ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: RE-DIS-COVERING IDENTITY:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING
THE ONTOLOGICAL COMPLEXITIES
OF BEING GAY

Wallace Eddy, Doctor of Philosophy
2008

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This phenomenological study explored the lived experience of gay men. The study of identity in student affairs and higher education is grounded in student and human development theory. Does theory explain identity for gay men? How do gay men make meaning of their experience? This study is conducted in the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology. This methodology is based in the work of Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida, Levinas, and Sartre as key philosophers in phenomenological inquiry. Although these philosophers ground the methodology, van Manen offers the set of research activities that come together and offer ways to organize the exploration of this phenomenon.

Through exploration of existential sources, the themes of being an imposter in majority culture, living a double life, the power of words to hurt or connect, and the notion of “the closet” emerged. Once these themes from the existential sources were uncovered, participants who live the phenomenon under investigation were sought.

Working with six college students, I looked deeper into how the phenomenon manifests itself and how gay men make meaning of their lived experience. The theme of identity emerged as paramount. Specifically, the gay men participating in this study describe their identity as both complicated and, at times, ineffable; they knew who they were, but found theoretical descriptions of them limited and limiting. Gay men also find that their identity plays a pivotal role in the connections they are able or are not able to make with others – sometimes being gay hinders, and at other times it helps make connections.

From my work with these men, I suggest to educators that we need to stay attuned to the pedagogical environment, allow gay role models to be available, and educate future teachers about the potential crises and anxieties faced by gay men in middle and high school due to bullying. Finally, I suggest to those who teach developmental theory that it be underscored that theory is not a panacea and can never fully describe human beings. The concern I have is with the over application of theory in place of listening to and engaging with students.

RE-DIS-COVERING IDENTITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING THE ONTOLOGICAL COMPLEXITIES OF BEING GAY

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
the University of Maryland at College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2008

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Jean and David Eddy, for raising me to be an individual, to care less about group-think than my own ideas, and for nurturing in me an inquisitive way of being-in-the-world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The mentoring of Francine Hultgren during my journey into becoming a phenomenologist is an example of her profound pedagogical generosity. Francine, through her teaching and writing guidance, has allowed me to find and use my authentic writing voice, for which I am deeply grateful. I am appreciative of her willingness to serve as co-director of my dissertation research. Marylu McEwen has been my advisor throughout my doctoral journey at the University of Maryland and co-director of my dissertation. I am grateful for her patience, knowledge of student development theory, and ability to connect with anyone through her naturally empathic manner. I also gratefully acknowledge the time and critical energy devoted to my research by the other members of my committee: Jan Arminio, Vivian Boyd, Susan Jones, Susan Komives, and Linda Valli. The following men, who volunteered their time and experiences as gay men, were central to the quality of this work: Cesar, Ethan, Felipe, Justin, Marc, and Steve (though these are pseudonyms, you know who you are). Their willingness to share openly, honestly, and deeply went beyond my expectations.

I gratefully acknowledge permission from MPL Communications to reprint the lyrics of “I Am What I Am” from the Broadway musical, *La Cage Aux Folles*. All rights are reserved by the copyright holder.

I gratefully acknowledge permission from Michael Cole, Assistant to Stephen Schwartz (composer), to reprint the lyrics of “Defying Gravity” from the Broadway musical, *Wicked*. All rights are reserved by the copyright holder.

Support during the dissertation research process is critical and I wish to acknowledge my supervisor in Campus Recreation Services, Jay Gilchrist, for his flexibility with regard to my schedule, especially during critical writing periods. I am also grateful for my CRS colleagues who have encouraged me to finish this project, whether through good-natured teasing or frequently asking me, “How is it going?” Keith Edwards supported my efforts by teaching me how to use digital technology for recording and transcribing the conversations with my co-researchers. Probably the greatest support I received was from Kevin Woo, my partner in life, whose patience with me when I was at my most crazy, went beyond the call of duty. His ability to disappear (“you won’t even know I’m here”) when I needed solitude for writing was almost magical.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

SEARCHING FOR AUTHENTICITY: TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON OF BEING GAY

In…….out. Pause with me. In…….out. Again, pause with me. In…….out. Breathing: a dichotomous process. Breathing is natural. So, too, is being gay. Some describe being gay as dichotomous: you are either in or out of the closet. Is it really that simple?

> I tried to commit suicide once because I couldn't deal with being gay. I also considered disappearing so that I could escape a life of expectations. I've never put myself in a position of being killed by a closeted homosexual, but I understand why some people do. Sex with a stranger, they reason, means no one can trace you.
>
> Last night I had dinner with a young guy who inherited $150,000 from a grandparent, but his father, who is executor of the will, refuses to give him the money until he stops all of this "gay foolishness." He walked away from that inheritance and from a $40,000-a-year job in order to begin being a whole person at age twenty-six. Does he have any regrets? He's as poor as a church mouse now and would love to have a steady income, but he would never trade his discovery of wholeness for the price tag on the closet door. (McNaught, 1988, pp. 18-19)

Why begin with words from Brian McNaught? Brian helped me open the closet door a little wider, wide enough that I could see out and see that there was a world outside of the closet, one where I belonged, where I could flourish, where I could be. As the first real role model for me as a gay person, Brian represented a new self. In the inscription he wrote in my copy of his book *On Being Gay*, he gave me permission to be: "February 10, 1993. For Wallace, Sing your song with pride, joy and in celebration. I'm glad our paths crossed. Brian McNaught." So few words, such great power. These words called me into being – and they called me into a tension, a tension

between the truth of my being and the facade I chose to show most of the world. The notion of tension is one that is useful in phenomenological inquiry. The word tension comes to English through the Middle French from the Latin, *tension, tendere* and means "the act or action of stretching or the condition or degree of being stretched to stiffness" and "either of two balancing forces causing or tending to cause extension" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Tension, in the phenomenological sense is closer to the second definition, with the various aspects of a phenomenon that draw one into wondering more about that phenomenon. As one is drawn in to wonder more deeply, it is understanding that is extended. How would I resolve this tension? Is it necessary? With too much tension, does one break? Like breathing, tension may be dichotomous, a sense of being pulled back and forth. What is the opposite of tension? Relaxation? With too much tension, we break. With too much relaxation, we die, as in a heart that just relaxed into death. So how do we find a place to live with the tension, between breaking and death? Do we find a place? Or do we make a place? Before continuing, I should note that in philosophical work, the use of "we" without further delineation, refers to "we" as human beings.

Casey (1993), in his philosophical discussion of place as a concept about which we have lost meaning due to ignorance or overuse, writes about both natural and built places. For the phenomenon of this inquiry, the lived experience of being gay, I am conceptualizing place in two ways: relational and existentially spatial. A natural relational place is one where those with whom a gay person has contact are accepting and see the gay person as essentially whole. Built places, in the relational sense, are

relationships where a gay man must work to convince the other person that he is a whole being and that sexual orientation is a fundamental part of his way of being. The concept of existential space is one that needs to be defined since meaning can be elusive and individual when discussing philosophical terms. Existential space is "Being," that ontological entity that allows us to be. I can be a man, and being so requires existential space. I can be a son, and being so requires existential space. I can be a father, and being so requires existential space. When we define that space we give it "place," as in "having a place in the world." The pre-definitive state exists in the primordial sense, without which we could not "be," but once we name our existence in that space, we have made a "place" for ourselves.

Having a place in the world is fundamentally important to human beings. How can we understand the idea of "natural" and "built" place with regard to existential space for the gay man? Is it a question of "how" does one “be” in the world, or "where" does one “be” in the world? When talking about being gay, people often use the prepositions "in" and "out" in referring to the metaphor of the closet. Are you "in the closet?" or are you "out of the closet”? By using (pre)positions to describe a way of being, we give a sense of having a "place" – these words describe position relationally – that is, they give place. What do these prepositions describe?

They represent positionality with regard to "the closet." The metaphor of the closet is a powerful one and is explored more deeply in Chapter II when I bring forth the lived experience of being gay through existential sources: texts that describe what it is like to be gay and/or offer a perspective on that experience. If gay men are "in" the

closet do we have a "place"? Many gay rights activists would argue that being in the closet is an unhealthy "place" to be. But can an activist truly understand each individual gay man's need to be in any given place whether it be "in" or "out?" Do young (traditionally college-age) men still relate to the concept of the closet? Is the concept of the closet temporal in that it speaks to a certain generation? Or is the concept of the closet still meaningful for traditionally college-age men? How do they conceptualize their sense of place in the world? Do they believe they must be in or out of the closet? Or do they see it differently? Is their understanding more complex than this dichotomous construction? These are questions, among others, that serve to open the phenomenon.

Casey (1993) also talks about the idea of motion or moving between places. If I name "in" and "out" as places (resting points?), what kind of "place" exists between, and what about the movement between the two? Is that "place" between "in" and "out" a "place" or is it a way station between, a place to linger but not reside? This begs the question, are gay men ever truly "in" or "out" in our everyday living? Can gay men exist totally in a place of "in-ness" or "out-ness"? (I answer this question for myself later in this chapter.) Or do gay men exist in this lingering place? What effect does that have on one's being-in-the-world? Is there an effect on the greater Being, or the place in which our beings reside? What is the relationship between us beings who exist in the ontological environment of Being and the environment itself? Is the relationship mono-directional, with us acting upon the environment? Or is the relationship mutually

reflexive, with the environment also acting on us as beings? How do gay men encounter this sense of Being and how does this environment of Being affect gay men?

Before engaging the idea of moving between places in Being, we must ask what is Being? Heidegger (1927/1996) opens *Being and Time*, his major work that puts forth his arguments that philosophy must return to the fundamental question of the meaning of Being. Toward his goal of challenging Western metaphysics, Heidegger begins by stating that there are three prejudices that have governed Western thought regarding the idea of Being: (a) "Being is the most 'universal' concept," (b) "The concept of 'being' is indefinable," and (c) "'Being' is the self-evident concept" (Heidegger, pp. 2-3). Heidegger challenges the reader to move beyond traditional thinking about Being and to not accept the previously accepted truths listed above. For Heidegger, Being is not universal and clear, but is obscure, something which must be pursued. Indeed, it is the pursuit of the meaning and description of Being that was Heidegger's main philosophical project. The notion that Being is indefinable Heidegger works to disprove in the next 400 pages of *Being and Time*. But, lest we become too sure of our philosophical footing, Heidegger adds the challenge to understanding when he disputes the previously held belief that Being is a self-evident concept. For Heidegger, Being is there, but is hiding. Being is always, yet we are not always aware of it. Being remains elusive. Heidegger's great project of coming to a place of explicating the meaning of Being is often difficult because of the new language (or new ways Heidegger used language) that is presented in *Being and Time* for the purposes of forcing the reader to understand anew that Being had been forgotten in the course of Western metaphysics'

development, and must be re-apprehended. Heidegger's idea of challenging the simple understanding of Being is taken up by Casey (1993) as he explores the philosophical idea of place in new ways.

This idea of moving between places is discussed by Casey (1993) in his section on "built places," and some of his language illuminates my preceding questions:

> When we are moving among places in an exploratory manner, we are acutely aware of not having a place to be; however efficient and successful our voyaging may be and however many places we discover, we remain essentially homeless. (p. 121)

This speaks to the adolescent who is exploring his sexuality and may have experiences that, if experienced as an adult, would be labeled as gay. Does the adolescent know where he is? Does he realize this as a place of "homelessness" and that he will eventually find a home? Is the adolescent in our society, who is bombarded with negative imagery and messages about being gay, able to see being gay as a way of experiencing "home"? Or does it take extra energy as compared to the heterosexual adolescent to be able to find a sense of "home"?

This transitory experience does not only need to be seen in the negative. "Instead of being merely transitory, i.e., a superficial way station, a truly transitional space is often a place for creative action, providing enough protection to encourage experimentation (if not outright exploration) without being overly confining" (Casey, 1993, p. 122). So in a sense, the experience of "coming out" can be that creative place of exploration. Casey's words seem to suit the idea of emerging from the closet well in terms of the "in between" place as being less confining. The challenge for us as

educators, however, is to realize the notion of "providing enough protection," and clearly understanding what this means. As a student development educator, I see a conceptual confluence here between Casey's ideas of place and student development theory in the notion of "between-ness" being a dynamic place. Perry (1981) reminds us that development and growth do not take place in his "positions" (descriptions of resting points along the spectrum in intellectual development), but rather development and growth occurs "between" the positions. Understanding this between place as dynamic and potentially volatile, we must ask ourselves if we as a society provide enough protection for that exploratory space between "in" and "out"? And if I come to discover that being gay is a place of being between "in" and "out," what does that say about exploration? Is being gay a place of constant exploration? Does this allow a gay person to experience a sense of stability in terms of identity? What must I do as an educator to create an environment where a gay person can experience this exploration safely?

Speaking Out About Coming Out – Telling My Story

In the personal inscription he wrote for me in his book, Brian's words of "sing your song" I equate with "telling your story." Telling my story is important to feel whole and complete. From my journal: "Brian McNaught was here last Wednesday to speak. He is the author of *On Being Gay*, a marvelously warm book. I enjoyed the book very much and for the first time since I came out to myself, felt like I had my true identity and it was okay." Am I the only person to experience this self-revelation in this way? Others have felt a certain "lightness" or relief at having finally come to a place of truth about their sexual orientation. A marine who was interviewed for the book, *The*

Masculine Marine, describes his experience: "So I looked in the mirror, and I said, 'Eric, you're a faggot. Accept it. You're a homosexual.' And the weight of the world instantly came off my shoulders" (Zeeland, 1996, p. 116). What do gay men do with this information? Do we share it, or keep it to ourselves? The information, when kept to oneself, is a secret, something to keep hidden. There is an implied linearity in a frequently quoted theory of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979), which leads one to believe that being "out" or sharing one's homosexuality is somehow "better." Others (Cain, 1991; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger & Miller, 1996) believe that we must be careful in assuming this, and that keeping the secret may be necessary. Are these necessarily dichotomous? Or are there ways of sharing one's gay identity with some while keeping it secret from others? Murphy (1997) wrote a story about coming to terms with homosexuality. One of his main characters describes what having this secret is like:

> Now I'm carrying this secret on my person, already finding that it's a nerve-racking thing, it's like an explosive; you can't ever jar it or walk carelessly. But as it grows in discomfort, it becomes more exquisite, too, if that makes any sense at all. Because you can't share it with anyone, and precisely for that reason, maybe it's the only thing that's completely yours. (p. 61)

So where does that leave us? How do we understand the secret-keeping experience? Is there anything fundamental or elemental about this specific secret (being gay) that makes it a natural tension point between a positive and a negative experience? What is the effect of keeping this particular secret? "Secrets upon secrets. Thus by inexorable degrees does the love that dares not speak its name build walls instead, till a house is nothing but closets?" (Monette, 1992, p. 54). The keeping of this particular

secret, at least according to Monette, does great damage to the psyche. But how much courage, energy, and safety is necessary to share the secret? To what degree does sharing, or an attempt at sharing cause tension for the secret-keeper? Paul Russell (1999) writes of tension in his novel, *The Coming Storm*: not the tension of weather as the title suggests, rather a tension of whether – whether or not to share one's secret of homosexuality. In discussing his first love, the main character relates the story of how his first love interest told him that he had tendencies toward men. The main character was struck by this open sharing and felt a mounting tension about his own sexual identity: "His own fledgling secret, never before uttered, perched on his tongue, tested its newfound wings, but then, despite everything, refused to fly. Before he could say it, they'd somehow moved on to other, safer things" (Russell, 1999, pp. 51-52). "Safer things?" How can we make the sharing of this secret a "safer thing"?

Bearing Witness

What gives gay men the space to tell our story? When we don't have the safe space, we may feel compelled to tell our story, but are forced to wait until a safe space presents itself – sometimes with dramatic consequences.

The power of telling one's story became evident to me while reading Pierre Seel's (1995) book, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, which is an account of being rounded up in the Alsace region of France during Nazi terror for being gay. Seel's narrative is rich in description, mainly about the horrors of the concentration camp in which he spent time. He taught me much. There were camps in France as well as Germany and the homosexuals in these camps wore blue bands on their uniform, not the

pink triangle that is ubiquitous in both Holocaust history and gay pride celebrations. Pierre Seel did not come out until quite late in life and suffered much from that process, but not as much as he suffered in silence as a closeted gay man. My heart broke a little when he told of one particular story and his need to keep quiet as a means of survival:

> Two SS men brought a young man to the center of our square. Horrified, I recognized Jo, my loving friend, who was only eighteen years old. I hadn't previously spotted him in the camp. Had he arrived before or after me? We hadn't seen each other during the days before I was summoned by the Gestapo. Now I froze in terror. I had prayed that he would escape their lists, their roundups, their humiliations. And here he was, before my powerless eyes, which filled with tears. Unlike me, he had not carried dangerous letters, torn down posters, or signed any statements. And yet he had been caught and he was about to die. What had happened? What had the monsters accused him of? Because of my anguish I have completely forgotten the wording of the death sentence.
>
> Then the loudspeakers broadcast some noisy classical music while the SS stripped him naked and shoved a tin pail over his head. Next they sicced their ferocious German shepherds on him: the guard dogs first bit into his groin and thighs, then devoured him right in front of us. His shrieks of pain were distorted and amplified by the pail in which his head was trapped. My rigid body reeled, my eyes gaped at so much horror, tears poured down my cheeks, I fervently prayed that he would black out quickly.
>
> Since then I sometimes wake up howling in the middle of the night. For fifty years now that scene has kept ceaselessly passing and re-passing through my mind. I will never forget that barbaric murder of my love – before my very eyes, before *our* eyes, for there were hundreds of witnesses. Why are they still silent today? Have they all died? It's true that we were among the youngest in the camp and that a lot of time has gone by. But I suspect that some people prefer to remain silent forever, afraid to stir up hideous memories, like that one among so many others.
>
> As for myself, after decades of silence I have made up my mind to speak, to accuse, to bear witness. (Seel, 1995, pp. 43-44)

I remember reading that passage from the book standing in a bookstore, struck by the title. After reading the passage I bought the book and read it cover to cover,

learning a new history of Nazi terror – a history that included me, or what struck me most closely, a history that could have included me if I had been living in Europe during the holocaust. From the Nazi perspective, as a gay man I deserved to be interned in a concentration camp at best and executed at worst. But this is history. The holocaust was a horrific and evil chapter in history. It is difficult for me to imagine the horror.

Imagine being in the cold. Imagine being rounded up simply for being who you are, when those with power do not believe that who you are is acceptable. Imagine being carted off – taken away from that which is familiar. Imagine finding yourself in a strange place, subjected to physical and mental torment. Imagine being restrained against your will, not allowed to re-enter a world where a safe space was possible. Imagine your damaged body being bound and left for dead. History? Holocaust? Matthew Shepard: October 12, 1998. Outrage was what I felt upon learning of the brutal treatment of Matthew Shepard (Brooke, 1998). But the two perpetrators were hooligans and thugs at best, acting of their own volition without sanction from our society – we are, after all, more civilized than that. But then, I read about the July 19, 2005 public hangings that took place in Iran where two men were accused of committing "homosexual activities." "They were held in prison for 14 months, where they were beaten before admitting to having gay sex, and they were unaware the act was punishable by death" (Iranian injustice, 2005, p. 20). The photograph that accompanies the article is burned into my memory – the two accused young men, with crude blindfolds over their eyes, heads slightly bowed, and executioners behind them about to

slip nooses around their necks. Two men, no, boys really, for you see the two were 16 and 18 years old, about to die. I can't escape a sick sense of irony that years ago when I started this research project, I chose to use breathing as a metaphor for a phenomenon that was wholly natural and equate it with the wholly natural phenomenon of being gay. I suppose there is another sense of irony here; these two young men had their gay selves extinguished simultaneously with their being hanged – ending their ability to breathe. We must remember and bear witness to these acts. Exploring the phenomenon of being gay, writing about it, and sharing it is one way I can bear witness.

What about bearing witness? Seel's (1995) bearing witness these 50 years later has served as a cathartic experience for him – a way to reconcile with history. Should someone have to live with pain as Seel did for so long? What is it about our society that makes bearing witness, or telling our stories about being gay, so difficult? What can those of us in education do to create places where bearing witness becomes an affirming experience, not one of necessary catharsis? Is it too great a responsibility to bear witness and to be a facilitator for others to bear witness? Might education help bear that sense of responsibility?

As an educator and as a human being, the suicide of a young gay man in Utah a few years back haunts me (Russell, Bohan, & Lilly, 2000). He was openly gay and fought to have a gay student organization in his high school. Rather than allow the school to have a gay student organization, the school administration and the parents' organization disallowed any student groups. The law said that if the school chose to allow student groups to exist, they would have to allow the gay student group to also

exist. The adults made their choice – as did the youth; he is dead now. What was the responsibility of those educators? Would this story have been different if a space to bear witness had been created?

Dichotomous Tensions: Authentic/Inauthentic

Coming out can be joyful and can create a sense of wholeness as we learned from the passage in *On Being Gay* (McNaught, 1988). Coming out can be painful as we learned from the history recounted by Pierre Seel, the contemporary story of the student from Utah, and the murder of Matthew Shepard. Dichotomy again? Or is the experience somewhere between painful and joyful? Is coming out necessary? What is it like to be in the coming out process? What is essential about this process? Using a dictionary of word origins I looked up essential. Essence was listed with essential, but there was no information; it did say "see authentic" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). This I found a bit odd since I had never thought of authentic relating to essential or essence. Is it possible that hiding my gay self for so long brought me to a place where I equated authentic with that which is acceptable?

Heidegger (1927/1996) would say that, indeed, I had come to equate authentic with being acceptable; he would, however, challenge that position and say that to be authentic, one must struggle against the social norm in the world and that we must encounter the world in our own way to be authentic. Heidegger calls this idea of basing one's self on the beliefs of others or the social norm, "falling prey." The result of falling prey is a sense of lostness, lost in terms of letting others govern how one is to be-in-the-world, letting the "they" designate how one is to be rather than the self. When we have

fallen prey, we still have a self, but it is a "they-self" rather than being one-self. This lostness in the they-self may be regained. Human beings have the ability to choose our own way to be; in fact, Heidegger says that human beings must take responsibility for being acutely aware of the possibility of their being being taken over by the they-self and must work to re-turn to the one-self in order to live authentically. *Dasein* is the word that Heidegger uses to describe the particular form of being that humans inhabit, and he says that "*Dasein* is the being which I myself always am. Mineness belongs to existing *Dasein* as the condition of the possibility of authenticity and inauthenticity" (Heidegger, p. 49). So, to come to a place of authenticity, I must be mindful of what is true for me, mindful of what makes up my essence, rather than accept my essentialness at the hands of others.

Essence comes from the Latin *esse,* to be, used to mean the being (Merriam-Webster, 2005). It developed into other present participles, namely *essens* that gives us the English essence, the *essential* thing, the being itself. The other present participle into which it developed was *ens, ent*, from which we have the English *entity, nonentity.* This made me wonder about the relationship of the word authentic and entity. If one is not authentic, then is one not an entity? Therefore, when I was not being authentic (with myself or others), was I not really an entity? Or, rather, was I not "being" fully? By living inauthentically, I was calling into question my entity, or truthful being.

As I reflect on my life before coming out to myself, there was something missing. I held back from life. Frankly, some of that feeling has residual effects up to the present time. Having lived inauthentically for so long, especially through the major

developmental years of adolescence and early adulthood, it is difficult to unlearn ways of "hiding authenticity." This is a phenomenon that has caused a great deal of tension for me, and when I think of all the choices I made that were governed by the fear of being discovered for who I truly was, the sensation is overwhelming. The question, "Will I be discovered as an imposter?," was a constant source of fear. By being in a constant state of inauthenticity (both to self and others), I became highly self-conscious. Always worrying about when my imposter status would be discovered required me to be on guard all the time, guarding my true self from discovery. Being on guard all the time requires a great deal of self-consciousness. Being highly self-conscious forces one to confront one's inauthenticity. And this returns to the beginning of what is a vicious cycle of being – a cycle between opposing forces – dichotomy.

Feeling Different: Essencorship

When I first began this research project I was taken back to my adolescence. I have found entries in my journals with questions such as: "How could you not have known you were gay?" and the like. As I began looking to other sources I realize that as an adolescent with sexuality becoming ascendant in my life, I had been investigating other sources to figure out who I was. Countless times I consulted health books in the library at school, as well as on the shelves of my parents' home – looking in the index for "homosexuality" (gay wasn't in indexes when I was growing up, nor was the Internet ubiquitous) – all done in secrecy, of course. I told myself it was the shame of looking up something that dealt with sexuality that forced me into secrecy; now it seems that it was the "homo" part that was the source of shame. It is interesting how we split

the word to create an epithet. We rarely hear someone yelling “you homosexual” in derision, but the sting of “you homo” still makes me wince. This wincing is like that which occurs from pouring antiseptic on an open wound, with one great difference; the antiseptic is meant to heal, unlike the epithet.

As I write my way into the phenomenon of being gay and coming out, I realize that my first remembrance of "feeling different" because of who I was as a developing sexual/affectional being was in 1975 when I was 11 years old. While waiting for a dentist appointment, I was browsing through a magazine in the waiting room. A photograph caught my attention: the photo was two men on a couch holding each other – a chaste photograph, really. These two men were simply demonstrating their affection for each other in a publicly acceptable manner, that is, sitting together on a couch and holding each other – fully clothed. But what about this photograph was not publicly acceptable? The fact that two men were demonstrating their affection was the issue. Had the same photograph appeared with a woman and a man in the exact same pose, it would have been considered an adorable and perfectly normal image of a romantic relationship. Something about this photograph drew me to look. There it was beckoning me, calling to me like the Siren's song.

That photograph is indelibly marked upon my memory of gay realization. But the indelible mark has been hidden, still present, but covered by layers of "shoulds," "oughts," "ought nots," and "thou shalt nots." The power of *essencorship* is amazing. What is essencorship? I have coined this word to fill another silence in my life, the silence of one's essence that occurs when the voice of "the public" is louder and

stronger than the internal voice of truth. But that photograph continued to call to me – "look at me!" I am real. You are real. This image of how one may "be" is real. Come closer, take a look. Do I look familiar? Am I a mirror? Closing the magazine when I was called for my appointment, the cover headline also called to me: “I Am a Homosexual: The Gay Drive for Acceptance.” Another mirror? What would it take to be able to deal with this sense of difference? Time, maybe? Derrida (2002) uses the word *differance* to point out the possible double meaning of the word. [In traditional French, the word is spelled *differ**e**nce*.] He demonstrates that an etymological understanding of this word difference and what it means is useful. *Difference* comes from the French *differer*, which has two distinctly different meanings, unlike the English, “to differ.” *Differer* may mean to differ as in to point out differentiation, or it may mean to defer, and in deferral of something. Derrida’s distinction calls to me to wonder if maybe my sense of feeling different was merely a deferral, waiting to the time when either I or my environment was ready for me to be called into authentic being.

Waiting to be Called to Being

Simultaneously, however, I was repelled by the photograph of the two men on the couch in the magazine. At the time, I had no idea why I felt this tension. What about this photograph compelled me to look at it? What about this photograph repelled me? Upon reflection, I understand that somewhere in my essence, there was a gay boy waiting to be called into being. Even at 11 years old, I knew that there was something "different" about me. The image that the photograph represented was an image that fit

my essence. Yet, I was also repelled. Even at 11, I somewhere deep inside knew that looking at such a photograph was "wrong," and that being like that was unacceptable. The cover story was about how gay men were struggling for acceptance (Leo, 1975). At that point in my life I had never discussed homosexuality with anyone. I had never heard about it at home or at school (as far as I am able to remember) and had not had any same-sex experiences. So how could this experience with the magazine story, photograph, and cover be so visceral? Sitting there in the dentist's office, waiting my turn for an appointment, is not a memory I would be likely to retain. Yet, the desire to pick up that magazine and read more about the two men in the photograph was irresistible. The fear of being caught was overwhelming. And what would I do when they called my name to come back for a teeth cleaning? How would I get rid of the magazine without someone seeing what I was reading? The power of pre-reflective, physical attraction is amazing. The power of essencorship is overwhelming. For an 11-year-old, the whole experience was confusing.

Fast forward with me in a phenomenological time travel – welcome to 1992. I flew out to San Francisco about a week early before the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) national convention to spend time with my former college roommate Jim. We were always close during college, even though he transferred after our first year. He went to a college nearby, and it was his transfer that began our dialogues into sexual orientation. One weekend while I was visiting him at the University of Vermont, he said there was something he had to tell me. I knew what it was even before he said it. How is it possible that I could have known? Was there some

essential, yet unspoken, connection between us? He came out to me and we had a long conversation about what it was like for him. Being gay at the small liberal arts college where we both started out was not comfortable for him. Attending a larger university was much more conducive to being honest about his sexual orientation. Although there was no particular physical attraction between the two of us, I remember being attracted to his honesty, and more than slightly jealous of his depth of self-understanding.

At the end of our time together in San Francisco, Jim was going to drive me to my hotel. We went to the Castro district (the chiefly gay area of San Francisco) for brunch. After we ate we walked around the area for a while so Jim could show me more of his life and the things that interested him. I felt so comfortable about "being" there, but was nervous about taking too much interest in anything; essencorship raises its powerful hand again. When Jim dropped me off at my hotel, he said, "You'd be a successful gay man." I was confused, and jokingly asked what he meant. He said, "Didn't you see men looking at you?" Frankly I didn't, and told him so. He laughed and said that I'd better pay more attention. As Jim drove away, I wondered why he had said that. I then remembered a conversation we had had a few days earlier. I asked him what he thought about bisexuality. I don't remember the context of the conversation, but remember that Jim felt it was a cop out for gays who didn't want to admit to themselves their true sexual orientation. This didn't make me angry, but did shut me up. Upon reflection, I wonder if I was trying to open up a space where I could explore the possibility that I was something (anything) other than heterosexual. I began to wonder if Jim's parting comment was something of an invitation.

Later at that same ACPA convention, I went to my first lesbian, gay and bisexual social event sponsored by one of the association's standing committees. I went with a friend who was an out lesbian. She invited me to go along to "support her." In our subsequent talks, she wondered about my sexual orientation and thought a little exposure might be a good thing. I felt so comfortable at the social. I was, however, nervous to appear too interested. What was that pamphlet on the table? What were those addresses listed on the "going out" list? What kinds of people frequented such places? I also was surprised to see some old friends at this social, and they also were surprised to see me there. They were open about their sexual orientation and I was quiet. I had not yet "come to" the truth about myself, so certainly couldn't "come out" to them. They invited me to come along with them when they went out to a gay club. I agreed to go (all in the name of being supportive and open-minded, of course). At the club I felt so comfortable. I was more comfortable than my friends who were openly gay or lesbian. What could that be about? The sense of freedom I felt was amazing. The music carried me away to a place of truth. Dancing in a room full of men and women who were there to be with each other (men with men, women with women) was exhilarating. At the time I thought it was the overwhelming sense of freedom that was energizing my spirit. It would be months before I would realize it was something else.

About four months later while visiting my best friend in Maryland, I had my ear pierced. So what? I had the left ear pierced since "everyone" knows that the left ear is okay and the right ear is queer. I just wanted to "be different" (so unlike my adolescent impulses – when all I wanted was to not be different) and maybe even shock a few of

my overly conservative colleagues. When I went home to visit my parents in Vermont a few weeks after the piercing, there was a time when my father and I were alone in the car waiting for my mother to finish an errand. He asked me very gently if the earring "meant anything." I responded (nervously, palms sweating, stomach in knots) that "no, lots of guys get their left ear pierced." What I've come to realize is that my father was opening up the space (a built place, or a natural place) for me to simply "be" and to let him see more of my essential nature. But I wasn't fully aware yet; my essencorship was still very effective.

Coming to the Truth

Another month went by and suddenly one Sunday morning the truth arrived. I was sitting in my kitchen drinking coffee, my beautiful, warm and safe kitchen with lots of sunlight. There I sat enjoying the peace of Sunday morning and the sunlight. Out of nowhere, a thought intruded: "You've been teaching students that homosexuality is a normal way of being for years, why can't you accept it in yourself?" This question nearly knocked me out of my chair. The coffee suddenly tasted odd. My stomach suddenly ached. The sense of dizziness made movement awkward; I was paralyzed. I couldn't get up. I couldn't move. I couldn't escape from the truth. How long had the truth been pursuing me? Why was it able to catch me now? The time for truth had arrived, and rather dramatically. Even more oddly, however, was the acceptance. My coming to the truth was a compilation of thoughts that had entered my thinking over the six months, and experiences that had been occurring since I was 11 years old. What was it about that moment in time that allowed my essential being to be revealed?

Coming to the truth was an illuminating experience. I floated through the rest of the morning, wondering what this meant for me. Somehow, I felt that I needed to fix (as in make permanent through fixed expression) this knowledge in time to make it real for me. I called Jim in San Francisco and asked him if he remembered what his parting question to me was when he dropped me off at my hotel. He said yes, and asked why I was asking. I hesitated and said, "I think you know." He said, "I do, I did, and do you now?" We laughed and began to talk frenetically about all the times that Jim "wondered" about me and the times when he "knew." This was eye-opening for me as I began to realize the power of essencorship, though I didn't label it that way at the time. What will I do in my life as an educator to create places for students where essencorship is lessened – or at least the perceived need for this powerful censoring of authenticity? How will I encourage colleagues to do the same?

After telling the first person about my "newfound" identity, I had to tell others. Whom could I trust? When would be the right time? The coming to understand myself as being gay took so many years (28 for me) that I wanted the coming out to others to happen in a day! Of course, this doesn't happen this way. To whom could I come out? Who would be accepting? The opportunity to come out at work presented itself when a friend wanted to reserve a space on campus for which I was the responsible administrator. She said, "There's something you should know…there will be a lot of women at this event…women together…lesbians…because, I'm a lesbian." As I sat there and began to smile, my friend asked me "What?" I told her "Thank you for telling me and you'll never guess…I'm gay too." Then we shared what it was like to work at a

small and conservative liberal arts college and be gay. This was another freeing experience that began an on-going process of assessing comfort levels, personal readiness and environmental constraints before letting others know who I was; the coming out journey had begun. Does one ever "finish" coming out? Is there really such a thing as being "out" fully? My own answer to this question is no. When I consider the existential dimension of relationality (van Manen, 1997), it makes sense that when one is not a member of the "assumed norm" (here, heterosexual), then one must constantly let others know about one's sexual orientation, if it is germane to that relationship. My own experience has shown me that it is an on-going process – a way of experiencing the world. How can I bring together the fragments of my own story in a coherent way to bring others closer to my understanding?

When one is not a member of the "assumed norm" of being heterosexual and has dealt with what it is like to be different and has accepted that status, it is possible to have this status of "different being" and still be comfortable with oneself. Understanding that having the status of "different being" exists, because of the relational nature of living in community with others and its value relative to each relationship, frees the "different being" to accept this status as healthy. The status is only defined relationally; it is not the whole identity of the person.

My Re-turn through Phenomenology

Do I accept myself as a gay man? How does being a gay man affect my being a researcher? Or does my sexual orientation have nothing to do with how I conduct research?

Back and Forth: The Tension of the Topic

This "turning to the phenomenon" has been a somewhat circuitous process. Really, there was a "turning to" when I realized a few years back that I wanted to explore the phenomenon of coming out and being gay, using my voice in phenomenological writing. Then there was a "turning away from" this phenomenon. What was this about? There was some internalized homophobia present. What would it be like to answer the ubiquitous question of doctoral students: "What are your research interests?" I had connected to the phenomenon of the scholar-practitioner identity in student affairs because this topic interests me as well, and seemed perfectly "presentable" as a research interest area regardless of the environment. Having to "come out" as a researcher interested in the phenomenon of "being gay," or the "coming out process," could raise questions, potentially uncomfortable questions. Who cares? Obviously I cared, at least somewhat. Then there was a re-turning to the phenomenon – a turning back toward the phenomenon of coming out and being gay. Like my original coming to the truth experience mentioned above, in coming back to this phenomenon, there was a "lightening" experience of knowing I was in the right place for my research at this time. In terms of research methodology, phenomenology also called to me to re-turn: re-turn toward a deep exploration of the world through language. One of the aspects of phenomenology that called to me is the power in understanding the origins of the words we use to describe experience. Understanding the etymological development of a word can shed light on the original meaning of the word and possibly on the primordial meaning attached to the word as used in a description of lived experience.

Understanding the words used to weave text is critical since they are the warp and weft of our woven text. Words are our fundamental communication unit and must be chosen with care for they have the power to convey truth when used properly.

Dealing With The Tension: Re-Turning To The Topic

> Living under the fear of violence and harassment exhausts energy better used in academic pursuits and identity exploration and development. (Eddy & Forney, 2000, p. 135)

Why study the phenomenon of being gay? How did I choose to study gay men? Or did the study choose me? My reason for this study is to improve campus environments for gay men so they may work toward identity resolution and develop healthy self-esteem. However, my reason goes beyond gay men. I've come to understand that a negative environment for gay men does not only affect gay men, but has a negative impact on men in general; homophobia reaches well beyond gay men. (Women and transgender people experience the effects of homophobia, but they are beyond the scope of this study.) Pollack (2000) in his book, *Real Boys' Voices*, writes in his chapter, "The Secret Emotional Life of Boys," of how the boys he spoke with discussed homophobia – they expressed a secret terror of being thought of as or called gay. Pollack notes how this leads to a "double life" where the boy must be rough and tough on the outside, while scared on the inside. This is a waste of energy – and by "normalizing" the experience of being gay, I hope to liberate non-gay men from such fear as well.

My goal is to improve the campus environment by weaving together the rich lived experiences of my research participants in a way that allows others a sense of

understanding and empathy – gleaned from the thoughtful recollections of the gay men in my study who share their stories. My goals are both to bring forth and to change – bring forth the lived experience of gay men and share that experience in order to improve the environment. Hermeneutic phenomenology has that potentiality. Heidegger (1927/1996), the philosopher who brought together phenomenology and hermeneutics to create the research methodology I'm using, had powerful ideas about recollection, or re-collection as he might have stated it. Levin (1985) discusses his ideas regarding Heideggerian recollection that reinforces my desire to conduct this study:

> The goal of recollection is not to capture the past for a slavish repetition, which is any case is not possible to accomplish, but rather to find/create new historical opportunities for ourselves. The truth in the work of recollection is therefore to be judged not by accurate *correspondence* to the objective reality of a past epoch and another culture, but rather in terms of the character of the *transformation* by which a deeper understanding of the past significantly *alters* the course of the future. (p. 89)

My goal is not to have gay men offer recollections of their coming out experiences to document the "how" of their experience, but the "what" of their experience, to shed light on the actual lived experience and what meaning it held for them. By doing this, my hope is that educators who read my work will gain some connection to the experience of gay men and, having made the connection, will strive to transform and alter the environment in which the educators work to be more conducive to identity resolution for gay men. Transforming and altering are two verbs that describe the effect I hope to have on the environment. My hope is that with greater understanding and a deeper sense of empathy there will be less of a perceived need on the part of gay men to

experience "essencorship" and to become their authentic selves. Rich description of a phenomenonological nature allows for empathy and connection between those who live the phenomenon under consideration and those who do not. Putting a human face on a concept may be known as "personalization of the phenomenon" and has been shown to increase understanding and tolerance by those who do not live the phenomenon (Hogan & Rentz, 1996). This goal of re-collection for this research project is summed up well by David, one of the authors in a collection of life stories by gay youth: “It isn't about sexuality. It's about building self-esteem and self-worth. It's about providing a safe, nurturing environment for *all* youths to gain an education without fear of being degraded, derided, or physically harmed. It's about saving lives” (David, 1995, p. 85).

As I began this study, I asked, “Why focus on the environment, and more specifically the university and college campus environment”? I am a gay man and this compels me to conduct this study, but I am also a student affairs professional who is concerned with identity development as an area of scholarship. No one develops his or her identity in a vacuum; the environment in which that development occurs influences us. We act to develop a sense of identity, but we also are acted upon. I am interested in the influences that are present in the environment that interact with the individual to produce some end product, whether it is a behavior (Lewin, 1936) or an identity. Is the college environment somehow different from the environment at large in terms of being gay? Coming to know our authentic selves is critical for identity development and for self-esteem (Branden, 1988). As the study progressed, however, the questions began to shift away from the college environment; the questions were larger than the boundaries

of campus. In working to create an environment more conducive to identity resolution for gay men, I can be of service to my profession and to students. Van Manen (1997) reminds us that one aspect of phenomenological research is maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and I do this by keeping the environment that I hope to improve in mind as I conduct this study.

Citing Kaiser, Heubner (1989) defines the environment as "a set of stimuli occupying consciousness in any given moment" (p. 175), and continues by explaining that the "environment, in this construction, is active and evocative and calls forth a response from consciousness" (p. 175). How do gay men perceive the "set of stimuli occupying consciousness" in their everyday experience? What will be the response to the set of stimuli that is called forth? The environment for gay men on college campuses is less than welcoming. Gay men perceive the environment as being hostile toward them and more negative than their non-gay counterparts (Reynolds, 1989). What about prior to their college experience? How does this prior experience shape their college lives? Theorists and researchers have postulated and demonstrated that the environment has a direct effect on identity development for gay men (Cass, 1979; Evans & Levine, 1990). Given this impact, it is important to know what the environment is like for gay men. Summarizing empirical research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students, Bieschke, Eberz, and Wilson (2000) report that "Results from this body of research as a whole suggest that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students are often victims of verbal harassment and abuse, physical assault, intimidation, discrimination, and

marginalization in the college environment" (pp. 50-51). How is this environment experienced?

One of my goals in conducting this study is to enhance the environment for gay men to increase their ability to achieve identity resolution and to develop a healthy sense of self-esteem. Why be concerned with self-esteem? To be a healthy person it is critical that one has good self-esteem (Branden, 1988). Positive self-esteem is critical for a person to feel whole and that he or she deserves a place in the human world. Given the public debate about topics such as gay marriage and whether or not to include sexual orientation in non-discrimination policies, I imagine many gay men question their right as to whether they deserve to have a place in the human world. This questioning is fueled by an environment that includes people who use "gay panic" (the overwhelming anxiety caused to a heterosexual by being approached by a gay person) as a defense when they are accused of murdering a gay person, and an environment that includes a government unwilling to include sexual orientation in hate crimes legislation. Before one can work to improve the environment to allow gay men to experience healthy identity resolution and increase their sense of self-esteem, one must understand what is meant by self-esteem.

Branden (1992) defines self-esteem as having two major components, both as forms of confidence:

> Self-esteem is the experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. More specifically, self-esteem is . . . 1) Confidence in our ability to think and to cope with the basic challenges of life. 2) Confidence in our right to be happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants and to enjoy the fruits of our efforts. (p. 8)

Branden notes that the concept of self-esteem has been so overused and over-generalized that it has lost much of its meaning. His concern is that without specificity one loses sight of just what it is one are trying to achieve. For my study, I am using Branden's conceptualization of self-esteem when I discuss my purpose for conducting this research. A longer citation from Branden will make this concept clear:

> Self-efficacy and self-respect are the dual pillars of healthy self-esteem. Lacking either one, self-esteem is impaired. They are the defining characteristics of the term because of their fundamentality. They represent not derivative or secondary meanings of self-esteem but its essence.
>
> The experience of *self-efficacy* generates the sense of control over one's life that we associate with psychological well-being, the sense of being at the vital center of one's existence – as contrasted with being a passive spectator and a victim of events.
>
> The experience of *self-respect* makes possible a benevolent, non-neurotic sense of community with other individuals, the fellowship of independence and mutual regard – as contrasted with either alienated estrangement from the human race, on the one hand, or mindless submergence into the tribe, on the other. (pp. 17-18)

One of Branden's (1988) main tenets of what must be part of the lived experience for a person to have good self-esteem is living authentically. The pursuit of authenticity is a major force in phenomenological research (Heidegger, 1927/1996). The focus on authenticity in Branden's work makes his conceptualization of self-esteem an appropriate one for my phenomenological investigation into the lived experience of being gay. According to Branden:

> Good self-esteem demands *congruence* – which means that the self within and the self manifested in the world be in accord.

> If I choose to fake the reality of my person, I do so to mislead the consciousness of others (as well as my own). I do so because I feel or believe that who I really am is not acceptable. I value a delusion in someone else's mind above my own knowledge of the truth. The penalty is that I go through life with the tormented sense of being an imposter. This means, among other things, that I sentence myself to the anxiety of wondering *when I will be found out*. (pp. 121-122)

Wondering about one's appropriateness to life and the anxiety discussed in the preceding citation are two of the themes that emerged from consulting a variety of sources that bring forth the lived experience of being gay.

Another call to conduct this study came from the literature itself. When looking at the various sources of the lived experience of being gay, I note that there are an abundance of certain types of sources: There are positivistic studies (looking at perceptions of and by gay men, experiences of violence based on sexual orientation); there were numerous "coming out" stories (though told from myriad perspectives, are still directed to expound upon the experience in a certain way); and there are numerous personal account stories by gay men or about gay men (though these stories are rarely probed for deep meaning structures and how the gay man made sense of his lived experience, as well as little interpretive work or interpretive work rigorously guided by method). A hermeneutic phenomenological study describing the lived experience of gay men, interpreting the meaning of that experience, and translating that meaning into pedagogical implications for those of us who are and who work with gay men is necessary for me – both in terms of phenomenon and research methodology.

For me as a researcher there was also a turning in terms of research methodology. Although I am not able to say what drew me to the first course in

phenomenology I took, I am able to say that this methodology gave me a voice. Writing in traditional positivistic form always felt somehow false to me and as though I was an imposter in the intellectual world. Phenomenology allows for a different type of research experience where the power of individual voices is preeminent and the research takes an honest stance in terms of relationship to the research process. Through a discussion of turning to the phenomenon, the researcher divulges pre-understandings about the phenomenon under investigation. Doing this allows the reader to know the writer's perspective and also allows the reader to wonder and question the writer's interpretation of the various texts presented. This questioning by the reader adds to the hermeneutic (interpretive) nature of this methodology. Methodology "refers to the philosophic framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective" (van Manen, 1997, p. 27). Van Manen goes on to explain:

> The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

Weaving the Text: The Process of Phenomenological Writing in Pursuit of my Question

> The capacity to speak distinguishes the human being as a human being. Such a distinguishing mark bears in itself the very design of human essence. Man would not be man if it were denied him to speak – ceaselessly, ubiquitously, with respect to all things, in manifold variations, yet for the most part tacitly – by way of an "*It is*." Inasmuch as language grants this very thing, the essence of man [*sic*] consists in language. (Heidegger, 1993, p. 398)

The idea of text is powerful in phenomenology. The word "text" comes to modern English from Middle English, which evolved from the Middle French, *texte*

(Oxford University Press, 2005). The Middle French *texte* developed from the Old French (borrowing from Middle Latin) *textus* which is related to the original Latin meaning texture, tissue, structure, context, and was formed from the past participle of *textere*, meaning "to construct, weave." Why am I so concerned about words? Are they really all that powerful?

> What the elements are to chemistry, what the sounds are to music, are words to language. However, words are not only the elements of a language but also of the history of the people speaking it. They are important milestones along the way leading to the majestic Palace of Human Knowledge. (Klein, 1966, p. x)

Klein continues his discussion of the importance of words and language: "Language is a mirror in which the whole spiritual development of mankind [*sic*] reflects itself. Therefore, in tracing words to their origin, I am tracing simultaneously civilization and culture to their real roots" (p. x). Gazing into my mirror, what do I see about the word "text" that informs phenomenological methodology?

In discussing the development of the word text, the *Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories* (1991) notes, "A crucial move in the development of its semantics was then the application of *textus* to the 'weaving' of words, to the fabric of literary passage" (p. 376). It is this understanding of the word that is central to phenomenological work. The mirror reflects back the meaning of text as that which is woven from our experience, woven into a fabric that allows us to share experiences and discern meaning within and between the lines of that text.

Words are woven together to create text. Words are representations of concepts, and when taken together, words and concepts are language. Heidegger (1993) reminds

us that the gift of speaking and language is uniquely human. But, Heidegger goes deeper in attempting to understand language as more than a simple communicative tool. Language, according to Heidegger is essential to human beings: “We are within language, at home in language, prior to everything else” (p. 398). But, at times, humans forget that mere sharing of words does not necessarily constitute the fundamental act of communicating, of being-with. We must also listen to the silences, give space and time to let things show themselves in language. We must learn to say what we mean:

> Saying and speaking are not identical. One can speak, speak endlessly, and it may all say nothing. As opposed to that, one can be silent, not speak at all, and in not speaking say a great deal.... Yet what is it we call *saying*? To experience this, we shall hold to what language itself calls on us to think in this word. *Sagan* means to show, to let something appear, let it be seen and heard. (Heidegger, 1993, p. 408)

In phenomenological inquiry researchers find ways to listen to the language of participants, to the text they share through conversation. In paying close attention to the language of participants, the researcher may come closer to understanding the text of the participants. What are my participants saying? “In language as the saying, something like a way unfolds essentially. What is a way? The way lets us get somewhere. Here it is the saying that lets us get to the speaking of language, provided we listen to the saying” (Heidegger, 1993, p. 413). So, I must listen care-fully to my participants as they share their text with me through conversation.

Text represents the lived experience, the essence of one’s being, even one’s truth. Text allows for "story" to have a voice in research and keeps the individual in the research process. When educators look only to theory as a way to understand students

and shape our pedagogy, we risk "covering over" the actual experience of those living the phenomenon as we create "aggregate data" that (trans)forms reality into a theory. How text is represented opens up a huge responsibility for the researcher – that is, to be true to the phenomenon, and most important to the person who experiences that phenomenon. This kind of writing is specific and the practice is referred to as reflective writing.

> This textual activity is what we call "human science research." It is the phenomenological and hermeneutical study of human existence: phenomenology because it is the descriptive study of lived experience (phenomena) in the attempt to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning; hermeneutics because it is the interpretive study of the expressions and objectifications (texts) of lived experience in the attempt to determine the meaning embodied in them. (van Manen, 1997, p. 38)

This study brings forth the phenomenon of the coming out experience and the experience of being gay through descriptive writing. The study goes beyond description, however, and by following the methodical structure of human science research, allows the meaning that accompanies the coming out experience and being gay to be revealed as I am exploring the questions: **What is it to be gay? What meaning do gay men make of their existence (being-in-the-world: *Dasein*)? How do gay men live their "everydayness" with others? What words do gay men choose to describe their lives and stories? How do gay men find (or create) their place in the world?** These questions are all dimensions of the larger question: **What is the lived experience of being gay?**

In *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen (1997) offers possibilities for a methodical structure of human science research which may include engagement in the following:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

Van Manen refers to each of these six elements as "research activities" and does not imply any specific linearity, though some direction comes from the nature of phenomena: one must turn to a phenomenon before one can begin investigating it, and so forth. Van Manen refers to this process as one of dynamic interplay among these six research activities.

One aspect of phenomenology that is challenging for the reader is that it does not fully provide answers. There are no statistical analyses that demonstrate that specific relationships exist. There is no causal link drawn between antecedent and outcome. Often what the researcher is left with are more questions, deeper questions. These questions, however, add texture to the meaning the researcher is able to draw from "being with the texts" provided by those participating in the study. Dealing with

more questions is exciting; it pulls us toward greater understanding and deeper knowledge. Greater understanding and deeper knowledge is indeed the point of phenomenological inquiry (Hultgren, 1989):

> What then is the outcome or end of phenomenologic inquiry? In phenomenological study, one hopes to achieve awareness of different ways of thinking and acting. It is a search for new possibilities – *not* a search for laws which govern behavior. Description of experience promotes further perception of the phenomenon, uncovering it through explications of meanings in language, which allows the chance that better decisions will be made for those affected by such deep understandings. (p. 53)

As an example, once I came to the truth that I was a gay man, I've always believed that being gay is an identity, an orientation – orientation: “A person's basic attitude, beliefs, or feelings; a person's emotional or intellectual position in respect of a particular topic, circumstance, etc.” (Oxford University Press, 2005) – more than a sexual "preference" or act. Gore Vidal disagrees with me. Vidal (1999) notes that he does not "categorize" himself sexually. He maintains that sex is an act and is not related to an identity. Language is important to writers like Gore Vidal – he chooses and uses words carefully. It caused a fascinating tension for me to read his thoughts about the word gay and its use to describe a sexual orientation. He calls gay "…the weirdly inappropriate word used to describe a nonexistent category…" (Vidal, 1995, p. 144). Henry (1993), another writer working on a story about the potential discovery of a “gay gene” for *Time* magazine, came to a different conclusion: “To gays themselves, homosexuality is neither a choice nor a disease but an identity, deeply felt for as far back as their memory can reach. To them, it is not just behavior, not merely what they do in lovemaking, but who they are as people, pervading every moment of their perception, every aspect of

their character" (p. 36). So, I am left wondering, can I claim a gay identity? What do I mean by identity?

The word identity comes to English from the French, *identite*, which came from the Late Latin, *identitatem*, the accusative of *identitas* – literally meaning sameness. *Identitas* comes from the Latin *idem*, which means "the same" (Klein, 1966, pp. 766-767). Tracing *idem* back to its roots I see that it was made up of *id* meaning "it" and the emphatic participle "-em." *Id* is traced back to Indo-European roots with meanings ranging from "again" to "here, there" to "he, she." The emphatic participle "-em" is connected to "just so, in like manner" (Klein, pp. 766-767). Putting these meanings together I can see that identity may mean "he, she, just so, in like manner." Do gay people who have lived experiences that exist "in like manner" share an identity? I challenge Vidal's denouncing the existence of a gay identity. What will the participants in my study tell/show me? How will I come to understand identity as it is lived by my participants? What importance do they give to having a gay identity? Do they even think in terms of identity, or do they conceptualize their lived experience in a different way? How can I get closer to that which is "just so, in like manner" about gay men? Do gay men really have an identity?

In Chapter II, I explore this phenomenon of coming out and being gay through existential sources, sources that speak to the lived experience of those who are coming out and who are gay. Exploring these sources begins to offer responses to the questions posed in this chapter, and to open up new questions to be pursued in my study. In Chapter III, I discuss the epistemological and methodological aspects of hermeneutic

phenomenology and describe the ways in which I engage with gay college students in hermeneutic conversations to gather text for this research project. In Chapter IV, I explore how personal identity is manifested in the lived experience of being gay. Chapter V explores how relational aspects of identity reveal what it is for gay men to be in community with others. In Chapter VI, connections are made to what is revealed in this study and ways to improve the pedagogical environment for gay men.

CHAPTER II

BEYOND IN AND OUT: EXPLORING THE (PRE)POSITIONAL COMPLEXITIES OF BEING GAY

Do other gay men feel limited by the dichotomous terms of "out" versus "in"? Does the language of "out" and "in" restrict the discussion of being gay to the metaphor of the closet? How might I open up the phenomenon for broader and deeper understanding? In seeking sources to expand the understanding of the phenomenon of being gay, thereby engaging in an existential investigation of the phenomenon, I am struck by the word "sources." From the French I know that "source" is a spring from which we get fresh water – a life-giving substance (*Oxford Hachette French dictionary*, 2001, p. 804). The other sources I explore to help illuminate the phenomenon are also springs – from which we get life-giving substance, the sources give life to the phenomenon, connecting it to humanity. These sources offer examples of lived experience that are rich and textured; they are complex and exist between the sense of in and out, allowing us to see beyond the dichotomy.

To bring forth the lived experience of gay men, this chapter offers text based on narrative taken from various scholarly and artistic sources. In *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen (1997) notes that through the human science of hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers investigate the lived experience of some phenomenon rather than how that phenomenon may be conceptualized. After engaging with these various existential sources over an extended period of time, I have opened up the phenomenon and a number of thematic possibilities presented themselves. These

themes are used here to provide structure to assist the reader to understand the phenomenon as understood by the researcher. These themes are not meant to provide structure for the overall research study; they may or may not be re-presented in this study after I engage in conversations with my research participants.

Offering these themes as they presented themselves to me allows the reader to begin to see how the phenomenon is taking shape in my mind, how I am structuring my understanding of the phenomenon thus far. These themes serve as guideposts for the continued dialogue between reader and text, organizational points on a compass of shared understanding. The themes around which I organize these sources are (a) Foreigners: Expatriates and Exiles, (b) Norms, Difference, and Deviance, (c) The Closet, (d) Sticks and Stones, (e) Double Life: Masks, Mirrors, and Hiding, and (f) *L'Enfer, C'est Les Autres*. In addition, I open the discussion with the importance of careful re-presentation of the experience of others and conclude the chapter with the idea of how this study uses narrative navigation, or steering by stories, as a way to allow the phenomenon to be re-presented by me as hermeneutic phenomenological inquirer.

In this exploration, I include various themes from coming out stories found in books and on the Internet, discussion of images and artistic representation of coming out and gay experiences, examination of theory as it relates to coming out, phenomenological texts that add depth to the emerging themes, and discussion of pertinent topics as presented in the student affairs literature dealing with sexual orientation issues. In a review of the literature regarding sexual orientation, Lark (1998) notes various clusters of studies. This study aims to deepen the literature, especially in

the area of “exploring and describing the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people on campus” (Lark, p. 159).

All of these sources represent a form of text. These texts are sources as in the life-giving substance, from the French translation of “source.” These texts are life-giving in that they re-present the lived experience of others, shared so that the reader may come closer to understanding how others experience the world. As I discuss in Chapter I, it is from text that phenomenologists begin to understand a lived experience as it is lived by another person. The purpose of offering existential sources is to allow the reader to understand how this phenomenon has come to show itself to the author/researcher. Even though one can never actually be-with the experience of another person, it is possible to come closer to being-with another’s experience through a re-presentation of the other’s experience. By linguistic transformation of an experience, readers are able to come closer to being-with, and have a better understanding of the lived experience of another. For me as a researcher, the experience of doing phenomenological inquiry can be explained as the re-presentation of experience – in order for you the reader to be brought closer to a place of understanding.

When discussing gay identity, it is common to hear discussion of one being "in" or "out" of the closet. This dichotomization makes the phenomenon relatively simple to understand. But what kind of understanding is this? To what degree can one come to understand what the lived experience of being gay means when one relies on a falsely dichotomous paradigm? Being gay is more complex than this dichotomous

representation using the metaphor of the closet. Why do we encounter this reductionist approach to describing the experience of being gay? Is it because it gives us a simple way to describe what is a complex phenomenon, thereby making it more communicable to those who do not live the phenomenon? Or is it easier to lessen the humanness of being gay and therefore more easily demonize a segment of the population? Using labels rather than actual human examples makes it easier to hate, thus, the necessity of personalizing a phenomenon through phenomenological inquiry. What emerged for me as I considered the variety of sources of lived experiences of being gay is a pattern of themes more complex than the dichotomous understanding of being "in" or "out." They provide a beginning point to articulate my understanding of the lived experience of being gay. Opening up the phenomenon in this way allows for the possibility of widening horizons in conversations that follow. For Gadamer (1960/1999)

> The concept of "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (p. 305)

Foreigners: Expatriates and Exiles

> This may be the secret joy and sorrow of expatriate life: By virtue of living in a foreign land, you throw not merely your history but your identity into relief. (Leavitt & Mitchell, 2001, p. 92)

> It was as if I had been a secret agent in a foreign country. Everything I said, every glance – I *never* looked longingly at what I longed for – it all had to pass through the censor. (Tobias, 1998, p. 9)

> I just always knew I didn't belong there. My earliest memories are of being at odds, and that was long before the idea of sexual attraction. I knew I didn't fit in with my family, or with society. (Rowe, 1999, p.10)

> To be a foreigner, one is always conscious of one's own self…. Like standing in front of a mirror, one notices a lot of things about oneself that one did not see before. A recognition of "me" occurs. This "me" is not the "self" one is familiar with. I am not only a stranger to others, but also becoming a stranger to myself. (Wu, 1991, pp. 268-269)

Transmigration: Becoming a Foreigner

Are gay men expatriates in the predominately straight world? Is the predominately straight world a "home" for gay men? Is the journey away from the defined norm that one is straight an essential part of being gay?

The idea of transmigration for gay men begins at home. Home represents our original situatedness, a place from where all journeys begin. "Originally, home meant the center of the world – not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense" (Berger, 1984, p. 55).

> When we start to reflect upon our experience of home we first of all come to realize the *spaciality* of our home. When we speak of our home we usually speak of a country, city, street or a house. So, as the phenomenologists who have for long pointed to our lived body as the absolute zero-point from which all lived space is organized into here, there, up, down, small, large, we may just as well posit our home as a central point within our *lived world*. Are we not always *somewhere* in relation to our home? (Baldersson, 2004, Always Somewhere in Relation to Our Home section, ¶ 1)

The term transmigrate means "to cause to go from one state of existence or place to another", from the Latin *transmigrates*, past participle of *transmigrare* – meaning to migrate to another place (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2005). When one leaves home, how does one change? Does one re-create home elsewhere? Or, is one's home of origin always one's home?

There is then a leaving, either by choice or by force. When by choice, the leaving becomes an adventure. When by force, the leaving becomes banishment. During this period of either adventure or banishment, the gay man experiences (dis)covery – an uncovering of the authentic self. The form the movement takes, journey or banishment, leads to different ways of being away-from-home: the expatriate or the exile – but either way, a foreigner. Let's go back to the beginning of the journey, the origin: home.

The online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2005), commonly referred to as OED, gives us a glimpse into the idea of home and its various meanings:

> A dwelling-place, house, abode… the dwelling in which one habitually lives, or which one regards as one's proper abode. Sometimes including the members of a family collectively; the home-circle or household./ The place of one's dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally and properly attach to it, and are associated with it./ A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections center, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction.

The OED goes on to share various uses of home, and one use pertinent to the phenomenon of being gay is how home is used in games: "the place in which one is free from attack; the point which one tries to reach, the goal." A derivative of home that is referenced in the OED is the concept of "at-home" – "at one's ease, as if in one's own home; in one's element. Hence, unconstrained, unembarrassed, familiar or conversant *with*, well versed *in*." Norris (1990), in her phenomenological exploration of *What is Home When we Have Left It*, finds that "Home is being ourselves with others" (p. 241). Are gay men able to feel themselves with others? Do gay men feel that the predominantly straight world is home?

Leaving home, however necessary for personal growth and self-understanding, is often a jarring experience, a dismantling of "the center of the world" and "undoing the very meaning of the world" (Berger, 1984, pp. 56-57). But is the "undoing the meaning of the world" necessarily a negative experience? What learning may occur during the experience of journey?

> On every kind of journey, one moves between heterogeneous places. A beginning-place and an end-place may stand out as the most conspicuous parts of the journey – they delimit the diurnal aspect, the daily duration, the *dies*, of the journey – but the in-between places are just as interesting, and sometimes more so. (Casey, 1993, p. 275)

It is on the journey that gay men (dis)cover who they are and how they fit into the world. Engaging in and exploring the "in-between places" as noted by Casey is where the interesting, and I would assert, discovery-as-learning aspects of the journey occur. The experience of journey by gay men varies widely, sometimes as a function of prior life experience, and sometimes due to the encounters with others on that journey, and yet at other times, a combination of both. Casey comments on the diversity of journeys: "Whereas the starting- and ending places are often the same…the interplaces are intrinsically diverse, sometimes to the point of being distracting…" (p. 275). The experiencing of interplaces may be distracting for a gay man on the journey toward self-understanding; this is not necessarily a negative experience. The way in which one experiences this leaving of "home" and journey depends on the impetus for that leaving and venturing into the land of being a foreigner: the expatriate versus the exile.

The word "foreign" in English was originally *ferren*, *foreyn* coming from the Old French *forain*, which in turn derives from Late Latin *foranus*: "on the outside,

exterior, from the Latin *foris* "outside," literally "out of doors – related to *fores*, "door" (Harper, 2001). It is from "foreign" that we get the term "foreigner" – which is one way to describe the experience of a gay man who must venture from home on his odyssey toward understanding sexual identity. A foreigner is "one of another county, parish, etc.; a stranger, outsider. In early use especially one not a member of any particular guild, or non-freeman" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2005). In what ways are gay men strangers or outsiders? Being a foreigner can be an exciting experience. For those of us who have been fortunate enough to travel to other countries (especially where there were significant cultural differences that affected the lived experience, such as language, food, sleep/activity patterns, and so forth), we have known what it is to be a foreigner. There is a sense of wonder and learning when one is outside one's home culture. Some see the excitement of the learning; some feel it to be a burden, while others experience the learning as both. The journey is also an instructive experience, an opportunity to face one's self and take a careful look and come to know oneself on a deeper level. Although not always easy or comfortable, and often not under the best of circumstances, the journey can be worthwhile. As Zimmerman (1997) describes in his novel, *Hostage*, the journey toward self-understanding and appreciation is well worth the difficulties:

> What is it, he asked himself, that you like about being gay? Not simply the company and touch of men, not the conversation and camaraderie. No, something more profound. What he liked about gay people was exactly what he pitied so many straight people for missing. The honesty, thought Todd. Everything in this world was set up for heterosexuals – all the ceremonies, all the major events of life – which meant that if you were, indeed, straight you didn't even have to think about who you were, where you were going, what you

> really wanted. But if you were gay you were forced by your very nature to see that there were many layers of many truths beyond the surface of what was presented. As difficult as the self-search might be, that realization and the personal accounting it always entailed brought a wisdom well beyond one's years. It was something straight people – straight White people in particular – didn't automatically experience and learn, not unless there was a tragic death in the family, a struggle over substance abuse, divorce, or some kind of crisis that split open the crust of the earth. (p. 196)

So, too, is it like that for the gay man on his journey from sexual identity home? Some see the journey as positive and educational; some experience it as negative and burdensome, and others see it as a combination of both. Of course, the whole feeling like a foreigner concept may occur on an internal level, depending upon the degree of "outness" of the individual. Regardless, the potential pressures, anxieties, or creative tensions that exist for the foreigner can still exist even if only felt on the inside. The internal world of a gay man who is not yet "out" is still an ontological space, though hidden from others, where the pressures, anxieties, and tensions may be experienced and possibly resolved. But, what affects the ways in which the experience is perceived? One natural determinant is the catalyst for the journey in the first place.

The word "expatriate" has always held a romantic vision in my imagination. The word calls up ideas of the Lost Generation and their group of writer and artist friends and muses in the Paris of the 1910s and 1920s: journeys away from the confines of the home culture to an environment where creativity could be nourished and allowed to be free. Does this romantic image hold true as one way of understanding the leaving from the home-identity for a gay man as he embarks on his journey toward self-understanding? An expatriate, in the modern sense of the word, is "a person who lives

in a foreign country" (Harper, 2001) and comes from the French *expatrier*: "banish," from *ex-* "out of" + *patrie* "native land" – from the Latin *patria*, "one's native country…." The modern sense of "one who moves abroad" (Harper) shows where the catalyst for the movement comes – from the individual who will be moving. I believe this is true for the gay man who begins to understand that he is somehow different from his family and knows he is different from what he thought he was (and was thought to be by others) and knows that he must venture away from the familiar in order to understand what this sense of difference really means, how it will affect his life, his lived experience. Having the power to make the choice to leave the familiar in search of the authentic self is a great power indeed. It is interesting to note that the derivation of the modern usage of the word expatriate has roots in banishment (Harper) – but, in the modern sense at least, it is a self-imposed banishment, and while the time frame may be indeterminate, there is the possibility of returning to the familiar. Others may not leave the familiar by choice, but rather, by force: the exile.

To be an exile is to experience "enforced removal from one's native land according to an edict or sentence; penal expatriation or banishment" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2005). The etymological journey of "exile" comes to English from the Old French *exiller*, from the Late Latin *exilare*, from Latin *exilium* "banishment," from *exul* "banished person" (Harper, 2001). How do gay men experience the forced leaving of home when they disclose their sexual identity? What effects does banishment from home have? Is it possible to return home once one is forced to be an exile? Or does the exile rebuild life away from home? Stevens (2004) found that fear of rejection was one

factor in the identity development experience of gay men. “Rejection was often associated with negative reactions to disclosure and often meant the emotional disconnection from close friends and family” (Stevens, p. 195). In essence, the fear of rejection is akin to the experience of becoming an exile.

Regardless of how one becomes a foreigner, either by expatriation or exile, the experience of being a foreigner opens up questions of identity, adding texture to the “who am I?” question. As a foreigner, one looks at the self differently. Although it may be disconcerting to go through this process, it allows for dis-covery of one’s self in a deeper way than would be possible without the self-reflection. Norris (1990), in citing the essay “The Stranger” by Schutz, describes this questioning process as a challenging of assumptions and the new stance taken by the foreigner: that of reflective observer.

> In his essay, “The Stranger,” Schutz says that the foreigner is no longer able to take things for granted. His basic assumptions about being in the world with others are called into question. All that before was unquestionable is now questionable; thus a person is a reflective observer, not himself or herself. He or she is looking for the key to belong, to pass in the world of others. (Norris, p. 243)

This desire for the key to belonging and the new stance as reflective observer increases the sense of self-consciousness of the foreigner. With everything that was once taken for granted or understood to be a certain way called into question, the foreigner must learn to renegotiate the world and find ways to balance the need to fit in with the need to remain true to the self.

> Self-consciousness of being a foreigner always leads to the realization of the dissimilarities from others and their daily activities and social conventions. The ordinary social routines of one culture suddenly become awesome in the eyes of people from another culture. In fact, many people in their home culture would

> not mind finding themselves different from others. They may even try hard to make themselves stand out, since difference could mean being distinguished, original, or ingenious. People who deliberately distinguish themselves from others can be satisfied with what they did, as they know what they want and they do things according to what they want. Even if they were not satisfied with what they did, they then can easily revert to the shared social norm.
>
> This does not happen to foreigners. Foreigners usually only have the idea of conformity to the dominant culture, but do not know exactly how they can achieve this, and they feel they are not doing what they want. The worse thing is that they do not have a way to retreat either. The differences between themselves and others cannot be a luxury they want to enjoy, but a flaw they want to cover or get rid of. (Wu, 1991, p. 270)

As a foreigner, the gay man (in the predominantly straight world) is left to wonder: do I want to try to fit in by acting like the sexual majority? How important to me is it to fit into sexual majority culture? This sense of inner conflict is common to the experience of being a foreigner. Wu offers some illumination on this experiencing of inner conflict of the foreigner attempting to establish a more stable sense of self while living the experience of being a foreigner:

> The inner conflict inhabits my entire being. It makes me feel that my own "self" is falling apart. Now I have two "me's" inside myself. A "me" with whom I am familiar and with whom I feel connected. This is the "me" I enjoyed and was proud of. And I am still proud of it and would not let it go. The other "me" is a stranger. It is like a distorted figure that always appears whenever I am in the darkness of foreignness. I cannot accept it because I do not like to. I cannot reject it either because it is part of my own self. My old half hates my newly discovered half. It is also the newly acquired value that fights against the old value in my old half. To regain peace and confidence, a reorganization or reshaping of self is needed. This process is threatening, as one has to alter one's own identity, in order to accept this reincarnation. (Wu, 1991, p. 271)

Clearly, gay men may eventually feel comfortable enough with themselves to not feel the need to fit in, and not see their gayness as a "flaw they want to cover or get rid of"

(Wu, p. 270). But this entails a transformation of self from within – an ontological transmigration.

What about the return home after the period of expatriation or exile? It is important to re-establish a sense of home as Baldersson (2004) in his phenomenological exploration of *The Nature of At-Homeness* reminds us: "If we turn our back too long on the calling of the home, the danger is that its meaning may become seriously transformed" (Final remarks section, ¶ 2). And in describing the lived experience of homesickness, Winning (1990) writes of the criticality of having a sense of home in order to have a grounded identity: "…the home we come from is where our own being finds its genesis and belonging. It is the place that is intimately tied up into my sense of self, who I am" (p. 247).

Returning or Recreating Home: Homecoming or Homesteading

> Having undergone the disintegration and reorganization of his or her own self, and having established the new relationship with the world, the foreigner has gone through a profound change. This change is irreversible. To him or her, to recollect one's old memory is to dig out one's own identity, and to reevaluate oneself in a new light. That is to say, one has to find out the new connection between one's present existence and one's past and make it meaningful to one's own future. Not many foreigners can complete this reincarnation. Then the process of constantly seeking for at-homeness will last forever, no matter that one is just longing for home, retreating to a protected corner as one's home, or striving to make the new world home. (Wu, 1991, p. 275)

Casey (1993) offers a way of understanding the different ways we end journeys between places. He sees home as both the beginning and ending place for all journeys. Of course, the concept of home is more complex than a physical location or house. In a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experience of returning home, Shaw (2004)

expands the traditional idea of home: "Home, therefore, is more than a place, a geographical location. It is a notion...a notion that is the synthesis of the effect of a great many things" (Returning to Family section, ¶ 3).

Casey (1993) refers to the ways of ending a journey as "homecoming" and "homesteading":

> In *homesteading*, I journey to a new place that will become my future home-place. The homesteading place is typically unknown to me, or known only from accounts given by others who have preceded me. But I am determined to settle down for the long term in this novel place…. In *homecoming*…what matters most now is the fact of return to *the same place*. (p. 290)

The impetus for the initial journey away from home does not necessarily relate to the terminus of the journey. A natural assumption may be that the gay man who experiences the journey as an expatriate more likely will experience a homecoming than a gay man who experienced the journey as an exile. However, the expatriate may not wish to return after experiencing a new world on the journey. Likewise, the exile may be welcomed home depending on the experience of his journey and the experience of his journey on those with whom he made home before the journey began. Human experience has infinite permutations and, thus, we cannot predict how the journey away from and back to a sense of home will occur. But, regardless, there will be some form of conclusion to the journey; the gay man will be in a new place.

> Homesteading and homecoming possess two features in common. On one hand, they both involve *re-implacement*. An initial implacement is succeeded by a displacement elsewhere as a journey is undertaken; the displacement, which may itself be multiple, in turn gives way to a last implacement at the end of the journey that is comparatively conclusive and stable. The difference, of course, is that the re-implacing realized in homesteading is conspicuously "steady," not just long-standing but such as to involve dwelling-as-residing. In homecoming,

> the re-implacing may be momentary and need not include residing or re-residing. Indeed, homecoming may be followed by yet another journey, e.g. back to one's *contemporary* home, whereas the intention in homesteading is to remain in one's newly adopted home-place. But homecoming is no less poignant for lacking longevity. (Casey, 1993, p. 291)

Regardless how the journey ends, there is a sense of re-implacement. As Casey states, "In becoming re-implaced, I am either entering a new place (in homesteading) or a place anew (in homecoming)" (p. 292). The notion of re-implacement is "at stake in all getting back in/to place: *in* place in homecoming and *to* place in the case of homesteading" (Casey, p. 291).

Re-implacement may be a form of integration, a way to be in the world. In a grounded theory study looking at gay men in college and identity development, Stevens (2004) found the core category to be finding empowerment: "Finding empowerment moved men from merely accepting who they were as gay men to embracing this identity and possibly to integrating this identity dimension with self as whole" (p. 198). This sense of integration is a form of re-implacement, as I interpret these concepts, a renewed sense of home. But to understand the sense of re-implacement, I must turn back to the beginning of the journey (and even before the journey began) and see what in the lived experience of gay men caused the initial dis-placement.

Norms, Difference, and Deviance

We live in a world of norms. Humans create norms as a way to simplify the world. Life is much simpler when one can use a norm as a reference point against which one can compare his or her own behavior and the behavior of others. But there is a great danger in norms. By labeling something as the norm, thus "normal," one risks

placing that which does not conform outside the norm, or more directly put, "not normal." Too many gay men have felt that they were "not normal," and the effects have been detrimental to mental health and a major cause for *essencorship*:

> Hiding became my specialty. Involving myself in everything I could, attempting to fulfill the expectations of what family and friends thought would make me a "good" kid, putting on a smile whenever I was in public; it took several years before I could honestly smile. Right around that time I discovered the true meaning of honesty. More importantly, I discovered the true *value* of honesty. (Brimner, 1995, p. 35)

So, while norms serve a purpose, their overuse may cause damage. Over-reliance on norms can create environments that are not hospitable to those who do not fit the norm. This is true for gay men in college (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Rhoads, 1997b). Gay men from an early age know they are somehow different, but cannot yet name what that difference might be. One of the youth who spoke with Brimner (1995) comments: "In elementary school, I had some sense that I was 'different,' but I couldn't quite put my finger on it" (p. 80). In another anthology of writings about gay men, one young man says:

> I knew I was gay at an early age – of course, I didn't know it was being "gay," but I felt a close desire to be with guys my age as early as age five. I knew the feelings I felt had a name by junior high. It was also about this time when I knew it was "bad." (Gray, 1999, p. 33)

At the age of 12, performance artist Tim Miller (1997) knew he felt an overwhelming attraction to a friend: "I wanted Ralph to be my special friend and hold me near to him. I didn't have a name for what I felt, but I had an inkling that it was going to be trouble" (p. 13). In reflecting on his youth, the author Gambone (1996) says:

> When did I start to feel things that let me know I was a homosexual? In my journal, which I began in July 1968 at the age of twenty, the words *gay* and *homosexual* do not appear for almost a year. What does that mean? That I simply resisted the words to describe myself until they felt safe, familiar? (p. 98)

It is clear that for many of these young men, there is an undeniable sense that they were different, and that even though they couldn't quite yet name what that difference was, they knew or believed that it was bad, or would have negative consequences for them. As Brimner (1995) summarizes:

> Most lesbian and gay youths say they felt somehow different from their straight peers at a very early age, but they had nothing in their experience to explain what that difference was. Later – most typically between the ages of twelve and fourteen – when they realize that this *difference* is an attraction to persons of their own sex, or *homosexual* feelings, they have only society's whispered myths with which to identify. (p. 26)

As the experience of feeling different increases and small (and not so small) hints begin to surface for a gay man, it can still be a struggle to come to a place where he is able to name the difference. D'Augelli (1991) found that labeling oneself as gay followed feeling different by an average of 6 years. In his book based on conversations with various gay fiction writers, Gambone (1999) offers the thoughts of Andrew Holleran on dealing with this burgeoning knowledge:

> It's staggering to me that we all have these cognitive dissonances where we can lead two-track lives, where you're absorbing all the information but you refuse to process it. You absolutely *refuse* to make the conclusions that are screaming to be made, because you just will not do that. It's willful avoidance. (p. 180)

Willful avoidance? Maybe, but the avoidance is based on a felt societal interdict toward difference, and especially certain types of difference.

So how do these gay youth deal with this feeling of being/doing something wrong in the eyes of others? Many writers referred to the "best little boy in the world syndrome" as one means of coping: being the best at what you attempt and being the best behaved as a way of making up for your difference (Gambone, 1999). From his interview with writer Andrew Holleran, Gambone offers:

> Why do gay people feel they must be the best little boy in the world? Is it because they're compensating for a kind of guilt that they already have in them about something they already know to be wrong or feel to be wrong? It can't just be coincidental. There is something going on there. I was tremendously interested in pleasing my family. Anybody is, I think, of a certain kind of upbringing. And homosexuality was, of course, such a violation of that picture that it was a great pressure in itself to deny it or to compensate for it in some way. (p. 181)

But all the approval-seeking behavior can take its toll. At what cost is all this spent energy to be acceptable to others? At what point is one's identity so foreclosed that unearthing it at a later period in life will be difficult, if possible at all? Into my 40s now, I still have to stop and ask myself if something I am doing is authentic for me, or is it done *merely* to please someone else or make someone else more comfortable regarding my sexual orientation as a gay man. I emphasize the word *merely* to show that doing the thing was only for the other person, and often in opposition to what I know to be true for me. This is not a sense of selfishness, per se, but really self-less-ness, because sometimes I feel I lose myself when I act only for others. Handing over the power of our existence to others has long-lasting effects. Leavitt (2000), in his novel *Martin Bauman; or, A Sure Thing*, about a young writer who leaves college and

begins working in the city, has the main character describe his feelings upon realizing how much power over his own sense of identity and existence he gave to others:

> Today I cannot help but deplore my habit, from very early on, of endowing teachers and institutions with the capacity to validate not only my intelligence, but my right to exist. Why, I ask myself now, did I crave so urgently these tokens of approval? In part, I suspect, because I wanted, by means of them, to distract attention from what I perceived to be the single great blemish on my curriculum vitae – my homosexuality. This was especially true where my parents were concerned. By preceding the inevitable revelation with a catalogue of my successes, I hoped that I might elude their inevitable disapproval and grief. Thus even before I had admitted my homosexuality to myself, I was already gathering my trophies together, building a sort of arsenal against future encroachments. (p. 36)

There is a sense of loneliness that accompanies being outside the norm. How, then, do gay men figure out who they are in relation to the norm? Finding other gay men and comparing experiences is one way to name the difference. But how can gay youth identify others who may be feeling different? "In the real world of gay childhood and adolescence, only chemical scents and telling gestures identify each to the other" (Quinn, 2000, p. 73). Gesture is a powerful communication device. Levin (1985) describes gesture as movement that communicates meaning. Gay men are very aware of gestures and their powerful communicative properties. Gay men learn early on that gestures may have us "named" externally even before we have come to the truth ourselves. Being labeled as "queer," "fag," "gay," and the like is common for young men who use gestures that are considered effeminate by our societal standards. The stereotype of the limp wrist is a powerful reminder of how much may be communicated through a simple gesture. I wonder how many gay men still remember with sick horror

a school yard bully calling attention to someone and then making the "limp wrist" gesture – telling all within viewing distance that a labeling is taking place.

Do gay men use gestures purposefully to communicate their identity to other gay men? I am curious if my participants in this study will describe the ways they knew others were gay, or how they communicated their identity to others. The term "gaydar" is used frequently to describe the "sixth sense" gay men supposedly have to be able to identify each other. I think that it is something much less magical, and may be more related to gesture and careful observation. My participants may be able to enlighten me and give the language to describe that particular phenomenon within the phenomenon of being gay.

Making connections with others who feel different, and especially those who feel different because of their sexual orientation, is important for developing a healthy sense of identity – to not feel "I'm the only one." As time and social climates change, it has become easier for gay youth to not only recognize and find each other, but to simply be who they are without giving in to the societal messages of negativity. I admire the youth who are able to do this as it takes a lot of strength. "Stepping off the path of the norm, in order to pursue the wisdom of one's own inner voice – the beat of a different drum, if you will – requires great acts of courage, original thought, and vision" (Pimental-Habib, 1999, p. 221). Because of these greats acts of courage by more and more youth, I have faith that the horizon will keep getting brighter for the gay youth of tomorrow and leading youth toward growth and acceptance. The idea of horizon is

particularly apt here as "a horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further" (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 245).

> An unprecedented number of young people are acknowledging their homosexuality and publicly accepting it as natural, without any of the judgments that society often places upon it. Yet, they live in a world biased toward heterosexuality and one which is fraught with myths, ignorance, and misinformation about "the sex that dare not speak its name," as Oscar Wilde called *homosexuality*. That they reach any level of self-acceptance is no small achievement. (Pimental-Habib, 1999, p. 25)

Ultimately, the payoff of this courage is great. In the gay coming-of-age novel, *Keeper of Secrets*, Roeder (2002) uses a journal entry, secretly written over 100 years before the present time in the story, to describe a young man's experience once he has been able to give expression to his being gay by developing a relationship with another young man:

> I cannot believe the events of this day. They seem as far beyond my understanding as the stars. I feel as if my head were opened and libraries of knowledge poured into it, and yet I still know not what to think. (p. 202)

Sometimes the wonderful burgeoning knowledge regarding who one really is can leave many questions. Where can one go to think about this? What spaces are available? One place to think, dis-cover aspects of the self, and contemplate how the new knowledge will affect being-in-the-world is another aspect of the phenomenon of being gay.

The Closet

> Secrets upon secrets. Thus by inexorable degrees does the love that dares not speak its name build walls instead, till a house is nothing but closets. (Monette, 1992, p. 54)

> One way of looking at all this "coming out" stuff is . . . *uncomfortably*. After all, most of us grew up knowing homosexuality was simply too shameful to

> discuss. Murder and mayhem can be regularly televised, but two men or two women holding hands? Decency has its limits. (Tobias, 1998, p. 213)
>
> Since we are surrounded by people we cannot always trust, we would be foolish to be perfectly open about every big or little thing. (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 57)

What a powerful metaphor: the closet. My own experience of the closet was confusing, oppressive, and even claustrophobic. I remember after reading aloud a passage from a phenomenological description of my experience of existing in the closet as a way of being a gay man, a classmate challenged me by saying how much she cherished her walk-in closet – a place where she kept many of her treasured things. My first reaction was shocked anger at her ignorance. But then, how could I expect her to understand my experience fully? Although I still think she leapt to an easy response to my reading, at the time I simply responded that it would be impossible for her to really grasp my experience as she could choose to simply walk in and out of her closet at will without thinking of the repercussions, and that, frankly, no matter how precious and dearly they were held, gay men did not want to be things! However, in fairness, the experience of the closet is not always negative. It may be a safe haven if one feels threatened or feels overwhelmed by the understanding that one is different. Sometimes the closet may be necessary for protection (Cain, 1991). As I reflect on that classroom experience, I am left with two distinct thoughts: (a) how fortunate I am to be in an environment where, for the most part, I can be completely "out" of the closet, and (b) how painful the remnants of being in the closet can be and how quickly that pain can resurface.

The closet's etymological journey to the present day offers some insight into how it feels for a gay man to be in the closet. Closet is a noun that comes from the Old French diminutive of *clos* meaning "enclosure" (Klein, 1966, p. 302). Klein directs us to *close* as it is the English equivalent of the Old French *clos* and to *enclosure* and *enclose* as they appear in the etymological chain of meaning of closet. *Enclosure* comes from the transitive verb from the Old French *enclore* meaning to enclose, which comes from the Vulgar Latin *inclaudere* and was refashioned after *claudere* meaning to shut, to close, which in turn comes originally from the Latin *includere* meaning "to shut in, enclose" (Klein, 1966, p. 519). At the end of this etymological tracing, Klein directs us to *include* as a derivative of the Latin *includere*, a transitive verb meaning "to shut in, shut up, enclose, insert" (p. 519). Following this etymological journey proved fascinating as I began to see words like "inclusive" quite differently. The original meaning of the word include meant to shut in, to enclose. Is that what I want to be when I am being inclusive?

Harper (2001) offers another etymological perspective on the word *closet* in his *Online Etymological Dictionary*. He states that the word entered the English language circa 1340, coming from the Old French *closet* meaning "small enclosure." Harper, being more contemporary than Klein (1966), has a different view of the word and shares some of the common (and current) uses of the word.

> The adjective meaning "secret, unknown" recorded from 1952, first of alcoholism, but by 1970s used principally of homosexuality; the phrase *come out of the closet* "admit something openly" first recorded 1963, and led to new meanings for the word *out*. The verb form of *out* comes from the Old English *utian*, meaning, "expel" and has been used in various senses. Meaning "to

> expose as a closet homosexual" is first recorded 1990; as an adjective meaning "openly avowing one's homosexuality" it dates from 1970s. (Harper, 2001)

The modern sense of the word *closet* has come to mean more generally "a state or condition of secrecy, privacy, or obscurity" (Merriam-Webster, 2005)). I have heard people referring to themselves as "closet neat freaks" and such. Has the appropriation of the term "closet" as a descriptor of any characteristic or perceived flaw that one wishes to keep hidden covered over the painful and possibly shameful experience of the closet as it refers to a hiding place for gay men? Does this appropriation somehow normalize the term so when applied to the experience of gay men it will not mean that which it originally meant? In a sense, the word *closet* takes on a "taken-for-grantedness" where the meaning is covered over.

Being In

What does being in the closet feel like? For many, it is a safe place where they are in control of their identity. For others, it is a confining place where essencorship occurs. Very few of the texts I worked with describe in any great detail what the experience of being in the closet is like. Certainly, adjectives were offered, but not much in terms of the lived experience, what it felt like. Eric, one of the youth who is given a voice in Brimner's (1995) text of stories of young gay and lesbian lives, offers this reflection on the conflicted feelings he experienced being in the closet:

> However, I can remember back to the time when my place in the closet was the only safety I felt. I appreciate the path I traveled along before I turned the knob on the closet door. As I look into the hiding spots that kept me safe, I realize that safety and happiness are not equal. (p. 40)

Brimner says that the youth with whom he spoke were almost always somewhat conflicted about the closet – they remembered the feelings of safety while in the closet, but also the strong pull of freedom that coming out of the closet could offer. But these gay and lesbian youth knew well that coming out was taking a chance. Brimner (1995) sums this up as:

> Generations of lesbians and gays knew that rejection was the probable reaction that heterosexuals would have, should private lives become public. "The closet" became a safe place to store the gay aspect of one's identity. But harboring secrets is injurious to one's emotional well-being and allows false stereotypes to persist. (p. 43)

Paul Monette (1992), an outspoken writer who wrote about his struggles with coming to terms with being gay and then the challenges of sharing his true self with others, referred to being in the closet like being in a psychological prison – "No window in my cell and no chance of release till I faced the truth that I was a queer" (p. 174). He thought that life once out of the closet would be "all windows," and in fact being out was better for him, but the baggage of so many years in the closet proved difficult to unpack, sort through, and toss out that which was toxic to his new and true self. For him, the closet would always have a lasting mark on his identity. Monette goes on to describe how important it was for him to have his family accept and support him, but that it was not easy to be open with them at first, not wanting to risk loss of the support from them he had enjoyed thus far in his life. It is not surprising that it took him a long time to tell his family. Pimental-Habib (1999) offers this perspective on family: "Unless a gay person is born into a family that gives the message, 'you're gay! Good

for you!' then he or she learns exactly which voice to heed, the inner or the outer. No wonder it can be so difficult to come out of that damn closet!" (p. 23).

Not surprisingly, some actively seek the closet to feel safe, especially when attempting new endeavors or environments. Levin (1985) discusses how disclosive gesture can be – how much information we give away through our physical presence, our embodiment of experience. One college student talks about the fear that he might disclose his true identity through "gesture," a fear he brought upon himself by choosing one of the most difficult, yet if successful, effective closets: a fraternity. Scherer (2000) remembers his experience of pledging a fraternity:

> Here I was kneeling in line with nine other naked, young, and virile pledges, and I was trying hard (excuse the pun) not to get physically excited. With the stench of raw egg everywhere and with people yelling at us, there was little time to process everything intellectually and emotionally. That was the spring semester of my freshman year of college, when I was just beginning to understand what being gay was about.... Ironically I'd decided to join the most popular fraternity house at Brandeis as a way to hide in the closet. I'd thought that if I were in a fraternity no one would ever suspect I was gay. (p. 257)

So, what does it take to come out of the closet? When the need to base everything on the safety of the closet and one's definition of life becomes so narrow, then a need to leave the closet may occur. One college student who contributed an essay to an anthology of gay college student writings (Graber, 2000), remembers what it was like to be in the closet and saw how it was inhibiting others he knew to develop friendships and their own talents:

> People in the closet seem to define their whole lives on the basis of their sexuality. Everything they cherish is held in a delicate balance against the terror of others finding out they're gay. They could be brilliant, athletic, talented, etc., but they think it will all come crashing down if someone finds out. (p. 217)

It is often the anxiety and pain of living in the closet that pushes us from the closet, no matter how tentatively at first. "Living a lie, to an otherwise mentally healthy person, goes against one's innate impulse," Pimental-Habib (1999, p. 136) tells us, and goes on to explain one of the major driving forces for leaving the closet: "The natural propensity for the part of the human psyche that we call the conscience is to encourage us to exist in a way that is congruent, genuine to what we know to be truthful. In sum, to live honestly" (pp. 136-137). At what cost do gay men live honestly? "Although the developmental implications of coming out are significant, the process must also be understood in terms of its negative consequences" (Rhoads, 1995, p. 72).

Coming/Being Out

> Being fully present to who we are, accepting and not judging, really knowing about ourselves and being true to that knowledge, can seem to gay men and lesbians a frightening luxury. In a society where the norm is based on numbers, being a minority – particularly a minority that is endowed with a strong historical prejudice – can be a harsh slice of reality, a reason to feel like running from the truth as opposed to embracing it. Being "in the closet" means hiding this truth in the darkness; "coming out" of the closet means revealing the truth to light. (Pimental-Habib, 1999, p. 20)

Akers (1999), in reflecting on his experience of being in the closet, remembers:

> I still had to come out of the closet, so let me tell you what I do know about. I know that coming out is one of the scariest things that a young person can go through in their [*sic*] entire life. When you get to tell someone you're gay – that feeling of dread in the bottom of your stomach can't even begin to be described. I guess it's like when you've eaten something that doesn't agree with you, and you're pretty sure you're gonna puke – you don't want to, you're not looking forward to it, but you know that it's probably gonna happen. That sense of dread is almost like that. You're always afraid that the person you're telling is going to freak out and disown you as a friend, family member, or whatever. (¶ 5)

The physical response described by Akers brings me back to my own experiences of coming out to people. After the gut-wrenching decision to come out to someone, the gut wrenching continues! One of my closest friends and colleagues at my first job after my master's degree program was the health educator and was responsible for the gay and lesbian programs and support activities on campus. She had always spoken knowledgeably about gay and lesbian issues, and I had every reason to trust her. But she was one of the last people in my immediate circle of family and friends I told. Why? It was because (or so I believe upon reflection) the thought of losing her friendship and support was incredibly difficult to face. What if she could espouse open-minded values, but not actually live those values? I had seen students with parents who were self-described "liberals" and who, to the public at least, made a show of being open-minded. Then one of their children would come out to them and the topic about which they had been open minded in the past came too close to home and their perspective changed. I witnessed the pain experienced by these students. Could I risk that with my friend and colleague? It was my trust in her that ultimately allowed me to come out to her, but the experience was nauseating all the same. When I told her how difficult it had been, she looked at me in a motherly way and shook her head – knowing that I was acting on instinct more than knowledge of how she would react. She thanked me for trusting her enough to tell her the truth, and that she was glad I was finally able to come to grips with my identity. She was incredibly supportive when I made the decision to be completely open about my sexual orientation on campus. However, at times, she was unable to grasp my perspective on issues that I felt were affected by my

gay identity status. It was then that I realized that one may only get so close to understanding the perspective of another.

Another college administrator (Burns, 1998) at a different institution, who titles an article he wrote about his experiences with the gay and lesbian student organization at his university "Why don't gays keep quiet? Learning from our students," offers what he came to understand as his own prejudices regarding sexual orientation:

> In spite of my "liberal" views, I still found myself annoyed by those people who made so much ado about their "sexual orientation." Why did they have to tell me they were lesbian or gay, as if in prelude to anything else? I don't tell everyone about my sexuality so why do some gays and lesbians make such a big deal about theirs? I wondered why we had to have all these gay dances, gay pride weeks, "wear blue jeans if you are gay" days. I guess I would have preferred silence. (Burns, ¶ 3)

His experiences helped him get in touch with his own assumptions about sexual orientation and how he defined heterosexuality as the norm and what damage seeing the world in that manner could do to the open environment he hoped to create for his students:

> I also came to see that my notion of sexuality as a private matter is essentially a conceit. To be sure, the specific details of my sexual life are private, but the broad outlines of heterosexuality are not. Heterosexuality screams at us in this culture: in the way we talk, the jokes we tell, the expectations we have, the assumptions we make. Heterosexuality becomes invisible to those who stay within its traces. (Burns, ¶ 6)

After he came to accept his role in why some gay students did indeed keep quiet and why others felt so vehemently about speaking out, Burns realizes:

> What I learned from the RULGA students is that, for some, breaking silence about one's gayness is akin to talking out loud when you are in a dark place. There are good reasons to do so: you hear a voice that reassures you and helps you feel a little less afraid. In a hostile situation, however, talking aloud in a

> dark place means you could be discovered; breaking the silence is a risk. Breaking silence is a choice I have come to respect much more. (¶ 8)

Imagine how different the campus environment would be if all (or even many) administrators could come to understand the experience of gay men the way that Burns has? For the students who worked with Mr. Burns, they had won a victory; bringing a non-gay person to a place of understanding. But what about the next administrator? Faculty member? Roommate?

"Coming out refers not to a single moment or event but rather an ongoing revelation and performance of self that comes into play each time someone new, or perhaps familiar, (re)enters a queer person's life" (Gray, 1999, p. 21). Every time I took a new job or moved to a new location, I had to consider whether or not to come out to my colleagues and neighbors. When would be a good time? Why should I do it in the first place? When you are not part of an assumed norm, you must consider this. What will they think when they find out the truth? At a former job, several of the women I worked with kept trying to set me up on dates with the daughters of their friends, thinking that I would be "appropriate" for these young women. After finding excuses why I was too busy or unavailable (and after one rather bizarre and chilly date), I finally had to make it known that I was not available for dating…women. There were some uncomfortable silences in our office for a few weeks, but once the initial surprise wore off, everyone settled back into our routine and simply did our work. Some of the more open of our staff then started mentioning a cousin they had they were "sure" was gay,

and would I like to meet him? Although this was not particularly welcome attention, it did demonstrate that people could learn and come to accept difference.

After nearly twelve years with my partner, one might think that coming out would be rather uncomplicated. But, every time there is an extended family event, he and I are faced with the question: how much do we tell and to whom? Some, we believe, know the truth of our relationship, but prefer not to talk about it. Others really seem to want to know and want us to verbalize what they've been wondering about. And others clearly couldn't care less – as long as we are happy and are fully participating in family life. But it does get tiring – the wondering whether or not a "scene" will be created. The anticipatory anxiety is draining. In a work of fiction, Zimmerman (1997) summarizes this feeling:

> He was sick of this. Sick of being gay. Sick of having his life defined by a sexual act, when to him being gay meant every bit as much who he wanted to have breakfast with in the morning. It was just too big, all of this crap. So many issues, one after the other. He was so exhausted by the process of coming out, which seemed to go on and on, over and over, every day of his life. He'd thought coming out would be just one enormous moment when you crossed some line, something that you did and took care of once and for all. But no, instead, coming out kept happening in little but significant ways every day of his life. (p. 195)

Sticks and Stones: The Power of Name-Calling

> *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.* This oversimplified statement, which is used to train children to avoid acting violently, is one of the biggest lies taught in elementary schools. True enough, words cannot harm one physically; however, they can harm one emotionally and even change the course of one's life. The words that are used by those in authority during this period of one's life sometimes determine a person's future. Those important words that are not said may blind us to our past or deny us a bright future. Thus, in a real sense, words can destroy us. They can destroy one's self-concept. They can take away our self-confidence and feelings of self-

> worth. Unfortunately, they can harm us in ways much deeper than broken bones; they can destroy our dreams. (Diamond, 1991, p. 183)

What Do They Call Me?

I am at a very different place now with my reactions to what words people use to describe me in terms of my sexual orientation. I understand that some words may be used without thinking. There are, however, several words that are difficult for me to understand how someone could use them without knowing how damaging the words could be: queer and faggot. "Strange, peculiar, eccentric" is what queer means coming from Scottish, and perhaps from Low German (Brunswick dialect) *queer* meaning "oblique," "off-center," related to the German *quer* "oblique, perverse, odd," from Old High German *twerh* "oblique," from the Proto-Indo-European base *twerk-* "to turn, twist, wind" (Harper, 2001). Am I strange? Peculiar? Eccentric? Oblique? Perverse? Odd? Twisted? Regardless of the degree to which I, or any gay man, may be considered any of these adjectives, the meaning behind the word queer is not positive. Harper (2001), in his *Online Etymology Dictionary*, notes that the sense of homosexual for the adjective use of *queer* is first recorded in 1922; the noun to denote a homosexual person was first noted in 1935.

What about faggot? Again, I turn to Harper (2001) for guidance. He actually has a separate category at his entry for *faggot* given the rich history of the word and its relation to homosexuality. His first entry refers to the word as a bundle of sticks, which is its original history, but in his second entry, he notes how the word has possibly come

to mean a homosexual man, and also clears up a myth regarding the word, a myth quite popular with some gay historians:

> Faggot: “male homosexual," 1914, Amer.Eng. slang (shortened form *fag* is from 1921), probably from earlier contemptuous term for "woman" (1591), especially an old and unpleasant one, in reference to *faggot (1)* "bundle of sticks," as something awkward that has to be carried (cf. *baggage*). It was used in this sense in 20c. by D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, among others. It may also be reinforced by Yiddish *faygele* "homosexual," lit. "little bird." It also may have roots in Brit. public school slang *fag* "a junior who does certain duties for a senior" (1785), with suggestions of "catamite," from *fag* (v.). This was also used as a verb.
>
> Other obsolete senses of *faggot* were "man hired into military service simply to fill out the ranks at muster" (1700) and "vote manufactured for party purposes" (1817). The oft-heard statement that male homosexuals were called *faggots* in reference to their being burned at the stake is an etymological urban legend. Burning was sometimes a punishment meted out to homosexuals in Christian Europe (on the suggestion of the Biblical fate of Sodom and Gomorah), but in England, where parliament had made homosexuality a capital offense in 1533, hanging was the method prescribed. Any use of *faggot* in connection with public executions had long become an English historical obscurity by the time the word began to be used for "male homosexual" in 20th century American slang, whereas the contemptuous slang word for "woman" (and the other possible sources or influences listed here) was in active use. (Harper)

Regardless, the words are meant to hurt. But always? What about the idea of reappropriation of terms? It still bothers me to hear gay men use the terms *queer* and *faggot* when referring to each other. Even though they may believe that they are reappropriating the terms, does it not give tacit permission for others to use the words? Is the average person able to understand the shades of difference that occur depending upon the sexual orientation of the user? It may be that I simply do not agree with the concept of reappropriation of terms in general: it still bothers me to hear young Black men call each other *nigger*. But the word queer is a popular term for some gay men and

is embraced as an empowering descriptor, as Rhoads (1995) discovered in his study of college men and their experiences of coming out:

> For these students, queer means making a political commitment to changing society and improving the social condition for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Used in this manner, *queer* implies the sense of pride and power they share. As one student noted, "Queer is an in-your-face kind of gay." (p. 70)

For some, however, the term *queer* is not embraced. For example, Kirchick (2006) rejects the term *queer* as a political buzz word and finds the term confining. "Those who popularize the word queer – that is, gay leftists and some gay academics – will not let gay people escape from their queer clutches" (Kirchick, ¶ 7).

Queer, for many, represents an open-ness to difference and serves as a challenge to the heteronormative structure of sexual identity (Jagose, 1996). This openness is "a radical deconstruction of all conventional categories of sexuality and gender" (K. Plummer, 2005, p. 359). The development of queer theory occurred in the mid- to late 1980s "largely as a humanities/multicultural-based response to a more limited 'lesbian and gay studies'" (K. Plummer, p. 365). The concept of queer theory has many interpretations (K. Plummer) which may make it attractive to those who believe that sexual identity is a fluid, rather than static, concept. The sense of openness as represented by queer theory is compelling for me; it allows for understanding a phenomenon as it is, as the phenomenon presents itself. Queer theory eschews categories and "the deviance paradigm is fully abandoned" and "all normalizing strategies are shunned" (K. Plummer, p. 366).

However, queer theory, while opening up the linguistic (i.e., categorization) landscape of sexual identity, also may be problematic. The name, for one, may be repugnant to some. Plummer (2005) comments that some “older” and more traditional gay and lesbian scholars are offended by the term *queer* and have thus been put off exploring queer theory. How will someone learn of the openness and identity possibilities presented by queer theory if the very name offends? In the academy, this area of study has not changed much thinking:

> It would not be too unfair to say that outside the world of queer theorists – the world of “straight academia” – queer theory has been more or less ignored and has had minimal impact....More than this, many gays, lesbians, and feminists themselves see no advance at all in a queer theory that, after all, would simply “deconstruct” them, along with all their political gains, out of existence. (Plummer, p. 369)

It is difficult for me to imagine accepting the use of the words *queer* and *faggot* as epithets; it is even more disturbing to me to see the growing casual use of the word *gay* to mean something odd, bad, or even simply different (but with a negative connotation). Again, Harper’s (2001) online etymological dictionary offers insight into the word and its roots and eventual uses:

> Gay: 1178, "full of joy or mirth," from O.Fr. *gai* "gay, merry," perhaps from Frank. **gahi* (cf. O.H.G. *wahi* "pretty"). Meaning "brilliant, showy" is from c.1300. OED gives 1951 as earliest date for slang meaning "homosexual" (adj.), but this is certainly too late; *gey cat* "homosexual boy" is attested in N. Erskine's 1933 dictionary of "Underworld & Prison Slang;"...The "Dictionary of American Slang" reports that *gay* (adj.) was used by homosexuals, among themselves, in this sense since at least 1920. The word *gay* in the 1890s had an overall tinge of promiscuity – a *gay house* was a brothel. The suggestion of immorality in the word can be traced back to 1637. *Gay* as a noun meaning "a (usually male) homosexual" is attested from 1971.

I had heard that this derogatory use of the word *gay* was practically ubiquitous with teenagers, so I asked my niece who had recently graduated from high school. She admitted, though with some embarrassment because she is aware of my sexual orientation, that the word often is heard in the school hallways. I have struggled with my own feelings about this use of the term, as I have been assured that there is no venom behind the use. However it still bothers me. Caldwell (2003) describes the experience of being in the locker room of a condo association while on a ski vacation and overhearing the conversation of some young men and their use of the word *gay* in just this sense. In the lengthy quotation that follows, Caldwell (2003) describes the experience and his internal processing of what this form of use of the word *gay* meant to him:

> But unlike in the locker room at my high school those many years ago, there was no use of the word "faggot." There was only the phrase "That's so gay," uttered by boys in much the same way one might use the words "That's so gross" or "That's so stupid" or "ugly" or "scary." (¶ 2)
>
> One preteen named Jason, while struggling to slip out of his baggy swim trunks underneath a white towel securely fastened around his waist, literally yelled every word of a decidedly juvenile conversation he was having with a friend across the cedar-lined room. "Obnoxious" might have been the chosen adjective for this boy's behavior by the mature men around him, but for any gay man such as myself, "menacing" was a lot more fitting. (¶ 3)
>
> "That's so gay," Jason said for the second time, lackadaisically tossing his towel toward an open hamper, missing his mark and adding to a pile building up on the slippery tile floor. He used the phrase in a trite manner describing something he saw another boy doing in the school yard the week before – and it was clear to me he probably wouldn't understand why a gay man standing next to him in a public shower might find the phrase offensive or hurtful. (¶ 4)
>
> Personally, I have watched it spread from elementary school children into more widespread use, including by adults. In an age when youths and

> young adults are leading the charge toward the acceptance of openly gay people, they appear to be perpetuating some antigay attitudes, further demonizing "gay" by using it as a negative marker for anything different. Undoubtedly, students who are openly gay – or perceived to be such – are still subject to targeted assaults based solely on sexual orientation. But it is the ambiguous nature of the phrase "That's so gay" even when used lightly, that threatens the tenuous acceptance of gayness as a social norm. Like the words "Negro" or "colored," which once may have appeared progressive in a highly bigoted society, it has a stigmatizing effect. (¶ 7)

What Do I Call Myself?

Although the word *gay* has had a colorful history, for me it hearkens back to the original meaning – my sexual orientation certainly fills me with joy and mirth. What words do today's youth use to describe themselves? Are they conscious of the power of the terms they choose, or is the choice not important to them? In this research project, I open up the space during the conversations to allow my participants to share the words they use to describe themselves. Is the choice of terms generational?

Mann (2005), in a recent novel, describes a scene where the main character comes back to his hometown after being away for a long time and encounters a young gay man and asks this young man about coming out to his parents: "When did you tell them you were gay?" (p. 107). The youth responds, "I don't use terms like gay. Gay is so your generation. I'm queer. Or, actually, *nonheterosexual*" (p. 107). Even though that was a fictional account of how one young gay man describes himself, Spillane (2005) offers some insight into how young gay people describe themselves in an article in *The Advocate.* He says that the current youth generation are not interested in the specific sexual orientation labels that have been used in the past. These teens do not want to be defined by the label; rather, they want to be who they are and use the "who

happens to be attracted to…" concept rather than having the label as a key defining factor. Spillane shares the comments of Alex Mann, a 17-year-old from Lynchburg, Virginia, who talks about terms as being only part of the issue. The larger issue is the meaning that is attached to the terms: "I don't mind the term *gay*, but I don't like the stereotypes that come along with the word….Typical stereotypes of a gay man don't define every one, and one should look at the bigger picture" (p. 34).

Concern about the meanings attached to terms is not isolated to youth. King (Winfrey, 2004) is credited with bringing the term "down low" out of the closet, so to speak. He wrote a book about his sexual relationships with men and went on the Oprah show to discuss his thesis: having sex with men does not mean you are gay. For King, the idea of being on the "down low" is making the distinction between physical gratification and orientation: "If I was a gay man, I may want to be in a relationship with another man and play house. But when you're on the 'down low' all you want to do is have sex" (Winfrey, Sex, Lies and Double Lives section, ¶ 4). This is not the first time such a distinction has been drawn. As mentioned toward the end of Chapter I, Gore Vidal (1999) has made this distinction for years. Vidal has been quite vocal about not being gay – he simply engages in sex with other men. Gay activists have expressed frustration with Vidal's stance – wanting to claim him as "one of our own" but with his resisting at every turn and refusing to be categorized sexually. He maintains that sex is an act and is not related to an identity (Vidal). In response to an interviewer's statement: "You've said that you didn't think that anyone was a homosexual," Vidal responds:

> I've always said it was just an adjective. It's not a noun, though it's always used as a noun. Put it the other way. What is a heterosexual person? I've never met one. When you say Lyndon Johnson and Adlai Stevenson behaved like two typical heterosexuals over the weekend, in their response, well, I don't know what they had in common. To me, it's just descriptive of an act. (p. 195)

In the same interview, the interviewer again addresses the importance of language and the words we use to describe ourselves, and again Vidal responds that the words are more confining than useful: "…I have never allowed myself to be pigeonholed like that. Also I don't regard myself as one thing over another. The point is, why not discard all the words? Say that all sexual acts have parity" (p. 196). To me, Vidal's denial of label is not a point of frustration, but a way to add texture to the phenomenon of being gay. It seems that many cannot grasp the complexity of the Vidal distinction; he has always refused to pander to the lowest intellectual common denominator by accepting a label that simply did not make sense to him, nor was an accurate description of his lived experience. What his distinction does is to help point out that *being gay* and *engaging in male, same-sex sexual activity* are indeed two different phenomena.

I remember being pleased when ACPA expanded its non-discrimination statement to include sexual orientation as a protected category. But I was even more pleased when the category was refined by adding "affectional" to the category, thus becoming "sexual/affectional orientation," thereby removing sole focus on the sexual and reminding us that categories must be carefully descriptive if they are to be of any use at all. Words we use to name ourselves and our lives are very important. They allow us to be in control of our lives and our well being. While watching the incredibly powerful play *Take Me Out* by Greenburg (2003) about a gay baseball player who

decides to come out to his team mates and the public, one bit of dialogue particularly grabbed my attention:

> **Kippy**: I'm just so happy for you, Darren.
> **Darren**: Why?
> **Kippy**: Because now *you're* gonna be happy.
> **Darren**: I've always *been* happy.
> **Kippy**: But now you'll be *completely* happy. You've *named* yourself, Darren – you've put yourself into *words* – which means you're free in a way you've never been before. (p. 12)

Regardless of whether or not one accepts Vidal's (1999) distinction, I believe what really matters is the choice of words one uses to describe one's life in its various domains, having the power to be able to call oneself into authentic being. I hear a voice that calls a gay man into being...being simply "who I am."

The following lyrics come from the Broadway musical *La Cage Aux Folles*:

I am what I am
I am my own special creation
So, come take a look,
give me the hook or the ovation.

It's my world that I want to have
a little pride in;
My world, and it's not a place
I have to hide in.

I am what I am
I don't want praise, I don't want pity.
I bang my own drum
Some think it's noise, I think it's pretty.

Your life is a sham
'til you can shout out loud
"I am what I am."

I am what I am
and what I am needs no excuses

I deal my own deck
sometimes the ace, sometimes the deuces.

It's one life
and there's no return and no deposit;
one life
so it's time to open up your closet.

Life's not worth a damn
'til you can say
"Hey world, I am what I am."
(as cited in McNaught, 1988, pp. 36-39)

La Cage Aux Folles is a show about drag queens coming to terms with the world and their lives. They are strong on the outside, but vulnerable on the inside – another dichotomy like "inness" versus "outness." But before moving too far into this connection to the phenomenon of coming out, let's spend a moment with the title of this musical. The English translation of this title (a French idiom) is "birds of a feather." I suppose that fits the meaning of the film, but what does the French mean? Literally, a cage of crazies (in French, *folle* is the feminine of *fou*, translated as crazy, as in to be or go mad, *Oxford Hachette French dictionary*, 2001, p. 379), and not just crazies, but the feminine form of crazies. The Broadway show is about drag queens, so does the feminine form make sense? Does it make sense because of the performance content, or does it reveal something about the worldview of homosexuality?

The drag queens in *La Cage Aux Folles* spent countless hours in front of mirrors making sure their "masks" of makeup were flawless (though sometimes purposefully hideous). How carefully do gay men in college attend to their masks? Or do they feel the need to wear masks? Have things changed in our world since the conception of *La*

Cage Aux Folles so that masks are not necessary? Or do gay college men have multiple masks, ones that are quickly changeable depending on the situation? Mirrors play a role in gay life. One of my observations of going to gay clubs when I was first coming out was that there were mirrors everywhere. To me this was vanity gone awry. I used to laugh about it, but now think about it differently. What do the mirrors symbolize? Are they a way to safeguard that gay men's masks are still in place? Why would gay men feel the need to wear a mask in a gay establishment? Is one really ever able to fully remove one's masks? What does one see when one looks in the mirror?

Double Life: Masks, Mirrors, and Hiding

> By not telling anyone, I was building and maintaining a wall, creating a safe way to be two people at once. (Scherer, 2000, p. 257)
>
> Being gay doesn't mean you lack self-control. On the contrary, gays and lesbians have had to suppress their natural desires far more often than heterosexuals. Restraint comes with the territory, and anyone who thinks otherwise is just plain ignorant. (Bean, 2003, p. 218)
>
> If I knew I was a penis-toucher as opposed to a gang-banger, I also knew I had to keep quiet about it. How do kids know this? Few parents actually say: "here's what being gay is. Now, *don't do it*." Instead, there is a subliminal cultural law out there that told me to keep quiet about penises until I found someone who looked like he was keeping quiet too. (Rettenmund, 1995, p. 131)

Feeling like an Imposter

Living a double life is energy draining. Feeling like an imposter is stressful. Altrows (2004) completed a phenomenological inquiry into the topic of *Feeling Like an Imposter* and worked through the differences between actually being an imposter (such as misrepresenting yourself and your qualifications), and feeling like an imposter. Feeling like an imposter is just as draining and fear-filled as actually being an imposter:

> Just like a real imposter, when we feel like an imposter we attempt to hide the truth that we are not who we present ourselves to be. We carefully manage our public image and avoid situations in which we might be caught off guard, without our masks...We do not invite others to our home, for fear that something in our home might "give us away." Or if we do decide to let others into our home, we stash all our make-up, self-help books, and dirty dishes out of sight. (Altrows, Fear of Being Found Out section, ¶ 4)

Do gay men feel like imposters in the straight world? What must we hide? There is an expression in the gay world that has both masculine and feminine forms: "de-dyking or de-fagging the apartment" – removing those items that give expression to our authentic lives as gay people: photographs of significant others, specialty publications for the gay reader, and so forth. In a study of gay college men, D'Augelli (1991) found "Many men made conscious efforts to disguise their being gay in situations in which their disclosure of gay identity was threatened" (p. 143). The fear of being labeled as gay was also found to be strong in the heterosexual male college student, and this fear caused a censoring of behavior (Davis, 2002). Or does it only feel like being an imposter if the closet door is kept firmly shut? What are the "qualifications" a gay man would need to not be or feel like an imposter?

> Feeling like an imposter seems to be an experience of uncertainty and insecurity about one's qualifications. It is as if we are trying to pass off as someone with qualities or traits that we do not possess. In some settings we may feel like we are trying to pass off as an insider while being an outsider to a special group of people who all have the qualifications and characteristics that we do not have. We feel separate and out of place, different from the "others." (Altrows, 2004, "Being" and "Feeling Like" an Imposter section, ¶ 8)

The experience of feeling different is part of the lived experience of being gay. But feeling different and feeling like an imposter are two different feelings. Feeling like an imposter occurs when we believe that our authentic selves must be covered over

and hidden, kept from view of the others, lest they discover just how we are different. When a gay man attempts to "pass" as heterosexual, then he sets himself up as an imposter, constructing, as Baldwin (1956) says of closeted gay men in his novel *Giovanni's Room*, "elaborate systems of evasion, of illusion, designed to make themselves and the world appear to be what they and the world are not" (p. 30). A word I want to focus on in Baldwin's statement is "elaborate" as it gives us some insight into the energy put into creating the various facades used to project a false image of oneself. When gay men build these elaborate systems, we are using energy that could be spent on more authentic aspects of our lives. Feeling like one needs to expend this extra energy can bring one to a breaking point. In describing the experience of hiding his gay identity from the fraternity he was pledging, Scherer (2000) shares what it was like to struggle with maintaining his elaborate systems:

> I cried because I realized how difficult it was to be gay where no one understood what that meant. *How can I continue this?* I thought. *Am I going to make it? Can I pretend any longer?* The answers were not cut and dried. I struggled with the hunger to belong and the desire to be free, with my emotions *and* who I was. (p. 261)

Given the stress this feeling like an imposter causes, why continue it? Like all human beings, gay men receive clues from our culture that there are appropriate ways to be and inappropriate ways. Is there a price to pay for not being or acting as expected? By censoring our behavior, are we able to save those close to us from disappointment, and ourselves from their possible anger? For gay men, this saving others from disappointment or anger often is experienced as dishonesty, though necessary:

> Dishonesty serves to protect us and those we love from every reaction to our fear of abandonment, from presumed disappointment to outright anger. Protective colorization is a means of survival no less for the queer kid than for the brown wren or common chameleon. Thus, the internal closet is born, and with it a whole context for dealing with the world. (Quinn, 2000, p. 18)

This struggle with being/feeling like an imposter really is born out of a sense of fear, and out of the need to protect us from perceived threat.

> Because it's a straight world and I've always had to be on guard. I've always had to do this doublethink crap. I've always had to monitor myself. How would you like to live like that? How would you like worrying all the time what people would do to you, how they would hurt you, if they knew the truth of who you were? I grew up with it. It was always in my head. I was always afraid. (Zimmerman, 1998, p. 112)

However negative this experience of living as an imposter is, and I do not want in anyway to minimize the attendant stresses, it is possible to come to accept the double life as a secret, a secret that we keep for ourselves and maybe a chosen few. Keeping secrets (at least some types) is exhilarating.

One of the main characters in Murphy's (1997) novel, *Getting Off Clean*, experienced the stresses involved with feeling like an imposter. However, he comes to see it differently, and admits that there can be a sense of control when you keep something to yourself.

> Now I'm carrying this secret on my person, already finding that it's a nerve-racking thing, it's like an explosive; you can't ever jar it or walk carelessly. But as it grows in discomfort, it becomes more exquisite, too, if that makes any sense at all. Because you can't share it with anyone, and precisely for that reason, maybe it's the only thing that's completely yours. (p. 61)

I share this last quotation to show that there are a variety of ways to perceive this experience of living two lives, of feeling like an imposter. Gay men, like others from

numeric-minority populations, have become good process-observers; we know how to keep track of our environment and the cues in that environment so we may protect ourselves as much as possible. The experience of feeling like an imposter also adds complexity to the identity questions that we all must ask, such as the fundamental question: Who am I? (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968). For a gay man, in addition to asking "who am I?" he must add, "who am I…with you?" since sexual orientation is not readily visible. This additional identity question sharpens our perception as to how others see us.

> When we feel like an imposter, we are acutely aware of how others may see us, although we are not really sure how they do. Our sense of self is split between the "I" who experiences the world through our own eyes and the "me" whom we see through the eyes of others. We experience a sense of nakedness or transparency in the eyes of a real or imaginary audience. As we squirm under the other's gaze, we fear being found out for who we "really" are behind our facade. We tend to live with a sense of dread and foreboding that it will be only a matter of time before we are found out. (Altrows, 2004, Fear of Being Found Out section, ¶ 2)

Living in the Tension: Fear of Dis-Covery

Fear of discovery causes me to wear masks. What exactly is a mask? What is its purpose? In etymologically exploring the word mask (Klein, 1966; Merriam-Webster, 2005), I find that it comes from the Middle French *masque* and Old Italian *maschera*. A mask is a cover (or partial cover) for the face used for disguise. The human face is one of the ways we human beings are able to read each other. If we wear masks, then what is the meaning we read? We can only know what people choose to tell us, through their faces, or through their texts. In looking through the various meanings of mask, the one that has the most relevance for me is "something that serves

to conceal or disguise" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Pursuing further etymological tracing led me to "pretense" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Pretense comes from Middle English, from Middle French *pretensse*, from (assumed) Medieval Latin *praetensa*, from Late Latin, feminine of *praetensus*, past participle of Latin *praetendere*. I note with interest in the etymology that pretense is linked to the feminine – my guess is that it has to do with the sexist society in which it was originally applied – I imagine the stigma attached to a "woman of pretenses."

In looking through the various definitions and meanings of pretense, I am drawn to "simulation" as in "saw through his *pretense* of indifference" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). This sentence example offered by the dictionary hits home with me. I was always wondering when someone would see through my pretense of being heterosexual. So I move on to looking up simulation. At simulation, I find a meaning of "a sham object" or "counterfeit." On to counterfeit. At counterfeit, I find that it came from Middle English *countrefet*, from Middle French *contrefait*, from past participle of *contrefaire* to imitate, from *contre* + *faire* to make, from Latin *facere*.

The word that strikes me from the various meanings in the definition of counterfeit is "feigned." I had a rough idea what the word meant, and it seemed to fall in line with my thinking on how the idea of masks and hiding connected to sexual identity for gay men. Looking up feign (Merriam-Webster, 2005) I find that it, too, came from Middle English, from Old French *feign*-, stem of *feindre*, from Latin *fingere* to shape, feign. The obsolete meaning of the word is disguise or conceal. However obsolete, these words make sense to me in my use of the word as it applies to gay men

and concealing their sexual identity. However, another of the words in the list (one in current usage) makes sense to me as well, and that is "pretend."

Pretend also comes from Middle English (Merriam-Webster, 2005), from Latin *praetendere* to allege as an excuse, literally, to stretch out, from *prae-* pre- + *tendere* to stretch. Was I "stretching the truth" when I would be silent about being interested in members of the opposite sex or when I said I was too busy with course work to be dating? A synonym for pretend offered by the dictionary is "assume," and my next journey is to the word assume.

At assume I find that it, like many other words in my chain, came from Middle English, from Latin *assumere*, from *ad-* + *sumere* to take (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Assume may mean to take up or to take on, such as an identity. An interesting note is listed with the synonyms. The first group of synonyms are grouped together to all mean "to put on a false or deceptive appearance." However, the note goes on to say that "assume" in this sense often implies a justifiable motive rather than an intent to deceive. I feel a sense of wholeness here. Yes, I had assumed (pretended) an identity, and had hoped that people would assume (to take as granted or true) that I was that identity. I like the use of "assume an identity" with its more positive connotation in terms of motivation for use rather than the words that lead me to assume, which in many ways are negative. I was living my truth in many layers, and my assumption of a heterosexual identity was for protection, both psychological and physical. But what does one see in the mirror once an identity has been "assumed"?

Maybe mirrors are a way to force us to encounter ourselves. While considering the idea of facing oneself (one - self?) in the mirror, I have a memory from childhood come back to me. What is the difference between a mirror and a window? Only shadow. When I was a child I remember finding a piece of broken mirror near our school. Being curious, I looked it over and was surprised to find that it was only a piece of glass that had gray paint sprayed on the back. I noticed this because there were a few scratches that let light through. Looking at it from the mirror side, I could barely discern the scratches. But peering through the scratches from the painted side, I could see through the glass...through the looking glass so to speak. This became even clearer to me one night when walking by the large window in our living room. There was only a small light on in the room and it was dark outside. I caught a sudden reflection of myself in the window and was startled. That which gave me a view of the world during the light of day allowed me to see myself because of the darkness on the other side.

As I think about it now, it would have been powerful to stand there and focus on myself and watch my image disappear as the sun came up...being lost in the light. I guess this is like my experience in the closet (a metaphor of darkness, but now I see it as powerful shadow). Like my new understanding of the mirror, I was able to glimpse myself because shadow transformed the window into a mirror, and being able to have this glimpse is critical. Shadow is often considered as darkness, but in the sense of allowing reflection to occur, it can be powerful in getting a glimpse of the self. In other words, sometimes one may have to encounter the darkness (of the closet, of anticipated negative response, of other fears) in order to see the true self. Van Manen and Levering

(1996) illuminate this criticality in their discussion of secrecy and the origin of identity: "The recognition of one's visibility is as consequential for the development of the self as the recognition of the possibility of invisibility. Inner invisibility, or secrecy, is ultimately only possible after the fact of visibility" (p. 97). So I must encounter the shadow fully before I am able to withdraw into its safety. The metaphor of shadow and darkness can be powerful. I want to stay with this image of the closet as a dark place, especially given my new understanding of the power of shadow.

Hiding: Truth and Lies

Hiding. Hiding what? The truth? One man in his coming out story (McClatchy, 1996) says, "Coming out is the opposite of hiding" (p. 201). Is hiding the truth the same as lying? Or in the case of hiding one's gayness, is it the keeping of a secret? Is there a difference between keeping a secret and lying? Does the difference exist in the intent or purpose of the action or inaction of withholding the truth? Do gay men feel like we're intentionally lying when we don't tell the truth about our gayness? Or is it not within our control, at least at first? McClatchy titles his coming out story *My Fountain Pen*, which is what first drew me to the story, which exists in a compendium of coming out stories by writers. I was drawn to the book because I felt that I would have something in common with them, since I've always enjoyed writing – especially as a means of self-discovery. In remembering his childhood and his first fountain pen, McClatchy sheds some light on this idea of lying and whether or not it is completely under our volitional control:

> Long before I was given that fountain pen, of course, I had learned to hide things. Childhood's true polymorphous perversity, its constant source of both pleasure and power, is lying. But that pen helped me to discover something better than the lie. Almost as soon as it was given to me, I learned to hide inside the pen. Or rather, the pen allowed me to learn the difference between *hiding* something and *disguising* something – that is to say, making it difficult but not impossible to see. Even when I knew the difference, I couldn't always keep myself from confusing them. (p. 194)

Why would gay men want to disguise their identity, to make their identity difficult, but not impossible to see? Though gay men may fear the cost of exposure, the hurt of hiding and disguising can be profound.

> Because sexuality is so personal a concern, many gay people bear their burden alone. Growing up, they cannot develop the support system most straight people rely on to carry them through difficult times. *For years gays hide the essence of their being* [italics added] from those closest to them; when the time comes to tell family members and good friends, the fear of negative reaction can be overwhelming, even paralyzing. (Woog, 1998, p. 75)

So maybe coming out is a form of truth telling. I have become aware of the power of prepositions in our language. Seemingly harmless little words denoting position, they are full of meaning. I ask myself what do I really mean by "coming out." I don't find this term satisfactory, and mainly due to the preposition. What about coming "to" as in "coming to the truth"? This makes more sense for me as many of the authors of the coming out stories I read talked about "knowing" the truth and missing various cues along the way of their journey to sexuality and relationships. What these authors don't say in these exact words but relate through their writing is a progressive understanding of the truth and a gradual meeting of the two selves: public and private. This helps illuminate the phenomenon of coming out as a form of truth telling.

One way gay men engage in truth telling is the coming out story. One coming out story (Delany, 1996) was written by someone who lived as a gay man before the Stonewall riots of 1969. Delany is able to help me understand this idea of coming out by adding historical perspective. What we take coming out to mean today is different than it was only four decades ago. The media shaped the meaning as much as the gay community:

> Through the late sixties a sensation-hungry media began rummaging through various marginal social areas for new and exciting vocabulary. In almost every case, once a new term was found an almost complete change in meaning occurred as the term was applied to more or less bourgeois experiences and concerns. (Delany, 1996, p. 19)

It was during this period that gay liberation proponents started combining "coming out" with "the closet." Delaney states that to his knowledge this was the first time the two concepts were linked. Coming out, according to Delany, really was a concept much like that of Formal Society and the debutante experience...one was *coming out* into gay society and, more specifically, having one's first homosexual experience. In many ways gay liberation changed the meaning. About this change in meaning Delany asks, "Despite its political goals, was this change really as beneficial as it was touted to be? Since it had been a case of displacing a term rather than adding a term, hadn't we lost something by that displacement?" (p. 21). Delany wonders if the politicization of any concept or term, in this case coming out, moves it away from its original meaning.

Delany's questions point me to the importance of human science as a means of getting beneath the labels used to describe experiences and getting to the experiences

themselves. This is why I see coming out as a truth telling experience; it gets at the experience, not at the political maelstrom surrounding the concept.

> Coming out is telling a story. The declaration is a lie, the way a good story is a lie, and it's useful like a story. The lie lets you hold on to some things, but you risk losing anything that won't fit inside it. Sometimes you need to tell lies just to go on living. (Stadler, 1996, p. 168)

We must remember that lies can be told to protect as well as to hurt. Sometimes the lies we tell ourselves are ways to protect ourselves from pain. But what burden do internal lies place on us? Here I am reminded of the movie *Birdcage* which is an adaptation of the theme from the Broadway show *La Cage aux Folles*. In the scenes that come to mind we see the son of a gay man asking his father to hide his gayness (the truth) when meeting the parents of the son's fiancee. Redecorating the apartment was relatively easy. "Acting straight" was not difficult for the father. But what about his partner, Albert, the living stereotype of effeminate gayness? What to do with Albert? How to get rid of him long enough for the father to meet the fiancee's parents? The tension experienced between love for son and love for lover becomes tangible, the cost of denial of authenticity apparent.

Is coming out always better? I remember, vividly, being questioned about this while giving a presentation on the topic of the theoretical construct of lesbian and gay sexual identity formation. I explained Cass's (1979) model of sexual identity formation and the language I used to describe the theory implied that being "more" out was more developed, and hence better, than being "less" out. That wasn't my intention. Why did I do it? Was it under my control, or did the theory lead me in that direction? In

discussions regarding theory with other phenomenologists, it was noted how theory can either cover over a phenomenon or help uncover it (or both). Cass's theory comes from her experience of working with gays and lesbians in her psychotherapy practice in Australia. After working with many clients she began to note patterns in development and thus created her theory. Her theory, in one sense, comes from experience...as theory should. But is the theory grounded in a specific time period, or is it universal? Many have referred to Cass's theory as a coming out theory (Fassinger, 1998). Doing so, however, implies directly that being "more" out is indeed better than being "less" out, because the stages labeled as more advanced refer to public disclosure (and comfort) with one's homosexuality. What I like about Cass's theory is that it gives heterosexuals a structure for understanding the process that many gay people go through and helps explain why there may be some tension between the person coming out and his or her heterosexual significant others.

Although some have tried to make theory more complex in terms of describing processes of coming to understand oneself as a gay person and as a member of a gay community (D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger & Miller, 1996), unfortunately, by offering organizing structure to aggregate experience observed over time, theory also serves to mask the complexity of the development of the gay self and makes it appear to be a more simple process. What about being human is simple? This question is related to the tension I experience with theories of human development. Having a theory or model offers an elegant way to describe a complex process. In the elegance, however, some of the complexity is lost.

Considering the sources for the lived experience of coming out in light of my own experience as a gay man, what I see as a more unifying theme is the idea of coming "to" the truth. My coming to understand myself as a gay man requires finding "the truth" of my being-in-the-world. With regard to "the truth," I find myself moving from fearing to fighting to facing to freeing to finding to featuring. Let me explain. I begin by fearing the truth. "How could I possibly be gay?" "What would that mean for me and for my family?" "How would I be treated?" Fighting the truth involves firmly placing a mask of heterosexuality on my public face. I begin forcing myself to date members of the opposite sex, to engage in activities that are seen as stereotypically heterosexual, and to eliminate any qualities of myself that are commonly attributed to the opposite sex. Facing the truth happens when living the lie becomes a burden and takes too much energy. I ask the same questions as in the fearing stage, but from a different vantage point. The pain of hiding the truth has created such dissonance that facing the truth becomes necessary. Once I have faced the truth I begin to free it. I begin exploring same-sex relationships, but first begin by trying to make contacts with the gay community. This contact happens in person, eventually, but starts through literature or other media sources. I seek to find ways to make being gay normal and okay. Once I've freed the truth, I go a bit wild with my new discovery. I focus on things gay to the exclusion of non-gay themed things (and people) in my life. At this point, I inadvertently turn away from former friends and family to spend more time with other gay people. At some point I recognize that I have distanced myself from friends and family and begin really to find the truth.

Being gay is only one part of my self, not my whole being. I find at this point that not every gay person is good and that not every worthwhile concept comes from the gay community. I begin to seek balance. Balance is expressed in featuring the truth. I begin to realize that gayness is integral to my self, but is featured at appropriate times. Is it necessary to shock my relatives by telling them? Must I always force the issue? Can I be (i.e., truly and fully exist) if others do not know about this aspect of my self? To this last question, McClatchy (1996) recounts his feelings of forcing the issue with his family:

> Not only was I going to force them to *know* about me, I was going to force them to talk about it. Not-speaking-about meant not-dealing-with. By putting it all into words, I would move the matter to a higher plane than a mere "knowing." From my sleeve of disguise, now turned inside out, I would pull the words that revealed and redeemed rather than belied and protected. (p. 198)

But, when others know about us being gay, while we are living and sharing the truth of our being, we risk opening ourselves up to a whole host of other lived experiences.

L'Enfer, C'est Les Autres

> The stories of harassment and discrimination seem endless. (Rhoads, 1995, p. 71)

> I just get so tired of being questioned about why I am gay and what it's like. (Rhoads, 1995, p. 69)

"So, what's your dissertation about?" How many times have I heard this question and dreaded having to respond? My dread comes from two sources: my own internalized homophobia and from the experience of hearing "how interesting…" and a long pause after I explain my topic. I have caught myself using phrases like, "It's about sexual orientation issues" (when I'm feeling adventurous), or "It's about identity

development and how students make meaning of their lives" (when I'm not feeling so adventurous). Both phrases are true, but they are designed to mask the true identity of my research – the lived experience of gay men who are college students. Why do I go through this? Because, "*l'enfer, c'est les autres,*" or "hell is other people."

Sartre's (1947) play *Huis Clos* is a dramatic exposition of one aspect of his philosophy: that meaning in our lives is related to our lived experience with others. In the play, three characters are brought to a drawing room that is actually their eternal afterlife – they are all dead. The misdeeds they had committed in life are coming back to them through various aspects of each other's characters and how they relate to one another. They realize that they will never be able to leave the room nor each other and that, for them, hell will be these other people who remind them of their lives. Van Manen (1997) presents this "lived other" as one of the lifeworld existentials, relationality: "the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them" (p. 104). For gay men, hell certainly may be other people. Without other people they would not fear being harmed for who they are. Gay men may experience the campus environment as a sort of hell. From a review of the literature, several themes of the campus environment for gay college students emerge: fear for safety, being targeted for harassment and violence, and being on the receiving end of negative attitudes (Eddy & Forney, 2000). But life would be much less rich and interesting without other people. Therefore, according to Sartre, our world is a necessary hell of other people.

It would be easy to assume that the sense of hell comes from outside the gay community. Not necessarily so. Those gay men who are afraid of "guilt by association" may do cruel or mean things to those who are identified as gay, or at least stay silent when someone else is abusing an identified gay man. Countless gay-themed coming-of-age novels I have read have had scenes where the closeted main character takes part in harassing the "gay kid" at school, or does nothing to stand up for the gay kid when he is being physically or verbally attacked. Leavitt (1993) believes that it is the living of the lies and keeping the lies secret that drive the cruelty: "Lies corrupt you, they provoke you to acts of cruelty your ordinary self would find shocking. Yet you commit them. You hurt people desperately in order to protect your lies…" (p. 165). What stands out for me, however, is the soul-constricting internal dialogue the main character has as he watches himself do nothing. At other times, silence can be telling. An openly gay athlete remembers:

> Of course, the person in our group with the most keen interest in the topic of homosexuality was also the one who said the least about it. I had my suspicions about our coxswain Jeff, an upperclassman who acted as a kind of assistant coach. I didn't say anything, but the way he kept his distance while the rest of us bonded and laughed when we'd joke about my sexuality fit the pattern of people who'd been coming out to me. (Graber, 2000, p. 215)

Another way that people who are gay can contribute to the hell of other gay people is by a belief that everyone should be out – damn the consequences. Brian McNaught (1994), the educator whom I identified at the beginning of Chapter I helping me find my voice as a gay man, explains it this way: "Those who are out, often forgetting how long and hard their own struggle was, sometimes feel contempt for those

who cling to the security of the shadows" (p. 44). For me, being out of the closet is indeed better, but both Cain (1991) and van Manen and Levering (1996) remind their readers that there are times, for safety and mental health sake, that people guard their degree of disclosure.

From outside the gay community, there are also people who contribute to the necessary hell of living with other people. These people range from the innocently ignorant and misguided to the hurtful and hateful. I find it important to make these distinctions as doing so allows me to gauge my reaction and temper my response. David (1995) shares:

> One incident that stands out in my memory occurred when I was around fourteen. My mother and I were watching television when a speaker from a local gay group appeared on one of those half-minute editorial segments that are repeated every so often. After about five seconds, my mother remarked, "I really feel sorry for those people, because they need help. They're really sick!" That just about destroyed the feelings of self-worth I had been working so hard to develop. (p. 68)

Did David's mother want to hurt him? Was she trying to make him feel badly about himself? From the rest of the story, it is clear that she did not want to do anything that might harm her son. But, harm him she did, through her innocently misguided comment.

There are those outside the gay community who are hurtful, sometimes even hateful, in the way they contribute to our lived experience. The church comes to mind for me as I have struggled with religion for most of my adult life – at least my adult life once I came to the truth of being gay. But I can't only consider my own perspective. Although there may be some truly hateful people in the world, many from outside the

gay community who do hurtful things often do so with the best of intentions. Morality is the domain in which this hurtful lived experience often occurs. Many churches and even political organizations claim morality as their hallmark. Levin (1985) challenges this idea that it is the church, or any other organization, that can claim responsibility for morality. The principal title of Levin's philosophical work on embodiment, *The Body's Recollection of Being*, sums up much of his argument, that we must turn back to our physical selves and re-understand how embodiment informs our experience. In terms of morality, Levin notes that we tend toward the "tool-like" nature of moral education. In other words, we try to "give" morals externally rather than "deriving" morality from the body. Levin goes on to explain how the "head" and "body" traditionally have been separated by metaphysics and we, as human beings with both, see that which comes from the head as good, and what comes from the body as evil. Levin suggests that we should "ground moral education in a naturalism which *begins* with the truth of our body and its entrustment of goodness, inherent in the psyche's most 'natural' movements" (p. 233). For me, as a gay man, this makes sense. My body tells me clearly what my sexual and affectional orientation is to be.

But there are others with whom I share the world who simply cannot understand my perspective of how natural it is for me to be gay. Some of these others, as Sartre (1947) comments, create a hell for gay men. If I needed any further motivation for my research, I only need to look to this comment taken from a survey that is included in Rhoads' (1994) research about gay college men and their struggles for identity:

> It is obvious that homosexuals are genetically inferior to heterosexuals, and therefore should be eliminated, before they contaminate the rest of the "straight" world. If I were in a position of power I would implement a program to eliminate homosexuals to make the world a better place to live. (p. 16)

Narrative Navigation – Steering by Stories

Living life as a foreigner at times, being different from the norm, dealing with the difficulties of the closet and coming out, living in a world of other people who can make our lives hell, listening to the epithets, and, at times, experiencing the energy-draining double life of hiding seems overwhelming. I understand from a personal perspective how tiring it can be to live two lives – to live in the tension that exists between the dichotomous poles of "in" versus "out." Is it possible to resolve this dichotomy? Or am I able to at least get beyond the dichotomy, as I understand the lived experience in which gay men live? I've implied that these two contrary notions (in vs. out) must exist separately, but that is not completely true. As discussed earlier, featuring the truth is something everyone may come to, given the safe space. Van Manen and Levering (1996) refer to William James and his notion of three distinct aspects of the self: empirical, social, and spiritual. The empirical self is the bodily self. The social self is defined in relation to the many others with whom we come into contact, so there may be many social selves. The spiritual self is that core self in which our true self resides. "While I may experience my-self as different or changing in different environments or social situations, I nevertheless know that in some undeniable sense I remain the same throughout my personal life history" (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 102). This spiritual sense of self is what calls me to the pedagogical

implications of understanding the experience of coming to the truth with regard to being gay and coming out, or publicly pro- or re-claiming the self.

How has the experience of exploring this phenomenon informed my work with students? How can I integrate this work into my practice of education? I see a main focus of my pedagogy as assisting students in finding that spiritual self at the core of their being: reconciling the dichotomy of coming to the truth and coming out as well as celebrating their being-in-the-world as gay men.

To do this there needs to be a sense of visibility. I can contribute to this sense of visibility through my research. My hope is that through my additions to the visibility of gayness and its normality, I can assist students in finding their authentic selves and the space to relieve some of the tension, allowing them ultimately to find their place. Some tension is critical for life, but too much can be fatal. The experience of being open about being gay can be difficult and sometimes costly. But there are rewards, too. Helping students weigh the costs and rewards is another way I can be pedagogically responsible. I do not believe that anyone should be forced out, but I do believe that all of us in education should work toward creating safe educational environments where gay men may be out. This research project is one step in that journey. Until the time when all environments are safe, it is critical to be honest with those struggling with sexual orientation because:

> Coming out is not chiefly a means to happiness. It is a conscious giving up of power, a subjugation to an increased prospect of discrimination, and an opening to a heightened awareness of the ways by which society despises gays – these are not the near occasions of happiness. Yet coming out – even in the face of social interdict – gives people a sense of self, a sense that for better or worse

> their lives are their own, that their lives have a ground. (Mohr, as cited in Rhoads, 1994, p. 77)

It is through this gathering, interpreting, and sharing of stories that I may assist young (and older) gay men as they navigate their way toward an authentic sexual orientation/identity. How can I as a researcher tell their stories and their story: their individual stories as well as their collective story? The power of such narrative navigation calls to phenomenology and asks: **what is the lived experience of being gay and how do gay men make meaning of this lived experience?**

CHAPTER III

MAKING HIS-STORY COME TO LIFE: PHENOMENOLOGY AS VOICE

> We live out our life as stories as illustrations of the human condition. The beauty of narrative and fiction is that we find our own stories within the stories of others. (F. H. Hultgren, personal communication, February 26, 1998)

> A writer's job is to tell stories that connect readers to all the people on earth, to show these people as the complicated human beings they really are, with histories, families, emotions, and legitimate needs. We can replace one-dimensional stereotypes with multidimensional individuals with whom our readers can identify. (Pipher, 2006, p. 6)

> The honest personal story is the most powerful message. Whether in the form of poetry or video or AA testimonial, the first-person story has the power to move emotions, open minds, touch hearts, and burst barriers in a way that no other human statement can do. (Brimner, 1995, p. 11)

> When I read *Catcher in the Rye* for the first time and knew what it was like to have someone speak for me, to close a book with a sense of both triumph and relief, one lonely isolated social animal finally making contact. (Lamott, 1995, p. xix)

> Becoming a writer is about becoming conscious. When you're conscious and writing from a place of insight and simplicity and real caring about the truth, you have the ability to throw the lights on for your reader. He or she will recognize his or her life and truth in what you say, in the pictures you have painted, and this decreases the terrible sense of isolation that we have all had too much of. (Lamott, 1995, p. 226)

Finding My Research Place

What is research? What is it to do research? In the world of scholarly activity, there are a number of answers to these questions. As an undergraduate, with a liberal arts background, I saw research as “looking into something that interests you.” My experience with formal education has taken me on a research journey, a journey away

from and then back toward what is authentic research in terms of how I see knowledge and its place in the world of human beings. Where I am now calls for a different question: What is it to be a researcher? For me, as a phenomenologist, research is part of my being-in-the-world; it is part of my ontological stance in the world of education, and in the world-at-large. To understand what it is for me to be a researcher, I share my journey, the path taken in finding my research place.

A Door Closed

Disconnection is the best word to describe my lived experience of learning statistics and research method in my master's degree program. What was the point of taking human experience, assuming I was looking at it objectively, and reducing it to numbers that could either explain or predict? I have vivid memories of my first semester in graduate school and how my writing was changed. My initial attempts at writing in my graduate program were returned with comments to the effect that there were too many adjectives in my work. My work was too embellished with unnecessary detail that didn't simply state the facts. Clearly, my writing "problem" was the result of my liberal arts background. So, I went about changing my writing so it would look like the writing of a social scientist – more professional, if you will. It was a struggle at first; giving up the rich form of writing I had cultivated in both U.S. and British schools was difficult – it felt wrong. But those who were guiding me in that direction were trusted advisors who clearly knew what they were doing. These trusted advisors were published in our profession; who was I to question their perspective? Growing up as a

researcher was like growing up in general: not easy. Frankly, I became bored with writing. It felt mechanical. It was dull. But, it was acceptable.

A Window Opened

The door closing was an effect of the times at which it took place. The idea that qualitative research could be as useful and as "valid" as quantitative was just beginning to emerge in the profession of student affairs. Soon after completing my master's degree, a special edition of the *Journal of College Student Development* was published (Caple, 1991) that fully acknowledged qualitative research as an important mode of inquiry that must be embraced in student affairs if the profession wanted to add richness to its literature. By the time my intellectual journey brought me to a doctoral program (1997), qualitative research was firmly on the research scene in student affairs.

The very first semester of my doctoral experience provided an experience with an undergraduate student that was jarring; that was the moment that I truly began to see how I viewed truth. While discussing my excitement of coming to a university that was "diverse" in terms of race and ethnicity, especially after a nearly all White experience where I had been working, I noticed that one of the student employees in our office was giving me an inquisitive look. She let me go on for a while, and then gently and good-naturedly began to laugh. It was clear she was not laughing at me, but at something I had said. I had to ask. Since she was invited, she shared her perspective as a Black woman coming to the university, especially from a nearly all-Black neighborhood and high school. She said she had never been anywhere Whiter than this university. When I considered the statistics of race and ethnicity, I was left wondering: what do they

really mean? After all, to me, the campus was incredibly diverse, and thus exciting. To the student in our office, it was incredibly homogenous and uninviting. It was from this experience that I began to question the "facts" as presented by statistics and the positivist approach to research and epistemology, and began to believe in truth as lived experience. This new belief system would expand my understanding of research processes, for as Crotty (2003) states, "Different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world" (p. 66).

Being introduced to what I then only knew as the qualitative paradigm was like having a window opened, and my scholarly spirit could again flourish. During my exploration into this "new" paradigm, I began to experience the phenomenological nod of comprehension – I could see myself and my way of coming to understand the world described in the various qualitative texts that I read. As I moved away from participating in scholarship in a passive way (taking in information and applying and synthesizing) and moved toward the creation of scholarship, I began to understand the importance of identifying one's research frame, one's way of seeing the world, and most importantly one's understanding of the source of knowledge. Broido and Manning (2002) summarize its importance: "Paradigms shape research at its most basic level; worldviews frame the types of questions asked and what the answers might look like" (p. 435).

As I continued on my intellectual journey, my understanding became more nuanced regarding qualitative approaches to research; I came to understand that how I understood the world could be described as constructionist. Crotty (2003) defines

constructionism as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. What constructionism claims is that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (pp. 42-43). Arminio and Hultgren (2002) summarize this concept succinctly: "A major assumption of constructionism is that meaning occurs through engagement in the world – it is constructed" (p. 446).

Coming to understand that my way of comprehending the world was not something odd or foreign, but was experienced by others who had already conducted quality research in this paradigm, was encouraging. Believing that knowledge is constructed through individual reflection and social interaction has become my epistemological perspective. Merriam (1998) introduces the common elements of qualitative research: (a) "The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's" (p. 6); (b) "The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 7); (c) Qualitative research "usually involves fieldwork...in order to observe behavior in its natural setting" (p. 7); (d) It creates concepts and theories rather than tests them; and (e) "The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive" (p. 8).

Finding My Voice: Heeding the Call of Phenomenology

Coming to an understanding of how I made sense of the world and of how knowledge is constructed allowed me to open myself to new ways of being-in-the-

world: as a phenomenologist. Phenomenology is a term that has been misused (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). However, the phenomenological perspective is what undergirds this paradigm often referred to as qualitative. Frequently, phenomenology is associated with interview research and anything qualitative in nature. The term qualitative is one that is generally accepted as a descriptor for research that is undertaken from perspectives that contrast the quantitative, or positivistic (Patton, 1991). However, the term qualitative is not adequate for describing phenomenology; interpretive is more accurate. Researchers engaging in phenomenological studies are bringing forth the experiences of those participating in the study and offering an interpretation of that lived experience. Though Patton uses the term qualitative, I find a resonance with his discussion of epistemology:

> The epistemological stance of most of the qualitative approaches to research is that our knowledge of the world and its objects is not direct. That is, there is no simple, one-to-one correspondence between events in the physical or social world and our knowledge of them....Rather, knowledge is a matter of the world first being *presented* to us and then cognitively worked by us into a *re-presentation*. (pp. 390-391)

Finding a research paradigm and an epistemological perspective that made sense to me was an important development on the continuing journey toward being a scholar. As van Manen (2002a) notes, there are many forms of phenomenology. To some this may beg the questions: what is the "real" phenomenology and how do I know if what I am reading is "good" phenomenology? As I began to compare the various phenomenological approaches, their epistemological base remained the same; it was the ways that one approached the methodology that differed, as well as the grounding –

philosophical or psychological. To answer the above posed question for myself, I see phenomenology as a language with its various forms as dialects – the basic structure is a commonality, but there are nuances that are present in each approach. The commonality, however, remains: "Phenomenology as an approach lets us see by helping to uncover what is hidden or concealed. Phenomenology resists imposing a structure of understanding. Rather, it tries to let things reveal themselves" (Johnson, 2000, p. 15).

The spring semester of 1998 was truly springtime for me, and with the spring came a sense of re-connection: my introduction to phenomenology. Again I was allowed to wonder. Again I was allowed to play with words. Again I was allowed rich detail. Again I was allowed to be artful in my writing. Actually, all of these ways of being were expectations. Phenomenology offered me a sense of freedom and a research home where my ways of understanding the world were considered appropriate research. Story once again would be permitted to capture me with its power and to use me as a writer to give voice to and share the stories of others, in a way that compels the reader to come a little closer to understanding the lived experience of another. Story does that. And that is what I am here to do: make (several) his-stor(ies) come to life: (by using) phenomenology as voice. Well-written narrative transcends boundaries; it allows people to glimpse the experience of another. If we are sensitive to the narrative, we may be affected in a way that makes us care about the other's lived experience. One goal of this research project is to bring my readers closer to the experience of others and leave compelled to care about those who have shared their stories. This I do through letting the phenomenon of being gay present itself through the text of my participants and to be

re-presented through my linguistic transformation of that text after phenomenological reflection. Levin (1985) reminds us of the power of story to rise above differences when told well:

> As the communicativeness of all great literature attests, in its spanning of historical epochs and cultural worlds, it is the open and sincere sharing of that which has been directly experienced in a thoughtful way which transcends most completely, or anyway most satisfactorily, the inevitable discontinuities that can so easily separate different people, different historical epochs, and different cultures. (p. 81)

And so it is in this spirit that I invite you to peer into the worlds of others through the powerful lens of phenomenological inquiry, which allows me to give voice to the gay men who share their lived experience. But first, what is phenomenological inquiry and from where did it come?

Phenomenology as a Philosophical Way of Understanding

> Phenomenology wants to slow the researcher down and hold his or her gaze on the phenomenon itself – the lived experience of some activity – seeking not to locate it in an abstract matrix by saying how its abstracted structure might be similar to others, but rather to illumine its specific quality as an experience. (Willis, 2001, Background section, ¶ 1)

> The phenomenological movement was launched under the battle cry of "Back to the things themselves!" The "things themselves," as phenomenologists understand the phrase, are phenomena that present themselves immediately to us as conscious human beings. Phenomenology suggests that, if we lay aside, as best we can, the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning. (Crotty, 2003, p. 78)

Phenomenology: Genesis

Edmund Husserl is considered the father of modern phenomenology (Gelvin, 1989; Laverty, 2003). As a mathematician, he was well versed in the positivist world of the natural sciences. He came to a place of understanding that all of life's meaning was not "out there" and that much could be learned from observing life as it is lived, and not as it is categorized and reduced to theory. In fact, Husserl criticized psychologists for attempting to correlate isolated variables, thereby ignoring context (Laverty). However, Husserl could not divorce himself from his training in mathematics, and influenced by that discipline, he came to believe that one could approach lived experience (a phenomenon) and allow the experience to be approached without prejudice if one transcended one's preunderstandings about the phenomenon. Husserl believed that "...we can step out of the natural attitude and 'put out of action' or 'exclude' or 'parenthesize' parts of the world from our consciousness, a conscious act that frequently is referred to as 'bracketing' (*Einklammerung*)" (Dahlberg et al., 2001, p. 60). It was this very concept of bracketing that became a point of contention with later thinkers. "Husserl's notion of transcendence and transcendental subjectivity has been and continues to be the source of much philosophical discussion and dispute among human science researchers" (Dahlberg et al., p. 59).

Although there were questions about the degree to which researchers could engage in bracketing, the philosophical concept that underlies phenomenology requires that researchers do indeed attempt to bracket former understandings. Husserl is not the only phenomenologist to hold the notion of bracketing prior understandings as

necessary in phenomenological inquiry. “That phenomenology requires us to place our usual understandings in abeyance and have a fresh look at things has been driven home to us by phenomenologist after phenomenologist” (Crotty, 2003, p. 80).

Phenomenology: Exodus

Husserl’s relationship with the theologian turned philosopher, Martin Heidegger, clearly had a profound affect on Heidegger’s thinking (Laverty, 2003). Where Heidegger departs from the understanding of phenomenology by his colleague Husserl is in the area of “bracketing” one’s pre-understandings (Johnson, 2000; Laverty). Heidegger simply could not accept that one can set aside pre-understandings in hoping to come to a phenomenon without prejudice:

> To approach the phenomenon without presuppositions of any kind, to "bracket" them, as Husserl hoped to do, is, according to Heidegger, in the first place inadvisable, and in the second impossible. Inadvisable because it would involve discarding not only the errors but the wisdom of our tradition. Impossible because without language, without the conceptual apparatus with which the tradition preserves its insights, there can be no genuine thinking about, and thus no serious approach to, the phenomenon in any event. (Bontekoe, 1996, pp. 63-64)

In addition to not accepting the idea of bracketing, Heidegger also believed that “our understanding is interpretive from the very start and that interpretive involvement with things need not be at a level of intellection or cognition, but more usually comes in concernful, practical dealings” (Moran, 2000, p. 231). In Heidegger’s move in this direction, he incorporates hermeneutics into his work:

> His philosophy makes it clear that the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic, that is, our understanding of the everyday world is derived from our interpretations of it. All new things encountered in the lifeworld are related to earlier experiences. We do not use a pen without first recognizing it as

> something to write with, or a knife without understanding that it can cut. (Dahlberg, et al., 2001, p. 78)

Heidegger became the first philosopher to bring phenomenology and hermeneutics together. He makes the distinction that his work is an approach to grasping a phenomenon, rather than focusing on the "what" of the phenomenon. Johnson (2000) expounds on this idea:

> Heidegger emphasizes that phenomenology is not like other studies that are termed "-ologies." Theology is the study of God. Psychology is the study of the human psyche. Each of these terms tell us *what* is to be studied. Heidegger says that phenomenology is concerned with *how* the thing is approached. Phenomenology as an approach lets us see by helping to uncover what is hidden or concealed. Phenomenology resists imposing a structure of understanding. Rather, it tries to let things reveal themselves. (p. 15)

Heidegger never proposed that what he was doing was "pure" phenomenology. He was clear that one could not approach a phenomenon without one's pre-understandings. These pre-understandings must be embraced, rather than bracketed, and brought forth into the interpretive process. In summarizing the apparent concern over a contradiction in terms and philosophical traditions, Gelvin (1989) in his commentary on Heidegger's *Being and Time* offers this summary:

> The difficulty is that many phenomenologists argue that Heidegger's "hermeneutic phenomenology" is a contradiction in terms. They maintain, and with a certain amount of cogency, that in the tradition of Edmund Husserl – the father of modern phenomenology – the whole purpose of this method is to achieve a vision of consciousness totally untainted by "systems" or interpretations: to let the facts speak for themselves, as it were. (p. 38)

But, for Heidegger, hermeneutic phenomenology was not only possible, but required. As we look to the "things themselves" we are already engaging in an interpretive process. We do not experience the world without interpretation, in Heidegger's view.

He felt that the world's view of human existence had become taken for granted. As a way to overcome this problem, he turned to his question of the meaning of Being and redefined how one looked at our existence: *Dasein*. For Heidegger, the question of Being and what it means for human existence became the ultimate question of philosophical work (Heidegger, 1953/1996).

The Fundamentality of Dasein

Heidegger knew that to continue with the same language to describe human existence would keep philosophy moving in the same direction it had been moving since Descartes: "Historiographically, the intention of the existential analytic can be clarified by considering Descartes, to whom one attributes the discovery of the *cogito sum* as the point of departure for all modern philosophical questioning" (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 43). The Cartesian split of mind and body made no sense to Heidegger. In addition, Heidegger felt that the discipline of philosophy had moved away from what he believed was the fundamental philosophical question: what is Being? The consideration of things in the world and the human relationship to them did not interest Heidegger. His great project would not be ontic; his project would be to re-turn to the fundamentality of Being and keep his focus on the ontological aspects of philosophy (Heidegger, 1927/1996; Johnson, 2000; Moran, 2000). And so, Heidegger uses the word *Dasein* to re-orient his readers toward Being. But, what does *Dasein* mean?

To understand Heidegger's *Dasein*, let us re-turn to his own words. Heidegger (1953/1996) opens discussion of his term *Dasein* in the introduction to his masterwork *Being and Time*:

> *Dasein* is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being. Thus it is constitutive of the being of *Dasein* to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being. And this in turn means that *Dasein* understands itself in its being in some way and with some explicitness. It is proper to this being that it be disclosed to itself with and through its being. *Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Dasein*. The ontic distinction of *Dasein* lies in the fact that it *is* ontological. (p. 10)

Is it not self-evident what is *Dasein*? It is actually easier to come to a place of understanding what Heidegger means if you spend time with his language – it is often self-referential, and consequently confusing. Gelvin (1989) offers a rich description on the etymological background of *Dasein*, and his specificity is an example of the deep wondering about how words are used in phenomenology to bring forth meaning. Some would find such detailed explication of word derivation tedious, but for a word such as *Dasein* as constructed by Heidegger, this depth aids in understanding:

> Basically, in common, everyday German discourse, the term refers to human existence. This meaning is not completely abandoned by Heidegger; but he emphasizes its etymology as well. The term consists of two parts -- *da*, meaning "here," and *sein*, "to be." Thus the etymologically derived translation of the term is "to be here." Some translators have chosen to use such phrases as "to be *there*," noting that at times the German term *da* can be translated by the English "there." *Da*, however, must be distinguished from *dort*, which means "there" in the sense of "at that place – not *here*."*Da* basically means "here," as in the simple German sentence *Da kommt er*: "Here he comes." The English language would allow such a sentence to run: "There he comes." Nevertheless, I suggest that to emphasize the "there" over the "here" is distortive. (Gelvin, p. 27)

And so, I can conclude with Gelvin's assistance that *Dasein* is neither here nor there; rather it is here and there.

Because *Dasein* is a fundamental aspect of our (beings) Being, its meaning cannot be easily captured with our everyday language. Heidegger, in his life project of

bringing philosophy back to the question of Being, understood this, and thus carefully chose to use *Dasein* to describe his understanding of human existence. The concept is challenging, and that was part of Heidegger's point: the question of Being is challenging.

> *Dasein* is that kind of existence that is always involved in an understanding of its Being. It must never be confused with the existence of things that lie before us and are on hand or at hand as natural or cultural objects (*Vorhandenheit, Zuhandenheit*). In order to stress the special meaning *Dasein* has for him, Heidegger often hyphenates the word (*Dasein*), suggesting "there being," which is to say, the openness to Being characteristic of human existence, which is "there" in the world. (Krell, 1993, p. 48)

Reflecting on my own reading of Heidegger (1927/1996), I have come to see *Dasein* as a capacity rather than an entity. *Dasein* is our form of human existence, our way of being-in-the-world. It is a concept that goes beyond the conceptual. It eludes apprehension and comprehension; and yet, its presence allows for comprehension. *Dasein* is that capacity human beings have which allows us to wonder about our existence, our being-in-the-world. The concept of *Dasein* is fundamental to hermeneutic phenomenology for without our capacity to wonder, human beings would not be able to interpret experience in the world, nor would we even be called to question, and being called to question is what allows hermeneutic phenomenology to exist. *Dasein* gives us the space to question, and as Gadamer believed, the question was at the heart of phenomenological research:

> To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer. The significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned. (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 363)

As human beings we make choices. We may choose to simply exist in the world, or we may choose to engage with the world and others actively, and therefore make connections and come to places of understanding. And so, when researchers engage with others in a phenomenological project, what we are engaging is this capacity to wonder: *Dasein*.

Dasein and the Pink Triangle

Heidegger was a Nazi. So, how can I use his hermeneutic phenomenology to bring forth the lived experience of gay men, a group of human beings that were brutalized under the political party of which he was a member? The horrific account by Pierre Seel of his former lover being devoured by dogs before Seel's eyes at the hands of the Nazis in a concentration camp (Seel, 1995) is a chilling reminder of the extent of Nazi brutality. But what do I know of Heidegger's being-in-the-world as a Nazi? Can I ever know his motivations? Polt (1999), in his discussion of the "later Heidegger," examines Heidegger's political involvement and offers:

> It should simply be noted that he was hardly a typical Nazi. He viewed the revolution in terms of his idiosyncratic interpretation of Western metaphysics, and he quietly disagreed with several aspects of the official Nazi ideology, including its racism. His political superiors were right to accuse him of a "private National Socialism." (pp. 113-114)

But does being an atypical Nazi excuse Heidegger?

It has been a struggle wondering about "the Heidegger question" as I have come to name the issue of his membership in the Nazi party. I tried to understand his possible motivations and, after reading Safranski (1998), I even tried to understand Heidegger in

terms of his early years and the pressures of the church and theology, and his relatively meager upbringing as a force that drove him to want to be the philosopher king of Germany. Does this excuse his membership in the Nazi Party? How can I come to some resolution regarding the Heidegger question? First, I subject Heidegger to the hermeneutic circle where one considers parts and whole as a way to come to understanding, of interpreting something. We humans are complex beings made up of inter-relating parts that contribute to our total human being. When I submit Heidegger to this consideration of parts and whole, I can be horrified, disgusted, appalled, or whatever negative adjective captures my feeling toward the Nazi aspect of his being. But taken as a whole, Heidegger offered us *Dasein* as a way to consider our Being, a way that brings us back to a fundamental ontological level of human science, rescuing us from the positivist world of other-science.

Gay men have been victimized by the positivistic world of other-science: the truly offensive search for a "cause" for homosexuality. For gay men, our way of being is not "caused;" we simply are and wish to simply continue being. And so, I draw on Heidegger, not in an "ends justify the means" way, but with care to apply his ideas for good, rather than the evil such as that brought to the world by the Nazis. Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis is still a struggle for me, and although the following question is dangerously close to stating by implication that the ends justify the means, I wonder: if in their horrific experiments the Nazi doctors had discovered a drug that could cure cancer, would we reject it? This question is meant to be provocative – to engage in moral questions is provocative.

Wonder-full Human Science: "Operationalizing" Dasein

Heidegger has enjoyed a place of influence among intellectuals and has influenced their work. Among those intellectuals are Sartre, Foucault, and Derrida (Gottlieb, 1990). Heidegger's work has not been universally accepted. In fact, there are those who find his work practically unintelligible, even though

> Heidegger is currently one of the best-represented philosophers on American bookshop shelves. But it is not academics and their students in the mainstream "analytic" tradition of British and American philosophy who read him. Such philosophers tend mostly to divide into two camps: those who believe his writings are largely gibberish and those who believe they are entirely gibberish. (Gottlieb, 1990, ¶ 5)

Others have stated that even though Heidegger claimed his work to be a new way of approaching philosophy and a new approach from metaphysics, his ideas were not particularly original (Glicksman, 1938). At times, I, too, have questioned the intelligibility of Heidegger. But that is the point. Heidegger wanted us to question – everything about our Being. His belief was that philosophy had moved so far away from the question of Being, that we needed a new language to understand it. Yes, reading Heidegger's texts, filled with neologisms, requires multiple visits. Heidegger makes us revisit and revisit his ideas in order to understand them – thereby maintaining our attention on the question of Being.

So how do I reconcile myself to phenomenology as methodology? Heidegger asks us to return to a more conscious attentiveness to the world, and at the risk of using "Heideggerese," return to a greater understanding of our being-in-the-world. If one were to dwell in the world of philosophy as a discipline, one could continue to wonder about

wondering. However, my pedagogical interests are with understanding the lived experience of gay men, and through sharing my research, allow them to have their ontological freedom through dis-covering their experience. It is important to bring forth the experience of gay men to allow their truths to be known and not keep them hidden, covered over, or distorted. Heidegger (1953/1996) refers to the danger in the covering up of phenomena:

> There are various ways phenomena can be covered up. In the first place, a phenomenon can be covered up in the sense that it is still completely *undiscovered*. There is neither knowledge nor lack of knowledge about it. In the second place, a phenomenon can be *buried over*. This means it was once discovered but then got covered up again. This covering up can be total, but more commonly, what was once discovered may still be visible, though only as semblance. However, where there is semblance there is "being." This kind of covering up, "distortion," is the most frequent and the most dangerous kind because here the possibilities of being deceived and misled are especially pernicious. (p. 32)

Distortion regarding the lives of gay men is one of my concerns. How are the lives of these gay men used for political purposes? What aspects of their lives are used to make political points? Are these men aware that others may distort their experience for gain? How should I best bring forth, and therefore, dis- or re-dis-cover the lived experience of gay men?

The methodological guidance for this research project is mainly based in the work of van Manen (1997). He has brought to the research world a number of what he calls "research activities" that, when taken in some thoughtful combination as called for by the phenomenon under consideration, allow the researcher to give voice to that phenomenon.

Reductio and *Vocatio*: Letting the Phenomenon Be

Phenomenology is both philosophy and research methodology (van Manen, 1997). For me, it is this fundamental point that causes confusion about the mode of inquiry. We live in a "sound-bite" world that expects quick and simple explanations, nuggets of information that supposedly represent some idea, experience, or occurrence. But, is human experience so simple? Can it be reduced to sound bites? It is this phenomenon of the current sound bite mentality that makes phenomenological inquiry both difficult to explain and necessary. When I am asked about my research and I explain that I am using phenomenological inquiry as a methodology, I usually receive inquisitive and interested looks – that is, until I begin to explain the complexities of this mode of inquiry. At the same time, my own belief in the general complexity that is the human experience is well understood and shared through phenomenology. A graphic representation of the complexity of phenomenology is offered by van Manen (2002a) at his web site devoted to phenomenological inquiry: phenomenologyonline.com. In van Manen's representation of phenomenology, he offers a web of concepts, ideas, and ways of seeing and understanding phenomenology. At the beginning of understanding phenomenological inquiry and writing as a methodology are the two "methodological impulses" of the *reductio* and the *vocatio*. Phenomenology is achieved through reflection and writing. The ways in which we conduct the reflection and writing are care-full and attuned to the phenomenon under consideration.

The Reductio

> Openness – in the sense of interpretive availability – is a sustaining motive of all qualitative inquiry. (van Manen, 2002b, p. 237)

As I have come to grasp the idea of the *reductio*, it requires connected knowing (Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996) to understand it in its fullness and to believe in its possibility. The *reductio* is that aspect of phenomenology that asks the researcher to bracket pre-understandings of the phenomenon under consideration. "The aim of the *reductio* (the reduction or epoché) is to reachieve direct contact with the world by suspending prejudgments, bracketing assumptions, deconstructing claims, and restoring openness" (van Manen, 2002a, *Reductio* section, ¶ 1). Is this ever truly possible? Can one ever really suspend prejudgments? What about one's assumptions? Can one approach a phenomenon about which one has some knowledge without bringing that knowledge to the current consideration? Husserl introduced this concept of *epoché* in his form of phenomenology (Moran, 2000). He believed that one could bracket out preunderstandings and get back to the phenomenon in its primordial form – the way it presents itself to the world in its naturalness. It was in considering the questions I've posed before about the possibility of *reductio* being honestly available to the phenomenologist that Heidegger differed with his teacher, Husserl. Heidegger offered the world hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology for coming to understand the world and how human beings come to a place of understanding their being-in-the-world.

However, in order to conduct phenomenology inquiry, one must engage in the stance of the *reductio*, or reduction. Again, we may employ etymological tracing to be clear about what reduction means in its truest sense. There is an irony present here in that for our common use of reduction, we think of "reducing" something or as "reductionism understood as abstracting, codifying, shortening" (van Manen, 2002a, *Reductio* section, ¶ 5). Etymologically, reduction originally derives from *re-ducere*, "to lead back," and it is in this sense that we must understand the term in phenomenology. We are trying to be led back to a phenomenon in its original meaning – how it presents itself to the world. Connected knowing (Goldberger et al., 1996), a belief and trust in the possibility of another's way of knowing, is a useful perspective for coming to understand reduction as an aspect of the phenomenological approach, especially given the complexity of what reduction actually means.

> It would be a mistake to see the reduction as a predetermined procedure that we should apply to the phenomenon that is being researched. The practice of human science is never simply a matter of procedure. Rather the reduction refers to a certain attentiveness. If we want to come to an understanding of the unique meaning and significance of something we need to reflect on it by practicing a thoughtful attentiveness. (van Manen, 2002a, *Reductio* section, ¶ 4)

However, it is still the goal of the phenomenologist to approach the phenomenon under consideration in a way that allows the phenomenon to present itself closely as possible to its original form. As I have studied and come to know phenomenological inquiry, I do not believe that it is ever possible to suspend one's preunderstandings fully about a phenomenon. However, it is possible to share with the reader of one's research how one has come to be interested in the phenomenon (in the *turning to the*

phenomenon, as represented in Chapter I) and the beliefs and ways of understanding the researcher has about the phenomenon (in the *exploring the phenomenon through existential investigation*, as represented in Chapter II). Through these writing processes the preundertandings held by the researcher are exposed so the reader may engage with the text, knowing the various biases brought to the project by the researcher. So although I cannot divorce myself from my preunderstandings, I can openly share them. In a manner similar to the constant-comparative method of data analysis in grounded theory (Creswell, 1998), as a researcher I must constantly ask myself if I am approaching the phenomenon in an open manner, or am I allowing my preunderstandings to dominate the lens through which I am considering it. And though I must not let my preunderstandings dominate the reflection process, as a gay man myself, thus living the phenomenon under consideration, there will be more of me and my preunderstandings presented in this study than would be in, say, a study I might conduct of the lived experience of lesbians. As van Manen (2002a) calls this, I would be engaging in the reduction as "a certain reflective attentiveness that must be practiced for phenomenological understanding to occur" (*Reductio* section, ¶ 7). Continuing the discussion of phenomenological reduction, van Manen reminds us that

> the reduction is consequently not only a research method, it also describes the phenomenological attitude that must be adopted by anyone who wishes to participate in the questions that a certain project pursues. In other words, phenomenological meaning and understanding have to be produced constantly anew by the writers and the readers of phenomenological texts. (*Reductio* section, ¶ 7)

In order for this engagement with text to occur, text must be brought forth.

The Vocatio

> The human science researcher is not just a writer, someone who writes up the research report. Rather, the researcher is an author who writes from the midst of life experience where meanings resonate and reverberate with reflective being. The researcher-as-author is challenged to construct a phenomenological text that makes of the reader a writer – rewriting the text again at every reading. (van Manen, 2002b, p. 238)

In order to bring forward the phenomenon, phenomenologists transform their understanding of the text into language (van Manen, 1997). It is through language that one shares understandings. Indeed, Gadamer (1960/1999) believed that "Language is not just one of man's [*sic*] possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man [*sic*] has a world at all" (p. 443). A tension exists in this linguistic transformation in that once one has grasped a phenomenon and brought it forward through text, it is no longer in its true and pure (uninterpreted) form. This is a tension that the philosophers in phenomenology have struggled with in their work. But, although one may never be able to be with a phenomenon in its pre-reflective state, one can come closer to understanding if one is careful in the use of language in creating the phenomenological text. The researcher wants to bring the reader closer to the phenomenon than she or he was before engaging with the text. To show the "what" of the *vocatio*, van Manen (2002a) summarizes its purpose: "The aim of the *vocatio* is to let things 'speak' or be 'heard' by bringing them into nearness through the vocative power of language" (*Vocatio* section, ¶ 1). It is the "how" of the *vocatio* that is more elusive. How does one transform understanding (both the cognitive and the affective) into language that

when woven together offers a text that brings the reader closer to the phenomenon? How does one remain mindful that one must let the phenomenon speak for itself?

Vocatio originates from the Latin *vocare*, meaning "to call." So phenomenologists are called by the phenomenon to bring it forward. The Latin *vocare* also has a strong etymological relationship to voice (Harper, 2001), and the etymological link which takes us back to original meaning reminds the phenomenologist of a fundamental aspect of phenomenology: giving voice to the phenomenon through our phenomenological writing. It is in the midst of the tension of coming as close as possible to grasping a phenomenon in its pre-reflective state that phenomenology resides. Knowing that one can never explicate the pre-reflective and remain mindful of one's own preunderstandings, a phenomenologist listens – both to the call of the phenomenon and to the poetry of language chosen to elicit a connection among the phenomenon, the text, and the reader. As van Manen (1997) states, "To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal" (p. 18). The *reductio* is a mindset and stance that must be maintained by the researcher in doing phenomenology; the *vocatio* represents the bringing forth of text in phenomenology. The various aspects of how the *vocatio* is achieved are discussed later in this chapter.

Gathering, Interpreting, Re-Presenting: Engaging the Methodology

Human science research deals with the experiences of human beings (van Manen, 1997). There is no attempt to find some "central tendency," nor is there any attempt to predict future behavior or experiences. Through rich and artful description, the reader is brought closer to the lifeworld of the participants in the study. The researcher offers an interpretation of the lived experience and suggests ways in which pedagogical advances may be made. Good phenomenological inquiry adds to the literature of any profession that touches the phenomenon being discussed – it offers us the story of the lived experience.

> The social scientists have a mantra: "The plural of anecdote is not data." I think they are mistaken. An accumulation of accurate stories about how the human world works, stories that provide an account wrapped in an interpretation, adds up to knowledge, better knowledge than we can get elsewhere. Data are meaningless until we can articulate a story that makes sense out of them. (Magnet, 2003, ¶ 10)

As van Manen (1997) notes, there are no prescribed ways one must engage in phenomenology, so the human science researcher must make choices regarding what methods to employ that are true to the methodology and are appropriate to the phenomenon under consideration. To show the way I have come to understand phenomenological inquiry, I outline three areas that encompass the process: gathering, interpreting, and re-presenting. The gathering involves interacting with various texts that describe the lived experience of the phenomenon under consideration. Text in this case is broadly defined, including personal accounts offered by participants, diaries, pieces of artwork, poetry, novels – any piece of information that allows insight into the

phenomenon. Once these texts are gathered, they must be interpreted. The researcher is the analytic used in this process (van Manen, 1997). For this reason, it is vital that I offer detailed explication of my prior experiences with and conceptions of the phenomenon so that readers may openly question whether an interpretation offered is one authentically gleaned from phenomenological reflection, or rather a simple retelling of my pre-conception of the phenomenon. The last part of the process is the re-presentation of the lived experience. Here the researcher offers an artful and compelling narrative that describes the lived experience of the participants involved in the study with the intent of giving readers the opportunity to gain an insider's view into the phenomenon: in essence, re-presenting possible meanings of the participants' stories of the phenomenon as they live it and make meaning of it.

Being a researcher and employing the methodology of phenomenological inquiry is a way of being-in-the-world: it is an orientation to the lifeworld of the self and of others (van Manen, 1997).

> If we understand phenomenological method not as a controlled set of procedures but more modestly as a "way toward human understanding" then it may be possible that someone can lead us a way to it, or into it. And even if we are open to it then wonder is still more a state of being than an intellectual activity. To be able to wonder about something one needs to be able to adopt a state of receptive passivity. (van Manen, 2002b, p. 249)

This way of being-in-the-world requires that I possess certain qualities; I must be: (a) reflective, (b) insightful, (c) sensitive to language, and (d) constantly open to experience (van Manen, 2002a). Van Manen's list calls for me to question myself constantly in terms of biases and prejudices, as well as force myself to see a wide variety of

possibilities and perspectives to reassure myself that the experience is being seen as presented and not as presumed. In addition, I must reflect on my prior experiences with the phenomenon under consideration, and write honestly about those biases to allow the reader to judge for her or himself the degree to which I have allowed the phenomenon to speak through me. In other words, whose voice is being heard in the research text?

A challenge in being a phenomenologist is freedom, specifically, freedom from structure. As a researcher whose experience in inquiry was grounded in the social sciences, this freedom from structure was especially challenging for me. The importance of theory in the social sciences has also influenced my perspective on research and its aims. For me, the process of becoming a phenomenologist has been an unlearning as well as a learning process.

Other forms of research methodology have clear and expected (required, even) methods that flow from the methodology. In phenomenological inquiry, the researcher must understand the methodology and let the methods used for generation of research text be directed by the phenomenon under consideration. How does one do this? The philosophers in the phenomenological arena (Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur) do not tell researchers how phenomenology is to be conducted in any specific way. How, then, do philosophers conduct research?

Philosophers engage in processes of thinking about and reflecting upon experience to formulate broad questions about that experience. “Philosophical method...is conceived as asking and trying to answer *first-order* questions” (Adler & Van Doren, 1972, p. 277). In other words, a philosophical approach to research is

seeking answers to fundamental questions, not research problems. It can be a challenge for the non-philosopher to see how it is done in terms of methodology and method. For those of us concerned with education and pedagogy, we are fortunate to have van Manen (1997) provide an interpretation of the methodology for us and offer a broad map we may follow as we construct methods that are true both to the methodology and to the phenomenon. It is critical for the researcher to recognize the responsibility to be the compass in this process – to constantly stay "true" to the phenomenon and let it guide the direction across the map.

Gathering

To gather is "to bring together" or "collect." Gathering, in a less used definition of the word, also may mean, "to reach a conclusion often intuitively from hints or through inferences" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999, p. 482). In phenomenological inquiry, as phenomenologists gather the data of experience, we are already beginning to make meaning of it. The paying of close and focused attention to the experience allows me to be open to the hints of meaning that are present; I am always in the process of meaning-making (van Manen, 1997). Experience is gathered through text. I gather text of the experience of others so I might increase my own experience (van Manen, 1997).

Text is a general term for fixed expression of experience. In order for us to understand the experience of another, we must have something we can look at, listen to, or otherwise interact with in some manner. Phenomenology as methodology allows me as a researcher to include any text in a research project as long as it brings me closer to

the lived experience that is the focus of the project (van Manen, 1997, 2002a). In van Manen's (1997) language, this is the research activity of "investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it" (p. 30), which may be accomplished in myriad ways. For my research, Chapter II represents engagement with various sources of the lived experience and establishes a context for the gathering of text in this research project. The majority of text in this chapter comes from artistic and scholarly sources, data that were already fixed (made visible, permanent) in some way.

Co-researchers: Sharing experience. The next gathering of text is through conversations with participants in this study. In phenomenology, as a human science, the terminology of many research traditions are eschewed as falsely distancing the researcher from the "researched." For instance, what should I call those with whom conversations take place in this project to gather text for interpretation? Participants? Conversants? As van Manen (1997) makes clear, those who participate in the research study are obviously participants with whom the researcher is having conversations, but they are also directly involved in the making of meaning in a dialogic way with the researcher; therefore, by the very nature of the methodology, they become co-researchers. They are involved by sharing their experiences, but just as importantly are involved as meaning makers along with the researcher's interpretation of their lived experience.

How will I go about finding these co-researchers and what qualities must they possess to offer a rich contribution to this research project? Finding participants for my study required a form of entry into the community of gay men on the university campus

where I conducted the study. Fortunately, I have colleagues who work directly with this group of men, as advisors to the various campus groups serving gay students (in both the Office of Campus Programs and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equity Office). In addition, I have colleagues who are connected with natural student groupings such as residence halls, where students' identities often are shared. These colleagues assisted me in making appropriate contact. I got the word out through these colleagues about my study, either through word of mouth as they work with these groups of men, or through e-mail solicitation. I contacted these colleagues through email (Appendix A) and asked them to nominate men to participate in my study. I also appealed to graduate students in college student personnel (who through assistantships frequently have contact with large numbers of students and have the potential to identify co-researchers). Once potential co-researchers were identified, I contacted them via email (Appendix B) to solicit participation in my study.

In order to generate adequate text from phenomenological conversations, I needed to recruit at least six men who were willing to share their experience of being gay with me and assist in a dialogic exchange to help bring their interpretation to light. I chose this number based on previous successful phenomenological dissertations recently conducted that have had between five (Pigza, 2005) and eight (Packard, 2004) participants. I was mindful that if through the recruitment process, there were seven or more very interested men who it appeared would offer something valuable, then I would have to make a decision regarding total number at that time, keeping in mind that for this type of work and the depth of conversations, smaller numbers are required. What is

most important is that the participants offer lived experience that is rich enough in detail to allow readers to make connections with the experience and to be able to come closer to an understanding of that lived experience. Moustakas (1994) offers advice on research participant selection criteria for a phenomenological study:

> Essential criteria include: the research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview and (perhaps a follow-up interview), grants the investigator the right to tape-record, possibly videotape the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation and other publications. (p. 107)

On the other hand, I knew it was also possible that not enough participants would be identified through the initial nomination process, and that I would need to use snowball sampling (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) by requesting that any identified participants nominate other possible participants.

During the gathering of men to be co-researchers for this project, the various responses to my request for nominations from campus colleagues led me to wonder about how these colleagues would decide whom to nominate. In this wondering, I began to think about what it might be about the individual gay men who would be nominated that led them to be nominated. Were they particularly “out” on campus? Were they in leadership roles in gay student groups? Or did they simply have a close enough relationship to one of my colleagues to be open about their sexual orientation? These questions, resulting from the wondering, engaged the interpretive process. I was fortunate, as more than enough co-researchers responded to my request for participation.

From the original 17 names I received from nominators, 11 eventually responded to my email invitation to participate and indicated their willingness to be part of my study by completing the Participant Interest Form (Appendix C). The first week of nominations, however, ended with only three potential co-researchers. During the second week of taking Participant Interest Forms, I had reached eight possible co-researchers. How would I go about choosing six from these eight? Would their experiences on campus be different enough to discern the broadest campus experience spectrum for my study? After exploring several text-gathering possibilities with Francine, my methodological guide, and discussing alternative ways to generate adequate text appropriate to the methodology, three more Participant Interest Forms arrived. With the 11 potential co-researchers, it was easier to see where discernment could occur in terms of campus experience and involvement.

Of the 11, two lived on-campus in a residence hall, one lived off-campus with family, two lived off-campus alone, three lived off-campus with friends, and three identified their living situations as "other" – one with his partner, and the other two with either room- or housemates. In terms of academic year, one was a freshman, one was a junior, two were seniors, four were master's students, and three were doctoral students. The primary campus involvement ranged from very LGBT-focused to not-at-all LGBT-focused.

Working with Susan Jones, one of my dissertation committee faculty members, I applied the two levels of selection criteria as stated in the Institutional Review Board application: where the potential co-researcher lives (for example, off or on-campus,

type of living situation, with family or friends, and so forth) and primary extracurricular activities with a focus on creating maximum diversity in terms of campus involvement and activity. These two criteria were applied because the focus of the study is asking the question, "What is the lived experience of being gay?" and then considering it in terms of working with college students, the campus environment, and education-at-large. Applying these criteria resulted in a group of six men representing both undergraduate and graduate students, on- and off-campus as place of residence, and a wide range in experiences with gay organizations.

After meeting with Susan, I sent e-mail messages to the six men chosen to participate in the study. I waited until after the first round of conversations was complete before sending email messages to those who had completed Participant Interest Forms but were not selected, per the guidelines set out in the IRB application. I must say that it was a more difficult experience than I anticipated; as I began to see the experiences of these men, the reality of their humanness confronted me. Making choices among humans was a responsibility and called forth a sense of response-ability.

Conversations: Generating text from lived experience. Once research participants were identified and agreed to participate, I engaged with them in a series of conversations. At the first conversation, they were given the Participant Consent Form (Appendix D) to read and sign. All conversations were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. Listening to the recordings during transcription, as well as additional listenings to be sure of tone used by co-researchers, was helpful in beginning to come to understand how the co-researchers lived the phenomenon. For Gadamer (1960/1999):

> Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject. (p. 385)

To achieve this type of conversation and understanding, I as the researcher needed to listen care-fully to the co-researchers. Levin (1989) believes that many human beings have forgotten how to listen with care. Too much psychological noise gets in the way. Levin wonders:

> How often, and how well, do we listen to other people? Do we in fact *know how* to listen to others in an open, welcoming, receptive way? Are we able to hear, to greet, what others tell us, no matter how painful it may be, no matter how threatening to our ego, no matter how demanding on our capacity to care and be compassionate? (p. 85)

Levin does offer a way of listening that is care-full – he calls this type of listening, "hearkening":

> Hearkening requires the disciplined practice of *Gelassenheit*, i.e. letting-go and letting-be, as a mode or style of listening. In learning *Gelassenheit*, the art of "just listening," listening without getting entangled in the ego's stories and preoccupations, one learns a different way of channelling, focusing, attending. (p. 48)

The actual protocol of the conversations is another methodological issue confronting the phenomenologist, as it is important for the field of conversation to remain open enough so that the participant's voice is heard and leads the conversation in the direction of the participant's lived experience:

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become

> involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 383)

For those who use the positivist paradigm, the idea of allowing the phenomenon that is under consideration to take the lead in setting the direction of an interview is foreign. For the phenomenologist, the phenomenon setting direction is necessary: "The art of the researcher in the *hermeneutic* interview is to keep the question (of the meaning of the phenomenon) open, to keep himself or herself and the interviewee oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned" (van Manen, 1997, p. 98). More fundamentally, "We cannot have experiences without asking questions....Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question" (Gadamer, pp. 362-363). Given that the researcher must be ever mindful to allow the conversation to move as naturally as possible, there are, however, a number of orienting questions that I used to give general shape to the questions employed during the conversations. The general shape of the questions, however, was always oriented to the overarching phenomenological question: **"What is the lived experience of being gay?"**

These orienting questions are general questions I kept in mind to maintain focus on the phenomenon in the process of this research. These questions are not questions that I would directly ask the participants; these questions were meant to keep me oriented toward the pedagogical goals of the inquiry. I remained open to letting the participants guide the conversation as long as the conversation content still related to

the co-researchers' lived experience of being gay. Questions to maintain my focus on the phenomenon under consideration included the following:

1. How do these students come to see themselves in terms of sexual identity?
2. What language do they use to name their sexual orientation/identity?
3. What meaning do they make of the lived experience of being gay?
4. How do they see sexual orientation affecting their "place in the world"?
5. How do they describe their level of "outness" (openness about sexual orientation), and how do they see this affecting their representation of themselves? How does their level of disclosure affect their various relationships?
6. How does their sexual orientation influence their worldview?

These orienting questions helped keep me focused on the phenomenon.

> The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. Although the primary researcher may in advance develop a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon, these are varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114)

Moustakas (1994) offers some broad questions that may be used or adapted to assist the co-researchers to tap into their experience in ways that may be brought forward phenomenologically:

1. What dimensions, incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?

2. How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?

3. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?

4. What feelings were generated by the experience?

5. What thoughts stood out for you?

6. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?

7. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

These questions were useful in bringing co-researchers back to a description of lived experience, rather than purely reflected memory. I kept these questions handy in the event that a co-researcher needed additional prompts to continue a story, to add depth to the narrative, or if the conversation seemed to come to a stop, without having brought forth something meaningful to the co-researcher or the project. I had to remember, however, as the researcher involved in these conversations, that exact questions and conversations are not predetermined.

> However much a person trying to understand may leave open the truth of what is said, however much he [*sic*] may dismiss the immediate meaning of the object and consider its deeper significance instead, and take the latter not as true but merely as meaningful, so that the possibility of its truth remains unsettled, this is the real and fundamental nature of a question: namely to make things indeterminate. (Gadamer, 1960/1999, pp. 374-375)

Regardless what questions come up during the conversations, the researcher's responsibility is to stay focused on the co-researcher's sharing of experience. Gathering meaningful (literally, meaning-full) text through conversation also requires being attuned to the way the co-researcher is sharing, the environment in which the

conversation is occurring, and even the silences that occur during the conversation. The language of the conversation is only one part of the listening experience.

> There is a dimensionality of our sonorous nature not contained by, and not channelled through, the structures of language. There is more to communication than language. There is more to language than its cognitive-instrumental content. In every discursive situation, there are consonances and dissonances, echoes and resonances which remain unspoken – and which perhaps cannot be spoken. There are consonances and dissonances, echoes and resonances, tones and undercurrents of meaning, of sense, of feeling, communicated only through the listening-space *around* language and *between* language, or *by* it, but not *in* it. (Levin, 1989, p. 195)

My co-researchers and I engaged in three individual conversations. All conversations were held in a private conference room on campus, or in a private office, also on campus. The conversations began with the very general statement: "Tell me about yourself" and then became either more focused following the list of general list of questions/conversation topics (Appendix D) or flowed from the responses of co-researchers. Each subsequent conversation followed up on the previous conversation to clarify points or to ask further questions based on the prior conversation. During the third conversation, I offered fragments of ideas that were emerging from the text as possible themes and asked my co-researchers to react to those emerging fragments. The reactions allowed me to begin assessing the degree to which my initial interpretive activities were generating salient possibilities for re-presenting the lived experience of the co-researchers. A group conversation was held and three co-researchers attended. The experience of the group conversation allowed the co-researchers to react more fully to emerging themes, as well as reflect on the experience of participating in this study.

Conversations with text: Other means of gathering. In addition to the conversations, I gathered text through some writing experiences by the co-researchers. Van Manen (1997) notes that it is often easier for participants to speak about their experiences and allow the researcher to then examine the text for essential meaning. By asking co-researchers to write something down, there was the possibility that they would worry too much about "getting it right," and therefore, write about the reflection rather than the actual experience as it was lived. In describing my request for written work, I assured my co-researchers that what I was interested in was their experience, and that there was no correct way to approach this written work. I was aware that there was also the possibility that some persons might be able to articulate their experience more fully through writing, and these written exercises would allow such persons to do so.

Two written pieces were generated by my co-researchers: a letter to either his younger self or to someone who was not aware of his sexual orientation, and a reflection on the experience of participating in the study. The letter was to allow the co-researchers to go back to a time when they may have been less sure of their sexual orientation and remember what that was like. The letter to the younger self served as the observations of how being gay has played out for each man and offered a chance to speak to his younger self about what he has learned as he has navigated the world as a gay man. The letter to someone who was not aware of his sexual orientation served as an opportunity to put the thoughts and feelings of keeping this aspect of himself secret into writing. By putting those thoughts on telling someone who was not aware of his

sexual orientation on paper, I hoped that those co-researchers who chose to do this written exercise might gain some clarity into why they felt unable to share their sexual orientation with that person. The reflection on participating in the study was a way to get the co-researchers to consider what it was like to share this aspect of themselves, their being gay. Part of my hope for this reflection piece was that by asking them to reflect on this recent experience of research participation regarding their sexual orientation, the text they would generate would offer some insight into what really stood out for them as co-researchers. What was it about participating in this study that offered them the opportunity to make deeper meaning regarding their lived experience of being gay men? Also, my hope was that asking them to write something individually on this topic would be a beginning place when we came together in group conversation.

The combination of conversation transcripts (and my reflections upon reading and re-reading them) and written materials by the participants were used as starting points for subsequent conversations. These various texts generated in the research process provided a rich source of data to uncover the essence of being gay – what it is like to live this experience and what it means to those who do. In order to share this richness, this text must be transformed into something meaningful for a reader of the research.

Interpreting

> All interpretive phenomenological inquiry is cognizant of the realization that no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge. Therefore, it behooves us to remain as attentive as possible to life as we live it and to the infinite variety of possible human

> experiences and possible explications of those experiences. (van Manen, 2002b, p. 7)

> Ontological inquiry is a possible way of interpretation which we characterized as a development and appropriation of an understanding. Every interpretation has its fore-having, its fore-sight, and its fore-conception. If such an interpretation becomes an explicit task of an inquiry, the totality of these "presuppositions" (which we call the *hermeneutical situation*) needs to be clarified and made secure beforehand both in a fundamental experience of the "object" to be disclosed, and in terms of that experience. (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 214)

The aspect of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry that is often the most difficult to explain is data analysis. The word *analysis* really is not appropriate for the methodology because it connotes a technical and specific approach to breaking down information and then reconstructing it according to rules that govern an approach or method. In phenomenology, *reflection* is a more appropriate term.

Interpretation through reflection. Using reflection does not imply that there are no boundaries and that there are no techniques that may be employed in the process of interpreting the texts that come from the conversations with co-researchers. Acknowledging that the researcher is the analytic tool in the process of phenomenological inquiry, Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that it "requires a reflective turn of mind on the part of the researcher" (p. 113) to be able to do this kind of research. Phenomenological reflection is a means of interpreting text (van Manen, 1997). But, what is interpretation? What does it mean to interpret?

To interpret is "to explain or tell the meaning of: present in understandable terms" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999, p. 612). In further reading the definitions offered for interpret, the reader is directed to the word construe: "to

understand or explain the sense or intention of – usually in a particular way or with respect to a given set of circumstances" (p. 248).

Heidegger (1927/1996) in *Being and Time* states:

> We shall call the development of understanding *interpretation*. In interpretation understanding appropriates what it has understood in an understanding way. In interpretation understanding does not become something different, but rather itself. Interpretation is existentially based in understanding, and not the other way around. Interpretation is not the acknowledgment of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding. (p. 139)

The way I understand Heidegger's description of interpretation is that the act of interpreting does not end in some static finality, some pronouncement of understanding. Interpretation is more dynamic; it is on the way to understanding, always moving toward an authentic apprehension of some phenomenon, toward the finding of meaning. Derrida (1978, 2002) would take this further since he believed that a general and consistent theory of a phenomenon is impossible, as the interpretive stance of the perceiver is in constant flux. Those who interpret change, and therefore, the phenomenon changes as well, at least in terms of how the phenomenon is seen, interpreted. One must keep in mind that the phenomenon already existed prior to interpretation: it is what it is without the researcher naming it what it is. "Meanings – the projected possibilities determined for us by our circumspective dealing with the things we encounter in the world – exist *before* language does. Words are themselves merely *tools* invented for the sake of making specific meanings conspicuous and communicable" (Bontekoe, 1996, pp. 71-72).

Derrida (Moran, 2000) would trouble Bontekoe's statement about words – for Derrida did not believe that even words could convey actual meaning, but simply refer the perceiver to other words – always in search of meaning but without ever fully arriving at it. So, we must interpret, and be satisfied with its somewhat ethereal nature, in order to find the phenomenon's significance. Derrida noted that he owed much to Heidegger regarding the development of his thought.

In his essay *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger (1993) adds to the puzzle of the place of language in our understanding of our Being by proposing the following thesis statement for his text on language: "*To bring language as language to language*" (p. 398). In essence, Heidegger (1993) is proposing that language (and its function, importance, even fundamentality to Being) may only be understood in terms of itself – similar to Derrida's notion that words do not mean without referring to other words. Thus we can see the power of language in coming to terms with our Being – quite literally.

> Interpretation does not, so to speak, throw a "significance" over what is nakedly objectively present and does not stick a value on it, but what is encountered in the world is always already in a relevance which is disclosed in the understanding of world, a relevance which is made explicit by interpretation. (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 140)

And Bontekoe (1996) points out that interpretation is a significant activity because "interpretation changes our relationship to the things in our world by increasing the possibilities of our interaction with them" (p. 69). So, when phenomenologists engage in interpretation, we open ourselves to the world and new possibilities for

understanding. As van Manen (1997) reminds us, staying open to possibilities is one of the fundamental tenets of phenomenological inquiry.

How does the interpretation happen? What is required for interpretation and understanding to be possible? Heidegger (1927/1996) believed that we understand new phenomena by or through a process of understanding, which is based in the phenomena we already understand. How can this be possible? Is this not a vicious circle of logic? It is the hermeneutic circle of understanding (Bontekoe, 1996). Heidegger (1927/1996) wonders about this circle as well:

> But if interpretation always already has to operate within what is understood and nurture itself from this, how should it then produce scientific results without going in a circle, especially when the presupposed understanding still operates in the common knowledge of human being and world? (p. 143)

Heidegger concludes, "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle, but to get in it in the right way" (p. 143). In entering this circle of understanding, Heidegger (1927/1996) brings us back to a fundamental concept in phenomenology – to remain focused on "the things themselves":

> A positive possibility of the most primordial knowledge is hidden in it which, however, is only grasped in a genuine way when interpretation has understood that its first, constant, and the last task is not to let fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception be given to it by chance ideas and popular conceptions, but to guarantee the scientific theme by developing these in terms of the things themselves. (p. 143)

Being in the hermeneutic circle means being and remaining with one's text over time. In similar fashion to the ethnographer, the phenomenologist must have a prolonged engagement with the data and be open to the directions in which the data/phenomena lead the researcher. In discussing the philosophical and

methodological foundations of hermeneutic phenomenology, there are two distinct, yet related aspects to this research approach: phenomenology as a rich description of the phenomenon, and hermeneutics as the meaning-making process. "The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something" (van Manen, 1997, p. 77). But how do I go about grasping the essential meaning? There is no prescribed method for approaching reflection in phenomenological inquiry; rather, "Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure – grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process of a free act of 'seeing' meaning" (van Manen, p. 79).

Engaging hermeneutics: Reflection toward meaning. In seeing meaning, I am looking for themes that represent that meaning. What I am doing, according to van Manen (1997), is trying "to unearth something 'telling,' something 'meaningful,' something 'thematic' in the various experiential accounts – we work at mining meaning from them" (p. 86). What I am doing is not only "seeing," but also, listening. I am listening for and attending to key statements and key silences; and with these keys, I can unlock meaning.

Key statements are those which demand our attention through their intensity, their ability to pull us up short to a place of wonder, or their fundamentality. Key statements point us toward emerging themes in the text. One must remember that "phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived

experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (van Manen, 1997, p. 90). Whereas in other forms of interpretive research, the researcher is reporting what one finds, in hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher takes these various knots in the web of experience and joins them together through artful writing in an attempt to show the reader the lived experience of the phenomenon. To bring forward these knots of experience, glimpses of the lived experience from those who participate in the research project are shared and then interpreted through a textual conversation with other philosophical and phenomenological sources. Van Manen (1997) does offer several ways to approach the act of reflecting on text to begin the process of bringing forth meaning, and thus meaning-structures, or themes. The approaches van Manen offers are (a) the wholistic, or sententious approach, (b) the selective or highlighting approach, and (c) the detailed or line-by-line approach.

The wholistic, or sententious, approach happens when "we attend to the text as a whole" (van Manen, 1997, p. 93). To approach text in this manner, one asks, "What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole? We then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase" (van Manen, 1997, p. 93). According to the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1999), sententious comes to modern English from the Middle English as "full of meaning" with origins in the Latin *sententiosus*, from *sententia*, meaning sentence or maxim. Another definition of sententious is offered by Merriam-Webster (1999) as, "given to or abounding in aphoristic expression" (p. 1067). An aphoristic expression is one that is embodied in an aphorism, or "a concise statement of a principle" or "a terse

formulation of a truth or sentiment" (Merriam-Webster, 1999, p. 54). So what the researcher is attempting in the wholistic or sententious approach to phenomenological text is to dis-cover, reveal, and apprehend the meaning of a text by examining it as a whole and offering possibilities for the "formulation of a truth" or an interpretation that is full of meaning. Truth, interpretation, and meaning will have significant variation depending upon the truth-seeker, interpreter, or meaning-maker: one aspect that puts human in the human sciences. Expressing this variation and calling for a suspension of judgment toward the phenomenological writing process, van Manen (1997) reminds the researcher:

> Expressing the fundamental or overall meaning of a text is a judgment call. Different readers might discern different fundamental meaning. And it does not make one interpretation necessarily more true than another. But there is much possibility here to err or to see meaning that is idiosyncratic. (van Manen, 1997, p. 94)

To work toward meaning making that may be less idiosyncratic, other approaches to phenomenological text may be taken in combination with the wholistic or sententious approach.

The selective or highlighting approach occurs when "we listen to or read a text several times and ask, what statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described? These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight" (van Manen, 1997, p. 93). In its overall purpose, the selective or highlighting approach is the same as the wholistic or sententious: to reveal meaning structures, themes. In some ways, the selective or highlighting approach is more systematic and its description less elusive than the wholistic or sententious

approach – it is relatively clear how to proceed with this approach, though not as specific as the detailed or line-by-line approach.

In the detailed or line-by-line approach, "We look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, what does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (van Manen, 1997, p. 93). One of the benefits I discovered in transcribing my research conversations with co-researchers is the possibility of beginning the process of wondering about the meaning of the text, literally as it is re-created from audio recording to written text in a line-by-line fashion. Being with text in this creative manner (as in "given to creating," Merriam-Webster, 1999, p. 272) allows one to take in the language of co-researchers over time and to let this language percolate in the conscious and subconscious of the self as researcher and co-creator of meaning. Stepping back from the text and asking the wholistic and sententious questions more readily is possible after being with the text in a line-by-line way. The point of phenomenological reflection is to see meaning and meaning structures, or themes.

Meaning structures in pursuit of understanding. What are themes? There are two types of themes that phenomenologists concern themselves with in phenomenological inquiry: the incidental and the essential. It is important to recognize both, as doing so provides the comparative perspective that allows the researcher to determine which is which. "Phenomenological themes may be understood as the *structures of experience*" (van Manen, 1997, p. 79). Through phenomenology, what I am attempting to do literally is to dis-cover the meaning that is embedded in textual

accounts of lived experience. How do I know if I have understood the meaning as lived by the co-researchers versus my own meaning? I am aware that prior experience may distort the interpretive process. Therefore, it is important for me to share the interpretations of the text with the co-researchers throughout the research process. For me, it is asking the question: "Does the co-researcher see him or herself in the text I create that represents the meaning I have come to understand?" And, "What additional understandings might they be brought to that they were unaware of before?" This stance is especially important for the phenomenon of this project – as gay men have longed to see themselves accurately portrayed in text, and it is through seeing that there are others "out there" who are like them in the regard of sexual/affectional attraction that has been a salvation (Pimental-Habib, 1999).

This notion of being sure the co-researchers see themselves in the text is imperative to remaining true to the methodology (Jones, 2002). In this project, once I began dis-covering meaning through interpreting the texts, I took that interpretation back to my co-researchers for verification, related to the root *veritas*, the Latin for truth (Harper, 2001), in the interest of ensuring that the co-researchers see their truth in my interpretations. The co-researchers and I had what van Manen (1997) calls "hermeneutic conversations" whereby "both the researcher and the interviewee weigh the appropriateness of each theme by asking: Is this what the experience is really like?'" (p. 99). Once answered in the affirmative, the co-researchers and I co-constructed meaning and gained a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Another consideration in the interpretation aspect of the research process is discerning the incidental themes from the essential themes. Through this phenomenological inquiry, I am looking for the essential themes, as they are the foundation of the phenomenon.

> *In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is*. To this end the phenomenologist uses the method of free imaginative variation in order to verify whether a theme belongs to a phenomenon essentially (rather than incidentally). The process of free imaginative variation can also be used to generate other essential themes. (van Manen, 1997, p. 107)

Moustakas (1994) offers some insight into this idea of imaginative variation: "The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through utilization of imagination, varying frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions" (pp. 97-98). Although the essential themes are my main focus, by bringing forward incidental themes I add texture to the phenomenon, and in a way am showing what is essential by showing what is not.

For me the metaphor of sunlight and the prism is apt in understanding the art of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. The visual idea of sunlight is common to humans with sight. The visual idea of the entire spectrum within sunlight is not. When sunlight passes through a prism, the various parts of the light are bent and changed in such a way as to allow the essential aspects that comprise the sunlight to be revealed. What the prism does is allow us to see deeper into the sunlight and understand it more complexly. Good phenomenological reflection does the same thing; it brings the reader

of the research closer to the lived experience of another, and brings a more complex understanding to that experience. In addition, good hermeneutic interpretation brings the co-researchers to a deeper understanding of their own experiences with the phenomenon as represented in the texts the co-researchers co-construct. Crotty (2003) explains:

> Included in much hermeneutic theory is the prospect of gaining an understanding of the text that is deeper or goes further than the author's own understanding. This aim derives from the view that in large measure authors' meanings and intentions remain implicit and go unrecognized by the authors themselves. Because in the writing of the text so much is simply taken for granted, skilled hermeneutic inquiry has the potential to uncover meanings and intentions that are, in this sense, hidden in the text. Interpreters may end up with an explicit awareness of meanings, and especially assumptions, that the authors themselves would have been unable to articulate. (p. 91)

Once I have interpreted the texts provided by co-researchers, I must find artful, engaging, and compelling ways to share that interpretation.

Re-Presenting

> Human science research *is* a form of writing. Creating a phenomenological text is the object of the research project. (van Manen, 1997, p. 111)

> Good writing facilitates the making of connections in a way that inspires openheartedness, thinking, talking, and action. (Pipher, 2006, p. 7)

> The very first thing I tell my new students on the first day of a workshop is that good writing is about telling the truth. We are a species that needs and wants to understand who we are. (Lamott, 1995, p. 3)

To represent is "to bring clearly before the mind," "to serve as a sign or symbol," "to take the place of in some respect," "to apprehend (an object) by means of an idea," "to portray or exhibit in art: depict" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999, p. 993). The word represent is linked to the word present (verb sense)

through its etymology. Noting that the verb present comes to modern English from Middle English, from the Middle French *representer*, from Latin *repraesentare*, from *re- + presentare*, to present, I can see the link between the words across time and languages (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Looking at a definition of present, I see that the word means, "to offer to view (as in show)" and "to bring to one's attention" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999, p. 921). Phenomenological writers attempt to bring to readers' attention the phenomenon under consideration. The explanation of the verb form of the word present is best understood in phenomenological methodology as "to offer to view," as what is being attempted is to allow the phenomenon to show itself as itself; the phenomenologist engages in revealing more than showing.

The verb reveal comes from the Middle English *revelen*, from the Middle French *reveler*, from Latin *revelare* to uncover, reveal from *re- + velare* to cover, veil, from *velum* veil (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999, p. 1002) and means "to open up to view: display." To display means "to put or spread before the view" or "to make evident" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999, p. 335). Phenomenological inquiry attempts to make the phenomenon under consideration evident to the readers of the research text; to open up to view previously hidden and concealed aspects of the phenomenon, allowing the reader to see what is essential about the phenomenon, what makes the phenomenon what it is and without which it would not be (van Manen, 1997). How is it that phenomena are revealed in phenomenological inquiry?

In tracing the etymology of reveal, I was pointed to disclose as a synonym (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1999, p. 1002). From earlier etymological work, I remembered disclose is related to the Latin *claudere* meaning to close (Klein, 1966). When I followed the tracing further to the word, close, I found that the word close is linguistically connected to closet, or a "hidden place." In this etymological tracing of words related to the concept of re-presenting in phenomenology, there is a resonance with the phenomenon of being gay. The idiomatic phrase, "to come out of the closet," is an apt one to describe phenomena explored through phenomenological inquiry, not just the phenomenon of being gay, since one is dis-closing, bringing forth, and revealing when one conducts phenomenological inquiry.

Why all the hyphens in your writing? I faced this question when sharing various pieces of my phenomenological writing with colleagues. The careful, precise, and artistic use of language is one of the devices used by phenomenologists to compel readers to think more deeply about the phenomenon at hand. Using a hyphen in a word that is not normally hyphenated brings the reader up short and forces a second look at the word and how it is being used. In the case of re-presentation, I purposefully use the hyphen between the first two syllables to show that in representing the lived experience of my co-researchers, I am attempting to re-present that experience; in other words my representation will be accurate only if it is a re-presentation. This technique of manipulating words is one aspect of sensitivity to language that allows phenomenologists to bring the reader closer to seeing the constructed meaning in phenomenological writing.

> The phenomenological method consists of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive – sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak. This means that an authentic speaker must be a true listener, able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing, able to listen to the way the things of the world speak to us. (van Manen, 1997, p. 111)

Phenomenological writing is phenomenological research. "For scholars such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty the activities of researching and reflecting on the one hand, and reading and writing on the other hand, are indeed quite indistinguishable" (van Manen, 1997, p. 126). When van Manen (1997) refers to writing, he refers to writing *and* re-writing because a phenomenological text requires "re-thinking, re-flecting, and re-cognizing" (p. 131), and it is through re-writing that these occur. Writing is a way to concretize thought; it makes thought seeable, if you will. What researchers are doing when engaging in phenomenological inquiry is bringing forth a phenomenon and the researcher's interpretations of it, thereby making it real for others by putting it on paper – allowing others to see the researcher's thoughts. The goal is to make the implicit explicit. Explaining this further, van Manen (1997) says:

> Writing gives appearance and body to thought. And as it does, we disembody what in another sense we already embody. However, not until we had written this down did we quite know what we knew. Writing separates the knower from the known, but it also allows us to reclaim this knowledge and make it our own in a new and more intimate manner. Writing constantly seeks to make external what somehow is internal. (p. 127)

In the subsequent chapters of this research endeavor, I give appearance and body to the thoughts that are the result of my reflections on the lived experiences shared with me by my co-researchers. Bringing forth this lived experience is achieved through linguistic

transformation of the "field text" of conversation transcriptions to "research text" of hermeneutic phenomenological description. If, as van Manen (1997) tells us, "The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible" (pp. 125-126), then I must remain mindful of this "carefully cultivated thoughtfulness" (p. 131) as I move forward with the research.

There is a tension for me in this "linguistic project." The philosophical language (and to some extent, reasoning) pushes away readers. Yes, philosophy raises important and deep questions, but the language is often difficult to grasp. Although it is possible to make a claim that philosophical writing is complex and requires a complex mind to understand, this rather elitist stance has the potential to make philosophy less approachable. For me, the tension is that good, well-written phenomenology is firmly grounded in philosophy, but also draws people in. It offers compelling narrative; in other words, it has the potential to speak to anyone, not just those who have studied philosophy as a discipline. The resolution of this tension is the work for phenomenologists – to explain the complexities of every-dayness in language that is approachable and allows the reader to deepen his or her appreciation for the lived experience being shared and the meaning being made by those who live the experience.

What structure will the research text take? In what form and ways will I bring forth my interpretations? In discussing how the research is to take shape and the approaches one might take toward creating the phenomenological text, van Manen (1997) offers several possibilities: thematically, analytically, exemplificatively,

exegetically, existentially, and inventing an approach. What is important, he says, is that the approach taken is the one that makes the most sense for the phenomenon under consideration, again the supremacy of phenomenon over method. Although it may not be possible to give a specific outline of how the research will take shape (it takes shape as it occurs), the phenomenologist can "organize with broad brushstrokes the overall sense of the approach required by the fundamental question or notion one is addressing" (van Manen, 1997, p. 167).

> Human science research as writing is an original activity. There is no systematic argument, no sequence of propositions that we must follow in order to arrive at a conclusion, a generalization, or a truth statement, because that would be to see writing itself as a technical method. (van Manen, p. 173)

As I wrote my way into the phenomenon, my approach remained open to the possibilities of combining the thematically, exemplificatively, exegetically, and existentially ways of organizing the text. For me as a researcher, I understand best when I organize experience by theme – it is how I make sense of things. Thematic explication through writing becomes an interpretive act: reflection through writing. The notion of theme is carried further in a manner I call thematic conversation, or conversation among themes. The conversation took place between the themes generated from the texts of my co-researchers and the themes brought forth through the lived experience introduced in Chapter II, a dialogue between the themes emerging from the hermeneutic conversations with co-researchers and the themes represented as my preunderstandings. The dialogue is also one that I engage in with the text itself as I

attempt to make it speak. How do my preunderstandings and emerging meanings thematically complement each other? In what ways do they challenge each other?

How does this form of conversation deepen our understanding of the phenomenon? This way of working with themes is a form of intra-interpretive conversation: I am interpreting the shared experience of the co-researchers of this study, the already interpreted experience of others as shared in Chapter II, and my own experience with the phenomenon shared in Chapter I. Providing varying examples of the conversation text that further explicate the emerging themes will assist the reader to know how I came to see emergent themes and will offer greater richness to the understanding of those themes. The exegetical approach is accomplished through "engaging one's writing in a dialogical or exegetical fashion with the thinking of some other phenomenological author(s) – in other words, with the tradition of the field" (van Manen, 1997, p. 171). With the ontological nature of my research question, and more specifically with my question about authenticity, I engage with the classic phenomenologists who have written extensively on these topics, to the extent that these phenomenological writings help reveal the lived experience of my co-researchers.

The lifeworld existentials, as discussed by van Manen (1997), are another way to reflect on and write about the lived experience of my co-researchers. The existentials of lived time (temporality), lived relationship with others (relationality), lived body (corporeality), and lived space (spaciality) intuitively are appropriate as compass points. Lived time may be experienced by a gay man as a slowing down while waiting for a response from the person to whom he has just come out. If he has been aware of his

sexual orientation for some time and has been in the closet, time may speed up as he leaves the closet and engages in the world of relationships. As gay men meet new people there is the decision of whether or not to be open about one's sexual orientation; our relationality is always affected by sexual orientation. Corporeality is naturally part of the experience of a gay man, whether it is the decision of being true to the physical longings he experiences, or how he interprets his body in relation to sexual orientation. For lived space, safety may be an issue. Where is it that I feel safe? Are there spaces and places where I do not feel comfortable or even safe? How do I take space and make a place for myself?

What aspects of self do I bring to the research process? In phenomenology, the researcher is the interpreter and presenter of meaning offered by the co-researchers. As the interpreter and presenter, I must remain mindful of the various aspects of my self that affect the lens through which I see the lived experience as shared by my co-researchers. Social identities (for example, race, gender, ethnicity) have the possibility of great impact on interpretation and the environment created during the conversations with co-researchers. "The interpretation of the data is inevitably impacted by our own experiences and worldview. This reality requires that special attention be given to how our own and the participants' social identities influence what is said and what is understood" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 106). This concept of the interplay of social identities and the research process is referred to as positionality.

Positionality is the lived vantage point or perspective on the world. It comprises those identity elements that are related to power (all forms), or lack of power, one experiences in the world.

> Positionality refers to the social position of the knower, i.e. the class, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. of the knower. Questions of positionality are epistemological in nature in that they relate to how knowledge is produced and how the knower comes to an understanding of knowledge. Epistemology involves theorizing about knowledge and the exploration of the nature, scope, and legitimacy of knowledge claims. (Rhoads, 1997a, p. 10)

A lived vantage point may be either ad- or disad- in nature. One may be ad-vantaged when one holds certain power based on one's identity characteristics, or one may be disad-vantaged if one is not a member of a dominant social group. This idea of positionality is important to keep in mind in reflecting on and writing of phenomenological text, as well as when engaging with co-researchers. It was critical that I remained acutely aware of my own positionality and kept in mind how this might affect the relationality between my co-researchers and me as researcher. In writing about interpretations of the co-researcher's experience, I stayed mindful of my positionality as having an effect on the interpretive lens. If I understand and openly share my interpretive lens(es) in the research process, the research project may allow me to grasp social reality as constructed by another – in essence, I may try on the lens of another to see the world from a different perspective:

> Among the potential benefits is the additional major one of getting better at what we can never be too good at – that process of decentering whereby we strive to truly understand – in short, to do justice to how someone can think and feel and conclude the way they do when all of this is, possibly, antithetical to how we ourselves think, feel and conclude. (Peshkin, 2001, p. 245)

The choice of how to use one's interpretive lens is one way the researcher is advantaged: having the power to construct the research text, text that is meant to re-present the experience of the co-researchers. In his study of gay college students, Rhoads (1997a) recognizes the importance of addressing the issue of his heterosexuality in terms of positionality and finding ways to accurately portray the experiences of his gay co-researchers:

> Issues of positionality are connected to the representational practices we employ in constructing images of our research subjects. Because exploration of the other involves creating images of individuals and groups different from ourselves, some qualitative researchers have employed research subjects in a collaborative process of interpreting data and then constructing representations. (p. 15)

Additionally, our positionality is constantly changing because the contexts in which we interpret and re-present texts are constantly changing. The work of Derrida is useful here in understanding how our reading and interpreting of texts is an ever-dynamic experience. Derrida's "strategy is to call attention to the *contexts* of texts and to show how their meanings are transformed when recontextualized, that is through being inserted into different narratives, compared with other texts, and so on" (Moran, 2000, p. 435). With the ever-changing context of our interpretive stance, researchers must remain constantly mindful of their positionality.

The ultimate goal of phenomenological research is to share lived experience to which the reader might not have otherwise had access and to help the reader see what meaning the experience has for those who live it. Understanding how others make meaning of their lives allows us to live more response-ably (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002) in the world with others. It also allows us to develop what van Manen (1997) calls

"tact" as we are in the world with others. Tact "is the sensitivity one has to seeing others in their authentic way of being" (F. H. Hultgren, personal communication, February 5, 1998). To bring the reader to a place of understanding the phenomenological text must be powerful: "A description is a powerful one if it reawakens our basic experience of the phenomenon it describes, and in such a manner that we experience the more foundational grounds of the experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 122).

There is a great responsibility, as well as response-ability (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002), in conducting phenomenological research – to both the co-researchers and to the reader. The researcher must be ever mindful of his or her pre-understandings and remain oriented toward the phenomenon and to let it speak for itself, thereby producing good phenomenology. Arminio and Hultgren offer the concept of goodness as a concept for judging qualitative research rather than "rigor" as required by positivist research. For phenomenology, Arminio and Hultgren state: "Goodness is shown in the lived quality of the language and the deeper meaning brought forward by the researcher in conversation with the text" (p. 453). For the phenomenologist, demonstrating goodness

> requires peer, participant, and reader confirmability. In phenomenology, an insightful interpretation brings forth a phenomenological nod from the reader, where the description allows readers to understand what a certain experience must have been like without having gone through it themselves. (Arminio & Hultgren, p. 457)

Phenomenological researchers want to "know" the world in a profound manner; thus this means we are in the world with intentional attunement to the living world around us – our act of researching is a way of grounding ourselves in the living world.

"Phenomenology calls this inseparable connection to the world the principle of 'intentionality'" (van Manen, 1997, p. 5). I demonstrate my intentionality by sharing the stories of the lived experience of my co-researchers as they offer what it is and what it means to them to be gay.

> Stories need communities to be heard, but communities themselves are also built through story tellings. *Stories gather people around them*: they have to attract audiences, and these audiences may then start to build a common perception, a common language, a commonality. (Plummer, 1995, p. 174)

> Stories are the most basic tool for connecting us to one another. Research shows that storytelling not only engages all the senses, it triggers activity on both the left and the right sides of the brain. Because stories elicit whole brain/whole body responses, they are far more likely than other kinds of writing to evoke strong emotions. People attend, remember, and are transformed by stories. (Pipher, 2006, p. 11)

"The phenomenological reduction teaches us that complete reduction is impossible, that full or final descriptions are unattainable. But rather than therefore giving up on human science altogether, we need to pursue its project with extra vigour" (van Manen, 1997, p. 18). Part of that vigor is directed at allowing the compelling nature of co-researchers' stories to be brought forth through good writing.

> Good writing enlarges readers' knowledge of the world, or empowers readers to act for the common good, or even inspires other good writing. We all understand the world from our own point of view, our own frames of reference, that allow us to make sense of what our senses take in. Writers help readers construct larger, more expansive frames of reference so that more of the world can be more accurately perceived. (Pipher, 2006, p. 7)

Those of us engaged in this study – researcher, co-researchers, and readers – are not seeking answers; we are seeking to understand the experience of others so we may ask better questions, of ourselves, our experiences, and our world. Initially, as I began

this project, it seemed to me to be about re-presenting the lived experience and stories of my co-researchers. As I engaged with my co-researchers and began writing about the experiences they were sharing, my own connection to the research emerged. I, too, was part of the research, and aspects of my-self were evident. As a gay man, this was appropriate as I also live the phenomenon. Can I ever truly separate my-self from the selves of my co-researchers in the re-presentation of the experience of being gay? Reminding myself of Heidegger's (1927/1996) caution that describing experience and interpretation may not be separate acts provided me with an answer to my question. No, I could not separate my-self from the research. How best then to represent the re-presentation of lived experience? It is not through stories, but through rendering portraits of experience that re-present the phenomenon of being gay. And so, let us meet my co-researchers and wonder how the experience of these men may enrich our lives and enhance our pedagogy.

CHAPTER IV

KNOWING (SELF) AND BEING: EXPLORING PERSONAL IDENTITY FOR GAY MEN

> Yet the phenomenologist's world is also a world in which our received notions – the systems of significant symbols that make us human – are seen to hide that potential meaning from us and hold us back from bringing it to birth. Phenomenologists chafe under what they see to be a tyrannous culture. They long to smash the fetters and engage with the world in new ways to construct new understandings. Research, for phenomenologists, is this very attempt to break free and see the world afresh. (Crotty, 2003, p. 86)

> The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expressions of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1998, p. xx)

The themes of this study are organized around Knowing and Being (self and other(s) and Being Known (how gay men are known by others) and are offered as portraits of lived experience as interpreted and re-presented by me as researcher, or possibly more accurately, portrait painter using words rather than pigment. The portrait artist is an interpreter of the person who sits for her or him. The actress Helen Mirren, in discussing her fears of playing a living person in the movie "The Queen," comments about how much anxiety she felt leading up to the playing of the part and her fears over getting it right. Suddenly, it occurred to her that what she was doing was very much like the art of the portrait painter where the artist brings a piece of him or herself into the process and, therefore, aspects of the artist are in the painting (Morgan & Frears, 2006).

The act of painting a portrait is an act of interpretation, and interpretation does not get at what is "right" or "correct" in its aim, but works toward "development of possibilities projected in understanding" (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 139). What I am

offering here is a sort of portrait: my interpretation, my understanding of the lived experience of being gay. As a portrait that is painted through words, the brushstrokes (keystrokes?) may be obvious as they represent the human act of interpretation, a necessary imprecision of the human sciences. “Composing linguistic transformations is not a mechanical procedure. Rather, it is a creative, hermeneutic process” (van Manen, 1997, p. 96).

How does a portrait painter paint? Does one begin by painting an overall background, a setting in which to place the subject of the painting? Or, does one look at the subject and the setting and determine what stands out to be painted first? Or, is it possible to start from one side of the canvas and proceed to the next? It seems to me, although not an artist, that all of these approaches may present themselves to the portrait painter as possibilities. Similarly, reflecting on text from phenomenological conversations may be experienced in similar ways.

There is a back and forthness in this experience of interpreting text – between approaches and between texts, of the various co-researchers in the project and in the text of other phenomenological and philosophical writers who have offered text that may assist in illuminating experience and revealing the meaning of the phenomenon under consideration. Using the various approaches to isolating thematic statements (van Manen, 1997) and to begin creating these portraits of the lived experience of being gay, I identified the ideas and aspects of the lived experience descriptions that stood out as central to the co-researchers’ understanding of their experience. In other words, I looked

for and noted “those moments which ‘fly up like sparks’ from the description” (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 2002, p. 6) to re-create meaning structures or themes.

There is another back and forthness that occurs when reflecting on and writing about the phenomenon of being gay, and probably exists for any phenomenon where I might be looking into aspects of Being and being-in-the-world. A challenge of writing about aspects of Being is structure. Where ought various aspects be presented to illustrate the re-presentation of meaning structure, of theme? Aspects of knowing the self and being-in-the-world are also, at times, aspects of being known. Aspects of being known are in ontological proximity to knowing others. And knowing others, in some ways, serves to sharpen one’s ability to know the self. The task of bringing forth aspects of knowing and being becomes a big swirling mass of epistemological and ontological matter, landing first here, then moving there.

As Derrida (1978) points out, it is not surprising that there is no apparent permanence to knowing and being as presented through text; each time anyone approaches text, the meaning shifts, at least somewhat. But what I attempt to get at is closer to the question of the meaning of Being, a la Heidegger’s project. Being, as described by Heidegger (1927/1996), is pre-reflective. However, as we engage Being as beings-in-the-world, we see hints of Being through reflection and attempt to show aspects of Being for a particular phenomenon under study. So in the re-presentation of the phenomenon of being gay as I interpret it, notice the backness and forthness of the various aspects of knowing (self, others), and being known. For clarity, I present the aspects that seem most related to the self here in Chapter IV, and present those aspects

of self that engage the other in Chapter V. As this text moves forth with exploration of meaning structures of the phenomenon of being gay, I would like to introduce you to six men who agreed to join me on this project of dis-covery.

Conversational Journey Toward Knowing and Being

As I mentioned in Chapter III, making choices about who would be asked to participate as co-researchers in my study was a great responsibility. Having made those choices, I am pleased that these six men were also response-able, they were able to respond to the question, "What is the lived experience of being gay?" Our conversations are a journey toward co-creation of meaning by bringing forth experiences of being gay men and working toward deeper meaning of those experiences.

Co-Researchers Gathered

The six men who agreed to participate as co-researchers are Cesar, Ethan, Felipe, Justin, Marc, and Steve (all pseudonyms). Three of the men are undergraduates (two seniors, one junior) and three are graduate students (all master's degree level). One of the co-researchers identifies as Latino, one identifies as Latino and international, and four identify as White. Although race was not the focus of the study or an aspect of the selection criteria, I was pleased that at least two of the co-researchers are students of color. In terms of geographic region of origin, within the United States, the West coast, New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the South are all represented. One co-researcher grew up in South America. The co-researchers ranged in age from 20 to 28 years old.

Cesar. Cesar is a first-generation college student and is a graduate student. He was drawn to the study because he has a deep desire to make colleges and universities

(indeed all environments) safe places for gay men. His Latino background provides him a complex view on wearing the label of minority in the U.S. – as a person of color, and as a gay man. He also notes that being a gay Latino has its own set of complexities given the machismo that is part of his heritage. Cesar is close with his family, including his extended family, and they are aware of his being a gay man.

Ethan. Ethan grew up not far from the university and went to school in several of the local school districts. He identifies himself as partially out of the closet – depending upon the context of a situation and the people involved. His immediate family members are all aware he is gay, but his extended family does not know, and he does not want them to know at this time. He says that when he is in public, he prefers to act "normal" (his word), which upon probing from me, means "straight-acting." We explored that a bit, but it began to feel a bit like therapy, and I was concerned about the direction of his participation in the project. Ethan wanted to participate because he felt it was important that a variety of experiences of being gay be shared, not just the experiences of those gay men who are already willing to be totally open about their sexuality. I appreciate his candor and find his perspective adds nuance and texture to the conversations for this study.

Felipe. Felipe is an international graduate student. Before coming to the university, Felipe had traveled a good deal internationally and shared his various experiences of encountering gay culture in other countries as well as in the U.S. While at the university, Felipe has been open about being gay (where he feels it is appropriate) and has not felt the need to hide his sexuality. However, at home in South America, he

is only open with his immediate family and some close friends. Felipe's father lives in a very conservative area of his home country, and Felipe is concerned how his father would be treated if more people knew about Felipe's sexual orientation. When he is traveling at home, Felipe doesn't make a big show of hiding his sexuality, but is careful.

Justin. Justin is the youngest of my study's co-researchers. His approach to talking about being a gay man is different from the others in that he feels it is "weird" and awkward to say "I am gay." For Justin, being gay is simply one aspect of his total self and should not have to be separated from the other aspects. He does, however, acknowledge that for many, both gay and not, this separation of identity aspects is important for self-understanding. Justin is very forthcoming about exhibiting feminine traits, and feels he could never pass as straight, regardless of how hard he tries.

Marc. Marc has been part of several studies inquiring into various experiences of being a gay man. Most were more focused on specific experiences within the greater experience of being gay, such as being a gay child of a gay parent, and so forth. Initially, the global approach is a challenge for Marc as he was accustomed to being asked specific questions with specific purposes behind the questions. The open nature of phenomenological inquiry is difficult for him at first, but once he gets used to the freedom and allows the phenomenon we are talking about to take the lead, he enjoys the experience and feels that he is able to explore what his being gay means to him for the first time.

Steve. Steve is a "pomo-homo," or a post-modern homosexual. My first encounter with this term was when Steve uses it to describe himself. For Steve, a pomo-

homo is one who is quite educated about the social construction of the concept of homosexuality, and one who works against being categorized. Steve is well versed in gay literature and history. He also is aware of several conceptualizations of sexual identity development and does not believe that language itself is hurtful. Steve grew up on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and was happy to leave that area for the relative openness of the university, and what he hoped was a more progressive atmosphere. Steve is a martial artist and is often mistaken for being heterosexual, which, frankly, makes him angry because of his distaste for putting people into categories.

What is it to Know?

What is it to know? What is it to know one's self? And when did knowing lose its sense of intimacy, as in "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain...?" (Holy Bible, 1972, p. 3). My first real encounter with the idea of knowing as an idea to study came with my exploration of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). With Belenky et al., I was introduced to the idea of epistemology and how differently one may come to know one's world. What is epistemology? What is knowing?

Knowing is a noun that has dual meaning of acquaintance and cognizance, dating back to the 14th Century (Merriam-Webster, 2005 – for the etymological work in this section on knowing, all citations are from Merriam-Webster). The idea of knowing as cognizance is the basis of epistemology as an area of study, as in "the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge," coming from the Greek *epistanai*, to understand. But how might the epistemological aspect be brought together with the

aspect of acquaintance? Acquaintance is "the state of being acquainted" which comes from the Latin *accognoscere* with the root *cognoscere*, meaning to know. Cognizance also shares the Latin root *cognoscere*. If knowing is the noun form that stems from the verb to know, what is it to know? Although the most common definition of "to know" is "to perceive directly, have direct cognition of," the secondary definition calls out to be heard for my study of the lived experience of gay men: "to have understanding of" for it is an understanding of being gay that I seek to illuminate through descriptions of how gay men come to know themselves, to know others, and what it is to be known by others. Knowing is also a sense of coming to the truth. "Truth is neither an object 'out there' nor a proposition about such objects. Instead, truth is personal, and all truth is known in personal relationships" (Palmer, 1993, p. 48). As gay men come to know themselves as gay men, they come to know a deeper sense of truth. In this case, the relationship in which truth dwells is with the self.

The relationship between knowing and being had been understood through the Cartesian formula: *cogito, ergo sum*, or "I think, therefore I am" (Newman, 2005, *Cogito Ergo Sum* section, ¶ 3) and generally accepted as a basis of understanding these two fundamental aspects of philosophy. Heidegger (1927/1996), in turning the philosophical world back to the question of the meaning of Being, turned the Cartesian formula around, arguing that being precedes thinking. Heidegger's idea came forth in the sharing of stories of coming to know one's self in terms of being gay. As we talk about our experiences of understanding who we are as gay men, there is a common experience of our pasts of knowing that we were somehow different, but not being sure

what that difference was or what it meant for us. As we came to understand ourselves as sexual beings, what that difference was and what that difference meant became more and more clear. As we reflect upon the experience of coming to understand this difference, it is clear that we *were* before we *knew*. What is the experience of coming to understand one's self for gay men? In conversation, as we talk about coming to know one's self as a gay man and what it means to be gay, Steve's response, "It's just who I am," offers an affirmative response to the commonly asked identity question, "Who am I?" (Ludwig, 1997). How might we resolve this question of identity?

Knowing (Self) and Being: Dissing Identity

> The real essence of being gay is being who you truly are. There is no secret formula or mode of behavior which makes one person more gay than another. Once a person has learned to be himself or herself, being gay becomes a gift and life becomes an opportunity to explore and celebrate. (McNaught, 1988, p. 3)

> It is rare that cultural legacies are the objects of dispassionate study. It is much more common to "celebrate" a cultural inheritance as a claim to recognition, and the content of the culture is often subordinated to the claim. Pride takes the place of understanding. (Moulakis, 2007, Celebrating identity section ¶ 1)

> More important perhaps is the question of how one experiences personal identity. How do I experience my sense of self? And who am *I* when I speak of myself as *self*? Developmental psychology and analytic theory have done little to clarify the subjective or lived meaning of identity. (vanManen & Levering, 1996, p. 90)

"But I just don't see myself in it [identity theory]. I tried to fit into the models, but it just didn't cut it" (Marc). Cesar and Steve echo this sentiment Marc shares. Cesar, too, had been exposed to theories of identity development and struggled with seeing himself represented. Steve, as a self-described "pomo-homo" spent a considerable amount of energy learning queer theory as well as various identity theories, and

although he could see the usefulness of theories when speaking with others in his academic discipline, he comments that they really didn't portray the full story. Should theory portray the full story? Or is the problem more with the application of theory once learned? To come to know one-self goes beyond theory, and for gay men we even need to "dis" identity to trouble the concept and to liberate self from theory.

What is it to "dis" identity? Dissing identity is about moving toward ontological freedom, the freedom simply to be. To dis something has two meanings (Merriam-Webster, 2005). On the one hand, to dis means "to treat with disrespect or contempt, insult," and on the other, "to find fault with, criticize." With regard to the notion of identity as a way to knowing self and being, I do not mean to treat with disrespect or contempt, or to insult. My aim, however, is to address identity as Cesar, Ethan, Felipe, Justin, Marc, Steve, and I do. We criticize this idea of identity and that being gay means *having* an identity as such. It is useful to understand what it means to criticize as it pertains to our dissing of identity: "to consider the merits and demerits of and judge accordingly" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). For the seven of us engaged in conversation around what it is to be gay, the notion of identity presents itself with its merits and demerits. At times, it is helpful to be named as having the identity of being gay, for instance, when wanting to find other gay men with whom we might share our stories, experiences, and yes, our lives. At other times, the having of a gay identity is troublesome, such as when we feel threatened by the having of that gay identity. Or when we observe others who pro-claim that identity and what we observe is foreign to

us and how we understand our-selves as gay men, then we ask: How is it possible that we share an identity when we seem nothing alike other than a category of identity?

As we wonder, ponder, and converse, the seven of us find ourselves going back and forth between accepting that there is such an entity as a gay identity, or that no such identity exists. We are simply unique in our *Dasein*, our way of being-in-the-world, but then we wonder, do we not share some aspects of being gay with other gay men? And so we find ourselves dissing identity through covering, closing, and missing. We experience the dis-covery of identity, the dis-closure of identity, and the dis-missing of identity. But what, then, is identity?

> The problem of identity has been a basic philosophical issue since Parmenides. Parmenides stated it in the form: "thought and being are the same," with a radicality and simplicity perhaps never again possible for later thinkers....
> In the history of Western philosophy, identity was at first thought as unity, as the unity of a thing with itself. (Stambaugh, 1957/1969, pp. 7-8)

Is identity an aspect of our Being? Or is identity something one has? "From the point of view of everyday experience, identity seems to emerge in concrete situations with others as a kind of immanent self-knowledge; it refers to who I am, to what makes it possible to say 'I'" (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 93). Identity comes to English from the Latin *identidem*, meaning repeatedly, and is constructed as a contraction of *idem et idem*, literally "same and same" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The various definitions of identity begin to open up the troubling possibilities of the notion of identity, or, possibilities for troubling the notion: "Sameness of essential or generic character in different instances; sameness in all that constituted the objective reality of a thing: oneness; the distinguishing character or personality of an individual,

individuality; the condition of being the same with something described or asserted" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The definition of identity points me toward both "oneness" and "individuality" as aspects of synonymity with identity. Oneness is defined as "the quality or state or fact of being one," whereas individuality is defined as the "total character peculiar to and distinguishing an individual from others, separate or distinct existence" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). How is it possible to be a descriptor of sameness or the "condition of being the same with something described or asserted," yet also the "total character peculiar to and distinguishing an individual from others"?

In construction of the word, identity, does the seemingly odd combination of the same word "same" point to the distinctly different ideas of identity? What does "same" mean? Is it possible to be "same as self" and "same as others" in one human being? How may I come closer to understanding? By moving from concept to experience, as van Manen and Levering (1996) remind us, "Our experiential sense of identity differs from cognitive, psychological, social, or analytical theories, in that these theories tend to sacrifice the immediate, visceral knowledge of self for the sake of an intellectual concept" (p. 93). Intellectual concept or directly encountered lived experience, this notion of identity and its meaning is elusive.

> What does the formula A=A state which is customarily used to represent the principle of identity? The formula expresses the equality of A and A. An equation requires at least two elements. One A is equal to another. Is this what the principle of identity is supposed to mean? Obviously not. (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 23)

Traditional formulations of identity are problematic as these formulations attempt the impossible: to make two entities the same, which Heidegger points out is not possible. For absolute sameness, only one of any entity need exist.

> If someone constantly repeats himself, for example: "the plant is a plant," he speaks in a tautology. For something to be the same, one is always enough. Two are not needed, as they are in the case of equality.
>
> The formula A=A speaks of equality. It doesn't define A as the same. The common formulation of the principle of identity thus conceals precisely what the principle is trying to say: A is A, that is, every A is itself the same. (Heidegger, 1957/1969, pp. 23-24)

So, how do I resolve this seemingly impossible way of understanding identity? If sameness between entities is not possible, how do I understand the aspect of sameness called for in the Latin *idem* which forms the phrase *idem et idem*, from which the word identity is formed by contraction?

Maybe we need to open our thinking beyond sameness as a limiting concept. Is it possible to have degrees of sameness? Could I be somewhat like another without being exactly the same, and said to share an aspect of identity? Clearly, as Heidegger states, two entities cannot be the same, but is there a sameness in a shared aspect of our being-in-the-world?

The idea of sameness is also thought of in terms of permanence in time, for example, how one stays the same and maintains a sense of unity of self over time. The notion of self and maintaining a unity of self is personal identity, maintaining a sameness within the self, rather than between self and an-other. But there is also a

mediating factor with personal identity, mediating between two ways of understanding identity (Ricoeur, 1990/1992).

Ricoeur (1990/1992) works out some of the problems of personal identity through the notion of identity as narrative and draws a distinction between two forms of identity, the *idem* and the *ipse*. In discussing the confrontation that occurs in the problem of defining personal identity, Ricoeur (1990/1992) says, "Let me recall the terms of the confrontation: on one side, identity as *sameness* (Latin *idem*, German *Gleichheit*, French *memete*); on the other, identity as *selfhood* (Latin *ipse*, German *Selbstheit*, French *ipseite*). Selfhood, I have repeatedly affirmed, is not sameness" (p. 116). And so, back to the idea of permanence in time, for it helps distinguish what might be meant by identity. Ricoeur notes, "It is with the question of *permanence in time* that the confrontation between our two versions of identity becomes a genuine problem..." (p. 116). He goes on to wonder:

> Is there a form of permanence in time which can be connected to the question "who?" inasmuch as it is irreducible to any question of "what?" Is there a form of permanence in time that is a reply to the question "Who am I?" (p. 118)

Now one begins to see some distinguishing characteristics coming forward. The key difference in ways of understanding identity is the "what" and the "who," with "what" representing the idea of sameness, and "who" the idea of selfhood. Everyone has elements of "what" in their way of being-in-the-world, and some of these "whats" may be shares with others. But each individual will interpret the way these "whats" manifest themselves differently, and that interpretation leads to the self, or the "who." So, I may share an aspect of being gay with other gay men, such as how I carry myself

physically, but how I interpret that way of carrying myself and how I incorporate that into my life story will be different, at least somewhat. It is in that different interpretation where selfhood emerges. It also may be in this distinction between what and who that makes the seeing of self in theory so difficult for Marc, Cesar, and Steve.

The idea of interpreting our lives is one fundamental aspect of narrative identity, and narrative identity allows us to understand that some degree of sameness may exist between us and others, but we are not bound by that sameness; we have the freedom of selfhood through the intervention of narrative identity. Narrative identity serves as an intervention "in the conceptual constitution of personal identity in the manner of a specific mediator between the pole of character, where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, and the pole of self-maintenance, where selfhood frees itself from sameness" (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, pp. 118-119). The idea of character, where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide as Ricoeur states, may be understood on two levels. One level of understanding is in "one of the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), and the other exists within the plot of some narrative, as in Tom Sawyer is a main character in *Huck Finn* by Mark Twain. "Understood in narrative terms, identity can be called, by linguistic convention, the identity of the character" (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 141).

"Where narrative becomes important, then, is in the mediation between the two aspects of identity, with the attendant questions. "*Idem* provides us with answer to the question 'What am I?' and *ipse* the answer to the question 'Who am I?'" (Snaevarr, 2007, Ricoeur section, ¶ 2). Where it becomes a challenge, however, is to distinguish

between the what and who in the "am I" question. There is the possibility that one may confuse the what for the who and begin to assume that the what is the who, thereby becoming some label of identity rather than one-self. Part of the difficulty is that none of us is completely the author of our being, as one may be the author of, say, a novel. In wondering about the various narrative roles in life and how these roles might compare to the narrative roles of lived experience, Ricoeur (1990/1992) wonders:

> What is to be said, first of all, about the relation between author, narrator, and character, whose roles and voices are quite distinct on the plane of fiction? When I interpret myself in terms of a life story, am I all three at once, as in the autobiographical narrative? Narrator and character, perhaps, but of a life of which, unlike the creatures of fiction, I am not the author but at most, to use Aristotle's expression, the coauthor, the *sunaition*. (p. 160)

Although it seems odd not to consider oneself the author of one's being, it is because "whole sections of my life are part of the life history of others – of my parents, my friends, my companions" (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 161); we are not the sole authors of our existence. Because we exist with others, others share a role of authorship.

Heidegger (1927/1996) would caution, however, to not get too caught up in worrying over the co-authorship of others, but to stand steadfast in a stance of wonder about one's own being-in-the-world and the relationship to Being in order to live an authentic life for one-self. The idea of "anxiety" is introduced by Heidegger as a jolting realization that there are forces greater than the self, in which humans play a part, but are not in sole control of their lives. Although Heidegger is referring to the greater sense of Being, the fact that we live in the world with others is part of our being-in-the-world, and, thus, one aspect of Being. As we encounter this Heideggerian sense of anxiety, we

must come to a place of resolution. Of course, as Heidegger (1927/1996) notes, we could simply remain in an undifferentiated state of Being, never questioning the meaning of our life, and not recognizing our "thrownness," or that our place in the world is not completely our choice. If we choose, however, to move beyond an undifferentiated life and resolve the Heideggerian anxiety that comes with recognition of a degree of powerlessness in our being-in-the-world as it relates to Being, we have, according to Heidegger (1927/1996) two options: to be-come authentic or inauthentic.

If one cannot bear the idea of not being fully in control of one's destiny and future and knowing that only death awaits us (we are beings-toward-death, after all), we may experience "fallen-ness," and immerse our self in the world of the other, living our self as "they-self" rather than "one-self." If, however, one is able to accept the reality of not being in complete control, and through such acceptance, take whatever control of one's life is possible, a person begins to truly "care" for one's world and one's being in it. To Heidegger (1927/1996), this is being authentic. For Heidegger, the key to authenticity is to not give in to the easiness of an undifferentiated life. As I reflect on my own experience of being gay, I wonder if being gay is an ontological asset. By being "different" are gay men not forced to address this sense of difference, and thereby move toward a more differentiated life?

Marc had come to understand himself as being gay in early high school. Although Marc describes high school as the worst time of his life, even the horrible experiences helped him come to understand his difference from others, and how that difference made him stronger. Marc's boyfriend, however, did not come to understand

him-self as a gay man until college. Marc notes that they both shared similar struggles, that of coming to understand that being different does not mean being less than others, but that they dis-covered this truth at different times. Marc hints that although he was stronger for it, making his dis-covery during high school was difficult as he states over and over again, "I hated high school."

If we are to be the authors of meaning in our lives, we must not have our sense of self be overshadowed by some concept of identity, some comparison with an idea or set of ideas that others may identify *as* us, or assume that some idea *is* us; rather, this idea or these ideas should be seen as simply one aspect *of* us. There is a danger in thinking of our-selves as abstractions, and this concern is echoed by Heidegger (1957/1969):

> It is no longer possible for thinking to represent the unity of identity as mere sameness, and to disregard the mediation that prevails in unity. Wherever this is done, identity is represented only in an abstract manner.... Even in the improved formula "A is A," abstract identity alone appears. (p. 25)

In addition to not allowing our selves to become abstractions, as gay men, we must stay in control of who is narrating our lives. For if we allow others to narrate our life stories, we run the risk of losing our sense of being characters in those stories, and becoming caricatures of our true selves.

A caricature is an "exaggeration by means of often ludicrous distortion of parts or characteristics...a distortion so gross as to seem like caricature" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Caricature comes to English by way of the Italian *caricatura*, which means, literally, "act of loading" from *caricare* (to load), originally from the Latin *carricare*.

So when someone else is allowed to narrate our life stories, we may have those stories loaded with notions, ideas, and meanings that are not true for the character of the story. For Ethan, this was especially troubling as he found it difficult to come to understand himself as a gay man because all he saw around him in culture were caricatures of gay men, of what gay was supposed to mean. "The biggest thing I think I lacked were gay role models...I didn't allow myself to have friends who were very effeminate guys; I had my own homophobia." And although Ethan expresses he is "not confident enough in my sexuality to wear it on my sleeve, and be open about it to everyone, and just feel comfortable being myself in all my classes," he does recognize the dangers in only caricatures of gay men being the information available to his fellow students. Therefore, he shares that he has joined the Speaker's Bureau on campus to visit classes and "tell them what kind of people I like and try to give them an image that I was like them, but I was gay." This idea that caricatures make it more difficult to "see one's self" in these images is troubling. And, "despite the proliferation of gay media portraits, stereotypes linger. Many young people buy into these characterizations about what gays should value and how they should present themselves – and conclude, 'this isn't me'" (Savin-Williams, 2005, ¶ 13).

I find it interesting that a synonym for caricature is "travesty" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), in the sense that it "implies that the subject remains unchanged but that the style is extravagant or absurd" as in "this production is a *travesty* of the opera." So it may become a travesty if gay men allow others to take the narrative role of sharing the life stories of being gay. Although we gay men may remain unchanged in the physical

sense (though possibly not in onto-psychological ways), the telling of our stories may become a travesty of the truth. But before we gay men can tell our stories, we must come to understand them ourselves. Understanding our selves is a complex and nonlinear process engaging aspects of dis-covering, dis-closing, and dis-missing identity.

Dis-Covering Identity: Knowing Self Through Difference and Being Other

> The Dasein does not need a special kind of observation, nor does it need to conduct a sort of espionage on the ego in order to have the self; rather, as the Dasein gives itself over immediately and passionately to the world, its own self is reflected to it from things. (Heidegger, 1975/1982, p. 159)

> I think there's a universal sense of feeling different and I know I felt that. I mean it's hard to describe...I don't know how to put that into words, but I know when I was talking to my mom after I came out she had experienced the same thing so I think it's just this feeling of you're not conforming somehow to what you're supposed to be doing. (Marc)

Dis-covering identity is really about discovering difference on the way to self. The aspect of the self that becomes our sexual orientation exists in us prior to our coming to know it exists. On our journey to understanding our selves as sexual and affectional beings, there is a stop on that journey called difference, or the beginnings of knowing that one is different, even though the “how” of that difference is yet to be understood. The Coming-In-To Being is the experience of wondering about what the sense of difference one is experiencing is about, what it means. This experience of dis-covering identity is also one of another form of dissing: orienting. Knowing how one is oriented to the world, to others in the world, gives us a stable sense of self. However, for gay men, a sense of dis-orientation is part of dis-covering identity.

To disorient is "to cause to lose bearings: displace from normal position or relationship, or to cause to lose the sense of time, place, or identity" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Where does this sense of dis-orientation come from? What is it to experience being different, but not knowing what that difference means? How might being the "other" allow gay men to come to understand themselves and become "self" through "other"? How might we know our authentic self? Heidegger (1927/1996) challenges the Cartesian *Cogito* which states, "I think, therefore I am" (Newman, 2005, *Cogito Ergo Sum* section, ¶ 3) by turning the Cartesian formulation on its head. For Heidegger, Being precedes knowing, although Dasein may not have access to Being without the capacity of knowing; in other words, I am, therefore I am able to know, and when I practice knowing, I become aware that I am. Of what, however, do I become aware? Of being the "other"?

> My experience of the other is at the same time an experience that involves my own self-consciousness, a self-consciousness in which I am pre-reflectively aware that I am an object for another. This experience can further motivate a reflective self-consciousness, as I consider how I must appear to the other. (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007, Social forms of self-consciousness section, ¶ 3)

What is it to be the "other"? What is it to come to know oneself through the experience of being the other? Being different and being the other is not the same thing. If difference is un-sameness, then it may be said that everyone experiences difference, or being different. For gay men, however, that sense of difference becomes being "the other." Otherness is not the same as difference; otherness is a specific positionality of against, not simply different. Felipe describes himself and the experience of feeling like the other as an experience of being against the mainstream, against the majority of the

world. For him, “it instills a sense of minority, not on racial grounds, but I understand what it is to be a minority.” Cesar also felt a sense of being different and being the other, though he notices it more when he is around groups of presumably heterosexual men. In some ways, the context of being in a majority heterosexual world throws being gay into relief, making the sense of feeling different quite normal.

The term alterity describes the philosophical wondering about the otherness of people (Voestermans, 1991) and is connected to the idea of identity.

> “Identity” is the affirmation of who we are by contrasting nearly every element of our way of life with that of others. This self-other dialectic is the core of the debate on alterity and identity: they invest each other with meaning, one does not go without the other. (Voestermans, 1991, p. 219)

The idea of alterity becomes important for gay men in self-understanding. Gay men become “the other” as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Alterity is simply otherness, which is “the quality or state of being radically alien to the conscious self or a particular cultural orientation” (Merriam-Webster, 2005). However, as we share stories of feeling like, and thus, being the other in our ways of being-in-the-world, my co-researchers and I accept that a sense of alterity is necessary to distinguish this aspect of difference from many around us. Although alterity is discussed in simple terms of “otherness,” for me it began to take on various levels of meaning. For gay men who take on the notion that they must see themselves as other before they fully understand themselves, it is an assumed alterity.

To assume has its etymological roots in the Latin *assumere*, a combination of *ad-* and *sumere*, to take (Merriam-Webster, 2005). To assume is “to take up” or “to take

to or upon oneself" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). So when gay men assume alterity, it is the taking on of this sense of otherness, in order to understand oneself better. This is contrasted with the experience of assigned alterity, or when the sense of otherness is given to or assigned to gay men by others (to be discussed further in the relational aspects of identity in Chapter V). The experiencing of alterity is different depending on how it occurs. Assumed alterity serves to open up one's understanding of self; assigned alterity tends to close down possibilities for understanding.

Again, Marc's description of his high school years calls to me to share the painful experience of knowing he was different, yet valuing that difference as it allowed (and continues to allow) him to celebrate his difference. The pain does not overshadow the possibility of ontological celebration, but is part of the aspect of coming to understand one is different and the other. Taking on the mantle of difference allows Marc to not only understand himself, but to move beyond the painful memories of high school and the sense of being different.

So, does the self exist only because of the other? Is alterity required for selfhood to happen? Does the self pre-exist its relationality with others? Heidegger (1975/1982) suggests that the self is present to and for itself regardless of contact with or consideration of the other. Our selves are not dependent upon the other.

> The self is there for the Dasein itself without reflection and without inner perception, *before* all reflection. Reflection, in the sense of a turning back, is only a mode of self-*apprehension*, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure. The way in which the self is unveiled to itself in the factical Dasein can nevertheless be fittingly called reflection, except that we must not take this expression to mean what is commonly meant by it – the ego bent around backward and staring at itself – but an interconnection such as is manifested in

> the optical meaning of the term. To reflect means, in the optical context, to break at something, to radiate back from there, to show itself in a reflection from something. (p. 159)

What Heidegger is saying is that the self is always there, although *Dasein* may not always be aware of self. Heidegger hints that although the self is always present, it may require some other being (or thing) in presence in order for the self to fully be one-self. However, to show the complexity of the world, Heidegger (1927/1996) in *Being and Time* notes that the idea of others is one that also is always present. This co-existence of self and others becomes problematic when the self and others are not understood in their pre-given existence, when the self does not reflect on being-in-the-world as being-in-the-world with others. When we come to know others, it is a way for us to come to know ourselves.

> But the characteristic of encountering the *others* is, after all, oriented toward one's *own* Da-sein. Does not it, too, start with the distinction and isolation of the "I," so that a transition from this isolated subject to the others must then be sought? In order to avoid this misunderstanding, we must observe in what sense we are talking about "the others." "The others" does not mean everybody else but me – those from whom the I distinguishes itself. They are, rather, those from whom one mostly does *not* distinguish oneself, those among whom one is, too. (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 111)

Ethan tried to escape what he determined were "others," meaning gay men who did not seem like him. He admits that he struggled with the idea that defining how gay should be manifest is problematic. He finds that the gay men he encountered through the Pride Alliance group and Safe Space program on campus were too "weird" for him. These gay men are too "out there," "in your face gay," and too feminine for Ethan. He wonders, "How can I know if I'm gay when I can't find anyone who is like me and is

also gay?" In an attempt to find gay men, not from whom he would want to distinguish himself, but rather gay men whom he would want to be like, or as Heidegger (1927/1996) states "those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself, those among whom one is, too" (p. 111), Ethan studied abroad, hoping to find gay men with whom he had more in common. Ethan found that gay men exhibit a variety of behaviors and that seeing more of the world opened up his limited understanding. Heidegger (1927/1996) reminds us that the world is always a world of "withness," we human beings exist with others, and that being-with is an aspect of our being-in-the-world.

> This being-there-too with them does not have the ontological character of being objectively present "with" them within a world. The "with" is of the character of Da-sein, the "also" means the sameness of being as circumspect, heedful being-in-the-world. "With" and "also" are to be understood *existentially*, not categorically. On the basis of this *like-with* being-in-the-world, the world is always already the one that I share with the others. The world of Da-sein is a *with-world*. Being in is *being-with* others. The innerworldly being-in-itself of others is *Mitda-sein*. (Heidegger, 1927/1996, pp. 111-112)

Extending the ideas of Heidegger and with a nod to the scholarship of Husserl and Sartre, Zahavi (1999) comments on the relation between self understanding and encountering and being encountered by others, noting that

> Self awareness entails a self-apprehension of the perspective of the Other, and it therefore has the encounter with the Other and the Other's intervention as its condition of possibility. It is, in other words, a type of self-awareness which does not have its origin in the self but depends upon *radical alterity*. When I experience the Other as experiencing myself and when I take over the Other's objectifying and alienating apprehension of myself, my self-awareness is mediated by the Other. Through the Other a type of self-awareness is made possible wherein I apprehend myself as seen in the midst of the world, as a person among persons, and as an object among objects. (p. 164)

So, is it true to that to be able to know oneself, one must know how others come to see us? Is this formulation of self-understanding or self-knowing a complication of the Cartesian *Cogito*? Maybe rather than *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), maybe it is "I am for others to think about, and therefore I am able to understand myself." Although this idea of knowing the self through being known by others has some philosophical salience, it may be true that we come to a more thorough understanding of ourselves via understanding how others see and understand us. There is an aspect of control that is part of the experience of being gay that requires troubling. I believe it is true that we may better understand ourselves if we are given the human mirrors of the others in our lives, but for gay men, these mirrors run the risk of becoming more like mirrors in a carnival Fun House. Although no human mirror reflects images exactly as the image presents itself (this is impossible given the humanness of such a mirror experience and the inherent interpretive nature of human encounter), how clearly do others see us?

Sitting in his seat during his first time on an airplane, Cesar discovers that the seat in front of him has a tray that he can pull down. As they are already in the air and people are allowed to be moving around the cabin, Cesar's parents indulge him and his need as a three-year-old to play with this new discovery. Without thinking, the tray table becomes a typewriter and Cesar begins typing away. "I'm going to be a secretaria, I'm going to be a secretaria" Cesar begins singing aloud, along with the theme song of a favorite television show he would watch with his grandmother. With hindsight and his knowledge that he is gay, Cesar wonders if this experience was a hint at the person he

was to become. He remembers his parents reprimanding him, but he wonders if it was because he might be annoying other passengers, or maybe his exuberant and possibly feminine behavior was troubling for his parents, coming from their son.

We come back to this wondering later in our conversational experience. Cesar shares a letter he wrote to his father, a painful memory of a time when Cesar felt disconnected from his father, and he recalls the clarity he felt that his father would not accept feminine behaviors in his son.

> I know you don't know this but one of the things that most hurt me was hearing you call mom out on my behavior; I remember you saying "your son" in a certain tone to her that made me feel as if I wasn't also your son...I think this hurt me even more than the cold shoulder I felt from you. I remember the fight you and mom had in the kitchen one time where you were very upset I had chosen to dye my hair...you used a tone and spoke with so much anger...it was so appalling to me to hear this since I was doing nothing more than getting some highlights in my hair, yet you equated it to me being in a gang or involved with drugs or something as bad as that. How little did you know about me and my life at that time. (Cesar)

As I read this letter, and especially this part, putting it together with our conversations so far, I wonder whether or not Cesar's father really did know his son was gay, and that maybe that was one source of the tension. I have the benefit of learning various aspects of these stories at nearly the same time, allowing for connections that do not happen as one experiences one's life day by day. I hesitate asking Cesar about this because I know how important his relationship was with his father and how far that relationship had come since the fight over his hair highlights. The pain is palpable in Cesar's letter; the feeling of having his father disconnect from him is clear. Later, we do, indeed, connect this experience of his father not appreciating the possible feminine characteristics his

son may have exhibited. With his father's lack of understanding the complexity of being gay, or even what being gay meant, Cesar begins to wonder if this wanting to be the *secretaria* on his first airplane experience was indeed a sign of his being different. Of course, at the time, Cesar only knew that he was playing honestly, different or not; his authentic self was on display.

What leads young gay men to understand their sense of being different? Awareness that being gay is not okay is a common early memory for all of us as we share our life stories. Examples in the media are not broad; rather, these examples are rather narrow, and often based on the commonly held stereotypes that gay men are either overly feminine, or possibly psychologically deranged. Justin remembers being in a chat room on the Internet, a chat room for younger gay men to talk to one another and not to feel alone, called, "Gaybc."

> I would hear about these horrible experiences, like this one guy who was from Ireland who had his house burned down because he was gay. Crazy stuff. And stuff about emotional struggles, sexual confusion, stuff like that...and I thought, well, this should be a harder experience. And I wondered, how do I just know this [about being gay]? (Justin)

However, biology intervenes. It seems that all of us involved in the conversations feel compelled to state that being gay is not just about sex. Where does that need come from? Are we answering an accusation from others about the nature of gay? Regardless, we come to see that being gay is, indeed, beyond biology, but begins in biology. The onset of puberty offers many possibilities for chaos. For young gay men, there is the additional chaotic possibility of being different, sexually.

Ethan knew he was supposed to find girls attractive. But he didn't. It was his scoutmaster and baseball coach that stirred his interests. Steve, too, knew that he wasn't attracted to girls, but he also wouldn't allow himself to notice boys. Looking back, he expresses he had a "vague understanding that I'm probably not straight, but also a denial, too, because of the environment I was in." About a year later, Steve admitted to himself that he was gay, but "had this very naive thought in my head, I can just hide that for the rest of my life." Justin, too, knew that he was supposed to find girls attractive.

> In sixth grade there was a girl in my class who was really pretty, blond, and I thought she's really pretty, well, actually, I'm supposed to be thinking she's pretty. And she is pretty, but then when I actually tried to think of her in a sexual way, it was like, "hmmm, no" and then when I went to the boys, I was like, "hmmm, yeah," so it was just a very natural sort of "oh" moment.

For Marc and Cesar, there is less of a knowing they were supposed to like girls. The memory for Marc is quite visceral, the memory about Tye, a boy in his homeroom with whom Marc also had band and physical education. Marc thought Tye was amazing, and although Tye wasn't what the girls typically were attracted to, Marc was drawn to his soft-spoken nature, and, of course, as Marc tells it, "he had a cute face." At the time, Marc was confused by this attraction, and when he thought about it at the time, "it was like, wow, what is this feeling? What the hell is going on here?" At first, Cesar didn't find it jarring that he would find boys attractive, or at least until he understood what that attraction might mean. Cesar remembers, "It was me and my friend Ted and it was conversations about boys...we were talking about boys and who was cute and who was a jerk. I don't think I had the consciousness to say, I'm probably gay if I'm checking out boys."

Sometimes, biology may be thwarted by sheer will. For Felipe, “There were earlier wonderings, but I didn’t call them gay.”

> I did have like an arousal in the shower stalls when we went swimming, for example, at the club and I saw a man naked, and it aroused me. I also realized that many men were being aroused there too; it was a very sexually charged environment. So that really put me wondering, wow, there's something here.

And although Felipe had some clear and direct sensory information to the contrary, he did not connect that information with who he was to become. He is not sure if it was something internal that would not allow him to believe he could be gay. More likely, it was the environment that he describes “very Catholic,” in a country that made for a difficult connecting of the biological drives he was experiencing with the truth of his being. The sublimation of his authentic sexual self could not go on forever. So, on the one hand, Felipe was physically experiencing attraction for men, but, “on the other hand, I was still looking for women. I had some girlfriends, and it didn't seem to conflict at that stage. Only later it did.” In some ways, Felipe knew who he really was, but he just wasn’t sure about how to name it in a way that made sense for him, that countered the images of gay men as feminine that are anathema in his highly macho culture.

Dis-Covering Identity: Coming to Terms

What do gay men do after experiencing a sense of being different and feeling like the “other”? They must come to terms. Coming to terms is an expression of acceptance, where one has arrived at a place of understanding. That understanding is coupled with acceptance of what is, and no longer focused on what might be. For gay

men, “coming to terms” may be taken quite literally. What is this sense of difference I am experiencing? How may I name it so I may understand it? The idea of “coming to” goes beyond terms; indeed, it is an aspect of consciousness, consciousness of self. One may speak of an unconscious person (in the physical sense) who regains consciousness as “coming to.” For gay men there is also a coming to of consciousness as the epistemological insight into the ontological aspect of their sexual/affectional way of being-in-the-world reveals itself. How do gay men come to terms? From where might they learn the terms?

In Chapter II, I explore the phrase “That’s so gay” with its implications of denoting something odd, wrong, bizarre, or just weird. For Cesar, Ethan, Felipe, Justin, Marc, and Steve, that particular phrase is troublesome. Although their friends and family members who used the phrase in their presence explained that it was not meant as a derogatory term, the phrase still bothers these men. Steve really has trouble with hearing the phrase from his younger brother, especially because he and his younger brother have such a good relationship. And although Steve’s mother has banned the phrase from their home, Steve’s younger brother still uses it.

> I really dislike that phrase and it's mostly because your intentions are blatantly clear with the sentence. You're not referring to a particular person's sexual orientation, you're associating everything negative that you have in your mind about whatever subject you're on with the word gay, which is I think, if nothing else, rude. You’ve just associated somebody who takes their identity gay very seriously and associated that same word with whatever you were trying to put down. (Steve)

And when Steve came to college, the experience of hearing the phrase continued. Though, as he relates a story of an encounter in his residence hall his freshman year,

Steve has developed a sense of himself that is strong enough to challenge the use of that phrase.

> I mean, it's interesting though how often people use that phrase because they have no frame of reference to stop using it. Like during my freshman year in my dorm, my experience in college has been really positive, overall, and my experience in the dorms, too. But, I was hanging out in some guys' room and there were a bunch of people there, four or five guys and two or three girls in this tiny little dorm room. Anyway, somebody starting saying, "That's gay" and I said, "Hey, enough of that", and then I said, "Hey, that's not really cool, I'm gay." And the guy turns to me and says, "Oh, I'm sorry...that's so straight, fuck that shit" and everyone was like, yeah, "That's straight, man, I hate that."

Although Steve handled himself well, and generously toward his residence hall mates, he still feels uncomfortable that more people don't challenge the phrase. His younger brother hears the phrase in school, and from Steve's recollection of his time at the same school, teachers would hear the phrase and say nothing.

As Marc and I talk about language and coming to understand who he is in terms of his sexuality, we wonder what the world might be like if everyone who was gay felt comfortable expressing that aspect of themselves openly. "I feel like I would have been able to put words to emotions at an earlier age." Now that the words to express those emotions are readily present for Marc, he has committed himself to sharing those words, and the experiences they describe, to try to bring others to a place of understanding what it is like to not have the words to describe yourself because those words may be considered taboo in some way. Like Steve, in school Marc witnessed negative comments being made about students that were rooted in sexual orientation. Since that time, Marc has seen much progress in this area of people being more comfortable confronting these negative comments. At the same time, however, Marc

shares that when people become comfortable confronting someone for using a pejorative term or phrase, a new word or phrase emerges.

As Marc shares his experiences of working with college students, one of these new phrases catches me off guard.

> I've seen some retreats too...there's this new "no homo" thing, have you heard about this? Like if a guy says something to another guy that could remotely be perceived as being something gay, then they follow up with "no homo" so, it would be like, "Wallace, that's a nice tie...no homo."

The subtext suggests that “I recognize that by saying this you might think I’m gay and I’m not, so I’m going to add this little disclaimer at the end to be clear...I’m no homo.” For Marc what is even more disturbing is the number of times he hears this expression used by other students in leadership roles with influence over others. Especially of concern for him is its use by resident assistants. What might the experience be like for a young gay man who is just coming to understand (and quite possibly coming to terms, in both senses of the expression) who hears his resident assistant make a comment that ends in “no homo”? And what of earlier educational experiences? Ethan shocks me when he says, “There were a lot of gay jokes, starting in first or second grade.” The power of language and its ability to divide, define and confine must not be forgotten, especially by those of us in pedagogical roles.

> Absolute difference, inconceivable in terms of formal logic, is established only by language. Language accomplishes a relation between terms that breaks up the unity of a genus. The terms, the interlocutors, absolve themselves from the relation, or remain absolute within relationship. Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or of history. (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 195)

As gay men dis-cover difference and come to terms about what that difference means for them, there is a sense of opening the self up to the truth of being.

Dis-Closing Identity: The Truth of Being

What is dis-closing identity? Disclosure is "the act or an instance of disclosing" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). To disclose, the verb that gives action to disclosure, comes to English through the Anglo-French *desclore* which is "to open, unlock, reveal" and originally from Medieval Latin *disclaudere*, a combination of the Latin *dis* and *claudere*, which means "to close." So, to disclose is to open up, to reveal, to bring into view. I note with interest that the idea of disclose, meaning "to open up," is considered obsolete. Disclosure has come to mean "to make known or public" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), with an emphasis on the "public." For gay men, both senses of disclosure apply to our being-in-the-world.

The idea of "coming out" is an act of disclosure in one sense, the publicly claiming of sexual orientation. But it is also an act of dis-closure, of opening one's self to the possibility of truth. Heidegger (1927/1996) traces the idea of truth back to the Greek *alethia*. "In the human sciences truth is better seen as something that must be uncovered or as something that reveals itself into unconcealment" (van Manen, 1997, p. 175). For gay men, our truth of being gay needs to be revealed, first to ourselves, and then to the other important people in our lives. Once gay men have come to the truth of their being gay, the decision of sharing that truth confronts us. Although here I am writing about gay men, for Heidegger, all human beings (*Da-sein*) have choices about

the degree to which we reflect upon our lives and come to understand (and then share) our authentic selves.

> The fact that the goddess of truth who leads Parmenides places him before two paths, that of discovering and that of concealment, signifies nothing other than the fact that Da-sein is always already both in the truth and untruth. The path of discovering is gained only in *krinein logo*, in distinguishing between them understandingly and in deciding for the one rather than the other. (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 205)

So all human beings must come to a decision about working to distinguish between the truth and untruth of our lives.

In my own life, I have known men who only late in life chose to be true to themselves about being gay, often after having led a superficially heterosexual life on the outside. The possibility of living such a double life is not surprising when you consider that "Da-sein is equiprimordially in truth and untruth" (Heidegger, 1927/1996, p. 205). We human beings always have the choice to be authentic. Sometimes, however, being authentic may be necessary to keep on the inside. Sometimes being completely open may be dangerous or cause difficulty. Heidegger (1927/1996), although clearly directing human beings toward the path of discovery and authentic being-in-the-world, acknowledges that sometimes we must hide our truth.

> The covering up itself, whether it be understood in the sense of concealment, or being buried over, or distortion, has in turn a twofold possibility. There are accidental coverings and necessary ones, the latter grounded in the enduring nature of the discovered. (p. 32)

But the choice to hide one's truth may only come once one has discovered it. We must be able to see ourselves before we are able to hide ourselves from others.

"The recognition of one's visibility is as consequential for the development of the self as the recognition of the possibility of invisibility. Inner invisibility, or secrecy, is ultimately only possible after the fact of visibility" (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 97). The notion that at times one may be inauthentic is not foreign. Even to Heidegger, the philosopher who spent much of his work guiding human beings back to the question of the meaning of Being and toward authentic selfhood, understood that it is necessary to be lost in inauthenticity; but then, another choice confronts us.

Heidegger (1927/1996) notes how the authentic self is at first, before it is fully authentic, lost in the "they self" of others. At some point, if authenticity is to be achieved, the self needs to choose to abandon living for others, and choose to live for one's self. Heidegger goes on to say that everyone who is going to move toward authenticity must experience a "making up for not choosing" (p. 248) to be authentic.

> Making up for not choosing signifies *choosing to make this choice* – deciding for a potentiality-of-being, and making this decision from one's own self. In choosing to make this choice, Da-sein *makes possible*, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality-of-being.
>
> But because Da-sein is lost in the "they," it must first *find* itself. In order to find *itself* at all, it must be "shown" to itself in its possible authenticity. In terms of its *possibility*, Da-sein *is* already a potentiality-for-being-its-self, but it needs to his this potentiality attested. (p. 248)

Too often, the idea of disclosure for gay men means "coming out." What happens when a phrase becomes common and is commonly understood? The phrase "coming out" has come to mean disclosure in general. I note in Chapter II that coming out has become useful for anyone wanting to explain the idea of disclosing something hidden. One may be a closet liberal in a family of conservatives. The eventual sharing

of one's liberalism with his or her conservative family becomes "coming out as liberal." The idea that phrases used by gay men are becoming more commonly understood is a good thing, in my perspective, in that the language of gay men becomes less foreign. However, what gets lost? For one, the "closet" gets lost. As the meaning of the phrase "coming out" becomes more widely accepted, and it is appropriated widely, it loses its original attachment to the closet; it becomes an incomplete phrase that loses the meaning of a once powerful metaphor.

"It's the butt of a lot of jokes...like when you're standing in a closet and someone comments on you being back in the closet" (Justin). "I feel like it's kind of this passing joke, it's been truncated to 'coming out.' We don't ask what we're coming out of anymore" (Marc). A joke? The closet? Justin believes that the closet has become a joke, mainly because people are more comfortable talking about gay issues than before. But as Justin describes the closet as "a sort of small room and you're alone in it and there's no one else there, and people don't normally hang out in closets, so it's a little bit of an odd place to be," it is clear that the closet is not a joke for him. Although he feels he spent very little time "in the closet," it left its indelible imprint. He has no desire to ever be back in a closet.

Adding to this notion of the closet being lost from the phrase "coming out of the closet," Felipe feels that the closet part of the phrase is important because it underscores the shame that is attached to being gay; at least it was for him. The relative openness that is available to gay men today, versus prior generations, is part of why the closet has been lost. Justin believes that closet may have been dropped from the phrase because

what, after all, is in the closet? Sexuality is what exists in the closet, not all of our characteristics that make up our being-in-the-world.

> I think the difference is that when we say you are coming out of the closet, you are not just referring to specific characteristics about you, you're saying that the entirety of who you are was in that closet. I think nowadays when people come out, a lot of their personality characteristics stay the same because they've always been out there. Your entire self is not in the closet, just your sexuality, so maybe that's why the closet part of coming out is no longer there. (Justin)

And what about emerging from the closet? Is it necessary? Is it possible to be authentic while remaining in the closet? Sometimes, remaining in the closet is necessary if the possibility of stigmatization or danger is too great (Cain, 1991). In an ideal world, gay men would not have to be in the closet. Coming out of the closet would not even be an aspect of the phenomenon of being gay. But, we do not live in an ideal world. The experience of coming out of the closet, at least to some degree, is necessary for becoming a complete self. "Yeah, it's something you have to do, it's not that you were born in the closet, you're just revealing the truth to the world. You were hidden before, you weren't ready to reveal" (Felipe).

Dis-Missing Identity: Moving Beyond Definitionism

> I think "I'm gay" is a really weird thing to say...I don't remember the last time I told someone that I'm gay because it's not a necessary thing...and the meanings that other people attach to gay may not describe me...definitely wouldn't describe a lot of gay guys I know. (Justin)

> Some left behind comfort with those labels and later refused to be categorized according to standard labels of sexual orientation. They see those categories as narrow and confining and inadequate to capture the complexity of their own experiences. (Russell, Bohan, & Lilly, 2000, p. 89)

> Other young people fully embrace their same-sex orientation, but they philosophically oppose the relegation of their sexuality to an identity box. The

> mere creation of sexual categories reifies a label as an "it," a trait with stereotypical depictions that do not fit their experience. Labels are considered overly reductionist and unable to capture the full extent of their sexuality. Identity terms box them in, constrain their options, and oversimplify a complex aspect of the self. (Savin-Williams, 2005, ¶ 12)

Savin-Williams (2005) shares an anecdote about an encounter with one of his students who opened up Savin-Williams's understanding that the gay youth of today neither required, nor did they desire to name their sexual identity. For older gay men, Savin-Williams opines, this could be seen as turning one's back on all the hard work of older gay men and lesbians who have worked to bring the world to a more equal place for sexual minorities. The encounter began a new way of seeing gay youth for Savin-Williams (2005).

> Derrick, a twenty-year-old college student from rural Ohio, came to discuss his career. I just assumed he was being gender-sensitive when he referred to his "partner" because nothing about Derrick or his mannerisms set off my gaydar. During our second discussion I inadvertently referred to his partner as a "she." Derrick looked bewildered. "Taylor is a *he*. We've been together for over a year." Derrick, now bordering on annoyance, corrected me. "No, I'm not gay. I said Taylor is my partner." Derrick is not self-hating, homophobic, or confused about who he is. He just doesn't think he's gay. (¶ 1)

As I read various accounts of youth and how they see themselves regarding their sexuality, and as I work with my co-researchers in this study to understand the lived experience of being gay, this idea of rejecting labels becomes apparent. For me, it is a moving beyond definitionism. What do I mean by definitionism? Definitionism is the antithesis of ontological freedom. The ability to simply be one's authentic self, regardless how inconstant that self may be, is to be in an ontological space beyond definitionism. To be defined is to be confined. Escaping definitionism is knowing the

self to be unique and not externally defined by others. It is to move toward an authentic self and to move beyond remaining in the "theyself" (Heidegger, 1927/1996). But let's back up a bit and take a look at the word that I'm using to describe this experience of not fitting labels, or not wanting to let others have the power to create and assign those labels.

The notion of ism is described as "a distinctive doctrine, cause, or theory...an oppressive and especially discriminatory attitude or belief" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). To express the lived experience of being gay and being confined by labels, I've coupled the idea of isms with definition. What is definition? What is it to define? Definition is "an act of determining" and "a statement expressing the essential nature of something" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Before continuing, it is important to clarify the difference in the use of essential and essence in the philosophical tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology and the social sciences. Actually, the social science use of essential, as noted above in the definition of "definition," is at the very heart of why I discuss definitionism as something to be troubled.

Van Manen (1997) addresses in the preface to the second edition of *Researching Lived Experience* the concerns raised by some scholars in the social sciences about the concept of essence. What are essences? Using the example of poetry as a form of literature, van Manen (1997) explains that "in some respects poetry has certain qualities or properties that make it distinguishable from other literary forms...without these qualities or properties poetry would no longer be experienced as poetry" (p. xiv). Rather than turn away from the challenging discourse from social scientists, van Manen

engages with the questions posed by the anti-essentialists to help illuminate that which is the nature of hermeneutic phenomenology. Questions bring us closer to deeper understanding; Gadamer (1960/1999) reminds us, it's all about questions. In addressing the questions of the anti-essentialists, van Manen (1997) illuminates one of the fundamental reasons that hermeneutic phenomenology is an appropriate methodology for my study of the lived experience of gay men:

> Anti essentialists have shown that there are essentialist perspectives that reduce social phenomena to immutable categories and social groups to fixed types. Essentialism of this categorical variety shares with positivism the reification of experiential phenomena into external objects. Categorical essentialism is dangerous in that it tends to see things in absolute terms, and from these fixed properties one derives moral convictions. (p. xvi)

As my co-researchers share with me their lived experience, I am drawn into their individual stories, even as similarities among their experiences begin to emerge, and wonder to what degree their similarities are an expression of essence. To understand this notion of essence and what is essential to a phenomenon, I turn again to van Manen and his offering of one interpretation of the essence of essence:

> Essence is not a single, fixed property by which we know something; rather, it is meaning constituted by a complex array of aspects, properties and qualities – some of which are incidental and some of which are more critical to the being of things. (van Manen, 1997, p. xv)

How do these ideas of being defined become meaningful for gay men? Are we not on the search for the essential nature of what the lived experience of being gay is about? And what about the act of determining? Do gay men not want to determine their own ways of being-in-the-world? The concern over definition comes in to play in looking deeper into its possible meanings. Definition is also "a product of defining" and

defining is “the action or the power of describing, explaining or making definite” (Merriam-Webster, 2005). It is in the words “power” and “definite” that the trouble arises. Who has the power of describing? And what is it to be definite? The notion of the power to describe goes back to the earlier idea of narrative identity. For gay men, we want to be in control of describing our experience and how we are as beings-in-the-world; we want to tell our own stories. And being definite is more about closing down possibilities for being, rather than opening up a more fluid understanding of our selves. We are never finished being until death; therefore, we never desire to be definite. It may help to understand the idea of definite and its etymological history.

Like its verb form define, definite has its roots in Latin as *definire*, a combination of *de-* and *finire*. *Finire* means “to limit, end” from the Latin *finis*, boundary, or end (Harper, 2001). It is the idea of boundaries and ends that are of concern. The definition of definite sheds some light on the concern: “having distinct or certain limits...free of all ambiguity, uncertainty, or obscurity” (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Who wants to have boundaries placed on them? Who wants to have distinct and certain limits placed upon them? It really is about the desire for freedom of being, of wanting to answer only to the self in terms of our lives, not to be confined by the ideas of others. Notice also that the word confined shares the etymological connection of *finis* with define; in other words, to be defined also may mean to be confined. And what about the sense of constancy as described by “free of all ambiguity, uncertainty, or obscurity”? Do human beings really live lives without ambiguity, uncertainty, or obscurity? Cesar challenges this idea of constancy. About being gay, he says:

> It's an unfinished book with endless pages and multicolored inks, invisible inks at times. The language is understood, is written and rewritten, revised on a daily basis for me. I'm never gay in the same way, and even that changes the way I'm gay, how I share it, where I share it. The complexity is probably the most awesome part of my lived experience.

Is it possible to be confined through being defined from within? Do gay men confine themselves through acts of definition? In a letter to a former lover, Maria, Felipe laments the potentially overpowering aspects of gay subculture.

> When you are gay and you start getting into the subculture, the identity starts creeping into you, all the good and bad aspects of it. Good because you feel a sense of community, of belonging, of solidarity...of shared codes and likes. Bad because still it revolves too much around sex, fashion, youth, and the look.

Superficial is how Felipe goes on to describe gay subculture, limiting. It was especially hard because Felipe could identify with some aspects, and as he says, “I like beautiful men, but I think that's too narrow a view of life, and to hold those values to be the maximum....” The seductive power of a subculture is undeniable. I find Felipe to be an evolved soul, deeply considerate of others, and highly reflective on his own life and experiences. He admits that the lure of gay subculture is there, but remaining aware of the subculture’s power to define, and thus confine, is critical in understanding one’s authentic stance in the world.

> I had some gay friends in Boston, for instance, and sometimes I got fed up because they only talked about the gym and you're getting too fat and you're looking good and I went out last night with this person and we...And then you realize, I don't want to get too absorbed in that because it's contagious. (Felipe)

What about other subcultures? Having explored the possibility of heterosexuality as a way of sexual and affectional expression, Felipe shares a view from a different perspective. “Being heterosexual, it's easier to just find what you want

because the options are open. To be gay, well, many times you have to go to the subculture to find someone, but then you get disappointed because you find only those kinds of situations." What would it be like if being gay wasn't considered being so different from any other way of being-in-the-world? How much easier might it be for gay men to understand their authentic selves if the powers of definition were held in their own hands, and not the hands of others? How diverse might gay men find themselves if the ontological freedom of not being defined by subculture was our reality? Understanding the power of definition is not about blaming; it is about shedding light on that which is already under the glare of a spotlight and yet unseen, and seeing it for what it is: power.

***Searching For* Idem *On The Way To* Ipse**

> He wandered into the library. Everything was bright, empty. The library had never been a place he had lingered; it was always somewhere he went just before class, before study hall, to finish an assignment. He wandered over to a shelf of books, one near the back.
>
> He knew it was there, but he had always been afraid to look. It was known as the fag shelf, the collection of gay nonfiction. Coming-out stories. Biographies. Gay studies. Books about HIV and safe sex. He had passed it hundreds of times.
>
> Todd took a book from the shelf, an anthology of teenage coming-out stories. He slipped it into his bag and walked out of the library.
>
> The next day, he went back. He had devoured the volume he had snatched the day before, locking his door and staying up until one in the morning to finish it. (Dolby, 2008, p. 247)

When I read this fictional account of a young man in high school clandestinely searching for ways to understand his burgeoning sense of who he was, I had strong,

visceral memories of my own high school experience. Growing up in a small Vermont town, I remember our high school library was not the most sophisticated. My experience of high school was also in the late 70s and early 80s when homosexuality was not as prevalent in the news media, as well as in entertainment and cultural outlets. So, although my school didn't have a "fag shelf" as Dolby (2008) describes, there were a few texts on sexuality with passing references to homosexuality. Growing up in a small community, and knowing that news travels fast, I took great care not to be seen looking at those texts. And I wouldn't have dared slip one of those books in a book bag and hope I wouldn't get caught trying to remove the book from the library without checking it out. The possibility of discovery and the attendant shame (both from "stealing" and the content of the book) would be too great for me to bear. So, what to do? I volunteered with the librarian so I would have greater and more private access to any materials about homosexuality. I look back at that experience and the limited resources and wonder, would I have become myself as a gay man earlier if I had had access to more open resources about being gay?

Cesar's understanding of himself took shape through MTV's Real World television show. The cast of the San Francisco season included Pedro Zamora, a gay man who was public about his sexuality. On the show, he had a boyfriend, and was involved with gay issues in the city. He also was involved with AIDS education and was HIV positive at the time. Cesar recorded the episodes so he could watch them – the show was on late, and he was still in school.

> I was glued to that show, The Real World was the show I would watch religiously in high school, and it was at that point in time I thought, "My God, there are gay people, and that's what they're called. And was like, oh! yeah! that's me." (Cesar)

Cesar remembers the end of that season of the Real World program. As the television screen fades to black, the line "In memory of Pedro Zamora" with Pedro's date of birth and date of death appears on the screen. After a moment of shock, Cesar burst into tears. Family members could not understand why Cesar was acting this way over a television show. For Cesar, Pedro's death was more personal. Pedro was not simply a character on a television program; he was a role model. Reliving this experience was emotional for Cesar as he was remembering the sense of loss of someone important in his life, even though that person was on the television. Pedro was someone with whom Cesar could identify.

The ability to see others with whom we share an aspect of our identity (*idem*) allows us to understand better how we might be our selves (*ipse*). Seeing someone who may look like us, feel like us, and indeed be like us helps gay men not feel alone. Knowing that there are others who are like us provides a sense of comfort that "I'm not the only one." For Cesar, seeing Pedro, a proud, positive, caring, intelligent, and loving man gave Cesar a stronger sense of self. He was able to see the sameness with Pedro on his way to becoming himself as a gay man. As a Latino, seeing another Latino who was a gay man and positive role model was especially important for Cesar – too often the public representation of gay was too White.

> I saw Pedro as a role model, now that I'm saying it out loud. It's like, oh my God, I totally look like Pedro! I speak Spanish like Pedro, he has a crazy loud

> Latino family like I do...where have you been my entire life? We need to chat and share stories. And it was probably the first time that I saw someone else who looked like me and who was okay with who they were. (Cesar)

Knowing *of* others is an important way that gay men come to know themselves. And for many gay men, knowing *of* others is felt to be the only safe way to come to understand the self. For me, growing up in a small town in Vermont, there was no opportunity to meet other gay men – there were none, as far as I knew. Although there are dangers associated with the Internet and young gay men attempting to make contact with each other, this form of knowing *of* others is important to gay men since the advent of and now practically ubiquitous nature of this technology. Justin and Steven especially remember the Internet being an important outlet for coming to understand what it might mean to be gay. Like me, they, too, were brought up in less urban environments, and the Internet allowed them to be connected to the world of gay men. Of course, there was a sense of secrecy surrounding the use of the Internet to make connections with other gay men; being found out was a real concern.

The Internet, however much it allows young gay men throughout the world to connect, is still only a virtual connection. And though this virtual connection is a beginning of knowing other gay men and often necessary, it does not suffice as a way to really see and know other gay men, and this connection is, in essence, a technological connection, not a human connection. As we talked about role models and mentors, Cesar, Ethan, Felipe, Justin, Marc, Steve, and I remember the desire to meet others like us, to know other gay men beyond images in the media, in other words, to really know other gay men.

How do we come to know others as gay men? How does being known as a gay man affect the lived experience of being gay? In Chapter V, I shift my gaze a bit. As a phenomenological portrait artist, I expand the canvas to include others and paint these others linguistically into and along with the lives of my co-researchers.

CHAPTER V

KNOWING (OTHERS) AND BEING KNOWN: EXPLORING RELATIONAL IDENTITY FOR GAY MEN

> When I turn towards perception, and pass from direct perception to thinking about that perception, I re-enact it, and find at work in my organs of perception a thinking older than myself of which those organs are merely the trace. In the same way I understand the existence of other people. Here again I have only the trace of a consciousness which evades me in its actuality and, when my gaze meets another gaze, I re-enact the alien existence in a sort of reflection. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1998, pp. 351-352)

> In contrast, when otherness is thought of in relative terms, understanding the other is not necessarily either violent or quixotic. The difference between the self and the other is not absolute, and so there is no ethical imperative to preserve absolute difference....If otherness is merely relative, understanding the other is a possibility and the ethical concern becomes one of trying to understand better. Because of the emphasis on bridging distance and understanding, philosophies of relative otherness tend to take love, rather than justice, as the model for relating to others. (Treanor, 2006, p. 8)

Levinas (1961/1969), in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, reframes the notion of alterity and otherness. He does not consider the other as a subject as one might consider the self. Nor does he consider the other an object; he sees the other as radically other. This radical nature of the other challenged how the world of philosophy saw otherness. Levinas's way of seeing otherness calls for us to see the other in and of itself as being what it is, not what we would make it. Nor does this radical shift in understanding of other ask us to place labels on others; every person is other from all others. As beings-in-the-world with others, Heidegger's (1927/1996) notion of *MitDasein*, we are called to responsibility for others. Indeed, Levinas calls us to know others, even though a complete knowing is not possible, at least from our subjective stance in the world.

Knowing Others

> People simultaneously exist on three separate planes for us – as persons generically, as people with personal identities, and as distinct individuals – and who they are for us at any moment depends on what we want to know about them and what vantage point we take. (Ludwig, 1997, p. 91)

During a conversation with Felipe, who grew up in South America, we talk about meeting other gay people and how you would know if someone were gay. I am curious about how this experience might be different in a different culture. Felipe says, "It was pretty easy to pick up like who is – like usually good places were like a supermarket, or museums, or like maybe some dangerous places I wouldn't go to like some parks…." His comment of "It was pretty easy to pick up like who is" stood out to me as being central to the question, even more so than the locations he mentioned. In probing deeper into how he could pick up on who was gay, Felipe offers a number of traits such as effeminate gestures, certain styles of clothing, ways of walking, and so forth as traits that are more common in gay men than straight men. Felipe is the first co-researcher to bring up this notion that gay men "just know" who else is gay, but this idea is a thread throughout all the co-researchers' experiences of being gay men. And, initially, they all comment on observable traits as ways of knowing.

The phenomenon too commonly referred to as "gaydar" is discussed by all of my co-researchers, but as we look below the surface of this phenomenon, it reveals itself to be more complex than implied by this "portmanteau" made by blending gay and radar (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The journey toward understanding how gay men come to know other gay men is circuitous, and there is something revealing in the journey.

Why were we seven gay men, most of us very open about our sexuality, struggling with understanding and expressing how we come to identify others as gay men? Is there something about our culture that teaches gay men to remain in superficial ways of knowing rather than the more intimate knowing that comes from truly connecting with others? Why was is so difficult for us to move beyond the superficial?

Sometimes exposition on what a phenomenon is not may help clarify the thinking that led one to what the phenomenon actually is. In describing the phenomenon of phenomenological writing, van Manen (2002a) explains that it is difficult to explain the "what is" of writing in phenomenological inquiry, and even that "it is easier to say what phenomenological writing is not" (2002a, Writing section, ¶ 3). Likewise, Heidegger (1957/1969), in introducing his lecture *The Principle of Identity*, reminds the reader: "When thinking attempts to pursue something that has claimed its attention, it may happen that on the way it undergoes a change" (p. 23). And in setting up the reader to understand the meandering path about to be taken in the lecture, Heidegger tells the reader, "It is advisable, therefore, in what follows to pay attention to the path of thought rather than to its content" (p. 23).

As I begin to understand how gay men come to know others, there is also a meandering path, a path toward understanding where the twists and turns often are caused by a sense of falling prey to the they-self as described by Heidegger (1927/1996). One falls prey to the they-self when one allows the expectations, desires, influences, and directive energy of others to determine how the self will be in-the-world, rather than the authentic self, a self determined by one-self, rather than giving

into the they-self. As the seven of us in this study journey toward the ways in which we gay men come to know other gay men, we find ourselves at the beginning with the idea of "gaydar." It becomes clear that this term, gaydar, is commonly used, but when I ask, "What is gaydar?" there is silence. In the silence of curiosity, we all begin to wonder aloud about this idea of gaydar. It takes us meandering around the idea and coming to places that ultimately didn't seem right, before we were able to put language to this elusive and seemingly ineffable idea of what it is for gay men to come to know other gay men.

Reading the Body: Drawing Nearer Through Traits as Identity Clues

The idea of traits as indicators of one's sexual orientation is not a new notion. The stereotypical limp wrist, the "swishy" walk, the lisping voice are all characteristics that have been used to identify gay men – though clearly not always accurately. Take Mike Tyson, for example, with his high-pitched, lisping voice. His public declarations (and marriages) have identified him as heterosexual. But it is interesting for me to note that all of my co-researchers, themselves gay men, also use the trait explanation for identifying gay men. For instance, the dialogue between Justin and me regarding the existence of gaydar is illustrative of this trait explanation:

> W: Do you believe in gaydar?
>
> J: Yeah!
>
> W: What is it?
>
> J: Um, I, I, can't like quite define it – it's just – if I see a person, even before, even if it's just peripheral vision, um, often times, I'll be like, that person's gay

> and normally I'll be right, or that person is straight and I'll be right. So, sometimes it's just looks alone, like, he has nice clothes...
>
> W: When you say looks, you mean how the person looks?
>
> J: Dress, hairstyle, posture, hygiene, movements, I mean it's...it's just like, it's not really thinking about it, I'll be just like, I'll automatically, "oh yeah." Or talking, especially, sometimes...
>
> W: Tell me more about that. How talking? How?
>
> J: I mean again it's just, um, only works with people who have, you know, stereotypically gay behaviors, but, like, I mean my voice isn't all that friggin' masculine, and so if I see that in someone else, I'll be like, probably gay.
>
> W: Ok.
>
> J: Like if they're not trying to lower their voice like a lot of straight men do [says this while lowering his voice to make the point] – then it's kind of like... [laughs]

Ethan also comments on traits that would give him a clue that someone is likely to be gay, for example, "the way that they're walking, the way that they engage with other people, the gestures they use, if they smile, if they show more affection, just more affection in general, instead of putting on a manly facade...macho-ness." Traits are also part of the way Felipe explains how he might know if someone is gay. When I ask Felipe about a specific experience and how he knew the other person was gay, he comments that he could observe in the following ways:

> The way they walk, and um, there are some effeminate gestures that are more prevalent among gay people. I wouldn't say that all of them fit that pattern, but, it's rare that those who are effeminate are not gay, and even slight movements of the arms, of their hips...[gay men] are more delicate... of course now there's a dress aspect, a clothes aspect....

In addition to my co-researchers, other researchers offer ideas that point toward traits as an explanation for the identification of gay men. A recent example of such

research appeared in the electronic version of *New York Magazine* (France, 2007) under the title "The Science of Gaydar." The article cites a wide variety of scientific research that attempts to demonstrate that gay men exhibit certain behaviors or have specific and identifiable traits, including the sound of one's voice, scalp whorl patterns, thumbprint density, hand dexterity, and so forth. France, in his description of the research, keeps referring to "gaydar." His understanding of gaydar (the author notes at the beginning of the article that he is gay) is somewhat different from my own and that of my co-researchers. The author posits, "That's what we mean by gaydar – not the skill of the viewer so much as the telltale sign most gay people project, the set of traits that make us unmistakably one" (France, 2007, ¶ 2). This search for biological clues goes beyond just what may constitute or account for gayness. It attempts to locate and name those elements that, on the surface, portray what it is to be gay. The author continues, "A small constellation of researchers is specifically analyzing the traits and characteristics that, though more pronounced in some than in others, not only make us gay but also make us *appear* gay" (¶ 3). Should I be worried about that which might make us appear gay?

One aspect of gayness that is brought forth in a phenomenological research study titled "Gay Jocks: A Phenomenology of Gay Men in Athletics" is the fluidity of the external manifestation of gay identity:

> Gay men can employ masculine and feminine behaviours at will, depending on the social context and what they are trying to express. Most gay men have had the experience of "butching it up" when trying to hide their homosexuality. Likewise, many know what it means to "let your hair down" and "camp it up" among friends. This variability in the use of masculine and feminine behaviours

> indicates an important dimension to the experience of being gay, which is the experience of fluidity. (Pronger, 1990, p. 146)

The importance of this fluidity is related to the environment and the degree to which the environment appears safe for gay men. Pronger goes on to say, "Gay men contextualize their experiences. They apply culturally received categories of homosexuality at different times and under different circumstances" (p. 146). As a coping strategy or a safety mechanism, the notion that gay men have a fluid sense of their external manifestation of sexuality seems useful. But what are the consequences of censoring one aspect of one's essential being-in-the-world? What is the boundary between fluid identity and stereotyping behavior? What are the consequences of giving in to stereotypes about gay men?

The consequences may be greater for heterosexual men. Davis (2002), in his phenomenological study, "Voices of Gender Role Conflict: The Social Construction of Men's Identity," finds that one theme emerging is "fear of femininity." Some of the men in Davis's study note "both fear and frustration related to the narrow boundaries" (p. 516) regarding the acceptable ways for men to communicate. "At the root of this frustration was a fear of being seen as 'feminine' or somehow 'unmanly'" (p. 516). So by giving into a belief that stereotypical behaviors define men in terms of sexual orientation, heterosexual men also are negatively affected. I should note that all the men in Davis's study self-identified as heterosexual. Davis goes on to describe how broadly certain behaviors might be interpreted.

> Participants also discussed how even seemingly nongendered activities raised questions about how others interpret their sexual orientation. Openness to

> talking, wearing a lot of cologne, and clothing choices were each actions mentioned by participants that made other people question their sexual orientation.... This connection between ostensibly feminine activities and being gay sent a clear message to these students that to avoid certain labels, they had to restrict their behavior. (Davis, 2002, p. 516)

Although the initial discussion of this theme of the phenomenon of gender role conflict for men was to point out the negative experience for heterosexual men having to restrict their behavior in order to not be labeled gay, Davis does make a strong point in the discussion section of the article that comments from the participants leading to the uncovering of this theme are homophobic at their base. So, in addition to being a restricting experience for heterosexual men, the homophobia of straight men plays out negatively for gay men.

During the course of our conversations, I ask my co-researchers if there are any times when they would choose to self-censor their behavior to avoid revealing their sexual orientation. Some of my co-researchers make comments about the difference between their behavior in work and personal settings, and that although they wouldn't call it censoring their behavior, they did downplay any stereotypical (flamboyant, effeminate) behavior in the work place. The only commonality among the co-researchers about when they would choose to censor their behavior is in the presence of ostensibly straight men, especially if there is evidence that these heterosexual men are particularly homophobic, for example, negative comments directed toward gay men.

Steve talks of a party he attended where one man was putting on a bit of a macho act and was making derogatory comments about gay men. One of Steve's friends, who is aware of Steve's sexual orientation, was also part of the conversation

and found the situation humorous, mainly because he is aware of Steve's comfort with himself. After a while of listening to this man make these negative comments, Steve looked the man in the eye and said, "Yeah, fuckin' gay people, you know, I hate 'em." There must have been something in either the look Steve gave the man or the look in his eye, but immediately the man looked nervous. Steve's friend interjected, "I think you just realized something" and the man agreed that he had and began backing away from his earlier comments. During our conversation, I comment how painful it can be when one sees some people's true colors. Steve stops me, and says that he doesn't believe that what the man was doing was showing his true colors; rather, the man was putting on a macho act. In Steve's words:

> Yeah, and I like to think it's not necessarily that they're showing their true colors because he was very polite to me afterwards, and it wasn't, he wasn't all like weirded, he was like, that's cool with me. We got into a conversation, you know and he wasn't like I'm going to leave the room now – so I said, "Yeah, it's fine," and just laughed it off with him. I like to think that he, you know, integrated some of that, at least into what he was saying....

Steve was able to see through the bravado and recognize what likely was going on. Davis's (2002) research would add credence to this possibility. So, the fear of femininity expressed by heterosexual men, combined with a need to avoid any stereotypically gay behaviors, is a toxic mixture, one that poisons the human environment.

As we explore this issue of being able to know who else is gay in a given situation, I ask my co-researchers to go beyond their initial responses that refer to traits exhibited by other men. Doing so results in several examples of why the trait

explanation falls short. For example, Felipe comments that his ability to know who else is gay based on traits is easier in some cultures than others. Felipe grew up in South America and spent time in Switzerland and the United States as a student. He notes that it is much more difficult for him to identify gay men in Switzerland than it is in his home country or in the United States, mainly because Swiss men seem more open to a wider variety of acceptable public behaviors that would not fit the stereotypical heterosexual definition. Specifically, Swiss men don't seem to need to act macho to express their masculinity. Felipe also notes that in his home country in South America, macho behavior is part of the fabric of being a heterosexual man, similar to his observations of men in the United States. Other co-researchers bring up the phenomenon of "metrosexuality," the idea that heterosexual men can exhibit stereotypically gay behaviors (caring about their grooming and clothing, being sensitive and willing to listen to others, and so forth) and still be heterosexual (Simpson, 2002).

To continue the conversation and to move beyond the trait explanation, I ask them if they are in a group of men where none of the men are exhibiting any stereotypical gay behaviors, could they still "read" who is gay? My co-researchers are quite certain they can. Of course, I ask them, how? This question of mine results in silence from all my co-researchers, at least initially. Clearly, this question gives them pause. They state they can tell who is gay, even without the exhibition of stereotypically gay behaviors, but they are grasping how to explain it; this aspect of the phenomenon of being gay is elusive for them. At one point, Justin refers to the experience as like having a sixth sense. And then, a little while later, he contradicts himself with, "I wouldn't treat

it as a, like, sixth sense, I would just say it's pretty straight forward...." Marc also thinks it is like having a sixth sense, a special sensory perceptiveness that gay men have and wonders, "I don't know if it's biology trying to help us out a little bit...I think that maybe it's a coping mechanism we develop...since we can't find people who are like us, that's our method for finding people that are like us."

Again, I ask what is going on when this type of perceptiveness is happening; how did you "know" that this other person is gay? My co-researchers and I struggle with this idea over the course of several conversations; it is clearly elusive to us. At one point, Marc becomes frustrated with trying to put his experience into words, and the frustration brings forth a torrent of ideas:

> I don't know, I guess it's almost like the opposite of magnets, like, instead of opposites attracting, I can feel this...I don't know how to put it into words, I know that's what you want me to do – um, it's like this heightened sense of awareness, I guess this sense of like when adrenaline starts running through your body in anticipation of something bad happening or like everything all of a sudden is very...You're very aware of everything, like it's not anything near the degree of an adrenaline rush, but it's kind of like, someone inched up your adrenaline level and you just feel hyper sensitive to some things and you start to notice...and you start going, ok. Then I think after you get the first intuition, then I think you start to look for sensory fact-based data to back it up. So, I think it's first instinct and then try and back it up with data.

Finally, we are able to dig a bit deeper into the experience. What becomes more and more obvious to me during our struggles with coming to understand this way of knowing other gay men is how deeply ingrained we are in the "they-self" of believing the stereotypes about ourselves. This insight of intuition as a possibility for explaining how one can perceive who else is (or might be) gay along with the notion of sensory data for confirmation, offers new direction for our conversations regarding this aspect

of the phenomenon. I explore this idea of intuition and instinct as a way of knowing with the other co-researchers and we share the experience with a knowing nod of agreement, similar to the phenomenological nod, "where the description allows readers to understand what a certain experience must have been like without having gone through it themselves" (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 457).

Going Deeper: Instinct and Intuition

All of the co-researchers agree that one aspect of their gayness that is undeniable is the experience of gaydar, a sense of understanding the presence of someone else who is gay. However, we keep asking ourselves the "what is" question because a description remains elusive. Is gaydar something instinctual? Or, is gaydar more a sense of intuition? Or, is it some combination of these two aspects of humanity that are operating at a certain frequency in gay men that allow for intra-orientational and interpersonal communication?

The word instinct comes to modern English from Middle English and from Latin, *instinctus* meaning impulse, from *instinguere* meaning to incite (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The definition of instinct begins to open possibilities for understanding the experience of gaydar: "a natural or inherent aptitude, impulse, or capacity...a largely inheritable and unalterable tendency of an organism to make a complex and specific response to environmental stimuli without involving reason...behavior that is mediated by reactions below the conscious level" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The *Online Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2005) describes instinct as that characteristic "manifesting itself in acts which appear to be rational, but are performed

without conscious design or intentional adaptation of means to ends.... The faculty supposed to be involved in this operation (formerly often regarded as a kind of intuitive knowledge)." For Marc, delineating the difference between instinct and intuition is something that he finds difficult to describe, but he feels there is a distinct difference: "I feel like instinct is much more biological, like the way that I would perceive those words, like instinct to me is something that you do naturally, and intuition is something that you feel...." If intuition is something that you feel, is it also biologically based, or is it something learned?

Intuition is "quick and ready insight...immediate apprehension or cognition...the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The etymological tracing of intuition shows that the word comes to modern English from the Middle English *intuycyon*, and from the Late Latin *intuition, intuitio*, or the act of contemplating, and ultimately from the Latin, *intuEri*, meaning to look at, contemplate, from *in-* + *tuEri*, to look at (Merriam-Webster, 2005). So, for me, intuition is both something biologically based in that it comes from "to look at" using the sense of sight, and also from the notion of the act of contemplation, a learned behavior. Another description of intuition is an instance of direct or immediate insight (from *Online Oxford English Dictionary*, direct quotation: "direct or immediate insight; an instance of this" - - the phrasing, however, was a bit awkward). Felipe offers, "You build up lots of cues from everywhere in your life and then you arrive at this model that you more or less apply to people you see. It's

a kind of energy, but it's also a very brief impression." The brevity of the impression, however, does not matter as human beings have the capacity of:

> "Sizing up a situation"; this happens all the time among human beings…it is effective and informative – often being all we need to understand what is going on, even if the circumstance is complicated…this is not to deny that some are more adept than others at quickly taking in a social situation – a skill that requires no more than a glance for its enactment. (Casey, 2000, p. 149)

When I combine this natural aptitude (instinct) and quick and ready insight (intuition) I may be able to begin to understand the experience of "knowing" that someone else is gay, too, which is commonly referred to as gaydar. What stands out from these words that may offer possibility for understanding the experience of gaydar? Insight, or maybe more appropriately, in-sight, stands out as connecting to the descriptions of the experiences of gaydar as shared by my co-researchers. Or maybe, better yet, a reversal: sight-in – experiencing gaydar gives one sight-in-to the being of another. One aspect of knowing is the ability to discern (Merriam-Webster, 2005), coming from the Latin *discernere*, meaning to separate, distinguish between. The definition of discern as "to detect with the eyes" is especially meaningful for how gay men come to know others, for truly, the "eyes have it."

Meaning-full Glances and Knowing Looks

> Through phenomenological reflection I discover vision, not as a "thinking about seeing," to use Descartes' expression, but as a gaze at grips with a visible world, and that is why for me there can be another's gaze; that expressive instrument called a face can carry an existence, as my own existence is carried by my body, that knowledge-acquiring apparatus. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1998, p. 351)

> The lived look then, as a touching between two people, seems to unfold from the desire to open oneself and to meet with the other's inner self. (Paradis, 2007, I contact Section, ¶ 11)

> It's like a language you know, before you learn it, you don't notice it – but then it's a non-verbal language, based mostly on the way people look, and glances. (Felipe)

A glance is a "swift movement of the eyes" or a "quick or cursory look" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), and the archaic uses of the noun direct the etymological trace to "allusion," which is defined as "the act of alluding to or hinting at something" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). When we speak of gaydar, we are then speaking of meaning-full glances, and we are engaging in the act of hinting at something. When one looks at the verb sense of glance, additional etymological clues surface. The verb sense refers to the eyes and the act of glancing as, "to move swiftly from one thing to another" or "to take a quick look at something" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). "The glance is too often taken as the epitome of the shallow in human perception, something that merely flits over the *superficies* – literally the 'outer face,' the bare 'outward appearance' – of things" (Casey, 2000, p. 161). However, in the transitive sense, the verb offers deeper insight into how a glance may be meaningful. The reader is pointed to the word "insinuate" when researching the transitive sense of the verb. To insinuate, or "to introduce (as an idea) gradually or in a subtle, indirect, or covert way" or "to impart or suggest in an artful or indirect way" (Merriam-Webster, 2005) offers insight into the ways in which gay men may communicate through a meaning-full glance. The notion of revealing oneself is even more directly referred to in the second definition of insinuate: "to introduce (as oneself) by stealthy, smooth, or artful means" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Being a gay man means being aware of the necessity of judging each new

situation and each new encounter with someone: should I reveal myself completely? Or, is it safer to keep part of me hidden?

The "impart or suggest in an artful or indirect way" (Merriam-Webster, 2005) aspect of the definition of glance, directs me to "imply" as an associated word. To imply is to "involve or indicate by inference, association, or necessary consequence rather than by direct statement" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), and the first synonym offered for imply is "suggest." When one suggests, it is "to call forth: evoke, to mention or imply as a possibility...to call to mind by thought or association" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). In the chain of definition for suggest, the phrase, "to call forth: evoke" stands out as particularly enlightening for the theme of knowing others and of gaydar. What gay men do when they experience gaydar is to evoke a sense of self and other, where self and other share a commonality. Evoke comes to English via the French *evoquer*, which in turn comes from the Latin, *evocare*, from *e-* + *vocare* to call. The first listed definition of evoke is "to call forth or up," but it is the second aspect of the first listing that stands out to me as a gay man researching gay men and hearing stories of how gaydar is experienced: evoke may also mean, "to cite especially with approval or for support" (Merriam-Webster, 2005).

In meaning-full glances and knowing looks, how does one "call forth" the essence of another? There is a reciprocity that occurs in the glance, essential aspects of the other may be shared through the glance.

> The glance not only goes out; it comes (back) in. It is in-formative. As performative of perspectives, it is informative of the world. For it is by glancing, just glimpsing, that we learn a great deal of what we know about the world. A

> glance reveals an entire situation, a whole scene of action. And it does so with surprising comprehensiveness and scope. (Casey, 2000, p. 148)

How do I "cite especially with approval or for support" as in the definition of evoke from Merriam-Webster (2005)? What is it about the glance that allows us to connect beyond the need to identify others? "A glance *takes in* – it takes a lot in, namely, all kinds of surface. In so doing, it *takes us places*, all kinds of places. A glance *takes us out of ourselves*, out of our customary egoic identity" (Casey, 2000, p.148). Or, as Sartre (1943/1984) discusses in his section "The Look" in *Being and Nothingness*, does one simply become aware that the object of our gaze is not simply an object, but is also a subjective, conscious being? How does a sense of inter-subjectivity move the object of our glance to a more knowing look? What is it in these glances and knowing looks that are full of meaning?

> When we meet another person in his or her landscape or world we meet that person first of all through his [*sic*] body. In our physical or bodily presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we always conceal something at the same time – not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves. When the body is the object of someone else's gaze, it may lose its naturalness (Linschoten, 1953; Sartre, 1956) or instead it may happen that it grows enhanced in its modality of being. (van Manen, 1997, pp. 103-104)

The idea of sharing meaning-full glances and knowing looks is also about sharing secrets – secrets of identity. On the Metro in Washington, DC, Ethan comments how he knows when he is in the presence of other gay men. He also notes how he does not want to make too much eye contact for fear that these other gay men might "give away my secret and the others on the Metro might find out about me." When gay men share these secrets with others through meaning-full glances and knowing looks, we are

communicating bodily. In a phenomenological study of secrecy, van Manen and Levering (1996) describe the physiognomy of secrecy:

> There exists a magical key to the sphere of secrecy: the body's language. Physiognomy is a language without words, and therefore the misleading and hiding power of words can be defeated by physiognomic clues and effects. Physiognomy refers to the phenomenon of external, visible, physical signs that somehow betray inner feelings, thoughts, or character traits. Often it is the face that triggers hints of things kept secret. (p. 78)

Before moving forward with exploring meaning-full glances and knowing looks, it is useful to examine the word used by van Manen and Levering in describing this certain language of physicality. Physiognomy comes to Modern English via Middle English, Late Latin, and originally from the Greek *physiognomonia*, created from *physis*, meaning nature, physique, appearance, and *gnomon*, meaning interpreter (Merriam-Webster, 1999). Therefore, when we speak of physiognomy, we are referring to an interpretation of one's nature, physique, or appearance. One of the definitions of physiognomy offered by Merriam-Webster (1999) is "inner character or quality revealed outwardly" (p. 877), and it is in this understanding that van Manen and Levering (1996) ground their discussion of how secrets may be revealed via the face through physiognomic identification.

More specifically than the face for physiognomic clues, in terms of the meaning-full glances and knowing looks, what is specifically required are the eyes. By looking into the eyes of another, we open ourselves to possibly knowing the other more deeply than we did before, or possibly truly knowing the person at all. The eyes have been referred to as the "mirrors of the soul" (Paradis, 2007, I contact Section, ¶ 6). As I have

said much earlier in this text, the differentiation between mirrors and windows is simply a shifting of the light. When light is behind the membrane that serves either as reflector or transparent medium, the membrane becomes a window. When the light is on the side of the viewer of that membrane, images are reflected, as in a mirror. Do gay men shift the light for each other, allowing the eyes to become simultaneously mirrors and windows: mirrors of oneself as another gay man, and windows into the possibility of seeing a gay man before you?

The metaphor of mirrors and windows in reference to the eyes has been explored in other phenomenological inquiry projects. Paradis (2007), in exploring "The Pedagogical Significance of the Look," says:

> The eyes are windows which allow others access to us and us access to them. To look "into" the eyes of another implies depth. It is as though one looks into the person.... It is as though one looks beyond the person's mere physicality into the person's very being. It is in this sense too that the eyes are referred to as "mirrors of the soul." It is in the eyes, in the look of another, that one's soul, one's "self," is revealed or manifested. The eyes mirror the inner self. To speak of eye contact in light of this is to speak of contact or touching of inner selves. (I contact Section, ¶ 6)

As gay men look into each other's eyes, are they opening windows? Are they attempting to open themselves up to being known by another? For Paradis, eye contact is one way to be together in intimate fashion, to really know someone else. Maybe gay men are attempting to open themselves up to creating a safe, intimate space to make contact with others like them when they exchange these meaning-full glances? Again, from Paradis's (2007) study:

> When we speak of eye contact, we speak of a coming together of looks and thus of people – a coming together which allows two people to be in touch with each

> other. Eye contact is not merely a meeting of eyes or an exchange of looks, it is a "touching" of two people which allows them to "be" together. It is a kind of intimate communication, a sharing, an intercourse which makes possible the touching of their "I"s. Eye contact opens up the possibilities for our being together. It is a special kind of being in touch with one another. (I contact Section, ¶ 3)

Meaning-full glances and knowing looks are primordial forms of communication; they are preverbal and precognitive. Felipe's story of being in the waiting room at the U.S. embassy in his home country waiting for his turn to make his application for a visa to study in the United States comes to mind: "I looked into his eyes and he looked into mine, really looked into me, and we knew [that we were gay]...no words were necessary." Another example comes from a phenomenological study by Yeu (2007) where she explores the difficulties of saying goodbye to her mother as the researcher set off on a journey to another country. She notes how she could read so much in her mother's eyes without either of them having to speak: "The openness of the eyes embodied in giving and receiving is primordial intimacy itself.... This intimate openness exists before we make it verbal" (Openness of the eyes Section, ¶ 2).

Paradis (2007) also notes the primal nature of the look:

> The look as a form of communication seems to go beyond what many others – words, handshakes, smiles – can do. The look seems to make possible a communion, a complete uniting, a oneness between us where our inner selves, that which words cannot describe, can come together in measureless moments. The power of the look is the immediacy in which it allows us to be together, the immediacy which is a primordial manifestation of our very being. (I contact Section, ¶ 15)

Felipe and these phenomenologists also note that there is a mutuality when one truly makes eye contact. “In these shared looks is our mutual willingness to be open, to look into and acknowledge the other” (Paradis, 2007, I contact Section, ¶ 10). Yeu (2007) writes about the shared-ness of the look as being a powerful way for two people to co-construct their intimate space in which they inhabit, if only for a moment:

> “Seeing-the-other” also means “being-seen-by-the-other.” The other comes to me not as an object of my seeing but as a subject who is also seeing me. Therefore, “I” and “the other” co-exist in each other's world as both subjects and become fully “you” and “I.” In this case, “I” may look at “you” in a different way from looking at grass or a desk. (Eyes in the world of primordial intimacy Section, ¶ 5)

In sharing meaning-full glances and knowing looks, gay men are attempting to make contact, yes, eye contact, but a deeper sense of contact as well. This form of connection is a way that gay men may communicate their gayness to one another. In other words, “My look is a manifestation of me, your look a manifestation of you and, hence, in eye contact, our looks allow us to manifest ourselves to each other” (Paradis, 2007, I contact Section, ¶ 3).

Steve shares a story of attending a management training session for a local restaurant. One of the trainers seemed somehow familiar to him:

> I know this person from somewhere – like, he looks very familiar, and for some reason, he seems, I guess there was an aspect of friendliness to him...and I kept looking at him and he kept looking at me. And I said, "Derek, I know you from somewhere?" and he says, “I feel like I know you from somewhere too” – and I was like, where though, it's like where in the world? But at this point, too, I was all – you know, something was actually going off once I started the conversation...we kept going with the "Do I know you from somewhere?" and listing all these places we might have been in contact because he's from [Eastern city] and I'm from the [location near that Eastern city] and so we couldn't think

> of any, you know, and then he was, like, well, damn this is so...so confusing and then he was like, you know, Youth Pride, and I was like, Yes!

It turns out that, after additional conversation, Steve and Derek had never been to the same Pride celebration. They just felt like they somehow knew one another, that there was something familiar about the other. Familiar is a good word to describe the feeling these two experienced. Familiar comes to Modern English from the Middle English, *familier*, from the Anglo-French and Latin *familiaris*, which comes from Latin *familia*, meaning household (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The root *familia* also gives us the English word family. And in this experience of the management training session, Steve and Derek recognize that in at least one way, they are from the same family. The connection began with a sense of familiarity, followed by glances and knowing looks of familiarity, and eventually was confirmed though a verbalized exchange.

The interpretation of facial physiognomic clues, in the case of the phenomenon of being gay, a meaning-full glance happens within a physical environment with a variety of cultural rules. “In ordinary social intercourse between people, the exchange of glances is quite essential. There exist all kinds of rules for the length, the intensity, and the legitimacy of casting a glance at someone else” (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 81). Felipe comments, “The fact that some guy stares at you for longer than a few seconds then the chances are that he’s gay because men usually don’t look at each other for long.” Justin also mentions the length of eye contact as a means of knowing that someone else is gay. The week before our third conversation, Justin was interviewing for an internship with one of the four big accounting firms. The interview was set up so

that Justin was on one side of a table and staff members from the firm were across from him. During his opportunity to ask questions, Justin "asked a question and this one, one of the first year employees was answering it, and we just had this eye contact the whole time, and he sort of had, he wasn't very effeminate, but he had a little bit and I was like, oh, my God, you're so gay." When I ask him to describe more about how he was certain, Justin says, "Like, just reading eye contact, I think, I mean excessive eye contact, kind of gives it away."

Interestingly, van Manen and Levering (1996) go on to discuss what it means to hold excessive eye contact.

> In Western society there is a cultural limitation to the length of time that one may look someone else directly in the eyes without being accused of staring or indiscreetness. If one persists in looking someone straight in the eyes for an extended period of time, this situation may offer only two possibilities: Either one fights or one makes love. (p. 81)

Of course what might be defined as excessive depends on the context of the eye contact and the relationship of the individuals involved in that eye contact:

> The intentionality of the gaze varies in relation to the context and the ambience in which it is manifested. In addition, of course, the relationship between the individuals engaged in reciprocal gazing affects the interpretation of the meaning of being stared at. (Stack & Plant, 1982, p. 371)

From the comments of my co-researchers, when they have misread the signals of someone and held too long eye contact and that someone was heterosexual, the response is often aggressive or hostile (fight), but when eye contact is made with someone who is later confirmed to be gay, the response is either more affectionate, understanding, or at least neutral. Davis (2002), in his study of men and gender role

conflict, also uncovered similar ideas to maintaining excessive eye contact. The men in his study were aware that there were codes of communication caveats that were constantly present and that these caveats must be obeyed in order to not be misunderstood to be gay. The connection between these caveats and homophobia may be present (as was my hunch when I first encountered Davis's study), but I can't escape van Manen and Levering's (1996) comment, "If one persists in looking someone straight in the eyes for an extended period of time, this situation may offer only two possibilities: Either one fights or one makes love" (p. 81).

The importance of the glance as a means of communication for gay men is hinted at by van Manen and Levering (1996) as they explore the role of the glance in maintaining or sharing secrets:

> The quick glance is briefer than normal eye-to-eye contact and can carry all kinds of special meaning. One can exchange meaningful looks. What is exchanged in those looks is nobody else's business, and often those quick secret exchanges of the glance are not noticed by others.... It seems peculiar that this secret glance, which is briefer than what is permissible in ordinary eye-to-eye exchanges, nevertheless communicates some secret understanding.... The meaningful look seems to create a feeling of sameness, togetherness. It reminds us of the common understandings that we share with someone else, even if the precise content of this shared understanding may not be completely clear to the people who exchange the furtive glance. (p. 82)

The power of these glances is evident in an anecdote shared by Jeff Key, a marine who fought in Iraq and was subsequently discharged from the service for being open about being gay. The story appeared in *The Advocate*, and the opening piece of the article comes from Jeff Key's diary:

> Badrah, Iraq, May 20, 2003 I stand atop my vehicle with my weapon at the ready, balancing friendly with guarded. We want the people to know we are here

> to help, but looking passive is an invitation to trouble. A man in his early 20s passes on the opposite side of the street. He is fit and good-looking in that brooding Middle Eastern sort of way.
>
> I follow him with my eyes. So I'm watching my Iraqi soccer player walk down the street and he looks back – in that way. There's no way we can do anything, but I'm desperate for a verbal acknowledgment of what we both know. He figures out how.
>
> 'You have wife?' he asks.
>
> 'No, no wife,' I say. 'You?'
>
> 'No wife,' he answers.
>
> Then those beautiful brown eyes lit up. I just smile. We're making out big-time with our words. (Clinton, 2005, p. 40)

What an amazing and powerful story of two men who were able, even in a tremendously difficult environment, to communicate an important aspect of their being through a meaning-full glance. It must not be forgotten what happened to Jeff Key upon discovery of his sexual orientation – he was removed from the military. For Key's Iraqi soccer player, the possible result of discovery could have been death by execution, common in Middle Eastern cultures (Iranian Injustice, 2005).

Pronger (1990), in his phenomenological study of gay men in athletics, comments on the necessity for gay men to be able to communicate with each other using these meaning-full glances: "Gay men subtly communicate their shared worldview.... This subtlety has important implications for gay men; it allows them to remain undiscovered by the uninitiated, thereby affording them some protection from the expressions of homophobia that frequently accompany detection" (pp. 149-150). These meaning-full glances also may be exchanged between men who are not, at least

initially, interested in communicating with one another. One of Pronger's (1990) co-researchers offers the following anecdote as an example of a "subtle, knowing look":

> One man told me about being in a university weight room and watching an athlete to whom he was attracted lifting a weight. To most observers, the scenario would appear to be quite straight. A man whom he didn't know was standing nearby and watching the same athlete. Moving from the athlete to each other, their admiring eyes met, and with no more obvious gesture than a slight pause in their gazes, they became aware of their secret fraternity. (p. 150)

Some gay men, who may not yet understand their sexuality, may communicate their gay nature through meaning-full glances, but glances that are not yet knowing looks. Several of my co-researchers share experiences of attending high school reunions where they discovered after several years that some of the men they knew were gay in high school, but who had not yet externally identified themselves, actually were gay and had become public with that aspect of their identity. The "I knew it" response is a common experience of my co-researchers. What was the experience like for those men whom my co-researchers knew about? The theme of knowing others is about connection. The theme of being known offers the possibility of connection, and yet also of disconnection, and even rejection. For gay men, what is it to be known?

Being Known

> Relative otherness asserts that the otherness of the other, no matter how alien and shocking, is never without a measure of similitude that provides a legitimate context for dialogue and understanding. Philosophies of relative otherness encourage dialogue because there is real hope of understanding better. This claim is unlike Enlightenment confidence in the unlimited power of reason, and it is made with humility rather than hubris. It articulates the *hope* of *understanding*. (Treanor, 2006, p. 267)

> We possess an urge for classification that makes us want to seek commonalities with certain people and differences with others.... Since the labels we attach to

> people contain implicit information about their likely attitudes and values, they offer us a way of predicting and interpreting their actions. As condensed packets of information, these labels are mentally economical and relatively resistant to change. (Ludwig, 1997, pp. 92-93)

To be known, gay men must share their selves with others; they must disclose (share) their dis-closure (truth) of self. The experience of disclosure as pathway to being known is often liberating, but it is not without its anxieties. As mentioned in Chapter IV, appropriately channeled anxieties help human beings dis-cover their authentic selves (Heidegger, 1927/1996). It would be a wonderful world if being known manifested itself as "being understood" as discussed in the section on what it is to know in Chapter IV. However, the experience of gay men and being known is not always about being understood. Being known may be being seen as different. Being known may feel like being exposed. Being known is the experience of assigned alterity, of being made "the other." How does one express this idea of assigned alterity? To every self another self is the other. Some selves seem to have more right to selfhood than others. Some others are assigned their otherness, and this otherness may be seen as less worthy than the selfhood of the others who assigned the status of "other" in the first place. Being known also may be a wonderful thing, and also may be experienced as a sense of intimate completion.

Reflecting on the conversations with my co-researchers, I come to see that being known possesses the potentiality for ontological freedom. Corporeally, being known means being able to carry oneself as one chooses without worry over certain gestures being judged as "too gay." Relationally, being known offers the possibility of deeper

relationships. Temporally, being known allows gay men to be “on course” with life events such as being an adolescent during adolescence and experimenting with relationships as young adults. Spacially, to be known as a gay man brings the desire to live freely and safely, not to worry about one’s physical safety. Do these existentials manifest as described here? Or, do gay men always live with the question of “What if?” and being made the “other”?

Safety and Survival in Silence

The child sits toward the back of the bus and keeps his eyes on the floor. Maybe if I don’t make eye contact they will leave me alone? Why did I sit in the back again? Now I will have to walk all the way to the front of the bus to get off once I get to my stop. Will mom be at the bus stop waiting again? I want her to be there, but what if I get off the bus crying again? Will she make me tell her why? Why doesn’t the bus driver do anything about these bullies? But soon the chorus of chants begins and the sting of the word faggot hits its mark. Why are they tormenting me? What have I done?

Like many children, the boy in the story above did not do anything. Children can be cruel; not simply for what another person does, but sometimes, as in the case of a gay boy (or a boy who is believed to be gay), cruelty may be spawned simply by who one is. When Justin shares the story of his bus ride home from school, I can hear the pain in his voice. What is the source of the pain? Is the source out of guilt? Is it embarrassment? Is it somehow the pleasure of feeling safe because someone else is the target? You see, Justin is not the gay boy being tormented on the bus; however, Justin witnesses this torment and did nothing about it.

I am still shocked by the story Steve tells of one of his high school friends, Robert. Robert was the only gay man who was open about his sexual orientation in their high school. Because of his openness, Steve felt that he could tell Robert about himself and that he was gay too. Steve does not exhibit the stereotypical behaviors associated with gay men, behaviors that Robert exhibits frequently. Robert is effeminate and wears designer clothes. In Steve's hometown, the wearing of designer clothes is one sure sign that one is gay. Actually, it was the sharing of his sexual orientation with Robert that began Steve's disclosure to his high school. Fortunately, for Steve, he feels able to "take care of myself, I could hold my own to a degree" though he admits:

> I was a little worried about violence.... people would fuck with Robert – they'd try to run him off the road and shit because he was different, especially because there were lots of rednecks that were really into that – they had tried to run him off the road several times in our 11th grade year, coming to school. It was a really terrible situation when it came to violence toward people they perceived as not being...it was a bad situation.

What must it be like for those who do not feel able to "take care of myself"? Maybe I was shocked because in my own high school experience I had never witnessed the kind of physical violence that Steve shares in his story about Robert. Although I will probably never know him, I wonder, for Robert, was the actual act of violence the most horrific aspect of the experience? Or was it the fact that it was known in his high school why he was the target of such violence? I can see why safety and survival may be felt through silence.

Feeling the need to keep silent about being gay also may be driven by concern for others and what a sense of openness about being gay might create for others.

Felipe's father is aware of Felipe's sexual orientation, and although not fully embracing the fact that his son is gay, is at least civil, if uncomfortable. For Felipe, the greater concern is the people around whom his father lives. Felipe's father lives in a relatively small community, and for a man to have a gay son in that particular part of South America is not a welcome bit of news. As Felipe describes what it would be like for him or his father if Felipe were open about his sexuality, there is a hint of resignation in his voice – he would prefer the environment to be different and more accepting, but he is aware of the cultural reality:

> Over there it is still very much a taboo, and the problem is that my father, and he's quite right, because he doesn't want people to know because he might have consequences himself because he lives there. I'm here [in the U.S.], I'm happy, but I'm not there...they joke and it's a small town, and they love to make fun of people, and joke, and gossip and if they find out I'm gay and spread the word, all this, you know, his son is gay, whatever, and then he...if he cannot accept it himself yet, it would be much harder to defend. I don't want to expose him. People around that region, they are, they don't have the virtue of being discrete, they just, they're very imprudent – they don't care, that's the way they are.

Sometimes it makes sense to remain silent about one's being gay. There are times when the ontological freedom of openness may be dangerous, and it is for every gay man to decide whether or not he will remain silent, or risk safety by speaking up. Even though it may mean remaining safe, silence does not mean freedom from suffering.

The experience of keeping a fundamental aspect of the self hidden for whatever reason, whether it be for safety, or because one isn't yet sure how to express that aspect, causes tension. There is a fear that signals may be given that betray the secret aspect:

> He was afraid his old friends might pick up on something different in him, would sense that he had changed. It was as if what had happened with Ben had

> branded the word *faggot* on his forehead, and he couldn't erase it. (Dolby, 2008, p. 96)

Why worry? Who cares? Clearly for Todd, the main character in Dolby's novel, it was disconcerting, troubling and anxiety producing; it wasn't what was *expected* of him. Todd, after his first intimate encounter with another man, finds himself thinking about what he has done all the time; it almost haunts him.

> It was wrong, he knew, this new fixation on guys. Maybe not wrong – intellectually, he knew it was not wrong. Just unacceptable. It didn't seem possible to reconcile it with the rest of his life. He was supposed to be a normal guy, a guy who could step out of a Ralph Lauren ad, or the Berkley catalog, or *The Preppy Handbook*. If he could change it, he would. But deep down, underneath everything, and with a sense of surprise, relief, and shame, he realized he couldn't. (p. 97)

The confusion of feelings that Todd feels in Dolby's novel are shared by Cesar and Marc. Cesar remembers with feelings of discomfort bordering on physical illness the experience of being catcalled in the halls of his school. During our conversation, I am introduced to a new word: *joto*. This word is one of the words hurled at Cesar as he walks down the halls of his school. I stop Cesar and have to ask, "What does *joto* mean? I'm afraid I don't know that word in Spanish." With his voice becoming halting with emotion, Cesar repeats the word and says:

> And for me to say it – it still stirs up a lot of emotion and defensiveness, because it – so very much like queer was back in the beginning of the gay movement. It was very much a derogatory term – like faggot. Some try to reclaim the word, like faggot, but it's painful, that's still the way I see *joto*.

I am amazed at how many times during our conversation Cesar uses the word "shame." He is proud of his gay self, and without making a point of it, shares his being gay whenever appropriate so that others may see the pride he attaches to, what for him, is a

quite normal way of being. Cesar explains that the shame he felt was brought on by the experience of being catcalled in school – being made to stand out from the crowd for an aspect of himself that was considered wrong, not okay, or deviant by his peers.

Sometimes gay men keep silent for reasons that go beyond physical safety and survival. Sometimes it's just not worth the energy to share, risking the psychological energy drain. As part of this research project, I asked my co-researchers to write a letter to either their younger self or to someone who was not aware of their sexual orientation. Marc chose to write to his uncle. Marc's family spends a week or two each year at a communal lake house on vacation. Marc is clearly conflicted about whether or not it is worth it to share his true self and whether or not he has the psychological energy to survive possible rejection, as some excerpts from that letter reveal:

> There is something that I need for you to know: I'm gay. This may or may not come as a surprise to you; my guess is that it will. After years of living my life unafraid of who I am to virtually the entire world, the time has come for me to deal with the hardest people to tell – those who are closest to you.
>
> There are several reasons why I have never brought this up. Many of these reasons revolve around the conversations of the family at the lake house. More than once I have heard yours and others' homophobic and downright dehumanizing comments. It's impossible to feel safe and relaxed in this atmosphere; whenever I am at the lake, I am careful that I don't accidentally use the "wrong" pronoun. It is as though I have been made to feel ashamed of being who I am.... I wish I could show you that I'm just as normal as anyone else.... But, I've been afraid and outnumbered. Too many conservative viewpoints and no open minds. I wish that I truly believed that if I made this proclamation over dinner one night that everyone would go, "So?" and continue to swat the flies and enjoy the chicken. If I felt this is what would happen, I would have done this years ago. I was afraid to ruin everyone's vacation and more afraid of my emotions and self concept to ever do this.

What happens when it becomes impossible to stay silent, when the worry over safety, or even survival, becomes secondary to the need to be one-self and share one-self openly? Sometimes the drive to be authentic allows us to overcome the natural (and social) laws that have kept us down; sometimes we rise up and defy gravity.

Defying Gravity: Disclosure as The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Something has changed within me
Something is not the same
I'm through with playing by the rules
Of someone else's game
Too late for second-guessing
Too late to go back to sleep
It's time to trust my instincts
Close my eyes: and leap!

It's time to try
Defying gravity
I think I'll try
Defying gravity
And you can't pull me down!
(Schwartz, 2003, track 11)

These lyrics come from the Broadway musical, "Wicked." The story of the musical is a retelling of the story of *The Wizard of Oz*, from the perspective of the so-called Wicked Witch of the West. In "Wicked," we learn that what was told in the story of *The Wizard of Oz* left out background that helps explain how Elphaba (the proper name for the Wicked Witch of the West) became to be known as wicked. At the end of Act I, Elphaba is no longer able to tolerate the hypocrisy that surrounds her in the world of Oz, and is no longer able to deny her own superior powers. And so Elphaba makes the decision that she will defy gravity (literally) and fly free from the hypocrisy of not being true to herself. It is not that she necessarily wants to go out on her own, to set her

own course, but as she says, “Something has changed within me, something is not the same,” and so she is compelled to respond to that which has changed within her – a coming to understand the truth of herself. The song is jubilant, even though the decision to defy gravity will cause Elphaba loneliness and difficulty in her life. The jubilance comes from the celebration of being authentic, and regardless of the consequences, she wanted everyone to know who she really was.

For gay men, is there a sense of wanting others to share in one’s truth of being gay, heeding the call to “flee from hypocrisy”? In Kundera’s (1984/1999) novel from which I take the second half of this section’s title, one of the main characters, Franz, also struggles with wanting to share the truth. In his case, the truth is his having an affair. His struggle revolves around what he knows about himself and what he chooses to tell about himself. Franz wanted to live in his truth.

> What does it mean to live in truth? Putting it negatively is easy enough: it means not lying, not hiding, and not dissimulating. Franz...was certain that the division of life into private and public spheres is the source of all lies: a person is one thing in private and something quite different in public. For Franz, living in truth meant breaking down the barriers between the private and the public. (Kundera, pp. 112-113)

Gay men connect with the notion of private and public self as a dilemma for living authentically. We may have come to a place of dis-closure, but will we engage in disclosure? Will we live with a sense of congruence between our private and public selves?

The story of Elphaba may be fictional, but her choice to be completely open about her real self is a strong metaphor of the courage it takes for those who have been

defined as too different to be honest and authentic in sharing one's self. The experience of sharing one's authentic self as a gay man is an act of courage. The sharing of authenticity is a "moment of truth." The phrase, "moment of truth," has a rather bloody history, but it does help me understand and put words to the courage involved in disclosing to others that one is gay. A moment of truth is "the final sword thrust in a bullfight" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), and was first used in English by Hemingway in 1932 in his *Death in the Afternoon*, taking the phrase from the Spanish, *el momento de la verdad*, used in bullfighting parlance (Harper, 2001). The phrase has come to be defined as "a moment of crisis on whose outcome much or everything depends" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), and this is a good description for the experience of disclosing that one is gay. The word crisis, in this case, should not be taken in its negative connotation, rather, as "an emotionally significant event or radical change of status in a person's life" (Merriam-Webster, 2005). And for gay men, there really is not one moment of truth, but moments of truth, as the experience of disclosing one's self as a gay men is an ongoing experience. Whenever a gay man encounters someone who does not know that he is gay, there is a choice to be made, to be open and disclose, or to keep the gay aspect of self hidden. This act of disclosure is one of the relational aspects of the phenomenon of being gay, and this relational aspect adds gravity to the experience. The desire to defy that gravity becomes intense when we gay men are in the presence of someone important in our lives. Sometimes it becomes impossible to keep the secret.

> Philosophical reflection about the (im)possibility of keeping secrets underscores once more how pervasively relational the experience of secrecy really is. While we sometimes hide (through pretense, simulation, feigning, lying) aspects of our

> inner thoughts and feelings, the point is that this process of showing and hiding is a thoroughly relational phenomenon. Often we only discover the weight and meaning of keeping a secret when we are interacting with the person from whom we want to hide it. (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 105)

Like Marc in his story of his uncle and the lake house, when he says, “the time has come for me to deal with the hardest people to tell – those who are closest to you,” Steve found that one of the most emotionally draining experiences of disclosure was with someone closest to him, his mother. Although Steve talks about his sexual orientation to groups as a way of educating others through sharing himself, when he relays the story of telling his mom he is gay, his discomfort and emotion return.

> I remember when I told my mom, though I can't remember if I told my aunt Kathy first because she is the youngest of seven and my mom was like the second oldest of the seven, and my aunt Kathy is very "cool" and I knew she wouldn't care. I told my mom in this really weird, emotional, way. I was really depressed all through early high school and middle school a lot because of this. We had this strange scene in my room where she could tell it was obvious I wanted to tell her something, but I couldn't get it out. And then, I burst into tears and I was able to tell her. She was, like, "Whoa" and then she gave me a big hug and we sat there for a while. She didn't ask me about it for like a month after that, you know, and I was like alright. I had to actually sit her down and be like, well, you know we had that whole big moment and then it's sort of teetered off into nothingness and I know you must have questions. I can field those if you want. But she didn't really. She said she'd read about it, and at first she had dealt with the same things a lot of people dealt with like, "Where did I go wrong?" and, "Why?" I tried to help her see that it's not necessarily what it's all about. There's not necessarily a right or wrong here, and definitely not her fault – there is not fault, it’s just who I am.

Knowing how emotionally difficult disclosing one’s sexual orientation may be, sometimes gay men choose to find creative ways of disclosure. Take Brice, a college volleyball player who shares his sexual orientation through some traditional childhood games. Brice made headlines in his hometown for being open about his sexual

orientation on his college volleyball team. He says that the article in his local paper makes is seem "like I confidently strode into the athletic department like a fearless warrior to declare my sexual orientation, [though] it was actually a much more nerve-racking, drawn-out process" (Dahlmeier, 2008, Introduction Section, ¶2). After telling one of his closest friends, Gaby, that he is gay, Brice wanted to share this bit of information with his housemates. In general, Gaby's response was positive. "She was blown away. Like most of my female friends, she just figured I was asexual. She explained, 'I finally know how to act around you...I could never quite figure out where you were coming from'" (Dahlmeier, 2008, Telling my friends Section, ¶ 1). Brice was unsure how his other housemates would react, but he wanted to tell them.

> I wanted to come out to the rest of my housemates but wanted to avoid the super intense serious talk that started: "Guys, I have something I want to tell you..." My friend suggested that I make it a game. And so my next two housemates found out via Hangman. They had gotten down to "B-R-I-C-E I-S G-A_." My housemate was just about to pee her pants while they were guessing, "Brice is gax! ... No, Brice is gat? ... hmm." Meanwhile I was about to have a heart attack. Finally, Gaby says, "It's a synonym for happy." Perhaps out of fear that I would be thoroughly insulted, my other housemate cautiously whispered, "Brice is Gay?" (Dahlmeier, Telling my friends Section, ¶ 2)

Brice goes on to tell other friends through a scavenger hunt and charades. Why use these games to tell one's story? Brice wants his friends to accept him, and he wants their acceptance to be genuine. He also is aware of the tension surrounding such a revelation, and wants to minimize much of that tension for his friends, and for himself. How exhausting it is to spend emotional energy anticipating the reactions of people when gay men share their authentic selves with others through acts of disclosure. I know people close to me in my life share that this anticipatory anxiety surrounds the

experience of disclosing something monumentous, whether it be the positive news of getting married or the devastating news of a grave illness. But for gay men, this emotional energy is called forth when in the presence of someone new to our life.

Unfortunately, even when others know we are gay, they may inadvertently create an environment that feels hostile to one's being-in-the-world as a gay man. As I began this dissertation journey I made notes about my own experiences of coming to be known as a gay man. What and how would I be in terms of openness when I came to this university? Out. Completely. Or that is what I told myself as I prepared to leave my comfortable, known place in the world – a job and friendship group I had had for eight years. During those eight years I had learned a lot about who I was: going from "I'm simply too busy with my career to date" to "I am a gay man." It was quite a journey, and the various turns it took all added to the man I have become. I had worked hard to come out in the small community that was Dickinson College. With so few student affairs professionals on staff and being the administrator responsible for the Greek system, a system that comprised 52% of the student body, I was known. Finally, after years of hiding my true being, of giving in to essencorship, I was truly known.

Of course, my experience of being known is freeing. However, with freedom comes the possibility of pain. As I think about my experience of being known as a gay man, one anecdote reminds me that just because one is known does not mean that those who know are welcoming of that knowledge, and the experience has affected relationships. School spirit. Good old-fashioned athletic rivalry. Social gatherings before games. Seeing old friends. Hearing epithets. What did you say? It is hard to

describe the thoughts and emotions that coursed through me when what was a fun, relaxing, and social gathering became a domain of hate. It was so seemingly benign.

The day before the game I spent my free time peeling and cooking potatoes, cutting up celery, frying and crumbling bacon, preparing sweet corn, and finally, combining them to make a salad to share with colleagues and friends at a tailgate event before the football game between the University of Maryland and the University of Virginia. As the pre-game social event was winding down and kickoff approached, over the footbridge that links the parking garage to the area where we were tailgating came a contingent of University of Virginia fans proudly wearing their university colors. One member of our group noticed the oncoming fans from the rival university and yelled, "cavalqueers" at their group. The University of Virginia sports teams are known as the Cavaliers, so this clever twist on the word seemed a delightfully derisive term to taunt the opposing team. What bothered me the most? Was it the use of the term so clearly as an epithet? Or, was it the casual way another person in the group joined in and continued the chant? What made me angrier? Was it the actual use of the word "cavalqueer" as a derogatory moniker for an opposing sports team? Or was it that no one seemed bothered by the word and its use? Was I the only one who responded to the word negatively? Knowing there were many people at this event who were aware of my sexual orientation, I wondered why no one even gave me one of those "you know how drunk people can be" sideways glances. My feelings toward this group of people chilled a bit after this experience; keeping my guard up became, once again, the norm of my

existence in their presence. Is it any wonder that gay men sometimes choose to remain silent about who we are as beings-in-the-world?

Being Known as Being Seen: The Tensions of Visibility

> To be looked at, and to experience oneself becoming an object to someone else (and thus to oneself), makes the person aware of his or her "whatness." This conscious "whatness" somehow brings about a certain vulnerability, and a profound sense of being in default of a personal defense or possible escape from the look. (Saevi, 2007, The disabling look section, ¶ 1)

> The look of the other does not always objectify and make one feel alienated to one "self." People who generally believe in themselves and who are capable may in fact feel encouraged by the look of the other. For example, the athlete may perform a superb act under the admiring glance of the onlookers. (Saevi, 2007, Enabling seeing section, ¶ 1)

Do human beings simply see other people? Are we simply seen? Or, do we see other people "as," as in, seeing a person as teacher, as an Asian person, or as a friend? Do we ever simply see a person without some classifying characteristic? For Sartre (1943/1984) to be seen was to be called into question. One is no longer simply a subject acting upon the world, but an object for the other to examine, challenge, and quite possibly even vanquish. If one becomes the object of another's vision, is one seen as one's self, or is one seen as some object that becomes a sort of human simile? In other words, is one ever able to be visible without being visible "as"? What is it to be visible as a gay man? Are there times when invisibility is preferable to visibility? The problem lies with "as" – how others see gay men is problematic. It becomes a case of being defined again. And it is a definition of being gay created by others that is the problem.

Assuming, then, that if one encounters a gay man, then the definition one holds of gay men is applicable to this particular encounter. As discussed earlier, Heidegger

(1957/1969) points out the fallacy of the traditional view that the formula A=A is identity. One thing or phenomenon cannot be the same as another. It follows that one person cannot be exactly like another person, but what about aspects of identity? Is it possible to apply an aspect of identity embodied by one person to another person who shares that aspect? Are these aspects ever the same, or are they merely similar? So, even when one holds a definition of some aspect of identity, it simply cannot be applied to a person who embodies that aspect. If one continues with Heidegger's troubling of the concept of identity as applied here, if the first "A" is a gay man one encounters, and the second "A" is one's definition of what a gay man is, the power of definition lies with the person encountering the gay man, not the gay man himself. There is a dangerous proximity of "as" and "is," because at what point does "as" become "is," as in "gay is _____"?

Steve is somewhat conflicted about his ability to pass as straight. For him, the idea of passing is ridiculous. He would like to live in a world where passing is not necessary, and being seen for one's true self is accepted. He understands, however, that this world he imagines is not yet a reality. Steve is a brown belt in Shotakahan Karate, and besides not exhibiting any stereotypical feminine traits, his ability in this martial arts discipline is "another reason people didn't think I was gay." Somehow these two aspects are not compatible in the minds of Steve's high school contemporaries.

Steve shares a story of a party that took place at his house during his high school years:

> My brother was there...he hung out with a crowd, the roughnecks, the tough people, the punks, or the thugs. There was this guy, Luke, at the party and I remember he was a really big deal, like, he was strong and he had a gun or something. At some point during the party we [Steve and Luke] were like wrestling and I just kicked his ass. And there was this moment where me and my brother talked about it later and we both noticed it was either "he just got his ass beat by Steve the sissy," or "Steve the sissy is actually badass." And so he [Luke] went around like "Kyle's badass, you'd better look out for him." And so though I saw Robert being harassed and dealing with violence because he was gay, nobody ever threatened me.

Steve's newfound status as "badass" in his high school challenges the notion that gay is weak, effeminate. Steve is unaware if his newfound status really changed the minds of his schoolmates, or whether they simply saw him as exceptional rather than deal with the dissonance created by his defying the stereotypes of gay men. In a philosophical study of personal identity, Ludwig (1997) finds similarly, "Once we pigeonhole others, we seldom can be proven wrong. When their actions conform to our expectations, they confirm them. When they don't, they represent exceptions to the rule" (p. 94) With the social power of pigeonholing as an aspect of being known as gay, why tell others about yourself?

Reflecting on Justin's story of observing another school child being harassed on the school bus and taunted with anti-gay epithets, I wonder what it was that motivated Justin to tell some of his friends about being gay. Justin also wonders just what it was, and couldn't quite explain it. It was a feeling of needing to share this aspect of himself, to make that aspect not a complete secret. He only knew that when he began to understand his feelings of being different from many of the other boys, and to understand what that difference meant, he wanted to share this knew self-knowledge.

Who could he tell his story? Who would understand? Would whomever he shared his story with keep his secret? Even though he didn't want this self-knowledge to be a complete secret, he wasn't sure he wanted it to be completely known at school. Justin chose what he felt was a safe time to let others know that he was gay. Toward the end of his sixth grade year, Justin knew he would be moving about 500 miles away to live with his father and start junior high school in another state. With the school year coming to a close, it seemed like a safe time to tell a few close intimates his secret, and thereby make his secret a little less so.

> So I was about to move 500 miles away, so who cares about what someone thinks, so, like, at the last trip – we took a last trip to some beach at the end of middle school and I told just a few of my female friends who I recently became close with. I didn't have a lot of friends in middle school. I told them and word spread around in half an hour and people asked me, "Are you gay," and I'm like, "No" – so, I only told a few people and denied it to everyone else - had denied it to others, but never to myself throughout middle school. I never really pretended like I was straight to myself – only to others – it's not a very easy thing.

And so, timing is important to Justin. Knowing that he will not have to face his classmates in the coming school year, he feels some degree of safety in beginning to share his authentic self with a few close friends. The tension in wanting to share his authentic self and the concern over what that sharing might mean comes through in the juxtaposition of his comments, "So who cares about what someone thinks," and "I never really pretended like I was straight to myself – only to others." Cleary, for Justin the desire to be authentic and be authentic in the company of others was strong. His awareness of what that sharing might mean, however, is always present. Why does Justin want to share his authentic self? Why do any gay men want to share their

authentic self in the face of possible stigmatization? Sharing one's authentic self and being known by others allows for the possibility of connecting with others – true connections based on authenticity, not artifice.

Being Known as Being Understood: Possibility for Connection

> There is the personal identity that every self must have in order to have a home for her soul, somewhere to return after meeting with and wondering at the other's difference. This is not a place where we compare ourselves with others or others with us; the other may remain what he is just as we remain ourselves. Yet this identity is never final, but always in becoming, always in the future, always with you. (Loyttyniemi , 2006, p. 261)

Being known by others offers the possibility of real connection, or real relationship. Cesar tells of his friend, Eric, and how without Eric he would never have survived high school, a period of time he refers to as "probably the worst four years of my life – I'd hate to have to do any part of them over again." Cesar and Eric formed a close bond over their knowledge that they shared a commonality in terms of sexual orientation. With this connection made, both Cesar and Eric took on the mantra, "To hell with the world; if they can't accept us – at least we have each other." Cesar remembers the torrent of questions he and Eric had for each other: "How did you figure it out? When did you know? Who else knows?"

The day that Cesar and Eric really came to know each other and be known to the other is a memory that is still vivid in Cesar's mind. He remembers the weather: "It's sunny and the sun is breaking through the clouds." He remembers the setting, "We were at the blue wall outside Mrs. Northertz's class on the green lawn, and everybody was rushing to class." What he can't remember exactly is how the connection got started.

Was it a look? All he remembers is that it all seemed to happen so fast and that had it not happened, his experience in high school would have been a complete nightmare.

What happens when we are known before we disclose? Steve feels blessed that he has the Nana (grandmother) he has. As we talk about family and how family members came to know about our sexual orientation, Steve smiles and says, “Nana knew.” Steve is a member of “Speaker’s Bureau,” a group dedicated to sharing stories of the members’ sexual orientation in an effort to educate others. One aspect of the introduction section of the Speaker’s Bureau program is to tell a funny story about someone in your life or an experience when sexual orientation was involved. Doing this is meant to lighten up the atmosphere (again, attempting to manage the anxiety of others, similarly discussed above in defying gravity). For his funny story, Steve tells of a vacation his family took and about a conversation between him and his Nana:

> I was doing laundry or something; I was drying towels, I think. By then I was doing some of my own laundry, and Nana came in the room and started talking about the smells, 'cause it's Nana, she’s kind of sporadic! She asked, “You know how to get your clothes to smell really good? You take them straight from the washer and put them in the dryer immediately, because if you let them sit in the wash too long you get that mildewy smell. And you can't actually smell it if you put your face in the fabric, but when you're walking around and you're just like, ‘is that me?’” I thought, okay, and I was like, “Great Nana, I'll keep that in mind.” And then she continues, “And you know who else smells really great? Gay men, 'cause gay men really know how to keep clean and whatnot.” And on that note, this non-sequitur, she adds, “I don't see why anybody's family would ever ostracize someone, a member of their family just for being gay because that seems so silly, you know, you're going to love who you're going to love no matter what.”

As he shares this story, I can’t help but wonder how he reacts, so I ask him. “I freaked out then, you know. I was like 12 and so I was just like, ‘Okay, Nana, I'm going

to go now, bye.' And that's how we left it." What was Steve's Nana doing? Steve admits, "Oh yeah, I mean, I had an inkling, but I was in denial sort of with myself" about his sexual orientation at the time of this encounter with his Nana. Steve feels that his Nana was trying to open up a safe place for him to be-come himself, to explore, understand, and simply be in her presence. Her final comments during that encounter, "I don't see why anybody's family would ever ostracize someone, a member of their family just for being gay because that seems so silly, you know, you're going to love who you're going to love no matter what," stays with me as a real moment of connection. What would the lived experience of gay men be like if everyone could offer such generous moments of connection?

Portraits. Is considering portraits a one-way experience? Or do portraits look back at us, the gazer? Although I can't be certain of the experience of paint and canvas, I am more sure that portraits of lived experience expressed through language do look out at us, and engage us. Portraits of lived experience call to us: "See us, understand us, care about us." As I gaze back over these portraits of the lived experience of being gay, I am called to the pedagogical possibilities these portraits present. How will I be with gay men in my pedagogical role? What aspects of the environment may I have influence over and make safer for gay men to come to their authentic selves? How did the experience of sharing so deeply affect my co-researchers? Have they changed? Have I changed?

CHAPTER VI

KNOWING AND BEING WITH GAY MEN: BE-(COM)-ING PEDAGOGICALLY IN-TACT

> Endings seem much less difficult because it is easy to reflect back and see the path already traveled. Still, the very ease of providing a summary can cut against the spirit and goals of a text. Oh sure, many people do seem to like 'a sense of closure.' But perhaps a lack of closure it a good thing, at least in some cases. If a scholarly work ends with a tight summation and we are led to a sense of completion, the work may be placed back on the shelf while we, on the other hand, go on operating as if the reading hardly took place. A closure, in this sense, can serve as an ending to, rather than an opening of, a continued discussion. (Anton, 2001, p. 161)

> Indeed, the greatest hindrance to gaining access to the phenomenology of wonder and the wonder of phenomenological method is perhaps our cultural inclination to devalue passivity in favour of a pervasive activism and a valuing of information in all realms of inquiry. We are so inclined to convert research into action and useable "results" that this activism can limit our possibility for understanding, a form of understanding that involves the experience of meaningfulness. (van Manen, 2002b, p. 251)

> To understand is not to project oneself into the text; it is to receive an enlarged self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation. (Ricoeur, 1981, pp. 182-183)

What do Cesar, Ethan, Felipe, Justin, Marc, and Steve tell me about their lived experience as gay men? What do they want me to do with the stories, memories, and anecdotes they share to bring forth what it is like for them to be gay men? What do their experiences call to us as educators to do? My co-researchers just want to be, not to be left alone, as in to not be bothered; they want the ontological freedom just to be who they are. What does it require of us as educators, the care-takers of the pedagogical environment?

In our role as educators, we are required to be authentic in our approach to students. Anton (2001) describes authenticity as “a habit of passionate responsibility” (p. 160) and “the practice of openness by which we are called to fitting responses” (p. 160). Offering fitting responses to our students through openness to these students’ authentic ways of being is complex. But the complexity of response should match the complexity of being. Students do not come to us in neat, orderly, and simple ways. They bring with them a totality of their experiences that make up their being-in-the-world. As I discussed in Chapters IV and V, gay men are a complex combination of sameness with other gay men and unique aspects of self, taken together in ever-changing degrees of ascendancy.

What do their experiences mean to us? The experiences of these gay men call to those of us in education to be open enough to accept the various encounters with *Dasein* (beings-in-the-world) as they are, for who they are. Of course, education would not be a pedagogical environment if those of us in it were not trying to share what we know with those who seek to know, which means the possibility for change within those various *Dasein*. But it is for each individual to make the changes; we educators are part of the environment that allows for those changes to take place.

Being open to accepting others as they are is an ethical matter. The themes of identity and difference and self and other have been part of philosophical discussion since the beginning of philosophy (Stambaugh, 1975/1969). It is this theme of identity and difference, especially the issue of difference that concerns me. Difference defines who is the “other” in our world. My co-researchers are well aware that as gay men they

are considered the "other." Being considered the other places them in a specific category, a category that allows them to be defined, and confined, rather than simply to be in the world. Will our culture (and any other for that matter) ever get beyond difference as a form of division? A larger question is who has the power to define what shall be called different, and who shall be considered the "other"? What role do we educators play in the naming of difference, and how are encounters with difference manifested in our pedagogical environments? How do we educators understand difference and otherness? Do we see difference and otherness as an ethical aspect of our practice? We might take a hint from Levinas (1991/1998).

Levinas's notion of ethics is directed toward the other, those others with whom we humans exist. The title of one section in Levinas's *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other* sums up a major aspect of his idea: "Ethics, or the Meaning of Being." For Levinas, an ethical stance in the world is a stance with, toward, and for the other. In essence, our ethical stance is our human responsibility.

> Does not this summons to responsibility break through the forms of generality in which my knowledge, my knowing the other man [*sic*] re-presents him [*sic*] to me as similar to myself, and designate me, in the face of the other, as responsible without any possible escape, and thus as the unique, the chosen one? (Levinas, 1991/1998, p. 147)

The reference to "the chosen one" above is quite deliberate by Levinas. He is asking us as human beings to reach out to others and understand them in their otherness and not attempt to make others over in our own image. The notion of "the chosen one" is a reference to religious belief, and that when one is "chosen" by a higher power for some task or responsibility, one does not say, "No." For Levinas, the responsibility we have

toward others is sacred; all human beings become "chosen." What does Levinas call to us as educators to do? Or, maybe more accurately stated, who shall we be when we are present with others, especially in our roles as educators?

In pondering my question from my wondering about Levinas and the ethical stance we educators must have in our work, the statement above reverberates: "Being open to accepting others as they are is an ethical matter." For van Manen, being open to accepting others as they are is accepting them in their authenticity. When we accept others in their authentic way of being, we approach others with what van Manen (1991) calls "tact." "To exercise tact one must be able to overcome an orientation to the world that seems to come natural to human beings, the attitude of seeing oneself at the center of all things" (van Manen, 1991, p. 139).

Theory And Shorthanding: An Un-Whole-Ly Reliance

> In a real sense every human being is vulnerable; every human being is mortal and subject to fears and dangers. Every human being is my other. The other is actually or potentially weak and vulnerable, just as I know myself to be actually or potentially weak and vulnerable. However, the existence of the other does not merely manifest itself as my feelings of pity or compassion for the hurt or suffering of this other person. More pointedly I experience the other as a voice, as an appeal to me. And this is what we mean when we speak of our living with children as a vocation, a calling. (van Manen, 1991, p. 141)

How am I called to work with students? In van Manen's work on pedagogical tact, he often refers to children, but the notion of pedagogical tact applies to all students, all of those individuals in our educational care. For me as a student affairs professional, the most direct manner in which I will apply my knowing and being with gay men to be more pedagogically in-tact is to call theory, or more precisely, the use and application

of theory, into question. The main concern for me is that in teaching theory we emphasize the responsible use of theory and focus on the appropriate application of theories within the context of student affairs work. In a conversation with Francine as I was feeling rather overwhelmed in the process of thematizing and how my beliefs regarding theory were changing, I shared a despairing moment when I discovered that the one area of student affairs I had taught and would like to teach again was student development theory, and I was no longer sure if I believed in theory as important for professional practice. In my anxiety, I took the easy route of assuming that I wouldn't be able to teach that particular subject again. Francine's approach was response-able. After asking me what it was I had come to believe about theory, Francine asked if maybe I could still teach theory, but that my approach to both theory and the teaching of it might change. I remember leaving that conversation still unsure about whether or not I could ever encounter and/or teach theory again.

Theory as* Idem: *Structure as Sameness

Theory is what initially grounded me in student affairs. When I first decided to go to graduate school for student affairs, I was not aware of student development theory. What I did know was that I enjoyed working with students and cherished the thought of being able to work on a college or university campus; the higher education environment felt like home. But what really anchored me to the student affairs profession was my study of student development theory. I have always been someone who "lives in my head" and appreciates the positive aspects of living a "life of the mind," so it is no surprise that the study of theory was attractive to me. It is also no

surprise, then, that when I began this research project, I wanted to express my understanding of my own coming to terms with my sexual orientation as a gay man through a *process model*. “Are you sure you want to do that?” Francine gently asked me when we met to talk about the initial chapters. I explained that theory and process models made sense to me, and I thought it would be a good way to show how I came to understand myself in terms of the phenomenon being considered. Francine asked me to go back to the phenomenological literature and see whether or not a process model was methodologically appropriate for this type of study. Even though process models and theory are elegant, as in “marked by elegance” with elegance’s meaning of “scientific precision, neatness, and simplicity” (Merriam-Webster, 2005), they oversimplify the lived experience of a phenomenon. The process model came out.

The human sciences, the epistemological home of hermeneutic phenomenology, approaches theory differently than the social sciences. As I struggled with how I would continue to value theory in student affairs, Francine shared an experience she had during a research presentation program on campus. A faculty member in American Studies introduced a session by explaining the difference between the humanities (akin to the human sciences) and social sciences this way: The role of the social sciences is to explain and organize human behavior, and the role of the humanities is to trouble those explanations and organizing structures. The point being that as educators, we need both approaches. Human experience is far too complex to hold in one’s mind and consider how that experience might be useful in our pedagogy, thus the need for the social sciences and theory to help organize experience. However, there is the possibility that if

educators only have theory as a guide to our pedagogical work, there is the possibility to cover over experience and thus lose the individuality of human experience. For a long time, I have used the metaphor of the oyster and grain of sand to describe how I see myself in pursuit of knowledge and positive change: I am the grain of sand in the oyster that creates just enough irritation to cause the oyster to grow a pearl. And so I choose to irritate theory that needs to be troubled, as well as the ways in which theory is applied, and possibly over relied upon to explain individuals and their experiences.

> The idea of theory as something elegant is one of its positive attributes.
>
> Theory frequently serves to simplify the complex – to connect what appears to be random and to organize what appears to be chaotic. Theory is inherently reductionist; it helps one reduce or organize many difficult-to-manage pieces or dimensions into fewer, simpler parts and an integrated, organized whole. One aspect of theory that is frequently not described or discussed is that theory – whether empirical or rational – is developed through the lenses, or perspectives, of those who create or describe it. (McEwen, 1996, p. 151)

McEwen (1996) goes on to discuss how theory has been described as "autobiographical," and that for the theorist, "Their theory becomes, in essence, an autobiographical account of their own organizational experiences. Thus it is important to be aware of the subjectivity and relativism of any theory" (pp. 151-152). This does not mean that theory is not useful. A caution, however, is necessary with regard to the use of theory as well as accepting that a theory is "true," especially given the autobiographical nature of theory; many truths are present. Those who use theory must not take the easy route, says McEwen; and must recognize that "It can be easy to accept theory without question and use it in practice without challenge" (p. 153), and that "One of the important components of knowing and using theory is to evaluate it, both within

practice and in relationship to new literature and new research" (p. 153). I agree. Those of us who study and use theory must evaluate theory, and more importantly, evaluate its application.

Educators of practitioners must be responsible in how they teach theory so that the students of theory may be response-able in the environments in which they work after their professional graduate programs. To be response-able, in this case, means being able to assist students to figure out who they are, to help answer the "Who am I?" question. If practitioners rely on theory, will they be response-able? Or may over reliance on theory limit the response-ability of the practitioner and force the question: "Who does this theory think you are?" (F. H. Hultgren, personal communication, May 16, 2008). And who gets left out? My growing belief is that although there are cautions about not letting theory be seen as something static and representing a permanence of the human condition (McEwen, 1996), in the application of theory it may be forgetten that theory is dynamic and that it does not explain everything and everyone.

A widely cited model of gay identity development is Cass's theoretical model (Fassinger, 1991). In the introduction to her model, Cass (1979) states, "There are six stages of development that all individuals move through in order to acquire an identity of 'homosexual' fully integrated within the individual's overall concept of self" (p. 220). I wonder about her use of the word "all" as it applies to gay men. Do all gay men experience coming to understand their sexual identity via these six stages, and in the order they are presented? Similarly to Gilligan's (1982) concern that those who are left out of theory are seen as being problematic, I am concerned that gay men who do not fit

the patterns of theory may be seen as problematic. Gilligan's work was with women and moral development, not gay men, but I am struck by her comment, "The failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of human condition, an omission of certain truths about life" (p. 2). Justin would never describe his experience of being gay as ever being in a place of "identity confusion" (Cass, 1979), the first stage of Cass's model. He was quite clear about who he was from an early age and did not experience what Cass describes as "identity comparison," which according to Cass requires dealing with "the social alienation that now arises" (p. 225). Justin would describe dealing with his family's learning of his sexual identity as a challenge. But the description of that challenge evokes a more visceral response and, I believe, a stronger desire to care about that response, than hearing about how he faced "the social alienation that now arises" (p. 225), the language Cass uses in her model.

There have been many critiques of the various models of sexual identity formation (Fassinger, 1991), either for the models' linearity, or for not separating the development of personal identity from social identity. Fassinger attempts to provide a more comprehensive model of identity development (Fassinger, 1998). In describing why educators should understand development of sexual identity, Fassinger (1998), citing McEwen, states, "Identity models are thought to be particularly important in understanding student development because students' experiences of their own identities create a lens through which all cognitive, affective, and behavioral events are filtered" (p. 13). So, the models become the lens for experience? I think that both

Fassinger and McEwen mean that the models help practitioners understand identity so that the practitioner may get a closer look into how students come to understand their identity and how that identity creates a lens for interpreting future experiences.

Fassinger's (1998) model expands Cass's model by separating individual sexual identity from group membership identity. Her concern is that models of sexual identity development "ignore demographic or cultural factors that influence the LGB identity formation process" (p. 15), and thus her distinction between the personal and social aspects of identity development. Fassinger raises an important point in stating that sexual identity models require public disclosure as a milestone of maturity, ignoring the social realities of different environments. I applaud Fassinger's taking into account the cultural influences on how one comes to understand one's sexual identity. But then I hear Cesar reminding me of his pain over wondering if his family would be able to accept him as a gay man, given the machismo that is part of his Latino culture. His description of his struggles brings me closer to understanding what the experience was like and draws me in to care more than reading the language used in theory, such as his exploration "of one's position re: gay people as a group (both attitudes and membership)" or of his commitment "to personal involvement with a reference group, with awareness of oppression and consequences of choices" (Fassinger, 1998, p. 17). The language of theory distances me from his experience.

Models simplify identity development and make the ideas of identity development more manageable, and thus, possibly, more learnable. But what gets lost in the model? The experience, upon which the model is based, gets lost. The lived

experience becomes reified in theory. Fassinger (1998) hints as she concludes her chapter on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development that one must pay attention to individual differences in how students come to understand their sexual identity. "Student development theories, like most mainstream developmental theories, have not given adequate attention to the unique ways in which LGB individuals traverse the maturational maps posited in those theories" (p. 22). I agree. For deeper understanding, when using theory, one must couple theories and models with stories that share theories of the unique. As he introduces the human sciences, van Manen (1997) winks at us with the following:

> Generalizations about human experiences are almost always of troublesome value. The phenomenologist would mischievously like to quote the novelist George Eliot who, in the novel *Middlemarch*, wrote that it is the "power of generalizing which gives men so much superiority in mistake over the dumb animals" (1871/1988). The tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience. (p. 22)

If one allows theory to decide who one is, then one is more *idem* than *ipse*, meaning that the self is lost in favor of being the same as others who "fit" the theory. I am reminded of my conversations with Marc where he desperately wanted to describe himself and other gay men based on theory, and I remember his struggle to get past his reliance on theory and get to his own experience. So, what is an educator to do? In a section titled "Promoting Responsible Use of Theory," Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) remind us that "Appropriate use of theories requires that they be used tentatively rather than prescriptively and that the potential for individual variations is

kept in mind" (p. 278). How do educators communicate this message and its importance to students learning theory as one aspect of their future practice in education?

One of the most effective methods of making theory real for students of student development theory is through application. Evans et al. (1998) are effective in this method. The authors use case studies at the beginning of chapters to set up situations in which students may one day find themselves. As the chapter is developed, connections are made between the evolving understanding of the theory discussed in the chapter and the case study presented at the beginning of that chapter. Although this approach is effective, might it be more effective and comprehensive to provide examples of the misuse of theory, as a way of providing an example of what not to do? In discussing linking theory and practice, Evans et al. offer that "A 'fly by the seat of your pants' approach may sometimes result in beneficial outcomes, but it is just as likely to result in disaster" (p. 19). Yes, that may be true, but could it not also be true that the over- or mis-application of theory also results in disaster? As I reflect on my education at both the master's and doctoral level in student affairs, as well as on my reading in the professional literature, much of the attention regarding the application of theory to practice is devoted to how to choose which theory or combination of theories is most appropriate to a given situation. I also remember lamenting how little time there appeared to be in student development theory courses to cover all the material and to feel as though I had really grasped the theories. I understand that taking time to discuss the issues surrounding the inappropriate use of theory will not be the primary concern for most faculty, but at what cost? What is the result of entry-level student affairs

practitioners entering the profession with student development theory in their repertoire as a panacea? In adhering to theory, one celebrates the *idem* at the expense of the *ipse*. Is that what is most appropriate for enhancing the educational environment? What is the consequence for gay identity development?

When I began this project, as a student of college student personnel and higher education, it seemed to make sense to ground the study in the experience of college students. Thus, in the original title of this work, the words, "in college" completed the title. What became apparent in the doing of this research is that to isolate the phenomenon of being gay to "in college" would be to force the phenomenon into a submissive role in the research project, rather than allowing the phenomenon to guide the researcher, as is appropriate to hermeneutic phenomenology. If we as educators wait to wonder about, worry about, care about gay men in our pedagogical environments until the college years, we will be too late.

Shorthanding: Tact-Less Language and Limiting Theory

> Tact discerns what is unique and different about a child and attempts to enhance this uniqueness. In contrast, a tactless teacher fails to see differences among children. A tactless teacher treats all children the same way in the mistaken belief that such an approach serves the principle of equal justice and consistency. ... Being concerned about equality among children still can mean that one is able to see uniqueness and difference among them. Pedagogical tact knows how to discern and evaluate uniqueness. Pedagogical tact aims to enhance the difference that "difference" makes in a child's personal growth and development. (van Manen, 1991, p. 169)

What happens when one moves away from full description of an experience or a phenomenon and creates abbreviated language as a form of shorthand? Does one lose meaning? Or maybe what is lost is the force of the experience or phenomenon. As

educators, we need to engage with students as individuals and understand that their uniqueness is to be valued if we want to approach our pedagogy with tact. In the opening quotation for this section, van Manen (1991) challenges the idea that educators must treat every student the same as a way of being fair or just. In fact, if educators do not look for the individual differences in students, they run the risk of losing what is valuable: the unique qualities of self (related to the *ipse*) in favor of the easier and more readily observable characteristics of sameness (the *idem*).

When Steve introduced himself to me as a "pomo-homo," I had no idea what he meant. As he explains that pomo-homo is short for "postmodern homosexual," it begins to make more sense, but I am still not sure what it means for him. The term seems to be an identifier that is supposed to carry meaning. One aspect of being a pomo-homo is that such a person does not believe that words, in and of themselves, have the power to hurt. Intellectually, I follow his argument, but as he describes various experiences where words such as "faggot" are used, he describes the experiences with language of pain, hurt, and anger. At one point, Steve catches himself and says, "I'm contradicting myself!" I ask him about that and he says he is not sure what he believes about words anymore. When we experience the "shorthanding" of experience as an easy way of describing something or someone, we lose meaning.

When I was in high school, I took some business classes. One part of the classes was learning shorthand. I remember the first time I opened a book of shorthand and looked at what appeared to be a bunch of squiggles and lines and thought, "That will never make sense to me." Over time and with practice, those lines and squiggles began

to make sense. Once one becomes very good as shorthand, one can translate quite quickly. But even when one is very good as shorthand, it is not possible to will someone else to understand those squiggles and lines. To those who have not learned the system, the squiggles remain meaningless squiggles and the lines remain lines void of meaning. For those trying to learn shorthand, like learning any new language, in the beginning mistakes are made, words and ideas get lost. What gets lost when we get caught up in shorthanding?

What do the phrases, "A woman who identifies as lesbian," "A man who identifies as gay," mean? With my new understandings as I come toward the end of this dissertation, the verb phrase "to identify" invokes for me the sense of the *idem* aspect of identity: those aspects of sameness between two or more people, that becomes a common identity characteristic. Choosing to identify, however, does not betray the *ipse*, the selfhood that is the unique aspect of each human being. Understanding how the *idem* and *ipse* interact, yet with neither dominating, allows me to see that shared characteristics need not limit the self. It is only the rigid application of shared characteristics that limits the self, that moves defining the self closer to confining the self. F. Scott Fitzgerald, in *The Crack-Up* (as cited in Moncur & Moncur, 2008), says "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function". Keeping the notions of *idem* and *ipse* as different, yet simultaneously present aspects of identity, is crucial if we are to see people as parts of both groups and as individuals – to see people in their authenticity – to have pedagogical tact.

In education, do we use identity theory as a form of shorthanding? When one speaks of a colleague and wants to let someone know her ethnicity, one may use the phrase, "She identifies as Asian-American," as a way to communicate one aspect of that colleague. What comes with this shorthanding? Is it possible, then, that the person receiving this information now attaches her or his beliefs about the identity group mentioned? Where does this leave the selfhood of the person being described? Does this shorthanding allow the selfhood to have a place in the interactions one may have with the person described, or is the described person's selfhood now dis-placed by the labels applied? Labels are necessary parts of theory; they are part of the structure that attempts to capture development. But is it possible to capture development? Even the word development implies dynamism, of near constant change. In describing aspects of creating theory, D'Augelli (1994) notes, "The difficulty in developing theory is a result of the nature of the phenomenon, complex lives changing over time, and the inevitable social and political consequences of models" (p. 118).

There are, however, some areas of theory that challenge the idea that identity is a fixed idea that may be categorized. For me as a phenomenologist, the nature of theory brings forth a tension, captured well in language by Denzin and Lincoln (2005):

> There is a tension between a humanistic cultural studies, which stresses lived experiences (meaning), and a more structural cultural studies project, which stresses the structural and material determinants (race, class, gender) and effects of experience. Of course, there are two sides to every coin, and both sides are needed – indeed, both are critical. (p. 25)

My own orientation to research, especially as brought forth in this dissertation, is firmly in the human sciences tradition, more akin to the humanistic cultural studies mentioned

above by Denzin and Lincoln than structural cultural studies. But two areas of theory do inform my work here: queer theory and postmodernism.

Queer theory is rather difficult to pin down, partially due to its nature as "a theory that refused fixed identity" (K. Plummer, 2005, p. 265). Alexander Doty (as cited in K. Plummer) suggests at least six different meanings of queer theory ranging from being simply a synonym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) to a "particular form of cultural readership and textual coding that creates spaces not contained within conventional categories such as gay, straight, and transgendered" (p. 365). Olesen (2005) also notes that, "The emergence of the term 'queer theory,' referring to those gay men and women who refuse assimilation into either gay culture or oppressive heterosexual culture, also has been loosely used as a cover term for gay and lesbian studies" (p. 243). But where queer theory augments understanding the lived experience of my co-researchers in this study as well as the other texts I use to offer glimpses into the lived experience of being gay, is that it "puts everything out of joint, out of order" and "brings with it a radical deconstruction of all conventional categories of sexuality and gender" (K. Plummer, 2005, p. 359).

To remain true to my own call for responsibility and response-ability regarding theory and its use, I must note that Plummer (2005) reminds us, "Far from breaking boundaries, queer theorists often have erected them, for while they may not wish for closure, they nevertheless find it. Queer theories have their gurus, their followers, and their canonical texts" (p. 360). Plummer does, however, offer a list of key themes of queer theory; a number of them speak to the work I am doing here: (a) "There is a de-

centering of identity," (b) "it offers a critique of mainstream or 'corporate' homosexuality," (c) "all normalizing strategies are shunned," and (d) "the deviance paradigm is fully abandoned and the interest lies in a logic of insiders/outsiders and transgression" (p. 366). These themes speak to the overarching notion of queer theory that posits, "In general, 'queer' may be seen as partially deconstructing our own discourses and creating a greater openness in the way we think through our categories" (K. Plummer, 2005, p. 365). It is this greater openness in the way we think through our categories that allows queer theory to be in closer alignment with the human science approach of phenomenology.

The other theoretical perspective that augments my study of the lived experience of being gay is postmodernism. Postmodernism, like queer theory, troubles the idea that there are fixed identities, that there is one objective truth to be discovered, and that the way reality is interpreted will vary depending upon the individual doing the interpretation. Rue (as cited in Crotty, 2003) "describes postmodernism as 'a philosophical orientation that rejects the dominant foundational program of the Western tradition'" (p. 192).

> There are no absolute truths and no objective values. There may be local truths and values around, but none of them has the endorsement of things as they really are.... As for reality itself, it does not speak to us, does not tell us what is true or good or beautiful. The universe is not itself any of these things, it does not interpret. Only we do, variously. (Rue, as cited in Crotty, p. 192)

If, one believes as Crotty (2003) does that "reality is too rich for reason" (p. 210), then postmodernism allows one to accept that there are various realities and interpretations of reality that occur simultaneously; one reality and interpretation is not necessarily

privileged over another. So, too, the experiences of my co-researchers would point to a desire to be accepted as they are, in their own interpretations of their reality as they live it. Postmodernism allows for a "radical decentring [*sic*]of the subject, privileging nonidentity (or the dispersal of identity) over any stable self-conception" (Crotty, 2003, p. 185).

Those theorists who ascribe to the notions of postmodernism reject the idea that there is one metanarrative that provides a structure into which our individual narratives must fit. As one of the theorists described as postmodern, "Derrida does not accept the possibility of general laws governing the nature of reality.... For him, as for anti-positivists generally, there can be no description of reality into which the standpoint and interests of the observer have not entered" (Crotty, 2003, p. 205). In my interpretations of the lived experiences of my co-researchers, my standpoint, and, indeed, my interests come into play – my desire to re-present their experience as examples of why those of us in education should care about the educational environments in which gay men find themselves is certainly an example of both my standpoint and interests.

I hear echoes of my cautions about the over-reliance on theory as I turn to Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) where they note, "The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, any discourse or genre, or any tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or privileged form of authority knowledge" (p. 961). But lest I throw up my hands and abandon theory altogether, I take comfort in the knowledge that "a postmodernist position does allow us to know 'something' without claiming to know everything" (Richardson & St. Pierre, p. 961). For me, the

concern is not the creation, or even the use of theory in practice. However, my concern lies with the over- and mis-application of theory that leads to the labeling of human beings and experience and fixes human beings and their experiences in time and space, rather than allowing human beings and their experiences the freedom to be as they are, in their authenticity.

Creating Space for Ontological Freedom

In Chapter IV in the section "Dis-Missing Identity: Moving Beyond Definitionism" I discuss the idea of moving beyond definitionism as a way to move toward ontological freedom and share that what my co-researchers desire most is simply the ability to be themselves, just to be who they are, wherever they are. In other words, they express a desire for ontological freedom. In what spaces do my co-researchers find it difficult to be simply who they are? Although they are all beyond their secondary school years, the memories call them back to a place where ontological freedom was elusive and, at times, nearly impossible.

L'Enfer, c'est L'Ecole

> As I arrived at my locker, which was situated in the hallway between the science room and the industrial education lab, I saw that my lock wasn't properly closed. I immediately felt sick to my stomach. Oh no. Please don't let this be what I think it is. I took off the lock and opened the door, and there on one of my blue binders was the word FAG written in black felt pen. One little word, but one that was loaded with enough hate that it brought my entire world tumbling down. I stared, seeing for the first time this ugly slang written about me. Of course I had heard it before, in the hallways, and I always wondered if people were saying that about me. But this was different. To me this said, "YOU ARE A FAG." It was devastating. (Tewksbury, 2006, p. 29)

In Chapter II, I explore the notion that for gay men, hell is other people using the line from Sartre's (1947) play *Huis Clos, l'Enfer, c'est les autres*. I wondered if my co-researchers also would experience the world in this way. Focusing on the college aspect of this research project, my wonderings were about the campus experience and whether or not the campus experience would be hellish. The stories shared were painful at times, poignant and triumphant at others, but commonly were not about college campuses; clearly, *L'Enfer, C'est L'Ecole*, or hell is school, and specifically middle and high school. As I read over the conversation transcripts where my co-researchers share their experiences of being bullied, being catcalled in school hallways and on the playground, and witnessing other students thought to be gay being terrorized, I find myself looking into the terrified eyes of little boys. The experience described at the beginning of this section by Tewksbury is not fiction; it is from his memoir of growing up in Western Canada in a conservative environment. Even after he became an Olympic champion swimmer and was doing well in his chosen career, he still remembers with agony the painful experience of going to school, knowing that he was gay and that this knowledge was both scary and dangerous. What Tewksbury (2006) really wanted to be was invisible.

> It wasn't being gay that was killing me, it was the loneliness and isolation. I felt vulnerable and freakish, like I was the only person in the world with this affliction. It was an awful place to be, feeling like a sitting duck in the vicious land of junior high, waiting to be attacked by one of the many jerks I so carefully tried to keep from noticing me. (p. 27)

This idea of wanting to be invisible saddens me. No child should feel the need to be invisible; all students have something to offer their fellow students. What can

teachers do to make the environment better so that students are less likely to feel the desire to be invisible? In his discussion of pedagogical tact, van Manen (1991) notes that, "Tact preserves a child's space" (p. 161). In describing what it is to preserve a child's space, van Manen tells the story of Corey, a student who is in front of his class giving a presentation on the results of a science project. Corey gets confused and becomes silent. The silence grows until some snickering starts. Rather than allow the situation to continue toward further embarrassment, Corey's teacher intervenes:

> What Corey's teacher had done is to make an awkward and embarrassing experience livable. By her tactful intervention she has made Corey's experience lighter, bearable, just an awkward moment that Corey may not feel proud of, but that he can come to terms with nevertheless. (van Manen, 1991, p. 162)

Through her intervention, Corey's teacher has protected what is vulnerable, another aspect of tact. Gay boys also feel this sense of vulnerability, often due to the sense that they are somehow different. Not understanding what that difference might mean creates further anxiety.

As they begin to understand the nature of their difference, my co-researchers share how anxiety producing the experience is. What might a teacher have done to lessen this anxiety? Could Justin's bus driver have intervened when the children were taunting the child who was believed to be gay? How does one become more tactful in pedagogical relations? "Pedagogical tact does what it does by exercising a certain perceptive sensitivity as well as by practising an active and expressive caring concern for the child" (van Manen, 1991, p. 172). Being pedagogically tactful requires that we

really listen to our students, and even listen for the silences that may call to us more loudly. If we listen care-fully, we might hear a calling to potentiality.

> Pedagogical tact can only work when the pedagogue's eyes and ears search in a caring and receptive manner for the potential of a child, what this child can become. This requires a perceiving and listening oriented to the uniqueness of the child, using a multiplicity of perspectives, considerations, and vantage points to try to gain a vision and pedagogical understanding of a child. (van Manen, 1991, p. 172)

Continuing the discussion of the role of tact in the pedagogical experience, van Manen (1991) wonders whether or not teachers gravitate toward tactful approaches to their work, or fall into easy traps of classifying students by surface impressions.

> It is important to contrast the openness of this sensitive capacity of tact to the inclination to see and hear only what one wants to see and hear about a child. The latter orientation leads to inflexible judgments, stereotyping, classifying – seeing only the external behavior of children and not their inner lives and their individual intentions and projects. (van Manen, 1991, p. 172)

What role might teacher education play in creating teachers who approach their work with tact, and therefore see students in their individuality and authenticity? What can we in education do to work toward instilling this sense of openness to children that would allow a gay boy to be himself and to have his uniqueness celebrated by his teachers? Teacher education courses must include ample opportunity to reflect on one's own cultural, emotional, and thus pedagogical baggage so that this baggage does not weigh down teachers and allow teachers to see children for who they are, as they are, not as some foregone conclusion based on judgments, stereotypes, or classifications.

The anthology, *Two Teenagers in 20*, is filled with stories much like the one above by Mark Tewksbury. What comes through to me is summed up by Troix-

Reginald Bettencourt (1994) when he wonders and asks, “Before I dropped out of high school, I always felt alone and out of place. I was very popular, and everybody thought I was cool. Why did I feel so isolated?” (p. 157). Bettencourt goes on to explain how he falls in love with a friend who reciprocates those feelings. He notes that even after their relationship became physical, neither one associated themselves with being gay, “because fags wore dresses and put on lipstick. So what were we doing? Why didn’t we tell anyone else how we were feeling?” (p. 157). It is not surprising, really, that Bettencourt and his friend/lover did not tell anyone about their relationship. The stories in the anthology from which this story comes offer ample examples of the horrific environment endured by gay boys, and even by those thought to be gay, regardless of the truth. Imagine how different the experience of school might have been for Bettencourt and others if teachers had been more pedagogically tactful?

As I listen to the stories of bullying and harassment shared by my co-researchers, I wonder, “Why didn’t teachers stop it?” Maybe the teachers or administrators didn’t know? Steve’s vivid example of his friend Robert, who experienced not only taunting, but also potentially deadly physical behaviors such as being driven off the road, comes to mind. Steve was sure that many teachers knew. Cesar knew teachers witnessed the catcalling he experienced in school. Ethan knew that teachers were aware of the prevalence of homophobic remarks in his supposedly liberal high school. Why not address such negative behavior?

Several of my co-researchers wonder still about some of their teachers and whether or not they might be gay. Imagine the impact if a teacher could be openly gay

in school and be a positive example for students. For me this may be an imagining, but for Flowers and Buston (2001), this kind of openness is critical in schools because,

> If schools are to become non-heterosexist institutions, they must foster an environment where it is as easy for gay and lesbian teachers to be open about key aspects of their lives, if they so wish, as it is for heterosexual teachers. This is one way in which gay and lesbian role models can become as available to pupils as are heterosexual role models. (p. 63)

Whether or not there were gay teachers in my co-researchers' schools or not, why would authority figures not address the bullying and harassing comments and behaviors? Such comments and attendant behavior are grounded in sexuality, and for teachers and school administrators the topic of sexuality is a political and social mine field; therefore, silence frequently reigns.

Where Art Thou, Eros?

As we were in our third conversations, my co-researchers and I explored some possible emerging themes. From what I read, I see that for my co-researchers, being gay is about more than sex. It is about a way of being. As I share this with Justin, he stops me when I use the phrase, "Being gay is beyond biology," and offers:

> But biology is the core though. I think that biology...without that you just have...I think that is the center, I think that's the core definition of gay and you have other things within the gay community but, I think even in straight relationships there's, there's...sexual attraction as the core and from there emotions...but at the core, sex. I wouldn't call someone gay who doesn't want to have sex with men is what I'm saying. I think at the very least it's a pre-requisite.

Justin is the only one who directly talks about the sexual aspect of sexual orientation. I was somewhat surprised by this. I mention earlier in this text that I remember being pleased that the American College Personnel Association added the word "affectional"

to its category “sexual orientation” to show that it means more than just sex. But, the aspect of sex is still there. I wonder why my other co-researchers didn’t talk about the sexual aspect of sexual orientation? I posit that it could be the educational environment. This experience for my co-researchers, after all, involved participation in a doctoral dissertation study, and maybe topics around sex are too “base” and not scholarly enough. What place is there for sex in such a study? Where art thou Eros?

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) devotes an entire chapter to “Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process”:

> Professors rarely speak of the place of eros or the erotic in our classrooms. Trained in the philosophical context of Western metaphysical dualism, many of us have accepted the notion that there is a split between the body and the mind. Believing this, individuals enter the classroom to teach as though only the mind is present, and not the body. (p. 191)

And what is the concern with the body being present in teaching? “To call attention to the body is to betray the legacy of repression and denial that has been handed down to us by our professorial elders...” (p. 191). For hooks, the body and mind must not be separated. Human beings feel things through bodily experiences as well as through intellectual engagement. But hooks (1994) is not talking about sex, per se. “To understand the place of eros and eroticism in the classroom, we must move beyond thinking of those forces solely in terms of the sexual, though that dimension need not be denied” (p. 194). The classroom to which hooks refers is the college classroom. What about the middle school and high school classroom?

Remember Joycelyn Elders? She dared suggest, as Surgeon General of the United States, that sex education needed to be opened up and discussed more broadly in

the classroom. She was politically martyred for her comments regarding the teaching of masturbation as a healthy sexual activity, especially among rising birth rates to teen mothers and the increase in sexually transmitted diseases (*Then & Now*, 2005). In nearby Montgomery County, Maryland, there has been much debate about whether or not to allow the topic of homosexuality to be taught in the sex education curriculum (Schemo, 2007). There has been heated debate about whether or not inclusion of homosexuality in sex education is appropriate, even though "The lessons' central message is respect and acceptance of the many permutations of sexual identity, both in others and in one's self" (Schemo, 2007, ¶ 2). What is the concern over this addition to the curriculum? Parent and community groups fought the school district over the inclusion of lessons that discussed homosexuality in the sex education curriculum. After a legal battle, the courts stopped the lessons being included, "noting that they seemed to offer only one perspective on homosexuality and to dismiss religions that consider it a sin" (de Vise, 2007, ¶ 3).

I wonder about this ruling and what would happen if the situation were reversed? Do we teach multiple perspectives on heterosexuality? Are discussions of the world's overpopulation attributed to heterosexuality? Do we allow for multiple religious perspectives in our teaching about heterosexuality, for example the possibility for polygamy in Islam? My concerns are reflected in a *New York Times* article that addresses the debate in Montgomery County. "Montgomery is a mostly well-educated, politically liberal enclave. But opponents of the new curriculum, portrayed as a vocal minority by school officials, may be more in sync with the mood of parents nationally"

(Schemo, 2007, ¶ 5). Schemo cites research about parents and at what point in their child's education it would be appropriate to include discussion of homosexuality. High school was less of a concern for parents, but middle school was seen as too early for a discussion of homosexuality.

The plan for Montgomery County is to "introduce sexual orientation topics to eighth- and 10th-graders" (de Vise, 2007, ¶ 6). But from what I hear from my co-researchers, this will be too late. By the eighth grade, homophobic remarks and abuse and bullying based on sexual orientation will already be part of the school culture. "Homophobic terms enter boys' vocabulary during primary school, well before puberty and their own sexual maturity" (D. C. Plummer, 2001, p. 21). Clearly the issue runs deeper than sexuality. The taunts do not have the sexual meaning when used by youngsters; these taunts are just "known" to be an effective way to terrorize a young boy. The thread of homophobia and heterosexism is a powerful one in the tapestry of the schoolyard. "When first adopted, words like poofter and faggot generally lack the sexual connotations that adults associate with them. But this lack of sexual meaning doesn't stop these terms from being the worst insults available to boys" (D. C.Plummer, 2001, p. 21).

Curriculum and Pedagogical Transformation: Becoming More In-Tact

What to do? Influencing cultural change is really the only thing that will make this form of terror for boys in school decrease. It probably is unrealistic to think that I will be able to change the minds of parents in the U.S. However, I do work in education. How might the insights from my study and others like it influence teacher

education so that future teachers understand what the lived experience is like for young boys who are taunted and bullied using homophobic and heterosexist language? How might these understandings influence the development of curricula to include homosexuality as just one strand in the fabric of knowledge, not necessarily a strand that stands out?

Teachers could include stories that describe children with gay parents, and focus on the activities of the family, rather than on the sexual orientation of the parents. In providing examples of family structures, teachers could be sure to include the various forms in which families manifest themselves. The use of literature that "normalizes" being gay is probably the most accessible possibility at this point. This notion of "normalizing" the idea of being gay is becoming more and more mainstream in fiction. A recent example is Christopher Rice's novel that was released in the spring of 2008. "Rice, who has been out [of the closet] for a decade, says his mission is to 'weave gay themes and characters into universal stories.' In fact, [in this novel], his protagonist is straight" (della Cava, 2008, ¶ 8 & 9). If educators could adopt this idea of "weaving gay themes and characters into universal stories" as they develop the various curricula that will influence subsequent generations, there may be hope yet for reducing the lived horror for young boys who either are gay, or are identified (in the sense of *idem*) as gay.

In a study that addresses what it is like for gay men to grow up in a heterosexist society, Flowers and Buston (2001) note that the school environment is exactly the place to begin reshaping our culture(s) toward being more accepting of differences, especially differences of sexual orientation:

> The school is an obvious site in which heterosexism and homophobic behaviour can be tackled. Most immediately the young person spends much of his/her time here, but it is also a site where the attitudes and behaviours of future generations of adults can be shaped. If homophobic attitudes and heterosexist assumptions can be challenged here, future workplace, family and even legislative contexts may change in turn. (p. 62)

Flowers and Buston also agree that, "The formal curriculum is another site within the school where changes need to be made. There is much scope for gay and lesbian images to be available as a matter of course" (p. 63). By "matter of course," I believe they are echoing the idea of "weaving gay themes and characters into universal stories" mentioned above. It will be quite an endeavor to change the school experience for boys who are gay and either know it or will dis-cover it, but an endeavor worth undertaking, especially if we as educators take seriously the role of shaping the future.

Where might I have impact on the future of pedagogy? As a doctoral student, I had the opportunity to co-teach a graduate course on cross-cultural issues in counseling and an undergraduate course with the title, "Education and Racism." I was amazed at how little these students appeared to have considered their own aspects of identity and how those aspects might affect their work in the classroom or counseling setting. For some of the students the "us" and "them" mentality of seeing those who are different was striking.

For the graduate course, my co-instructor was my faculty advisor who had taught the course before. As we were preparing the syllabus, I shared my concern about not having had advanced teaching experience in the area of counseling. She assured me that although we would be applying what was being learned to the counseling setting,

much of the work would be to unpack and understand personal beliefs regarding people who were different from the students in the class. The class discussions were lively at times, with various prejudices being exposed and the occasional student-to-student confrontation regarding differing beliefs. On the whole, the experience was productive. What stands out to me was one student in particular. When I first saw her in the class, I thought, "Oh no, she's going to be difficult." Why? She is White and looks like she could be the poster model for the Junior League – all she needed to complete my stereotype would be a strand of pearls.

However, she surprised me. At the outset, she admitted that her exposure to people who were different from her was limited and that she knew that she would make "stupid" mistakes and comments. Anyone can make these admissions, but it takes real work to get beyond one's cultural baggage. She worked hard over the course of the semester, always willing to speak up and honestly share her ignorance. Over the course of the semester, I witnessed her grow as a person. Her papers reflected at least cognitive change, and from the personal stories she shared about confronting her fiancé about his prejudices, I came to believe that she truly had grown. She gives me hope that through serious engagement regarding differences, I can make a positive difference for gay men, at least in educational settings. Imagine if all future teachers and school counselors were required to participate in a course where prejudices were exposed in a safe and caring setting so those prejudices could be re-formed into respect?

In the undergraduate course, though the title of the course was, "Education and Racism," I included more than discussion on race. I included readings and discussion on

various ethnicities, issues of social and economic class, and sexual orientation. This was a class of about 10 students, and approximately half of the students were students of color. Of all the discussions, those around sexual orientation became the most challenging. I was accused, possibly accurately, of trying to present a too-positive image of gay people. But then, for me, what can be too positive? I chose not to share with the class that I was gay. Why not? I was afraid that doing so would open myself up to the criticism of "agenda pushing" rather than teaching. This course was over the three-week winter term and was too short to really get at the deeper issues. The dynamic that stands out for me is the style of confrontation between the students. I spent much energy trying to keep the students from attacking each other. I encouraged them to ask questions and challenge each other regarding their beliefs, but most of my energy was spent trying to maintain a level of civility in the classroom.

One White student in particular was adamant that his opinion was correct, especially as it was based on the Bible: gay people are immoral and definitely should not be allowed around children in any setting, educational or otherwise. I tried to ask questions that would allow him to explore his beliefs, without telling him he was "wrong." However, several of the students in the class had no difficulty in telling him he was wrong. These students were also Christians who believed in the teaching of the Bible. They were clear, however, that there are various interpretations, and that this White student was choosing interpretations that put people who were different in a "less than" category. It was painful to watch the passion on both sides of these arguments.

I remember the conflict I felt over agreeing with the group of students who were challenging the White student, but not wanting him to feel ganged up on. What to do? Clearly, we were at an impasse, and in my own experience, an impasse based on faith is nearly insurmountable, especially when the impasse occurs without extensive time to work through it. What stays with me from this experience was the method of challenging different beliefs. The students who challenged the White student were passionate and committed to social justice, but their aggressive approach only backed the White student into a corner and left him there. I think, in some ways, he left the class with a less positive notion of people who are different.

From this experience of teaching undergraduate students about diversity issues, I take away the lesson that if we are to engage with students in meaningful ways regarding their future relations with "the other," we need time. The brevity of the educational experience of teaching a course dealing with diversity over the winter term that only lasts three weeks made it difficult for the students to engage with the material and reflect on what the material meant for them. Do we in education encourage students to make time to reflect on challenging material and consider how such material may change their lives? Educators must consider how they might build in time for such reflection.

As educators, we must also encourage students to find ways to engage with those who are different in order to expand students' experience base. One way this might be done is to support the development of courses that are specifically focused on gay issues. Although possibly not as powerful as direct experience, engaging in

discussion surrounding issues facing gay students is one way for students who are not gay to come closer to understanding what it might be like to be gay. Coming closer to understanding will hopefully allow students to expand their sense of empathy for gay men. But even beyond courses specifically focused on issues facing gay students, the curriculum as a whole should be considered as a possibility for discussing difference. Rather than speaking of James Baldwin as an African American author, reference should also be made to his being gay and how that aspect of his identity may have shaped the literature he created.

Although not directly involved in curriculum design, student affairs professionals should be sure to be part of discussions regarding how to integrate gay issues into the classroom experience. Through the study of theory and enhanced by observation of direct experience, student affairs professionals are in a position to advocate for inclusion of various identities in classroom discussions as well as in out of class settings. In these out of class settings, student affairs professionals tend to be on the front lines of being able to make a difference by challenging stereotypes and offensive language and behavior, including various constituent groups when making decisions, and being visible allies to gay students (among others).

For instance, student affairs professionals have the opportunity to exert positive influence in residence halls. The positive influence may serve to create a living environment for all students (including gay men) that is safe and allows for a variety of personal expressions of identity. The importance of a living environment that is safe or that allows for a sense of ontological freedom is underscored by Justin's experience of

receiving his first year residence hall room assignment. Because he was aware that he does not mask his gay self well, he wanted to get a sense of his roommates. Under the guise of wanting to find out what each of them was bringing to the room so that there wouldn't be duplicates, Justin emailed his three roommates and asked a few questions in an attempt to figure out their degree of openness to difference, especially sexual orientation. In hindsight, Justin realizes that it would be very difficult to ascertain his future roommates' level of comfort with his being gay via this email contact. But, what this experience did shed light on was the necessity of paying attention to how his roommates would receive him and how much energy he spent on this activity and how much mental energy he spent wondering and worrying.

Beyond the bounds of residence life, on campus it is important that there are visible signs that being gay is not a problem, and, in fact, that being gay is affirmed and welcomed on the campus. Steve tells the story of coming to visit the university when he was in the process of deciding to which colleges he was going to apply. When he visited the University of Maryland, he noticed that out in front of the Union Building there was a huge banner announcing "Pride Month" with other language and symbols on it making it clear that the "pride" being referred to was gay pride. Although he didn't remember much else from his campus visit, the visibility of the pride banner was an important factor in his decision to apply to the university. Steve also notes that during the campus tour in April, the student tour guide made mention of the various celebration months (April is the celebration month for other groups as well) and never flinched when including the Pride Month information. To Steve, this sent a welcoming message

and helped him finalize his decision to apply to and plan to attend the university. These outward and visible signs of welcome to gay men are important in setting an inclusive tone to the campus environment. Student affairs professionals are in a prime position to ensure that gay men are included in such signs of welcome.

Answering The Call Of Authenticity

> Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters critically, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands. (Taylor, as cited in Anton, 2001, p. 148)

Deeper Than Idem, *Closer to* Ipse

As I reflect on my work with this dissertation and my experiences of listening to my co-researchers talk about their lived experience of being gay, I wonder how they may be affected. The effect on me is clear: I can no longer approach theory about identity in the same way; specifically, the idea that theory is a form of shorthand does not really describe human experience. Possibly, theory describes aggregate patterns of experience, but never individual experience. But what of my co-researchers, were they, too, affected by participating in this study? They gave me so much of their time, and I was amazed at their willingness to share stories of such depth, in terms of joy, pain, fear, and excitement. What, if anything, did I give them?

As they came to our third conversation, I asked my co-researchers to bring with them a brief reflection on what the experience of participating in my research study had been like for them. I did this at this point in our experience together to allow them

enough contact with me and the project to be able to reflect on the experience. Given that we would not be having a fourth conversation, I felt that my co-researchers would feel comfortable expressing their reflections honestly, without wondering if I would challenge those reflections. Reading over their reflections brings an echo to my reading of van Manen (1997): it is often the case that those who participate in human science research are changed by it.

The notion of time is present. How often do we as human beings take time to reflect on our experience in ways that allow for meaning making? Although technology allows us to be more efficient, it also allows us to crowd our time with more tasks, rather than create time for personal reflection. Several of my co-researchers were well accustomed to talking about their lives as gay men, whether it be through high school educational groups (Justin, Marc), university programs to speak to groups about being gay (Ethan), or participation in prior research projects (Cesar, Steve). But something is different in this experience of participating in a hermeneutic phenomenological research study. At first, as I opened our time together and gave a brief overview of just what hermeneutic phenomenology is and attempts to do, there was some curiosity on the part of my co-researchers. Let the phenomenon lead? "Whatever, it's your research, dude" (Justin).

Not only is it different to be given the opportunity to take time to just be with one's lived experience, but time is experienced differently. Cesar notes his experience of lived time: "As I look back on this multi-month experience, I am struck by the

quickness over which it has transpired." He was surprised at how much he had shared in a relatively short period of time and how deeply the effect is of that sharing.

> Thinking back more, I am struck on how important these conversations have been for me as I continue thinking about my life and experiencing life as a Gay Chicano man. Being able to articulate coming to terms with my sexuality was not a new experience this time around; however, it felt somewhat new all over again since it was very intentional in its purpose. I think this helped me think much more critically about my experiences and also put things into perspective in terms of what my lived experience has been like. Being able to think and ponder in great detail about them [lived experiences] made this time unique and much more meaningful.

Cesar finds being part of this study is an opportunity for him. And although I would agree that it was an opportunity to share one's story and possibly make educational environments more open to and safer for gay men, Cesar is pleased that he now is able to understand his journey better toward being the gay man he is today.

> Participating in this study has been an opportunity not only to learn more about myself and how I've made sense of my experiences of being a Gay man, but also a unique opportunity to reflect back and think about how much I love my life as a Gay man. As I probably shared earlier in this study, I have had many disappointments, heartaches, and have shed countless tears for being Gay, however, despite all this these moments have really helped shape who I am today, and in no way would I ever want it to be any different. As I conclude this experience, I thank you Wallace for allowing me to think about my life and sexuality in more complex ways.

One of van Manen's (1997) research activities for conducting phenomenological inquiry is "balancing the research context by considering parts and whole" (p. 31). And although the specific meaning for the conducting of research is different, the idea presents itself to my co-researchers as a way of coming to understand themselves. Marc describes his experience of thinking about the various parts of his coming to understand himself and how they relate to the whole person he has become as "an interesting trip

down memory lane. I am slowly realizing how my past is pieced together to make me who I am today...this experience has added to the meaning making process, and is allowing me to own my experiences." Steve also attributes a sense of personal growth to being able to take a look at various parts of his life experience and see how these experiences contribute to the whole of his self.

> It [participation in this study] has allowed me to examine different parts of my life in a continuous, thematic way that I have never before been able to do. I have never thought of some of the different stories I shared in such quick succession before, and it was interesting using previous conversation transcripts to refer back to during conversations. I noticed certain reactions or beliefs/thoughts only after I articulated them and reflected, but in some cases not actually while I was articulating them.

Another aspect of phenomenology that presents itself to my co-researchers is the openness of the inquiry. Justin considers himself a good friend, once you get to know him. He does not choose to share his personal stories with strangers. He is somewhat protective of himself, and that protection often takes the form of remaining superficial in connections with others not close to him. However, through the course of our conversations, Justin finds himself to be opening up more to sharing with others, and quite possibly risking more because of his deeper understanding of himself. In some ways, the deeper understanding has become a form of protection, allowing him to engage with others more deeply. In his reflection upon participating in this study, Justin says:

> I also learned that I enjoy open-ended questions more than specific ones because it opens things up.... The un-prescriptive nature of this research allows for more openness and I learned about relating to a stranger (that would be you) in ways that I wouldn't have previously thought possible. I also learned in a way that I'm not very introspective and prefer to tell stories on a surface level. I've chosen to

not delve deeply into my emotional experiences because I was not forced to do so.

The openness of the methodology also allows for difficult memories to come forward. Ethan comments that the experience of participating in this study helped him see more positively what being gay might mean for him. He still struggles with considering himself "normal" and is not sure if he will ever feel truly comfortable as a gay man. In telling the stories of his life, Ethan shares a story that surprises him, not the story per se, but that he is sharing it with another person. I will not share the specifics of this story here out of deference to Ethan, and the story does not shed light on the phenomenon of being gay in a way that has not already been shared in this text. Allowing the phenomenon to lead our conversations is how the story came out; the story demanded to be told. For Ethan, the openness of this mode of inquiry allows him to see himself somewhat differently and own a part of his life story that prior to participation he disowned, to accept responsibility for his contributions toward the less positive aspects of his dis-covering of his gay self.

I find myself wanting to rush Ethan toward a sense of self-acceptance so his authentic being-in-the-world may be made manifest. But then, I am reminded of an interview with artist, Peter Van Miltenberg, who had chosen to come out later in life where he says: "To sit back and say that someone who doesn't accept their sexuality is wrong, is no less judgmental than being homophobic" (Block, 1999, p. 62). Am I being judgmental when I want someone to be at a place of authenticity? The question is not a comfortable one, but one I must keep in mind. Van Miltenberg (Block, 1999)

remembers his own experience and reminds me that we gay men who are relatively open about our sexual orientation must not let our journeys and growth cloud our interactions with those on similar journeys.

> When you've been discriminated against for a long time, felt fear and rejection and summoned the strength to step away from it and be at peace with yourself, only then do you appreciate the freedom such a catharsis brings. But all you can say to people on that journey is make it in your own time and of your own choice. (p. 62)

Marc does not agree with Van Miltenberg. He is adamant that gay men in higher education must be open about their sexuality. And although he does admit that all circumstances are different regarding safety of the work environment, men who are gay and work in higher education, whether as faculty or administrators, should be open. Marc's reasoning is that the more open a variety of gay men are, the more likely that a male student who is questioning his sexuality will see some aspect of himself with which he can connect and therefore see an example of someone like, or at least similar to him. Marc's concern goes to society at large as well. Without role models on campus, what images of being gay do young men have? Marc believes that although "it's becoming much better in society, still, gay people are like the weird people who have leather parades and dykes on bikes, and that's the images they get, or pedophiles."

I think for Marc and me it really is about a sense of freedom, and as I've mentioned earlier in this text, ontological freedom, or the freedom to simply be. There is a tension here between the idea that everyone should be open and disclose their sexuality, and the freedom to choose which aspects of self to disclose. Even in discussions meant to open up the idea of freedom and the ability to disclose the truth,

there is an assumption made that everyone is on equal footing. Yes, all of us humans make choices for ourselves, but we must not forget the environment in which we make those choices. In a discussion about meaning making and the ways that truth is shared through disclosure, DiCenso (1990) clearly believes that to be authentic means to be open and to share one's authentic self.

> Freedom is irreducible to acts of self-assertion and domination that repress others. Rather, freedom appears as a mode of being that cultivates self-awareness and the fruition of selfhood as it allows others to become what they are. Freedom is connected to an authentic selfhood predicated upon openness and disclosure. (pp. 60-61)

I agree with the notion that freedom does not come at the expense of the freedom of others as expressed by DiCenso. However, we do not live in a world of philosophy. We live in a world populated by others, others who exert influence on our ability to disclose our authentic selves. So, maybe it is the environment and the people who create the environment in which gay men find themselves that needs attention. If indeed, "Freedom is connected to an authentic selfhood predicated upon openness and disclosure" (DiCenso, 1990, p. 61), then our attention as educators should be on improving the environment so that openness and disclosure are more readily possible, and therefore make freedom more readily possible. If we pay attention to the materials used in primary and secondary education, as suggested earlier in this chapter, we will have the opportunity to shape the attitudes of students so that they might allow gay students to be in peace. If teachers pay attention to the comments made, and address those comments that are hurtful, students will have the opportunity to feel free to explore their aspects of identity without fear.

My co-researchers feel that they received so much from participating in a phenomenological study, but there is also an awareness of giving as well. My co-researchers say that participating allows them to share their stories of being gay. The sharing of stories, hopefully, will allow other gay men to see themselves (or at least aspects of themselves) in the stories of others and maybe come closer to self-acceptance, and therefore, their authentic self. Felipe talks about how growing up in his home he was exposed to positive ideas about being gay. Felipe's mother is a psychologist and has a number of books that speak of sexual orientation and its variation as being normal. For Felipe,

> Participating in this research experience has been important for me. I am thrilled by the thought that some guy in the future might read the study trying to find clues about his sexual orientation and identity by reading these case studies, just as I did myself. Participating in this study is an exercise in self-awareness, so I learnt to appreciate more my experiences and realize how they have shaped how I am right now. It has also affirmed my confidence in talking about being gay with different people.

The experience for my co-researchers and me is truly one of giving and receiving, of communion. We share our lives and the stories that open windows into what it is to be a gay man and how we make meaning of our lives.

Phenomenology as Wonder-Full Research

> For a phenomenological text to "lead" the way to human understanding it must lead the reader to wonder. (van Manen, 2002b, p. 5)

As I read over the linguistic transformation of the lived experience of being gay as shared by my co-researchers in concert with the existential sources that brought forth initial themes, I am led to wonder further. Although this research has added to my

understanding of at least one aspect of the human condition, I am still wondering. Where does this exploration of the ontological complexities of being gay lead me in the posing of future questions? What aspects of this study raise questions that need to be pursued to add to my understanding of the human condition and shed light on ways that the human condition may be enhanced?

This exploration of identity brings me to a place of questioning the use of theory in practice. A great degree of the energy around my questioning is about how graduate faculty educate future practitioners about the nature, use, and possible mis-application of theory. Among other qualities, practitioners who conduct their practice based on theory are referred to as scholar-practitioners (Carpenter, 2001; Schroeder & Pike, 2001). For me, I've come to a place of understanding both the value of theory and its limitations. How best, then, to educate future practitioners regarding the responsible use of theory? How do faculty educate practitioners to be scholar-practitioners? To what degree do those who prepare future practitioners understand the identity of the scholar-practitioner? Komives (1998) has written about the continuum that runs from scholar-practitioner to practitioner-scholar. This conceptualization helps bring to light the variety of degrees of focus that is possible in practitioners who base their practice on scholarship. Carpenter (2001) provides a list of elements and a framework for understanding what is required for a professional to be a scholar-practitioner. What, however, is the lived experience of being a scholar-practitioner?

Although Carpenter and Komives outline the various qualities that one must possess to be considered a scholar-practitioner, what may be missing? What is it to

negotiate the role of being an administrator who desires to base practice on scholarship? Before one can teach students how to use theory in practice responsibly (or maybe, really, response-ably, as in able to respond to the authentic nature of students) in order to facilitate the development of a scholar-practitioner identity, one needs to understand more clearly what is to have such an identity. Do we know if one ***has*** an identity of scholar-practitioner, or ***is*** one a scholar-practitioner? Is it some set of sameness traits that makes up a scholar-practitioner identity? Or, is being a scholar-practitioner more about who the professional is, one's self? Similar to the phenomenon of being gay, might one understand more precisely the notion and lived experience of being a scholar practitioner as some balance of the *idem* and *ipse* aspects of identity, a balance of same attributes and selfhood?

Another area of future research that interests me as a result of this study may not be possible for me to undertake. As I reflect on the lived experience of being gay, I wonder about the lived experience of lesbian women. Or, maybe the question is better phrased as, "What is the lived experience of women who identify as lesbian?" Do women also experience identity as a balance of the *idem* and *ipse* aspects of identity? I note that this research may not be possible for me to undertake personally, but while meeting with Linda Valli about my study and discussing some of my initial thoughts on the idea of gaydar, we both wondered if this idea might be similar for women who identify as lesbian. The difficulty, however, is whether or not I would be able, as a man, to establish the level of trust and rapport necessary with women co-researchers. Would I be able to have conversations with enough depth to allow me text to reflect upon and

render a linguistic transformation that brings forth the lived experience of these women? It may be possible, however, to work on such a project with a researcher who is a woman and who has the skills of rapport building and an understanding of interpretive research. Whether or not I engage with this future research, it is an important avenue to pursue.

My hunch is that some aspects of the lived experience of women who identify as lesbian may have some similarities to the lived experience of being gay men, as both exist as "the other" in U.S. culture. Some of the themes from Chapter II, such as finding a safe space to make a place called home, the experience of the closet, and dealing with norms, difference, and deviance, may have some salience for women who identify as lesbian. But I am called to wonder about the lived experience of these women in all the possible nuanced ways that set their experience apart from gay men. Before embarking on such a study, I would need to consider the available literature about "outsiders" attempting to gain entrance to a group of possible research participants. For instance, Rhoads (1994) offers ideas on surmounting the challenges of entering the gay community as a heterosexual man in order to conduct his study on coming out in college for gay men. I would also need to converse with women who have conducted research with women and who have a degree of experience of working with, or being, women who identify as lesbian.

Phenomenology as Benediction

As I think of Cesar, Ethan, Felipe, Justin, Marc, and Steve, I see six different men. Yes, they are all gay, but other than that, there is little resemblance. But, what

does stand out for me is their individual selves, and how each of them has embraced that self where he is now and is open to seeing how that self may develop over time. Even Ethan, who struggles with how he will go forth in the world as a gay man, was sure in his selfhood. Part of his selfhood is struggle over this one aspect. These six men help me understand that there is sameness in being gay, and yet great difference, and being able to balance the apparently diametric aspects of sameness/difference is part of coming to understand one's self, the *ipse*, of embracing selfhood in its authentic nature and moving beyond the *idem*, or sameness with others.

I am ever amazed at the power phenomenology has to be "something that promotes goodness or well-being" (Merriam-Webster, 2005), a benediction. As I watch these men embrace their authentic selves and think about the stories of their lived experience they share with me, what calls to me as an educator is how critical it is to hearken (Levin, 1989) unto those in our care. It is in the hearkening that I come closer to understanding the other, simply as the other in all its magnificent difference, and maybe come to know our selves more intimately in authenticity.

> We may bring truth to light by finding it and speaking its name – but truth also brings us to life by finding and naming us. As we allow ourselves to be known by that which we know, our capacity for knowledge grows broader and deeper. The knower who advances most rapidly toward the heart of truth is one who not only asks "What is out there?" in each encounter with the world, but one who also asks "What does this encounter reveal about me?" Only as we allow ourselves to be known – and thus cleansed of the prejudices and self-interests that distort the community of truth – can we begin truly to know. (Palmer, 1993, p. 60)

In knowing ourselves in our authenticity, we develop the capacity to be pedagogically responsible as well as response-able. We are responsible in caring for

students and the environment in which they learn. We are response-able when we listen to the call of students to be with them in all their complexity. When we are authentic, who are we? Anton's (2001) study of authenticity and selfhood responds: "We are existential openings, valuative and finite clearings in and through whom worldly existence – cosmos – comes to meaningful manifestation. We are places and moments of Earth which, negating its very nonexistence, upsurge into that supremely meaningful care-taking called being-in-the-world" (p. 150). As we leave this engagement with the complexity of the phenomenon of being gay, I ask that you experience your being-in-the-world with care and that you find ways to bring the being-in-the-world of others into meaningful manifestation.

APPENDIX A

TEXT FOR ELECTRONIC LETTERS TO PARTICIPANT NOMINATORS

Dear _____:

I am requesting your assistance with soliciting participants for my doctoral dissertation research. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experience of gay men in college and to understand the meaning they make of that experience.

I am writing to you because of your possible connections, either as an advisor to student groups serving gay men, or through other connections on campus with college men on the University of Maryland campus who identify as gay. The key criterion for participation is being willing to share the experience of what being gay is like and to be willing to reflect on that experience with me as researcher. Another important factor is that the student be available for these conversations during the fall 2006 and spring 2007 semesters.

Given the sensitivity of sexual orientation for some men, I would prefer if you contacted anyone you might nominate to let him know that you would like to nominate him for this study.

Please send the names of any college men you believe would be willing to share their experience of what it is like and what it means to them to be gay. It would be helpful if you could share as much contact information as possible, such as name, email address, and telephone number. When I contact the student(s) you nominate, I will let him/them know that you were the nominator.

Names of potential participants may be forwarded to me via email to weddy@umd.edu or if you prefer, by telephone at 301-226-4416, my campus extension with private voice mail. Please forward any names to me by [insert date approximately one week from date letter sent]. If I have not heard from you by then, I will follow up by phone. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about my study or potential participants.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with identifying potential participants.

Sincerely,

Wallace Eddy
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling and Personnel Services
301-226-4416
weddy@umd.edu

Marylu K. McEwen
Associate Professor
Counseling and Personnel Services
301-405-2871
mmcewen@umd.edu

APPENDIX B

EMAIL TEXT FOR INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Dear [name of possible participant]:

You have been nominated by [Name of Nominator] as a potential participant in a research study I am conducting that is exploring what it means to be a gay man in college. The person who nominated you believed that you were comfortable enough with your sexual orientation and that you might be willing to share your experience of what it means for you to be gay.

To participate in this study will require that you engage in approximately three individual conversations lasting about one hour each. These conversations will take place in the fall 2006 and spring 2007 semesters. So that I may reflect on what is said during our conversations, they will be audio taped and then transcribed. Your participation will remain confidential, as you will choose a pseudonym to be used in the study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to not participate at any time.

Sharing the stories of the lived experience of being a gay college student is important to me; I hope you will consider being part of this study to assist me in doing so. **If you are willing to be considered for participation in this study, simply respond to this email message with your name and the best way to get in contact with your regarding the scheduling of conversations.**

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me at weddy@umd.edu or by phone at 301-226-4416, my work number with private voicemail. My research is being conducted under the direction of Professor Marylu K. McEwen in the Department of Counseling and Personnel Services; she is also available if you have questions about this research study. Thank you for your interest in participating in my study and sharing your experiences of being a gay college student.

Sincerely,

Wallace Eddy
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling and Personnel Services
301-226-4416
weddy@umd.edu

Marylu K. McEwen
Associate Professor
Counseling and Personnel Services
301-405-2871
mmcewen@umd.edu

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INTEREST FORM

Name:

Email address:

Phone:

Does the phone number above have private voice mail where messages regarding this study may be left? ___Yes ___No ___Please do not contact me by phone

Place of Residence:

___ on-campus in residence hall
___ on-campus in fraternity house
___ off-campus with family
___ off-campus alone
___ off-campus with friends
___ other (please explain):_____

Academic Class Year:

___ freshman
___ sophomore
___ junior
___ senior
___ graduate student: (circle one) *Master's* *Doctoral* *Other*

Primary Campus Involvement:

___ student government
___ advocacy groups (working for social justice, the environment, political issues, etc.)
___ social activities programming group
___ fraternity
___ other (please explain):_____

PLEASE RETURN THIS INTEREST FORM ELECTRONICALLY TO: weddy@umd.edu or in a sealed envelope to: Wallace Eddy, 1115 CRC, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project Title : Beyond the Dichotomy: A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Ontological Complexities of Being Gay College Men

Why is the research being done?
This is a research project being conducted by Marylu K. McEwen and Wallace Eddy at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have been nominated by a faculty or staff member as a man at the University of Maryland who identifies as gay. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of gay men in college and how they make meaning of their experiences.

What will I be asked to do?
The procedures involve participating in three hour-long individual conversations. These conversations will occur on the University of Maryland campus, or in another private location convenient for you. The conversations will be open-ended with a few guiding questions. The content of the conversations will be your experiences as a gay man and how you make meaning of those experiences. These conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed. Emerging ideas, concepts, and themes will be discussed with you at the beginning of each subsequent conversation. In addition, you may be asked to participate in a group conversation once all individual conversations are complete, though participation in the group conversation is not required to participate in individual conversations.

What about confidentiality?
We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym. This is the name that will be used throughout the research project to identify your conversations, the audio recordings of conversations, and references to the experiences you share in the text of the research project. The audio recordings of the conversations and transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet at the home of the student researcher. All computer files related to your conversations and transcripts will only be identifiable by your pseudonym. Only the researchers will have access to the audio recordings and the recordings will be destroyed within one year of the research being completed. Your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible in any reports or articles that are written based on this research project. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

What are the risks and benefits of this research?
There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project. This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the experiences of gay college men and the ways they make meaning of those experiences. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the experiences of gay college men.

Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate tin this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?
This research is being conducted by Marylu K. McEwen and Wallace Eddy from the Department of Counseling and Personnel Services at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact one of the investigators:

Marylu K. McEwen
Associate Professor
CAPS Department
3214 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
301-405-2871
mmcewen@umd.edu

Wallace Eddy
Doctoral Candidate
CAPS Department
1115 Campus Recreation Center
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
301-226-4416
weddy@umd.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

Institutional Review Board Office
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
301-405-0678
irb@deams.umd.edu

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures governing your participation in this research.

Statement of Age and Consent
Your signature indicates that:

you are at least 18 years of age;
the research has been expla ined to you;
your questions have been fully answered; and
you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant: _____
(please print)

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Possible Opening Questions or Conversation Topics

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about what being gay means to you.
3. What language do you use to describe yourself? Do you use the same language in describing other gay men?
4. What are your first memories of being gay?
5. Describe what is has been like for you to be gay on campus.
6. How has being gay on campus been different from being gay other places?
7. How would you describe your degree of “outness”?
8. Is there anyone in your life you would like to know that you are gay but that does not yet know?
9. What are the obstacles to telling that person (those people) you are gay?
10. How important is it to you that others in your life know you are gay?

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