Rocky Journey Toward Effective LGBT Leadership: A Qualitative Case Study Research of the Perceptions of Openly Gay Male Leaders in High-Level Leadership Positions

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Rocky Journey Toward Effective LGBT Leadership: A Qualitative Case Study Research of the Perceptions of Openly Gay Male Leaders in High-Level Leadership Positions

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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A very special gratitude goes to Barak Obama; no president in history has done more for LGBT rights than he has. Obama helped lift the ban on LGBT people serving openly in the military, granted federal contractors protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and put a historic number of LGBT people in high-ranking positions. And on his watch, marriage equality became the law of the land.

Finally, I dedicate this doctoral journey to the LGBT community in its fight for equality. Special mention to these gay leaders who had the courage to break the pink ceiling. Our time is now!
ABSTRACT

Rocky Journey Toward Effective LGBT Leadership: A Qualitative Case Study Research of the Perceptions of Openly Gay Male Leaders in High-Level Leadership Positions

by Javier Valdovinos

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to explore and discover the perceptions of California gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions, specifically in regard to the types of support they received and the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position.

Findings: Data collection and analysis resulted in six major findings in the ascent or journey to leadership of the 12 selected participants: (a) self-acceptance and personal determination, (b) networking support, (c) education and leadership skills, (d) family and friends, (e) internalized homophobia, and (f) social prejudice and stereotypes. Imposed-by-default societal norms foster internalized homophobia in gay men. The conclusions indicated that most participants described having a feeling of low self-worth because they were gay, especially at the beginning of their professional careers. Gay men who are accepting of themselves and comfortable with their lifestyle are more likely to gain access to leadership roles. Being honest with themselves and comfortable with their lifestyle was a significant motivator for all gay males in this research study. As a part of the journey to high-level leadership roles, each of the participants felt a deep sense of personal efficacy, or self-confidence, that great heights could be achieved once they did not have to focus on hiding their sexual preference. All participants stated that they were more successful after they acknowledged their homosexuality.
Methodology: This case study research design utilized qualitative data to analyze the research questions regarding supports and barriers openly gay male leaders experienced to attain high-level leadership positions. Qualitative data were obtained by conducting 10-question interviews with a select group of 12 gay male leaders who are in executive leadership roles in California organizations to elicit themes, patterns, and trends in their lived experiences.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Today’s workforce is the most knowledgeable, diverse, and empowered in recorded history, and old leadership paradigms no longer apply (Snyder, 2006). Researchers believe that workforces in the United States of America are among the most diverse in the world, and organizations will need to manage these cultural challenges to maintain their global competitiveness (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Martin, 2014). However, although individuals are experiencing more inclusion in the workplace and diversity is on the rise, minorities are still underrepresented in leadership positions (Macoukji, 2013; Zarya, 2016).

Those few individuals who lead organizations often confront barriers imposed by the dominant group (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Wyatt, 2007) and are constantly advocating for respect and against discrimination from both the community and the organization. Minority leaders persistently seek for support from identified allies. Among others, African American, Latino, Asian, and women minorities have been historically passed over to hold executive positions while White males are the predominant group. Another discriminated group, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, And Transgender (LGBT), has been slowly moving up to management positions but still is underrepresented (McNaught, 1993a; Woods, 1994).

Although LGBT leaders have experienced barriers to achieving high-level leadership positions, as leaders, they are able to successfully promote employee engagement and job satisfaction (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Snyder, 2006). Snyder’s (2006) study found that in corporations and working teams under the direct leadership of noncloseted gay executives, an environment is created “where employees care about their
work, demonstrate a deep commitment to professional excellence, and feel individually connected to advancing the success of the organization itself” (p. vii).

What makes these leaders successful? What are the adaptive factors that support a successful career? There are some theories, models, and proposals on characteristics, traits, self-efficacies, and constraints of leaders based on lived experiences of college students and a few leaders. Positive portrayal of developmental theory for lesbians and gays only started to form in the late 1970s (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1979). Porter (1998) stated that “the higher education community has been an important arena for gays and lesbians to begin their journey of discovering how their identity may shape both the personal and professional aspects of self” (p. 3). But still, it is ambiguous how members of LGBT communities approach leadership and how they develop leadership self-efficacy, overcoming barriers and obstacles (Ostick, 2011).

There is little research about the professional lives of LGBT individuals other than the struggle of workplace equality and other forms of discrimination or from books, such as The Corporate Closet (Woods, 1994) and The G Quotient (Snyder, 2006). There have been limited studies focused on LGBT leaders and how they make decisions, lead others, or work with teams (L. Cooper, 2009). The emergence of new paradigms entails how important it is to consider how a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity can contribute to a communal experience of marginalization that potentially has an impact on leadership.

Background

Since ancient times, male homosexuals have been documented as leaders mostly in the field of arts, maybe obeying an intrinsic reclaim of the art as the idealistic platform
to express secret and ambiguous desires without being recognized as homosexuals (Valdovinos, 1990). Similarly, male homosexuals have also ventured into areas of philosophy, science, the military, government, and even in sports. However, it was not until recently that they have gained notoriety as successful and visible business leaders (Snyder, 2006).

**Historical Framework**

Throughout history, homosexuality has been a well-known expression of human sexuality and accepted to a certain degree. Historians have discussed the sexual preferences of leaders throughout history, such as Alexander the Great (Cartledge, 2004), Peter the Great (Fox, 2004), and Abraham Lincoln (Tripp, 2005). Among the Greeks, homosexuality was considered not only natural (in intellectual ranks), but as an elevated form of love, higher than heterosexual love. The linkage between a man and a woman represented something practical: a well-organized house, a refuge for resting and reload, and as the way to conceive children. Homosexual love in its typical form, with interlaced philosophical, intellectual, and spiritual virtues, was extolled (Rowse, 1981). Being homosexual was associated with courage in battle, philosophical mentorship, and the defense of democracy (Snyder, 2006).

In modern history, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo—artistic, intellectual, and scientific leaders—revolutionized art with anatomical, mathematic, and scientific incorporations into their work, creating and influencing work that was more detailed and authentic. More recently, Alan Turing, a Briton who ushered science into a new era, brought mechanical intelligence into the public eye for the first time, opening it up to enrichment, analysis, and criticism (S. B. Cooper & van Leeuwen, 2013). Other areas in
which homosexuals have led and inspired generations are in music (Tchaikovsky) and poetry and literature, including Walt Whitman, Garcia Lorca, D. H. Lawrence, Yukio Mishima, Oscar Wilde, Jean Cocteau, and E. M. Forster (Valdovinos, 1990).

**LGBT Leaders**

Under the modern concept of LGBT leadership, there are figures fitting into this description such as Harvey Milk, an aspiring leader and human rights activist who played a vital role by becoming the first openly gay official in the United States when he was elected in 1977 to serve as a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. This type of leadership (grassroots) surged from organized movement around common groups’ concerns (Shilts, 1987) and key individuals involved in such efforts who later found themselves in true leadership roles because of their successful experiences (Baker & Green, 2007).

**Diversity in the Workplace**

Within the scope of leadership, the latest community to be infiltrated by LGBT leaders is business; these immense corporations dominate the global economy. Stakes at this point are too high and are not only challenging for any societal group but also specifically for minorities. Comedian Ellen DeGeneres in the television industry and the successful Apple Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Tim Cook, are examples of LGBT leadership. Cook’s decision, in October 2014, to publicly announce his sexual orientation as gay, instantly converted him into a global role model in the executive world. He was maintaining a low profile, but his coming out made him high profile and the only openly gay CEO in the Fortune 500. Being the face of Apple, Cook has used the platform to opine on diverse issues such as immigration reform, female representation on
Wall Street, human rights, access to education, and privacy rights. Cook even ventured to the Deep South into his home state of Alabama to lament the current state of racial inequality there (Lashinsky, 2015). According to Lashinsky (2015), the secret for his success is simply that he leads differently.

Based on this eminent existence, it is clear that people with sexual orientation different than the societally imposed do secure leadership roles, but very little is known about the relationship between LGBT leaders and other minorities and leadership development (Rhoads, 1994; Woods, 1994). Young LGBT individuals are coming out publicly as gay at an early age, including middle and high school, but the lack of sufficient representation in all societal institutions creates a need to include role models specifically for the LGBT community.

**LGBT and Leadership**

With the openness and inclusiveness of LGBT individuals in the workplace, more discoveries continue to reinforce the importance of organizational diversification and equity in this global economy. Individuals within an organization have a particular form of procedure for accomplishing or approaching challenges, especially a systematic or established one. Studies have shown that men and women have different points of view (Disch, 2002; Hussey, 2002; Lindsey, 2004). For instance, women were found to have four times more neurons connecting the brain’s left and right side than men (Buxton, 2002). On the other hand, men use the left side of the brain to resolve a problem systematically, one step at a time (Cosgrove, Mazure, & Staley, 2007); conversely, women can concentrate on various problems at one time and frequently prefer to solve problems through multiples activities at the same time (Lloyd & Archer, 1976). Based on
these studies and applied to LGBT individuals, it may suggest that LGBT individuals think and lead differently than non-LGBT individuals.

However, it is not clear whether a leader’s LGBT identity directly and significantly influences his or her role as a leader including the behavior toward the group being led (Fassinger, Shullman, & Stevenson, 2010). The research literature suggests that some elements of such LGBT identity, intersected with a marginalized status, are relevant to understand leader and follower behavior and their relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Leadership style is defined as the behavioral pattern a person exhibits when attempting to influence the activities of others as perceived by those others (Stogdill, 1974). However, the little literature there is on LGBT leadership, including scholarly dissertations, mostly focuses on theories, models, and proposals on characteristics, traits, self-efficacies, and constraints of leaders based on lived experiences of students and a few leaders. Some researchers, such as Ostick (2011), state that the emergence of new models to explain leadership in the last 2 decades has also opened the door to incursions of diverse student bodies engaged in leadership. There are theories such as social constructivism (Lambert, 2002; Ruggie, 1998), postmodernism (Boje, Gephart, & Thatchenkery 1995; Cilliers & Spurrett, 1999; Coyne, 1996), and critical theories (such as grounded theory of applied critical thinking), that are now tested in studies of leadership. Similarly, adding depth beyond existing paradigms, researchers have concentrated on empirical findings and positivist models (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). These findings have led to a theory base that includes the asexual model, the G quotient, the LGBT paradigm, and transformational leadership.
The asexual model. Different approaches have been researched to even include the asexual imperative (Woods, 1994), whose most cherished belief about the workplace consists of, or at least it should, an organizational hierarchy of abstract slots to be filled by generic, asexual workers. The main objective is to manage activities, manufacturing commodities, or providing a service, and any sexual indication is merely “friendly social diversion, an imprudent distraction, or an unwanted (and in the case of harassment, illegal) intrusion. Whatever it is, it’s not official business” (Woods, 1994, p. 32).

The G quotient. One of the reasons gay executives are succeeding is the fact that they have adapted to their surroundings throughout history (Snyder, 2006). Snyder (2006) attributed this type of success to the simultaneous convergence of three forces: the reconstruction of contemporary employees, the fundamental learned skills of gay men (adaptability, intuitive communication, and creative problem solving), and the social, historical, and political context of this time (Snyder, 2006).

LGBT paradigm. A significant number of LGBT individuals enter into leadership positions, and sexual orientation issues and concerns may or may not be directly involved to such leadership roles (Fassinger et al., 2010). On the one hand, essentialists view LGBT identity as the main core of one’s leadership role; on the other hand, social constructivists view LGBT individuals as gay professionals in which sexual orientation constitutes only a small portion of one’s core identity as a leader (Fassinger, 2008).

Transformational leadership model. The transformational leadership paradigm may be very effective because of the raising of both leaders and subordinates to higher levels of morality, timeliness, and motivation (Burns, 1978). This model bases its
efficacy on empowering team members with the ability to thrive. The transformational leadership model highlights the fostering of follower motivation, commitment, engagement, and enhanced morale by leader behaviors. The leader becomes both a learner and a learning facilitator, creating such opportunities and challenges to be explored by followers and advantages resources to help them to accomplish goals.

Characteristics of LGBT Leaders

Reframing the theoretical inclusion of LGBT leaders implies considering the constructs of a LGBT leadership, and even more importantly, the basis on which effective LGBT leadership is founded. Recent studies have identified and deconstructed the characteristics of effective (transformational) LGBT leadership (L. Cooper, 2009). Addressing the unique issues of this type of leadership is essential to understanding the cultural significance of this imperative, especially because society has been defined from a heterosexual, White, occidental, monogamous, and Christian point of view (Ariste, 1984). D’Emilio (1993) suggested in a study that effective leadership may be crucial in helping LGBT individuals identify themselves with role models to overcome specific challenges. Similarly, Levin (1998) confirmed that, indeed, transitioning from a culturally defined heterosexual identity and developing new LGBT identity can be challenging.

Types of Support and Barriers Encountered on the LGBT Leadership Journey

Although there are legal human rights protections for LGBT people, LGBT employees experience workplace barriers that limit career advancement and thus restrict potential contributions to corporative success, per Catalyst’s (2013a) third report on building LGBT-inclusive workplaces. A study by Coon (2001) of 50 openly gay men
and lesbians in prominent positions across several career fields found that the majority of participants viewed their sexual minority identity as having a positive impact on their professional lives. Based on diverse literature, there is contradictory information to study contributing factors for effective LGBT leadership (Macoukji, 2014; Snyder, 2006). It is necessary to identify and analyze what type of support LGBT individuals receive throughout their personal and professional lives and what barriers they encountered in their journey.

**Support.** Institutional LGBT and political support is necessary for the emergence of LGBT liberation and recognition as a social movement process (Piven & Cloward, 1979). Observations that standpoint theorists make, mainly that being a part of an oppressed group gives one an incentive to speak out against injustice, are solely based on experiences of oppressed LGBT individuals. Additionally, Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, and Soto (2002) found that having a positive self-identification as gay (and Black) led to more positive health outcomes. This discovery is important because it provides a psychological (mental health) justification for examining the process of intersectionality. For instance, by exploring self-acceptance as a supportive factor, the notion of a social identity theory (Hogg, 2006) facilitates the understanding of the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Another instance of the intersectionality bases the support from a collective perspective: The leadership theory enhances the vision, talent, and influence of a leader who creates urgency, energy, and collective mobilization toward a movement—in this case LGBT liberation—or goal (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Northouse, 2013).
Barriers. In recent studies, participants in research studies mentioned how experiences of homophobia, racism, and discrimination within LGBT populations and even with their own respective racial group affected their self-identities and their social activism (Arwood, 2006; Coon, 2001; Pastrana, 2008). Participants also argued about how their racial identities contributed to increased visibility, ease of access to communities of color, and enabling effects (Pastrana, 2008). In many cases, the presence of these multiple identifiers often forces subjects to choose which marker to highlight in particular settings, sometimes causing tensions (barriers) while at other times creating opportunities (Pastrana, 2008). The Pastrana (2008) study identified race identity, skin tone, and language as barriers to coming out, to interacting with others from the corresponding racial population, and to accessing basic social and economic resources, defined also as structural barriers. The stereotype literature provided critical information about how particular groups (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) influence other’s perceptions of the competence and likability of a leader (Macoukji, 2013). Another stereotype, which explained how these stereotypes are formed, was the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007) while role congruity theory helped to explain the outcomes experienced by racial, sexual, and gender minorities in terms of why certain groups predominately are represented in specific leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Lived Experiences (Perceptions) of LGBT Leaders

The theoretical definition of lived experience is the experience of the participants throughout their lives as the experience is naturally occurring (Bickman & Rog, 1998; Husserl, 1970). The lived experiences of LGBT persons have not been researched in
depth. Old models of leadership, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, center the power of leadership in the knowledge of the leader and the exercised authority over the followers; however, this leadership is transactional interplayed by lead-and-obey based on reward and punishment (Fassinger et al., 2010) and does not work with the evolved workforce and current environmental and organizational imperatives and global drivers of change.

In summary, characteristics and constructs of LGBT leaders are formed and delimited by the positive perceptions and personal struggle, and the LGBT self-identity and sexual orientation disclosure to family, friends, and coworkers is based on the level of trust in the relationships (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). It is important to consider how a LGBT identity could contribute to a lived experience of marginalization, which eventually influences leadership. The accepted identity of one’s sexual orientation significantly interacts with gender orientation and with the determined group composition, affecting both the follower and the leader (L. Cooper, 2009).

Statement of the Research Problem

A review and analysis of LGBT literature and statistics from a vast array of independent and governmental sources indicated that there is a lack of knowledge of the lives of minorities in the workplace (Hayer, 2015; Herrschaft & Luther, 2006; Hewlett, Luce, and West, 2005; Paludi, 2012). Researchers also recommended phenomenological analysis of the lived journeys to leadership of underrepresented groups who experience marginalization such as LGBT-identity individuals (Hayer, 2015; Ostick, 2011; Robertson, 2013). As LGBT leaders continue to emerge globally and specifically in America, it seems necessary to know firsthand the lived experiences and stories of people who have been able to achieve high-level positions in organizations. Their stories can
help aspiring LGBT leaders to discover and communicate who they are or what their companies need, transmit values, share knowledge, tame the grapevine, and create a vision for what is to come (Denning, 2011; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Herrschaft & Luther, 2005; Hoover, 2009).

Studies portray issues focused on LGBT persons describing leadership characteristics or the role of LGBT people in their response to change or leadership (L. Cooper, 2009). Studies also focused on gay and lesbian college students involved in leadership and the significance they made of their self-efficacy, helping them to identify elements contributing to leadership engagement (Ostick, 2011). Other researchers concentrated their efforts on identifying models of effective LGBT leadership, what learned skills gay men have developed to successfully lead organizations, and introducing new concepts to measure the level of innovation, inclusion, channels of communication, adaptability, teamwork, intuition, and connectivity on gay executives in the workplace (Snyder, 2006).

Furthermore, Fassinger et al. (2010) presented the need for a positive (affirmative) model to understand the leadership of people conforming the sexual minorities (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders). Fassinger et al. (2010) used literature on stigma and disparagement, leadership in certain communities (e.g., college students, females), and LGBT career issues. Their study corroborated the almost nonexistent literature on LGBT support and barriers to understand the specific leadership challenges faced by sexually marginalized people.

A lack of literature still exists regarding the interrelation between LGBT issues and leadership (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Most researchers converged their
recommendations to study the lives of LGBT individuals to analyze what experiences caused positive or negative influences in their decision to engage in leadership roles (Ostick, 2011).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to explore and discover the perceptions of California gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions about the types of support they received and the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position.

**Research Questions**

1. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of support they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?

2. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?

**Significance of the Problem**

The information gathered from this study will add knowledge to the body of the limited literature on LGBT leadership. Specifically, the significance of this research resides largely in the recognition of the barriers openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions experienced throughout their lives. In the same way, identification of the types of support they received will contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon and help to build greater awareness that promotes acceptance, respect, and
inclusion of all groups that aspire to effectively support this nation’s economy (Hayer, 2015).

L. Cooper (2009) stated that it is essential to the growth of the LGBT community to know the successful gay male leaders’ journey to leadership, his personal experiences and professional difficulties, to develop role models from a LGBT perspective. Engagement with these stories helps individuals to grow in their relationships with the community and with organizations in whatever capacity of leadership they may be involved (Ostick, 2011).

In addition, data from the study may be used to develop policies to embrace diversity and promote tolerance in schools. For instance, educators in middle school are often challenged with situation of bullying toward LGBT youth but are not able to effectively intervene and resolve issues. Studies support the necessity to provide educational training for middle school staff to eliminate this form of victimization and develop safe learning environments for these students (Navarro, 2014).

Research studies are an essential guide for teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors, and social workers interacting with students on a daily basis. Data can also be used by school board members and officials to determine future school policy and prepare the next generation of school administrators (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012).

The findings from this study will provide leaders with information useful in mentoring and training managers for LGBT-owned business, revealing effective strategies for handling business and relationships. Lastly, the findings will assist with training leadership for a diverse workforce (L. Cooper, 2009).
Definitions

**Ally.** A member of the majority or dominant group who works to end oppression by recognizing his or her own privilege and supporting or advocating for the oppressed population. For example, a straight cisgender person who supports and stands up for the equality of LGBT people (Miller, 2015).

**Asexual.** A term used to define the workplace as a neutral zone into which such things as sexual orientation and gender are imported (Colgan & Rumens, 2015).

**Barrier.** Actions or individuals impeding or limiting the acceptance or advancement of LGBT individuals, therefore, restricting potential contributions to personal or organizational success (Catalyst, 2016).

**Bisexual.** A man or a woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties with women and men. An individual who sees him or herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians or gay males whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with same-sex partners. One who is him or herself a self-identified bisexual (Abelove, 1993).

**Closet.** The principal metaphor by which gay men have thought and spoken about sexual identity. To be *in the closet* is to misrepresent one’s sexuality to others, to encourage (or at least permit) them to draw a conclusion that one known is false (Woods, 1994).

**Gay male.** A man who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with men or who sees himself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified gay men whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with men and who is himself a self-
identified gay male. The term gay can be used in exchange for both gay men and lesbian women (Abelove, 1993).

**Heteronormativity.** Norms, values, and practices with the assumption of heterosexuality as natural and privileged (Ariste, 1984; Pringle, 2008).

**High-level leadership position.** A top-level-ranking leadership role within the respective department, organization, or industry in U.S. organizations (e.g., superintendent, principal, president, vice-president, CEO, chief, etc.).

**Homophobia.** A dread of gay people—as well as an irrational fear of homosexuality—and the behaviors emanating from this fear or phobia of homosexuals (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Herek, 1984b).

**Lesbian.** A woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with women and who is herself a self-identified lesbian (Abelove, 1993).

**LGBT.** A culture of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities and systems understood by LGBT individuals that define how LGBT individuals live and present themselves (Abelove, 1993).

**Openly LGBT.** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals who define, accept, and present themselves and publicly as living the LGBT culture.

**Paradigm.** A set of commonly held values or beliefs that serve as a model for behavior within a particular school of thought (leadership, research, organization, community, or culture) and that define a theoretical, testable framework (Kuhn, 1996).
**Pink ceiling.** The concept of a glass ceiling has been proven and validated for women and minorities of color. A similar ceiling, called the “pink ceiling,” affects homosexuals in the workplace negatively, through barriers gays or lesbians experience when trying to escalate to the next step of leadership within an organization (Arwood, 2006).

**Support.** Situations and actions an individual experiences when there is a display of in-group favoritism toward self (Spectrum Center, University of Michigan). After being categorized by a group membership, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparison out-group on some valued dimension (Haslam, 2001).

**Transgender.** Used as a catch-all umbrella term for a variety of individuals, behaviors, and groups centered on the full or partial reversal of gender roles. People assigned a gender at birth, based on their genitals, but who feel that this is a false or incomplete description of them. Transgender can include a number of subcategories, which, among others, include transsexuals who are men and women who desire to make a transition from their birth sex to that of the opposite sex, with some type of medical alteration, cross-dressers who wear the clothing of another gender for any reason, drag kings and drag queens, kings who temporarily attempt to pass as men, and queens who temporarily attempt to pass as women (Abelove, 1993).

**Delimitations**

The study was conducted with a sample of 12 openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions. Because of the limited number of openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership roles and the lack of a centralized database, a nonprobability,
purposive sample was used. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), in nonprobability sampling “the researcher uses subjects who happen to be accessible or who may represent certain types of characteristics” (p. 136). In convenience sampling, also called available sampling, a group of subjects is selected on the basis of being accessible or expedient. In the same way, purposeful sampling (sometimes called purposive sampling) allows the researcher to select particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the subject of interest. The criteria to satisfy the population sample design were that the individuals were doing the following:

1. self-identifying as an openly gay male,

2. currently working in the state of California, and

3. occupying a high-level leadership role in the organization

The first participant was preidentified and assisted in the recruitment of additional participants, a practice which is known as snowball sampling technique.

**Organization of the Study**

The remaining chapters of this study explore in detail the lived experiences of the participants, focusing on the types of support and barriers they encountered throughout their lives. Chapter II presents an extensive review of existing literature on LGBT models of leadership, characteristics of openly gay leaders, and the limitations and successes in the workplace. Chapter III explains the rationale for the research design, population, sample, data collection, research instruments, and methods of data analysis that are used. Chapter IV displays the research findings, and Chapter V establishes the conclusions, course of actions, and the recommendation for future studies.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I believe that no one should ever have to choose between a career we love and living our lives with authenticity and integrity.

—Selisse Berry (Out & Equal Executive Director)

During the 16th annual Shirley G. Wassong Memorial Lecture in European and American Art, the historian Dargman Herzog, professor at the Graduate Center City University of New York, said that it was usual for most people to look back on the 20th century and consider it as the time of sexual liberalization; however, the 20th century was highly complex and often contradictory in its conceptions of sexual rights, contraception, homosexuality, premarital sex, the eroticization of marriage, abortion, prostitution, sexual imagery, sexual violence, and an array of other issues that were implicated with historical, religious, and political events (Herzog, 2013).

Although several research studies have been conducted on sexuality, LGBT sexuality has not always been afforded the attention it deserves by organization scholars (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Fassinger et al., 2010). Early research focused mainly on two areas: sexual harassment and sexual minorities (Arwood, 2006; Flenar, 2013; Pringle, 2008). A few of these early works have explored sexuality intermingled with work and organizations but basically under the lens of gender, feminism, and inequality (Colgan & Rumens, 2015). Of all these equality and diversity venues, sexual orientation remains one of the most invisible and sensitive areas of diversity. There has been much more research about organizational management studies on gender, racial discrimination, and ethnicity than on sexual orientation (Bowen & Blackman, 2003; Colgan & McKearney, 2011).
One of the first studies on LGBT in the workplace that included interviews with more than 100 gay and lesbian alumni of the Harvard Business School from the 1940s to 1995 was conducted by Friskopp and Silverstein (1995). The Harvard Business School study was the most complete and most in-depth study of gay and lesbian managers, executives, and employees in the United States. This work discussed issues about coming out versus being closeted in the workplace, harassment, discrimination, health and insurance benefits, resources and support groups, and the difference between gay men and lesbians (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). The study compiled stories of barriers and types of support executives experienced since their school years through their adult lives both in their personal lives and in the workplace. It also addressed the interference of institutional oversight and the importance of regulating laws and the moral implications of homosexuality.

Chapter II presents a review of the literature as it pertains to barriers and supports openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions experienced throughout their lives. The researcher developed a literature synthesis matrix to develop the literature review for this study. The literature review is organized into six main sections: sexual orientation and the law, homosexuality in the workplace, LGBT and gay leadership, characteristics of gay male leaders, models of gay leadership, LGBT and gay models of leadership, and the barriers and supports in the workplace. Each section transitions from a general review of the literature to a specific focus on bringing about limitations and successes in the journey to obtain high-level positions. Although not much has been written about gay leadership and its population, the literature was used to frame the problem and to identify the central issues (L. Cooper, 2009; Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014).
The first section presents an overview of the theoretical background of sexual orientation interlaced with the law, its importance, consequences, and the evolution of institutional laws imposed by society shaping the interaction of sexual orientation and institutions. The second section introduces diversity in the workplace, statistics, and sexual orientation in the workplace.

The third section delves into the current perception and statistics about LGBT and gay leaders in the corporate ambit, describing how societal awareness has evolved because of government regulations and how these measures have gradually changed the path for gay leaders who try to bring change to their organizations.

The fourth section focuses on characteristics of openly gay male leaders, how challenging the coming out process has been for successful CEOs and how stereotypes have an impact on the role congruity, the implication of perception and moral values, and the perception of gay leaders from their subordinates and others (persons outside of the organization).

The fifth section focuses on LGBT models of leadership. This section explores the literature regarding four models that emerged from research studies on LGBT leaders, its characteristics, the principles and dimensions contextualizing gay leaders, and the challenges each model presents.

The sixth section synthetizes the limitations and successes gay leaders have experienced on their journey, identifying internal and external barriers and how these barriers are overcome with the support they receive for their professional advancement, and what programs and networks are crucial to becoming a successful leader.
Sexual Orientation and the Law

According to a recent study by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (Fidas, Cooper, & Raspanti, 2016), despite a changing social and legal landscape for LGBT people, still over half (53%) of LGBT workers nationwide hide who they are at work. This behavior was based on the perceptions LGBT people and other marginalized groups have experienced, making them feel welcome or pushing them to the sidelines of job (Adams et al., 2013; Fidas et al., 2016; Miller, 2014). The majority of the Fortune 500 companies have implemented workplace protections on the basis of sexual orientation (91%) and gender identity (61%); however, many LGBT workers continue to face harassment in workplaces that are not affected by the very policies and benefits aimed at creating greater equality in the workplace (Baksh, 2016; Fidas et al., 2014; Kidd, 2015).

The lack of protective laws and weak enforcement—where companies have some policies—obligate LGBT individuals to continue wondering whether they should come out at work. Some advancement has occurred, but while open discrimination wanes, the soft discrimination barrier remains (Kidd, 2015; Schneider, 2016). In the United States, there are still 28 states with laws that allow employers fire to employees simply for being openly gay. For this reason, many gay people avoid career choices, such as relocation, career changes, or promotions, because they cannot allow themselves to be in an environment where they can be fired simply for being gay (Baksh, 2016; Schneider, 2016).

Some progress has been made. Pivotal events contributed to support the gay rights movement. On September 20, 2011, the U.S. military allowed lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) service members to serve openly after a protracted political battle to lift
the ban on open service known as “don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT). Four years later, the Department of Defense formulated policy options regarding the military service of transgender service members. Similarly, in October 2013, the repeal of the Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA, forced the federal government to acknowledge legal marriages of same-sex couples and allow them to access an array of federal benefits. The decision changed the landscape for same-sex marriage and led to further developments for the rights of LGBT employees in the workplace, affecting employee benefit plans, leave entitlements, and antidiscrimination policies. Similarly, on July 27, 2015, the Boy Scouts of America’s top leadership voted to end its ban on openly gay adult leaders, 2 years after the organization allowed openly gay scouts in 2013.

These institutional changes have influenced the attitude and treatment toward gay male employees in the workplace. Employers now have a responsibility to protect all employees against discrimination of any form. It is the employer’s responsibility to ensure that employees are protected against homophobic harassment and prejudicial treatment (Arwood, 2006). The creation of a safe, productive, and inclusive workplace is dependent upon employers’ creating an environment that has zero tolerance for homophobic harassment and prejudicial treatment (Adams et al., 2013; Irwin, 1999). Companies should be active and proactive in challenging individual, institutional, and systematic discrimination in the workplace, but still there is a large number [or workplaces] that have been skirting around the LGBT question, treating it as the elephant in the room (Qvist, 2014). There are few outed role models to demonstrate that members of the LGBT community even exist in business (Qvist, 2014). While employers may not
be perpetuating homophobic practices, they collude with these practices by not actively challenging them or creating negative consequences for those who do (Irwin, 1999).

By using a combination of subtle signals and bold statements, companies can create an inclusive environment that permeates the entire organization and, ultimately, society. The solutions can be simple and yet have extremely positive outcomes; all that is required is an open mind and responsible leadership (Qvist, 2014).

**Homosexuality in the Workplace**

To fully understand the barriers gay individuals experience in the workplace, it is necessary to realize that sometimes our socially constructed understandings of the world, events, communities, and people are accurate and sometimes they are not. These social constructions are based on individual perceptions of acts and can be biased (Busch & Busch, 2001) or based on social dimensions of scientific knowledge (Longino, 2016). The dilemma is to know how accurate the social construction is at any particular time (Busch & Busch, 2001).

According to the annual sociological survey (Fidas et al., 2016), and the daily Gallup Daily Tracking, both American-based research institutions, in 1997, 44% of Americans surveyed believed that homosexual relations between consenting adults should not be legal; of those who called themselves Christians, 69% believed this. In 1998, 84% of the sample was willing to extend equal rights in the workplace to homosexuals, 64% of Christians would not. Also, in 1998, 54% of those surveyed still believe homosexuality to be a “sin,” and even more—59%—believed it to be morally wrong (Arwood, 2006). Almost two decades later in the new millennium, Americans have shifted views on gay marriage and benefits in the workplace. In 2013, a Gallup
survey revealed that 54% of Americans say they would vote for a law that would give marriage benefits to federal government employees who are legally married to a same-sex partner while 39% say they would vote against it. Similarly, 50% of Americans in May 2012 said marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized by the law as valid and 48% said same-sex marriages should not be valid. This contrasts with 1996, when 27% said such marriages should be valid and 68% said they should not be valid (Mendez, 2013).

The result of these social perceptions is an extreme social, moral, and ethical dichotomy between the opposing views on the topic of homosexuality (Cesaretti, 2003). Perhaps seeing a gay person on the television set is less invasive than having one be your team leader or department manager at work. Regardless of the rationale, society is posed with many issues that need immediate attention in relation to homosexuality and all of the implications the stigma possesses. The public discussion has transcended the political and has grown to an ethical and moral examination and analysis. And it showed that society has difficulty discussing sex and ethics in most contexts. As a result, humans are looking to their religious and spiritual leaders for guidance (Cesaretti, 2003).

Thus, homophobia is both on the defensive and offensive, both neurotic and considerate; it is mobilized and powerful and championed by some very influential and privileged people whose advocacy of discrimination legitimizes hatred and gives moral and legal authority to prejudice and bigotry (Arwood, 2006; Fone, 2000). Recently, on November 2016, according to Shaun King, the editor of New York Daily News, there has been a rise in the number of reports of attacks and threats made against LGBT on social media since Donald Trump’s election as U.S. President, ignited perhaps by his bigoted
rhetoric (Haelle, 2016; Silva, 2017). Because political events are mingled with dominant corporations, the elected president’s position on LGBT issues can be influential on executive leaders. According to Kouzes and Posner (2003), organizational leaders motivate followers to share the organization’s vision and values.

**LGBT and Gay Leadership**

Throughout history, homosexuality has been a well-known expression of human sexuality and accepted to a certain degree. Historians have discussed the sexual preferences of leaders throughout history, such as Alexander the Great (Cartledge, 2004), Peter the Great (Fox, 2004), and Abraham Lincoln (Tripp, 2005). Although homosexual acts were punishable among the ancient Hebrews, among the Greeks, homosexuality was considered not only natural (in intellectual ranks) but as an elevated form of love, higher than the heterosexual love (Crompton, 2003; Valdovinos, 1990). In recent history, homosexuals succeeded in most areas such as science, mathematics, and anatomy (Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo); mechanical intelligence (Alan Turing); music (Tchaikovsky); and poetry and literature (Walt Whitman, Oscar Wilde, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster, Garcia Lorca, Yukio Mishima, and Jean Cocteau).

Under the modern concept of leadership, there are figures who fit into this description including Harvey Milk, a visionary civil and human rights leader who became one of the first openly gay elected officials in the United States when he won a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977. This type of leadership comes from the structural base of organizing societal concerns of certain groups (Shilts, 1987), and individuals leading such efforts evolve later in consequential formal leadership roles as a result of this social activism (Baker & Green, 2007).
Within the scope of leadership, the world of business is the ultimate place for the LGBT community to reach. Stakes at this point are too high, not only challenging for any societal group but also specifically for minorities. Comedian Ellen DeGeneres in the television industry, and Tim Cook, the successful Apple CEO, are examples of successful LGBT leadership. Cook’s decision in October 2014 to publicly announce his sexual orientation as gay, instantly converted him a global role model in the executive world. Cook maintained a low profile, but his coming out made him high profile and the only openly gay CEO in the Fortune 500. Being the face of Apple, Cook has used the platform to opine on diverse issues such as immigration reform, female representation on Wall Street, human rights, access to education, and privacy rights (Lorenzetti, 2014).

**Gay CEOs: Three Cases**

The few openly gay CEOs have successfully carried their leadership, creating profits and prestige for the companies they led, even if their openness was involuntary, such as in the case of John Browne, who led the famous energy corporation British Petroleum (BP) for almost 12 years until he resigned as chief executive in 2007 after his sexual orientation was exposed by the United Kingdom newspaper the *Daily Mail*. Browne became the first accepted and openly homosexual leader of a major publicly traded company. Since then, Browne has been an advocate for openness in the workplace when it comes to sexual orientation. His book, *The Glass Closet*, posits that openness in the workplace is good for business and he hopes to normalize its acceptance (Lorenzetti, 2014).

Robert Hanson, former CEO of American Eagle, took the reins of American Eagle Company in 2012 while he was openly gay. Jason Grenfell-Gardner, the CEO of
IGI Laboratories, a global pharmaceutical firm, has always been open about his sexual orientation even before he got this top leadership position. Mike Jeffries, CEO of Abercrombie & Fitch and Glen Senk, former CEO of Urban Outfitters, were open regarding their sexual orientation, and stakeholders did not object. Trevor Burgess, CEO of C1 Financial, and Scott McGregor, CEO of Camco Clean Energy, are other renowned gay leaders.

As women are breaking the gender glass ceiling in top executive positions, gay male individuals experience the need for breaking the pink ceiling (Arwood, 2006). In order to succeed, gay males should be able to serve as mentors for other gays, as well as influence the business and political environment, as a result of LGBT movements throughout history (Arwood, 2006; Hayer, 2015). However, inequity still persists in various sectors of society and is reflected in the workplace, and gay men are much underrepresented. In the Fortune 500, Tim Cook was the only openly gay CEO. Before Cook came out in October 2014, there were no openly gay CEOs in the Fortune 500 according to Deena Fidas of the Human Rights Campaign (Fidas et al., 2016).

Mentorship

With the premise that mentorship is an important way to help retain talent and provide key direction for career growth (Briggs, 2015; Broder-Singer, 2011; McCleary, 2016; Miller, 2014), research work revealed that one of the most significant challenges for a gay individual is finding a mentor on the job. While corporate America has advanced in its antidiscrimination policies, LGBT individuals continue to face barriers in the workplace and mobility to executive-level positions (Hassell, 2016). Openly gay
CEOs are a rarity in the business world even though more companies are publicly expressing their support for gay rights and inclusive workplaces (Petroff, 2014).

To navigate this pathway, gay individuals need the support from coworkers and management. Openly gay professionals agreed that where people live and work plays a very influential role in their lives; gay professionals are more attracted to cities where there is already a strong and visible gay community, such as San Francisco, Portland, Austin, and New Orleans (Mendes, 2013) with laws protecting gay people from discrimination (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Woog, 2001).

**Characteristics of Gay Men Leaders**

In his research study, L. Cooper (2009) identified different theories and deconstructed behavior and leadership characteristics within LGBT leaders as defined by previous research studies (Arminio, 1993; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bass & Stodgill, 1990; Cass, 1979; Evans, 1993; Porter, 1998; Renn & Bilodeau, 2003; Wall & Evans, 2000). These studies showed how LGBT leaders are perceived from a heterosexual perspective and how gay male leaders perceive themselves. Such theories assume different points of view for the attributions of leadership, ranging from the conception that some are natural-born leaders and some become leaders because of a great need, to the existence of particular traits or cognitive schemes based on the needs of the LGBT community.

The literature revealed four characteristics of transformational gay leadership: crucial focus on employee development, attribution of success to networking, charismatic and envisioning, and stereotypes and role incongruence.
**Emphasis on Employee Development**

One characteristic of transformational gay leaders was the immersion in a culture with emphasis on follower development. These leaders evaluate their followers for the ability to meet current and predetermined future expectations (Schein, 1999). The evaluation included diversity within the organization and the inclusion of different lifestyles; forming these followers facilitated the flourishing of gay leaders because gay individuals tend to be creative minded and fit directly into a diverse group of people (Florida, 2004). This type of transformational leadership provided a structured forum for LGBT persons to be open with their identities in their workplace and with the goal of advancing their company’s success (Keister, 2004).

The scarce literature from previous studies revealed that gay leaders adopting transformational leadership models in their organizations helped to inspire exceptional performance and assisted others in recognizing their abilities and future within an organization by sharing their vision and goals among all participants (L. Cooper, 2009).

**Success Based on Networking**

Another characteristic among gay male leaders that differentiates them considerably from heterosexual leaders was the tendency for networking (Levin, 1998). Although networking is a recurring business practice for both LGBT persons and heterosexual leaders, gay male leaders tend to attribute the majority of their success to networking. Gay male leaders successfully changed corporate policies to reflect a more gay-friendly environment in the workplace across major corporations (Levin, 1998). Informal gay networks played a significant role in how gay men found work and how they navigated the workplace once hired (Keister, 2004). Informal networks allow LGBT
persons to be open with their identities, develop core values, boost morale, and develop a sense of belonging within the organization (Keister, 2004).

**Charisma, Envisioning, and High Standards**

The characteristics of gay leadership varied according to the type of leadership model (transformational, transactional, situational, and compliance leadership). L. Cooper’s (2009) research characterized the transformational gay leader as charismatic, envisioning, and setting high standards for emulation. Similarly, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) found that LGBT leaders always experienced their work days differently; they found it enjoyable to break up the monotony of doing things the same every day, and they tended to keep work activities different, full of entertainment, and/or exciting.

Additionally, LGBT leaders perceive their followers as individuals with potential constructive contributors. When they share a common vision and goals, that “suggests that the transformational leaders’ vision for the future is compelling and contagious” (S. Armstrong, 2001, p. 6). Gay transformational leaders are known for their ability to envision the future and to lead by example. All leaders act in ways that are consistent with their beliefs. All leaders are persistent in the pursuit of their visions and are always vigilant about the little things that make a big difference (S. Armstrong, 2001). In addition to leading by example, gay transformational leaders use praise and encouragement effectively.

Gay leaders are inspired by individuals who help them discover their passions and skills that contribute to the organization. However, gay leadership is pressured by another type of leadership, the compliance model, which forces compliance and manages by hierarchy and bureaucratic control. Compliance leadership does not work because
when individuals are governed by compliance alone, they lose the ability to be creative and are unlikely to find the required solutions for problems in contemporary organizations (L. Cooper, 2009). Compliance leadership has been evident in LGBT history because of the fear of facing adversity, coming out with sexuality, and dealing with workplace issues between homophobic persons (Collins, 2001; D’Emilio, 2000).

**Stereotypes and Role Incongruence**

The characteristics of gay leaders have always been subjected to a strong barrier of stereotypes. Gay men are perceived as being feminine (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993; Herek, 1984a; Simmons, 1965); passive and gentle (Gurwitz & Marcus, 1978); and compassionate, sensitive to the needs of others (Jackson & Sullivan, 1989) as well as exquisite, tuned-voiced, and loving drama (Madon, 1997). These stereotypes present a view of gay males that is contrary to what is perceived to be necessary and desirable to perform effectively as a leader, as leadership is seen as requiring predominantly masculine or agentic traits (e.g., Duehr & Bono, 2006; Heilman et al., 1989; Schein, 1973). (Macoukji, 2014, p. 9)

Stereotypes mean that the perception of the characteristics of gay males is usually not congruent with what is required to succeed as a leader. However, results from studies demonstrate that there is significant difference between leader gender, sexual orientation, and effectiveness as a leader (Macoukji, 2014).

Contributing to the literature on gay leaders’ characteristics, Macoukji (2014) researched the role congruity and the implications of perception and moral values. In his study, Macoukji analyzed the perception of gay leaders from their subordinates and others (persons outside of the organization). He indicated the existence of incongruence
between the characteristics of an individual and the role on agency and communality.
Results indicated that gay leaders were perceived to be less agentic (focused on competence) and more communal (focused on organizational warmth) than their heterosexual counterparts (Macoukji, 2014).

Models of Gay Leadership

In contemporary leadership environments, creativity is essential because of constant changes that occur within organizations (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008; L. Cooper, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2003). To be effective, gay leaders adopted leadership models where innovation, employee development, motivation, and goal sharing formed the core values of the organization (L. Cooper, 2009).

The Asexual Imperative

According to Ellis and Riggle (1995), the business world should view the workplace as an asexual environment whereby gender is neutral. In 1980, an affair between top executives of two Fortune 100 companies, Mary Cunningham and William Agee, former American business executives, set a precedent for sexual relationships within organizations. This scandal harmed both individuals and organizations and highlighted the importance of maintaining the workplace as a structured place as hierarchically abstract slots filled by generic asexual workers (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Woods, 1994). As a result, any activity within the organization (e.g., managing, providing service, manufacturing) and behavior not related to the organization’s purpose should be kept aside (Woods, 1994).
The emergence of the idea of sexual orientation does not position the figures of the homosexual in a relationship of equivalence. Within the workplace, the heterosexual is presumed to be the *neutral*, while the homosexual is constituted to have a *sexual orientation*. Sexuality then is off limits because it is labeled as social diversion, imprudent distraction, or an unwanted (i.e., harassment) intrusion. In addition, alternative sexual relationships (LGBT) are conceived not only as forbidden but constructed as abnormal (Colgan & Rumens, 2015) with a different sexual orientation. In this way, homosexuals are positioned as deviant from the supposedly neutral heterosexuals. When this knowledge is coupled with the assumption that the workplace should be asexual, employers are confronted by the prospect of having to manage sexual orientations, in particular, and sexualities more generally.

However, instead of society’s adhering to the asexual workplace standard, heterosexuals are known to bring photos of family members, take time off for family situations, and so forth, while LGBT persons are not extended the same flexibility (Colgan, Creegan, McKearney, & Wright, 2006). LGBT persons may be asked to remove personal photos that indicate homosexuality and may not be invited to family events (Ellis & Riggle, 1994). These practices have fueled management’s interfering into organizing, controlling, and suppressing sexual orientation at work through dress codes, equality and diversity initiatives, sexual harassment policies, and other measures (Brower, 2013; Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Colgan et al., 2009; Hearn & Parking, 1995; Skidmore, 2004).
Sexuality is a private matter. Employees should not be intimate at work, and therefore, sexuality is seen as the transgression of asexual actors into sexual territory, not as an inherent component of organizational behavior (Woods, 1994).

The asexual imperative is a central, pervasive feature of professional culture; it insists that workers be judged based on the quality of their work. Interactions in the workforce should be stripped of their sexual component. Woods (1994) believed, “For gay males whose sexuality has been stigmatized, criminalized, medicalized, morally condemned, and subjected to interpersonal penalties of all sorts, this is a powerful idea” (p. 52).

The G Quotient

In 2006, Kirk Snyder conducted a 5-year research project involving 2,000 organizations and 3,500 openly gay managers and executives to study levels of job satisfaction and workplace morale. This effective model of leadership, called the G Quotient, consisted of measuring seven components of executive leadership: innovation, inclusion, connectivity, adaptability, collaboration, intuition, and communication. Snyder’s study demonstrated that employees with gay male supervisors have higher rates of satisfaction, job commitment, and productivity. He suggested that the gay involvement taught these managers to place a greater emphasis on the individual value of their employees. This leadership model emphasized the process of work rather than the final product, placing value on experiential learning and seeing inspiration as a manageable commodity (Snyder, 2006).

This model implied that “in organizations and working units under the direct leadership of non-closeted gay executives, an environment is created where employees
care about their work, demonstrate a deep commitment to professional excellence, and feel individually connected to advancing the success of the organization itself” (Snyder, 2006, p. vii). Thus, this belief fosters a workplace climate based on inclusion that develops employee engagement that is not seen in other professional environments.

These outcomes ratify the importance of nurturing a culture with emphasis on follower development, which, in turn, functions as significant support and allows the flourishing of gay leaders (Florida, 2004; Schein, 1999). However, there should be factors that permit the leadership success of gay executives, three forces that simultaneously converge: (a) the reconstruction of contemporary employees; (b) the development and refining of the fundamental skills of gay men, primarily but not limited to adaptability, intuitive communication, and creative problem solving; and (c) the social, historical, and political context of this time (Snyder, 2006). The reconstruction of contemporary employees referred to the way information was available to everybody and the velocity of sharing; having this knowledge and the possibility of interconnection among them creates employee empowerment and therefore a better workforce.

The learned skills of gay men are intrinsic to their gay experience if they identify themselves as being different from those around them. This recognition results in awareness of a need to adapt their verbal and nonverbal communication in an effort to avoid disapproval from those they care about. Thus, they have a different perception of the world. Before the coming out process, gay males instinctively have the ability to scan their environment to become aware of and predict the emotional responses of others. This skill is later mastered and useful in the workplace to select relevant information and discard what is irrelevant (Snyder, 2006).
To survive the challenges of childhood, gay men must learn creative ways to navigate societal impositions. These experiences are helpful for them to become creative problem solvers. Homosexuals have been treated differently at different times in different cultures, and the context of this time is permissive for same-sex relationships and for allowing them in the workforce to hold executive positions (Snyder, 2006).

The seven principles of the G Quotient paradigm are inclusion, creativity, adaptability, connectivity, communication, intuition, and collaboration (Snyder, 2006):

1. **Inclusion.** Gay managers inspire their employees to engage in their work by demonstrating a true respect for the individual value of each employee. These leaders are perceived as motivators with actions, rather than dictators with rules, and equality drives all processes of work.

2. **Creativity.** Gay executives look at ideas in fresh new ways and innovation becomes an organizational product. People with different ideas are valued in their workplace environment.

3. **Adaptability.** Gay leaders believe their organizations must develop an awareness and appreciation for the concept of change or face difficulty in developing new strategies to remain competitive.

4. **Connectivity.** In G Quotient environments, connectivity occurs through external networking and internal awareness. Connectivity keeps gay managers and their employees in touch with both organizational and industry movement, providing a competitive edge.

5. **Communication.** Authenticity provides gay leaders internal credibility by promoting communication using the strength of their own individuality. These leaders
consistently and freely share information with their employees regarding the direction of the organization. Professional disclosure contributes to greater trust within the workplace environment.

6. **Intuition.** Gay executives view intuition as a business asset and encourage their employees to develop and apply their own set of professional instincts. The integration of intuitions in the decision-making process results in better hires, better utilization of individual talent, and increased harmony because people are assembled into teams that complement individual strengths.

7. **Collaboration.** Gay managers build cultures where collaboration enhances all the conceptual and physical processes associated with organizational development and management.

Although the G Quotient leadership is a relatively new model, gay executives “are winning the leadership race” (Snyder, 2006, p. 100).

**The Affirmative LGBT Paradigm**

This model argues that some LGBT leadership is unintentional and emerges out of local activism, but many LGBT individuals deliberately pursue professional leadership roles, and there is a possibility that the sexual marginalization issues and concerns may or may not be directly relevant to the leadership role (Fassinger et al., 2010). In this paradigm, *professional gay* may be a leader where a truly gay identity and consequences conform to the core of one’s leadership role, but it may be that the leader can also be viewed as a *gay professional* in which sexual orientation constitutes only a small part of one’s identity as a leader (Fassinger, 2008). This model for gay leadership can be unintentional, as if a group of LGBT persons chose to live in a particular area, making
them leaders in that environment, or gay males may assume leadership roles in mixed or heterosexuality organizations, overcoming challenges because of their gay identity.

This new, multidimensional model of LGBT leadership enactment incorporates sexual orientation (including identity disclosure), gender orientation (including leader gender), and the situation (conceptualizing the group composition). The model is also embedded in context with the most relevant factors affecting the enactment of leadership being stigma and marginalization. The existence of gay leaders is clear, but what is not known is whether and how a gay leader’s identity might have an impact on the enactment of a leadership role, including the response of the followers (Fassinger et al., 2010).

It is appropriate to believe that sexual orientation does affect leadership, as the research literature suggests that identity dimensions—specifically those emanating from a marginalized condition—have significant relevance for understanding leader-follower relationships, but regardless of the stigma of their sexual minority identity and the possibility for discrimination, LGBT individuals progressively are open about their sexual orientation (Chin, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007; Croteau, Bieschke, Fassinger, & Manning, 2008), and there is evidence to discern that disclosing one’s LGBT identity in the workplace is definitely associated with positive outcomes (Croteau et al., 2008; Fassinger, 2008).

The affirmative LGBT model of gay leadership is contextualized within stigma and marginalization and proposes three dimensions:

1. Sexual orientation (including identity disclosure), which discussed the development of gay identity, whether that identification is known and disclosed, or not. This dimension encompasses the review of the existing literature as a result of research
studies from Coon (2001), Snyder (2006), and Renn (2007) regarding the self-disclosure and leadership, especially among student leaders as developmental gay leaders.

2. Gender orientation (including leader gender), which discussed not only biological/assigned gender, but also gender roles, opinion, cognitions, conduct, and presentation, the way in which each individual’s gender is expressed (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). There was a predominant belief that wanting same-sex partners indicated a desire to be the other sex or that gender nonconformity was proof of homosexuality, beliefs and attitudes toward sexual orientation are completely gendered (Chin et al., 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007), and gender transgressors (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007).

3. Situation (conceptualizing the group composition), which highlighted the fact that followers do not come to situations with neutral experiences. Followers contributed their own worldviews, especially related to their personal foundation identities, based on their lived experiences as well.

The affirmative LGBT model suggests that sexual orientation (especially with identity disclosure) interacts with gender orientation (including gender) and with the situation (specifically group composition) to affect both the leader and followers in a complicated and changing process of leadership interaction. This mechanism happens within a context of stigma and marginalization relatively intrinsic to gay minorities.

**Transformational Leadership**

The LGBT community is moving toward transformational leadership (Sandownick, 2005) as opposed to heterosexual transactional and compliance leadership.
The transformational leadership style was introduced in 1978 and further researched by Bass in 1985. The transformational type of leadership evolves from the grassroots model. Alinsky (1989) created tactics and strategies converting the large emotional energy of grassroots groups into effective antigovernment, antiinstitutional, and anticorporate activism. His proposals have been spread and taught today as a set of model behaviors and actions. These ideas are also used with an emotional commitment to victory that goes well beyond those who become targets (Sandownick, 2005).

Bass and Avolio (1990) suggested that leaders are able to provide intellectual stimulation by emphasizing one’s ability, promoting independence and hard work, and by advocating the use of logic and reasoning in problem solving. This behavior can improve employee motivation and make individuals’ daily work experience more meaningful (L. Cooper, 2009). L. Cooper’s findings indicated that gay male leaders exude transformational leadership characteristics.

Transformational leadership is developed among team members by sharing visions and goals, is based on leading by example, and uses encouragement and praise effectively. Transformational leaders see followers as individuals able to make constructive contributions.

Models of leadership development have explored tactics including flexible supports that supplement in-person interactions, such as executive coaching, individual leadership development plans and projects, peer networks, and focused supports for alumni. Some leaders are also veering the focus of their leadership supports to the organization as a whole, directing it at the entire workforce, including teams and sections (e.g., core support grants, organizational consulting, team coaching, board development).
These approaches are popular within the nonprofit field as ways to more effectively discuss leadership needs that benefit the collective leadership within corporations (Sheridan & Howard, 2011).

In every model of leadership, all leaders must overcome an array of challenges regardless of their sexual orientation; however, gay male leaders not only must do what heterosexual leaders do, but they also experience throughout their lives an additional set of barriers unique to their condition, developing a different set of skills and supports to deal with the societal double standard.

**Barriers and Support**

I think the major barriers lie within a certain “sameness” of the people who advance. Diversity statistics don't seem to reflect a senior leadership team that parallels society in general.

—Anonymous gay man

**Barriers**

According to a Catalyst’s report (Silva & Warren, 2009) on building LGBT-inclusive workplaces, some barriers faced by gay male employees are, among others, a lack of awareness on gay issues that makes other employees rely on stereotypes and may generate hostile work environments for LGBT employees including discriminatory behaviors (inappropriate humor or derogatory language); exclusion from essential relationships and advancement opportunities; and an absence of role models. The report includes workplace experiences of gay male employees and supports the development of programs and practices that promote diversity, nurture inclusion, and increase awareness, accountability, and action. This report showed that many barriers faced by LGBT
employees are similar to those experienced by females, visualizing that organizational efforts may increment inclusion and benefit a broad range of groups (Silva & Warren, 2009).

Gay male employees working for organizations that offer diversity and inclusion programs were more satisfied and committed, described their workplace as more fair, and had more positive relationships with their managers and coworkers (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Snyder, 2006).

Although organizations that offer inclusion and diversity exist, gay males oftentimes encounter barriers in the workplace including lack of networking and role models, homophobia, stereotypes, sexual orientation discrimination, and lack of knowledge on LGBT issues by coworkers.

**Lack of networking and role models.** Catalyst’s report (Silva & Warren, 2009) included respondents’ experienced barriers associated with a lack of network connections with important people both inside and outside their organizations. For instance, participants reported a lack of senior gay role models. Leadership opportunities required inclusive programs and policies with visible senior leadership support. According to Silva and Warren (2009), “Without senior leaders who identify as LGBT, LGBT employees may question whether they can reach those levels when no one else ‘like them’ has already” (p. 9).

To overcome the lack of leadership, nonprofit organizations have developed programs, such as The 21st Century Fellows Program, with a fundamental goal of retaining and promoting the diversity that exists in LGBT organizations (Sheridan & Howard, 2011). Allies of this program, such as The Rockwood Leadership Institute,
conducted training to nonprofit leaders in core leadership competencies, such as communication, conflict resolution, visioning, partnership, and team building; The Pipeline Project developed and coordinated programs targeted to increase diversity within LGBT corporations by enhancing staffing, retention, promotion, and organizational support for people of color; and The Haas Jr., Fund’s Flexible Leadership Investments Program provides recipients with tailored, flexible support (e.g., coaches, consultants) to help identify and strengthen their leadership need (Sheridan & Howard, 2011).

Sexual orientation discrimination. Additional research has also found that sexual minorities experienced career barriers because of their sexual orientation. For example, a study conducted by the Williams Institute (Gates, 2011) reported that 10% of gay, lesbian, or bisexual workers encountered being denied a promotion because of their sexual orientation in 2007. In 2000, 18% of gay, lesbian, or bisexual workers who responded experienced discrimination in applying for or keeping their jobs. Permeated by these barriers, the path to be openly gay and becoming a leader is narrowed (Gates, 2011).

Homophobia and discrimination. American society has permitted—and in many cases, encouraged—homophobia to flourish (Woog, 2001). Throughout history, society has been predominately heteronormative, and homosexuality has been deemed incompatible to group cohesiveness (Woog, 2001). People also keep stereotypes regarding the description of how successful leaders should look. Research described the think leader, think male phenomenon, in which effective leaders are presumed to have a defined set of stereotypically masculine traits, leading men to be seen as default leaders.
(Sczesny, 2003; Silva & Warren, 2009) as opposed to female leaders and other minority groups.

Certain organizations used to be “breeding ground for sexism, racism, and homophobia” (Colgan & Rumens, 2015, p. 80) because they adopted by default a culture as heteronormative masculine, as in the case of the United Kingdom Police. Effeminacy in gay men was purported to represent the antithesis of traditional masculinity and effective policing (Colgan & Rumens, 2015). However, although some programs have been implemented to change these assumptions, studies showed how police training can reproduce masculine values that supported a sexist, racist, and homophobic police culture (Burke, 1993; Cashmore, 2001; Prokos & Padavic, 2002). The normative masculinity continued to be as the most valorized form of identity, and it is essentialized and celebrated as a better appropriated way of doing police work (Beusch, 2009).

**Stereotypes and role incongruity.** Another barrier an LGBT person experienced to become a leader was role congruity. Macoukji (2013) stated, in his study of interaction of leader gender and sexual orientation on leadership evaluations, that (a) role incongruity is conceptions that there is an incongruence between the characteristics of an individual and the role on communality (or warmth) and agency (or competence); and (b) this mechanism underlies moral shock, affective reactions of defiance, anger, and distaste toward individuals and/or groups who do not follow societal mores. When examining moderated mediation analyses, moral neglection mediates the relationship between leader demographics and evaluations of leader effectiveness (but not leader likability) for gay male leaders. Conclusions from Macoukji’s study helped to inform researchers “how and why stereotypes influence others’ leadership evaluations and
suggest entry points for interventions designed to minimize discrimination against sexual minorities in organizational settings” (p. v).

Sexual minority leaders are evaluated more harshly due to role incongruity, defined as the qualities ascribed to sexual minorities that do not overlap or are incongruous with those attributed to leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Also, not only may sexual minority leaders be perceived as incongruous with the leadership role due to stereotypes of their personal characteristics and qualities, but they are further penalized because of their sexual minority status such that they arouse more negative emotions of contempt, anger, and/or disgust due to negative perceptions by others, based on perceived violations of social norms governing sexual conduct (Macoukji, 2013).

**Internalized fear.** Bell and Weinberg (1978) conducted a study and found that emerging gay leaders expressed considerable fear and anxiety for their safety due to heterosexual views and/or loss of job caused by discrimination. People categorize themselves and are categorized by others along different dimensions of primary and secondary diversity (Herek, 1998), which later is translated into internal and external barriers. Judicial workplace studies found that coworkers counselled/expected LGBT employees to hide their sexuality or criticized disclosure (Brewer & Grey, 1999; Brower, 2003). Moore (1993) found that 37% of Americans stated that they did not want gay people to disclose their sexuality.

Staying in the closet is a powerful barrier because closeted employees express frustration and fear about visible sexual identity and their inability to report unequal treatment or to have legal protections address these issues (Kollen, 2016). Other studies also found that gay leaders were less likely to disclose their sexuality when they
experienced or witnessed discrimination (Croteau, 1996; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). In his book *The Glass Closet*, John Browne (2014), the BP executive, stated that “hiding part of myself prevented me from having a fuller relationship with many of my colleagues” (p. 4).

According to the most recent surveys (Gates, 2017), societal conditions are changing and the fear has been decreasing in the past 5 years. Millennials are the first generation in the United States to grow up in an environment where social acceptance of the LGBT community markedly increased. This acceptance may be an important factor in explaining their greater willingness to identify as LGBT. They may not have experienced the levels of discrimination and stigma experienced by their older counterparts. The perceived risks associated with publicly identifying as LGBT might also be lower in millennials than among other generations (Gates, 2017).

**Double barrier. Gay African Americans.** Black LGBT icons, while often invisible or erased from the dominant queer narrative, have been at the heart of the struggle for rights and inclusion (Gates & Newport, 2015). In fact, what many refer to as the LGBT movement’s beginning, the rebellion against the police at the Stonewall Inn, was predominately instigated by queer and transgender youth of color (Gates & Newport, 2015). The duality of being Black and gay is sometimes challenging and oftentimes heavy—homophobia, racism, incarceration, mortality, and issues of identity can weigh on one’s spirit, feelings of self-worth, and one’s very existence (Wilbekin, 2016). HIV and AIDS are still prominent in the Black gay community. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that half of Black gay and bisexual men will test HIV positive in their lifetime (Pastrana, 2008). Another challenge emerged with Black Lives Matter (a
movement lead by LGBT activists), which is still a controversial issue and trending topic in this country, and social justice is constantly being disputed in the African American community.

**Supports**

Adverse to barriers, the support and guidance gay male leaders receive from each other is crucial for their professional advancement; discussing challenges and accomplishments, validating each other’s experiences, and sharing different types of tools is very common within the gay leaders’ established programs, such as The 21st Century Fellows Program (Sheridan & Howard, 2011). These programs include great involvement on the part of their direct supervisors or executive directors, allowing these leaders to be part of their own professional development plans, which include maintenance of a gay leaders’ database for support. Support can come from LGBT programs, opportunities to increase a LGBT person’s self-confidence, and LGBT community support groups.

**LGBT programs.** LGBT programs are fulfilling an important need among emerging colored leaders in the LGBT movement. People of color are greatly underrepresented in the executive leadership of LGBT organizations. This lack of diversity at organizations’ executive positions can deter work to advance the interests of a diverse LGBT community and be detrimental to the overall LGBT movement (Sheridan & Howard, 2011). Because many emerging leaders of color reported the lack of a network in their daily work, it is an important program component that cultivates connections across organizations and hopefully over time will conduct to field-level impacts (Sheridan & Howard, 2011). Programs take a holistic approach to supporting
these leaders in their leadership journey, including developing both hard and soft leadership skills, fostering a supportive space where new leaders can develop strong relationships with others in the organization, and offering related support that fellows (fellowship intern) can customize to their individual leadership needs.

Fellows are well positioned to continue to enhance their leadership to benefit not only themselves but also their organizations and the movement more broadly. This is evidenced by fellows’ plans to continue their professional development, apply skills at their organizations, shape discussions around diversity in the movement, and take on more visible and active leadership roles (Sheridan & Howard, 2011).

**Self-confidence.** Self-confidence and self-efficacy function as immense supports to gay male leaders. Sexual orientation serves to improve self-efficacy for engagement in leadership by broadening perspectives, improving relationships and comfort within groups, allowing the participants to bring their full selves to their experiences, creating empathy, and understanding, and improving personal awareness (Ostick, 2011). Being in the closet affects the way gay leaders run companies; hiding part of oneself prevents having fuller relationships with many colleagues (Browne, 2014) while being out increases their overall self-confidence, which leads to greater involvement, and improved visibility and voice is important to leadership self-efficacy (Ostick 2011).

**Allies supporting LGBT community.** Well-recognized organizations that value LGBT inclusion and minorities, including Starbucks, Goldman Sacks, Google, and American Airlines, are finding that such inclusions support the bottom line (Browne, 2014). Using a combination of subtle signals and bold statements, companies
can create an inclusive atmosphere that permeates throughout the entire organization - and ultimately throughout society. The solutions can, as we have seen, be simple and yet have extremely positive outcomes; all that is required is an open mind and responsible leadership. (“Challenges for LGBT People in the Workplace and How to Overcome Them,” 2014, para. 13)

The support of the business as allies is increasingly vital as society goes further down the road toward change, and apathy is simply a nonoption (Antonoff, 2012).

**Summary**

The review of literature explored journals, articles, books, book reviews, scholarly studies, institutional research reports, statistics, and biographies revealing various issues to be considered for the present research study. The topics and key searches were diversity and sexual orientation in the workplace, LGBT and gay leadership, models and characteristics of gay leadership, and barriers and types of support on gay leadership.

The theoretical background started with the search for gay leaders throughout history, especially those succeeding in the contemporary business world, focusing on challenges experienced and the help received on their journey to hold top executive positions.

The following are findings from the review of literature:

1. It is evident that sexual minority individuals fill very few leadership roles; however, little is known on their experiences throughout their lives before reaching executive positions.

2. Most of the existing literature specifically on barriers and support experienced by gay male leaders is scarce. The existing literature encompasses general societal discrimination and challenges the LGBT community as a whole, including lesbians,
bisexuals, and transgender, experience. Very little contemporary openly gay executives’ biographical books have been published, such as Fit to Serve, by Ambassador J. Hormel (Hormel & Martin, 2011); and The Glass Closet, by former BP CEO J. Browne (2014).

3. Mentoring and support from other gay leaders is an essential factor to create and maintain a path to obtain top-level positions in the corporate business world.

4. Networking with gay leaders is a preferred strategy because gay friends played an important role in helping LGBT people to accept being gay themselves. These role models helped assure others that it was possible to be successful in business and also to be gay.

5. The existence of internal barriers to accept themselves as gay individuals and the threat of external barriers such as discrimination and homophobia create a difficult path to escalate higher positions.

6. LGBT employees often face barriers that create a less inclusive workplace and negatively impact their career advancement.

7. A lack of awareness about LGBT employees was linked to stereotypes, discriminatory behaviors, and exclusion from opportunities to form important relationships.

8. Laws in the workplace to protect sexual minorities are imperative and can help the overall success of the organization as a whole, increasing productivity.

9. Models of gay leadership indicated that learned skills of a gay men are intrinsic to their gay experience, for those who identify themselves as being different from those around them.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III reports the methodology used for this qualitative case study of the experiences of openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions. The chapter details the statement of purpose, reviews the research questions, describes the population and sample, analyzes the research instruments, and explains the data collection and analysis processes, including interviews, and the systematic procedures employed. Additionally, this chapter includes the limitations and establishes the validity and reliability of the study. This chapter concludes with a summary of the overall methodology used in the research study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and discover the perceptions of California gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions about the types of support they received and the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position.

Research Questions

1. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of support they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?

2. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?
Research Design

According to Stake (1995) and Yin (2002), case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. In this type of design, researchers “collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). Similarly, Patton (2015) stated, “The case study stands on its own as a detailed and rich story about a person, organization, event, campaign, or program—whatever the focus of study” (p. 259). Patton (2012) concurred stating, “In a case study, the emphasis is on obtaining thorough knowledge of an individual” (p. 9).

To add richness to the research, an ethnographic qualitative framework and data collection were used to better understand the culture of a group of people, their behaviors and perspectives (Patton, 2015). This is sometimes referred to as “thick description”—a term attributed to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz writing on the idea of an interpretive theory of culture. The term ethnography has come to be equated with virtually any qualitative research project where the intent is to emphasize detail observational and interview evidence, providing a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice (Yin, 2014).

This research utilized an ethnographic case study analysis by interviewing a select group of gay male leaders who are in high-level executive leadership roles to elicit themes, patterns, and trends in their lived experiences, focusing particularly on the barriers and supports they experienced throughout their lives. The perspective of this study is based on the premise that multiple perceptions can exist under the same
experience and that the experience of each participant is what constituted an interpretation of the reality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Qualitative inquiry includes a description and interpretation of the case being studied. Data come from fieldwork and observations of interactions (Patton, 2015). For this study, qualitative research was conducted with 12 exemplary gay males in high-level positions through face-to-face, open-ended interviews. The final result of the research process was a “creative synthesis” that presented a thorough reflection of the intuition and understanding of the researcher as experienced in the context of rigorous and systematic observation, dialogue, interviews, and immersion (Patton, 2002, p. 108).

Ethnographic case study designs are in-depth studies of an individual group, institution, organization, or program (Creswell, 2003). Case studies strive toward a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1990). The body of literature in case study research is “primitive and limited” (Yin, 2002, p. 17) in comparison to that of experimental or quasiexperimental research. The requirements and inflexibility of the latter forms of research make case studies the only viable alternative in some instances.

Types of qualitative case studies are characterized by the size of the delimited case, such as whether the case associates one individual, various individuals, a group, an entire program, or an activity. They may also be distinguished in terms of the intent of the case analysis. Three differences exist in terms of intent: the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study (Creswell, 2007). In a single instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), the investigator concentrates on an issue or concern and then selects one delimited case to illustrate this issue. In a collective
case study (or multiple case study), the one issue or concern is again selected, but the researcher selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue. The inquirer might select for study several programs from several research sites or multiple programs within a single site. According to Creswell (2014), “Often the inquirer purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue” (p. 189). Yin (2002) argued that the multiple case study design uses the logic of replication in which the researcher replicates the procedures for each case. As a general rule, qualitative researchers are reluctant to generalize from one case to another because the contexts of cases differ. To best generalize, however, the inquirer needs to select representative cases for inclusion in the qualitative study. The last type of case study design is an intrinsic case study in which the focus is on the case itself (e.g., evaluating a program, or studying a student having difficulty—see Stake, 1995) because the case presents an unusual or unique situation. This resembles the focus of narrative research, but the case study analytic procedures of a detailed description of the case, set within its context or surroundings, still hold true (Creswell, 2007).

To understand what makes gay male leaders successful and to know what the adaptive factors are that support a successful career, a case study methodology was used for this research. Qualitative ethnographic case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. When the approach is applied correctly, it becomes a valuable method for social science research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For instance, some important theories in clinical psychology were developed from intensive one-on-one case studies of individuals (Patten, 2012).
**Appropriateness of Design**

According to Yin (1994), case study research is an empirical inquiry suitable for studying complex social phenomena in which the researcher focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, case study is an exploratory or descriptive type and may be one individual or one group, including multiple cases (Stake, 1995). Additionally, an ethnographic case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on an extensive data collection (Creswell, 1998). The definition of the ethnographic case study methodology was adequate for this research.

Another possible method also suitable for this research was the phenomenological qualitative inquiry-based method because the research study intended to comprehend the answers regarding the meaning, the structure, and essence of the lived experiences of this phenomenon for this group of people (Patton, 2002). However, phenomenological inquiry explores the individual’s experiences and identifies themes that emerged from the description of lived experiences rather than focusing specifically on particular events or processes (Creswell, 1998), and this research study focuses on the types of support gay male leaders experienced throughout their lives and the barriers they encountered on their path to leadership. Consequently, case study research design links the data to be collected and conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of the study. It provides a conceptual framework and an action plan for getting from a set of questions to conclusions (Yin, 1994).
Using case study methodology, the researcher gathered data, such as responses to open-ended interview questions on experiences of gay male individuals in high-level leadership positions, that were analyzed through the use of informed judgement to identify major and minor themes expressed by participants. The analytic strategy to analyze the evidence was the explanation-building technique (mainly explanatory), which analyzed case study data by building an explanation about the case and identifying a set of causal links (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, Yin (1994) defined explanation as a result of series of iterations: initial theoretical statement, comparing findings of an initial case, revising statement, comparing details of the case, revising, and comparing to other additional cases.

**Procedures for Conducting a Case Study**

Several procedures are available for conducting case studies (Merriam-Webster, 1999; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). This study relied primarily on Stake’s (1995) approach to conducting a case study in which researchers determine whether a case study approach is appropriate to the research problem. A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). The cases for this study are openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions in California.

Researchers next need to identify their case or cases. These cases may involve an individual, several individuals, a program, an event, or an activity. In conducting case study research, the investigator first considers what type of case study is most promising and useful. The case can be single or collective, multisited or within-site, focused on a
For this case study 12 openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions were selected, and because of the limited number of openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership roles and the lack of a centralized database, a purposive sample was used. Purposeful sampling (also called purposive sampling) is a strategic selection of “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 265).

The data collection in case study research is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. For example, Yin (2002) recommended six types of information to collect: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. This researcher developed questions, which were approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) prior to the study, and articles, books, biographical information, dissertations, statistics, and recording device, and transcription software were used to complete the data analysis.

Yin (2002) stated that the type of analysis of these data can be a holistic analysis of the entire case or an embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case. Through this data collection, a detailed description of the case (Stake, 1995) emerged in which the researcher detailed such aspects as the history of the case, the chronology of events, or a day-by-day rendering of the activities of the case.

**Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as “a group of element or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to
which we intend to generalize the result of the research” (p. 129). Similarly, a target population was defined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as “a group of individuals (or a group of organizations) with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study” (p. 142). According to the most recent Gallup poll (Gates, 2017), the portion of American adults identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) increased to 4.1% in 2016 from 3.5% in 2012. These figures, drawn from the largest representative sample of LGBT Americans collected in the United States, implied that more than an estimated 10 million adults now identify as LGBT individuals, approximately 1.75 million more compared with 2012 (Gates, 2017). Although there is a list of LGBT individuals in leadership positions, it is estimated that there are a great number of LGBT persons who are not disclosing their sexual preference in their organizations (OUTstanding, 2015). Despite this large population of LGBT persons, only a few names are on the list of openly gay and lesbian leaders in top-level executive positions (Fortune 500); openly gay males and lesbians are more common in the mid- and high-level echelons of the organizations. The target population for this study was openly gay males in high-level leadership positions in California.

Sample

Because of the limited number of openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership roles and the lack of a centralized database, a nonprobability purposeful snowball sampling strategy was used. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), in nonprobability sampling “the researcher uses subjects who happen to be accessible or who may represent certain types of characteristics” (p. 136). In convenience sampling (also called available sampling), a group of subjects is selected on the basis of being
accessible or expedient. In the same way, purposeful sampling (sometimes called purposive sampling) allows the researcher to select particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the subject of interest (McMillan & Schumacher 2010).

The researcher maintained a reasonable belief that San Francisco, California, a sanctuary city for LGBT persons, and the urban settlements surrounding the Bay Area have the archaic environment to nurture gay males in high-level leadership positions. For this study, the targeted population was gay male leaders who have achieved high-level leadership positions in their respective workplace environment, within the urban areas of California.

There are several types of convenience and purposive sampling procedures for qualitative investigations, but “the emphasis [will] always be on selecting cases that are information rich” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 138). Therefore, the criteria to satisfy the population sample design, was that the individuals,

- self-identified as openly gay male,
- currently worked in California, and
- occupied a high-level leadership role in the organization

The first participant was preidentified by the researcher through his own personal contacts, and to recruit additional participants, a snowball technique was used. Participants were asked whether they were aware of other leaders who possessed the qualifying criteria (Creswell, 2003). The use of the snowball technique also allowed an opportunity to gain the trust of potential participants through strong referrals. A total of 12 gay male leaders from California urban areas were interviewed and data were
collected from open-ended and focused questions and direct observation. Follow-up telephone conversations were conducted to clarify collected data. A database was created containing case study notes, documents, tabular materials, and narratives (initial open-ended answers to the study questions suggested by the investigator).

**Challenges**

Although there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry, some difficulties are intrinsic to establishing the population sample. Sample size “depends on what one wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (Patton, 1990, p. 184). The purposive and convenience sample could also be highly vulnerable to selection bias, unclear generalizability, and a high level of sampling error (Dudovskiy, 2017).

**Instrumentation**

Two main instruments were used in this study, the interview questions and field notes, in addition to the researcher who defined the parameters and processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Interview Questions**

Ten interview questions were obtained or designed for this research to gain insight into the specific barriers and types of support gay male leaders experienced throughout their lives. During the review of the literature, questions from similar studies were identified and new open-ended questions were developed that directly correlated to the purpose of the study. Open-ended interview requires careful and complete wording
of each question before the interview, and the question would be completely answered by the participant (Patton, 2015).

This study utilized a combination of the interview guide and the standardized open-ended interview. The standardized questionnaire included 10 open-ended questions (Appendix D), and the interview guide helped to delimitate in advance the issue to be explored, the types of support received, and the barriers they encountered throughout their lives. The interview was sectioned in three parts: experiences they remember at a younger age, the lived experiences during their working years, and the experiences in high-level leadership positions. This guide is essential to help leaders focus on barriers and supports while allowing individuals’ perspectives and experiences to emerge (Patton, 2015).

Interviews were audio-taped to gain insight into the lived experiences of each participant. Using audio-taped interviews gives one the ability to play back interviews to hear the tones and inflections of participants and to settle nuances in participants’ responses (McDougall, 2000). Audio-taped interviews also provided a descriptive contextual richness of events as experienced by the participants (Byrne, 2001). A disadvantage of taped interviews is that the nonverbal expressions are lost (Byrne, 2001). To minimize disadvantages, the participant’s nonverbal communication was noted. The researcher consciously maintained objectivity and distance in his lived experience from the participant’s.

**Validity and Reliability**

Reliability was verified by the use of a pilot test. Additionally, a panel of survey experts reviewed the questionnaire for reliability purposes (DeVellis, 2012; Johnson &
Christensen, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Comparably, Creswell (2014) stated that researchers need to convey the steps they take in their study to check for the accuracy and credibility of their findings. Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different groups (Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007).

Diverse strategies were used in this case study to create validity, such as member checking through taking the final report or specific descriptions back to participants and determining whether these participants believed that they were accurate; the researcher conducted an in-depth data analysis for individual participants and a comparison of all participants for common themes. Negative or discrepant information was also discussed and included in the report because by presenting contradictory evidence, the report becomes more realistic and more valid (Creswell, 2014). A peer debriefing was utilized to enhance the report. According to Creswell (2014), “This strategy-involving an interpretation beyond the researcher- adds validity to an account” (p. 202).

The foundation of the study was strengthened by the researcher’s engaging in personal awareness and explicit reflection about biases and preexisting notions and allowing for examination and open scrutiny of research protocols by the research committee, BUIRB, and field-testing through a pilot-test process.

Field Test

According to Roberts (2004), when a researcher developed his or her own instrument, “it must be field tested” (p. 38). Further, Creswell (2005) described that if a researcher developed his or her own instrument, the process consisted of “reviewing the
literature, presenting general questions to a target group, constructing questions for the item pool, and pilot testing the items” (p. 160).

Since the researcher needed to develop this instrument, content validity included a thorough review by two experts, and reliability (field tests where appropriate) were assessed. Also, with respect to content validity, Creswell (2005) stated that experts needed to review “the plan and the procedures used in constructing the instrument” (p. 164). Two experts examined the information about the objectives of the instrument in both content areas as well as the level of difficulty of the questions. This expert review helped “identify whether the questions are valid” (Creswell, 2005, pp. 164-165). To ensure that the complete interview was captured, the pilot interview feedback gave a structured guideline interview to ensure that the interview stayed under the specified timeline. The pilot interview (Appendix E) provided the researcher an opportunity to gauge responses to research questions for clarity and overall understanding. Upon completion of the pilot test, participants were solicited for participation and referrals for actual study. Prospective participants were contacted and asked to participate.

**Expert Panel**

Patton (2002) established that the meaningfulness, insights gleaned, and validity of qualitative inquiry have more of a correlation with the information richness of the selected cases and the analytical capabilities of the researcher than to the sample size itself. Furthermore, Patten (2012) explained that to determine the content validity of a measure, the researcher must make judgments on the appropriateness of its contents. Considering that “there is no statistical test to determine whether a measure adequately covers a content area or adequately represents a construct, content validity usually
depends on the judgment of experts in the field” (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008, p. 2279). For this study, experts in the field of LGBT as a cultural community reviewed the interview questions (Appendix F). More specifically, the experts were two individuals who had earned a doctorate degree. One of the individuals is currently serving as an assistant professor in literature with a designated emphasis in women, gender, and sexuality at the George Washington University, while the other is an expert in impostor phenomenon syndrome in gay leaders.

These experts helped to attest to the validity of the measure by determining the cohesion and relevance between the interview questions and the research questions. In addition, they screened the questions to ensure that they were written in a manner that elicited common and shared meanings among participants in accordance with Patten’s (2012) advice. Following the piloting of the questions to the experts, the researcher revised the instrument based on the experts’ feedback.

Data Collection

The BUIRB approved, the data collection for this research study through a detailed online quality review process. The BUIRB reviews all research projects involving humans, approving only research that maintains professional standards. After receiving approval (Appendix A) from the review board, the researcher conducted interviews of openly gay males in high-level leadership positions. Due to the nature of this study and the collection of data being primarily through interviews of professional adults, this study was considered as minimal risk within the BUIRB process. Each participant was provided with a participant letter of invitation (Appendix B) and a Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix C).
Procedure

Data were collected using audio-taped interview and field notes with each leader. Utilizing preliminary electronic correspondence with the referred participants, their eligibility for the study was confirmed (leader’s sexual orientation, current position as a leader, and location), corroborating the criteria to satisfy the population sample design. The interview instrument (Appendix D) included leadership questions, asked to gain insight into the specific barriers and support, if any, that the leader possessed. The interview questions collected self-reported information from participants to gain insight into the lived experiences of each participant. Audio-taped interviews made it possible to play back interviews to hear the tones and inflections of participants and to settle nuances in participants’ responses (McDougall, 2000). Interviews were transcribed later for conducting the analysis. The questions were field tested and updated as a result of feedback and approval through the Brandman dissertation chair.

The Interview Process

Upon acceptance, participants were informed of study, purpose, and procedures. Interviews, once scheduled, occurred over the course of 2 months. Each interview was audio recorded and took approximately 60 minutes. The use of an audio recorder captured much more information than relying on memory only (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Field notes were taken during the interview and the sessions to be transcribed were digitally recorded. Participants were informed that all digital recordings would be kept confidential and secured in a box to ensure that the only person who had access was the researcher and that nothing would be published or shared without the participants’ explicit verbal authorized consent (tape recorded during interview).
Interviewing was completed based on research participants’ availability. No particular order was used in scheduling the interview dates and times. An interview schedule was built once all participants had confirmed individual interview appointments. The end of the interview included closing remarks, thanking the interviewee for his time and willingness to contribute to the research, and a reminder that the researcher may need a small follow-up interview for clarification of answers relevant to the analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis began immediately upon collecting data from participants and continued throughout the interview process. Creswell (2003) outlined a process of organizing and preparing the data, reading and reviewing all the data, and then coding the data. The researcher organized and prepared the data by having the audio recordings transcribed by a third-party confidential transcription service. Each participant was assigned a letter and number combination (X1, X2, X3, etc.). Information that could personally identify the participants was removed and replaced with a generalized term using brackets [ ]. These transcriptions were shared with the interviewee to review for accuracy, allowing the opportunity for feedback to ensure that the interview was accurately transcribed. The data were then formally coded for theme emergence to identify patterns and repetition that spoke to categories, subcategories, themes, concepts, and then assertions (Patton, 2015). Additionally, a research expert was used to review a sample of the transcribed interview data to add interrater reliability to the study.

**Interrater Reliability**

To support the interrater reliability of the researcher’s coding process, an expert was consulted. This expert had earned a doctorate and had experience with qualitative
research by conducting analyses of interview transcripts using the NVivo software. Interrater reliability is the use of one or more researchers to independently analyze and code data to establish more consistency in the findings (D. Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Marteau, 1997; Morse, 1997; Patton, 2015). The researcher and the research expert met to compare their independent analyses from samples of the data and made adjustments to increase the reliability of the analysis.

**Limitations**

The researcher conducted a qualitative study using a sample of 12 openly gay male participants from a large survey population. The findings cannot be statistically generalized to the greater population, but it is valid to anticipate that the findings are reflective of the larger population. Due to the limited availability of participants, the study focused only on openly gay male persons excluding other persons with different sexual orientation within the LGBT umbrella. Additionally, a potential limitation was the area where the study was conducted; Northern California is a region where the LGBT population has grown considerably in comparison with other places within the state. A replica of the study in another setting (Southern California, a more conservative population, or another Midwest state), may not produce the same findings.

**Summary**

This research study utilized a case study methodology by interviewing a select group of gay male leaders who are in high-level executive leadership roles in California to elicit themes, patterns, and trends in their lived experiences, focusing particularly on the barriers and supports they experienced throughout their lives. Because of the limited number of openly gay male leaders and the lack of a centralized database, a
nonprobability, purposive sample of 12 cases was used, utilizing the snowball technique. Data collected from personal field notes and transcribed interviews were coded using open coding and NVivo software allowing the identification of repetitive patterns and analyzing results. A chain of evidence was constantly maintained to increase reliability.
Table 1

*Synthesis Matrix of Major Research Concepts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching area</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Overview of references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation in the workplace</td>
<td>The majority of the Fortune 500 companies have implemented workplace protections on the basis of sexual orientation. However, there are still 28 states with laws that allow employers fire employees simply for being openly gay. Influential institutions adopting LGBT inclusion, and milestone events (lift ban on DADT, Repeal of DOMA) contributed to increase gay leadership.</td>
<td>Adams et al., 2013; Baksh, 2016; Cesaretti, 2003; Colgan &amp; Rumens, 2015; L. Cooper, 2009; Fassinger et al., 2010; Fidas et al., 2014; Fortune, 2016; Friskopp &amp; Silverstein, 1995; Irwin, 1999; Kidd, 2015; Kroll, 2016; Mendes, 2013; Miller, 2014; Schneider, 2016.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT leadership</td>
<td>Under the modern concept of leadership, there are figures fitting into this description. This type of leadership arises from grassroots organizing around common groups concerns. LGBT individuals continue to face barriers in the workplace and mobility to executive-level positions.</td>
<td>Adams et al., 2013; Arwood, 2006; Baker &amp; Green, 2007; Browne, 2014; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Catalyst, 2013a, 2013b; Colgan &amp; Rumens, 2015; Diversity, Inc., 2014; Friskopp &amp; Silverstein, 1996; Hayer, 2015; Lorenzetti, 2014; Petroff, 2014; Soares, Cobb, Lebow, Regis, Weinstein, &amp; Woinas; Woog, 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of gay leaders</td>
<td>Gay leaders are the immersion on a culture with emphasis on follower development. Networking with gay leaders is a preferred strategy. Characteristics of gay leaders have always been subjected to a strong barrier: Stereotypes.</td>
<td>Adams et al., 2013; Arminio, 1993; Bass, 1985; Bass &amp; Avolio, 1990; Bass &amp; Stodgill, 1990; Cass, 1979; L. Cooper, 2009; Evans, 1993; Florida, 2002; Keister, 2004; Macoukji 2014; Porter, 1998; Renn &amp; Bilodeau, 2003; Wall &amp; Evans, 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overarching area</td>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Overview of references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models of gay leadership</td>
<td>Corporations prefer to adopt an asexual workplace. Sexuality then is off limits because is labeled as social diversion, imprudent distraction, or an unwanted (i.e., harassment) intrusion. LGBT community is moving toward transformational leadership, as apposing to (heterosexual) transactional and compliance leadership. The learned skills of gay men are intrinsic to their gay experience. Sexual orientation does affect leadership, as the research literature suggests.</td>
<td>Alinsky, 1989; Brower, 2013; Chin &amp; Sanchez-Huiles, 2007; Croteau et al., 2008; Colgan &amp; Rumens, 2015; Colgan et al., 2009; Coon, 2001; L. Cooper, 2009; Eagly &amp; Carli, 2007; Ellis &amp; Riggle, 1995; Fassinger, 2008; Fassinger &amp; Arseneau, 2007; Fassinger et al., 2010; Florida, 2002; Sandownick, 2005; Schein, 1999; Skidmore, 2004; Snyder, 2006; Sheridan &amp; Howard, 2011; Woods, 1984.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers and support on gay leadership</td>
<td>Barriers faced by gay male employees are a lack of awareness, exclusion from essential relationships and advancement opportunities; and an absence of role models. Adversely to barriers, the support and guidance gay male leaders receive from each other is crucial for their professional advancement</td>
<td>Eagly &amp; Karau, 2002; Hayer, 2015; Herek, 1998; Macoukji, 2014; Ostick 201; Sheridan &amp; Howard, 2011; Silva &amp; Warren, 2009; Gates, 2011; Woog, 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical foundation</td>
<td>The theoretical perspectives and models and characteristics of gay leadership, the asexual environment, the G Quotient, transformational leadership, and the LGBT paradigm. Internal and external barriers, and support to gay leaders.</td>
<td>Adams et al., 2013; Bowen &amp; Blackman, 2003; Colgan &amp; Rumens, 2015; Fassinger et al., 2010; Friskopp &amp; Silverstein, 1995; Herzog, 2013; McNaught, 1993a, 1993b; Out &amp; Equal, 2015; Snyder, 2014; Woods, 1984</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

When I became myself, and really knew who I was, I became successful. People see through people that aren’t comfortable with themselves. I’m comfortable with who I am, and I’m comfortable that others know it.

—Participant 2

Overview

This chapter presents and examines the findings of the qualitative research exploring how gay male leaders perceive and describe their leadership journey to attain high-level leadership positions. This chapter summarizes the data collected from 12 interviews of gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions in organizations within California. The findings are organized by interview questions, yielding similarities, trends, and themes that emerged from the responses. Analysis of individual interviews and anecdotes are included, enhancing data channeled to respond to the research questions. This chapter also includes a review of the purpose of the study, research questions, and research methodology. The data collection and data analysis follow these sections in the form of tables depicting themes and patterns from each interview. This chapter concludes with an overall analysis of themes and patterns from all 12 interviews.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to explore and discover the perceptions of California gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions about the types of support they received and the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position. By investigating the theoretical approaches of gay leadership, characteristics, models, social implications, and
workforce interactions in their ascent to leadership, the study reveals unique insights into a highly educated and fast-growing LGBT population in the United States. In addition to providing individual perspectives of the phenomenon, a collective narrative is presented to illuminate the empowerment of embracement, tolerance, and inclusion of a diverse underrepresented group based on sexual orientation.

Research Questions

To examine the lived experience of selected openly-gay male leaders, the study employed a qualitative case study methodology (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Patten, 2012; Yin, 1994) to probe the following research questions.

1. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of support they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?

2. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of barriers they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The research protocols of the study were designed by the researcher, reviewed by the dissertation committee, and approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). An overview of the research process is provided in this section, followed by sections that report data findings and analyses. This descriptive qualitative case study used open-ended semistructured interview questions to explore and describe the perceptions of California gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions about the types of support they received and the types of barriers they encountered along their
leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position. Furthermore, interview questions were asked to attempt to discover any perceived supports and barriers that may have occurred during the journey to attain high-level leadership positions.

To gain information-rich participants who could illuminate this lived journey through meaningful expression, and because of the limited number of openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership roles and the lack of a centralized database, a purposive sample was used. Purposeful sampling (also called purposive sampling) is a strategic selection of “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 265).

Interviews entailed 10 main questions developed using the connotations that emerged from the theoretical framework with additional probing questions, if needed, during each interview (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Alignment of Interview Questions With Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Corresponding interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of support they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?</td>
<td>Question 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?</td>
<td>Question 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Yin (2014), interviews are an excellent source of evidence because they are targeted (focus directly on case study topics) and insightful, providing
explanation as well as personal views (e.g., perceptions, attitudes, and meanings). The analytical strategy of pattern matching was used to code and analyze data from interviews. For case study analysis, one of the most used techniques is to use a pattern-matching logic (Trochim, 1989; Yin, 2014) among the participants’ responses and patterns predicted based on the literature review. Analysis started with sharing some of the participants’ responses to establish how they connected to the interview questions, and later using tables to reflect the themes and patterns of the participants based on the full transcript. Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 as well as the corresponding probing questions were designed to answer Research Question 1 in determining the participants’ perceptions of types of support received throughout their journey to leadership. Interview Questions 1, 2, and 5 were developed to seek responses implicating the existence of desires, role models, facts, physical environments, circumstances, and constituents contributing to attain promotions, ascensions, and top-level positions within organizations. Interview Questions 3 and 7 were designed to identify traits, characteristics, skills, and inherent features influencing and determining their rise to leadership positions. Interview Question 8 looked for groups, channels, and communities playing a significant role in their journey to high management.

Interview Questions 4, 6, 9, and 10 and the corresponding probe questions were developed to respond to Research Question 2, seeking the existence of barriers obstructing their path to leadership. Interview Questions 6 and 9 were constructed to distinguish obstacles, impediments, deficiencies, and struggles the participants experienced during their journey. Interview Questions 4 and 10 were framed to reveal those key elements directly associated with their sexual orientation, which highly
impacted their life, highlighting the transition from behaving according to traditional social norms to being openly gay, especially within their organizations.

**Interview Questions**

To examine the lived experience of selected openly gay male leaders, the study employed a qualitative case study to probe the following interview questions.

1. Can you share with me what inspired you to become a leader in your career?
2. What factors most influenced your decision to pursue leadership roles?
3. Can you describe what strengths supported your rise to leadership or presented barriers to you?
4. Can you describe how coming out/being out has impacted your role as a leader?
   a. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?
5. Who or what—people, places, or events—would you identify as being significant influence in your journey to attain a leadership position?
6. Can you describe what weaknesses you had which presented barriers to you?
7. Can you describe any qualities gay men possess that either enhance or detract from their role as a leader?
8. What networks—if any—did you reach to as you sought to achieve a high-level leadership position?
   a. Personal and professional gay mentors
   b. Personal and professional non-LGBT mentors
9. How would you describe any barriers related to your sexual orientation that you experienced during your career?”
a. Internal/personal barriers?

b. Social barriers?

c. Financial barriers?

10. What key insights from your leadership journey, as they relate to being openly gay, can you share with other gay males who aspire to become leaders?

**Data Collection Protocol**

After approval to conduct the study was obtained, potential participants were contacted by the researcher via e-mail requesting their participation in the study. Participants who agreed to participate were sent an informational letter regarding the nature of the study, the informed consent for participation, and the Brandman University Research Participant’s Bill of Rights. Once reviewed and confirmation of their approval to participate was obtained, each participant received the interview protocol and all interview questions in the exact wording and order they would be asked. Participants returned the signed informed consent paperwork to the researcher in person at the time of the interview, agreeing to be audio recorded. Interviews were scheduled to be conducted in person or via telephone upon the participant’s request. Interviews were recorded using an application on an iPhone to ensure the quality of the recording. Interviews were immediately sent using the same application from the iPhone for professional transcription. The transcriptions of the interviews were reviewed by the transcriber, researcher, and participants to ensure that accurate responses were captured. Interviews were then uploaded to NVivo, coding software used for qualitative research data analysis. Each interview transcription was coded individually to draw out themes and patterns. To ensure interrater reliability, the coding of the same interview transcripts was given to a
subject matter expert for analysis in order to increase accuracy. The researcher and subject matter expert compared results and agreed that the percentage of accuracy was high and interrater reliability was met.

**Population and Sample**

Participants for this research were 12 openly gay males who hold high-level leadership positions and work within the California. These participants met the criteria of being openly gay males at work, working in California cities (Chatsworth, La Jolla, Los Angeles, Moreno Valley, Ontario, Palm Springs, Pasadena, and San Diego), and were currently holding high-level management positions.

For the purposes of this case study, purposeful sampling was used by the researcher to obtain the sample. In order to meet particular elements of this study, purposeful sampling was conducted to gain insight from openly gay school district superintendents, an openly gay city councilmember, openly gay chief officers at law firms, an openly gay director of mental health at state prisons, an openly gay director of human resources, an openly gay general manager at a resort, and a foreign civil service officer. According to Patten (2012), purposeful sampling is used to select individuals who the researcher believes will be good sources of information. Michael Patton (2015) described purposeful sampling as “cases for study that illuminate and offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 46). Yin (2014) suggested that purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77).
Table 3 places all 12 participants in order of interview schedule, breakdown of age range, type of industry, and educational level.

Table 3

*Demographic Data From Participant Questionnaire and Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Openly gay at workplace</th>
<th>Leader in U.S. organization</th>
<th>Age category</th>
<th>Field/industry</th>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41-65</td>
<td>Education/Human Rights</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41-65</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
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Presentation of Findings

In order to draw out themes and patterns, the data collected were analyzed and studied through individual examination of each participant’s responses. Analysis started with sharing some of the participants’ responses to establish how they connected to the interview questions and later using tables to reflect the themes and patterns of the participants based on the full transcript. Multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the pattern matching, thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory (Yin, 1994). To protect participants’ confidentiality, a numerical identifier was assigned to each participant in the order interviews were conducted. Once individual interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the data were organized in reference to each research question through the interview questions. Tables were created for each individual interview to draw out common themes and patterns among all responses from the 12 participants.

Data Findings by Research Questions and Interview Questions

The first research question of the study was, “How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of support they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?” To elucidate the assistance, inspirations, role models, strengths, qualities, and the overall factors contributing to achieve leadership positions, responses to Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 illustrate these constituents, and the analysis allowed the researcher to deduct the significant influences. Participants 1 through 12 reported a variety of examples and situations that were embedded in their lived experience. Following are excerpts from participants’ responses:
Interview Question 1. Can you share with me what inspired you to become a leader in your career?

Participant 1.

My inspiration to become a leader in education is that I’m the youngest of seven from a Mexicana family. The oldest sibling when he went to school, kindergarten in 1935, he was denied entry of the school because it was a White school and he was Mexicano. My grandfather worked with the superintendent and the leaders of the city to try to get my brother in, and he ended up being the first Latino educator and administrator. So, when I grew up, he was my teacher, and so I immediately wanted to become a teacher, and he became a principal when I decided I would be a principal as well. So, I would follow right in his footsteps to do that. I think he probably was the most inspirational. So, that would probably be my initial in terms of who was inspirational in terms of me getting into my field as a leader.

So, as I became a teacher, I knew I wanted to become a principal. I specifically targeted what I was going to teach because I knew where I was going. So, I didn’t just be placed wherever they placed me. I wanted to teach kindergarten, that’s what I did, I wanted to teach first grade that’s what I did, I wanted to teach third grade that’s what I did, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, I wanted to teach all the grades so that no teacher would tell me I didn’t know what I was doing. And I did.

Participant 2.

Well, when I was in school as a student, a young student, I was in the principal’s office a lot because I was in trouble. I used to talk a lot, and I was very social.
When I was growing up, you couldn’t read. I used to get sent to the principal’s office. I would be in there a lot, and I would think to myself, “I want to be a principal, because I like being in here but I would really be different than the principal is.” I would get to know these kids, and try to understand them instead of paddling them like they did me. That’s why I told everybody I wanted to be a principal. The elementary principal was Mrs. [name], and she was in charge of things, and I liked that. I like being in charge. She was responsible for stuff, and I thought that was neat.

Then my high school principal Mr. [name], he inspired me because our school had a lot of problems, because it was during integration, when they bused in a lot of Black kids. I liked the way that he treated them. I was surprised that he was understanding. He lived in San Diego, and that’s where he died. I think he wanted them to feel welcome. That inspired me because I thought that’s really nice. He didn’t have to be that way. I think there were a lot of teachers that weren’t nice to those kids, because I saw that. I think that’s what a leader does. I didn’t know that then, but that inspired me to want to do that. All of this happened in Tennessee. The South in the 70s.

Participant 3.

I don’t know if it started with me being inspired by something, I think it was individuals in my life believing . . . seeing something in me that I didn’t, and maybe that was a lot of self-doubt and maybe some self-torment that I put on myself over the years because I’m a gay male and having a lot of shame and doubt about what that meant about me as an individual growing up. It took me a
long time to overcome, but I think individuals in my life saw something in me and lifted me up and encouraged me to go further, and would point things out that I never saw myself, or didn’t affirm in myself, that helped me, encouraged me, to be in certain leadership roles.

**Participant 4.**

My parents are wonderful people. They come from a very humble background: maid and a gardener. What we did not have in material wealth, I think they made up for in incredible morals and values that they taught my brother and I. There’s generally the understanding that we had a responsibility to leave things better than we found it. I think that’s a recipe for public service. It’s exactly what I do. I don’t wake up to move a stock price or improve a shareholders report, I just try to make the world a better place. I think my parents sent us a message, rather unintentionally, because they weren’t registered to vote, and they’re not particularly political people, but that message or that instruction from them to my brother and I, I think is what sort of set me on this journey to public service.

**Participant 5.**

Well, there was no intention at all to be a leader. It just happened as I wound up in leadership positions just because of a lot of things that happened as I progressed through my career. I was encouraged a lot by mentors and supervisors. They invited me to take on roles, take on responsibilities, which led to leadership roles. I took civil service examinations since I was in civil service, and usually I wound up in the top rank; and by being in the top rank in a
competitive civil service examination, you're being recruited, immediately, to be a supervisor or a manager.

And I also continued formal education. I’m master’s in social work, master’s in public administration, and then at one point when I thought I was going to retire early, master’s in Asia Pacific studies, and then my PhD in public administration. But the real theme of all this for me, as we talk, is that I was an outsider in the organization as a gay man, and I saw things differently than the people inside the organization wherever I was.

So, I was encouraged and brought in by the people that were status quo because of my education, my background, my ability to write, and they actually turned to me. Since I was different, I came from an outside perspective, that led to a different kind of role. That’s my best answer to that question. I came from a world where I was rejected. When I began my career, my original intention was to go into a career in foreign service. I wanted to be an ambassador. My next-door neighbor was the United States Consulate General in Tijuana, and I went with him to his consulate, and I thought, “Wow. This is what I want to do. I want to represent the country in other countries.”

Participant 6.

At work, a lot of my job here has just been progressing in this career. I started in the business in the reservations office. I started at the ground level, and worked here summers when I was going through college, came back, and meant to actually go and have a career in theater or arts administration. Had a job here, that eventually won out. That was almost 30 years ago, so this is the only place
I’ve ever worked. We were doing a lot of renovation and buying new projects, a lot of building. I did a lot of finance and project management, then became the chief financial officer here, and went to law school at night. When I came back out of college, I intended to do theater work, and I had an internship at the old Globe. I had spent a lot of time in college directing and producing theater and meant to do that. Eventually, became interested in the work I was doing here, thought as long as it stays interesting and I can keep growing here, then I’ll stay here. Several steps along the way, reconsidered that and looked at it and this was still a good place to be. I’m still here. I grew up in Southern California and went to high school here in San Diego. Started doing that, went back East to go to college, and unlike many of my classmates who’ve moved to New York or Washington DC or somewhere on the East Coast, I came straight back to San Diego.

Participant 7.

I don’t think . . . I think I always just was taught to do your best at everything. So, you just tried hard . . . and my parents both had difficult lives and came out of adversity and it was always expected that I would do the same and do my best at whatever I tried.

Participant 8.

I was an elementary school teacher, and I knew even in my early time as a teacher that I wanted to make a difference. Even though I loved the classroom, I wanted to figure out, “How can I apply this so that I can make a difference on a wider scale?” I was working on my administrative credential and my master’s, and
[company] approached me and said, “Would you consider doing some work for us?” I don’t know that I’ve seen myself as this big natural leader. I have been drawn to it, and I think just by my personality. I went to work for [company], left the classroom, and I thought, “I will always go back to the classroom.” I would struggle the first 6 months, and I just ended up making a career at [company], and after 3 years, I lived in Fresno, I taught in Fresno Unified, I told my boss, “If there’s ever an opportunity, I would love to get out of the valley.” She called me one day and said, “We’d like to transfer you to San Diego.” They moved me to San Diego, and within a year she was promoted.

That started my career. I said I went from teaching first grade to being the VP of sales on the West for [company], with not a lot of. . . . Luckily, she remained my boss. That probably started my career in leadership, because I had a really strong mentor. She was tough in many ways, but I learned a lot from her. [Company] was this well-known publisher, but in some ways still kind of small and traditional, and I was able to really . . . Again, because of her support and mentorship, I was able to do a lot as a young manager. I was probably like 30. I’ve been in various VP roles in publishing, publishing and educational technology.

**Participant 9.**

Well, I guess, I’m a lawyer and so I like the profession and I just thought, I pretty much ran from my leadership positions and you know don’t really know if you’re going [to] get elected. So, I thought, well I’ll stick my neck out and it worked. I got elected and then I ran for higher convictions. I guess just mostly to help the
profession. I think lawyers do good things and I know lawyers can do a lot of things, so I thought I could help. I guess that’s why. I wanted to help the profession.

**Participant 10.**

I think that the most important issue for me in my entire life, not just in my career, is justice. Alongside that, injustice. Everything that I’ve done, every project I’ve taken up, every cause I fought for has been because I have felt that there is some injustice taking place that needed to be corrected. That was the case with my work on [country]. I’m a former Soviet Union. It was the case with my work around HIV/AIDS and it’s the case with my work today around LGBT rights.

**Participant 11.**

I think that the opportunity presented itself somewhat on a natural basis for me. I happened to take a position that was not a popular position or in a popular field. Working in prisons and working in corrections back in [the] early 2000s was not popular. There was not much focus on prison mental health. It interested me, but I don’t believe that I had a particular calling or draw to it.

Having this opportunity, I fell into it. Being in an unpopular field I think gave me the opportunity to obtain leadership positions initially. My first leadership position, there were very few people who I think were interested in it. That sort of gave me the opportunity to get in on the ground floor I want to say. Once that occurred, there was a change then in society and how the public viewed prison mental health and prison healthcare to the point that all of a sudden [be]came a hot area. It’s sort of like I got in on the ground floor before it became
very popular. There weren’t many people who knew a lot about it. Having worked in it for a couple years at that time, I can’t say I had a whole lot of expertise it, but I had more than others coming into the field.

In terms of then seeking the leadership positions, I pursued them because there was a vacuum in leadership or vacuum in talent because these weren’t well-paying jobs. I felt it was sort of a way to still use my skills but, at the same time, to follow a particular calling that I had always had. I had wanted to serve an underserved population. A lot of it comes, I think, from my undergraduate training where they really worked with us to help us understand that we have a particular calling. We have to determine or find out what that is. I think that that’s sort of what happened to me.

Participant 12.

I would say my interest in working with others and building relationships, I would say part of the inspiration was how fortunate I was in my career because as you tend to take on more responsibilities, eventually they want you to move into management and eventually leadership. I also had great mentors along the way who probably inspired me as well, saying I was capable of doing more. I would say that certainly was a part of it, I also grew up in a small town, and I think there was a bit of “I can do it” once I live the small town and go to the big city sort of thing. There was a little bit of that, I’d like to be a successful professional some day and despite all the odds. I think that was probably part of it as well.

I like to teach, I like to help others. I think even in the professional environment, there are some of that. 1% that you give someone creates other than
99% and when you see them grow and do well, it just feels really good. Someone did it for you, so wouldn’t it be nice if you can do it for others, so I think that sort of what inspires me is that constant opportunity that keeps coming back saying look at this one, he’s 25, 26 years old, he is just getting started. I would like to be an inspiration to that, so I think that’s probably part of it. I get gratification out of it and I also hopefully help others.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 1.** The first question of the interview encompassed the overall desire of openly gay males to become top leaders. Brief comparative data findings and analysis of the initial inspiration are presented as follows. Table 4 presents the researcher’s analysis of the general themes that emanated from the interview responses to illustrate the individual and collective lived experience.

Table 4

*Interview Question 1: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses*

<table>
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<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
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<td>1. Can you share with me what inspired you to become a leader in your career?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>C. Making difference for others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Positive role models</td>
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**Personal awareness.** Most participants described having high confidence levels about their abilities, enabling them to take risks and accept challenges leading to leadership roles. Although at the beginning of their careers they were not pursuing top leadership positions, the openly gay males of this study expressed their full consciousness
of their originally limited technical capabilities, forcing them to realize the importance of education. The aspiration to pursue dreams was present in many participants; a self-determination increased after they were out of the closet and feeling comfortable with themselves, making them fully aware of their true selves. This resonated with the strategies of self-awareness, “Getting to know yourself inside and out is a continuous journey of peeling back the layers of the onion and becoming more and more comfortable with what is in the middle—the true essence of you” (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 61).

**Educational attainment.** Every participant possessed a bachelor’s degree or higher, including seven participants with doctoral degrees. All participants described the value of their educational history in developing a solid foundation for success. The educational setting armed participants with strategic thinking, communication, and sources for effective networking and personal and professional development. Education was identified as an important factor in their journey to high-level leadership positions.

**Making a difference for others.** Altruistic attitudes were found in most participants to promote positive affective states and personal satisfaction. Such attitudes reflected a willingness to help others and an orientation characterized by generosity of spirit of the gay male leaders. Participant 3 was convinced that his inspiration to become a leader was the desire to help others, it was his call,

> They saw [in me] drive, they saw someone that never doubted . . . they saw someone who was on this earth for a mission, and a purpose, and I wholeheartedly believe that the work that I’m doing, helping students and kids, is why I was put on this earth. I love doing this work and I think they saw that. The only person that was holding me back was me.
Role models. All participants, at different times during their journey, were inspired by role models. These role models included parents, siblings, extended family, teachers, principals, colleagues, mentors, and other people within their professional environment. In all cases, motivations and efficacies were registered early in life and later during the participants’ careers. Four participants were specifically motivated by economic struggle during their childhoods, growing up in low-income families with working parents and siblings. Six participants expressed gratitude for certain teachers during their early years and for educators who acted as professional mentors to broaden their educational and professional experiences in the education field. These role models provided the participants with great motivation to continue the journey. Participants 1, 3, and 4 were inspired by gay-themed TV shows and gay characters, realizing that people with the same sexual orientation were capable of navigating throughout heterosexual environments and able to attain leadership roles.

It is pertinent to emphasize responses from two participants who were influenced by their personal doubts and fears, as the literature review suggested. Although it was not a common pattern of influence in all participants, it was still deemed appropriate to be considered as a factor of influence, even if it was rooted in an adverse feeling. Being gay during a time without LGBT rights was dangerous and forced gay males to remain in the closet; the fear of being outed was constant. Participants 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 12 began their careers during this time, conditioning their behavior on the established socio-heteronormative laws (Ariste, 1984; Pringle, 2008), leaving the LGBT community without legal protection. Nine participants showed strong leadership traits, but the fear of being outed made them question themselves on a personal level about whether they
would be able to overcome these fears. Participant 3 indicated that he did not know if his inspiration to become a leader

started with me being inspired by something in particular, I think it was

individuals in my life believing . . . seeing something in me that I didn’t, and

maybe that was a lot of self-doubt and maybe some self-torment that I put on

myself over the years because I’m a gay male and having a lot of shame and

doubt about what that meant about me as an individual growing up. It took me a

long time to overcome, but I think individuals in my life saw something in me and

lifted me up and encouraged me to go further, and would point things out that I

never saw myself, or didn’t affirm in myself, that helped me, encouraged me, to

be in certain leadership roles.

Participant 1 expressed that there was no doubt about his desire to have the power. However, he thought that part of that power base, the need,

was the thing that I didn’t get in terms of being gay. You know I sort of gave up my power, I gave up myself, I gave up my self-identity, and I gave up my love for myself. And that sort of drove the need to have power somewhere where I could be respected and honored there, because I never thought I’d be honored on this side of the world.

Following are excerpts from participants’ responses to Interview Question 2. These responses provide facts and elements contributing to participants’ path to leadership.

**Interview Question 2.** What factors most influenced your decision to pursue leadership roles?
Participant 1.

Self-determination. When I was a teacher, I loved the results I got as a teacher with my 25-30 kids. At that time in my teaching career and at that time in education, there was a lot of teaming going on. You would team with your grade-level team or your team with your four, five, six, or K1-3 so when there was teaming going on, they identified a team leader. Team leader oversaw a group of teachers. So, I wanted to be a team leader, to affect more than the 30 kids in my class. So, I became a team leader and affected maybe 120 kids. Well that was enough appetite for me. To say I want more than 120, I want to be a principal, where now I have 5-600 kids. So, that desire to greatly affect the lives of more and more kids was probably the biggest factor of me wanting to jump into a principalship role.

Plus, I loved by that time, I loved the fact that I wanted to be a staff development person. I wanted to be a trainer, I wanted to help teachers, I wanted to train other people, and the only way you could do that beside actually being a staff film and presenter was either to apply for a staff to build presenter, there weren’t may positions there, or go into administration where I would have control over my own staff.

Participant 2.

Well, I don’t like to be told what to do. I mean, I guess I don’t mind it, but I like to create things, and I like to be creative. I’m innovative. In leadership, you get the chance to do that. Even when you’re a teacher you can be creative and innovative. I think as a teacher I was. I think that, that’s why principals would
say to me, “You should be a principal. You should go into leadership.” I think when you say what factors most influence you, it was the idea that I could create something, or I could develop something, or I could take something and make it better than when I got it.

Creativity and autonomy were an important issue. The autonomy, I like the autonomy because when you’re in leadership, you solve a lot of problems. I like solving problems. I don’t mind if people have problems. I meet with a lot of people that are upset. It helps that I want to help solve their problem. It’s because I listen, but I’m also listening to hear what they want because I want to solve their problem. That’s leadership because I want to help them feel better.

I don’t think it’s about power. It’s about influence. I think you influence people. I try to model what I expect. That’s work together, and to be collaborative, and to support people. You can’t give everybody what they want, but you can listen to them, and you can think about what they want. I don’t like to be told what to do. I think it stifles creativity when somebody tells you how to do something. I think it limits what you can create and do. I just think that you have to think outside the box. Everybody does the same thing all the time. It becomes routine. I just think you have to add a little difference sometimes.

Participant 3.

I think the very first role model that I saw that I wanted to be like was the show, *Who’s the Boss*? And it was a female character, the main lead female character who was like an executive in marketing, and I don’t know, for whatever reason, I wanted to aspire to be like her. As I got later in life, in high school, there started
to be gay men on TV. One of which was an HIV positive man, Pedro Zamora, I
think his name was on MTV’s the real world, and it was the first time I saw an
openly gay individual on television that was living his life authentically and
openly, with people that were not gay in a house. As MTV the real world is, and I
think that helped me to see that I might be able to be gay and have support from
non-gay individuals. That was the first time I think I saw that. Another TV show
was also on MTV called My So-Called Life, and an actor by the name of Wilson
Cruz, who I now actually know in real life, played an openly gay character.

A lot of it for me is about being curious and wanting to continue growing
myself. I guess more than anything else it was about this personal achievement,
personal growth. I’m sorry to keep saying the same word over and over, but my
assumption is that they saw passion. They saw drive, they saw someone that
never doubted . . . they saw someone who was on this earth for a mission, and a
purpose, and I wholeheartedly believe that the work that I’m doing, helping
students and kids, is why I was put on this earth. I love doing this work and I
think they saw that. The only person that was holding me back was me. I wanted
to always be successful, it’s not like I wanted to be a teacher and I was happy with
that forever. But, I don’t know if I would have been able to excel and to do what
I’m doing now if people wouldn’t have pushed me in that direction. And I give
them credit for seeing something in me, that was more than I thought of myself.
Participant 4.

People encouraged me to run for office, which is kind of a luxury right. Some people self-identify as, “I’m going to do this.” In my particular case, I was very fortunate to have folks I respected a great deal say, “We think you should run.”

At the time I was, what I though was, very young. I was probably 23 or there about when someone first suggested [it] to me, and it was that external encouragement that I think led me to even consider it, let alone end up doing it and end up doing it successfully. I figured out what I was passionate about. I mean equality certainly was always a thing. Obviously, that was personally impactful to me, but during those intervening years, I became involved in issues around affordable housing and nonprofits and other stuff like that. I think I understood then, because I was running for city council, how being on a city council could help that.

[Name] and others we could say that that’s sort of like a mentor. I’ve been fortunate. That’s a big part of it, too. Someone suggesting that I run, those people are mentors as well. I wouldn’t be here without good mentors.

Participant 5.

Well there’s another aspect of this I can talk about of being an outsider. And the question is how do you deal with that? Some people become sex addicts. Some people get depressed. Some people will become alcoholics. Some will become drug addicts. Some will resort to crime. Different people cope with this in different ways. Many of us become workaholics. That’s me. There’re dozens of different ways of coping with that internal feeling of shame. Some will eat, some
will wear a lot of jewelry and be flamboyant, a whole lot of different ways of coping with that in his theory. My way of coping with it, from day one, is work. That’s why I have three master’s and a PhD. That’s why I would work 12, 14 hours a day. And I’ve done a lot of stuff and accomplished a whole lot of things, so that’s not all a negative. Rejection is my history, I talked little bits about it with the foreign service, and I was bullied in school from day one, told to leave parole.

We were living in fear every day, so that shame is always there. So, that kicker that’s causing me to be a workaholic, that motivation is always there, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but it gets real old. We needed to compensate, well that’s what it’s about, and that’s what this book talks about. But on the other hand, is that you need a support network out there also, or just becomes too much, because we’re all human. And so, part of the motivation, I don’t know about a decision to produce leadership role, but part of the motivation to keep me moving, that got me into leadership roles was this, he calls it in Velvet Rage “shame,” it’s certainly got me being a workaholic, which got me into leadership roles. But there’s a limit to how much you can do without a support network behind you. At least, that’s my message, if that makes sense. So, what it was is I had to make myself, constantly, essential to the organization I work for, they needed to need me, and that’s what kept me safe. There was a need. . . . We need you.
Participant 6.

I suppose. I just never . . . It would never occur to me to stay static in one place. I always imagined that I would continue in my career and have increasing levels of responsibility as I grew older, so I wasn’t as much pursuing it as I just sort of expected that that’s what I would do. It would be great if I could do that here, as long as they kept giving me more responsibility and positions of more . . . that were interesting. A lot of it for me is about being curious and want[ing] to continue growing myself. I guess more than anything else it was about this personal achievement, personal growth.

Participant 7.

There’s a risk in advancing, you know there’s fewer people at the top and the farther you move up, the more likely it is you might not make the right cut or whatever, but you can be in a position where you make decisions instead of just following orders from other people, and that just seemed more appealing to me to be able to influence and change things rather than just take orders.

Oh, I had a few people in my career that looked out for me and thought I was capable of maybe more than I thought I was capable of and helped me and pushed me. And I’m the last of six kids, so I have five older siblings that were further along in their careers and had experiences they could share with me to help with me.

Participant 8.

I like leading and managing and driving a business, and I’ve always felt like I’ve had a loner business. When I went to work for [company] [name], fabulous
president, she said, “If you’re going to lead for me, you have to come into this office.” I went to [city] once a month, my division was based there, and that is where I really learned about leading. What I’ve loved about leading, too, and I see it across leaders and even managers here at the university, is I’ve not had any ego wrapped up in it, even though oftentimes when you’re in a leadership role it’s seen as “he’s the boss,” or he’s whatever. What instinctively, and I think intrinsically, I think, drives me, is I really just like making a difference. I like figuring out a plan and how to work strategically in making everyone successful.

Our program is about building relationships. I’ve had [to] pull out every skill I have, and I’m having to still . . . I think the beauty of being a leader, too, is, you never stop learning. I’ve said that to people. If you think you hung the moon, you’re going to struggle in some of these companies, because they want to know that you’re still going to learn.

It’s a two-way communication between you and the subordinates. It’s interesting that relationship. I think that’s true of humans. I don’t care what age. I’ve always coached my managers, because I’ve had multiple managers report to me, that if you lead by title, the day you step into the role it will be a struggle. Because if people believe that you’re managing them, and not building a relationship and working with them and developing them, they don’t want to work for you.

Participant 9.

That’s a good, well, I don’t really know, to be honest. I guess a desire to . . . The profession had been good to me, and so I wanted to give back and especially with
other gay lawyers. I know the profession is a little tougher when you’re gay. It’s gotten better, but I thought I could help. And I really like to, don’t know about mentor but just be around younger gay lawyers and be there for a sounding board and advice. I guess that’s a factor. I wanted to be in a place where I could do that. I wanted to be in a role where I could do that.

**Participant 10.**

I think that as young gay men or I say young boys, many of us myself included are driven to excel in order to prove our worth to our families, our parents, our teachers, our ministers, our Boy Scout leaders. We’re not part of this beautiful painting of American life. I think that, in part, as a survival mechanism when you’re young, you don’t want to disappoint your parents. You want to do the best . . . the absolute best you can and for me. I think that is what helped nudge me into leadership roles that was a sign of success. Alongside of that is the challenge, the comfort I have with making big decisions.

There are many pieces. I think one of the main ones though that I would hope is explored in your research on is the role with the need to excel and prove oneself. Shapes are decisions and shapes are personalities as young people . . . before we ever come out of the closet, but we know we’re gay and we know the consequences of being found out. My parents were not supportive initially. For the first year and a half or so, they were very . . . they were just the opposite. They were quite actively not supportive, but I knew that they would be. . . . I knew that they would come around. I knew that this would be a wonderful experience for them as people, as humans, as conscious beings.
Participant 11.

I think that the opportunity presented itself somewhat on a natural basis for me personally. I happened to take a position that was not a popular position or in a popular field. Working in prisons and working in corrections back in early 2000 was not popular. Being in an unpopular field I think gave me the opportunity to obtain leadership positions initially. It’s sort of like I got in on the ground floor before it became very popular. There weren’t many people who knew a lot about it.

In terms of then seeking the leadership positions, I pursued them because there was a vacuum in leadership or vacuum in talent because these weren’t well-paying jobs. They’re civil service jobs. People could make a lot more in other areas. I felt it was sort of a way to still use my skills, but at the same time to follow a particular calling that I had always had. I had wanted to serve an underserved population. Part of me has always been a fish out of water in terms of not wanting to pursue what everyone else was pursuing. It was a bit unique.

A lot of it comes I think from my undergraduate training where they really worked with us to help us understand that we have a particular calling. We have to determine or find out what that is. I think that that’s sort of what happened to me. I didn’t know that this was for me until I got into it and then decided that this is something I wanted to pursue.

I think another factor is my undergraduate training; I have an undergrad, a BA in psychology and a BA in French. More than that I went to a small Catholic college that was sponsored by the [charity company]. Spending 4 years there and
more than anything, they wanted to teach us how to think, how to problem solve, how to evaluate. The reason I chose that university, again, it was not a very popular choice. The reason I chose that university was because of that mission. There was a mission of service, a mission of acknowledging the role of poverty in people’s lives and how that plays a factor.

**Participant 12.**

Well, I guess I’ll start with the very factual piece, which is just capital accumulation compensation. Usually to achieve higher earnings you need to take on more responsibility. I would say that’s certainly on the list, it shouldn’t be the primary one, but [in] reality, it certainly influences it. I think I’m fortunate that I have a confidence level about my abilities so that probably enables me to take on more thinking that even if I don’t know I can figure it out. I don’t have a lot of advanced education I just have a bachelor’s degree in accounting. I was more interested in achieving more in the working environment than I was in the academic environment. I guess that’s pretty much what influenced, I don’t know if it was a conscious decision or if it was a subconscious one.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 2.** Brief comparative data findings and analysis of the most influential factors are presented as follows. Table 5 presents the researcher’s analysis of the general themes that emanated from the interview responses to illustrate the individual and collective lived experience.
Table 5

*Interview Question 2: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What factors most influenced your decision to pursue leadership roles?</td>
<td>A. Desire to lead, impact others, and have power</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Education and professional skills</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Gay identity and gay constituents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Personal growth and opportunity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Desire to lead, impact others, and have power.** Eleven participants expressed their determination to affect other people’s lives by doing the right thing. All four participants in the education field knew since childhood that they wanted to become principals so they could influence and help children. Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 10, and 12 described having a desire for power. However, their reasons for wanting that power were different. Participants 1 and 3 had no doubt about their desire to have power and be in control, while Participants 2 and 6 did not think it was about power, but about influencing others through their passions. For Participants 10 and 12, power was associated with getting respect and being questioned less (as heterosexual leaders are). Having power was deemed necessary to influence others, as A. Savage (2002) stated, because corporate culture nearly always shifts to a culture based on power and not necessarily on performance or results.

**Education and professional skills.** Education was a powerful factor in all participants. Except for Participants 4 and 12, all had master’s degrees, and eight participants had doctoral degrees. All participants extolled the importance of building a solid foundation based on education. Skills and abilities, such as writing,
communication, collaboration, building relationships, project management, and being a progressive visionary and a problem solver, were acquired through the educational setting. Having a higher education degree provided the participants with self-confidence, respect, and personal awareness, allowing them to escalate to top leadership positions. The intersectionality of having a higher education degree and being gay was an influential factor when pursuing high-level leadership positions.

**Gay identity and gay constituents.** Gay-related factors influencing participants to pursue leadership positions were identified in all participants in various positive and negative experiences. Participant 1 emphasized that the price for taking leadership positions during his journey was too high.

> You know I sort of gave up my power, I gave up myself, I gave up my self-identity I gave up my love for myself. And that sort of drove the need to have power somewhere where I could be respected and honored there, because I never thought I’d be honored on this side of the world.

Participant 2 correlated his leadership directly with his inherent gay attributes, such as creativity and innovation, convinced that gay people have different views. Participant 3 was influenced by the television character of the program *Who’s the Boss*, and *My So-Called Life*, encouraging him to pursue leadership positions. Participant 4 was influenced and supported by the gay community to use his political power to help the underserved LGBT minority. For Participants 5, 6, and 9, being an outsider was an important factor to for them reach management positions. However, Participants 6 and 7 considered that their success was based mostly on personal achievement and personal growth. Being gay was an impediment for Participant 10, when he tried to obtain top
secret security clearance to work for a foreign-service agency, and was denied—originally—because the “possibilities that [he] could be blackmailed.”

**Personal growth and opportunity.** Six participants reported that identifying professional opportunities was a major factor to escalate to executive positions. While each individual participant identified opportunity differently, identical commonalities emerged in Participants 3 and 6, when both described that an important factor was about being curious and wanting to continue growing themselves. Participant 2, 5, and 8 identified opportunity offered by mentors, and Participants 5 and 10 recognized that venturing in unpopular fields established a path to leadership and personal growth.

The intent of Interview Question 3 was to identify the strengths participants mentioned and key factors on their path to attaining high-level leadership positions. Brief comparative data findings and analysis of these strengths are presented as follows. Table 5 presents the researcher’s analysis of the general themes that emanated from the interview responses to illustrate the experiences.

**Interview Question 3.** Can you describe what strengths supported your rise to leadership?

**Participant 1.**

The strengths that I have and had then and continue to have [are] certainly my desire to be a leader, my leadership skills. My leadership skills, meaning that I’m not an autocratic leader, I’m more of a collaborative leader. I like to work with teams and people to move in certain directions. I’m not a top-down type of person, although I can be when needed. So, I have those management leadership skills, I’m also beyond a manager. So, I’m a progressive visionary, and I could
tie it by knowing I’m gay, fearing I’m gay, so therefore I knew I had to be better than anyone else. Had to be better. Could go the opposite way, where a lot of people go: I’m gay, defeated, I’m victim. Let me just have a shitty life. I took the other road. I’m going to be so good.

Participant 2.

My strengths are I’m a real people person. I’m really relational. I like to talk to people. I love to meet people. I enjoy their stories, and I enjoy people who are different than me. I think that being gay it’s a real strength. I’ve never said that before. I also think it was a weakness too. I always perceived that it was a weakness. I did. I didn’t know if anybody else did. I always thought for instance like when I got this position, I thought they’re not going to choose me because I’m gay. That’s what I said, but nobody ever said that to me.

Another strength I think that, as I learned more about myself, and I felt as I became more comfortable with who I am, I think I became okay with what . . . Even if it was negative, I was okay with it. I couldn’t change who I was, and I wasn’t going to change who I was. I think it’s so important to be who you are, and to allow others into something that you’re not.

Participant 3.

Again, I think I would attribute my very first experiences in leadership from other people believing in me, and seeing things that I didn’t see in myself. I wish I did see those things in myself, but I think I had a lot of self-doubt, and probably some low self-esteem. I think that revolves around my gay identity, and having Catholic guilt, or just guilt in general about being a gay man. I think pushed me
to not feel highly about myself, so I think as I started to work in jobs that were not necessarily leadership roles, people pushing me up because they saw something in me again that I didn’t think I saw in myself. Once I made decisions to start tiptoeing in leadership roles, so to speak, I think I realized that I enjoyed it and that I could help to lead groups of people that helped them and helped the people that I was trying to benefit. In this case I was in education, so if I was in leadership roles I might be able to then benefit other educators and then benefit.

I think the strengths were, once I got a touch of leadership, once I was able to taste it and experience it and realize that if I’m in these leadership roles, I can make a greater impact, which is directly tied to my passion. So, my passion is helping kids and children better themselves and be successful and believe in themselves.

**Participant 4.**

I’m pretty tenacious. I don’t give up relatively easily, which is helpful in this line of work. It’s a work ethic, right? I mentioned my parents, that [is] their background. These are not lazy people. They’re really hardworking people. I’m grateful to them. Again, what they couldn’t give me in material wealth, they gave me in good morals and values. The idea that you got to work hard. Particularly for a man of color, you got to work twice as hard to get half as much, right? I think a lot of ways that was a good thing for someone running for office because frankly, you got to work extremely hard. As I like to say, “It’s not a job, it’s a lifestyle.” You work every day. No one is doing eight to five around here.
I think personality trait helped me very early on to be kind of identified as an overachiever or to be identified as someone who is worthy of advanced placement courses or things of that nature, but ultimately it took a long time to sort of break myself out of that habit and trust that there was a community of folks, a group of supporters, that would help me achieve goals and objectives.

**Participant 5.**

Well, being the outsider, and I’m going to keep going back to that, but different aspects. . . . See, most people start at the bottom, as an officer, and then promoted up. I came into the system at the equivalent of a lieutenant, because I came in from parole, in at a fairly high level, as the second-line supervisor, equivalent of a lieutenant, then I promoted up.

Working in prisons I abolished the Category A (effeminate homosexual) because of bias. That unit closed and that category doesn’t exist anymore. And I’ve seen them throughout the state in other institutions, and they’re doing just fine. And that category was abolished. But only an outsider could do that. The people in that are part of the system, you can’t do that. I don’t know how I did that. I just did, because you don’t think the insider way, and you just very quietly do what can’t be done.

**Participant 6.**

I think from a technical standpoint I have strong organizational skills, strong project management skills but I also try to approach things from the perspective of being a lifelong learner and listener so I don’t always think I’m the smartest guy in the room and I’d always think I’m the one who has all the answers. I think
getting other people’s perspective and input is important to arriving at a better outcome. I think part of that may come from being a little bit of an outsider sometimes from a LGBT perspective and just not feeling like I’m the one who always should have the right answers. I think those skills have been helpful and I have a big engine. I like to keep a lot of things going. I like to see results, I’m pretty results oriented and so that combination has served me well in my career. In terms of barriers and all that . . . Not a lot. I think I’ve been privileged and very lucky in my work life and in my community roles to be able to be asked to serve in a number of capacities and been able to do that.

**Participant 7.**

Yeah, I think . . . I don’t know if “tenacity” is the right word, but just not giving up, not taking “no” for an answer. My father was disabled and in the 50s, that was very difficult to have a career and be disabled, but he never took “no” for an answer; he always could do what everyone else could do and was just very determined.

**Participant 8.**

I would say that I do have high standards as a leader. I want us to be the strongest social and emotional learning program on the market, with the strong research and marketing. I want to make sure we’re putting quality, including our human resources, and that they’re well-trained, and so I always put a lot.

I lead, also I would say, by example, and not by title. It’s what I want to see in people, and I’ve always treated people the way I want to be treated. I think it’s just maintaining a high level of professional standards. Not that it’s always
easy. As a leader, I’m intentional about the relationships that I build internally in the organization to make sure that this unit has access to everything we need to be successful.

I’ve always coached my managers, because I’ve had multiple managers report to me, that if you lead by title, the day you step into the role it will be a struggle. Because if people believe that you’re managing them, and not building a relationship and working with them and developing them, they don’t want to work for you.

**Participant 9.**

I guess I had folks that were helping me too and supporting me. Not just gay people but straight people that were encouraging. Said that you’d be good at this. So, I guess just encouragement from some women, close women friends and some male friends, but probably more women, frankly. Straight women that were really supportive and encouraging. “You can do this. This was something that you could accomplish.” I think that was helpful.

The issue to being gay was never an issue with them, the people that I gravitated to and who gravitated towards me. I had some very close female friends in the profession and they were very supportive. And they frankly helped me, I think, with the straight men. I think they were good with straight men pushing them a little bit frankly, because straight women have always, in my opinion, gotten gay men better than straight men do.

I think that straight women in the business world can be a real ally for gay men and especially in leadership. Because I think there’s just a kinship a lot of
times between gay men and straight women. And they can help each other,
frankly, because we both have issues in leadership. We both have some, not
necessarily discrimination, but just have a little tougher road, I think, than straight
men do. Or people of color and women and gay people.

In a way, it was combining weaknesses and strengths. I hadn’t really
thought about that until now. But I think, right. We’re men, so we kind of are in
that world and they’re women, and so I think it complements the strengths and
weakness.

*Participant 10.*

I have a tendency or an ability to become very focused on something that I care
about. Say whether it’s the civil rights of or human rights of people infected or
affected by HIV/AIDS or the injustices that were taking place when I was a
graduate student then a young professional, young academic.

I think that I was fortunate also to pursue a PhD in economics and to really
spend a lot of time looking at economic theory. I think that economic theory is
incredibly useful, not because it allows us to [develop] precise relationships
between different variables and algorithms, but because it helps us understand the
way many people, most people on average think about choices.

I also think that I am very good with relationships and relational
dynamics. How people institutions interact, think about each other and relate to
each other. Some people are just relational in their thinking. Others come at their
worldview from a different perspective, but I think that it’s always been beneficial
to me to whether I’m looking at foreign policy from the White House and United
States, Russia, west and east, how they interact and what the motives and incentives and constraints and social and historical motivators and drivers might be, I think that that was my instincts in that space, in that relational thinking I think was a big plus.

**Participant 11.**

I think that the first leadership positions I got, and actually I’ve seen it play out in subsequent ones. I think that’s the relationships I’ve been able to form. I have no problem saying I don’t know or I’m not sure or I need help. In my first leadership position, I was able to identify some sort of who I guess would be the more seasoned or the elders. I worked closely with them for several years.

That’s where I really learned a lot about leadership, but I also learned a lot about how systems work. I learned a lot about relationships. I also learned I think a lot about loyalty, you know, both to yourself, but to others. I think that that’s what I’ve seen going on.

Some of the qualities or characteristic of leaders are the never ending, the learning process. It’s sort of give and learn at the same time. I have to laugh about that show that’s on that, undercover boss where the boss goes in and finds out what the day-to-day functions of his own company [are] like. I laugh about that because I’ve done that all of my life. That’s not anything unique to me. That’s just something I learned from people when I first started giving jobs as supervisors or leadership position is that if you don’t know how your staff get their job done, then you’re completely out of touch. When you’re an out-of-touch leader, you really can’t lead. As a leader, I spent a lot of time not in my office but
walking around and just randomly talking [to] people, talking to my staff. Sometimes talking to staff who don’t even know that I’m the director, exactly. I’m just some guy coming in. It helps me to make decisions. It helps me to understand what the staff really believe or think.

**Participant 12.**

I think in leadership you have to have the ability to communicate and hopefully be somewhat social so people see you as an inspiration and all that. From that perspective, that’s one of the strengths that I definitely have. I hope I’m a good communicator but I’m also a believer in frequent communications. If people know what’s going on, they are better enabled to do their job well and to help support whatever needs to be done. Instead of keeping information, giving me more, I don’t know if power is the right word but control. I look at the opposite if everybody else does well so do I.

I think part of that is just my ability to adapt. You have to be able to adapt [to] the change and you have to sort of proof yourself all over again. It’s like you had the credentials to get the job, but what are you’re going to do while you’re here. You’re measured later by what you actually achieve. There is this constant drive to have to do well because you’re in a new place where you have to say I can actually contribute to whatever it is we’re trying to do.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 3.** Brief comparative data findings and analyses of the strengths supporting their rise to leadership are presented as follows. Table 6 presents the researcher’s analysis of the general themes
that emanated from the interview responses to illustrate the individual and collective lived experience.

Table 6

*Interview Question 3: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses*

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<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Can you describe what strengths supported your rise to leadership or presented barriers to you?</td>
<td>A. Leadership traits</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Self-acceptance as gay person</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Solid network support</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Leadership traits.* All participants indicated the value of having leadership skills. These traits, usually found in transformational leaders (L. Cooper, 2009; Snyder, 2006), were acquired throughout different positions during the early stages of their professional lives. These gay leaders revealed being visionaries, tenacious, collaborators, coaches to their managers rather than supervisors, compassionate (especially those leaders in the educational environment), great listeners, and facilitators, were always learning and leading by example, going above and beyond their duties in their respective jobs.

I think from a technical standpoint I have strong organizational skills, strong project management skills but I also try to approach things from the perspective of being a lifelong learner and listener so I don’t always think I’m the smartest guy in the room and I’d always think I’m the one who has all the answers. I think getting other people’s perspective and input is important to arriving at a better outcome.
**Self-acceptance as gay person.** All participants manifested being more successful after acknowledging their homosexuality; however, some men described having a desire to know how to fit in, how to be part of the mainstream world. Although being an outsider was an advantage for bringing new ideas and different perspectives, these men had to build a level of confidence by making themselves aware and being comfortable with their sexual identity. Participant 1 expressed the “necessity to be better than anybody else” because he didn’t think enough of himself, and after receiving therapy and accepting himself as gay, his career started to flourish at a higher pace.

**Solid network support.** Nine participants enhanced the importance of having the support of a strong and solid network. Reaching out to gay mentors, straight allies, and LGBT organizations empowered these men and facilitated their rise to top-level executive leadership roles. Friendship with other gay peers was helpful in building that network, learning to see the different facets of their organization. Participant 12 manifested that there was a time when gays were hidden and establishing circles was not happening, but now “you just go networking because it’s networking and there [are] gay people there to support you.”

**Education.** Professional education and continuous learning adhered to leadership skills and also created a responsibility to help others who did not have the privilege of having an education or a loving and accepting family. The combination of having an advanced education and access to gay networks opened doors to promotions, establishing the path to attain high-level leadership positions.
Following are excerpts from participants’ responses to Interview Question 5. These responses provide people, places, and events identified as significantly influential in their leadership journey to becoming leaders.

**Interview Question 5.** Who or what—people, places, or events—would you identify as being significant influence in your journey to attain a leadership position?

**Participant 1.**

This college professor, instrumental, in my early years. These individuals were gay, and they were instrumental in being role models for me in terms of that. So that had a lot to do with it. I would say three people that are, not well, well I’d say more than three, but three key people that are straight that had a lot to do with me, one my mom and dad. My mom and dad I didn’t officially come out to but they loved me no matter what, I knew it, there was no question about it. They were much older when they had me, they were 45 so they were hugely supportive of me, anything I wanted and needed, they were there for me. And then when I was a principal, my first year of being a principal, in the secondary school I took legal guardianship of one of my students. And he was 13 and a half, going on 14, I took him home and raised him. And he has been instrumental in my life.

So, these people were instrumental in me doing what I needed to do. Now also in terms of the quote gay world I then surrounded myself with some of the top leaders of LGBT in the nation. So, I was with them as role models to help me understand how the political piece all worked. So, kind of all they all, but I would say the bottom line is I found role models and those are who I surrounded myself with. Also, some cities especially San Francisco are more idoneous or conducive
to become a leader. No doubt. No doubt about it. Like I just said if I were in central Fresno, let’s talk about California. Let’s not even go to red states, let’s go to red counties. Tulare County, Bakersfield, Fresno, Visalia, Kings Canyon.

**Participant 2.**

I think moving to California because if I’d stayed in Tennessee, I don’t think I would be a superintendent today. I don’t think I would have even become a principal. I was discriminated in my home state. Only one principal defended me and told me to go to California, where I would be content with myself. Another person who was [a] significant influence to pursue my career was my nephew really. He’s very successful and lives in Miami. I talked to him about this, and he’d go, “You know, you just got to stay strong. You’re not doing anything wrong.” I needed to hear that. So, that was probably the best thing.

**Participant 3.**

I think definitely has been a journey, it’s been stepping stones. It hasn’t been that I leaped into these positions, but I think I started at kind of the basic level. I want [to] back step and just kind of throw out something else that might be able to be connected to the previous question, and then I’ll get back to this in response. But the idea that I grew up in poverty and that I saw and witnessed every day the struggles of my single parent household. My mother for instance, raising three children on welfare and in government housing, and just seeing that struggle and hating every bit of it. Wanting to break that cycle and that I would see my future and hopefully that, number one, I would be happy and be successful in a career. And maybe that the career and the money and the success would make up for this
fault that unfortunately in my mind I thought being gay was a negative. A bad thing, and that I would have to make up for it somehow, in some way. So, I was kind of killing two birds with one stone, in that I would break the cycle of poverty by being successful in life.

Participant 4.

I definitely won the geographic lottery when I was born in San Diego. By the way, that part of the narrative is pretty important too. I was born and raised in San Diego and I think that was very influential to a lot of voters. They may not have cared what my sexual orientation was, but they appreciate the fact that I’m of and by this community, right? That was extremely helpful.

With regard to the LGBT component of it, I ran in the Third Council District in the city of San Diego. Would it have been as advantageous to run in any of the other eight city council districts? Probably not as much. Would I have been successful? In some of them I probably could have been. There are at least two other districts that have elected LGBT members of the city council that aren’t the third district. It has happened. It’s just what’s the probability of success? The district was very important.

Participant 5.

Professionalization. Doing things right. That’s what we were all about. My staff made that up. That’s a summary of the institution and everything we did. That’s from a confirmation book. You have to go in front of the state Senate to be confirmed ‘cause it’s a political appointment. It’s a political appointment. So, you go with a big book. You see in the confirmations hearings in the Senate.
You have a big book in front of you and it’s the answer to every possible question that could be asked and you just flip to the page as they’re asking questions, and it’s the answer to everything. So that’s the first issue.

The second issue is my partner. I worked in Sacramento, at San Quentin, at Soledad, and California Medical Facility Vacaville and California State Prison Solano, which are on the same property. I commuted every day and tried staying up there, but I couldn’t stand it. I had to come home every day. I had to have that, I had to be home. So that’s really important to you saying a significant influence in your journey. I had to have that. That’s the rock. I hope that makes some sense.

**Participant 6.**

Both my grandparents, my parents, my biological family, and in the family that I work for here that are my business partners now, both families with a very strong sense of public service. The place I like is [city]; I want to get married in [city] at our hotels. I’m not going somewhere else to do it, I’m going to fight for it here. I just never viewed that it should be anything different than that. San Diego, the city about 20 years ago was a different town. Different town in size, a different town in its progressive values or lack of and it was a different place. There’s been a lot of really good progress and so I’ve stayed.

**Participant 7.**

You know the world changes quickly, but I think as . . . When you start seeing the national discussion about gays in the military or marriage, and when you saw the sitcoms, the Ellen Show, Will & Grace, and other stuff with people on them that
were succeeding in their careers, I think it made you think it was possible and
kind of carved a pathway for you, so it made it . . . It gave you encouragement.
And I don’t think there was any . . . I had very good bosses who helped me along,
and they knew I was gay and just kind of, you know, nurtured my talent and
helped me get the right coaching and training I needed to move forward in my
career, but I think that would have been . . . They would have treated me the same
way either way, I think.

**Participant 8.**

There are parts of [city]. We’re in a beautiful area, and I for the most part have
felt comfortable, but there are times when . . . because I lived with my partner for
a number of years here with my children, and it was like, this is still pretty
conservative. [City] is conservative, it’s more Republican than, probably,
Democrat. Again, I haven’t experienced a lot of it, but I live in [city]. [City] is
like Irvine. It’s vanilla. I moved my daughters downtown for a few . . . God,
that’s so long. I moved downtown for a few years to give them some exposure.

I would consider New York, I would consider certain big cities, but it’s a
good question to ask. I am somewhat bound to a certain industry, because I’ve
been in it an entire . . . People say, “Can you reinvent yourself?” Maybe real
estate? It’s hard to go from this to pharmaceutical sales, but I guess if the
opportunity. . . . There have been a few jobs that I interviewed for that would
have to . . . [Company] wanted to hire me, and they wanted me to base out of
Dallas. At that time, I would not, I turned it down.
Fresno is the last place I would ever want to go back. It is still not gay friendly. My ex-partner is from there, and I met him there moving my mom into assisted living.

**Participant 9.**

I actually grew up in [city]. Yeah, and I was in a theater department in college, so I was in a place where, even this was in the mid-80s, people weren’t really out, but they weren’t really closeted either. Do you know what I mean? It was just sort of like everyone kind of knew, but no one really talked about it.

But I was close to a professor who was out and he had a very good life and I saw that and I thought, “Well, that makes sense. He’s got this great life and he’s out.” And I was around other gay people in theater so I thought, “Well, that makes sense.” I think Seattle was such a great environment because it’s such a liberal city and there were gay clubs. I was going to gay clubs, I shouldn’t have but I was only 19. I was one of the club kids and so I was around a lot of gay people and it was fun. It was like, “This is me. This is who I am. I’m not going to, I can’t change, even if I wanted to.”

**Participant 10.**

I definitely moved away from my small hometown in [rural town]. I knew that I could never . . . I left for college, I knew I couldn’t return even though it was another two years before I came out, I knew, I sensed and consciously knew that the coming out was inevitable and then I would never return to live there as a small Indiana town, 20,000 people, very conservative, lots of Mennonite and Amish people.
My parents, we were all originally from this even smaller town in [rural town], but people who weren’t of the two predominant conservative religions in town, there were Amish and Mennonites, everything else was quite comfortable with them. I decided very early on to focus on the Soviet Union and I knew that whatever career I took whether it was as a journalist or as an academic or a policy person that I would be traveling a lot and that I’d have opportunities to see the world, the Soviet Union would be my target on most trips I guess. They never were friendly toward gay people.

**Participant 11.**

You know, looking back, being here and being in California was the best decision we ever made. My partner [name] and I met in Chicago and we were very happy in Chicago. We’re both from the Midwest. I’m from [city], he’s from [city]. We just have that mindset. He had a job opportunity out here. I sort of came on a whim. It was a very scary thing to do, but I think that being here gave us a great amount of opportunity. I tell people all the time, California has been very good to us professionally and personally. It’s I think very, we lived in San Francisco and we lived in LA. We’ve lived in major places where being out is not a crime.

But even then, I think we’ve gravitated towards places where, we’ve never lived in gay neighborhoods or the gay ghetto. Here I am, I live in the [Southern California city] with somewhat the seat of the Republican Party in Los Angeles, as small as that may be, thank God. In terms of that, we’ve also sought out living in places where that is okay and we could be comfortable. I don’t know how it would be if I were in Fargo or someplace that may not be as liberal or as open-
minded. I’ve always, my career and [name]’s career have given us the opportunity to live in places where it’s okay to be who we are. I think that I’ve always just been fortunate. I know I’m fortunate for that.

You know, the Catholic school [has] a huge influence on my day-to-day life and every decision I make. I grew up very Catholic. I have aunts who are nuns. I grew up in a Catholic school. There’s an instance, reading one of your questions, that really changed my life. In undergrad, I went to confession. I confessed gay. The priest stopped me and he looked at me and he said, “I never want you to confess that again. That’s not a sin.” I never really thought, that just changed my life. It was sort of the affirmation that it’s okay. It was so powerful because he was almost angry at me. He wasn’t angry at me, but he was, don’t ever confess that again. That’s not a sin. Even though I wasn’t out at undergrad, I have since come out. It’s a wonderful community.

**Participant 12.**

I have lived in St. Louis area and then I lived in Chicago, then I lived in San Francisco and then I lived in Dallas, then San Jose and now here, but headquartered certain places because of jobs. I would say Dallas of all those locations was the most conservative, but people were friendly, but the religion was very deeply rooted. People accepted it but not in the same way that they would in San Francisco or Chicago or here.

I think there is absolutely some of that, so I have lived in, well I was from St. Louis area and then I lived in Chicago, then I lived in San Francisco and then I
lived in Dallas, then San Jose and now here, but headquartered certain places because of jobs.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 5.** The following comparative findings and data analysis of the places and events that significantly impacted their rise to leadership are presented in Table 7. Geographic and general themes emanated from the interview responses to Question 5.

Table 7

_Interview Question 5: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Who or what – people, places, or events – would you identify as being significant influence in your journey to attain a leadership position?</td>
<td>A. Gay-friendly cities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Family members and partners</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Gay-colleagues at work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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_Gay-friendly cities._ The success of gay civil rights movements and the legal recognition of gay marriage have contributed to the urban transformation and commodification of space in some cities (Rushbrook, 2002). This cosmopolitanism nurtures racial diversity and sexual diversity, attracting tourists and sophisticating communities such as the gay community (Rushbrook, 2002). On the West Coast, California’s liberalism is attractive to the gay community, and San Diego and San Francisco are cities open to gay acceptance, with LGBT representation in public office. A few places were mentioned as less attractive to live in, such as Fresno, Bakersfield, Visalia, and small cities above Redding, in Northern California, where some participants
experienced a hostile environment because they were openly gay. Two participants revealed purposely moving from Midwest rural areas to California because they could not be open regarding their sexual preference.

Opposed to seeking gay-friendly cities, Participants 11 and 12 mentioned their adversity to residing in gay-friendly neighborhoods and decided to stay away from gay communities and blend-in with the heterosexual environment.

**Family members and partners.** Almost all participants expressed gratitude to their family members for being supportive of them on their journey to leadership. Parents, grandparents, spouses, partners, and siblings were listed as significantly influential and primary supporters in their self-acceptance as gay persons, building confidence and belief in themselves. Participants 1 and 11 reported the value of having a partner and being accepted by their family members. Participant 4 shared the sacrifices made by his parents to provide educational opportunities, allowing him to obtain and enhance his talent, abilities, and efficacies in the political environment, a decisive factor in reaching a leadership role in public office.

**Colleagues at work.** Any person whose sexual orientation is known could face different challenges or barriers than an employee who is still in the closet (Arwood, 2006). Participants 6, 11, and 12 reported having gay mentors coaching and encouraging them to take on roles and responsibilities, which led to leadership roles. Participants 1 and 5 shared experiences of having gay supervisors who played the role of protectors from discriminatory actions at work. Participant 8 mentioned having a female heterosexual supervisor who trusted and supported him to pursue leadership positions.
Interview Question 7 encompasses the overall qualities openly gay males possess that enhance their role as leaders. A brief comparative data findings table and an analysis of these relationships are presented after the excerpts.

**Interview Question 7.** Can you describe any qualities gay men possess that either enhance or detract from their role as a leader?

**Participant 1.**

I will say this and this is kind of from where I am today which is April 8th, it’s not about me being gay. It’s my person, is that I have these skills. That being gay has nothing to do with it. I just happen to be gay. Now am I better in terms of organization? Well yeah, but there’s a lot of gay guys that are horrible at organization. So, it really has nothing to do with being gay. It’s just my environment and who I surround myself with, and my role models who many are gay but I don’t look at being gay as a separate than somebody else who may be straight and having the same success if that makes sense.

Well as I mentioned in my earlier talks, the degrading self-degrading that I had, being gay propelled me to excel. Okay, so could I have excelled if I didn’t have that skillset? Well I don’t have the skillset because I’m gay, I had that skillset because I worked on that skillset. But what propelled me to get better was this self-loathing I had. That I didn’t like myself because I would, so yeah could you say that being gay motivated me? Oh, yeah, it motivated me but I don’t think that because I’m gay that I was more successful than someone being straight.
**Participant 2.**

I think it depends. There’s gay men, there’s a spectrum. It’s not like we’re all the same. I think that men are particular, and they like things to be done a certain way. They want things to be done well. Most gay men like things to be nice. I think that’s a strength. I think that’s something that enhances. When you say what detracts you from your role as a leader, I think sometimes we worry too much, more so than men do, like straight men do. We feel more, are more sensitive. So sometimes as leaders, people don’t . . . Sometimes they don’t think we’re as serious about things, which is what they do to women too, that’s why Hillary Clinton.

We have to be present and visible in society. I think that’s what’s helped me because I didn’t want to move to a gay place, or a gay section, or this kind of place. I just wanted to be with people. I just think that’s so important, I do. I think people ought to live together.

**Participant 3.**

I think some might think that this . . . I think empathy, but some might say having empathy is not necessarily a benefit to leaders but I think actually it is. So, I think in particular . . . not every gay man, obviously that’s being very . . . that’s a stereotype, but I think in general gay men tend to be much more empathetic, and much more in tune with emotions than statistically straight, heterosexual men. I think that helps because I think a leader is in tune with the people that they’re leading, and if you don’t care about people’s emotions or people’s feelings, then you’re not empathetic. Or you don’t have the ability to empathize what others
experience, what others are going through, then you have a hard time leading. So, for example, if you’re leading a staff of 10, and five are happy and five can’t stand you because they feel like you’re not in tune with their needs. Or maybe you’re not perceived to be someone who’s respectful and considerate and compassionate about challenges that maybe they’re experiencing in their life, or that they’re needing a little bit more support at work to be successful.

I think in general, of course I’m generalizing I’m not using statistical data, but my analysis or my perspective would be that gay men tend to be a little more empathetic and in tune with the needs of people around them and in tune with emotions. Again, some might see that as a negative, I think it’s a positive and I think it allows people that they’re leading to connect better with.

Participant 4.

If you figure out that you can organize people, you can affect change not just for yourself, but broader macro level changes, you get kind of addicted to that. I think this is a real issue for our community currently is that it’s . . . It may have started with LGBT activism on a college campus, but then it became about affordable housing for working families. It came about decent public transportation, things of that nature that stuff I work on still to this day. The quality is sort of an unwillingness to be silent, an unwillingness to allow the status quo to stay the way it is. That’s a recipe for social change, which is basically what I do.
Participant 5.

There’s another word you can use is “detachment” that . . . as I said earlier, there’s no generic gay man, but since you’re not quite of the straight world that you’re in, you can be somewhat detached and stand back and look at what’s going on around you, because you have to have some detachment, especially in my time. Maybe not so much now. I’m not sure. To survive in what can be a hostile world. It can be a dangerous world.

I’m of a different generation. I know people now who just don’t pay any attention to that anymore, but they were born in the 70s, not in the 40s when I was born. That’s all I can add to it, is detachment, is the only thing I can come up with. Being the outsider and not knowing anything, I had to take a different approach to survive, so it’s okay to not, for these women . . . I’m thinking of these women who were lesbians who were trying to imitate and do it the right way. As women, I’ve observed over the years, they have tremendous skills. They can do all sorts of things I can’t do with inmates.

You’re sensitive to issues that other folks face. I think there’s also a real strength around understanding interpersonal relationships and dynamics that’s a little stronger. I think part of that comes from growing up and maybe this is generational to me and wouldn’t apply to young people as much but always having to read who are the people would be more supportive or not. Who are the people you could really trust and become allies?
Participant 6.

Whatever identity politics are at play, there are stereotypes that are associated with those groups. Stereotypes exist for a reason. I think that they really are predominant traits and that’s good and bad. For looking at running gay men in office it’s not a fluke that most of the earliest LGBT people elected to offices were lesbians. Because first of all they weren’t as threatening to men, they didn’t threaten their masculinity. They were viewed as strong and tough and decisive and all those things that are positive male characteristics or whatever stereotype you want to put on that and the opposite was true for men.

Participant 7.

I think anyone who’s had adversity in their life sometimes is better at what they do because they’re going to work harder or be more persistent, or things like that. So, I think it’s not unique to being gay, but any minority, gender, any difference people might feel like they have to work harder and do a better job to be taken seriously. And I think similarly, with any group that has self-esteem problems, there are all sorts of other issues that could make it more difficult for you to be a good employer or leader.

Participant 8.

I think empathy. I think just really believing and recognizing . . . just really believing in human beings, and that everyone has something to contribute. But genuinely believing that, versus, I think there are a lot of people that want to believe that respect everyone no matter what your race, religion, but I don’t necessarily buy it always. I think that children and senior citizens are the ones
that see through that intuitively, because you can’t pick a child up if you’re not a
. . . if you’re not child friendly, it’s like a bad teacher. Kids see through it.
Usually the kids are the good gauge.

I don’t like to generalize, but I think there’s a warmth too, when you have
been . . . I was raised, and I was in a traditional farming town, and I did have to
put a smile on my face a lot, even though at times it was like, oh my God, because
my parents. . . . Part of me is like, “Didn’t they ever know?” It’s like, oh my
God, there’s a reason, Mom, I come to your classroom every day for lunch,
because I don’t want to eat at junior high, because it’s pretty nasty. I think having
gone through that, and the people that have been in my life, that have been close,
and most of them were bullied or harassed or in some way treated differently
because they were different, I think there’s some compassion just for other
people. If that’s how it manifests. It’s hard for me to say as a gay population that
we’re like that, but I would hope that we have more empathy and more
compassion for just humans in general.

**Participant 9.**

I guess I would start with enhance. I think gay men trace the more conciliatory,
more bipartisan, not as, we’re not, and I’m generalizing, we’re not, winning isn’t
always the goal with gay men. It’s getting the right results. And kind of
understanding other men’s egos, women’s how to deal with women, we have an
easier time dealing with women than I think straight men do. We kind of know
what we have to do to get the straight me to do what we need them to do.
I think, because we’ve kind of grown up, especially people in their 50s, my age, as an outsider a little bit, we watched. We watched. And by observing, we learned how to do it. So, I think that’s a quality that gay men have that enhances our success. I think it gave me, and I think a lot of gay men, the ability to size people up to see what their agenda is. We’ve always kind of watched. We’ve been, we weren’t necessarily, we weren’t part of the team. We never were picked for the team, we weren’t in the fraternity. So, we weren’t vested. We had to negotiate around all that and to do that, I think, gain from observing.

*Participant 10.*

I think that our ability to cap into our feminine spirits, as it were, gives us a richer approach to decision making, a more evolved set of priorities and understandings. It can make us more empathetic sometimes with people and their situations, but I know . . . but sometimes I think each individual has to allow those qualities to come through as much as it feels comfortable to him.

I think there are many great, gay leaders for whom empathy is a real driving concern and there are some though that are as a hard-nosed and driven and analytic, and empathy is the last thing that comes to mind. Where that comes from, I don’t know. I’m tempted to say that gay people certainly older guys my age, around my age, a lot of them feel like, “Hey, I’ve been through it all.”

They’ve not only through at [a] time in which we were supposed to be invisible, but we live through a time in which we were supposed to die and we live through a time in which we were supposed to integrate into society. Before that, we lived in a time when we were supposed to demonstrate and oppose the
social order that oppressed us and ostracized us and now we’re supposed to have, now we’re supposed to get married and have children.

**Participant 11.**

I don’t know that I have it, but I really try and hope that, to me, the most important quality to have is humility. I don’t know that I have it. It’s what I strive to have. I want people to feel that I’m approachable. I want people to feel that, to know that I don’t have all the answers. I want people to understand that sometimes I’m struggling with the same problem just as much as they are. Just because I have a title doesn’t mean I have the answers. I think that a strong quality that I have is in terms of something I learned, I work in an industry where some people have a high school degree in and people have PhDs and MDs.

I’m trying to get them all on the same page. I’m trying to motivate them all. They’re all from different, some are custody officers who barely passed high school. Some of these neurosurgeons. To get everybody on the same page, I think one of the things that I’ve been successful in doing, and I think humility comes into this, I’m just another person. Breaking down those barriers gives everybody a comfort level with approaching you and with working with you.

**Participant 12.**

I think in many instances gay individuals, mostly gay men, they are probably a little bit more emotional[ly] oriented, a little bit more sensitive, caring, feeling. Again that doesn’t mean someone who is straight could be, but I just find that there is a little bit of that female, which tends to be more nurturing, excuse me, in nature and such.
I do think that for, at least for me, and I hope for some others is that whole just a little bit more sensitive caring. I think sometimes we feel that’s happened to us because we had to overcome barriers that maybe those that are just on a traditional path wouldn’t have to, and that also sounds stereotypical. But straight female, White male that goes and gets his degree and gets the job is like that’s just the path. But when someone is gay, there is always that, oh! Is that going to be a problem? I think you feel like you have to help others too because you know that it was a little bit harder. I do think that makes us a little bit more supportive and just kind of like, I know what it feels like.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 7.** The comparative and data analysis of qualities gay men possess enhancing their leadership are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Interview Question 7: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Can you describe any qualities gay men possess that either enhance or detract from their role as a leader?</td>
<td>A. Empathy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Being different, outsider</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>

**Empathy.** Gay men are stereotyped as being more sensitive than heterosexual men (Downs, 2005; Valdovinos, 1990), and eight participants of this study believed that gay persons are more sensitive and compassionate to issues affecting other people within their environment. Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12 reported that gay men
understand interpersonal relationships and dynamics in a different way than heterosexual men do, because gays are more conciliatory, more bipartisan, and winning is not always the goal with gay men; they understand other men’s egos by being observant and learning how to conduct themselves. Participant 9 expressed that gay men have the ability to size people up to see what their agenda is; their feminine spirit has a more evolved set of priorities and understanding. Gay leaders are more in tune with their emotions than heterosexuals, and they care about people’s emotions and feelings. Participant 3 indicated that gay leaders are considerate, respectful, and compassionate about challenges their subordinates are experiencing. It is important to mention that most participants were aware of the stereotypes associated with them; however, their perceptions of themselves were closely affirming these stereotypes.

**Being different, outsider.** Another quality that emerged from the responses was their disassociation with the status quo and connection with the workforce. As a principle of leadership, “connectivity follows adaptability because change mandates a subsequent need to acquire new perspectives and professional tools in order to maximize organizational success” (Snyder, 2006, p. xxx). Participants expressed that they like diversity, do things differently, and feel the need to be present and visible. Participant 6 revealed that gay men get a stronger sense of deep interpersonal dynamics, with deep bonds of trust and respect for people who have been “on the other side” in their marginalized and minority status. Participant 4 conveyed that he was unwilling to remain silent and became an activist advocating for those who were less fortunate. Gay men detach themselves from the heterosexual world by not allowing the status quo to stay the
way it is. These gay leaders are transformational leaders inviting subordinates to come up with answers, taking a different approach to solve problems in their organizations.

Following are excerpts from participants’ responses to Interview Question 8. These responses provide the types of networks reached and their importance to achieve high-level leadership positions. A brief comparative data findings table and analysis of these networks are presented after the excerpts.

**Interview Question 8.** What networks—if any—did you reach to as you sought to achieve a high-level leadership position?

a. Personal and professional gay mentors

b. Personal and professional non-LGBT mentors

**Participant 1.**

Networks in terms of LGBT leadership of course who I surrounded myself, National Center for Lesbian Rights, the top people that go into courts that battle are things. Equality California, which really was the foundation of a lot of my knowledge of laws and legislative work. So, I would say those were the organizations that were huge to me. ACLU was huge for me [to] understand my rights, my civil liberties in terms of where I went to. But I will say this again and I say it throughout . . . as I started talking, it’s who I surrounded myself with. Who I surrounded myself with was crucial.

**Participant 2.**

Well, I’m a network worker. I’m probably the biggest networker anybody knows. I’ve always maintained straight, gay, any kind of a relationship. I think it’s important to have lots of different people in your life. You don’t ever know when
you're going to need something. I have Black friends. I have Hispanic friends. I have White friends, and women. I’ve just always been open to knowing people. I’m very connecting. That’s something that I do, and people know that. I’ll have different sales people say, “Can you connect me with someone in this district?” So, I pride myself in that. I want to be known as a person who helps others. I think that’s how you do that, and you do that all the time.

Participant 3.

Yeah, I would say most of my mentors are in positions higher or much higher than I am. Most of my mentors are much more successful than I am, meaning that they make more money or most of them are older. They make more money or they’ve just found a level of success that’s beyond where I’ve been able to reach thus far. So, I think that having those individuals in my life has certainly helped. There’re folks that I can reach out to, that I can lean on, I can hang out with, I can ask them for advice. I could utilize them to network for career jumps and different job opportunities and these people that I say are mentors are also close friends.

For some reason I was drawn to that, because when I look at my core group of friends, they are primarily successful, openly gay, and just [the] kind of people that share the same kind of values and morals that I do. That we click on those levels, so when I was talking about being empathetic and being in tune with people’s emotions and needs, they all share those same attributes and they’ve found themselves to be super successful. I love to spend a lot of my time with
people like that because I learn from them, I’m inspired by them, I’m motivated by them.

Participant 4.

I’ve had wonderful folks like [name] who has been a friend and a mentor or Congresswoman [name] who’s not a member of the LGBT community, but has been my mentor since I was 14 years old. Obviously, my parents have been very helpful. [City] Democrats for Equality and the LGBT Democratic club in [city] created a district that would elect someone like me. They supported my campaigns over the years and that’s been important. There’s a host of folks, gay, not gay, that have been extremely helpful in getting me where I am.

Going back to the point before, I think there was a point in time where I would have accepted none of that help. I would have thought I could do it all on my own. That simply wasn’t true. I’m grateful those folks persisted in sort of helping me along when I still didn’t think I needed their help.

Participant 5.

I really failed to build networks, support networks, because of this “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” and really, as I approached retirement, and got more senior in the organization, the people that were my mentors began to fall away, because they retired or they were gone, so I was out there by myself and that doesn’t work, especially when you’re very, very senior. There was no one there.

You really have to have, either within or outside the organization, a stronger support system than I really had, because I became very senior. That’s one reason, the minute I could retire, I retired. Law enforcement retirement is
fairly early. It’s just constant stuff like this going on and my only reason for bringing all that up is, is that without a network and a support system, you start to feel like the Lone Ranger and my failure was to build that for myself, so I at least had the support system to fall back on, at least to talk about it and sort out options to resolve some of these things. I didn’t have that. It was all on me. That’s a mistake. That’s a real important insight that I think people have to have.

Participant 6.

I think it’s true from both, heterosexuals and LGBT. I’ve had some great mentors that I’ve seen in that in the arts world and who have worked there and some really great folks in the LGBT community. Now those same skills about working in coalitions and working collaboratively across a wide range of perspectives to try and make progress in whatever you’re talking about. Those skills I have learned in all of those communities and applied to all those communities.

Participant 7.

I was involved in LGBT politics and getting elected . . . getting leaders elected through the Victory Fund and I met a lot of . . . It was the first time I met that kind of in the corporate world that were leaders in their companies and that I could really call when I needed something or ask for advice or ask how they handle it in their company and things like that and it was very, very helpful.

Participant 8.

My networks might have been in the publishing world and a strong network of superintendents. I have maintained connections with large leader organizations in K-12 education through my work as a leader, so either through conferences, or
being on panels, or whatever I can do to stay connected and engaged with those organizations. In the LGBT world, I used the resources to do a lot with HRC and Equality California.

**Participant 9.**

I think in law school, it wasn’t a formal gay group, but we had a gay, we knew who we were. We knew who the gay law students were and we didn’t have a formal networking group, but we still would get together socially, go out, dinner, go out for drinks and be able to support each other that way. And then when I got into the profession, there was an organized gay bar association that’s a great resource for leadership, help and advice. So that’s been a great access. And now I feel like I’m out to help the other kids, to help them feel more at home and comfortable and accepted.

Yeah, where I worked there were straight men, and so it wasn’t necessarily like LGBT men to mentor, but I had straight men that were mentors as far as the professions, how to comport yourself. Whether you’re gay or straight, you have to be true to your word, you have to be ethical, you have to be smart, it doesn’t matter. Those leadership qualities transcend sexual orientation.

**Participant 10.**

I didn’t have any qualms about being mentored by straight men. I was out to all of them and I was pretty much in your face about that. I wasn’t demonstrating or flying pride flags in my office or anything like that. As far as formal networks, my own kind of individual personal network mixed or gay, straight, I always have had what I call my kitchen cabinet. There’s six or seven people that I consider to
be the wise ones who know me well and who can help me navigate murky waters and that’s always been a mixture of gay and straight people.

**Participant 11.**

You know, I think that the networks are, when I first started out is can I keep myself, with, for lack of a better term, the elders? They were either people very seasoned in their career or people who retired from their career who can give me that guidance and could point out the potholes I was going to step in. They were people, because when I build networks, my networks are almost interchangeable. They’re interchangeable with friendships. You know, the people who I’ve identified, I form personal relationships with.

Some are gay networks and some are not. I think that the elders who I first connected with were gay. They have been through really tough times and they had struggled to get to their leadership positions. I think that their mentoring of me was so that I didn’t have to go through that. That’s where those potholes and things, they could have been professionals that anybody would go in and could have stepped into. They could have also been because you were gay. A lot of those elders are gay. They are a lot of gay men, but also a lot of gay women. A lot of gay women work in this industry. In terms of that, with my networks, with my more peer networks or the people who I mentor, that’s mixed as well. That wasn’t necessarily chosen because of my being gay. Those were just people who I’ve connected with or people who also had, one thing I found I think, thinking about this interview, one of the things, I’ve connected I think with a lot
of gay people in this industry partly because of the choices we may sometimes make.

Participant 12.

The one, what I was referring to was more individual relationships. You’re right, today there [are] all these infinity groups and D&I oriented groups, whether it’s gay, lesbian, any of the various it could be African American, females, Asian females.

There is just any group you pick now, there is a group any large employer to some degree that does a pretty good job or helping just to say hey, we have things in common, we can get strength from that and support each [other] in that, but I was thinking more about when there weren’t those visible publicly available groups and you just had to sort of find them yourselves.

For me personally it tended to be more females that we like, they didn’t care versus the more traditional White male. I didn’t necessarily look for gay or lesbian people on the workforce, I just looked for people that would be OK with who I was. It just so happens that in most of those instances there were females.

I don’t think I ever identified it by gender or ethnic[ity], I think it was just more by individual. You just make connection, you just know good people, usually you [are a] pretty good judge of character and you sort of go, well this person seems to either be friendly or they seem to have a true genuine nature.

Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 8. Brief comparative data findings and an analysis of the types of networks and their impact are presented in Table 9 and the following text.
Table 9

Interview Question 8: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. What networks—if any—did you reach to as you sought to achieve a high-level leadership position?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Both gay and heterosexual</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Gay only</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

Both gay and heterosexual networks. Organizational structures, policies, informal and professional networks, and cultures are male dominated (Arwood, 2006), and there is a generic workplace issue involving tolerance and communication. Large corporations, in particular, throw people together from varied ethnic backgrounds, religions, sexual orientations, political points of view, economic classes, levels of education, neighborhoods, and family backgrounds (Kleiner & Nguyen, 2003). Gay persons seek support and advice from mentors and coworkers, regardless of the supporters’ sexual orientation. In this study, 10 participants indicated having gay and heterosexual friends and mentors who helped them throughout their professional life to attain high-level leadership positions. Participant 5 mentioned that a person has to have, either within or outside of the organization, a strong support system, because without a support system one can “feel like a lone ranger.” He also shared that at the beginning of his career, he lacked a support network, except for the women, because he was nonthreatening to them, and they were nonthreatening to him. Participant 9 added, “Whether you’re gay or straight, you have to be true to your world, you have to be ethical and smart. . . . Those leadership qualities transcend sexual orientation.”
Gay only. Only Participants 1 and 7 admitted to have relied only on gay networks and LGBT institutions to help them to climb the ladder to higher positions.

Following Research Question 2 are excerpts from participants’ responses to Interview Question 4. These responses provide the relationship between the fact of coming out/being out and the achievement of high-level leadership positions. A brief comparative data findings table and analysis of these relationships are presented after the excerpts.

Interview Question 4. Can you describe how coming out/being out has impacted your role as a leader?

Participant 1.

When I came out to my family, they were really cool with it. I decided I wanted to volunteer in my city of [city], so I became a police commissioner. I became a human service commissioner, stayed away from the gay stuff. And then for some reason when I became a principal, my counselor, who was already at the school when I went to that school, was gay. He’s gay. And [it] was kind of scary, but he really nurtured me to come out and to be who I am, even though he lived a separate life and then he lived a school life. So, I came out with his support.

So, when I was volunteering in the city, I decided let me see what I can do LGBT-wise. And I dabbled with HRC, Human Rights Campaign, and then I came to Palm Springs. I bought a place out here and somebody had said to me, “We want you to meet somebody. His name is [name], he is the executive director of [company] California and he would like to probably recruit you to be a board member.” I thought, “Whoa, that’s sort of interesting.” And before you
knew it he not only recruited me but he grew me to be the board president the largest civil rights organization in the state.

And I was sort of dealing with leadership and dealing still with being gay, still dealing with life, so [that] just kind of all melted together in some way.

Again, I had this desire because I was doing so well educationally, I had to take care of this other, the real me, the gay me, and so I didn’t stop at just me coming out. I went into the leadership role of LGBT.

Probe question. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

No, I would have never been happy. I would have never ever [have] been happy had I stayed in the closet. Despite the fact that I had such success as a teacher, despite the fact that I had success as an administrator, I came out when I was a principal, but the first half of being a principal I wasn’t out. So, everyone would say “[name], oh my gosh, leader, leader, leader, a wonderful life.” You’d ask me and I’d say, “Oh yeah but I’m [very] miserable.” “Why are you miserable?” “Because there’s this part of me that’s not out.” So, until you take care of yourself, take care of your soul, you’re never going to get to where you want to go, never. So, I had to work hard at that, I had to get therapeutic help, I had to put myself out there and be afraid and conquer my fears. I had to do that in order to be a better educator.

For me I had to take care of myself as a whole to be a better educator, to be a better leader in LGBT, that had to happen so, no, I would have never been as successful; and then let’s define what success is. Because if success is awards
and money, oh yeah, I did that, but if success is truly happiness, that’s where I would say I’m still working on that one. And lots, lots, tons of times better than I [was] when I was making the money, getting the awards, and closeted.

**Participant 2.**

I didn’t know that for a long time, but I do think has it a lot to do with it. I just think, and I don’t know this, but I’ve always felt like gay people are different. I mean, this is a little more, but when you grow up in a world that tells you what to do, and how to do it, and you’re supposed to do this, at the time my father was a marine. When he suspected when I was in high school that I was gay, he told me what a horrible life I would have. He told me how awful it was, and it was dirty, and all this.

I think when you assess yourself, and you say, “Well, I’m not going to get this because I’m gay,” then you think everybody else is thinking that, but actually they’re not thinking that, that’s just you. I don’t think I would have ever been like that if I hadn’t been okay with myself. I think because I am out, I’m very comfortable with any type of issue, whether it’s gay, straight, or anything.

It makes me more sensitive to gay issues. In this position when students, especially gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, if they identify as that in high school, or wherever, I really am more interested in supporting them.

**Probe question.** Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

Yeah, I have thought about it. Oprah Winfrey, when you talk about who inspired you, she was one of them, because when she was becoming successful. One of
the things that she said is that when she was first doing talk shows and things was that she had to talk less Black. She said, “When I became myself, and really knew who I was, I became successful. People see through people that aren’t comfortable with themselves. I’m comfortable with who I am, and I’m comfortable that others know it. I think that because I am comfortable that’s what’s helped me. You’re right, maybe if I hadn’t maybe I wouldn’t be as successful as I am.

The heterosexual person is entitled. It’s like White privilege. It’s just there. I mean, you don’t even know you have it. As where when you’re gay, you appreciate and value much more what happens than people who don’t have that.

*Participant 3.*

I think once I got rid of my shame, I knew who I was. Meaning, I would come out as someone who was gay; I think I was able to exude that wasn’t something I was ashamed about. I was proud of that piece of my identity. I think others were able to take that information in, in a positive way. And I think also time period changes. So, culturally, we become a little bit more open and accepting and evolved and understanding about what it means to be a gay individual. That has changed, so that’s probably helped me to feel more confident in myself. But, I think once I got to that point where I was very comfortable as a gay man, and I felt that I was of value that my gay identity was a blessing, and who I was supposed to be, and who I was born as, that I was able to have self-confidence.

*Probe question.* Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?
So, at the time, it was definitely not seen as a benefit or a value or a crutch or a positive. But in retrospect, looking back at my life, it is . . . I don’t know if I would have been as successful as I have become if I wasn’t gay. Would I have become a statistic and been like most of my peers? And end up kind of stuck in poverty, in and out of jail and juvenile hall and/or dead. So, was it because I was gay that pushed me to leave my community and leave my family? Be the only one in my family to leave the city where I grew up? I imagine I was, again, trying to escape so I can come out but also trying to make up for this identity that I thought made me less than.

I don’t know if I would have that motivation if I were straight. People just don’t understand people that are gay, or feel uncomfortable around it and so don’t want to hire someone. Because they don’t want to work with someone who’s openly gay, but for me, I think it would’ve been impossible for me to achieve at this level if I were in the closet because it would’ve weighed me down. It would’ve caused me to not believe in myself, it would’ve caused me to probably not be as driven, and I think once I . . . because I was working as a teacher in the closet at work, and then I was in education as an openly gay educator and I saw the difference . . . and there was a difference. I can go to work and not hide who I was, I could focus on what I’m there to do. I don’t have to think about what I’m saying and how I’m saying it, because I might give away the secret.

Or, I might . . . “Oh my gosh, what if my boss finds out I’m gay? Am I going to be evaluated negatively? Am I going to be not promoted next year on that job I want to get.” Once I was open and out, I was able to, I think, thrive.
But there was a lot that took place to get me to that spot of being comfortable in my own skin, and being at a place where I felt it was safe for me to come out and not be discriminated against. Not lose my job, not go backwards. Because I was all about going forward and climbing to better myself and to better my career. To better what I was passionate about and that was kids, so I wanted kids to succeed. Kids that were having challenges to be able to still graduate and believe in themselves. So, again, I was able to thrive on a whole new level once I was able to be out and open. Who I was, and know that the secret was out there. I didn’t have to hide who I was.

Participant 4.

Maybe counterintuitively, I’m kind of sitting here in a way because of it. Some of those people who were encouraging me to consider running for office were members of the LGBT community. We have this very special place in San Diego, the Third Council District that has historically elected LGBT people to represent it. At that point, no man had been elected before. What ended up happening and I think was that after having [name] represent the district for 8 years and [name] represent it for 8 years, there was a desire or interest in seeing a man elected to that office to serve and to be there.

The people who were encouraging, a couple of them were from the gay community who were looking for a male candidate who could potentially win the seat. While it was interesting that I kind of thought that this would never be something that I could do, in large part because of who I am, in many ways the start happened because of who I am, because I’m LGBT. The other piece of it is
a bit more grim. I was relatively young when this happened, but the truth is that probably the most qualified men died. They were lost to the epidemic. A whole generation of our community’s best leaders were wiped out. I think [when] you look at it from a historical perspective, the fact that women were somehow elected first . . . in many cases it was women who broke those barriers first. There was a hunger for a man. A lot of the men were not with us anymore so it became me. While I thought of it as being a barrier, it ended up being something of an advantage in that context. Since I don’t think you can replicate that anywhere.

_Probe question._ Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

Would I have run and won? Probably not. I’ve never been asked that question before. I think that, again, I don’t know that the same people would have approached me to run or to encourage me to run. Frankly, I think that if anything I’ve learned in all the years of this business, prior to my election and after it, is that I think the voters crave authenticity from their candidates. I think that it would have been difficult to be successful in this, not just because this was an LGBT-identified district that kind of people historically . . . I think it also, standing before voters and asking them to support you when maybe they know something’s up . . . I think sometimes constituents want me to lie to them, but often they don’t. I think that they’re willing to hear me tell them I disagree with them as long as I hear them out.

I think that one of the difficulties of being in the closet is you’re not being your authentic and true self. While you think you’re hiding something, I think
often whether it’s painfully obvious what you’re doing and other people pick up on that or if it just seems as though you’re suppressing or hiding something, that also comes through. Somehow or another, people pick up on that. I think that that is not helpful to a career in politics. Then lastly, this business is one that your life is a bit of a fish bowl. It’s not conducive to being in the closet. There’s obviously sadly still a lot of stories of people who are in the closet and their behavior is discovered and it’s embarrassing for all involved. I don’t want to judge anyone else’s journey. I definitely think that those who are in the closet, this is not the profession to get into. It would make your life even more difficult.

**Participant 5.**

At work, in prisons, because of my orientation and my marginalization, or internalized limitations, I feel empathy for the inmates. It’s empathy for somebody who’s marginalized, yes. Even if he did something stupid and crazy. And one of them who I had the most empathy for, [name] and I went to a concert once, California medical facility, the place where we did the HIV unit and the acute care general hospital one, did all that. I pushed the boundaries as far as being gay, and I took my husband to a concert in a prison. I was a Chief Deputy Warden. So, I pushed the boundaries just a tad.

People knew him. When I worked at [name of prison], when I first left, I was thrown out of parole, I took him to, didn’t have a wife to take, so I took my friend with me to staff social events at [name of prison]. Never identified him as my boyfriend, but I pushed the boundaries. Anyway, this was 1977. So, I took him to a concert at [name] prison in the gym. Just magnificent. It was by an
inmate, who was gay and had HIV. His grandmother had been very abusive to him, and [he] dealt with his shame by diving into drugs, and on one drug trip he killed her; he murdered her. He was a concert pianist, and so he’d give concerts in the prison. Just unbelievable. So, did I have some empathy for that kid? Yeah, absolutely. Does that justify what he did? No. But I can see the other side of the story. Am I going to help him escape? No. If he tries to crawl over the fence, will I shoot him? Yes. I’m a peace officer; I’m going to do my duty. But do I have empathy for him? Yes.

My message is though, that they all knew me and respected me, and my work didn’t affect me in my career in the slightest. So, my message is, if people know you and respect you, being gay is a nonissue, and that was an important learning thing there, too. So, I had to go through some learning there myself, because I didn’t know what was going to happen. But I needed also to just stand up and say, you know, “I’m not going to take this.”

Probe question. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

There’s another word you can use is “detachment” that . . . as I said earlier, there’s no generic gay man, but since you’re not quite of the straight world that you’re in, you can be somewhat detached and stand back and look at what’s going on around you, because you have to have some detachment, especially in my time. Maybe not so much now. I’m not sure. To survive in what can be a hostile world. It can be a dangerous world.
[Name] and I travel all the time. We travel a lot. That’s our safe space, because we never know when . . . Even if internal affairs is parked outside of our house, we just didn’t know, so our safe space became gay cruises. When they started, actually, in the early 1990s, late ‘80s. But there are places even those can’t go. But they’re all prewired. That’s the only place where we ever really felt safe and we knew we were going to be safe is on those ships. As a gay man, you’re . . . You even said this, that there are some people you don’t tell. You govern your speech, you govern your language. Your socialization, who you socialize with is limited. On social occasions, you don’t have a wife to bring with you. You don’t have the background, in my world, to discuss with straight male’s things they do and have in their world. Although, I’ve lived in a segregated community most of my life, in a ghetto. I live in one right now, by choice. That’s where I’m most comfortable when I’m not working.

I always spoke with pronouns and said if we went to this event, without pronouns, I’d always say “went to this.” I’d leave the pronoun out. That was my way of having some integrity, by leaving the pronoun out, because I didn’t want to explain who “we” is, but I don’t want to say “I,” because that’s a lie. I just left the pronoun out. I taught for years without pronouns when I would say anything about myself.

Participant 6.

I think . . . I’ve been out ever since high school. I was out even when I started working here at 17 I guess. I was out in high school and always when I come back to work here. I think in some ways it’s been a strength. I think being able to
be empathetic and be able to understand the perspectives of anybody who has ever felt otherness and I think that that’s an important thing, particularly in a business like ours that is, first of all, very people delivered; it takes a lot of commitment and a very diverse workforce to deliver the guest experience.

I always felt the great responsibility, along with the other LGBT members of our workforce to be able to be visible. I always brought my husband, now partner, to work social events and he has been as much a part of this as I have. Now in community work, the more I do and the more I’m in particularly places that aren’t traditionally LGBT places, whether that’s board, board appointments or public service appointments or anything like that in those particular areas, it’s not the only thing about me and it’s not the most interesting thing about me but it’s an important part of me, and I feel a lot of responsibility to use my privilege really for my position to be able to just normalize my relationship and my family and my life.

*Probe question.* Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

In my particular case I don’t think it would have been all that different frankly, and I think it would actually be the opposite. I think I’d be a lot less good at what I do. I think I’d be a lot less successful, I think I’d be . . . Having a part of you that you’re not able to share means in a lot of ways you’re not being honest, you’re not being authentic and you’re not showing up present. If you’re not fully engaged and fully present you can’t really be the best you can be.
What we trained everybody to talk about was look, if there’s this part of my life that you think is something I should be keeping inside but I’m able to stand up and be not only honest about that, but proud of that. How do you think I’ve been to be as your elected representative, don’t you think those qualities or honesty and authenticity they’re important values in life? If you don’t show up with that, if you stay in the closet, I think it’s not just harmful to a community as whole because people don’t realize that they know LGBT people, it’s really harmful for those individuals. I’ve seen it time and time again with folks and we shouldn’t be. . . . We should be past that in terms of as a community. If you look at any study, any statistics about LGBT acceptance, about marriage equality, about trans acceptance. Whatever it is, the difference in response is between people who say they know somebody in that category and they don’t know somebody or they don’t think they do are huge.

Coming out is the most important thing you can do. I, as an adult, realized that now, from an academic standpoint. I didn’t really get it back then but I have personally experienced the power of that so it doesn’t . . . Whoever it happens to be. My colleagues on a bank board or the airport board or whatever. They all know somebody who is LGBT and somebody who is in a same-sex marriage and somebody who is in a same-sex marriage raising children together. They can’t say they don’t know people and they can’t view it in the abstract.

When you have to be honest, you have to be out. Yeah, it makes me be honest all the time and it makes you have a . . . It just makes you consider the point of view of lots of other folks who aren’t in the majority for whatever reason.
It doesn’t have to just be straight, White gender males but that’s who we’re often talking about. I’ve got some of those attributes but not all of them so I can at least understand some of that. But for me, not to the extent that it hurt my career, my opportunities, my access to education and career. I don’t think that’s true for people who have multiple identities. I think it’s particularly not true for gay men of color or anyone who is gender nonconforming and I think . . . But at least I understand being gay and seeing it from the outside and often sadly I was experiencing that kind of homophobia from the inside. Seeing it amongst that corporate group or those folks and being like, “Hey I’m here in the room.”

Is not internal homophobia, but I was often working on change and acceptance from the inside of organizations. Not here but in other situations like a group of guys joking about stuff or whatever. It doesn’t really work the same as soon as you start having other people in your group. You can’t . . . Well, you don’t get to tell racist jokes. You don’t get to tell gay jokes anymore, you just don’t. Even if you think they’re funny. They may not be funny to the gay guys.

The reality is . . . The whole issue about diversity isn’t this old sense of box checking and it’s about the real strength that comes from institutions and organizations [that] rely on a broad and diverse kind of points of view and input and that genuine strength that comes from people who are by definition different. Different backgrounds, we spend a lot of time . . . our kids are at an independent school. We spend a lot of time talking about it’s not diversity, it’s diversity, and its inclusion. It’s bringing points of view whether it’s around race or ethnicity or gender or gender identity or expression or socioeconomic status. Whatever it is
that those things . . . those are meaningful differences that need to be considered and really coming to any kind of decision.

Participant 7.

I think I came out in 1991, so it was early. . . . And one of the first places, after I told my parents, my workplace was the first place people knew. This was in California. I wasn’t in Mississippi, but it was still fairly early and it was Orange County, so I didn’t get . . . I think I looked at it as just only an obstacle or burden, but I didn’t let it stop me. I don’t think, in hindsight, that I’ve suffered in my career for it at all.

There were people that didn’t want me to be out, they thought it’d be easier for me if I wasn’t. There were people, until . . . a few years ago, I was kind of then also a leader in our company. I’ve been in the same job since 1998 and I was the, out of 7,000 people, I’m the one that people look to make sure that we had domestic partner benefits that the company had good nondiscrimination policies and things like that. So, I think that some point the senior leadership of the company could have thought I was a pain, but I don’t think . . . I think life’s not fair and some people do have harder lives than others, but I think I was very lucky to encounter people that judge me on my abilities.

When I came out to my dad, he said, “Well, you know, I’m the dad. I’m supposed to know all the answers to everything, and I can’t help you. I just don’t know anything about this. I just need to go to the library and learn about it so I can be informed and help you.” And he came back and said, “Well, I understand there’s two options: you could be in the closet which sounds really good to me.
Or you could be out and why would you want to be out?” And I said, “Well you taught me to be honest with people.” And he said, “And why does that force you to lie?” I said, “Look, at work you have a picture of your family on your desk, you talk about what you did for the weekend and just casual conversation. I would have to be making stories up or changing names or whatever.” And he understood at that point that it was about being truthful and it was the right thing to do.

_Probe question._ Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

I think I probably wouldn’t have been any worse. I just can’t imagine what my personal life would have been like. It just would have been so hard to constantly not be truthful about my life and who I spent my weekends with, and what I do and all that . . . It was . . . I’ve never met anyone who says they wish they’d have stayed in the closet another day or another week.

_Participant 8._

It really has not, not negatively. Because I came out later in life, obviously married 20 years, and I was with [company], again the big publishers, Pearson, Houghton Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, are kind of known as these traditional publishing houses, but I had a fairy . . . I also was madly in love, so I came out proudly. I’d waited 42 years, and I didn’t plan to come out, but I fell in love, and so I was proud to come out. I had young children. I did not come out with the flag waving at [company], but they were very aware that I’d gone through this transition in my life.
I’m trying to think, in these leadership roles since [company], because I’ve had a few, I have not experienced any negative. University is also its own culture, and I didn’t know what to expect, but it’s been a very positive supportive environment for me. He’s my ex now, but my partner went to, [name] has a Christmas function at the [city] Fair, and we were all guests and stayed there, and we were all very comfortable. My personality is not one to overly do it, but I’ve not been uncomfortable. The chancellor, he’s my boss, and he’s been wonderful and very friendly to my life.

Probe question. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

Same opportunities if I remained in the closet? Yeah, I don’t think either way . . . I think I’ve been hired based on my experience and performance, not based on my choice of sexual partner. I really can say that. . . . Again, not that there haven’t been times in my career where it’s like . . . I was in Dallas with [company] in a hotel restaurant with my manage team, and a guy in there . . . We were just visiting over a glass of wine after a meeting and a guy started yelling, “Go back to San Francisco!” Because I guess he could hear me talking, and I kept ignoring him, and he came over to the table and told me to go back to San Francisco. When he got in my face, I said, “Sir, as you can see, I’m meeting with colleagues, so I would appreciate if you would leave me alone.” Then I went and told the hotel that I can’t stay in there, because he’s probably gone attack me. He’s come over to the table. I said, “You need to do something about this,” and I went to my room. I wasn’t about to stay in there, and I told my team, I go, “Sorry, but . . .”
had no desire to go to Dallas for years. Now my friend lives in, I don’t know what, it’s a nice part, and there’s a gay neighborhood, so now I stay in a really cool hotel. Then I’m like, “I could probably live here.”

My dad wanted me to golf. I don’t like it. I don’t want to go hit that ball around. I did a few times, but I’d rather go get a facial. I’d rather get a massage, or go to a movie. I wanted to go shopping. My parents should have known.

There were times that it was like, God, why does this have to be so male driven, and so always golfing? But it wasn’t necessarily me being isolated.

Participant 9.

I think it’s made me sort of more determined. Like, “You’re not going to say no because it’s too important.” And I think maybe it’s also inspired me because I see younger gay people. The men in my profession that are judges, high ranking judges, [they are] to this day, closeted. And that’s very disappointing to me, and very sad, because that sends a terrible message to young gay lawyers. Young gay male lawyers, that it’s not okay to be out.

To me it’s always been really important to set the opposite message. That you can’t be yourself, that you will succeed, if you are out, and that message that those closeted men send, a very different generation, they are. But they’re there, they’re there. I’m sure in all professions, in all leadership.

You still see it in Congress. You hear about men that are busted in a bathroom that are closeted, and that’s a bad message. It’s gradually going away, but I think that’s inspired me because I just don’t want those kids, I call them
kids, gay people, younger people, to ever feel like you need to stay in the closet to be successful. That’s a terrible message.

Probe question. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

Well, that’s a good question. It’s hard to know. I was told that I didn’t get a job because I was out in a law firm early in my career. I don’t know if that’s true or not, but I was told that. That a firm did not hire me, and so I suppose that, that might have hurt.

But it didn’t matter to me. I wouldn’t want a job, even then, this is in the late 80s, I wouldn’t [have] wanted that job if I had to be closeted to get it. I wouldn’t have wanted and I wouldn’t want to work for a place that would want me to be closeted. So, I guess if it’s true that they didn’t hire me, then I think it was a blessing in disguise. It was illegal, and bad, but it was also 25 years ago.

Participant 10.

I think it’s related and I think that . . . I realized I was different and that I preferred men or boys when I was four. I remember the incident. It was quite a dramatic one. At that point, especially when you’re told that being gay or being different in this way is bad, is immoral and I think that a lot of us had an early experience with really trying . . . really digging deep and trying to understand how do I fit in, how can I look like I fit in if I don’t and who matters in my life at a depth that most people at that age and stage of development don’t have to deal with.

It’s allowed me to conduct myself with authenticity and I think that especially earlier on, in my career say, and then late 80s, the mid to late 80s when
I was just getting my first professional job. To be out and a professional in foreign policy where you needed to have things like security clearances, that was very brave and there weren’t a lot of us. In fact, I didn’t know anybody else. It turns out there were a couple but I didn’t know them.

I think people admire both the honesty because if you can tell the truth about that, you can tell the truth about anything else, and the courage and the determination to do what you think is right, come what may, even though you know that you can’t control people’s responses and behaviors. So, I think in that way it was really good.

*Probe question.* Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

I think I would have been miserable. I think the biggest effect would have been on me. I think I just would have been absolutely unhappy with myself and unable to be enthusiastic about what I was doing and I would feel terrible about me deceiving people. That was for me. That’s not for everybody. I think that even today when it’s supposedly easier, I think it’s still for a lot of folks, it’s still very challenging to come out. I’m very slow to judge people on that one.

The determination to come out publicly probably goes back to my sense of being driven by justice and injustice and I came out not first to my parents but I thought that that was a . . . I came out first to friends and professors at college and then my parents and my brother. I think that coming out to my family was just incredibly important because of the conviction that I had that this was an opportunity for us to grow closer and to grow as people and to grow closer as a
family. Once that was done, I didn’t care who else knew. I wanted them to know as early in the process as possible.

**Participant 11.**

I came out in graduate school. I was 25 or so. When I went on internship I was openly gay. In graduate school, the last couple years I was openly gay and I had come out to my family. My partner, we’ve been together 18 years. I’ve always been openly gay in my work life. Since I’ve been a professional. I worked in the Catholic healthcare system in Chicago. I was openly gay. I found a great deal of support there. I have, working in corrections, I think sometimes people are like, how does that work? I think that it works really well. I think that there’s many gay people in leadership roles in that industry, because it’s still a social services industry.

Yeah, I’ve always been out. I’ve always worn a wedding ring on my left hand. If people don’t know me, they may not, people may not know that I’m gay. I don’t hide it, but I don’t necessarily inform people. I think the assumption is that everyone is straight. They are sometimes surprised in that. I’ve gone into certain jobs where it was announced that I was gay prior to my even getting there, and not in a positive way. In the long run, it didn’t have a negative impact on me for that.

Coming out I think that ultimately positively impacted my career. When I first started out, I wasn’t hiding who I was at all. To take another leadership position, I had to be willing to go to another place. The place I went to was an institution in shambles. I was being sent there to clean it out and fix it. I was
being sent with a pretty negative mission, to turn the place around. Turning the
place around might mean that people wouldn’t be in the same jobs anymore, or
people would have to be held accountable. That was the major instance where
someone at one institution knew someone in another who said, “Oh, by the way,
he’s gay.” And they actually said he’s part of a gay mafia. He’s being sent there
to fix things.

That led to, after that I had three significant promotions within the state
until I was ultimately made the statewide director. I think that if I look back, that
had an ultimately positive impact on it. It was sort of a test. I think that a lot of
people don’t get that necessarily opportunity. Not that I wanted that opportunity
to have to address these rumors and the craziness and still do my job. I think that
it sent a message to a lot of people.

_Probe question_. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you
had decided to remain in the closet?

I think I wouldn’t, because I would not have sought out any of these
opportunities. Because I think if was in the closet, I would feel that I had a secret,
and I wouldn’t want people to find out. I wouldn’t put myself out there. Because
I’m out, I have nothing to hide. I’ll put it all out there. I’ll take the risks. I don’t
mind looking like a fool if we fail as a team, I don’t mind any of that. I think if I
were closeted, I would be much more hesitant to take risks, to make decisions, to
be out there. Because ultimately there’s something I don’t want people to know
about me that I’d be afraid that they could find out or figure out. I don’t think I
would have had these opportunities at all if I had been in the closet. Not because
it wouldn’t have presented themselves. I don’t think I would have sought them out.

In order to become a true leader, a good leader, you have to be honest to yourself and to others. Absolutely. Absolutely. There’s a line from Shakespeare, “This above all to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.” I am who I am. I don’t have anything to hide. I guess I’ve always also not been afraid of losing a job. If I’m not what you want and I’m not the right guy for it, that’s okay. I don’t have a fear of not being able to succeed somewhere. If I’m not the right guy, it’s okay if you tell me I’m not the right guy. I think that in terms of just that openness on all levels I think lets people feel comfortable giving me a chance to be a leader or asking me to be a leader because they know that I’m not going to fight if there’s a determination that I’m not the right leader.

**Participant 12.**

Sometimes it was a little exhausting just to make sure you were in the right role at the right time. But partially it was just because at that point and you could be fired. I don’t think that would ever happen, based on the situations that I was in, but it was always a concern, right? Then the whole AIDS crisis came out.

All these things combined just kind of made you want to stay just slightly under the ladder and hopefully still be successful. Coming out for me was a little interesting at work because I was with a partner for 9 years and we ended the relationship and then 6 months later, he wrote to my parents, my grandparents and my employer to out me. Luckily my employer was supportive and eventually my
family was, too. I didn’t come out in the way I had planned, I just came out. I
didn’t hide it. If it came up great, but it usually just was more with people that
you were more personal with.

I used to say to them, I’m even more proud of your success but also just to
have a lot of admiration for you because I think it’s harder. I think a woman who
is good at what she does has to be 125% good to maybe get the same level of
recognition or success that perhaps a traditional older White male gets just
because there was that old boy network.

All those stereotypes come into play. There was a time when it was
harder to be [an] out leader because there was still a lot of prejudice and bias and
such. My career worked out where I didn’t really become a true leader until that
became acceptable I guess. There was a time where that wasn’t the case, but I
never chose to see the question remain in the closet, it was more not to come out.
I guess it’s how you look at it, I guess if you don’t come out that means you’re
remaining in the closet, but I never said no if someone asked me.

Probe question. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you
had decided to remain in the closet?

I don’t think it would have been successful because I don’t think I could have
achieved all of my potential because part of my energy would have been focused
on making sure people don’t know I was leading multiple lives. Like I said
earlier, when you have three or four different people, it’s exhausting.

It’s how I feel about, like successfully played Sybil in the 70s on TV that’s
great, but to do it every day it’s really, it’s a bit exhausting. One life is hard
enough, living multiple ones is harder. I would say, I don’t think if I would have come out like I did, but when I did, it probably would have influenced me more, [I] would have less confidence and I think eventually you’re not as happy with yourself or like yourself as much, if you’re always acting like it’s not OK. Because then it means you’ve got a problem to something you don’t accept either.

Yes, it would have been a problem if I hadn’t later. That might be gay lesbian, etcetera, and also being based in San Francisco as their headquarters. I mean there is just things about that, that being gay there was easier and it was almost more like there was a stronger support group because you can be in a meeting and think this through for gay people here. There is enough of us to be counted, but not necessarily recognized yet.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 4.** The fourth question of the interview intended to decompose the symbiosis between the fact of coming out/being out and the achieving of high-level leadership positions. Brief comparative data findings and analysis of these relationships are presented in the following paragraphs. Table 10 presents the researcher’s analysis of the general themes that emanated from the interview responses to illustrate the individual and collective lived experiences.

**Gained self-confidence and personal growth.** All participants described increasing self-confidence after disclosing their sexual orientation publicly, allowing them to take risks and accept new challenges pursuing higher-level leadership positions. Remarkably, honesty was a characteristic revealed by various participants; they had to be honest with themselves and with the people in their families and within their working
environments. Honesty allowed them to conduct themselves with authenticity, which helped them to continue pursuing their journey to leadership.

Table 10

*Interview Question 4: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Can you describe how coming out/being out has impacted your role as a leader?</td>
<td>A. Gained self-confidence and personal growth</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Great impact having family and peers support</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Obtained support from the LGBT community</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Made me more empathetic, more conscious about others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Was a strength and helped me to succeed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?</td>
<td>A. Would not succeed if remained in the closet</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Was hard at the beginning, but later it was a good decision</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. It would be the same</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. I am not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Great impact having family and peer support.* Total acceptance from family members and close friends was a constant response among participants in this study. In the lived experiences of most participants, coming out was a determining event, which shaped the confidence and personal awareness of these men. Eight participants manifested experiencing and causing emotional hardship to their parents or siblings immediately after disclosing their sexual preference, but those feelings were attenuated after the family was more informed and understanding of the situation, injecting
confidence and making them comfortable to deal with any type of issue. Participant 6 asserted that “family support matters; it helps later in work life to succeed.” Additionally, some participants expressed that being able to bring their partners to work gatherings allowed them to overcome shyness, fear, and introversion. All participants felt the need to be out, open, to be trusted, and to become better leaders. Coming out at the workplace always accelerated their transition to better positions, channeling their energy to become better individuals and better leaders.

**Obtained support from the LGBT community.** Seven participants indicated that having support from gays and lesbians at their workplaces was crucial for their career advancement. Coming out as gay individuals attracted more external support, such as receiving mentorship from gay supervisors, being able to attend LGBT workshops, and partnering with other organizations. Being out of the closet abled them to be part of a community, connecting with other gay leaders, and establishing new relationships.

**Made me more emphatic, more conscientious to others.** Seven participants indicated that this is a society that expects men to act in a tough, aggressive, unemotional manner, but the gay identity makes them more sensitive on social issues; they appreciate and value more what happens in their surroundings. Because of their orientation and their marginalization, or internalized limitations, these leaders have empathy for those individuals they serve (prisoners, students, guests, gay citizens), considering the point of view of “those who are not part of the majority,” knowing the feeling of not being welcomed.

**Was a strength and made me to succeed.** Half of the participants conveyed that coming out of the closet was a strength to some extent and was directly related with being
successful. While receiving awards and recognition for being members of the LGBT community, they experienced the opportunity to grow closer with people and with family. Although it was hard for the coming-out process, once it was done, they did not care who in the organization knew about their preferences, rather, they focused on mastering their skills as leaders. There were negative comments and rumors at the beginning of the process, but in the long run it did not have a negative impact on their lives. Their orientation was used as a strength to attain high-level leadership positions.

Interview Question 4 included a probe question to supplement and amplify the relationship between their gayness and their high-level leadership positions by directly asking if they would have the same outcome (success) if they would have remained in the closet.

Would not succeed if remained in the closet. Coming out as a gay individual was directly related to attaining high-level leadership positions, according to eight participants. On the other hand, two participants manifested that their sexual identity was not a determinant for holding high-level leadership positions, and two were not sure if their gay identity directly impacted their current positions within the organization. However, all 12 participants manifested that after coming out of the closet, they were much happier and less stressed within their organizations and with their families. Most participants were in the range of 41-61 years old and started their professional life when being homosexual was deeply stigmatized and had no legal protection. Their experiences include, at some point in their lives, living in a constant fear of beingouted in the workplace, making more difficult their escalation to higher positions. When a man is openly gay, coworkers may express their homophobia directly (Woods, 1994). In
correlation to this study, one participant was blackmailed for a period of time by an ex-lover, threatening to out him at work. In the end, he was outed, but luckily management was supportive and showed they cared about his well-being.

Participant 2 attributed all his success to his homosexuality, questioning whether he would have had such motivation if he had been straight (“if I were in the closet, it would’ve weighed me down, I wouldn’t be driven as I am. Once out, I was able to thrive”). Similarly, Participant 3 gave his gayness a high score to be successful (“I think it would’ve been impossible for me to achieve at this level if I were in the closet”). The lived experience of Participant 3 reflects a clear difference between living in the closet and outside of the closet, within the same environment. He revealed that he was not fully accepted at his school because there were rumors he was gay, and to avoid discrimination he decided to transfer to another school district where he was openly gay since the beginning. This change enabled him to see the difference within a same type of educational environment. After coming out of the closet and being openly gay, there was no need to think about what to say or how it was to be said, and he was able to focus on what he was supposed to do: educate. Most men indicated that they would have been miserable, unhappy, and without motivation if they would have remained in the closet.

Each of the participants exposed very personal coming-out stories and examples that led to sadness, fear, frustration, anger, and tears when relating what their family and partners had to endure in order to accept and support them as they aspired to attain a high-level leadership position. The commonality was that in each participant’s case, the relief they experienced after being out shaped their journey to their current role of leadership significantly.
Was hard at the beginning, but later it was a good decision. The process of coming out was difficult for all participants in both environments: family and the workplace. One participant experienced rejection when he applied for a position and was not hired because he was openly gay; however, he realized it was “a blessing in disguise. I wouldn’t have wanted to work for a place that would want me to be closeted.” These men experienced difficulties at the time of coming out, but it created a positive impact later in their lives.

It would be the same. Two participants expressed that their sexual preference had not impacted them negatively nor positively, and they have been successful in getting high-level positions because of their skills and knowledge, reflected by experience and performance. Participants 6 and 8 indicated that it would not be that different if they had remained in the closet; they decided to come out because they needed to take risks, make decisions, and be visible. They were convinced that in order to be a true leader, they needed to be honest with themselves and others.

I am not sure. Two participants were hesitant to respond about whether coming out of the closet impacted their path to high-level management positions. Participant 7 said that he received support from his supervisors, who were aware of his sexual preference, and “helped me along, and they knew I was gay and just kind of, you know, nurtured my talent and helped me get the right coaching and training I needed to move forward in my career, but I think that would have been . . . They would have treated me the same way either way, I think.” Similarly, Participant 9 was openly gay and received support from parents and peers at work (“although we never talked about it, they kind of
new but didn’t care, it didn’t matter”). For him it was hard to know if he would be successful if have decided to remain in the closet.

Following are excerpts from participants’ responses to Interview Question 6. These responses provide experiences showing weaknesses participants had that presented barriers and detracted them from their path to attain high-level leadership positions.

**Interview Question 6.** Can you describe what weaknesses you had which presented barriers to you?

**Participant 1.**

I was bullied during my college years, and I never got treated for that with a therapist. I carried that. I carried that horrendous experience of being bullied to a point that the person who bullied me was a classmate. And my senior year, he died 5 years later of a massive heart attack. I used to think what goes around comes around, but I wasn’t thrilled that he died, I was just shocked that he died. Never went to my reunions except one about five years ago. Never went to any of them for fear of that whole thing being brought up. So, I think that whole piece there, that psychologically damaged piece, too, is my weakness that I never really could really blossom out there because that was always a part of the stuff I hadn’t taken care of.

**Participant 2.**

I think your weaknesses are your strengths. I think the weaknesses, when I didn’t accept myself, or I didn’t value myself, or I didn’t think I was worth it, that sometimes limited where and how I would move forward. I would think I was supposed to suffer, like this was supposed to happen, but it’s not. No one
deserves to be mistreated. No one deserves to be not valued. So that was a weakness of mine that I think . . .

Participant 3.

I think the number one barrier was internalized homophobia, which I’ve been talking about kind of, in a roundabout way, in the other question. But, I think it had a lot to do with me doubting even my humanity, my self-worth, whether I was loved by God and my whole spirituality and it was a lot of internal conflict. I think it got better after the moment of coming out, but it still took me many years, I think, to overcome the effects of the internalized homophobia that really kept me from striving to climb the corporate ladder, so to speak. Or, to be effective in that, I think people saw that I probably doubted myself and so that’s not something that I think people are looking for to put in leadership roles. But at a certain point, when I got over it somewhat, or enough of it, I think people then started to see that I did in fact have some leadership qualities and that people kind of took me under their wing or just lifted me up, and encouraged me that my voice was a value and that I should speak up. I think that started with people realizing my passion.

Participant 4.

Well I think growing up LGBT, you have a lot of self-doubt. You end up being perhaps more private than you would otherwise. You internalize the external factors, or messages, that you get from the world that say, “You can’t do this. You can’t do that.” I certainly was susceptible to all of that and internalized and digested a lot of that. I was just grateful that I have a lot of family, friends, and
mentors who helped me to understand that that wasn’t necessarily true just because someone says it. It’s fake news. I think that those were weaknesses. That’s a weakness that is unique. . . . Frankly, everyone sort of has self-esteem issues, self-doubt, and whatever. I think those tend to be amplified because of the cultural messages that we get about what it is to be a gay man in America, right? It isn’t to say that straight, White, whatever, everything that I’m not is at a disadvantage because of that, I just think that if gave me an interesting narrative that got me started.

**Participant 5.**

I’ve given you a lot of positives about being an outsider, but being an outsider also, I didn’t relate well to the people I work with and I lacked a support network. Except for the women. I relate well to the women because I was nonthreatening to them. They were nonthreatening to me. But walking up to the guys and being able to have beer and talk about baseball just was not something I could connect to. Part of it is my own homophobia, but I was very reluctant to. . . . I’ve lived in a gay cocoon, actually, most of my life.

But because I learned to listen and to respect people, and so I could connect with them that way, but in a social way, in a networking way, that was a big flat spot for me. And that hurt me. It hurt my advancement, career-wise, because I wasn’t a good ol’ boy. It hurt me personally, because I was alone, really. So it hurt me professionally and it hurt me personally, because without my partner in this home, I’m alone.
Participant 6.

I always tried to not be in situations where I had barriers. I knew what job I wanted to do and what job I didn’t want to do. My college friends, they didn’t have really deep sense of values and morals. I needed to do that. Maybe those things would be barriers if I was trying to do a different kind of job or be in a different place or maybe if I was in a company that was a little more traditional or something, a bank or something, where you’re supposed to bring your wife and I just . . . I wasn’t ever in that situation but I think purposely not. I never really viewed those things particularly as barriers.

I think having positive attitude, that’s a lot of it and just and part of it is . . . Part of it is being in a situation where it didn’t have an impact on me. I think people are . . . Even people that are positive and proud and would rather speak up don’t because somehow it might impact them. It might impact their promotion opportunity or their career advancement or whatever and there’s real legitimate self-interest at work, self-preservation at work. I just didn’t even . . . I just didn’t ever really care. Part of it was . . . I’ve just always been super matter of fact unlike every situation I’d introduce [name]. Here’s my husband and here are these folks and I just. . . . There might be whispering that happens somewhere else but that’s okay. If I can do it because I’m in a position that. . . . Where it’s not going to impact me, that’s helpful to people who are in a different position.

Participant 7.

So, I’ve been with the company I’ve been with for 19 years, and early on, it was technically a public company traded on the New York Stock Exchange, but it was
really run by the grandfather and grandson of the founders and was very
conservative at the time. And the CEO couldn’t even bring himself to say the
word “gay.” He’d say, “alternative lifestyles” because he just thought it was so
bad. So, I think at that point, he was . . . our company changed owners and
everything progressed right at the time that I was rising in my career, but certainly
had he stayed CEO, that would have been a problem for me and my career, and it
would have been a hindrance to us getting domestic partner benefits and all that
stuff for our company or policies.

**Participant 8.**

I think there are some parts of my personality that have been affected by hiding
something for so many years, because I did. . . . That part of me, there’s a part of
my leadership that at times I shy away from certain things. I have to do a lot of
public speaking. I still don’t like it, and I still shy away from it, because that’s
still, there’s this voice that’s like, “They’re going to know.” Even though it’s like,
God, they all know. I think they can tell by my hair. But it’s my own.

People are like, “You sound great,” but there’s still this part of me that’s
like, “They’re going to criticize me.” That has impacted. That’s probably the
most significant, and I think still there are parts of my personality that I am able to
identify at times, that it’s like, “That’s probably just from covering that up for so
many years.” I would say the public speaking is a factor. You know it’s that
internal voice, but it’s like . . . I’ve thought about it over the years. I think there’s
a lot of layers to being gay that affect our personality.
**Participant 9.**

I know I played a tape in my head that, “I’m not as good as straight guys and I don’t golf, I don’t like sports, I don’t fit in.” I know I played those tapes in my head that, “I don’t belong here, I’m not as good as the straight kids, straight boys. I can’t.” I know I played that tape and it had to stop a bit influencing or dictating anything. It just was there, the tapes maybe don’t play anymore, but it definitely played in my head earlier in my career. Where I felt a little bit like an outsider, a little bit, and I guess that’s probably generational, I hope.

I don’t think the kids, law students today feel that way, but certainly 30 years ago I did. I felt like when everyone was talking about the game last night and their girlfriends, it’s just you feel out of place. So that was more my own issue, my own kind of issue, self-esteem issue. You have to get past, you have to get past the internalized barriers.

**Participant 10.**

Objectively, because people who were gay were automatically eliminated from candidacy for certain jobs, you just weren’t eligible for certain jobs in the government in particular. Beyond that, I think that . . . I don’t know if the weaknesses that I have are weaknesses that are associated with being gay. I think I see these weaknesses in all sorts of other people and straight people, just as frequently as I see them in people.

I can be impatient, I can be . . . I’m a perfectionist and I think that can be attributed to this need to excel and overachieve at least in part. I can become indignant at situations. It used to be much more common with me than it is now,
but I can still become just so indignant when I feel that someone has been dealt with unfairly. When it’s me that’s being dealt with unfairly, oh my god. I am so hurt, so easily hurt.

**Participant 11.**

I think the biggest, I know a weakness that I’m reminded, I remind myself of every day, but lots of people remind me of as well is that I’m very impatient and I don’t necessarily understand all the barriers to getting things done. I worked in civil service for close to 20 years. Any civil servant should know all the barriers to getting things done. I think that that’s been a weakness that’s gotten better, but it's still there. I see things very simplistically. I think that there should be simple ways to get a lot of things done. In terms of personal weaknesses, I would say that I definitely have that.

I think that we talked a little bit about another weakness earlier in the interview is that I sometimes don’t have the words to put, I’m a licensed psychologist and I have a master’s in healthcare administration. I don’t talk in theory. I don’t cite studies and that kind of thing. I’m not that cerebral-type guy. I guess I can be, but that’s just not how I conceptualize things. It’s not how I communicate. I could see that sometimes, people want that. They want that assurance of, for lack of a, they want the assurance of a big brain before they’ll buy into something.

**Participant 12.**

I don’t know if it’s a weakness, but I think initially when I started my career I think being gay made you think that could be a problem, but I don’t think it
turned out to be, but I think for others it might have been at [that] time period. Or to be found out that you were and then you lose your job because that could still happen then. I think . . . But for me personally, I think we’ve talked about most of it, that need to sort of please everyone, which is certainly not a good thing if you want to say no. [It is] hard to say no.

Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 6. While each participant framed very personal and different weaknesses as barriers to ascend to the current leadership role, some trends and examples are shared as follows. With respect to Research Question 6, Table 11 presents the researcher’s analysis of the themes that were evident in the individual and collective interview data analysis of weaknesses that presented barriers on participants’ path to leadership.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Can you describe what weaknesses you had which presented barriers to you?</td>
<td>A. Internalized low self-esteem</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Disconnection with heteronormativity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Physical appearance and soundness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Internalized low self-esteem. Half of the participants described a feeling of low self-worthiness for being gay, especially at the beginning of their professional careers. Participants shared that they did not value themselves as “complete persons,” that their sexual preference created self-doubt and internal conflicts, amplified because of cultural
messages about what it is to be gay in America. Participant 4 commented that being a person of color (Latino) added complications that other gay persons did not experience. Being gay and Latino positioned him in disadvantage to available opportunities to grow.

**Disconnection with heteronormativity.** Some participants reported that they could not connect in totality with their heterosexual counterparts; they did not share the same values and morals, obligating gay persons to form social gay communities where they could feel better about themselves. Working in noninclusive environments caused being passed over for professional opportunities, developing a desire to overwork to overachieve goals that others simply obtained with minimal performance. Gay persons could not access all networks and were limiting themselves to survive, legitimizing the self-interest, the self-preservation at work.

**Physical appearance and soundness.** Another constant weakness in four participants was the fear to look gay and sound gay. At the beginning of their careers, they were concerned about their appearance, acting and behaving in a way so that others could not discover their sexual preference. They had to amplify their vocabulary and deepen their voice to sound more “manly” and dissipate rumors in the office.

Question 9 of the interview was constructed to distinguish obstacles, impediments, deficiencies, and struggles the participants experienced during their journey. Following are excerpts of the interview and a table comparative of the analysis of the responses.

**Interview Question 9.** How would you describe any barriers related to your sexual orientation that you experienced during your career?
Participant 1.

I put my barriers on myself because I was insecure about being gay and I was closeted. So, let’s say that I wasn’t closeted and I came out, were there barriers? Oh, yes, in education there are. Because immediately we’re looked at as possibly pedophiles, right? So yeah, there are society barriers, you know, stereotypes that you had to overcome and you had to be careful. And there was your own perception and how you dealt with yourself and how you managed to either overcome them or be a victim to them. But was it harder being gay? Yes, it’s harder being gay because you do have that, no matter what.

Can you imagine if I was a gay principal in Alabama? Gay principal in Texas? Gay principal in Fresno? Well I think no matter what, it’s marginalized. Latino, marginalized gay, you add on to any of those other things and we’re even marginalized in our own LGBT community. Transgenders are marginalized significantly. Lesbians are sometimes marginalized. Color is marginalized. Money is marginalized. Power, position, marginalized, how people look at classes of . . . etcetera. So, I think it’s a matter of overcoming it, not becoming part of the problem or part of the victim of that problem.

Participant 2.

I think barriers are when people, like my secretary that one time, she never even asked me, but she judges. I think the barriers are when people judge you. They predetermine that you’re incapable of doing something. I know that happens. I know that people do that to people. Because of those barriers, it makes me want to help others get something more. I know that people keep people from things.
I’m a White man. There’s privilege that comes with that. When they find out I’m gay, sometimes they’re like . . . But you know, I’m just saying I know there’s barriers because people sometimes they don’t express it either. When they come in here sometimes, they ask, are you’re the superintendent? They say something sometimes. Sometimes, but not everybody, but it happens once in a while. Then social barriers are I don’t really enjoy. . . . It’s not that I don’t like straight people, but I’ve been around them my whole life. I’m kind of sick of them.

Participant 3.

So, one I think starts with being a teacher and wanting to be successful. Not just be that teacher that kind of blends in with the rest, I did always want to be and rise to [be] seen as someone that others could strive to be. Like a better teacher, that my students did better, that academically they performed better. I always wanted to stand out in that sense, I was unable to feel confident to be able to do that and be open about my sexual orientation. Not only because at that time of where my internalized homophobia and self-doubt lied, I think I was at a better place then. But I got messages, whether they were covert or overt messages, that it’s not okay to be a teacher and to be out. So, I think that caused me to . . . it caused some fear, like, gosh what if my boss were to find out if I was gay? Would I be evaluated negatively? Would I lose my job? Would I then lose my house I just bought? Would it cause problems in my personal relationship because I wouldn’t have a job? So, all of these things. And how would students then judge me if they saw the principal firing me because of my sexual orientation.
Participant 4.

I think the biggest and most important is the limitations we put on ourselves. Listening to those silent messages that say, “Can’t ever have a gay president.” Things like that. Part of this country is belief that anyone can grow up and become president and now we have proof that that actually may be true, but in a really negative way. We know that when that’s said, there are some caveats, right? Until recently, no person of color has ever been there. We still don’t have a woman that’s ever been there. We don’t have a person of the LGBT community. There are those cues that sort of tell you what you can and can’t do. That’s also true for people of color. It’s not just that.

I think that there are certainly impressions that gay men don’t always necessarily lead. Again, the absence in the rights on CEO of major corporations or heads of government or things of that nature. If you’re trying to be in leadership or if you are in leadership, you’re a bit of an outlier, right? I don’t think that’s so terrible because I think just one makes a difference.

I think that one of the challenges for gay men in leadership is that there are expectations of leaders that don’t necessarily always align with the gay male community.

Participant 5.

Internal, really, I’ve lived the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” existence, and as I mentioned, I kind of pushed the envelope there. I really failed to build networks, support networks, because of this “Don’t ask, don’t tell” and really, as I approached retirement, and got more senior in the organization, the people that
were my mentors began to fall away, because they retired or they were gone, so I was out there by myself.

Social barriers, we’ve lived a surrogated existence. Financial barriers, I’ve already mentioned, housing, financing, travel, not able to get a hotel room, that’s history, that’s coming back in some places.

**Participant 6.**

I think any of the barriers or the personal things, not really orientation related. It’s just for me about wanting to do as well as I can, not really financially but just as a person, that’s not some orientation question. When I was younger I worked an awful lot. I would have liked to have dated more, it all worked out fine, it all worked out fine in the end. I’m glad there was no Facebook when I was a kid or college student. No, I haven’t particularly and I think that’s been a great luxury for me. I’ve been able to be in this job and continue to do well and be accepted and be promoted and ultimately get asked to lead the company.

**Participant 7.**

I think I might have put limitations on myself of that I could only go so far in my career. And maybe that was a self-esteem thing related to being gay. Or maybe, because I didn’t see any other LGBT leadership in my company, but I think I probably did have some. When I thought about my career path I maybe didn’t set the bar high enough because of that.

**Participant 8.**

Barriers in that, I don’t want to, again, put [on] rose-colored glasses, in that I don’t know that every company, especially in the K-12 publishing, and that was
from 1993 to 2015. . . . There was more they could’ve done. There was more
they could’ve done.

*Participant 9.*

I guess it’s difficult to know. I guess for me, I’m sure that I’ve not gotten clients
because I’m gay. I guess I don’t, I’m sure that’s happened, but you don’t know
what you don’t know. You know? And so, but I’m sure that a lawyer has not
made referrals to me thinking, “Well that client won’t like a gay person, so let’s
steer it to somebody else more macho or more sports or more golf or whatever.” I
think that’s probably affected my career somewhat.

But on the other hand, I know I’ve gotten business because somebody
thought, “Oh, well he is gay and he would relate to this client and it would be a
good fit.” So, on the other hand, it’s helped. But I think probably it’s been a bit
of a, it probably, it could set your career back a little bit. But I’m sure women
feel the same way, people of color feel the same way. You know? If the decision
maker’s a straight White male, that’s who they probably want to pick. And we
have to change that, and we are changing that.

*Participant 10.*

When I was moving to Munich in 1988, the fact that my partner was treated
differently, we were together for 7 years. He was treated fundamentally
differently than the spouse of a straight person going to work at [company] and
there was nothing that we could do about it. Absolutely nothing we can do about
it. In fact, I think it contributed to the end of our relationship because to live in
Munich, one had to have a residence permit and a work permit in order to work and [name], the place that was employing me would not help.

**Participant 11.**

I think that in terms of barriers, I may have imposed a barrier based on my becoming a leader and a recognized leader that I don’t want to identify and that necessarily enmeshed way with the community. I think I’m part of the gay community. We support the gay community. We go to events and activities. I don’t want to necessarily feel like I’m that enmeshed with it. I think there’s a hesitancy based on my role as a leader. I don’t know if, I think that sometimes I found at times judgment in the gay community. I think that’s why I didn’t care for San Francisco that we were [there], at the time gay marriage and everyone was adopting.

My partner and I made the decision years ago we didn’t have an interest in having children. I think people somewhat held that against us, like our priorities weren’t in order. Because this was the thing to do, and everyone was doing it. We chose to extricate ourselves from that community, because we felt we were being negatively judged. Because our careers were more important than what others prioritized as being important. I think there are some barriers. I think that, I don’t know if they are unique to the gay community. I think any community you go to, you’ll find those barriers.

**Participant 12.**

I had my own internal personal barriers. Social barriers, gosh! A lot of that I feel it over time has resolved itself, but I can remember I mean especially when the
press first came out about AIDS and then the first couple of years after that, I mean people just went back into the closet. Being gay at that time was also concerning for some people. That’s one social barrier; I don’t feel there is as many as there used to be. I had a lot of friends when I was younger that were gay and they were either waiters or hair stylists or had different jobs simply because they thought that was either the only job they could get or it’s just what they wanted to do, but they didn’t tend to pay as well.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 9.** Brief comparative data findings and analysis of the barriers related to their sexual orientation and its impact are presented as follows (see Table 12).

Table 12

*Interview Question 9: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. How would you describe any barriers related to your sexual orientation that you experienced during your career?</td>
<td>A. External social barriers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Internal, self-imposed barriers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
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**External social barriers.** Gay persons are exposed to social prejudice and judgement from society in general and from their own gay community, according to some participants. These participants revealed that people judged their behaviors and used them to predetermine their capability to perform successfully, including in leadership roles. Undermined societal expectations were common because of their sexual preference, reinforcing stereotypes and impacting their rights, such as obtaining houses in
partnerships, traveling together, and even obtaining a hotel room in particular countries, as Participant 5 experienced when he was in the foreign service, causing the end of his gay relationship. The AIDS pandemic during the 1980s significantly impacted the gay lifestyle to the point of causing fear among the gay community, obligating gays to feel safer by returning back into the closet. The lack of protecting laws increased discrimination against the gay community.

**Internal self-imposed barriers.** Another common barrier identified in the participants’ responses was an internalized homophobia and self-limitations in some participants. Eight participants shared that they were insecure about themselves, doubting themselves about pursuing leadership careers. Their search for social acceptance and fear to be outed by coworkers added to a lack of support networks and low self-esteem, and built obstacles impeding a more rapid ascent to leadership roles.

The following section contains excerpts from participants’ responses to Interview Question 10. These responses provide insights from their leadership journey to become leaders.

**Interview Question 10.** What key insights from your leadership journey, as they relate to being openly gay, can you share with other gay males who aspire to become leaders?

**Participant 1.**

My advice to new generations is to surround yourself with people that would be role models to the area of focus or targeting that you’re looking at. Who are they? Are they role models? How can you learn from them? How can you learn from the mistakes they made so you don’t do those same things? Get involved with them in terms of that. Look at the people you are hanging around with, are they
the best for you in terms of that? So, that would probably be one of them. But I think my greatest asset to them would be the recommendation to learn to love yourself.

To overcome barriers, you can have therapy. Call someone in to talk to, if not a professional therapist. And not all therapists are good, so be choosy on who you select. And if you cannot afford therapy find ways to . . . whether it’s from LGBT centers that offer it for free to whatever, but I think therapy is probably one of the biggest things ever, ever. People who lose weight and go and get a bypass or whatever, the reason they gain their weight back is not because . . . the number one reason why they gain the weight back is because their mind is not there, and that is the work of a therapist.

*Participant 2.*

I would say that you need to find some mentors, and you need to be affirmed by people that are like you, and also people that aren’t like you. Be open to different people, and don’t seclude yourself to people that are just like you. Try to find people that are different than you, and make sure that they support you. You know that’s important because I think too often we just get around people that are just like us. Then we meet, and we’re in a room with people that aren’t like us, and we’re uncomfortable. It’s really important to be comfortable around people, different kinds of people. I’ve always tried to do that. It sounds so cliché, but it’s important to be yourself, and it’s important to live a purposeful life, and a life that you’re not always being something you’re not.
Participant 3.

I think what has worked for me in this whole puzzle piece of my life that I’ve been trying to hopefully describe in these answers is, find your passion. Not necessarily in this order but know what your passion is, figure it out and find it, you have it. Whether you realize it or not, and don’t let that be based on money, but being based on what causes you to feel good, and what are your strengths? What’s driving you? What is your purpose in life? Try to find a career that is aligned with that, and address your self-doubts. Address any internalized homophobia, and by doing that I think there’s some strategies in addressing that, whether you need professional counseling or you need to journal or you need to read some books from openly LGBT authors that have talked about their journey and overcoming these challenges. But surrounding yourself with people that you admire and look up to. Again, trying to surround yourself and create a circle of friends where you can say my circle of friends I respect and I admire and I look up to them. Because in return they will look up to you, and they will see things in you that inspire them as well. But I think that you’ll find yourself on a path that’s towards happiness. Where you’re thriving, where you’re your best self, and hopefully that leads into leadership roles where you’re able to make an even larger impact in whatever your passion is. Try to look at it in that lens. I think if you’re looking for leadership roles because you want the power, or you’re looking for leadership roles because you want the money, I think it’s going to be nearly impossible to find the happiness that you’re looking for. Or the success really.
Know that you’re going to make mistakes along the way, but that’s how you’re going to learn and you’re going to grow. So, forgive yourself, learn from them, and you’ll make the same ones again. Learn from those enough where you don’t make the same mistakes again. Put yourself out there, and you’ll grow in each new experience that you have.

**Participant 4.**

I think it goes back to that authenticity thing I was mentioning. I think as people ask, “Do I come out? Do I not come out? Do I make this a part of my working life or of my leadership narrative or do I keep it separate?” I certainly see plenty of people who are out, but they [are] just not out at work or they leave it unsaid. Again, everyone’s free to walk their path the way they want to walk it, but again I wouldn’t change a single thing. I think that people hopefully feel a level of comfort with me because I’m pretty upfront. I’m very upfront and honest about who and what I am. I think that that doesn’t stay with just the LGBT part of me. There’s a sense that I’ll tell them the truth every single time. I don’t think that’s only a benefit in politics, I think that’s probably helpful in a lot of things.

I would encourage a gay man to be yourself. One of the cool things about being LGBT, this is changing a little bit as we gain more rights, but in a lot of ways you kind of build your own life. You build kind of your own family in a way. It’s usually a close group of friends. Marriage equality and the ability to adopt and all this kind of other things that comes a little bit different than the more conventional paths. The ability to construct a life as you see it ought to be and how you feel it’s most comfortable and what’s going to make you most
fulfilled and most enriched. That’s a luxury that maybe doesn’t everyone get because we’re unconventional from the start. You can just do whatever you want. That’s hopefully a liberating message that’s counter to what you’re told constantly, which is that you can’t do a lot of this, that, or the other thing.

**Participant 5.**

Following up from the network question, I think is very important. The other lesson I’m drawing out of all this, is that when people know you, it’s more than likely safe to be out. And I talk in terms of safety. I came in from another generation and for (husband) and I it really was, is it safe? Now from your generation, it may not feel that way. I know people, one who was the chief of mental health for the whole state California, who brought his father and his husband to his swearing in, who is now the chief of mental healthcare for the county of (county), for the jail system, who brought all of his senior staff to his house where he has pictures of him and his husband all up and down the walls in the corridors.

**Participant 6.**

Part of being open and honest about who you are and about being proud of that is about being accepting of everybody. Part of that . . . you have to bring that experience with you as a leader and you get that experience from being comfortable and proud of who you are. I think it’s also interesting, today is so different than when I was growing up.

Whatever this list of things we were fighting for all of us? It always was, it’s not prescribing this for anyone, it’s just that it’s not proscribed. It’s that it’s
possible for people it’s not forbidden. One of the things talking to college age kids, young men now, as soon as they come out to their families they’re like, their families are like totally pressuring them about, but you need a nice boy, you need to settle down, you need to start having children. That’s not for everybody, but they really get that kind of pressure. Part of the lesson is about these are all possibilities, you get to choose your path now. You don’t have to go be a . . . whatever you used to be right a hairdresser or a florist whatever the things were that you could be. Not that those are bad things, it’s just that you don’t have to do that; you can pick other things. Be who you want to be.

We’re going through a whole bunch of leadership stuff here talking a lot about how you get better performance out of people, how you make them feel more engaged and more connected in what they’re doing and frankly also perform better. I say nobody is forced to come and work here. Everybody shows up voluntarily every day, me included. You got to make everybody, whether they’re chopping vegetables, cleaning rooms, or serving drinks to come here every day voluntarily.

Participant 7.

I’ve had a lot of advantages that other people didn’t have. I’ve have a loving family, a great partner, and a good education and things that. . . . I’ve had a lot of advantages other people weren’t lucky enough to have. But I think that, like I said earlier, I sort of put limitations on myself. I think people can go as far as they want in most cases and if you aren’t living in a community that’s supportive or in a job that’s supportive, then to the extent that you can move or change jobs,
the sooner the better. Because life is short and not everyone has opportunities to change jobs and move whenever they want, but if you’re not in a good situation, you owe it to yourself to do whatever you can to get in a good situation.

I mentioned the peer groups, the Victory Fund, and LGBT Fundraising. But the other boards I was on, I met people that were farther along in their careers that were kind of mentors and peers and probably having that as my peer group and friends, probably, made big difference. And I know you’ve talked to some of those people already.

**Participant 8.**

I think that probably for young kids it’s still . . . I think it’s better, I do, but I don’t think we’re there yet. I think there’s still a lot of fear for children, and if anything, I operated the first half century, for I’ll say the first 40 years, out of fear. Again, fear drove me to be successful because I didn’t want to end up back in Fresno, so I wanted to make a really good living. It definitely prevented me from being truthful and telling, especially [name], who was my wife at the time, that I really probably would be happier with a man.

It’s really helping them. . . . I’ve thought about that, even in my home town, how many kids still are going through [city], a farming town, and going through hell? Because I know, it doesn’t matter how much progress we’ve made. Those little towns, it’s got to be hell still. It would be, how do you work to help them work through that? And that you can have a great life, and you can come out.
Gay men also underestimate themselves, because that is more courage than most ever have, to be able to walk that. It probably would be just that. . . . I think if every gay, man and woman had a mentor that could hold their hand to let them know, you are going to survive this and you will make it. Because the number one thing that I remember is just living most of my life in fear. This probably would be the same even for leaders, because there is some baggage that we probably carry. Again, my sister would say we all have baggage, so cut the whole . . . I sincerely believe gay men have a few extra layers because of all that stuff, that probably for young leaders, it probably would be good to have a mentor. Doesn’t have to be through their company, but even through LGBT. That probably wouldn’t be bad, especially in these big states as young people start their careers. I’ve had an amazing management career. When it’s challenging it has nothing to do with my sexual orientation, but I still think that there are some layers to it, and some of them I probably don’t even identify, that having a mentor would probably help with.

**Participant 9.**

I guess to say that, for me, it’s made my life much, much happier. I’m married to a man, we have a great life, we’ve got great friends and great family and it’s just been, it was the right decision to live my life openly and freely and honestly. It was the right decision. And I don’t have any regrets about it at all.

And so, I think my insight would be that I think you’d experience that too. Whatever barriers or bumps in the road come along, everybody has them, even the captain of the football team, the beautiful straight White boy, he’s got issues
too. It’s life. Life throws curve balls, but you won’t regret it. You won’t regret being yourself, being out, not being afraid, turning the tape down, the self-esteem internalized phobia tape, put on the noise deafening headphones and don’t listen to it. I guess that would be my insights.

I just think when I saw your project, I thought that’s very interesting. I’m really glad that you’re doing it. I’m very excited about it. I don’t know, I’m sure you’re researching if there’s been other studies related or close to what you’re doing, I’ve never heard of what you’re doing. I think it’s great. It’s very exciting, it’s cutting edge, interesting, so good for you. I can’t wait to read it.

**Participant 10.**

I think the biggest barrier that we face can often be ourselves. If we don’t allow our gayness to be a barrier or an obstacle, nobody else will either.

As a gay leader, you’re a minority leader. You have to be able to manage a diverse portfolio of relationships, most of which are with the majority, the straight majority. That can sometimes be tricky. It’s certainly trickier than the straight leader managing relationships with gay people. They come from a position of power and it’s just presumed that as a member of the majority class, their leadership is, I think, less questioned.

It’s less audited than ours. I think we’re under more scrutiny. I think straight people are often wondering whether we understand them and I think sometimes we don’t. I think we often think we do and make a lot of assumptions, but I think that there’s a lot of room to be mistaken in those assumptions. I think
the gay leaders are just going to be under more scrutiny. They’ll be approached
with suspicion more often than their straight peers. You have to be on your game.

**Participant 11.**

I think that there’s been a couple things. One, I’ve not been afraid. I’ve not been
afraid of who I am, and that would negatively impact me. When you have that
belief and you truly believe it, it takes away any kind of negative power others
could have over you for it. Catherine of Siena said, “Be the person God meant
you to be and you’ll set the world on fire.” I say that every day. As long as I’m
being the person who I was meant to be, then everything falls into place. Again
that’s why I sometimes don’t have words for things. Because if you believe that,
and you go forward with that belief, things just fall into place. I think that not
being afraid takes so much, it gives you power because it takes all that negative
power away from others.

I also think that on the other side of that is to really become a successful
leader, you have to have fun and enjoy what you’re doing. You have to surround
yourself with people who support your vision not whether they know it or not, or
who people you believe could get to support your vision. I do really, really tough
work. I do work that nobody else wants to do. But I surround myself with teams
of people who end up enjoying what we do. That’s without motivation, comes
from that inspiration. Really, I think there’s fear and fun. For kids who are
younger and trying to think about how do I get there, those things, and it’s really
what we’ve been talking about. It’s mentors and elders.
It’s identifying people and saying, “I don’t necessarily want to follow in your footsteps but I want to know how you did what you did so that I can figure out how I need to do what I need to do.” I think the gay community does that a lot better than the straight community. I think the gay community as outsiders does a good job of identifying, helping people identify. Whereas I got straight nephews who are floundering at times because they don’t identify those mentors as easily I think as gay kids.

**Participant 12.**

You always have to be who you are; you’re just to adapt based on the environment of the circumstances. You have to be OK with that, at least to some degree; to be a leader, that’s just part of the deal because you’re always setting an example. I think leadership applies even if you’re a gay male and think, “Well it should be OK then, I’m out.” You can be out, but don’t stand up there and say this should be this way. That’s not the podium for it; be a leader in the role that you’re in and then be who you are in and then be who you are. Those two together should be enough.

That’s one thing that I would say in the leadership journey being openly gay. OK what else? It should be OK that others are not either gay. Well look at the most recent political campaign and the outcome right? Some people were very much like it should only be this way and no other way; well it’s okay to have a different option, we should be okay with that.

We may not agree with it but you shouldn’t force people to say it has to be okay to, I am this way, or you are that way. It should be much more of a
compromise because everybody has a right to their point of view. Don’t let it be as if everybody has just got to accept that this is who I am, and I am going to be open to whatever and if you want to be; you can be but be respectful.

I guess the only thing I will share is don’t assume what others assume or you think they know about you or you think you know about them, which is really in life right? It doesn’t necessarily just apply to gay people, but sometimes those that you think will be the least accepting or the most difficult turn out to [be] the most accepting and the least difficult. You may find out that they may have a family member that’s gay or maybe their son or daughter is, but they have never felt comfortable talking about it.

**Common themes and patterns in responses to Interview Question 10.** The last question of the interview intended to exhibit those elements and events these gay leaders identified as critical experiences throughout their journey to attain high-level leadership positions. Brief comparative data findings and analysis of these insights are presented as follows. Table 13 presents the researcher’s analysis of the general themes that emanated from the interview responses to illustrate the individual and collective lived experience.

Table 13

*Interview Question 10: Common Themes and Patterns in Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. What key insights from your leadership journey, as they relate to being openly gay, can you share with other gay males who aspire to become leaders?</td>
<td>A. Network support</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Authenticity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Honesty and openness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Network support.** Nine participants emphasized the importance of being surrounded by a strong supporting network, and the need to look for role models and mentors, both heterosexual allies and LGBT institutions. The importance of being affirmed by people like themselves is crucial to find a work-life balance, and networking was a priority in their journey to leadership. The expansion of their friendships, confidants, points of contact, and true mentors was a long-term process.

**Authenticity.** Eight participants revealed that becoming a leader requires a person to be himself, overcoming personal doubts and fears. The biggest barrier for gay leaders is often self-imposed limitations impeding the risk of taking necessary challenges to become true leaders. Participant 11 stated that “if you truly believe in yourself, it takes away any kind of negative power others could have over you.”

**Honesty and openness.** Several participants warned that leaders must be open to diversity and generational differences, adapting their decisions to any type of environment. Being honest and standing up for one’s beliefs makes people believe in their leader.

**Data Analysis by Common Themes in Research Questions**

In the following section, participant data are analyzed and presented according to the two research questions. The researcher analyzed all 12 participants’ responses to determine common themes for Research Questions 1 and 2. It was determined that there were four common themes across all participants for Research Question 1 and two for Research Question 2.

**Research Question 1.** “How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of support they received along their leadership
journey to attain a high-level leadership position?” All 12 participants’ responses were analyzed to look for common themes. Table 14 displays the common themes to answer Research Question 1, the perception of supports openly-gay male leaders received.

Table 14

Research Question 1: Common Themes and Patterns in all Participants’ Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of support they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?</td>
<td>A. Self-awareness and self-acceptance</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Solid network</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Education and leadership skills</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Family and Friends</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common Theme 1: Self-awareness and self-acceptance. Unanimously, 100% of all participants perceived that self-acceptance as a gay person is the main support. The aspiration to pursue dreams was present in many participants; their self-determination increased after they came out of the closet and felt comfortable with themselves, making them fully aware of their true self. This resonated with the strategies of self-awareness, “Getting to know yourself inside and out is a continuous journey of peeling back the layers of the onion and becoming more and more comfortable with what is in the middle—the true essence of you” (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 61). For instance, Participant 2 directly correlated his leadership with his inherently gay attributes, creativity and innovation, convinced that gay people have different views, while to
Participants 5, 6, and 9, being an outsider was an important factor to reach management positions.

**Common Theme 2: Reaching out to strong networks.** All 12 participants emphasized the importance of having the support of a strong and solid network. Reaching out to gay mentors, straight allies, and LGBT organizations empowered these men and facilitated their rise to top-level executive leadership roles. Friendship with other gay peers was helpful in building that network, learning to see the different facets of their organization. Participant 12 manifested that there was a time when gays were hidden and establishing circles was not happening, but now “you just go networking because it’s networking and there [are?] gay people there to support you.”

**Common Theme 3: Education and leadership skills.** A majority, 92%, of all participants viewed education and continuous learning as inherent to leadership skills and also creating a responsibility to help others who didn’t have the privilege of having an education or a loving and accepting family. The combination of having an advanced education and access to gay networks opened doors to promotions, establishing the path to attain high-level leadership positions.

**Common Theme 4: Family and friends.** Almost all participants expressed gratitude to their family members for being supportive on their journey to leadership. Parents, grandparents, spouses, partners, and siblings were listed as significantly influential and primary supporters in their self-acceptance as gay persons, building confidence and belief in themselves. Participants 1 and 11 reported the value of having a partner and being accepted by their family members. Participant 4 shared the sacrifices made by his parents to provide educational opportunities, allowing him to obtain and
enlarge his talent, abilities, and efficacies in the political environment, a decisive factor in reaching a leadership role in public office.

Research Question 2. “How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of barriers they received along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?” All 12 participants’ responses were analyzed to look for common themes. Table 15 displays the common themes to answer Research Question 2, the perception of supports openly gay male leaders received.

Table 15

Research Question 2: Common Themes and Patterns in all Participants’ Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Common theme</th>
<th>Number of respondents indicating theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and describe the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position?</td>
<td>A. Self-imposed limitation and internalized homophobia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Social prejudice and undermined societal expectations</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common Theme 1: Self-imposed limitation and internalized homophobia.

Roughly 67% of all participants perceived the feeling of low self-worthiness for being gay, especially at the beginning of their professional careers. Participants shared that they did not value themselves as “complete persons,” that their sexual preference created self-doubt and internal conflicts, amplified because of cultural messages about what is to be gay in America. Participant 4 commented that being a person of color (Latino) added
complications that other gay persons did not experience. Being gay and Latino positioned him at a disadvantage to available opportunities to grow.

**Common Theme 2: Social prejudice and undermined societal expectations.** A significant percentage of participants (83%) were exposed to social prejudice and judgement from society in general and from their own gay community. These participants revealed that people judged their behaviors and used that to predetermine participants’ capability to perform successfully, including in leadership roles. Undermined societal expectations were common because of their sexual preference, reinforcing stereotypes and impacting their rights, such as obtaining houses in partnerships, traveling together, and even obtaining a hotel room in particular countries, as Participant 5 experienced when he was in the foreign service, causing the end of his gay relationship.

**Conclusions**

As a whole, openly gay leaders described their lived experience as being a distinctive journey that was immersed in complexity over time. It was deeply impacted by early life experiences, family culture and contexts, coming out situations, personal aspirations toward achievement, expectations from self and others, support and networking structures, organizational or industry contexts, generational differences, and cultural orientations. This distinctive experience shaped mindsets, decisions, actions, values, and belief systems, which influenced their potential and ability to climb up the organizational hierarchy. These manifestations were inherently molded by the families in which they were raised, the companions they had, the community environment that they embraced, and life work that they selected as an expression of their lived experience.
The individualized combination of these experiences created a personal pathway in their lives, which ultimately shaped their journey to leadership.

Based on the data collected and the analysis, the value of the data is deeply embedded in the individual’s experience of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Although the researcher analyzed the data for themes and trends, the primary analysis was focused on illustrating the lived journey to leadership of each individual participant. The story of the ascent to leadership was shared in the participants’ own reflection and voice. For the researcher, the value of this research existed in understanding each participant’s journey first; then the value of the commonalities and similarities in all participants’ responses added greater value to understanding the larger scope of the population under study. Differences that existed were also identified, reflecting how incredibly unique the journey to leadership was for each participant. While each of them emerged from different backgrounds into an experience of high-level leadership in California organizations at the emergence of the 21st century, they offer an individual and collective voice that has highlighted the journey to leadership of openly gay leaders to high-level leadership positions in today’s business world.

Summary

This chapter presented the purpose, research questions, methodology, and findings of the qualitative inquiry conducted to illuminate the lived experience of openly gay leaders in high-level leadership positions. The research methods and data collection and analysis procedures were described. This was followed by a presentation and brief analysis of the findings by research question. Evident trends and themes in the data were analyzed and presented. Chapter V presents a final summary of the study, major
findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. These are followed by implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections of the researcher.

Most men indicated that they would have been miserable, unhappy, and without motivation if they would have remained in the closet.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the qualitative research study examining openly gay males’ journey to high-level executive leadership roles. The purpose statement, research questions, research methodology, and data collection processes are presented. The population and sample are provided, followed by an interpretive analysis of the data. Findings and conclusions are interwoven with connections and links to the review of literature and significance of the study. The conclusions of the researcher are presented, followed by implications for action and further recommendations for future research. Finally, closure of the topic of research is presented with concluding reflections and remarks from the researcher.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and discover the perceptions of 12 California gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions about the types of support they received and the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position. To illuminate and reflect upon their journey to leadership, this qualitative case study explored gay males’ perspectives on personal attributes, influences, actions, and experiences as well as support received from familial or professional sources that created a pathway to their level of success. By investigating the existing literature of sexual orientation in the workplace and gay leadership models, and considering participants’ social identity, self-perception, and motivational manifestations in their ascent to leadership, the study revealed unique insights into a highly educated and more-accepted LGBT population in the United States. In addition to providing a meaningful platform in which these leaders
reflected on and shared experiences in their own voices, their collective voice added
value to the overdue social justice phenomenon of empowering diversity, equality,
equity, and inclusion for underrepresented groups, based on gender, sexual preferences,
culture, and ethnicity.

Research Questions

To examine the lived experiences of selected openly gay male leaders, the study
employed a qualitative case study research (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Patten,
2012; Yin, 1994) to probe the following research questions:

1. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and
describe the types of support they received along their leadership journey to attain a
high-level leadership position?

2. How do openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions perceive and
describe the types of barriers they received along their leadership journey to attain a
high-level leadership position?

Research Methodology and Data Collection

This study utilized a qualitative research study design to illuminate the lived
experiences of openly gay male leaders in their journey to top-level executive leadership
roles in California organizations. According to Yin (2014), the scope of a case study is
an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth
and within its real-world context” (p. 16). Similarly, Patton (2015) stated, “The case
study stands on its own as a detailed and rich story about a person, organization, event,
campaign, or program—whatever the focus of study” (p. 259). Patten (2012) concurred
stating, “In a case study, the emphasis is on obtaining thorough knowledge of an individual” (p. 9).

The phenomenon of the openly gay leader’s journey to leadership was examined based on the premise that multiple perceptions can exist under the same experience and that the experience of each participant is what constitutes an interpretation of the reality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A review of literature was presented in Chapter II. It was used to inform the problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions.

The research protocols were designed by the researcher, reviewed by the Brandman Dissertation Research Committee, and approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). Appendices A, B, C, D, and E present the specific protocols utilized to conduct the study. Chapter III presented a detailed review of the research methodology. Validity and reliability protocols were presented in Chapter III to ensure consistency and rigor in data collection and analysis protocols.

A purposeful and snowball sampling structure was implemented to locate information-rich sources. The first participant was preidentified by the researcher through his own personal contacts, and to recruit additional participants, a snowball technique was used. Participants were asked if they were aware of other leaders who possessed the qualifying criteria (Creswell, 2003). The use of the snowball technique also allowed an opportunity to gain the trust of potential participants through strong referrals. Twelve gay male leaders from California urban areas were interviewed and data were collected from open-ended and focused questions and direct observation. Each selected participant received, reviewed, and completed the participant letter of invitation and informed consent (Appendix B), and the Brandman University Participant’s Bill of
Rights (Appendix C). Twelve participants engaged in face-to-face interviews that were mutually arranged between the researcher and participant. Each interview was recorded using an audio-recording device, with the informed consent of the participant. The time span of the interviews ranged from 1 hour to 2 hours. At the end of the interview, each participant was acknowledged and thanked for his participation.

Field notes were taken during the interview and the sessions were digitally recorded to be transcribed. The audio recordings were transcribed by a professional third-party transcription company. Any personally identifying information of the study participants was omitted from the responses. For coding purposes and to ensure anonymity, each participant was assigned a number (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). Immediately after each interview, the researcher reflected on the interview data in a reflex journal to note any highlights or unique concepts that were evident (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After coding individual interviews as related to the research questions, a comparative analysis across the entire data set was conducted. All informed consents, audio-recorded data, transcriptions, field notes, reflexive journal of the researcher, and any other physical or electronic information related to the research study were maintained in accordance with BUIRB protocols.

Throughout the research process, the researcher engaged in reflection upon personal mental frameworks, biases, and perceptions. The researcher was mindfully systematic in all phases of the research process to minimize limitations. A thorough analysis of the researcher’s notes, reflections, and data was convened in multiple
sessions. A final review of all research data informed the development of thematic aggregations. These resulted in determining major findings and conclusions of the study.

**Population**

The target population for this study was openly gay males in high-level leadership positions in their respective industries or workplace environments within California.

**Sample**

A purposeful snowball sampling was sought and yielded information-rich reflections about openly gay males’ journey to leadership. This methodology aimed to build a diverse sample of openly gay males in leadership positions within multiple industries. Twelve participants who met the following criteria were selected and interviewed:

1. Self-identified as openly gay male,
2. currently worked in California in a leadership role within the respective organization or industry,
3. occupied a high-level leadership role in the organization.

**Major Findings**

The central intent of this study was to identify the types of supports the openly gay males received in their journey to high-level executive leadership positions and the types of barriers they encountered throughout their lives. Data collection and analysis resulted in six major findings in the ascent or journey to leadership of the 12 selected participants: (a) self-acceptance and personal determination, (b) networking support, (c) education and leadership skills, (d) family and friends, (e) internalized homophobia, and (f) social prejudice and stereotypes.
Self-Acceptance and Personal Determination

The process of accepting their sexual orientation was crucial for all participants, and coming out to friends, family, and work peers catapulted their path to leadership. Although not reflected at the beginning of their careers, strong personal will and self-determination was present throughout their journey to leadership for openly gay leaders, resulting in high achievement.

Gay identity. Gay-related factors influencing participants to pursue leadership positions were identified in all participants in various positive and negative experiences, directly correlating their leadership with their inherently gay attributes such as creativity and innovation. All participants had an internal belief that was sufficiently powerful to endure the continual forces of familial, cultural, or organizational obstacles and barriers.

Gay constituents. Being open about their sexual preferences implied a high level of honesty with themselves and consequently with the external environment. Honesty and openness to be themselves contributed to their acquiring self-confidence and the security to take different approaches than their heterosexual counterparts. This authenticity was enhanced in that they considered themselves as non-status quo and truly empathized with those they led. The social context (gay friendly cities, diversity-embraced organizations) of each participant was instrumental in securing and strengthening this level of self-belief.

Personal determination. Participants’ personal awareness led to intensified strengths, identified weaknesses, and opportunities to succeed. This insight was meaningfully integrated into the development of personal efficacy and empowerment. It also allowed for the development of an infrastructure of supports that could yield success.
Many participants emphasized that their objective of reaching a high-level leadership role was not their principal goal. Conversely, their driving factor was having a passion for becoming more honest and satisfied with themselves in order to be effectively capable of achieving a better sense of completeness.

**Networking Supports**

- **Solid professional relationships.** All participants described the importance of building powerful personal, cultural, community, and organizational relationships. Both LGBT and heterosexual relationships were of the greatest value; the ability to build real relationships that truly supported their journey to leadership became imperative. Integrating their personal, community, and industry-based relationships allowed these participants to build greater power and influence in their environment. These relationships were an intrinsic factor in their success.

- **Networking as a priority.** All participants described networking as a priority in their journey to leadership, enhancing the importance of having the support of a strong and solid network. All participants affirmed that, either within or outside of the organization, a strong support system was essential, because without a support system their journey to leadership would be adversely impacted or impossible.

- **LGBT institutions.** Coming out as gay individuals attracted more external support, such as receiving mentorship from gay supervisors, being able to attend LGBT workshops, and partnering with other organizations. Being out of the closet enabled the participants to be part of a community, connecting with other gay leaders, and establishing new relationships. Most participants addressed being supported by both LGBT and heterosexual circles of friends and mentors, but only two participants denoted
that they relied exclusively on gay networks and LGBT institutions to help them climb the ladder to higher positions.

**Education and Leadership Skills**

**Educational attainment.** All participants described the value of their educational history in developing a solid foundation for success. The educational setting armed participants with strategic thinking, communication, and sources for effective networking and personal and professional development. Education was identified as an important factor in their journey to high-level leadership positions.

**Development of leadership abilities.** Skills and abilities, such as writing, communication, collaboration, building relationships, project management, and being a progressive visionary and a problem solver, were acquired through the educational setting. Having a higher education provided participants with self-confidence, respect, and personal awareness, allowing them to escalate to top leadership positions. These gay leaders revealed being visionaries, tenacious, collaborators, coaches to their subordinates rather than supervisors, compassionate (especially those leaders in the educational environment), great listeners, and facilitators going above and beyond their duties in their respective jobs.

**Family and Friendships**

**Coming-out process.** In the lived experiences of most participants, coming out was a determining event that shaped their confidence and personal awareness. Coming out to their families caused emotional hardship to their parents or siblings immediately after they disclosed their sexual preference, but those feelings were attenuated after the family was more informed and understanding of the situation, injecting confidence and
making the participants comfortable with dealing with any type of issue. Whether the coming-out event was positive or negative, it provided pivotal and rapid motivation to excel beyond the obstacles and barriers in both their personal and professional lives.

**Family circumstances.** Almost all participants expressed gratitude to their family members for being supportive on their journey to leadership. Parents, grandparents, spouses, partners, and siblings were listed as significantly influential and primary supporters in their self-acceptance as gay persons, building confidence and belief in themselves. Although the acceptance of having a gay son in the family, at the beginning of the participants’ college or professional life, was an emotionally charged and impressionable experience, total acceptance from family members and close friends was a constant need expressed among the participants. Spousal support served as a motivator; when it was possible to bring their partners to work gatherings, that allowed the participants to overcome, fear, guilt, and introversion.

**Internalized Homophobia**

Half of participants described a feeling of low self-worth because they were gay, especially at the beginning of their professional careers. Participants shared that they did not value themselves as “complete persons,” that their sexual preference created self-doubt and internal conflicts, amplified because of cultural messages about what it is to be gay in America.

**Disconnection with heteronormativity.** Self-acceptance as a homosexual person and adopting a gay lifestyle was a critical feature of the ascent to leadership. To advance, each participant engaged in a variety of experiences that shaped a path for success. Guilt, doubts, fears, and challenges were part of the journey. Success was possible when the
participants were willing to extend beyond their comfort zones and fully accept themselves for who they were. This required an absolute development of self-acceptance and behavior, which usually functioned against heterosexual norms. Taking risks created a significant emotional charge that had to be resolved in the individuals as they contended with the familial, social, and organizational barriers of proving their capabilities. Participants eventually had to venture into territory that was considered out of their norm, provoking cultural shock, but after enough circumstances and successful performance, the family, friends, and organization came to support the direction and goals of the participants. The process of successive development of skills, networks, and self-acceptance was essential.

**Social Prejudice and Stereotypes**

All participants described emotions that created doubts and fears in their ascent to top-level leadership roles, because of the standardized judgement to which they were stigmatized. In addition to their own perceptions, how they dealt with themselves and either overcame fear or became a victim to society, these participants dealt with stereotypes ranging from being considered pedophiles to being perceived as weak and vulnerable. At the beginning of their careers, self-marginalization from leadership positions was common among participants because of their insecurity about themselves, undermining their capacity to lead, focusing on being socially and organizationally accepted. Participants revealed that people judged their behaviors and predetermined their capability to perform successfully, including in leadership roles. Undermined societal expectations were common because of the participants’ sexual preference, reinforcing stereotypes and impacting their rights.
Unexpected Findings

One unexpected finding was their reluctance, at the beginning of these participants’ careers to take on leadership roles. All participants admitted that holding high-level leadership positions was not their desire at the beginning of their professional careers, but after coming out of the closet and with the guidance of their mentors, these participants mastered skills that enabled them to climb the leadership ladder. Another finding was their confidence with themselves later in life made participants determined to succeed, as it would be a “revenge” for all of the bad moments they had experienced throughout their lives.

Conclusions

The central purpose of this study was to explore and discover the perceptions of California gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions about the types of support they received and the types of barriers they encountered along their leadership journey to attain a high-level leadership position. The conclusions garnered from understanding the experience of the journey are presented in the following sections. Based on the findings of this study and supported by the literature, it was concluded that gay men were significantly impacted by both supports and barriers as follows:

Research Question 1: Supports

Self-acceptance as a gay person. Gay men who are accepting of themselves and comfortable with their lifestyle are more likely to gain access to leadership roles. Being honest with themselves and comfortable with their lifestyle was a significant motivator for all gay males in this research study. As a part of the journey to high-level leadership roles, each of the participants felt a deep sense of personal efficacy, or self-confidence,
that great heights could be achieved once they did not have to focus on hiding their sexual preference. All participants stated that they were more successful after they acknowledged their homosexuality; however, some men described having a desire to know how to fit in, how to be part of the mainstream world. As the literature suggested, having a positive self-identification as gay person led to more positive health outcomes, providing psychological (mental health) justification for examining the practice of intersectionality (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Crawford et al., 2002). For instance, when exploring self-acceptance as a supportive factor, the notion of social identity theory (Hogg, 2006) facilitated the understanding of the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Although being an outsider was an advantage for bringing new ideas and different perspectives into a hetero-normative workplace, these men had to build a level of confidence by making themselves aware of their potential and being comfortable with their sexual identity. Participants expressed the necessity to perform better than their coworkers because they did not think enough of themselves; however, after accepting their homosexuality and feeling comfortable with themselves, their careers started to flourish.

As Fassinger et al. (2010) found in their study, it was not clear that their gay identity determined their role as leaders, but it definitely impacted their behavior and the relationship with the group they led. All participants in this study felt the need to be out, open, trusted, and to become better leaders. Coming out at the workplace accelerated all of these participants’ transition to better positions, channeling their energy to become better individuals and better leaders.
Half of the participants conveyed that coming out of the closet was a strength to some extent and was directly related to their being successful. While receiving recognition for being members of the LGBT community, they experienced the opportunity to grow closer with others and with their families. Although the coming-out process was difficult, once it was done the participants did not care who in the organization knew about their preferences and they were able to focus on mastering their skills as leaders. There were negative situations at the beginning of the process, but in the long run, they did not have an adverse impact on the participants’ lives. Their sexual orientation was used as a strength for them to attain high-level leadership positions.

As in those cases presented by Arwood (2006), Colgan and Rumens (2015), Friskopp and Silverstein (1995), Snyder (2006), Woods (1994), and Woog (2001), each of the participants revealed very personal coming-out stories and examples that led to sadness, fear, frustration, anger, and tears when discussing what his family and partners had to endure in order to accept and support him in his coming-out process. Each participant wanted to be honest with himself, a critical factor to attaining a leadership position. The commonality was that in each participant’s case, the relief he experienced after being out significantly shaped his journey to his current leadership role.

**Education and skills and abilities.** Higher education creates a solid foundation for pursuing high-level leadership positions. Most participants described having high confidence in their abilities, enabling them to take risks and accept challenges leading to leadership roles, as Ostick (2011) claimed in the literature review. Although at the beginning of their careers, they were not pursuing top leadership positions, the openly gay males of this study expressed that they were fully aware of their originally limited
technical capabilities, forcing them to realize the importance of education (Navarro, 2014). The aspiration to pursue dreams was present in many participants, a self-determination increased after being out of the closet and feeling comfortable with themselves, making them fully aware of their true self. This resonated with the strategies of self-awareness, “Getting to know yourself inside and out is a continuous journey of peeling back the layers of the onion and becoming more and more comfortable with what is in the middle—the true essence of you” (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 46).

Similar to anyone aspiring to a leadership role, each individual needed to invest in the appropriate education, skills development, and networking to advance in that area. Different from others who were (by default) identified as candidates for top levels of an organization, these men had to dispel the stereotypes about their capabilities and excel in their performance to transcend the effects of internal homophobia and societal sexual discrimination (Herzog, 2013; McNaught, 1993b; Out & Equal, 2015; Snyder, 2014; Woods, 1994), to overcome the effects of the pink ceiling (Arwood, 2006; Irwin, 1999). Once broken, the self-efficacy and determination of these individuals was firm and unwavering.

**Networks and LGBT institutions.** It is imperative to establish solid professional networks and obtain support from heterosexual or straight allies and LGBT institutions. All 12 participants emphasized the importance of being surrounded by a strong supportive network, and the need to seek role models and mentors, both heterosexual allies and LGBT institutions. The importance of being affirmed by people like themselves was crucial for these participants to find a work-life balance, and networking was a priority in their journey to leadership. The expansion of their friendships,
confidants, points of contact, and true mentors was a long-term process. Reaching out to gay mentors, straight allies, and LGBT organizations empowered these men and facilitated their rise to top-level executive leadership positions. Friendship with other gay peers was helpful in building that network, learning to see the different facets of their organization. Browne (2014) explained the importance of networking and the consequences of having strong relationships in the organization, statements that participants in this study made that there was a time when gays were hidden and establishing circles was not happening, but now it is essential to network because there will always be gay people to support the gay community.

Role models were an important feature of discussion with the participants. Each participant shared the value and relevance of having role models, and specifically role models of like-sexual orientation, in his journey to top-level leadership roles. The literature review denoted LGBT institutions as an important resource to promote gay leadership (Sheridan & Howard, 2011); similarly, transnational corporations have changed company policies to include LGBT persons to promote diversity programs in the workplace. However, only one participant in this study in the 41-65 age range mentioned receiving support from LGBT associations, while two participants in the 26-40 age range admitted that LGBT institutions significantly supported their ascension to high-level leadership positions. Recent events, such as the repeal of the Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the Boy Scouts of America’s ending ban on openly gay adult leaders, the end of U.S. Armed Forces’ don’t ask don’t tell policy, the increase in celebrities coming out of the closet, and the overall Americans’ shifted view on same-sex
marriage, are continuing the proliferation of LGBT organizations focused on gay
leadership (Gates, 2017; Gates & Newport, 2015; Mendes, 2013; Miller, 2014).

**Research Question 2: Barriers**

Each individual described an array of variables that served as obstacles from
personal, societal, and organizational angles. To overcome these, a set of relationships
that allowed for development of their self-confidence in their environment was necessary
for them to achieve their current leadership role. Without these relationships, many
participants believed that the journey would not have been possible. Based on the
findings of this study and supported by the literature, gay men struggle with the following
barriers:

**Internalized homophobia.** Imposed-by-default societal norms foster internalized
homophobia in gay men. Most participants described having a feeling of low self-worth
because they were gay, especially at the beginning of their professional careers.
Participants shared that they did not value themselves as “complete persons,” that their
sexual preference created self-doubt and internal conflicts, amplified because of cultural
messages about what it is to be gay. Their constant search for social acceptance and fear
that they might be outed by coworkers added to a lack of support networks, low self-
esteeem, and built obstacles impeding a more rapid ascent to leadership roles.

As mentioned in the literature review, and reaffirming the findings of Bell and
Weinberg (1978), participants in this study confirmed that emerging gay leaders express
considerable fear and anxiety for their safety due to heterosexual views and/or loss of job
due to discrimination. People categorize themselves and are categorized by others along
different dimensions of primary and secondary diversity (Herek, 1998), which later
translates into internal and external barriers. At the beginning of their professional careers, these self-tormented persons over the years put themselves through a lot of shame and doubt about what it means to be a gay individual growing up in a heterosexual world.

However, this homophobia is both defensive and influential; it is repressive but, ultimately, the driving force in pushing the boundaries as far as being gay. Addressing any internalized homophobia and doing what they think would help them to overcome such an obstacle, such as getting professional counseling, soliciting the support of LGBT institutions, or reading books from openly LGBT authors who have talked about their journey and overcoming these challenges (Arwood, 2006; Fone, 2000) are unique ways to attain high-level leadership positions.

One common barrier from a cultural standpoint for 10 of the 12 participants was the perception of themselves or others as a leader. Even as they wished to assert themselves, their own perceptions initially caused limitations, doubts, or fears. Many of the gay male leaders attributed this feeling to a lifestyle and sexual preference perspective. In most cases, it was difficult to describe because of its complex affects within their families.

**Societal judgement and stereotypes.** Gay males oftentimes encounter barriers in the workplace including lack of networking and role models, homophobia, stereotypes, sexual orientation discrimination, and coworkers’ lack of knowledge about LGBT issues. Participants in the 26-40 age range faced less societal barriers that older participants in the 41-56 age range because protective laws have been established more recently, although American society has permitted—and in many cases, encouraged—homophobia
to flourish (Woog, 2001). Older participants grew up in a predominately heteronormative society, and homosexuality has been deemed incompatible to group cohesiveness (Woog, 2001). Normative masculinity continues to be the most valorized form of identity, and it is essentialized and celebrated as a more appropriate way to lead to high levels of leadership.

Participants reported that throughout their journey to leadership, they were exposed to social prejudice and judgement from society in general and from their own gay community. They revealed that people judged their behaviors and used to predetermine their capability to perform successfully, including in leadership roles. Undermined societal expectations were common because of their sexual preference, reinforcing stereotypes and impacting their rights for things such as obtaining houses in partnerships, traveling together, and even obtaining a hotel room in particular countries, as Participant 5 experienced when he was in the foreign service, causing the end of his gay relationship. The AIDS pandemic during the 1980s significantly impacted the gay lifestyle to the point of causing fear among those in the gay community, obligating gays to feel safer if they returned to the closet.

Another barrier gay male individuals experienced in their ascension to a leadership position was role congruity. Macoukji (2014) stated, in his study of the interaction of leader gender and sexual orientation on leadership evaluations, that role incongruity is the perception that there is an incongruence between the characteristics of an individual and the role on communality (or warmth) and agency (or competence). However, participants in this study were working in industries where their homosexuality did not deter their performance nor was it stereotyped for gay males.
Overcoming personal doubts and fears. The challenges of early life or catalytic life events of the participants were in nature similar to those experienced by minorities in high-level leadership roles. It was enriched with struggles, fears, choices, discrimination, challenges, and, finally, a decision to overcome these difficulties. The decision to overcome any barrier served as the pivotal facilitator to success. The obstacles were viewed as fears to be defeated that were inevitably present in the participants' road to success.

This conclusion is consistent with leadership theory (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Northouse, 2013), which describes leadership as a phenomenon in which the vision, talent, and influence of a leader creates urgency, energy, and collective mobilization toward a movement or goal. Participants transformed their lives because they surrounded themselves with people like them, with the same lifestyle and same vision. People learn and develop themselves when they face a challenge that matters deeply and will affect them both personally and professionally (McKee et al., 2008).

To overcome the effects of the internalized homophobia that kept participants from striving to climb the corporate ladder or to be effective in leadership, the participants needed to stop doubting and be themselves, not pretend to be the people society pictures as perfect leaders. When they had enough courage and overcame their fears, the participants then began to see that they possessed leadership qualities and that their voice was valued and ready to speak up.
Implications for Action

The conclusions suggest several implications for action. The following recommendations are based on the results of this research study and delineate specific actions, which help to enhance awareness of the need for a diverse leadership.

Implication 1

It is recommended that corporate America develop systems and protocols within their organizations to diversify executives and embrace, include, develop, and support gay leaders and other minority groups into its organizational elite. According to Bass and Avolio (1990), the traits of charisma, social responsibility, shared vision, inspiration, overcoming obstacles, individual consideration, influence, intellectual stimulation, developing potential, mentorship, and empowerment are essential for transforming an organization’s culture. Gay leadership uses a transformational approach based on the combination of self-acceptance, a set of acquired skills, strong networks, and life experiences of gay leaders.

Implication 2

Government must take responsibility to protect the LGBT community by establishing and enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation. The Obama administration set legal rights and nondiscriminatory laws, but the current administration threatens to dismantle years of progress and advocacy for minority groups, including the LGBT community (C. Savage & Shear, 2017).
Implication 3

Educational institutions must develop policies to embrace diversity and promote tolerance in schools to effectively intervene and resolve issues helping to avoid victimization of LGBT students. Research studies are an essential guide for teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors, and social workers interacting with students on a daily basis. School board members and officials should determine future school policy and prepare the next generation of school administrators with a better understanding of the LGBT community (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012).

Implication 4

LGBT leadership development should be included in educational settings; curriculum focused on marginalized populations needs to be designed. Universities should partner with LGBT institutions to develop and foster LGBT executive leadership programs, new models, and mindsets for innovation using design thinking based on LGBT identity.

Implication 5

LGBT advocacy organizations need programs that strengthen the LGBT movement in the short term by facilitating leadership, advancement, and connections between gay leaders within LGBT organizations and with other minority groups. These programs should seek a longer-term movement toward leadership by sustaining the advancement of gay leaders by better preparing them for higher positions and building supportive professional networks of peers.
Implication 6

Personnel offices for global corporations, federal and state agencies, and leading companies (such as those conforming to the Fortune 500) must seek out and recruit higher qualified minorities in high-level leadership roles. Individual communities and society are unconsciously biased and predisposed to believe things in the future should be the same way they have been in the past. These biases influence behaviors and decision making in a way that is not always favorable to gay leaders. Corporations overlook women, racial minorities, and gay leaders in their succession planning, because there are stereotypes of how leadership should look.

Recommendations for Further Research

Studies involving sexual orientation intersected with organizational leadership are difficult to conduct because of the sensitive nature of the subject and the personal and professional implications. As Day and Schoenrade (1997) reported, the nature and scope of the lived experiences of this minority population are constraints making it difficult to execute these research studies. However, engaging in study of their personal journeys and experience holds immense potential in building awareness of the phenomenon.

The limited studies have focused on how LGBT individuals make decisions, lead others, or work within teams. Effective leadership has been known to make a community or organization grow and become cohesive as well as tear it apart due to a lack of effective leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Based on this premise, it is imperative that studies like this be conducted to provide validated sources to develop policies shaping LGBT youth.
The first recommendation for research is to replicate this study on lesbian, bisexual, and transgender populations, to identify similarities and differences between the minorities and to allow researchers to establish a database of supports encompassing all LGBT communities.

The second recommendation for research is to explore the ramifications caused by the intersection of different variables such as race and ethnicity with gay leadership. The impact of double barriers on emerging leaders may diversify the obstacles and other angles that impact a journey to leadership, and the provision of supports may be different between the groups facilitating the development of leadership programs.

The third recommendation for research is to study the geographical impact on gay leadership. This study sampled a state where the conditions were more gay friendly, and the conditions in other states, regions, or countries could be significantly different.

The fourth recommendation is to explore the 360-leadership perspective of leaders of underrepresented groups, such as gay male leaders, through use of a formalized inventory or survey and then through a qualitative analysis of their experiences. This could yield more extensive knowledge about the specific impacts that serve either as barriers or as facilitators for success.

The fifth recommendation is to study gay leadership on industries socially defined as noncongruent with their sexual preference, such as law enforcement and construction, to mention a few.

A sixth recommendation for research is to conduct a study focused on the educational background of LGBT leaders and compare it with the industry in which they
are working in addition to looking at the unique challenges, insights, and methods that helped in improving their job knowledge.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

Although the willingness of gay professionals to actively hide their sexual preference has decreased over time, corporate America needs to shake its roots to include diversity in elite leadership. The incipient structure for a gay leadership model needs to revamp its dynamics, intersecting models including all sources of minority-based thinking, to accelerate organizational growth and promote a healthy environment. Gay men detach themselves from the heterosexual world by not allowing the status quo to stay the way it is. These gay leaders are transformational leaders inviting subordinates to come up with answers, taking a different approach to solve problems in their organizations.

These participants were fully aware of the barriers. At some point in their life and leadership journey, all participants acknowledged their obstacles, barriers, or challenges by discussing them with gay mentors or trusted allies. Beyond awareness of the obstacles, they were willing to overcome their fears by creating meaningful opportunities and utilizing the advantage of their unique vision. Each of the 12 participants was able to effectively prove his ability, skill, and talent. This required both self-motivation and efficacy that each of the participants could succeed.

Identifying participants was challenging because of the nature of the questions and the impact of mishandled information. Interviewing these men was easier than finding them because trust was established when the researcher disclosed his sexual
preference, and then participants expressed their willingness to be part of this study and contribute to help future generations of gay leaders.

**Final Reflections From the Researcher**

Staying in the closet was a powerful barrier, because closeted employees expressed frustration and fear about visible sexual identity and their inability to report unequal treatment or to have legal protections to address these issues. Gay leaders were less likely to disclose their sexuality when they experienced or witnessed discrimination, reversing the escalation to a better world. To overcome obstacles, each participant worked to surpass barriers that prevented many gay men from succeeding to the same levels socially. The importance of being surrounded by strong mentors, both gay and heterosexual, was pivotal to motivating their leadership journey; their alliances in some cases with female coworkers caused a solid force against the heterosexual male dominance, obeying—perhaps—to a mutual desire for breaking such barriers (pink and glass ceiling) as both are considered minority in leadership positions. These vulnerable men related their profound personal experiences, which often caused the researcher to empathize due to similar situations in his own journey. This made it difficult for him to stay neutral when these stories were filled with emotions, both sad and sometimes angry.

These men were eager to narrate their lifetime experiences, which literally changed their lives, especially the coming out process and the sense of freedom they felt when they disclosed their truly selves to loved ones and friends as well as in the workplace. All participants expressed this necessity to be honest and open in order to be a truly (and transformational) leader, and only after defeating their internalized homophobia were they confident enough and free to conquer any challenge, placing the
shame to be rejected as the least issue to be worried about. These leaders could not have been in such high-level leadership positions if they were not honest and sincere with themselves and others. Witnessing these journeys was a privilege, and giving a voice to both these participants’ frustrations and their accomplishments was an overdue honor.
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APPENDIX A

Brandman University IRB Application Action Approval

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB Application Action – Approval

Name of investigator/researcher: Javier Valdivinos
Faculty or Student ID Number: 800466125

Title of Research Project:
Rocky Journey toward Effective LGBT Leadership: A Qualitative Case Study of the Perception of Openly Gay Male Leaders in High-Level Leadership Positions

Project Type: [ ] New [ ] Continuation [ ] Resubmission

Category that applies to your research:
[ ] Doctoral Dissertation E60
[ ] DRP Clinical Project
[ ] Masters’ Thesis
[ ] Course Project
[ ] Faculty Professional/Academic Research
[ ] Other: ____________________________

Funded: [ ] No [ ] Yes
(Funding Agency; Type of Funding; Grant Number)

Project Duration (cannot exceed 1 year): 6 months

Principal Investigator’s Address: 350 Third Avenue Apt. 121, Chula Vista CA 91910
Email Address: jvaldivinos@brandman.edu Telephone Number: (619) 881-8342
Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name: Dr. Douglas DeVore
Email Address: ddevore@brandman.edu Telephone Number: (623) 293-2421

Category of Review:
[ ] Exempt Review [ ] Expedited Review [ ] Standard Review


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I have completed the NIH Certification and included a copy with this proposal

NIH Certificate currently on file in the office of the IRB Chair or Department Office

JAVIER VALDOVINOS
Signature of Principal Investigator: 119500
Date: 4/01/2017

Digitally signed by JAVIER VALDOVINOS
Date: 2017.04.01 19:18:45 -07'00'

Digitally signed by Doug Devore
DN: cn=Doug Devore, o=, ou=, email=ddevore@brandman.edu, c=US
Date: 2017.04.13 09:53:22 -07'00'

Brandman University IRB Rev, 11.14.14
Adopted
November 2014
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB APPLICATION ACTION – APPROVAL
COMPLETED BY BUoRB

IRB ACTION/APPROVAL

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Javier Valdovinos

☐ Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.
☐ Approved/Certified as Exempt form IRB Review.
☐ Approved as submitted.
☐ Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)
☐ Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)
☐ Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.

Level of Risk: ☑ No Risk  ☐ Minimal Risk  ☐ More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

IRB Reviewer: Jalin Johnson

Telephone: __________________________ Email: __________________________ Date: 04-28-17

BUoRB Chair: Doug DeVore

Telephone: __________________________ Email: __________________________ Date: __________________________

REvised IRB Application ☐ Approved ☐ Returned

Name: __________________________

Telephone: __________________________ Email: __________________________ Date: __________________________

BUoRB Chair: __________________________

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: The perceptions of openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions: What supports and barriers do they experience in their journey?

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Javier Valdovinos, MA. HRM&OD

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Javier Valdovinos, a doctoral student at Brandman University. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the perceptions of openly gay male leaders in high-level leadership roles.

In participating in this study, I agree to be interviewed about my experiences. The one-on-one interviews will take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time.

I understand that:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

a) I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

b) The possible benefit of this study is that my input may help add to the research regarding the impostor phenomenon and effective ways for individuals to cope with it. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the experiences gay men in leadership roles report having with the impostor phenomenon. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

c) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Javier Valdovinos at jvaldov1@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 619-851-8342. You may also contact the Brandman University Advisor for this study, Dr. Douglas DeVore at ddevore@brandman.edu.

d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.
e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by the law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights. I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_________________________________________________ _______________
Signature of Participant

Date

____________________________________________________ _______________
Printed Name of Participant

Date

__________________________________________________ ______________
Signature of Principal Investigator

Date
APPENDIX C

Participant Letter of Invitation

March 6, 2017

Dear Participant:

My name is Javier Valdovinos and I am a doctoral student at Brandman University conducting research to explore and describe the perceptions of gay male leaders in high-level leadership positions.

My hope is this study will help other gay individuals who pursue leadership positions to realize they are not alone and learn lived experiences from current gay leaders and, more importantly, offer ideas for how others overcome barriers and utilize supports on their journey to leadership.

Your current role as a gay man holding a high-level leadership position in the State of California, falls within the target population and makes you eligible to participate in my study. The research includes a 60-minute interview at a time that is convenient for you. All information shared during the interview will remain confidential and your name will not be attached to any notes or the interview transcript. All information will be stored in locked files accessible only to me. Further, you will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, you may be assured that the researcher is not in any way affiliated with your employer.

Thank you for your consideration and support of my research efforts. If you need to reach me before the interview, please contact me at 619-841-8342 or jvaldov1@mail.brandman.edu. I am also happy to answer any questions you may have in advance of your participation.

Sincerely,

Javier Valdovinos
APPENDIX D

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

The questions chosen for this interview are designed to address the research questions of the study in the exploration of the perceptions of openly gay male leaders.

Interview place: At the arrange location between the researcher and the participant

Opening and brief description of purpose/study

Good morning/afternoon,

Thank you for joining me in the interview today. Based on our previous discussion, our conversation today is part of my research to attain a doctorate degree in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University. The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions you have had as an openly gay male working in leadership positions. More specifically, I want to know about the types of support you have received and the types of barriers you have encountered in your journey to attain a high-level leadership position. The information that we discuss will be included my dissertation.

The interview will take about one hour and includes 10 questions. I may ask a few follow-up questions if I need further clarification

Informed Consent and Recording

To ensure privacy, your identity will not be revealed and will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without making any reference to you or your employer. With your permission, I would like to tape record this interview so that I ensure accurate recording of your responses, and later transcribe it for review. After I transcribe the conversation, I will send it to you via email so that you can make sure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas. I also want to remind you that although you have
signed the informed consent form and have the Brandman Bill of Rights please know that you may choose to withdraw from your participation at any point in the process. Do you have any questions or concerns before we start our interview?

[Answer any question]

**Interview Questions:**

1. Can you share with me what inspired you to become a leader in your career?

2. What factors most influenced your decision to pursue leadership roles?

3. Can you describe what strengths/weaknesses supported your rise to leadership or presented barriers to you?

4. Can you describe how coming out/being out has impacted your role as a leader?
   a. Do you think you would have had the same opportunities if you had decided to remain in the closet?

5. Who or what – people, places, or events – would you identify as being significant influence in your journey to attain a leadership position?

6. Can you describe what strengths supported your rise to leadership?
   a. How about weaknesses that presented barriers to you?

7. Can you describe any qualities gay men possess that either enhance or detract from their role as a leader?"

8. What networks – if any- did you reach to as you sought to achieve a high-level leadership position?
   a. Personal and Professional Gay Mentors
   b. Personal and Professional non-LGBT Mentors

9. How would you describe any barriers related to your sexual orientation that you experienced during your career?"
   a. Internal/Personal barriers?
   b. Social barriers?
   c. Financial barriers?

10. What key insights from your leadership journey, as they relate to being openly gay, can you share with other gay males who aspire to become leaders?

**End of the Interview**
This concludes my questions. Is there anything else that you would like to add to describe the full essence of your support and barriers you experienced during your journey to leadership that we did not explore in the questions asked? I will transcribe the interview and provide a copy. If you have any corrections or additions, feel free to send them to me. Thank you very much for your time and support in completing my research.

Possible probes that can be added to any question, for clarification:

1. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “What did you mean by ….”
4. “Why do think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about….”
6. “Can you give me an example of ….”
7. “How did you feel about that?”
APPENDIX F

Field-Test Interview Questions Feedback

Feedback Reflection Questions with Observer

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your perspective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?

2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?

3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?

4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?

5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?

6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

Feedback Reflection Questions with Observer

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you have experienced in your journey to become a leader in your organization?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?
3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I’m pretty new at this)?