced very early in the
interview process when the women discussed work environments or when I asked
if participants considered themselves out at work.

Decisions and Styles Related to Coming Out

Each lesbian administrator faces daily decisions about when, where, how,
and with whom to share her sexual orientation. These decisions create an
incessant internal evaluation stir that includes factors such as: (1) personal and
professional safety associated with their environment, (2) feeling responsible to be
a role model to others and to break down stereotypes, and (3) the need to maintain
personal and professional integrity. Theresa provides a unique description of the
complexity of lesbian administrator’s decisions related to coming out.

I believe that every time you go up another wrung on the
career ladder you take more risks [with your sexual
orientation]. I think you have to make a personal decision
about what is more important to you. Is it more important to
have integrity [or to conceal your sexual
orientation?]...Because once you are out publicly you cannot
pull it back in. It is a risk around job security and whether or
not people will talk with you or socialize with you... I see it almost as a matrix. By matrix I'm saying as the continuum grows there is also multiple factors that impact the continuum. I don't think it is just a one-to-one dynamic, maybe even fluid.

The women have acquired a unique style of coming out that allows them to be responsible to others while maintaining professional safety and integrity.

Ethel's coming out might be experienced like a rose in the blossoming process. Much like a rose peddle, Ethel reveals herself slowly so that over time the whole of her identity is made known to others without her necessarily announcing that she is a lesbian. Also like a rose, there is a prickly side to Ethel that is a “take it or leave it” attitude about her lesbianism.

... I don’t hide being a lesbian. I always talk about [my partner] but I’m not going to say “Hey I’m a lesbian.” ... I think about how I’m going to have to build the relationships with people so that it is a relationship that is natural and that [my sexual orientation] is not an issue.

Ethel went on to discuss that even in the most liberal and accepting environments, there are pockets of conservative antigay activist associated with a college. “And you know what? They are going to have to learn to live with me. That is just the way it is going to be!” And out come the thorns of the rose that just might prick you!

Jessica defines her method of coming out to others as an attempt to “weave” it into her work relationships. This is fitting as Jessica’s stories reveal a strong integration between her lesbianism and her work. At the time of our
meeting Jessica was in a career transition. She commented about how her lesbianism was impacting her job search activities.

...I’m looking forward to my interview next week as practice to see what questions I get asked and how I can potentially weave my life into my answers in a way that is clear enough to them that they can connect the dots and that they have the opportunity to evaluate me for my whole person rather than this much (Jessica holds up her fingers showing about an inch between her thumb and first finger)...I need to share that with them in a way that is not “I’m here, I’m queer, get used to it!” But rather share that in a way that is clear to them that this is who I am and this is how I see the world. And then let them, with that information, communicate with me and let me talk with them.

For the majority of Kelly’s career, she disguised her lesbianism through a strong friendship with a gay male colleague, her role as a mother, and her activism as a feminist. Kelly, the most senior woman in the study, did not believe that coming out at work was a choice without severe consequences. By hiding and presenting herself as a single feminist she was able to effectively maneuver her sexual orientation leading to her ability to reach her current executive position.

She realized she came to be a feminist at the same time she identified herself as a lesbian. Part of her feminist ideals seemed to come from her realization that being a lesbian meant that she would always need to be self-sufficient.

I thought, as a lesbian, I am going to have to make my own way. I didn’t view being in a relationship with another woman as being economic security. Plus I had a daughter. I am responsible and I need to take care of her...It was okay for us to be feminists...queers were not accepted... Back in that era gay people were considered perverts. I didn’t want anyone to feel upset with [me] working with students, or other women faculty, or my daughter’s friends or any of those types of things...I wasn’t ready to do battle over [my
lesbianism]... The risks were too great at that time and my daughter was a baby [so it was an issue of] survival for her and for me... Not sharing [my sexual orientation] made it easier to maneuver.

Theresa has a very deliberate process in making coming out decisions. She defines it as a “dance” where she works to preserve her own integrity while maintaining some level of comfort for heterosexuals. In getting to know Theresa, the metaphor of dance seems fitting as she appears to move with another in a way that minimizes bumping into each other and stepping on each other’s toes and maximizes relationship harmony. Theresa talked about this dance as a series of questions for herself that may include, what are the risks of people knowing that I am a lesbian to me personally? What are the risks of people knowing that I am a lesbian to their comfort and our relationship? What are my needs to be true to myself and who I am? What are the consequences of my lesbianism to my career? What are the consequences of my lesbianism to the college? How does my lesbianism up the ante to positional or organizational role risks? Here is the dance in Theresa’s own words.

[The dance] really is a tug and a push and a pull because I take baby steps initially... I’m also trying to be conscious of the other person. I don’t want to make it so uncomfortable and awkward for them... I learned that once people develop a friendship with you and then you come out it is so much easier on the person than if the first thing they know about you is that you are gay, especially if they have some fundamental beliefs against gays.

I experienced an example of Theresa’s dance when she talked me through her thought process of coming out to a new staff member who would be joining
the college under her leadership in the coming weeks. Theresa’s statement below is an example of the daily internal dialogue that beleaguers the women.

One thing that I have been thinking about lately that I believe is part of that leadership piece is that I have a new [administrator] coming on board who doesn’t know me. The [administrators] that I work with right now know about [my partner] and they have met [my partner] and have seen her at graduation. For me to tell them stories about something silly about what [my partner] and I did this weekend would be no big deal. And I really feel that they genuinely accept me for who I am and don’t have any concerns about who I am. So I’ve been thinking about how do I s-l-o-w-l-y fold in with [the new administrator] who I am and what I’m about? Do I start off being conservative so she doesn’t feel like I’m in her face?...But there is a part of me that says if I start off making too big a deal about [my sexual orientation] maybe it comes across that way, that I’m making it a big deal. Or what if she says, are you married? How am I going to respond? My sense is that I’m going to respond honestly and I’ll deal with it at that level. But there is also a part of me that kind of says I need to take it slow and let her initiate some questions and not just put it out there too fast, too soon.

Victoria engages in what I might call a “Boomerang” process in dealing with her coming out decisions. She exposes a little of her private life at a time, putting it out there and then waiting to see if anything comes back. And when she believes she has clearly exposed herself as a lesbian, she is shocked when others are unaware of her lesbianism. To them, her lesbianism is still something they are unable or unwilling to see. This statement reveals Victoria’s style of coming out.

I probably started coming out little by little...I also think I put little bits out like, oh [my partner] and I discovered Seaside, and if nobody ever brings something back up to me again...that tells me that they are a little uncomfortable and don’t know how to engage in a discussion about [my family].
Each woman has adopted a coming out style as a result of daily decisions to manage her sexual orientation identity in the workplace while maintaining personal and professional safety and integrity. One blossoms with a small threat of some prickly thorns, another weaves, a third disguises, a fourth dances, and a fifth engages in a boomerang style. Added to the emotional toll taken on by participants when they must continually survey and evaluate their environments to determine personal and professional safety levels, are the decisions about when, where, how, and with whom to come out. This energy used for continual evaluation takes away from the women’s ability to fully participate as community college leaders.

Building Relationships

Relationship building is paramount to the women’s ability to successfully negotiate their lesbianism to minimize personal and professional harm while maintaining their integrity. Underlying their relationship building needs are the women’s assumptions that most heterosexuals have some degree of homophobia. I think it comes down to believing that people have to become comfortable with me as a person before [accepting me as a lesbian]... I’m making some assumptions but I’m going to assume that if you are straight you probably have some biases against gays just because of what is around you culturally. There is church, there is television, there are politicians, there are laws, there’s legislation. So I’m going to make some assumptions that if you have been raised in a very Christian home for 25 years you are also going to have a hard time saying, well let’s all embrace gays because they are really cool people (Theresa).
Because homophobic cultural messages are ubiquitous, the women use their ability to build relationships as a way for heterosexuals to see past their lesbianism into their humanness.

... I go out of my way to work on relationships so that people will see me as a human. Because I want them to see me as a human before they see me as a lesbian. I want them to see me as a leader before they see me as a lesbian. I want the lesbian to be the back seat... I want them to think about my passion and my compassion (Ethel).

The women shared their vulnerability and fears about coming out, the greatest of which is fear of rejection and not being part of the institutional administrative team. Again, these fears eat up emotional and mental time that the women would rather spend dedicated to the fulfillment of the mission of the college.

...There is always that worry that somebody is not going to like you because you are gay or lesbian. I think I am always catching myself: I don’t think that will ever go away and that society will ever change enough... It is just always reminding me that there is discrimination and there is hatred and there are all of those things... (Ethel).

Victoria explains that rejection from the work team can result in the inability to accomplish leadership goals.

I would say that while I value and feel very comfortable with my style and who I am [as a lesbian], I also have a great need and desire to be accepted and to be recognized as part of the “team.” ... I think my work requires that [I be part of the team] if I am going to achieve goals and move the institution and be a visionary leader and an effective supervisor and promoter of values... So if I’m rejected or feel rejection or isolation then I don’t feel like I can do my work, I don’t have my tools (Victoria).
Not only do the women work hard to have other people experience their humanness before they experience their lesbianism, but they often feel a need to be superwoman to minimize homophobic responses toward them.

... If you are really an exemplary human being then how could somebody hold [the lesbianism] against you ... You’ve got to be a super dean and if you are super dean how could anyone go, aha, but she is a lesbian (Jessica).

And as relationships build and heterosexual colleagues begin to appreciate, respect, and like the women, the women find themselves opening up and using “lesbian” humor to demonstrate their trust in the relationship and perhaps to keep colleagues on their cultural toes.

You just made me remember an experience with a long term white male [colleague] ... We’ve worked together for several years and have a really good working relationship today but when I first started I was foreign [to him]. But the beauty now is that I can say things to him like “You know I really appreciate you because you remind me everyday how happy I am that I have chosen to spend my life with a woman (laughter).” Where he is just gloating and we’ve come together with a high degree of trust and to use humor that way. It breaks down those stereotypes (Victoria).

The women begin every relationship with an assumption that the other person(s) has some degree of homophobia. Therefore, the women have learned to build strong workplace relationships, often before revealing their sexual orientation, in hopes that others’ will judge them upon the quality and nature of their individual character rather than the cultural myths and stereotypes associated with lesbianism. The fact that the women want their lesbianism in “the back seat” when their lesbianism is that which has given them experiences to form the core of
what makes them good relationship builders is an interesting conundrum—one that occupied my thoughts throughout the writing of this dissertation. And once the women believe relationships with others are strong, they may use lesbian humor as a way to demonstrate their trust in relationships.

**Summary of Themes**

The women in this study provide valuable insights to understand how their lesbianism relates to their leadership experiences, values, priorities, and practices and identity negotiation to emerge as community college administrators. In answer to the first research question on leadership experiences, the women described anti lesbian work place environments as those that are homophobic, exclusive, fear producing, and energy zapping. They are left feeling unable or unwilling to commit their entire self to the work and mission of the institution. In contrast, the women described lesbian supportive environments as those that welcome lesbians by encouraging diverse ideas; having visual displays signifying acceptance of lesbians; fostering inclusive language policies, and practices; recognizing lesbian relationships as valid; and including lesbian issues in curricula. They equate a supportive environment with lessening their emotional load and creating opportunities to come out and integrate their whole self into the work environment. Lesbian supported environments validate that the women are part of the diversity of the community, increase workplace satisfaction, provide a sense of acceptance, and generate passion and commitment for work.
In response to the second research question regarding values, priorities, and practices, the women described their dedication to mentoring other women, particularly other young lesbians who show interest and ability to be future leaders. In part, this commitment stems from each woman's strong desire to remember her roots and "reach back" to help others in ways that others "reached back" to help her. There was no greater workplace commitment echoed by the women than their dedication to multiculturalism, equity, and fairness in the workplace. Based on personal experiences related to stereotyping, discrimination, and surviving homophobic work environments, each woman described her determination to promote understanding of multiculturalism and "level the playing field" for others in oppressed groups who lack power and privilege in our society. The women also expressed their need to educate others about lesbian issues and lifestyles as a way to create enhanced understanding and to break down stereotypes.

In response to the third research question associated with identity negotiation, the women have adapted a unique style to come out to others as a way to increase personal and professional safety while maintaining personal integrity. The women also described their need to build and use workplace relationships to negotiate their lesbian identity and mitigate homophobic responses toward them. Table 2 provides a summary of the themes associated with the research questions discussed in this chapter.
Table 2

*Summary of Research Findings by Theme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Principle Perspectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-lesbian environments</strong></td>
<td>Anti-lesbian environments use exclusive language, allow or encourage anti-gay and anti-lesbian jokes and stereotypical comments, exclude lesbian relationships from formal and informal political and social gatherings in the college, and restrict lesbian administrators from bringing their entire person to the workplace. Being in an anti-lesbian environment leads to fear of losing a job or losing career advancement opportunities, fear of taking risks, and diminished energy and commitment in conducting the work of the college.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lesbian-supported environments</strong></td>
<td>Lesbian supported environments promote inclusive language use, have written policies of non-discrimination that includes gays and lesbians, include lesbian relationships as part of the community college diversity, have visual symbols that welcome gays and lesbians, and intentionally encourage meaningful conversations about diversity related to lesbianism. Working in a safe environment leads to feelings of liberation and increases commitment to the institution with the ability to give full energy and effort to the work of the college.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mentorship</strong></td>
<td>Lesbian community college administrators are committed to mentor other women, especially lesbians as a way to “reach back” and pave the way for others to break the “glass and lavender ceilings.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment to multiculturalism, equity, and fairness</strong></td>
<td>Lesbian community college administrators are steadfast in their commitment to create community and technical college campuses and systems that embrace multiculturalism and enact fair and equitable practices, treatment, and processes for students, staff, faculty, and administrators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Principle Perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educating others about lesbian issues and lifestyles</td>
<td>Lesbian community college administrators believe it is their responsibility to educate others about lesbian issues and lifestyles and break down stereotypes associated with lesbianism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decisions related to coming out</td>
<td>The decisions of when, how, and with whom to come out in the workplace are relentless and continual. Coming out decisions are based upon a desire to balance personal integrity and personal and professional safety. Coming out involves a safety level scan of the environment and a trusting relationship between the lesbian administrator and the person(s) to whom she may feel a desire or need to come out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship building as a way to increase acceptance and minimize homophobic responses in the workplace.</td>
<td>There is an assumption that most heterosexuals have some degree of homophobia. This assumption leads to lesbians being fearful of rejection by colleagues. Building strong workplace relationships provides the opportunity for lesbians to demonstrate to their heterosexual colleagues that they are individuals with compassion, strong character, commitment, before homophobic responses emerge.</td>
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CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Phenomenological research provokes reflection and deepens understanding of a phenomenon for the reader, researcher, and participant. The purpose of this phenomenological research is to create a more in-depth understanding of the interrelationship between being lesbian and community college leadership. This chapter draws together research components by summarizing findings, discussing findings linked to prior research, drawing out research implications for community college policies and practices, recommending future research and sharing personal remarks and reflections. I organized the summary and discussion sections of the chapter around the three research questions:

1. What are lesbian community college administrators' experiences on their journey to and in occupancy of their current leadership role?
2. How does lesbianism influence leadership values, priorities, and practices?
3. How do lesbian community college administrators negotiate their lesbian identity to emerge as community college leaders?

Lesbian Community College Administrators' Experiences

Five lesbian community college administrators working in Washington State participated in this study: two Women of Color and three European Americans, one of whom has experienced religious oppression. The women vary in their stage of career from beginning to end and differ in age from late twenties to late fifties. The women hold administrative titles from associate dean to vice
president and have related administrative positions in Student Services, Instruction, Economic Development, and Technology. While life experiences and backgrounds varied among the women, the research uncovered commonness related to being lesbian and community college leadership.

A common leadership experience was employment in anti-lesbian work environments. They described anti-lesbian environments as ones where they were exposed to homophobic jokes and statements and excluded from formal and informal college social structures. Participants' descriptions of anti-lesbian work environments mirrored findings in previous literature. Prior campus climate research and research on lesbians in the workplace describe anti-lesbian environments as those where there is oppression, discrimination, ostracism, fear of career damage, and potential emotional or physical harm as a result of homophobia (Cryton-Hysom, 1991; Leider, 2001; Metzger, 1998).

Participants also described lesbian supported environments. The women in this study and participants from previous studies (Metzger, 1998; Mooney, 1992; Myrick & Brown, 1997) define lesbian supported environments as having openly gay and lesbian faculty, staff, and administrators on campus, including sexual orientation in non-discrimination clauses, supporting gay and lesbian campus activities, recognizing gay and lesbian relationships as a valued part of the institutional diversity, and having gay and lesbian issues as part of the curriculum. Beyond previous findings, this study brings to light the dramatic positive impact of having heterosexuals advocate for gay and lesbian issues, where the oppressor
reaches out and takes a stand in favor of sexual orientation inclusion. This research also exposes the contrasting impact of working in anti-lesbian environments versus lesbian supported environments. Anti-lesbian environments leave women with depleted energy, spirit, institutional commitment and unwillingness to take risks essential to be the very best leader possible to carry out the mission of their community college. Conversely, working in a lesbian supported environment promotes liberation, commitment to the college and its mission, and full participation in the college community.

**Lesbian Community College Administrators’ Values, Priorities, and Practices**

Cryton-Hysom (1991) and Coon (2001) found that gay and lesbian leaders had values, priorities, and practices of care that include empathy, social justice, and commitment to multiculturalism. They believed that these leadership qualities were connected to sexual orientation. My research supports Cryton-Hysom and Coon’s beliefs. Participants linked three leadership values, priorities, and practices to their lesbianism that involve care, empathy, social justice, and commitment to multiculturalism: (1) a duty to mentor other women and lesbians, (2) a need to educate others about lesbian issues and lifestyles, and (3) a commitment to multiculturalism, fairness, and equity.

Participants expressed a duty to mentor other women, especially other lesbians, who were interested in becoming community college administrators. This research adds new dimension to previous research where participants only cited an interest in being role models for others or having mentors for themselves
(Cryton-Hysom, 1991; Coon, 2001). This difference may be more semantic than real since acting as "role models" may be perceived as a mentorship type of role. However, the women in this study distinguished between being a role model to others to establish behavioral standards and being a mentor who purposefully supports women and lesbians interested in top-level community college administration. The women expressed their motivation to mentor because they had mentors who had taken them "under their wing" and nurtured their leadership talents despite their sexual orientation. Others mentioned that watching and being subjected to poor leadership provided the catalyst to mentor other women, especially lesbians, so that they would not experience similar career hardships.

A second value, priority, and practice linking lesbianism to leadership was the need to educate others about lesbian issues and lifestyles. As mentioned earlier, prior research cited gay and lesbian leaders' as role models who establish standards for others to follow (Cryton-Hysom, 1991; Coon 2001). I felt presumptuous to conclude that an interest in being a role model equates to educating others about lesbianism. In contrast to previous research, participants in this study stated their clear desire to educate colleagues about lesbian issues and lesbian lifestyles. Specifically, participants understand that they are the face of lesbianism to everyone with whom they come in contact through their administrative role. Therefore, they work to debunk stereotypes by allowing people to get to know them; asking critical questions that may spark more inclusive attitudes about lesbianism; and using themselves and their life
circumstances as a platform to educate others about the nuances and dynamics of discrimination.

A third leadership value, priority, and practice linked to lesbianism is commitment to multiculturalism, equity, and fairness for all. Throughout history lesbians created and nurtured movements and organizations that attempted to heal violence and pain inflicted by people onto people. Lesbians built rape crisis centers, worked for peace and disarmament, fostered racial harmony, promoted prisoner’s rights, and led the way for equal protections and equal rights (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998). Reminiscent of lesbians of the past, the women in this study expressed profound commitment to social justice and multiculturalism because they understand what it is like to be excluded and on the fringe of society (Cryton-Hysom, 1991; Odom, 1993; and Coon, 2001). Perhaps it is not surprising that lesbian administrators with strong leadership convictions toward social justice and multiculturalism would be drawn to work in community and technical colleges where the educational mission is open access to all and there are opportunities to level the socioeconomic playing field for success, happiness, and career fulfillment.

Negotiating Lesbian Identity in the Workplace

Decisions regarding when, where, how, and with whom to disclose one’s sexual orientation proliferate gay and lesbian literature and were part of every story, struggle, and joy expressed by the women in this research. The women in this study shared their workplace styles of “coming out” to mitigate professional
and personal harm. One blossoms like a rose peddle with prickly thorns by slowly disclosing her sexual orientation and then at times having a "take me or leave me" attitude. One disguised her sexual orientation for most of her career through a friendship with a gay male or her role as a mother. One weaves her sexual orientation into her work world. One dances to balance personal integrity and comfort of others. And one engages in what I describe as a "Boomerang" style by throwing hints out and seeing if anyone acknowledges her sexual orientation or engages in further discussion with her about her life.

Mooney (1992) stated that decisions related to revealing one's sexual orientation create tensions among lesbians in higher education. Mooney found that those who are "out" believe there is strength in numbers and that they are able to break stereotypes and promote equity for gays and lesbians. On the other hand, Mooney found that those who are closeted and don't reveal their sexual orientation fear discrimination and retaliation. The women in this study did not describe tensions discussed by Mooney. Rather, the women fit both sides of Mooney's polarity. They are all currently out, expressed appreciation for other lesbians who were out, recognized the hardship of being out, were committed to break stereotypes and promote equity, and expressed trepidation related to discrimination, rejection from colleagues, and harm of future career possibilities due to retaliation. In addition, the women's stories support prior research that the decision to disclose sexual orientation is influenced by many factors. Decision-making factors include how they will be received by others once they disclose
their sexual orientation; the level of trust they have toward the person or persons with whom they wish to tell; the degree to which they perceive they will be hurt emotionally or physically within their career; and their desire to be authentic and have integrity (Metzger, 1998; Wells & Kline, 2001). In addition to confirming the complexity of coming out decisions, this research substantiates the importance of relationships for negotiating lesbian identity in the workplace (Fone, 2000; Metzger, 1998; Wells & Kline, 2001). Participants revealed that relationship building helps colleagues and supervisors experience them as humans before stigmatizing and stereotyping them as perverted, amoral, butch lesbians. They believe that if one is "really an exemplary human being then how could somebody hold [the lesbianism] against you (Jessica)?"

**Summary**

Participants in this study provide an opportunity to understand the interrelationship between lesbianism and its impact on community college leadership experiences, values, priorities, practices, and identity negotiation. The strength of this research was the ability to spend four to six hours with each participant allowing her to share her story, discover insights about her leadership, and delve into the nuances and richness of her thoughts, feelings, and reactions to her everyday leadership life. This study supports past research findings related to qualities and characteristics of anti-lesbian and lesbian supportive environments; underscores the commitment of lesbian leaders to multiculturalism, equity, and justice for all; and echoes past research findings that decisions related to coming
out are complex and occupy lesbian time and energy. This study adds to the literature by illumina
ting contrasting impacts of working in anti-lesbian versus lesbian supportive environments; expos
ing the sense of duty to mentor women and lesbians seeking career advancement in community college administration; and divulging the vulnerability of lesbian community college administrators who endeavor to have colleagues experience them as human before determining the quality of their character and leadership based upon myths and stereotypes.

**Implications for the Community College System**

Community colleges across the nation are rapidly experiencing a leadership crisis due to the retirement of large numbers of administrators (Shults, 2001). Gibson-Benninger et al. (1996) suggest that the community college leadership crisis creates an opportunity to acquire new leaders who possess qualities necessary to be successful in the 21st Century. It is purported that successful future community college leaders will need to be caring, creative, collaborative, able to challenge the status quo, and able to welcome and support the institutional benefits that arrive from diversity of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Crytom-Hysom (1991), Odom, (1993), Coon (2001), and now this research study corroborates that lesbians may possess many successful community college leadership qualities needed for the 21st Century. Specifically lesbian administrators in this study report a direct link between their lesbianism and building relationships, challenging the status quo by educating others about
lesbianism and discrimination, and encouraging diversity, inclusion, fairness, and equity in all leadership endeavors.

**Insightful Questions That May Influence Community College Policies and Practices**

Participants' stories and perceptions offer insight and understanding into ways to cultivate and harness lesbian administrators' talents, institutional commitment, risk taking, energy, spirit, and dedication to and understanding of multiculturalism and diversity. The women's stories described qualities and characteristics of lesbian supportive work environments; the benefits of mentorship; the contributions that lesbians may bring to community colleges through their strong commitment to diversity and their quest for equity and fairness; and the desire to educate others about lesbian life and be judged by individual quality and character rather than the cultural stereotypes associated with lesbians. As a result of their storytelling, the women's narratives invite questions related to the three areas under study. Questions that came to mind as I listened to stories, transcribed interviews, wrote and rewrote research results, and reflected throughout the process include:

- How do I and others use humor in the workplace that may perpetuate stereotypes and offend lesbian colleagues?
- What types of visual displays do we have on campuses that welcome lesbians as part of our diversity?
- How do I and others convey that lesbian relationships are part of the diversity of our institutions?
• How do I and others take a stand supporting diversity, including sexual orientation?

• How do I and others respond to lesbian issues and lesbian colleagues on our campuses?

• How do I and others make it safe for lesbians to come out and find one another for support, leadership guidance, and mentorship?

• How do I and others mentor lesbians who may be interested in community college administration?

• How do our policies include or exclude sexual orientation?

• How do I and others enforce or break the lavender ceiling for lesbians seeking community college advancement?

• And how do I and others harness the talents of our entire workforce, including lesbians, to maximize leadership potential?

These questions and those you may ask yourself as a result of reading this dissertation facilitate a deeper understanding of lesbianism and may present an opportunity for us to change the way we act and think toward lesbians who are part of our lives. If your human and cultural interest has been piqued by this dissertation, perhaps you will dare to fashion meaningful conversations with others about lesbianism—conversations that are taboo but are critical in an effort to give value to all of those who live and work together. As it relates specifically to community colleges, these questions and those personal to your own cultural journey may also prompt change in policies and practices, open campus...
discussions, and produce a college community’s ability to embrace the talents, energy, and dedication of current lesbian community college administrators and lesbians seeking community college administrative positions.

**Implications for Further Study**

The power of this study is that it encourages understanding of hidden connections between being lesbian and community college leadership. This research also adds to the foundation of scholarship related to lesbian and gay leadership and may aid in further research. Suggestions for further research include:

- **Perceptions of lesbian leaders who define themselves as “in the closet.”** The women at the time of this study all consider themselves “out” or having disclosed their sexual orientation to their college community. It may be argued that lesbians who are out have a different experience in the workplace than lesbians who are “in the closet” or whose sexual orientation is not generally known in the workplace. A study of lesbians who are closeted may be compared to findings of this study.

- **Perception of lesbian leaders in community colleges outside Western Washington State.** All of the women in this study currently work in Western Washington State community and technical colleges. A study of lesbians in a geographic location outside of Western Washington may provide insights, stories, and experiences that differ from the participants in this study and expand understanding of lesbian community college administrators.
Perception of lesbian community college faculty and staff member leaders. All of the women in this study are community and technical college administrators ranging in title from assistant dean to vice president—generally considered high level administrators. A study of lesbian community and technical college faculty and/or staff leaders who occupy middle management positions of division chair, director, coordinator, and program manager could be compared to the results of this study to add depth and breadth of experiences of lesbian community college leaders.

Research studies such as those listed above may help educate lesbians about themselves as leaders, minimize discrimination by dispelling myths and stereotypes, expose contributions and leadership qualities of lesbians, and provide lesbians an opportunity to fully participate in educational leadership and advancement.

Personal Remarks and Reflections

Preparing this dissertation was one of the most rewarding learning experiences of my life. I have learned the nature of and process involved in original research, come to understand the history and dynamics of my own culture, and engaged in rich and meaningful conversations with family members, friends, and colleagues involving “hard-to-discuss” issues of cultural power, privilege, oppression, homophobia, and heterosexism. For example, many of my straight friends, colleagues, and family members never considered that, as heterosexuals, they are able to openly discuss their partnership at work without fear of being
harassed or physically attacked. Most had not considered that they can be assured that a job hire, promotion, or termination will not be linked to their sexual orientation—an aspect of themselves they cannot change. Many were sobered by the recognition that they will never run the risk of being reduced to a single aspect of their life, like sexual orientation, which discounts the complexity of their humanness. Several became aware that they can readily find role models and mentors of their same sexual orientation to support them. Some were enlightened to recognize that they can effortlessly find literature that reflects the reality of their lives as workers and leaders. And many began to appreciate the comfort and safety associated with their knowledge that other people’s assumptions about their sexual orientation are correct.

Throughout this learning process I was conscious of my responsibilities to research and write about a topic that may offend and create divisions among people when my desire is to create understanding about the interrelationship between being lesbian and its impact on community college leadership. I was fortunate to have the voices and stories of five courageous, spirited, and daring participants in the forefront of my mind during this extraordinary learning process. In interview sessions the women expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share lived experiences as a lesbian community college administrator—something they had never thought about or talked about in any depth. The women commented that being able to talk about the connection between their lesbianism and their leadership was rewarding and provided valuable insight to them. But more
importantly, the interviews propelled participants to consider taking action. In fact Theresa wrote me after our interviews were completed to inform me that she had taken action.

Hi Michelle, I thought you would enjoy knowing that I volunteered to speak in a Developmental Psychology class ...about my life, focusing on my life as a woman of color and a lesbian...Just wanted to let you know that your research has certainly made me think more deeply about this topic and been a great spring board for more opportunities to dialogue with others.

As a listener and learner I found the women’s sharing to be almost cathartic for them. It was as though they were able to quench a long standing thirst to be asked and to share the impact of their lesbianism on their work. I felt privileged to be part of this experience. As a way to conclude each final interview I asked participants to share what they hoped others would gain from reading this dissertation. I end with a medley of their hopes.

I hope that people will use it as a vehicle to either create some discussion or open themselves up to be supportive allies. I hope that people learn about the challenges and obstacles that I think lesbians are overcoming everyday and that we go above and beyond the call [of duty] because we don’t want our lesbianism to be questioned and we don’t want to lose our job, which is always in the back of our mind. I hope that a young lesbian in higher education who reads this says it’s okay to be me and that she is welcome. I hope that a 55 year old heterosexual white male who reads this will remind himself tomorrow at work that I am somewhere on his campus and ask himself what he can do on his campus to help me feel safe.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Script for initial telephone contact

Hello [name]

My name is Michelle Andreas and I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University in the Community College Leadership Program. I have completed my coursework and am now in my dissertation process. I am studying the experiences and perceptions of lesbian community college administrators. Specifically, my study focuses on the interrelationship between being lesbian and leadership experiences in community colleges. I am calling to see whether you will consider participating in this study.

Let me explain a bit about the study. I will be exploring themes and patterns that will assist in understanding how lesbianism shapes leadership experiences for lesbian community college administrators. This study will be the first research specifically devoted to lesbian community college administrative leadership and one of few studies conducted on lesbian and gay leadership in general. I believe this study will give recognition to professional contributions and experiences of lesbian community college administrators, describe lesbian community college administrative leaders who may offer guidance and role modeling through personal stories, assist in minimizing discrimination and violence associated with lesbians and gays on college campuses by dispelling myths and stereotypes, and enhance multicultural campus initiatives. The study will involve a minimum of four hours of interview time together over two to three sessions. A minimum amount of interaction is established, as opposed to a maximum amount of interaction, to allow you the ability to respond to questions, reflect, remember, and come back together with me to capture your thoughts and reactions throughout the process. Our opportunities together may occur in-person and over the telephone as you desire, throughout the next two months.

[Should the potential participant agree to be a participant]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. Following our conversation today, I will send you two copies of the Informed Consent Document that outlines the research study in writing. After reviewing the Informed Consent Document, if you still wish to participate, please sign and return one of the Informed Consent Documents to me. Keep the other Informed Consent Document for your records. If you decide not to participate, I would appreciate a telephone call or an e-mail message informing me of your desire to not participate in the study.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.
Appendix B: Letter to Participants

[Date]

[Address]

Dear [Participant’s name]:

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the research study exploring the interrelationship between being lesbian and community college leadership. As we discussed on the telephone, I have enclosed two copies of the Informed Consent Document outlining the research purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and assurance of confidentiality. Please review the material carefully. Once you fully understand the research project and wish to continue your participation, please sign one of the Informed Consent Documents and return it to me. The other document is for your records. Once I receive your signed Informed Consent Document, I will contact you to schedule interview times and places that meet your schedule. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you have about the research or your role in the project. Should you decide not to continue with the research project, please notify me of such desire by telephone or e-mail.

Sincerely,

Michelle Andreas
Doctoral Candidate
mandreaso@msn.com
(253) 566-3386
Appendix C: Informed Consent Document

Project Title: The Interrelationship Between Being Lesbian And Its Impact on Community College Leadership
Principal Investigator: George H. Copa, School of Education
Student Researcher: Michelle R. Andreas, Doctoral Student

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research is to discover the interrelationship and connections between being lesbian and community college leadership experiences. This research is not an attempt to gather information regarding lesbian leadership styles, personalities, or characteristics but rather to uncover themes and patterns that will assist in understanding how lesbianism shapes leadership experiences for lesbian community college administrators. This study will be the first research specifically devoted to lesbian community college administrative leadership and one of few studies conducted on lesbian and gay leadership in general. This study will give recognition to professional contributions and experiences of lesbian community college administrators, describe lesbian community college administrative leaders who may offer guidance and role modeling through personal stories, assist in minimizing discrimination and violence associated with lesbians and gays on college campuses by dispelling myths and stereotypes, and enhance multicultural campus initiatives. Findings of this study will be published as a doctoral dissertation that may lead to journal publications and professional presentations.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you are an experienced lesbian community college administrator who is willing to provide insights and information needed to make this study meaningful.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for approximately two months with a minimum of four total hours stretched over two-three sessions. A
minimum amount of interaction is established, as opposed to a maximum amount of interaction, to allow you the ability to respond to questions, reflect, remember, and return with insights related to the connection between lesbianism and leadership.

The following procedures are involved in this study.

1. The student researcher, Michelle Andreas will contact you by telephone to inquire about your interest to participate in the study. If you agree to participate in the study, the student researcher will follow-up by sending you a letter and two copies of the Informed Consent Document. If you wish to continue as a participant in the study you will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Document and return it to the student researcher.

2. Once the student researcher has received the signed Informed Consent Document, she will contact you and schedule interviews at a time and place suited to your needs.

3. Interviews and telephone conversations that go beyond the four hour minimum will be determined collaboratively by you and the student researcher.

4. Once interviews and conversations have been completed and the student researcher begins to develop themes from the interviews she will contact you periodically to check for data and information accuracy.

**RISKS**

The possible risks associated with participating in this research project are as follows. If you are an open lesbian the risks are minimal given that your identity as a lesbian is already known to others. If your identity as a lesbian is not known to others you may experience risks if your identity were to be exposed in the study. If exposed, you may experience harassment in the workplace, negative impact on your professional reputation, loss of professional relationships, and barriers to professional promotions. The student researcher will minimize risks to all participants, those openly lesbian and those not openly lesbian, by keeping all names, occupational statuses, and institutional affiliations completely confidential. Specifically, pseudonyms will be given to each participant and to institutional affiliations prior to the interview process and only pseudonyms will be used during the interview process. A code assigning pseudonyms to each participant and organizational affiliations will be kept in a locked cabinet with access only by the student researcher. Any information that may identify you or link you to a particular occupational status or institution will be obscured.
BENEFITS

The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study are:
(1) you may have your first experience of being able to deeply consider the connection between your lesbianism and your leadership contributions: an experience often suppressed by many lesbians who hear daily negative messages about their cultural status; (2) because little research has been done on lesbian leadership, you may feel a sense of contributing to the literature and research supporting your cultural group; and (3) through your stories and insights, you may serve as role model and guide to younger career lesbians who find themselves negotiating their identity in their profession.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any financial costs for participating in this research project. You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. During the course of the study and in the publication of the study findings your identity, occupational status, and institutional affiliations will be kept confidential and will be known only to Michelle Andreas, the student researcher. You will be assigned a pseudonym and a pseudonym will be given to your institution(s) prior to the interview process. Any information that may identify you or link you to a particular occupational status or institution will be obscured. Significant interview sections related to the research may be transcribed verbatim. Although pseudonyms will be used during taped interview sessions to ensure identity confidentiality, a transcription professional may be hired to transcribe segments of the interview session and, therefore, will be required to sign a confidentiality form ensuring strict confidentiality of all information transcribed. All written and recorded information, including interview tapes and notes gathered during the course of the research and the student researcher's journal will be kept in a locked storage cabinet accessible only by Michelle Andreas, the student researcher. All data gathered will be destroyed within one year of completion of Michelle Andreas' dissertation. In the event of any report or publication from this study, participant’s identities will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that participants cannot be identified.
Audio Recording

Interviews will be recorded so that an accurate and complete account of the interviews will be available to Michelle Andreas, the student researcher, during data analysis and the writing of the dissertation. On the recording you will be referred to by an assigned pseudonym and your college affiliations will be assigned a pseudonym. Only Michelle Andreas, student researcher, will have access to the recordings and when she is not using them they will be stored in a secure locked cabinet. Any sections of the interview transcribed will be done by a transcription professional who has signed a confidentiality form requiring confidentiality of all information transcribed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. During the interviews, you are free to skip any question that you prefer not to answer. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you withdraw from the study before it is completed, data already obtained from you may be integrated into the data obtained from other participants and used in the study results.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:

Michelle R. Andreas  
(253) 566-3386  
mandreasosu@msn.com  
1122 North Locust Lane  
Tacoma, WA  98406

Dr. George Copa  
(541) 737-8201  
copag@orst.edu  
School of Education  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, OR  97339

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@oregonstate.edu.
Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

__________________________________________________________________________

(Signature of Participant)  (Date)

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant or, where appropriate, with the participant's legally authorized representative, using a translator when necessary. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

__________________________________________________________________________

(Signature of Researcher)  (Date)
Appendix D: Question Guide for Interviews

This interview guide will be used to maintain the student researcher’s focus on the research question while allowing flexibility and adaptability to each participant’s unique personality and comfort level during the interview process. Specific interview questions and sequencing will be determined during the course of the interview to evoke responses best suited to each participant’s situation.

I. General career background
   A. Education
   B. Summary of positions and organizational affiliations

II. Experiences of lesbian community college leaders
   A. Personal story of coming to identify self as a lesbian (This may seem high risk; however, it is a customary way that lesbians become acquainted and begin building rapport.)
   B. Past and current experiences as a community college leader that participants perceive are directly related to being a lesbian.
   C. Past and current challenges and risks as a community college leader that participant’s perceive are directly related to being a lesbian.
   D. Participant’s perception of the connection between being a lesbian and her community college leadership
      i. Priorities
      ii. Values
      iii. Beliefs
      iv. Attitudes
      v. Perceptions
      vi. Behaviors
      vii. Activities
   E. Ways in which lesbian community college leaders have negotiated (bargained, maneuvered, managed, and navigated) their lesbian identity throughout their community college experiences.

III. Future
   A. Participant’s perception of ways that lesbian community college leaders can leverage their collective experiences to improve the community college mission.
   B. Participant’s perception of the knowledge needed by community college leaders and policy makers to maximize lesbian leadership potential and inclusion in community college administration