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## "I Feel Like I Just Need To Be More Careful, You Know?": Gay And Bisexual Post-Secondary Students Contemplate The Job Market

Kyle Carmelo Militello, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Dr. Tracey Adams, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Sociology

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## ABSTRACT

Through a qualitative lens, this research explores the concerns sexual minority students have about making the transition to full-time employment and examines how experiences of adversity shape concerns and anxieties. Unlike the previous generations before them, the students who participated in this study share the privilege of entering a labour market that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual identity. With the aim of complementing and advancing existing literature, the study is motivated by the following research question: despite being a protected class, do post-secondary gay and bisexual students hold anxieties about joining a potentially heteronormative workforce? To answer this question, in-depth interviews were conducted on twelve students currently attending a post-secondary institution within Southern Ontario. It was found that a clear majority of the students were apprehensive of joining the Canadian labour market, and question the effectiveness of current anti-discriminatory legislation.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Bisexuality, Workplace Discrimination, Anti-Discriminatory Legislation, Discrimination

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Despite Canada often being characterized as a progressive and “gay-friendly” country, Canadian sexual minorities continue to face prejudice and remain fearful that their non-heterosexual orientation will impede their chances of professional success. Many experience workplace discrimination, defined as the “... unfair and negative treatment of workers or job applicants based on personal attributes that are irrelevant to job performance” (Chung, 2001: 34). As a whole, the existing literature focuses almost exclusively on the experiences of adult sexual minorities currently *within* the labour market. Largely overlooked are the workplace expectations of LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> youth who have yet to enter the labour market.

The current generation of gay and bisexual Canadian post-secondary students will enter the workforce legally protected against various forms of workplace harassment and discrimination. However, despite these legislative protections, previous literature has shown that sexual minority men and women still experience many difficulties both within the workplace and larger society. A review of the literature, detailed in chapter 2 of this thesis, indicates that sexual minority Canadians encounter unique hurdles throughout their lives. These hardships often begin in early childhood and extend well into their professional lives upon entering the workforce. It is the intention of this study to investigate the impact these experiences have on gay<sup>2</sup> and bisexual post-secondary students preparing to enter the Canadian labour market.

With the aim to complement and advance existing literature on sexual orientation-based hardships within the Canadian labour market, my research is motivated by the following research question: *despite being a protected class under the Canadian Human Rights Act, do post-*

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<sup>1</sup> Initialism that stands for ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer’.

<sup>2</sup> In reference to the labelling of sexual identity, the study recruited post-secondary students who self-identified with either homosexual or bisexual sexual orientations. Throughout this thesis the term *gay* is used to collectively refer to both male and female participants who prefer same-sex sexual partners. An explanation for this label is provided within chapter 3, which details the study’s methodology.



*secondary gay and bisexual sexual minority students hold anxieties about joining a potentially heteronormative workforce?* Through in-depth interviews, I explore the concerns sexual minority students have about making the transition to full-time employment, and examine how previous negative experiences shape current concerns and anxieties.

While literature on the expectations and anxieties of LGBQ youth is limited, it has been found that gay men and lesbian women still face many obstacles and societal barriers (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Muraco, 2010; Ozeren, 2014; Pompili et al., 2014). I propose that those who have encountered difficult experiences such as disapproving family or friends, experiences of hardship related to publically acknowledging their sexual identity, or a history of homophobic victimization will have more concerns about entering the labour market.

This thesis begins, in chapter 2, with a review of the current literature. A historical overview of the experiences of sexual minorities in Canada, and the progression that led to the legal recognition of non-heterosexual Canadians, are provided. The realities and struggles sexual minority men and women face both within the paid labour market and larger society are then discussed.

Following a review of the literature, I describe the methodology employed to investigate my research question and achieve my study's exploratory aim. Detailing the study's qualitative design, chapter 3 also provides a description of the study's sample and outlines both the strengths and limitations of the study's methodology.

The research findings are presented in detail within chapter 4. These results explore the relationship between anticipated workplace anxiety and queer<sup>3</sup> identity while uncovering how gay and bisexual post-secondary students perceive existing legislative protections and view the Canadian labour market in regards to acceptance and equal opportunity.

Chapter 5, the final chapter of this thesis, then provides a general overview of what was accomplished within this study and explains how it advances current literature on sexual minorities, workplace discrimination, and how this population enacts protective measures to safeguard their professional futures. The data that emerged from the twelve participants

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<sup>3</sup> Queer is commonly viewed as an umbrella term that collectively refers to the sexual preferences and orientations that fall under the LGBQ initialism. While still offensive to some, queer was once seen as a derogatory slur but has been recently reclaimed by civil rights activists and younger generations of the LGBQ community (Greenblatt, 2005; Lev, 2010).

interviewed have many implications for both policy makers and legislators alike. These implications are reviewed and recommendations for strengthening current policy protections are proposed. Furthermore, in acknowledging that the findings within this study are exploratory in nature and merit further investigation, I conclude with a discussion of the study's limitations and provide suggestions for areas of future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite their legislative triumphs in recent decades, sexual minorities within Canada remain fearful that their non-heterosexual orientation will impede their chances of professional success. As this chapter will outline, through a review of the current literature, their concerns take root in an unfortunate reality: gay and bisexual men and women continue to face prejudice in the labour market.

#### 2.1 LGBQ COMMUNITY: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

While sexuality-based discrimination continues to shape many areas of society, it is undeniable that sexual minorities in Canada have experienced major strides towards mainstream societal acceptance and legal equality. The increasingly tolerant views towards same-sex attraction within Canada reflect a growing trend of acceptance and political recognition of queer identities. Specifically, research on global attitudes investigating the acceptance of the LGBQ community has found Canada to be among the countries most welcoming of sexual minorities. According to a 2013 survey by the Pew Research Center, Canadians expressed highly tolerant views with a clear majority of eighty-percent of those sampled believing society should accept homosexuality. This is a notable increase from 2007, when only seventy-percent of those sampled held tolerant views. Comparatively, these views are not as common in the United States, where a smaller majority of only sixty-percent share this belief. Overall, the study found that greater acceptance and tolerance was found in more affluent and secular societies (Pew Research Center, 2013).

However, despite this growing level of acceptance, the aftereffects rooted in heterosexist and homophobic policies and behaviours which promoted heterosexuality as the natural ideal of all sexual expression persist today. Within his research on the regulation of sexuality, Jeffery Weeks notes:

*“Of all the variations of sexual behaviour, homosexuality has had the most vivid social presence... It is, as many sexologists from Havelock Ellis to Alfred Kinsey*

*noted, the form closest to the heterosexual norm in our culture, and partly because of that it has often been the target of sustained social oppression” (Weeks, 2014: 119).*

Despite Canadian sexual minorities now benefitting from the legal security of being a protected class, which will be discussed below, the repercussions of Canada’s early anti-gay legislation used to sexually regulate the homosexual identity are still felt today. Continuing to hold a marginalized status, queer identities have been historically criminalized and pathologized within Canada. Investigating the relationship between society and sexuality, John W. Petras (1973) suggests homosexuality has traditionally been viewed as an ‘unapproved’ form of human sexual expression in Western society that threatened social order. According to Petras, unapproved forms of sexuality have been labeled as abnormalities and perversions, or with specific reference to the sociological tradition, a type of sexual deviance.

Within his book, *Sexuality in Society* (1973), Petras calls attention to the specific vocabulary that has become associated with unapproved forms of sexual expression, and how this influences the public’s attitude toward those who have been labelled deviant. In other words, terminology like ‘perversion’, ‘abnormality’ and ‘crime against nature’ shaped social thought. According to Petras, this vocabulary provided a base of reference for behaviours viewed as normal eroticism in that “... our reactions to acts of unapproved sexuality reflect the ways in which we see ourselves relative to the forms of behavior that have been defined as immoral, illegal, unapproved, perverted, and abnormal” (Petras, 1973: 93).

The legal study of sexuality appears to have always been closely tied to religion and sanctioned heterosexual intercourse focused on procreation. Considered a risk to public order, homosexuality within Canada has been the subject of various legalistic and moralistic restraints. In reference to these legal sanctions, ‘crime against nature’ was often used to depict homosexuality as the term ‘sodomy’ was not fit to be named among Christians (Spence, 1953: 312). In other words, whether it be referred to as a crime against nature, abomination, or simply a form of perversion, it appears same-sex attraction was so iniquitous that historical statutory restrictions vaguely alluded to the acts of homosexuality rather than actually put a name to the acts themselves.

Perhaps taking a more controversial stance, Hoffman (1968) argues that homosexuality as an identity has never in fact been illegal. Drawing a distinction between sexual identity and sexual practice, Hoffman suggests “What is illegal are certain acts [referring to anal intercourse]

... which [is] illegal in both a homosexual and heterosexual context... the law traditionally does not prohibit states of mind, but only proscribes certain forms of behavior” (Hoffman, 1968: 77-78). Therefore, according to Hoffman, vaguely termed laws citing ‘crimes against nature’ are not restricted to only homosexual contexts but also sexual activities occurring between heterosexual couples. The author argues that this statutory term is rooted in the underlying notion that the sole purpose of sexual behaviour was procreation; and that any sexual act to the contrary is thus ‘against nature’ (Hoffman, 1968).

While Hoffman believes laws regulating human sexuality, and more specifically queer forms of sexual expression, are unjust, he makes the invaluable point that their abolishment will not have an overly significant impact on the injustices faced by the LGBTQ community. This, according to Hoffman, is due to the simple fact that the problems these individuals face are not *legal* problems. Instead, the challenges queer people encounter are *social* in nature and will only be overcome through significant changes in the public’s attitude towards queer identities and same-sex sexual practices. According to Hoffman, if legislative amendments “... take place in the absence of any further changes on the part of the larger society in its attitude toward homosexuality, then they will accomplish nothing” (Hoffman, 1968: 94).

Despite having voiced his concerns nearly half a century ago, the relevance of Hoffman’s words still rings true today. Homosexuality has historically, and continues to be, a moral issue at the core of religious ideologies in that societal “... intolerance is rooted in the ancient Judaeo-Christian disgust for sexual acts associated with paganism” (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2000: 1095).

As a recognized social identity, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that homosexuality materialized into mainstream society. Writing extensively on its history, sociologist and social theorist Steven Seidman proposes that homosexuality first emerged into public consciousness shortly after World War II. Following the end of the Victorian era, which was largely characterized by a strict censorship of sexual expression that limited sex to the realms of the private, Seidman (1991) proposes that there was a ‘sexualisation of the public’ where sex spread into all areas of social life.

Influenced by medical-scientific discourse, a homosexual identity and subculture was formed and became “... a basis of individual identity and group life” (Seidman, 1991: 123). Gaining traction in the 1960s and 1970s, it was not long until a queer movement emerged

advocating for social inclusion and legitimization. Recent developments within the medical community regarding homosexuality have been instrumental in bringing about the present and more tolerant views of sexual minorities. As recently as 1987, homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Additionally, it was not until 1992 that the World Health Organization (WHO) removed homosexuality from its classification of mental disorders with the publication of the tenth revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10).

Within *Beyond the Closet* (2002), Seidman proposes that there has been a recent shift in queer activism from a desire to achieve tolerance and recognition to a fight towards equality, both legally and socially. Within his work, the author explains that the queer community has moved beyond merely striving for legislative equality but also aims to address the much broader systems of sexual and social oppression. According to Seidman (2002), this shift reflects a continued march towards social acceptance despite societal resistance. Specifically, the unequal treatment of queer people and society's persistent debate over the moral status of homosexuality represents "... a public that worries that gay equality means the end of heterosexual privilege and the ideal of a heterosexual national identity" (Seidman, 2002: 183).

In reference to legal discrimination, Seidman further suggests that the legislation used to sexually regulate the LGBTQ members of society sets them in opposition to what he calls a 'good sexual citizen'. By placing legal restraints on certain sexual acts, especially those largely associated with the queer community, the state creates a sexual hierarchy. According to Seidman (2002), this inevitably leads to and encourages the unequal and discriminatory treatment of anyone outside the heterosexual majority.

On a more positive note, sexual minorities within Canada have experienced many legislative and civil rights victories throughout the past century. During the early colonial era, Canada was greatly influenced by Britain's legal system and adopted various legislative statutes to regulate sexuality. According to The Canadian Encyclopedia (2014), during this period the punishment for participating in same-sex sexual acts was death, until the law was amended in 1861 to a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. It was not until 1969 that Canada officially decriminalized same-sex sexual practices.

Further amendments were made following the process that led to Canadian sovereignty in 1982 with the establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. By 1995 the Supreme Court

of Canada deemed that Section 15 of the Charter, guaranteeing the “... right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination”, should apply to sexual minority men and women (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2014). While not named specifically in the section, this ruling was considered a legal victory nonetheless and led to ‘sexual orientation<sup>4</sup>’ being added to the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1996. The Canadian Human Rights Act guarantees the equal opportunity and fair treatment of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Canadians, formally listing sexual orientation as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination. In the decades that followed, queer Canadians continued to gain visibility and experienced many political milestones, including the enactment of Bill C-38, commonly known as the Civil Marriage Act, where Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage in 2005 (ibid).

Canada’s shift away from its history that criminalized same-sex sexual practices reflects the changing values of Canadian society. The more inclusive and tolerant social climate that led to the legal protections discussed above is a reflection of this. According to legal historian Lawrence M. Friedman, legal systems are intrinsically tied to the culture they belong to and therefore are prone to change. Shaped by cultural conditions, the law “... varies in time and space, according to the conditions of the culture in which it is embedded” (Friedman, 1986: 764). In other words, public opinion influences the making and enforcement of the law. The values, opinions and attitudes within Western cultures are constantly changing and therefore the legal systems in these societies must adapt to reflect these changes.

While legal systems can serve to preserve inequalities, as historically was the case in Canada, developments in legislation to promote equality can lead to further social change. Within *The Law and Society Movement*, Friedman goes on to explain that as legal institutions evolve “... the output of the legal system – laws, decisions, orders, and administrative behavior – leads in turn to more social change... [which] ultimately affect[s] the behavior of members of society” (Friedman, 1986: 772-773). Ergo, just as a nation can influence the law, laws can also greatly influence the society that enacted them in that legislative advancements shape societal views and public perception. This begs the question, just how much do these legal protections

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<sup>4</sup> For context, under this legislation, ‘sexual orientation’ did not include transsexuality and does not protect transgender people.

shield the queer community from unjust and prejudicial treatment?

While it appears evident that homophobia within Canadian society, and the anti-gay legislation it fostered, has declined, its legacy still colours the experiences of queer Canadians today. This notion is mirrored in Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile's work, *The Canadian War on Queers* (2010), in which the authors argue that modern queer people now live in a state of contradiction in which legal equality does not necessarily translate into social equality. According to the authors:

*“On the one hand, our individual formal and abstract human rights are now increasingly recognized; on the other hand, our relationships often remain stigmatized and our sexualities and our desires are still censored, criminalized, and hated. This dilemma exists because same-gender eroticism does not have substantive social equality with normalized heterosexuality” (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010: 394).*

For instance, heterosexist microaggressions that target individuals based on their sexual orientation continue to be common in public spaces and subtle forms of sexual prejudice continuously remind queer individuals of their marginalized status (Herek, 2000; Burn, Kadlec, & Rexer, 2005). Particularly, many researchers have found that it is not uncommon for members of the LGBTQ community to be subjected to and witness gay jokes and heterosexist epithets (Silverschanz, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Nadal et al., 2011). Within their study on heterosexist microaggressions on college campuses, Woodford and colleagues (2012) found nearly all participants reported hearing the term “that’s so gay” at least once within the past year. Affecting one’s feeling of social acceptance and psychological well-being, “gay” has frequently been used to describe something as vacuous or undesirable (Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus 2010).

In fact, microaggressions targeting queer people are such common practice that some have argued blatant heterosexist or homophobic remarks commonly go unchallenged to the point of being socially acceptable (Sue, 2010). Additionally, Nadal and colleagues (2011) found that many queer individuals feel forced to “act straight” by regulating their appearance, mannerisms, and public displays of affection with same-sex partners in order to feel safe and accepted in certain public spaces and social situations. This finding is mirrored in other studies: when showing public displays of affection such as holding hands or kissing, sexual minorities constantly police their behaviour and exercise self-vigilance (Valentine, 1996; Corteen, 2002).

This self-policing is well documented in academic literature and commonly viewed as a survival strategy endorsed by many members within the queer community. Referencing the work



of Griffin (1992), Reingardé (2010) defines the identity management strategy known as ‘passing’ as “the way that sexual minorities maintain silence through a deliberate action on their part to act as heterosexuals” (Reingardé, 2010: 91). For fear of being humiliated, stigmatized, and marginalized, queer individuals attempt to hide their sexuality by strictly monitoring how they present themselves in public. With the intention to ‘pass’ as heterosexual, queer people often try to mask their queer identities in social spaces. ‘Passing’ appears to be a popular and strategic tool to navigate the public spheres of everyday life among many members of the LGBTQ community (Shippee, 2011).

## 2.2 *SEXUALITY AND THE WORKPLACE*

The emerging cohort of Canadian gay and bisexual men and women are among the first to enter the workforce legally protected against various forms of workplace harassment and discrimination. However, despite these legislative protections, previous literature has shown that those belonging to the LGBTQ community still experience many difficulties both within the workplace and larger society. Yet, due to their protected class status, it would not be unreasonable to expect Canadian post-secondary students who have yet to join the workforce to anticipate little to no labour-market sexuality-based discrimination. Nevertheless, those who have encountered hardship because of their sexual identity may feel differently.

While sexual orientation may appear to be irrelevant in workplace settings, research has shown that one’s participation in the paid labour market is heavily sexualized (Mizzi, 2013; Williams and Giuffre, 2011). Despite the growing support for the queer community, heterosexuals maintain a privileged status within many social institutions, including that of the workplace. According to Seidman (2002), queer people bear an unfortunate contradiction in that “... many individuals can choose to live beyond the closet but they must still live and participate in a world where most institutions maintain heterosexual domination” (Seidman, 2002: 6).

According to Mizzi (2013), employers wield ‘professionalism’ as a normative value system to govern employee behaviours within workplace environments; an instrument that is often assumed to ensure equality and justice in the paid labour market. However, while professionalism provides a positive sense of work identity and *appears* to exist outside the realm of human sexuality, the author argues it in fact “... desexualizes workers by asserting “proper”

identities devoid of sexuality and through this process relocates lesbians and gay men to the social periphery” (Mizzi, 2013: 1608). In turn, using professionalism to argue that the workplace is devoid of sexuality-based politics is just an additional strategy to marginalize differences between heterosexual and queer people within the paid labour market.

In line with Mizzi’s (2013) argument, Williams and colleagues (1999) also refute the common belief that ‘professional’ implies a work identity that is asexual; devoid of human sexual politics. Specifically, to improve workplaces for queer employees, the authors argue that it is important to acknowledge the role sexuality plays within workplace settings. In other words, “Human beings are sexual and consequently so are the places they work” (Williams et al., 1999: 91).

Viewing sexuality is a ‘basic feature’ belonging to all workplace settings, Williams and Giuffre (2011) assert that some sexual identities benefit from organizational sexuality while others are oppressed. Having no boundaries, the authors believe heteronormativity manifests itself into professional settings in the form of workplace laws and policies, the public observance of heterosexual norms such as engagements and marriages, sexual interactions in the form of flirtations and gossip between coworkers, and a gender and sexuality-based division of labour (Williams & Giuffre, 2011).

Overall, the beliefs discussed above foster a common misconception that the workplace is sexually neutral. As members of the dominant form of sexual expression, those who belong to the heterosexual majority often perceive topics of sexual orientation to be irrelevant in professional environments (Martin 1992). Investigating how sexuality is regulated and produced within institutions, Reingardé (2010) draws on the work of social theorist Michel Foucault by stating “The dominant discourse of heterosexuality in organizations puts the dominated discourse of homosexuality under pressure to be silenced, suppressed and eliminated...” (Reingardé, 2010: 85). According to the author, heterosexuality is normalized through both formal and informal workplace contexts, causing many to wrongfully assume sexuality resides outside the realm of public and professional environments. However, as Reingardé argues, the workplace has always been sexualized. In fact, only one sexual orientation has been deemed appropriate for the workplace: heterosexuality. In other words,

*“If we think that heterosexual sexuality is constantly evident, repetitive and even ritualistic in the work environment (wedding rings, talks about husbands and wives, pictures of children, heterosexual couplings at parties and other gatherings) then we*

*must admit that it is homosexual sexuality that is of no interest to other people rather than sexuality in general” (Reingardé, 2010: 88).*

While many risk public ostracism following the disclosure of their queer identity, it appears sexual minority men and women can successfully navigate professional workplace environments by adhering to traditional gender norms and conventional sexual mores while in the presence of their coworkers. By embodying heteronormativity, or what some authors have labelled ‘*homonormativity*’, queer workers have the potential to exist within the organization on the condition that they appear virtually ‘normal’ to their straight coworkers (Williams & Giuffre, 2011). Put differently, queer individuals face the decision to “...conform either to heteronormativity (invisible gays and lesbians) or to stereotypes (visible gays and lesbians)” (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009: 41).

As a whole, the existing literature primarily focuses on the experiences of adult sexual minorities currently within the labour market. In reference to my research, this study will complement and advance existing literature by focusing exclusively on young adults who have yet to enter the workforce. As this study investigates the labour market expectations of gay and bisexual post-secondary students by exploring participant previous experiences, the literature regarding the barriers sexual minorities face in the educational system, the labour market and larger society will now be reviewed below.

### *2.3 LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES*

Current literature has investigated the experiences of sexual minorities currently within the labour market. Due to hostile work environments, LGBTQ individuals often choose to leave their jobs in the hope of finding more accepting workplace environments (Fidas & Cooper, 2014). Faced with prejudice and heterosexism, many studies have documented the existence of workplace discrimination among both lesbian women and gay men. Several studies have revealed gender differences in minority sexual orientation-based workplace discrimination. Specifically, it appears gay men are exposed to an increased degree of verbal and physical threats (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001), whereas lesbian women are much more likely to experience harassment of a sexual nature (Denissen & Saguy, 2014).

Furthermore, many gay men and lesbian women believe their sexual orientation has

negatively impacted their professional lives in both gaining and keeping employment (Herek, 2009). A recent study conducted by Tilcsik (2011) found that men who were perceived to be gay by an employer faced notable hiring discrimination. Specifically, applicants that were believed to be heterosexual by the employer received a callback rate nearly double that of the perceived gay applicants (Tilcsik, 2011). Moreover, it has been found that the gender of one's coworkers can significantly influence one's experiences within the workplace. For instance, gay men often work closely with women and report more positive work relationships with their female colleagues (Tilcsik et al., 2015). In reference to lesbian women, some researchers have suggested that their sexual identity can be viewed as beneficial in male-dominated fields as they are more likely to be seen as "one of the boys" (Brand, 2008: 4). Other studies, however, contradict these findings and suggest lesbian women face a significant degree of discrimination even in male-dominated workplaces (Denissen & Saguy, 2014).

As targets, sexual minorities face a considerable degree of prejudice and discrimination ranging from verbal assaults to violent physical acts. However, experiences appear to vary. Gay men and lesbian women differ both in the type and frequency of the sexuality-based discrimination they are confronted with. According to Denissen & Saguy (2014), lesbian women are at an increased risk of being sexualized by their heterosexual male coworkers. In comparison, research investigating the prejudice experienced by gay men within the workplace indicates that, compared to lesbian women, gay men encounter a higher degree of sexuality-based discrimination. In particular, because homosexual men are viewed to transgress societal imposed gender roles, this group faces a higher degree of verbal and physical discrimination, particularly from their male coworkers (Crow et al., 1998; Gillingham, 2006).

Unfortunately, investigating the experiences of bisexual men and women is often complicated by the fact that these individuals are largely excluded and overlooked in labour market research. In what has become known as 'the erasure of bisexuals', the bisexual identity is often ignored and largely overshadowed by the two most recognized sexual identities of heterosexuality and homosexuality (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). However, despite this exclusion, researchers have begun to document bisexuals' unique sexuality-based hardships. Often feeling alienated from both the queer and heterosexual communities, researchers have found that bisexual men and women face a unique social stigma tied to their sexual identity. Specifically, members of the bisexual community are stereotyped as untrustworthy, confused,

and greedy (Hayfield, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014). According to a Canadian study, those who identify with a bisexual orientation frequently share feelings of ambivalence when deciding to disclose their sexual identity and often feel discouraged when faced with stereotypes that question their sexuality's legitimacy (Flanders et al., 2016).

Furthermore, a large transnational study investigating the experiences of bisexuals in the workplace found bisexual men and women are often viewed as unreliable and 'unpromotable' by management, not trusted by queer and straight coworkers alike (Green, Payne, & Green, 2011). The common perception of equating bisexuality with 'fence-sitting' or one's 'failure to choose' leads to high levels of discrimination in the workplace. According to Chamberlain's (2009) United Kingdom study on biphobia in the workplace:

"Overall, participants said that the prejudice and stereotypes of bisexuality extended into the workplace and colleagues often portrayed them as untrustworthy, indecisive or troublemakers at work... the stereotypes that surround bisexuality result in bisexual employees being labelled by colleagues as being uncertain, indecisive, and even unstable" (Chamberlain, 2009: 6-7).

In light of these challenges, and in addition to the verbal and physical workplace harassment they face, it appears one's minority sexual orientation can also have an impact on one's earning potential and annual salary. Recent literature has begun to focus on the association between sexual orientation and economic outcomes among those belonging to the LGBQ community. With the majority of research having been conducted in the United States and United Kingdom, various studies have identified grave income disparities between sexual minorities and their heterosexual coworkers. In considering gay men specifically, heterosexual males have been found to earn substantially more than their homosexual male colleagues (Antecol et al., 2008; Berg & Lin, 2002). In reference to an American context, gay and bisexual men have been found to earn as much as twenty-seven-percent less when controlling for age, race, education, and occupation (Badgett, 1995).

Although the literature investigating the experiences of Canadian sexual minorities is quite limited, various studies have indicated that the LGBQ population within Canada faces similar workplace hardships to their American counterparts. Mirroring the findings above, Canadian gay men have been found to have significantly lower personal incomes compared to their straight male coworkers. Specifically, within his investigation on the labour force outcomes of sexual minorities, Carpenter (2008) found that Canadian homosexual men appear to have a

twelve-percent income penalty. According to the author, this income disparity was statistically significant and persisted amongst various provinces even when controlling for variables such as age, race, and education.

In contrast, studies investigating the labour market outcomes of lesbian women have presented conflicting data. Generally, while some have documented a wage premium among lesbian women (Blandford, 2003) others have found lesbian women experience a very similar income penalty to that of gay men (Badgett, 1995). Taking it further, Waite & Denier (2015) examined the income outcomes of gay men and lesbian women in the Canadian labour market, highlighting the significance of masculinity and hegemonic gender beliefs to income disparities. Specifically, it was found that despite their prestigious occupational positions because of their high levels of education, gay men still earned far less than their heterosexual male counterparts. Waite and Denier (2015) further find that lesbian women earn more than their heterosexual counterparts, but they continue to earn less than both heterosexual and gay men.

Studies exploring the income penalties faced by bisexual men and women have been conducted in both Canada and the United States (Carpenter, 2008; Sabia, 2015). In a recent study, Bryson (2017) investigated the income disparities among bisexual and heterosexual men and women within the United Kingdom. While no wage gap was found among bisexual women, when controlling for demographic, occupation, and workplace characteristics, the author finds bisexual men earn twenty-percent less than heterosexual men (Bryson, 2017). In light of this research, it is clear that, like their homosexual peers, bisexual men and women also encounter economic disadvantages because of their minority sexual identity.

Finally, in reference to the occupational segregation of sexual minorities, the most consistent finding among researchers is that lesbian women and gay men are often clustered in occupations that are traditionally associated with members of the opposite sex (Baumle, Compton, and Poston, 2009). In short, it has been found that the occupational segregation of lesbian women and gay men is a result of the tendency for these individuals to blur traditional gender roles. Gay men and lesbian women are overrepresented in certain occupations as they are more willing to push gender norms and participate, respectively, in female-dominated and male-dominated work fields (Tilcsik et al., 2015).

## 2.4 EDUCATION AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES

Tilcsik and colleagues (2015) tie occupational segregation amongst gay men and lesbian women to life experiences that shape career choices. In this manner, to understand labour market outcomes for sexual minorities it is worth looking at their experiences in education and other spheres of social life.

Research has shown that sexual minority students face many hardships within the educational system. While school administrators have become increasingly aware of the widespread prevalence of homophobic bullying, the enactment of LGBTQ-inclusive anti-bullying policies are often questioned and unsupported due to dominant societal ideologies, parental objections, and religious considerations (Walton, 2004). Due to their sexual identity, either self-proclaimed or perceived, LGBTQ students face physical as well as verbal and psychological forms of bullying.

Homophobia within the educational institution manifests as sexuality-based bullying both in terms of verbal and physical harassment (Evans & Chapman, 2014). Homophobic school-based bullying, especially among male adolescents, has been found to be closely associated to hegemonic ideals of masculinity. According to Connell (1995), masculinity exists in contrast to femininity. The author explains Western culture views homosexual men to lack masculinity as 'gayness' is homologous to femininity. As a result, "Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men" (Connell, 1995: 78).

In line with Connell's views, the use of homophobia as a tool to police and encourage the development of dominant forms of masculinity among youth has been well documented in academic literature. Investigating the link between masculinity and school-based bullying among adolescent males, homophobia was found to be a central mechanism in both "... the construction and maintenance of dominant versions of masculinity" (Martino, 1999: 256). Students who displayed characteristics or traits thought to be associated with gay people often become targets among their peers (Martino, 1999). According to the author, this led to the development of homophobic and heterosexist versions of masculinity.

The effects of this peer-to-peer bullying has been shown to produce long-term consequences. Previous literature has documented an association between the experiences of childhood bullying and an increased risk of alcoholism, substance abuse, and suicidality (Russell

et al., 2011; Zou, Anderson, & Blosnich, 2013). These consequences reach such an extent that many adult LGBTQ individuals report having experienced various symptoms associated with posttraumatic-stress disorder (PTSD). In addition to high rates of attempted suicide, depression, alcoholism, and substance abuse, it was found that feelings of social isolation, difficulty expressing emotions, and general pessimistic outlooks on life were consequences derived from school-based childhood victimization (Rivers, 2004).

However, on a positive note, a small but growing body of literature has shown an improvement in the school-based bullying experiences of sexual minority teens. Through cross-sectional studies, it has been found that students report safer school climates where teachers and administration actively intervene when they witness or become aware of prejudicially-based forms of harassment (Blackburn, 2007). However, training programs and initiatives designed to provide teachers with the knowledge and ability on how to create LGBTQ-inclusive classroom environments are rare (Perrotti & Westheimer, 2001).

Although outlining racial and class influences goes beyond the limited scope of this study, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the intersectional nature of these factors in relation to sexuality and minority sexual identity. When considering the intersections between race and sexual orientation, Daley and colleagues (2008) view race and ethnicity to complicate the experiences of bullying among sexual minority youth. According to these authors, the intersection of race and a non-heterosexual identity led students to have differential experiences and "... increased the potential for victimization due to multiple oppressions" (Daley et al., 2008: 15). Furthermore, research on the experiences of LGBTQ racial minorities find that various factors such as internalized homophobia and fear of family disapproval have been found to delay one's decision to publicly disclose his or her minority sexual identity (Mustanski et al., 2014).

In addition to racial identity, the experiences of these youth are also complicated by socioeconomic status and financial wellbeing. According to Blackburn and McCready (2009), LGBTQ youth who attend schools in lower-income urban communities experience many hardships. Likely to also belong to a racial minority, the hardships these students face because of their sexual and racial identities are compounded by their lower class status. Schools located in communities where the median family income is below the national average are less likely to have queer-centered school programs. The absence of these inclusive programs and student club initiatives puts many lower-class sexual minority students at a greater risk of victimization and



harassment (Blackburn & McCready, 2009). On a positive note, a few provinces such as Ontario and Manitoba have begun to address the issue of bullying within schools by passing anti-bullying legislation. Enacted in 2012 and 2013 respectively, this legislation requires all publicly-funded schools to allow students to organize LGBTQ-inclusive student clubs such as gay-straight alliances (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2014).

Despite the hardships queer students face in schools, there appears to be a tendency for sexual minorities to invest highly in education. Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, studies have found gay men and lesbian women often have higher levels of educational attainment (Carpenter, 2008). Furthermore, research investigating the link between higher education and support for civil liberties has shown that level of education appears to be one of the strongest predictors of LGBTQ-tolerance and acceptance towards queer people (Loftus, 2001; Ohlander, Batalova, & Treas, 2005; Detenber et al., 2013). This appears to be in line with Waite & Denier's (2015) suggestion of a link between anticipated workplace hostility and education in that the tendency for sexual minorities to acquire higher levels of education is due to the belief that occupations requiring this degree of education provide more inclusive and accepting workplace environments.

To add to their hardship, the hostile environments queer youth face within schools are often extended to their home life. Despite increased acceptance and societal tolerance, the decision to disclose one's non-heterosexuality to family members continues to be a daunting decision for many LGBTQ youth. Current literature investigating parental relationships among this population has found that disclosure of a minority sexual identity has the potential to greatly impact familial relationships, potentially resulting in rejection and family dissolution (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Muraco, 2010). Leading to an atypical sequencing for later-life landmarks, these consequences include a delayed development of intimate relationships and a hindered psychological sense of community within the larger gay community (D'Augelli, 1994).

## 2.5 *SUMMARY*

In this chapter, the literature on gay and bisexual men and women has been reviewed. From this chapter it is clear queer Canadians encounter many hurdles all throughout their lives. These challenges begin in early childhood and extend all the way to their entrance into the

Canadian labour market. In this study, I examine and consider the impact these previous experiences have on the lives of those who identify with either homosexual or bisexual sexual orientations. Similar to the 2015 study conducted by Tilcsik, Anteby, and Knight on occupational segregation, I propose that the hardships gay and bisexual Canadians face have lasting consequences. Specifically, Tilcsik and colleagues (2015) found the occupational segregation patterns of gay men and lesbian women to be a reflection of their previous experiences with sexuality-based hardship and concealable stigma. According to the authors, gay men and lesbian women gravitate toward occupations that provide task independence and fields that are traditionally dominated by the opposite sex in an attempt to avoid sexuality-based discrimination in their future workplace.

Similarly, this present study focuses on the life experiences of gay and bisexual men and women currently attending a post-secondary institution and pays particular attention to how previous experiences shape an individual's expectations of joining the paid labour market. With the intention to complement and advance existing literature, my research attempts to answer the following question: *despite being a protected class under the Canadian Human Rights Act, do post-secondary gay and bisexual sexual minority students hold anxieties about joining a potentially heteronormative workforce?*

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Greater social visibility and changing political ideologies have led to an increased interest in the experiences of sexual minorities within the paid labour market. Although rudimentary, we have witnessed a growing body of literature focusing on the widely experienced workplace discrimination among queer individuals.

As demonstrated within the literature review, although numerous studies have documented the existing harassment, prejudice, and professional hardships sexual minority workers face within the workplace, few academics have focused on those members of the LGBTQ community who have yet to enter the Canadian labour market. As outlined within the Canadian Human Rights Act, Canada has implemented federal policies that prohibits workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation since 1996. My research seeks to investigate whether or not the new wave of gay and bisexual labour market participants anticipate mistreatment within the workplace despite these protections. Specifically, my research explores the lived experiences of twelve gay and bisexual students currently attending a Canadian post-secondary institution and uncovers their feelings about joining the workforce in the near future. It is my belief that those who have encountered adverse experiences related to their minority sexual identity will have greater concerns about entering the Canadian labour market following graduation.

With the primary aim of my research being to complement and advance existing literature on sexual orientation-based hardships within the Canadian labour market, my investigation is motivated by the following research question: *despite being a protected class under the Canadian Human Rights Act, do post-secondary gay and bisexual sexual minority students hold anxieties about joining a potentially heteronormative workforce?*

To address this research question I conducted twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight gay and four bisexual post-secondary students. These interviews explore students' concerns respecting the transition from full-time student to full-time paid employment, and

illuminate how previous experiences shape current concerns and anxieties. This chapter outlines my study's methodology and provides an overview describing the study's participants.

### *3.1 STUDY OVERVIEW*

Ethics approval was obtained for this study from the Office of Research Ethics at Western University in August 2016. Shortly after, participant recruitment for this study commenced in September 2016 and concluded May 2017. Within this time period, twelve students agreed to participate in the study, each consenting to a one-time audio-recorded face-to-face interview at a convenient location of their choosing. Interviews ranged from approximately thirty to sixty minutes. Once conducted, audio-recordings were transcribed for analysis.

### *3.2 SAMPLING PROCEDURE*

The sensitive subject of sexuality, in the case of sampling sexual minorities, presents many obstacles for researchers. According to Bell (1997), "... the singular most difficult aspect of researching sexual geographies is that of access" (1997: 414). Due to the nature of the study's target population, it was determined qualitative non-probability sampling methods were best suited for the study's objectives. As such, a combination of both snowball and convenience methods were deemed to be the most appropriate sampling procedures to complement the study's qualitative and exploratory aim.

Described as an 'opportunistic' sampling method, convenience sampling designs allow researchers the flexibility required when recruiting participants who not only have the desired knowledge and experience but, perhaps more importantly, are also available and willing to partake in the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Similarly, snowball sampling is defined as a sampling procedure where "... the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (Noy, 2008: 330). The popularity of this sampling method may be at least partly attributed to its effectiveness in gathering information on 'hidden populations', especially those that face stigma and marginalization (ibid). Within her discussion on accessing hidden and stigmatized populations, Browne (2007) believes snowball sampling is uniquely equipped to enable researchers to gain access to queer communities. According to

Browne, the use of a participant's personal social networks, often containing friends and acquaintances, plays a noteworthy role when the research is of a sensitive and private nature (Browne, 2007). As such, I chose to utilize passive snowball sampling for this investigation in that individuals and participants were encouraged to pass on my contact information to others they thought might be interested in the study. Interested individuals were then free to contact me.

In light of these reasons and to best reach my target population, various queer-oriented student clubs and organizations were contacted and assisted in the recruitment process of my study. Online recruitment posters were utilized on various social media sites as well as physical posters which were displayed in public areas frequently visited by students (libraries, school recreation centres, bulletin boards etc). Due to the sensitivity surrounding the topic of sexual identity, family hardships, and school bullying, among others, each interview was performed at a mutually agreed upon convenient location of the participant's choosing. To ensure confidentiality and comfort, heavily populated and public areas were avoided to best ensure the participant felt at ease discussing private and personal information. Common locations where the interviews were conducted included my personal office at the university's student library and private campus study rooms.

An interpretive approach was used to analyze the subjective experience of the research participants. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilized for my research in order to most accurately obtain the views and perspectives that the participants shared verbally. While providing the researcher with the ability to guide each interview with a standard set of questions and topics, semi-structured interviews "... allow individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011: 102). It is believed that this method allowed the conversation to flow more naturally, and by default, provide the participant the comfort to discuss their subjective experience more thoroughly.

### *3.3 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION*

At its conclusion, the sample was composed of twelve post-secondary students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. All participants identified with either a homosexual or

bisexual sexual orientation and were currently enrolled full-time at an Ontario college or university program. Below, table 3.1 provides an overview of the biographical information of each student who took part in the study.

**Table 3.1** Participant Biographical Information

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sexual Identity</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Desired Career Field</i>
<i>Alfred</i>	Man	19	Gay	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Information Technology
<i>Anderson</i>	Man	20	Gay	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Medicine
<i>Ellen</i>	Woman	18	Bisexual	1 <sup>st</sup>	Medicine
<i>Harvey</i>	Man	21	Gay	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Law
<i>Jodie</i>	Woman	19	Bisexual	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Medicine
<i>Judith</i>	Woman	21	Gay	4 <sup>th</sup>	Education
<i>Marsha</i>	Woman	21	Bisexual	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Non-Governmental Organization
<i>Matthew</i>	Man	20	Gay	4 <sup>th</sup>	Laboratory Science
<i>Michel</i>	Man	21	Gay	4 <sup>th</sup>	Marketing
<i>Neil</i>	Man	18	Gay	1 <sup>st</sup>	Finance
<i>Samuel</i>	Man	20	Gay	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Finance/Marketing
<i>Timothy</i>	Man	22	Bisexual	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Finance

In total, twelve individuals chose to participate in the study that made up a sample of eight men and four women. Belonging to various faculties and years of study, the sample is composed of students who desire to go into a variety of different fields including, but not limited to, law, medicine, information technology, education and business. The average age of the participants was twenty years old.

In reference to sexual identity, the study recruited post-secondary students who self-identified with either homosexual or bisexual sexual orientations. Of the twelve participants, only four identified as either a bisexual man or woman. The decision to label the remaining eight participants as *gay* was due to the terminology used by the majority. Of these participants, seven self-described their sexual identity as either a *gay man or woman*, whereas the remaining participant identified as a *homosexual* man.

As is evident from the study's participants, sexual orientation and the label used to describe one's sexual identity is very personal and depends on the individual. For instance, while some members of the LGBTQ community prefer to be labelled as *homosexual* instead of *gay*, others consider the term to be offensive or too clinical (Eliason, 2014). Similarly, while *lesbian* is commonly used to refer to women who choose same-sex sexual partners, some women prefer the term *gay* as the lesbian identity has become hyper-sexualized in Western cultures (Randazzo,

2015). With this in mind, I chose to refer to eight of the study's participants as *gay*. Throughout this thesis the term *gay* is used to collectively refer to both male and female participants who prefer same-sex sexual partners.

Due to the limited scope of the study, it is important to note that while table 3.1 does not include data on participant race or ethnicity, some participants were members of visible minorities. As such, the intersection of sexual and racial identities will be briefly discussed in the results chapter.

### 3.4 INTERVIEW GUIDE

A semi-structured interview guide allowed each participant to respond to a shared set of standard questions. This aided in the organization and later comparison of interview transcripts without infringing on the participant's ability to respond whichever way he or she desired. The organization of the interview guide was crucial for the comparison and analysis of the resulting data. Each participant was asked a number of questions categorized into six themes including: (1) sexual identification, (2) familial relationships, (3) day-to-day experiences, (4) educational experiences, (5) previous workplace experiences, and (6) anticipated workplace experiences.

Generally, each interview began with a discussion of the participant's sexual identity, followed by various questions regarding biographical information including their program of study, year of study and age. Shortly after, a series of questions involving familial experiences would follow. Participants were asked such questions as 'Do you believe your sexual identity has influenced your relationship with your immediate or extended family?' or, if undisclosed (i.e. closeted), 'Do you believe your family members would be supportive of your sexual identity?'. Questions involving day-to-day experiences included topics of both regulation and vulnerability such as 'Do you feel you have to regulate your sexuality in public settings?' and 'Do you feel vulnerable in public settings for potential sexuality-based victimization?'.

As each participant was currently enrolled in either a university or college program, questions revolving around previous school experiences focused on topics such as campus acceptance and potential exposure to peer bullying. The interviews would then conclude with a

discussion on previous and anticipated labour market involvement, such as ‘Do you anticipate any sexuality-based workplace victimization or mistreatment when you graduate?’<sup>5</sup>.

Within each interview the participants were asked to recall previous experiences of potential school-based harassment, identity disclosure, previous workplace discrimination, family relationships, among others. I expect that those who have encountered adverse experiences such as disapproving family or friends, experiences of hardship related to publicly acknowledging their sexuality, and/or a history of homophobic victimization within schools will have more concerns about entering the labour market despite the current legislative protections supposedly safe-guarding their minority status.

### 3.5 REFLEXIVITY

I believe it is also significant to mention my own connection to the subjects I was interviewing. Due to the nature of the investigation, it is possible my sexuality was either known or assumed by the time the interview took place. As a queer person myself, participants may have felt more comfortable to communicate their thoughts, histories, and opinions. In other words, as a member of the LGBTQ community, participants may have felt more comfortable speaking with me because of my non-heterosexuality. It is not unreasonable to consider the possibility that some participants, especially those less comfortable with their sexuality, may have been more reluctant or ‘guarded’ with their responses if interviewed by a heterosexual man or woman. However, because of this shared connection, I had to be very vigilant during the interview process. Careful not to make the assumption that the participants and I shared similar experiences, I regularly sought clarifications and detailed explanations.

While I did not know the majority of the interview participants personally, it is possible my own sexual identity played a significant influence in participant recruitment and data collection. Among the two participants I did know personally, it is possible their responses were influenced by some degree. For instance, these participants could have molded their responses based on what he or she believed I wanted to hear as a researcher or were less willing to disclose

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed list of questions asked during the study’s interviews, please refer to Appendix 2 for a copy of the interview guide.



personal experiences of hardship for fear of judgment. However, I am confident this is not the case. Once these individuals expressed interest in participating in the study, both were informed of the type of questions and themes the interview would contain to ensure each of them would be comfortable during the interview process. Each of these participants gave very detailed accounts of their lived experiences.

### *3.6 DATA ANALYSIS*

Each of the twelve interviews were transcribed manually; no data management software was utilized for this study. Participants were then assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Following the transcription process, the data derived from each interview was first reviewed individually, making note of unique experiences and responses. Later, a more collective, or group, analysis was conducted and interviews were compared and contrasted with one another. As previously mentioned, the design of the interview guide played a critical role in the analysis of the data. With the interview questions organized into six themes, this allowed the comparison of participant responses to be organized and explored quite easily. Once familiarized with the data, various themes emerged and were analyzed. The dominant themes that had materialized were then investigated and explored.

### *3.7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS*

Despite my confidence in the study's design, it is important to recognize its limitations. As a qualitative-based exploration, the participants were recruited through a non-probability sampling technique. Due to the nature of my target population, random-based sampling methods were simply not feasible or practical. According to Browne's (2005) discussion on the use of qualitative methodologies on 'hidden' populations, referencing the work of Faugier & Sargeant (1997) and Heaphy (2001), "... representative studies of sexualities are problematic because of the issues of sensitivity which make for difficulties in establishing sampling frames" (Browne, 2005: 51).

While it is unlikely this study's findings bear statistically generalizable results, I believe the results derived from my study's design are valuable nonetheless as "unlike quantitative

research... qualitative research aims to look at a ‘process’ or the ‘meanings’ individuals attribute to their given social situation” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011: 45). In other words, as a qualitative research design, my intent is to investigate and report on the lived experiences of my participants, advocating for a greater understanding and future research on the experiences and anxieties of the emerging cohort of sexual minority workers.

It is also significant to mention that my study focuses exclusively on men and women who self-identify with either homosexual or bisexual sexual orientations. While there are other identities within the LGBTQ community, the decision to exclude these identities was made with reason. For instance, the experiences of transgender individuals could be the result of a combination of factors such as gender identity and sexual identity. To isolate the impact of sexual orientation, the decision was made to include only select sexualities. I acknowledge the results derived from this study would not, and should not, carry the assumption of being representative or relevant to the experiences of all non-heterosexual identities and individuals within the LGBTQ community.

### 3.8 *SUMMARY*

In addressing various aspects related to my study’s methodology, including its aim, strengths, and limitations, I hope I have adequately justified its qualitative and exploratory research design. It is my intention that the results of this investigation will inspire future research to be conducted on the emerging cohort of queer workers entering the Canadian paid labour market.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter reviews the common themes that emerged from the narratives of twelve post-secondary sexual minority students within Southern Ontario, Canada. Of these twelve participants, eight self-described themselves as gay while the remaining four identified as bisexual. Overall, the interviews suggest sexual minority post-secondary students face a variety of challenges that eventually shape the concerns they have about joining the Canadian workforce. Overwhelmingly, it was common for participants to report that their non-heterosexual identity has influenced not only their career aspirations but also how they approach the job market. As expected, feelings of apprehensiveness towards joining the labour market appear to be indicative of personal or observed experiences of discrimination in the past. Despite the current legislative environment, a clear majority of study participants report feelings of worry and anxiousness in approaching the labour market following the end of their studies.

As a whole, the interviews present a pattern: those who had faced prejudice and mistreatment because of either their perceived or known sexual identity were more likely to anticipate workplace discrimination post-graduation. For many, despite the current legal and policy protections, fear of harassment significantly impacts how participants prepare to enter the workforce. While a few participants reported having experienced little to no prejudicial or discriminatory treatment, these individuals still acknowledged the difficulties other members of the LGBQ community commonly face. Despite their unfamiliarity with sexuality-based prejudice and mistreatment, it appears this awareness contributed to participant uneasiness regarding their future involvement in the paid labour market. Furthermore, there is also evidence that the forthcoming cohort of sexual minority workers lack faith in the current legislative anti-discriminatory protections supposedly safeguarding members of this community from workplace discrimination. These themes will be discussed in greater detail below, beginning with the labour

market expectations of the twelve participants.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4.1 ANTICIPATED WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

Despite an awareness of their legislative protections, gay and bisexual post-secondary students within Canada carry a significant degree of concern that their non-heterosexual orientation will impede their chances of professional success. A review of the data conveys an unfortunate reality: not only do these students fear being discriminated against in the workplace but they often consider various measures in the hopes of avoiding this anticipated mistreatment. Specifically, a cloud of vulnerability appears to hang over gay and bisexual post-secondary students which often forces these individuals to consider various protective measures to safeguard their professional futures. Overall, participants' sexual minority status seems to influence both their career aspirations and approach to the job market.

##### 4.1.1 APPREHENSIVENESS TOWARDS FUTURE WORKPLACE

In preparing to enter the workplace, a clear majority of the participants expressed a degree of concern and anxiety. Many feared the impact their sexual identity would have on both gaining employment and job satisfaction. When asked about whether or not they anticipated sexuality-based discrimination in their future workplace many participants expressed feelings of vulnerability and uneasiness:

*“I feel like I just need to be more careful, you know? I can't just be like ‘I'm gay’ because I feel like no matter what people will always judge. Especially in the work environment...”*

*– Samuel (Gay)*

*“As much as I am proud to be who I am, I've worked so hard to get to where I am and I don't want to be held back by [my sexual identity]. I don't think there's any benefit to [being a sexual minority] in all honesty. I think that people are only going*

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<sup>6</sup> Quotes from respondents have been edited for both clarity and length. Any potentially identifiable information has been removed in order to preserve confidentiality.

*to see you as equal or they're only going to see you as less than. No one is ever going to see you as above"*

*– Anderson (Gay)*

*"I feel like there's still a lot of stigma around sexuality ... Even though things are becoming more accepting, and I think that now it's at a pretty reasonable point of acceptance, I feel like there is always this thought in the back of my mind that there could be another employee who just chooses to [treat me differently]"*

*– Alfred (Gay)*

While the majority of participants planned on disclosing their sexual identity at some point in their future workplace, many expressed concern for potential repercussions. Specifically, it was not uncommon for participants to view their homosexuality or bisexuality as a threat to both obtaining and sustaining employment as well as negatively affecting their chances of career advancement. Fearing workplace hostility, nearly all students interviewed claimed that the idea of disclosing their sexual minority status within their future workplace caused them great anxiety. Social exclusion, ridicule, and rejection from either fellow coworkers, superiors, or clients were the most common forms of discriminatory mistreatment anticipated by participants.

Timing of identity disclosure was also a significant concern among participants. As discussed in the literature review, heteronormativity normalizes heterosexuality within workplace environments and professional settings. Those who are a part of the heterosexual majority are therefore, quite arguably, "out" by default. Seemingly mundane interactions such as telling a coworker of one's weekend plans with a spouse, bringing a romantic partner to a work function, or even family photos displayed on one's work station, constitute signals of heterosexuality that often go unquestioned, and corresponding privileges go unacknowledged.

When heterosexuality is constantly reinforced, queer individuals are hesitant to disclose their sexual identities for fear of unwanted attention. Many participants had considered the timing of when to disclose their queer identity in their future workplace to a considerable degree. For most, getting to know their future coworkers and superiors was important before disclosing any information regarding their sexual identity. For others, such as Anderson, a second-year university student who identifies as gay, disclosure will only come after the end of the probationary period:

Anderson: *I feel like I don't tell people right away... I don't want to tell anybody until like three months is up... it's always a risk and something that's scary to a lot of us.*

Interviewer: *And by three months do you mean probation?*

Anderson: *Probation. Yes... I don't want that to be the reason I get fired or why I get discriminated against because they don't need a reason at that point. Like, I know it's technically illegal but at that point they don't need a reason to fire you.*

When considering future disclosure, many participants varied in their response of when they planned to disclose their sexual minority status in their future workplace. Despite this variance, it was clear that each participant planned to be open about their non-heterosexuality at some point in their professional lives. Specifically, many planned to be very cautious to disclose their sexual identity when first starting their career but desired to be open within their workplace once they settle into their fields. When asked how his sexuality has influenced how he prepares to enter the workforce, Timothy states:

*"I couldn't imagine going to a work event where all my coworkers brought their significant others and not bring the person I'm with. I couldn't imagine leaving them out of my life for those portions... I would say that [my sexuality] does [influence me] when looking at my future and where I want to end up. Because when I plan for my future I'm not only planning for me, I'm planning for my significant other and I'm planning for my children."*

*– Timothy (Bisexual)*

For many, the consideration to be out within the workplace was heavily influenced by one's anticipated relationship status. This was common among many participants. The majority of those interviewed appeared to agree that disclosure within one's workplace is a future consideration that goes beyond simply being 'out' to coworkers. It is a consideration that affects not only themselves but also their future partner and/or family. However, while all participants strongly desired not to hide their sexuality within their future workplace, many feared the consequences of being openly gay or bisexual would have on their careers.

Despite the current equal opportunity legislation, a clear majority of the participants expressed concerns of joining a potentially unwelcoming workplace environment. Nevertheless, the anticipation of discriminatory treatment was less salient among two participants:

*"I would say that a boss necessarily discriminating against me because of my sexuality isn't something I'm concerned about... I think [sexual minorities] need to show that there is more to us than our sexuality. I feel like I don't want to be defined as just that 'gay guy' at work. I want to be defined for more than that. I want to be defined for my experience and what I can bring to the table."*

*– Neil (Gay)*

*“I don’t anticipate any [discrimination or unfair treatment in the workplace]. I’m relatively fortunate in how I portray myself in public... I’m not overly flamboyant and a lot of people don’t clock me on my sexuality. Whereas others, if they’re in the interview room, you’ll know fairly quickly... So, I, myself, don’t have concerns on that side but I could see how others could...”*

*– Timothy (Bisexual)*

These two notable exceptions stood out from the rest, and yet they still reflect broader concerns expressed by others. Timothy is not concerned because he feels people won’t be able to identify, or “clock”, his sexual orientation. He takes comfort in not being overly flamboyant and less stereotypically gay. Therefore, his insouciance lies in his ability to conceal his sexual orientation, not due to the fact that he believes it is irrelevant in the workplace. In contrast, while Neil is concerned his homosexuality will become too central in the workplace, being viewed as the ‘gay guy’ in the office, he trusts his abilities will overshadow the unwanted attention that he believes will result from his sexual orientation. Thus, despite not anticipating any sexuality-based mistreatment, both participants nonetheless are concerned their queer identities will influence their professional lives.

Other participants shared Neil’s fear of tokenism in the workplace, or what some referred to as a “diversity hire.” They believed that some workplaces might hire them to demonstrate inclusiveness. The risk here is that their abilities and potential may be overlooked. Such token hiring might also undermine a workplace culture of acceptance and further stigmatize those within the LGBTQ community. As explained by Harvey, a third-year university student identifying as gay, “I refuse to get a job simply because I am gay. I don’t want that to influence the decision at all... negative or positive”. For this reason, and many others, most participants indicated they would not come out during the interview or application process. As explained by Jodie, an aspiring medical student who identifies as bisexual:

*“I do hide [my sexuality] because I’m potentially going to med school. I know that there are people who judge and I don’t know who’s behind that screen looking and saying ‘yes, you’re accepted’ and ‘no, you’re not’. Even though they might say they’re not discriminatory if somebody doesn’t think that being gay or bisexual is acceptable they might think ‘oh, you don’t belong here’...”*

*– Jodie (Bisexual)*

Like Jodie, a few participants appeared to struggle with how forthcoming they should be on both their resume and professional job or program applications. The decision to disclose their

sexual minority status, or omit signals of their queer sexuality, such as involvement in a queer organization, was highly contemplated. While some believed their sexual orientation was irrelevant to the application and interview process, others reported that they would censor themselves when meeting potential future employers. This often involved strictly monitoring their personal social media accounts, careful not to have anything signal their homosexual or bisexual sexual identity to prospective employers or admission committees for fear of potential repercussions.

#### 4.1.2 INFLUENCE OF SEXUALITY ON CAREER ASPIRATIONS

The participants suggested a link between their sexual minority status and professional ambitions. Specifically, it was found that participants' career aspirations were greatly influenced by their membership within the queer community. In other words, several participants gravitated towards careers they believed would provide more inclusive and accepting workplace climates. Others indicated they would be drawn to inclusive companies and workplaces. In addition, it is also interesting to note that all twelve participants expressed a desire to work in an urban, highly populated, location upon finishing their degree. In doing so, the students believed this would increase the likelihood of finding a workplace that values, or at least tolerates, diversity.

*"[Once I graduate from Teachers College] if I noticed that there were policies and programs in place to help LGBTQ students or staff I would definitely consider that school over one that didn't have them because that just proves they're already more inclusive."*

*– Judith (Gay)*

*"... when looking into job descriptions I appreciate when companies say they are open [to diversity]. That there are fair opportunities for all genders, ethnicities and sexual orientations... I do prefer working in an environment that is more accepting of my [homosexuality]"*

*– Michel (Gay)*

While career decisions are typically shaped by an individual's skills, aptitudes and interests, many of the participants indicated a preference for fields they considered to be more "queer-friendly". Put differently, the feelings of vulnerability gay and bisexual students possess greatly influence their professional aspirations. Among the participants, some students reported



being drawn to more technical jobs where they felt their skills would be appreciated, and where they wouldn't need to interact much with other people:

*“The thing about computer science is it leads to IT jobs... that would basically lead me to a desk job where I'm just working on projects all day. That would be a type of environment that I feel would be neutral in terms of my sexuality and how it impacts me”*

– Alfred (Gay)

*“Science is not a very socially aware field of study... it's not that they're not progressive people, it's just that there's no space for acknowledging these issues in a scientific setting. It's just about doing your work and getting home and doing a good job... I like to think scientists are, you know, they've gone through so much schooling, they're very intelligent, they're very knowledgeable, I like to think they can translate that outside of science [in terms of being accepting towards sexual minorities]”*

– Matthew (Gay)

Matthew, in particular, appeared to be drawn to science because he considered this field to involve minimal interaction with other people. He was very attracted to professional environments where he could work independently and success was based on his objective performance. This participant was particularly explicit about his desire to minimize social interactions. Aspiring to work as a laboratory technician, Matthew had previous work experience in the area and stated, “[... working in a] lab, it's not a setting where you really talk about much. It's very 'go to work, do your experiments, go home'. It's not a very social atmosphere. The focus is not about relationships with people. It's about making discoveries [and] being innovative”.

For other participants, the intersection of their sexual identity and professional aspirations led some respondents to believe certain fields were closed to them. In other words, membership with the queer community caused many respondents to believe certain fields or professions were incompatible with their non-heterosexual orientation. For example, Anderson, a second-year university student who aspires to go into nursing, anticipated the female-dominated nursing profession to provide a more inclusive and accepting professional environment compared to the traditionally more male-dominated fields such as the trades and other blue collar work.

*“I don't think I would ever go and apply to do construction work even though I'm totally capable of doing that type of endurance work. I just don't feel comfortable around, I guess, “manly” professions. I think I would be made fun of for [my*

*homosexuality] ... I guess more women do nursing and because I think women are more accepting than men of sexual minorities, I feel safe with them”*

*– Anderson (Gay)*

Comparatively, Ellen, an aspiring medical student, felt that her bisexuality would not be tolerated in pediatrics compared to other medical specialities. Citing the groundless association linking queer identity with pedophilia, Ellen was quite explicit in her desire to avoid specializing in an area of medicine that focused on youth populations.

*“If I’m a doctor I’m definitely staying away from [pediatrics]... I mean, there’s that whole idea that LGBT people are pedophiles.”*

*- Ellen (Bisexual)*

For some participants, their sexual identity greatly influenced their fields of study and professional ambitions. Specifically, Marsha, a third-year social science student who focuses her degree on international politics and the discriminatory treatment facing various minority and disadvantaged groups, believes her own status as a sexual minority played an influential role in both her academic and professional aspirations. Desiring to get into a professional field involving research or working for a non-governmental organization, it is clear from this participant’s interview that her bisexuality and membership within the LGBTQ community was influential in drawing her to particular career fields.

Overall, it appears that among those interviewed many seek employment in fields that they perceive to be more accepting and, as a result, are less likely to encounter sexuality-based forms of discrimination or workplace mistreatment. While it was common for participants to have acknowledged the influence of their sexuality on their professional aspirations, this was not found among all those interviewed. In fact, a few participants believed their sexuality had little to no influence on their career goals. Nonetheless, these participants still had concerns that their sexual identity would negatively impact their professional futures. Specifically, participants reported feeling the most apprehensive to pursue careers that involve working with children and the physical trades.

*“I don’t think my sexual orientation had any impact on me deciding what job I wanted. I’ve only ever worked with kids. It’s all I know... with my sexual orientation it was just like okay this is a part of me and I’m just going to have to figure out how this fits in with my job... I want to teach younger kids. I’m kind of afraid of their parents... “why are you shoving this down my kid’s throat?” or “my kids are too*

*young to know about this” ... I’m afraid how it will affect my relationship with the kids’ parents... I’m more apprehensive about it because I’ll be working with children.”*

*– Judith (Gay)*

*“[Being a lawyer is] what I’ve always wanted to do... I’m a little worried because lawyers are generally on the more right-wing side of things. They’re a little more conservative usually. I mean these people still have problems with you having tattoos that are visible, let alone working with somebody that’s gay... [Compared to other professions] If I was going into something like construction, then I think I would be definitely more limited in terms of opportunities.*

*– Harvey (Gay)*

*“I feel like certain people who are homophobic may not want to see me as their doctor... I think it’s been an idea in my head that certain people may not want my help because of who I identify as. That’s something that I prepared myself for... certain people may not want my help even though I’m there to help [them]. I feel like it will be okay with my coworkers [other doctors], just not my patients”*

*– Jodie (Bisexual)*

These students often reported increased feelings of worry and anxiousness in approaching the professional labour market following the end of their studies as they viewed their sexual identities, in a sense, incompatible with their occupational interests. Many of these participants were often apprehensive about how clients and sometimes co-workers might react to their sexual orientation, and anticipated some difficulties. Nevertheless, they were committed to their career choices.

To summarize, in seeking more inclusive and accepting workplace climates, study participants appear predisposed to work in certain professional fields over others. With some proactively seeking careers they consider to be more “queer-friendly”, others, specifically among the male participants, consciously avoided occupations they perceived to be hyper-masculine or traditionally male-dominated such as the trades. Furthermore, while some viewed their professional interests as external to their sexual identity, these participants nonetheless reported great levels of anxiousness towards their professional futures and were concerned how their sexual minority status would impact their career success post-graduation.

Today’s sexual minority students will enter the workforce legally protected from harassment and discrimination, however, despite these legislative protections, the data derived from the participants has shown that gay and bisexual post-secondary students still experience

many hardships that evidently taint their expectations of the Canadian labour market. In other words, these students are apprehensive when it comes to their professional futures. This may very well be indicative of personal or observed discrimination they had experienced, or witnessed others encounter, in the past. Before providing an overview of these past experiences, the identity disclosure patterns among the participants will now be discussed.

#### 4.2 IDENTITY DISCLOSURE PATTERNS AMONG PARTICIPANTS

As a minority, queer individuals within Canada live in a society that assumes heterosexuality. This assumption greatly impacts the members of the LGBQ community. Among those interviewed, it was found that the decision to disclose or conceal their sexual identity in any setting, personal or professional, was complicated by a number of factors. As discussed within the literature review, public acknowledgment of one's non-heterosexuality carries the risk of being confronted with the less-than-accepting attitudes many hold towards sexual minorities. For this reason, members of the LGBQ community must continuously and strategically make decisions about when, where and to whom they want to disclose their queer identity.

As each participant has endured unique lived experiences, the process of identity disclosure for these students is equally as individual. Having participants who are at various stages of their coming out process allowed for a wide variety of responses and provided ample data for this study's exploitative aim. Some participants even suggested that not being out in the workplace may have contributed to positive workplace experiences. For example, Samuel, who was not open about his homosexuality to his coworkers, reported not having personally experienced any form of discrimination or mistreatment so far in a professional setting. However, he believes this is a direct result of him being closeted in the workplace:

Interviewer: *Do you believe your sexual identity has influenced your experience so far in the workplace?*

Samuel: *No. But only because I wasn't public in the workplace. I definitely felt like I could not be public in the workplace.*

In considering the aim of the study and the diverse group of students making up the sample, it is important to recognize the influence identity disclosure has had on the personal experiences of the participants. Quite arguably, as an invisible status, many of those who are

undisclosed and possess a queer identity are often assumed to be heterosexual and therefore are less likely to come into contact with sexuality-based forms of prejudice and discrimination. While this assumption could greatly influence the previous experiences among these individuals, it is important to note that even among those who had not disclosed their identity, and reported not personally experiencing any forms of sexuality-based mistreatment, it was common to have these participants report witnessing the discriminatory treatment faced by others.

In relation to the study, the participants varied in the degree to which they had publically acknowledged their sexual identity. While some had only disclosed their non-heterosexuality to a select number of close peers, others reported being fully 'out'; still others lay somewhere in between. Of the twelve participants, eight described themselves as being partially open with their sexuality while the remaining four reported being fully 'out', regardless of the social environment or context. Overall, the interviews suggest that the majority of the study's participants have decided to strategically disclose their sexual identity in certain environments over others. For example, Judith, who is open about her homosexuality to the majority of her friends and family, made the decision not to be out while working as a lifeguard at a private country club. Describing her work environment as heteronormative, "white" and "upper-middle class", she explains:

*"There was no way I was going to be out with those coworkers because I just didn't feel comfortable and it was in my home town and I was younger and was also the manager... and I didn't want to be the 'hot gossip' of that day or that week or whatever"*

*– Judith (Gay)*

Mirroring this, Michel, an international student from China, described himself as being open about his sexuality to the majority of his friends but hesitant to disclose his sexuality to his family back home. According to the participant:

*"I'm kind of afraid [my homosexuality] would break the relationship between me and my parents... I avoid anyone who could possibly inform my parents about my sexual orientation"*

*– Michel (Gay)*

When discussing the public disclosure of one's sexual identity, it is important to acknowledge that members of the LGBTQ community may choose to disclose their non-

heterosexual identities to various degrees in both professional and personal settings. In other words, public disclosure of one’s sexual identity is not a one-time decision but a choice that many gay and bisexual men and women make with every new social interaction or environment they are exposed to. The decision to disclose, or ‘come out’, was found to be a strategic and highly selective consideration among the study’s participants. Participants had to consciously make a choice about when and with whom they would disclose their sexual minority status. This decision often involved careful deliberations of the potential risks associated with being open about one’s homosexual or bisexual identity in a particular setting. To provide a general overview, table 4.1 highlights the disclosure patterns among the participants.

**Table 4.1** Participant Sexual Identity Disclosure Patterns

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Sexual Identity</i>	<i>Public Disclosure of Sexual Identity</i>
<i>Alfred</i>	Gay	Partial: disclosed to no family members and select peers
<i>Anderson</i>	Gay	Fully: disclosed to all family members and all peers
<i>Ellen</i>	Bisexual	Partial: disclosed to select family members and select peers
<i>Harvey</i>	Gay	Fully: disclosed to all family members and all peers
<i>Jodie</i>	Bisexual	Partial: disclosed to select family members and select peers
<i>Judith</i>	Gay	Partial: disclosed to select family members and select peers
<i>Marsha</i>	Bisexual	Partial: disclosed to no family members and select peers
<i>Matthew</i>	Gay	Fully: disclosed to all family members and all peers
<i>Michel</i>	Gay	Partial: disclosed to no family members and select peers
<i>Neil</i>	Gay	Fully: disclosed to all family members and all peers
<i>Samuel</i>	Gay	Partial: disclosed to select family members and majority of peers
<i>Timothy</i>	Bisexual	Partial: disclosed to majority of family members and majority of peers.

In considering the disclosure patterns among each of the participants, it is significant to note that discrepancies stemming from sexual orientation did exist. Interestingly, all participants who described themselves as having fully disclosed their sexual identity identified as gay; whereas all bisexual participants were only partially open with their sexuality. While Marsha, Timothy, Jodie, and Ellen shared many of the experiences reported by the participants identifying as gay, in other ways their experiences were unique. It appears participants’ bisexuality greatly influenced their willingness to publically disclose their sexual identity. For instance, not only was it common among bisexual participants to fear their sexuality would not be taken seriously following disclosure, but these participants also reported a distinctive anxiety regarding the selection of one’s future romantic partner and professional future.

*“bisexuality is kind of a weird thing for some people. Some see it as either straight or gay and there was one comment I got in first year... I wasn’t out and they didn’t know that they were talking to someone who was bisexual, who said bisexuality didn’t exist. They said they were using it as a transition piece from not being out as gay and just identifying as straight to just identify as gay. Use it kind of a stepping stone piece...”*

*– Timothy (Bisexual)*

*“I think it makes it easier for me to choose a guy [to marry] because it’s accepted and then with the goals that I have it’s more strategic to pick a male partner than a female even though they’re both equally as likely for me to [be] attracted to. But [because] I’m choosing a career where people can be prejudice towards me I think I’d choose a male.”*

*– Jodie (Bisexual)*

As part of the interview process, each participant was asked whether or not they planned to disclose their sexual identity in their future workplace. Interestingly, while each of the participants who identified as gay intended to disclose their non-heterosexuality at some point or another, the same question was met with a considerable degree of hesitation among many of the bisexual participants. Specifically, disclosure appeared to be dependent on the gender of their future partner. Nearly all of the bisexual participants believed an opposite-sex partner would be more “strategic” professionally. Among these participants, many were convinced that the appearance of a heterosexual relationship brought about by an opposite-sex partner would essentially shield them from workplace prejudice and discriminatory treatment.

As a whole, considering both gay and bisexual participants, this theme of selectively disclosing one’s sexual identity was found to be common among many of the students interviewed. In addition to places of work, it was common for many participants not to be open about their sexuality with their family, hometown, and secondary school institution. As will be discussed, many participants actively avoided being open about their sexual identity in certain environments for fear of rejection, loss of relationship, anticipation of familial disapproval, possibility of abuse and harassment, as well as potential exposure to institutionalized forms of discrimination and prejudice. An overview of the impact sexuality has had on participant day-to-day experiences, interpersonal relationships, educational experiences, and previous workplace experiences will now be discussed.

#### *4.3 PARTICIPANT SELF-REPORTED PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES: AN OVERVIEW*

### 4.3.1 IMPACT ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the growing acceptance of the queer community, a non-heterosexual identity can considerably influence how gay and bisexual youth navigate social spaces and interact with those around them. As described within the literature review, human sexuality is inherently social and deeply entwined in the social fabric of society. Exploring the link between sexuality and social environment, participants were asked to reflect on whether or not their minority sexual orientation has influenced their relationships with their families, friends, and peers.

#### 4.3.1.1 FAMILIAL EXPERIENCES

Overall, while all twelve participants were open about their sexuality to at least some degree, only eight reported being out to at least one member of their family. Fear of family disapproval appeared to delay one's decision to publically disclose his or her minority sexual identity. In reference to initial reactions, the experiences reported by the study's participants varied from being quite positive to distressingly negative. Although a majority report neither overly negative nor overly positive reactions from family members, a few stand out from the rest. Perhaps the most positive family-related experience reported by a participant was from eighteen-year-old Neil. When asked about his relationship with his family, he recalled his parents always being supportive from the very beginning. Other participants, such as Judith, also reported positive familial experiences. According to Judith, the disclosure of her homosexuality with her immediate family has allowed them to grow closer.

*"I never really had a coming out experience. My parents never asked me questions in terms of like 'oh, what girls are you interested in?', it was always very blanket questions and it was the same for my friends and community members as well. It was just very publically well known that I was gay from a young age. I never had a moment where everybody found out on a specific day"*

*– Neil (Gay)*

*"... since coming out my mom has read a lot more literature on the gay experience... and my mom actually spear-headed my church [to become more accepting] ... making my church be fully inclusive. I think she's definitely more educated."*

*– Judith (Gay)*



Comparatively, others had a much more difficult time coming out. Many interview participants reported that their queer identity had negatively influenced their relationship with their family to at least some degree. The pressure to conceal their sexuality from members of their family was both challenging and emotionally draining. During their interviews, it was common for the participants to recount the damaging effect that hiding their sexual identity has had on the relationship with their parents.

*“You know in movies there’s this typical father-son relationship portrayed? I feel like I don’t really have that with my dad... I feel like there’s less of an opportunity for me to form close relationships with [my parents]. I feel like they’re still my parents, so we still have that love for each other, but... I’m not ever being truly open with them”*

– Alfred (Gay)

*“I’ve spent a lot of time conditioning myself for the worst, like the worst possible scenario. So I really cut myself off [from forming] strong ties with like anybody in my family... Now nothing terrible happened. Like, my family’s great. But those are really five plus years I won’t get back building connections with them... Till this day there’s not a very strong connection between me, my mom, my brother, really anyone. So [hiding my sexuality] definitely had a very large impact...”*

– Matthew (Gay)

In exploring the strained relationships between participants and their families, over half of the participants reported their sexual identity had negatively impacted the relationship they have with either their immediate or extended family. Interestingly, it was not uncommon for these participants to report expectations of encountering prejudicial and unwelcoming workplace climates. For some, such as Matthew and Alfred, it is possible strained family relationships contributed to the decision of these students to pursue careers they believed would best accommodate their queer identity. For Matthew this meant a profession as a lab technician that involved little social interaction with coworkers. Similarly, Alfred believed a career in information technology would provide him a “neutral” workplace climate considering his homosexuality.

Religion and religious identity was also very prominent among those interviewed. Being a source of struggle both personally and within the family, nearly half of the respondents reported religion as having influenced the relationships with their families. For instance, one respondent

referenced their family's religious beliefs as a contributing factor in their decision not to disclose their sexual identity.

*“My parents don't know [of my homosexuality] for religious reasons... they're Muslim and basically, as you know, the religion is against [homosexuality]... you get taught specifically in [this] religion not to be gay and it is very clear, there's no beating around the bush”*

– Samuel (Gay)

*“I tried to help [my parents] interpret their faith in a way that wasn't a negative perception of me... I did a lot of Google research and just tried to find out how you could take some things literally but some things are open to interpretation and try to find that balance... I just wanted to make sure that [my mother] knew what [her] options were; she didn't have to pick one or the other. She can interpret things how she wants to.”*

– Matthew (Gay)

While the intersection between their religious and sexual identities caused some to abandon their faith, others continue to describe their faith as an important aspect of their identity and have encouraged their family to interpret their faith a little differently. Among these participants, family issues were highly intertwined with religious considerations.

In addition to religious affiliation, cultural identity was also seen to be a significant factor influencing family relationships among the participants. Specifically, disclosure of one's non-heterosexual orientation appeared to be complicated by cultural factors among participants belonging to ethnic and racial minority groups. Three participants brought up the influence their sexual orientation had on their family and cultural identity. For instance, Michel, an international student from China, states “I just don't want to disappoint [my family] ... In China there's less acceptance of homosexuals”. As their only son, Michel recognizes the expectation his parents have of him passing on his family's name to the next generation; something he explains is very important within Chinese culture. According to Michel, it is because of this that he fears his homosexuality may cause great tension between him and his family.

Mirroring the complexities brought about by one's cultural identity, Jodie, who identifies as bisexual and is partially out to immediate family and select friends, explains her Indian cultural background makes publically disclosing her sexuality to her extended family quite challenging. As explained by this participant:

*“... most Indians don’t come out and openly make it obvious because they’re very strict about who you get married to and who you are going to be in a relationship with... I think my parents would be a little bit uncomfortable with everyone knowing so that’s part of the reason I don’t tell everyone, it’s not just my life you’re going to be judging, you’re going to be judging them... Many Indians would say ‘you didn’t raise her right’ or ‘you didn’t explain things to her exactly how they should’ve been’... I think it would bring them into questioning or be judged.”*

*– Jodie (Bisexual)*

Thus, family relationships appeared to also be heavily influenced by cultural identity. The intersection between cultural and sexual identities appeared to further complicate participant interpersonal relationships and impact expectations of joining the paid labour market. For instance, for Jodie, it appears the family and culturally-rooted anxiety she carries triggers her anxieties of encountering homophobia and mistreatment in the workplace. As an aspiring doctor, she fears, “...certain people may not want my help because of who I identify as... patients have [their] own predispositional judgements”.

In exploring familial and cultural contexts, the majority of participants reported their sexual identity as having impacted the relationship they have with their family. It was found that those who encountered family-based hardships and disapproval often possessed greater anxieties of joining a potentially heteronormative workplace. Comparatively, students who belonged to more accepting families and reported more positive familial-based experiences anticipated less workplace hostility and sexuality-based discriminatory treatment. However, among those who were not open about their sexuality with their family, the choice of disclosure brings the possibility of rejection and hostility. Seeking social support elsewhere, it was common for the study’s participants to confide and find comfort in romantic partners, friends, and other members of the LGBTQ community.

#### *4.3.1.2 PEER EXPERIENCES*

Overall, friendship networks were reported as the most common source of social support among the participants. Specifically, friends played a critical role in providing a safe haven to both gay and bisexual participants struggling with their sexual identity. However, while peers often provided emotional comfort and companionship, a clear majority of participants reported either experiencing first-hand or witnessing sexuality peer-based victimization at some point

throughout their secondary school careers. This harassment took many forms including verbal, physical, and online cyber bullying.

In reference to verbal forms of harassment, nearly all participants reported hearing the phrase ‘that’s so gay’ and ‘faggot’ while at school. This form of harassment was so severe for one participant that he had to transfer high schools. According to Anderson, who identifies as gay, “I went to a school where I’d walk the hallways and get screamed at and this was before I’d even come out”. While it was much more common for students to report verbal forms of school-based harassment, one participant, Marsha, an international student from France, recalled witnessing an altercation between classmates turning physical because of a student’s perceived non-heterosexuality. These experiences of peer bullying appeared to occur almost exclusively during the high school years. Among those who had not experienced any school-based victimization, these participants were often closeted throughout high school and often witnessed their peers being targeted for either their perceived or known sexual identity.

*“We were outside playing football... my friend asked this other guy, like, ‘why aren’t you passing to me? Why aren’t you letting me play?’, and he’s like, ‘oh cause you’re a faggot’... I was still in the closet at that time... I was just terrified, like I didn’t know what to say, I didn’t know how to stand up for him... It was a very scary thing to witness because you feel so powerless.”*

– Matthew (Gay)

*“... my best friend came out in grade six or seven and I was always very close to him, but when he came out a lot of people kind of backed away from him. And a lot of people were homophobic towards him and he had to go through a lot of things throughout middle school and high school just because of that... he was that person that I kind of saw as ‘if I [came out] this is going to happen [to me]’. And sadly it was kind of the worst case scenario for him”*

– Samuel (Gay)

In times of emotional stress and personal turmoil it is common for participants to lean on friends for emotional support. With a majority of those interviewed claiming to have either experienced or witnessed verbal or physical forms of harassment, friendship networks played a critical role in providing a safe haven to non-heterosexual youth struggling with their sexual identity. Participants found refuge through relationships with friends, who were often also members of the queer community; these bonds appeared to provide a sense of collective identity built on common experiences.

However, it is important to note that a few respondents reported neither being subjected to, nor witnessing, any form of sexuality-based peer harassment or bullying of any kind. According to Neil, a first-year university student identifying as gay, "...there were only a couple gay kids in the school I would say but it was treated as completely normal. There wasn't something out of the blue or extra which I really liked. I was never treated differently for it". Similarly, Judith, who identifies as gay, states "I can't recall hearing about any discrimination or bullying based on sexual orientation". Compared to those who had experienced peer-to-peer victimization it is noteworthy to mention that these participants appeared to be more confident with their sexual identity, were more likely to be disclosed to the majority of their friends and family, and, for Neil in particular, were more optimistic about joining the workplace following graduation.

#### 4.3.2 DAY-TO-DAY EXPERIENCES

In exploring the intersection between sexuality and social environment, participants were asked to reflect whether or not they believed their sexual minority status has influenced how they navigate public spaces. Overall, it appears expression of one's sexuality is greatly influenced by social context. Specifically, two themes emerged among the participants. First, nearly all of those interviewed expressed a sense of vulnerability in public settings. This caused participants to be constantly aware of how they might be perceived because of their queer identity. Secondly, this awareness often caused many of the participants to regulate how they presented themselves in public.

##### 4.3.2.1 VULNERABILITY IN PUBLIC SETTINGS

Within their interviews many participants reported feeling vulnerable in public settings. As Harvey explains, fear of being victimized due to his sexuality is a concern he copes with on a daily basis and depends on both context and location:

*"It's completely based on context. It's relative to where we are, who we're with...when I'm on campus I have no problem holding hands with my boyfriend, hugging him, kissing him... But that changes when I'm at the mall for example. I don't do that at all. It's a lot of old people there. It's a lot of people that give you bad looks... you get stared at all the time and it's not a necessarily good feeling."*

– Harvey (Gay)

Roughly half of the participants reported experiencing verbal forms of street harassment because of their sexuality. This harassment came in the form of many slurs including ‘faggot’, ‘cocksucker’, and ‘homo’. According to one participant, Anderson, these unprovoked attacks occurred so regularly that it happens “all the time”. Mirroring what Anderson describes, other respondents shared similar experiences of street harassment and verbal assaults because of their perceived sexuality while in public environments:

*“... I had recently been out publicly for just a week or two and me and this guy were walking, not holding hands or anything, and this one guy gets out of his car and says “you should get married faggots”. Out of nowhere. And I was just so hurt by it... who is that? We don’t even know. It was just so mind boggling to me that they could just like... tell.”*

– Samuel (Gay)

*“Occasionally you do get odd comments being an openly gay couple walking down the street... one night me and my boyfriend were walking to the bar with some of my friends and there was like a side comment that was ‘oh, you fucking fag’... to me there was no better way to respond than to just walk away from it...”*

– Timothy (Bisexual)

Despite the growing acceptance of the queer community, as mentioned within the literature review, it appears verbal street assaults are commonly experienced among many of the study’s participants. This regular exposure to brazen accounts of homophobic and anti-LGBQ rhetoric often left gay and bisexual students feeling vulnerable in public spaces. As Matthew explains, “I’m always nervous... I find myself very frightened of straight men. You never know how they perceive people who aren’t straight. It’s always nerve-wracking”. As a response to this vulnerability, many participants appeared to be extremely aware of how they presented themselves in both personal and professional environments.

#### 4.3.2.2 REGULATING SEXUALITY

Nearly all the respondents reported having regulated their sexuality in public settings at one time or another. From intentionally avoiding simple hand-holding to more intimate displays of affection, this self-regulation was a response to the fear that many participants possessed of

being harassed, scolded, or shamed for expressing their sexuality in public settings. For some, like Judith, this came in the form of referring to her girlfriend as her ‘friend’ when she was in the presence of people who she has not yet disclosed her sexual identity to. For others it was completely based on context:

*“When I had a partner last year there were some nights we would hold hands when we walked back home but that’s at night. So it would be darker. We feel like not many people were watching us... I don’t really want to stand out in the crowd”*

– Michel (Gay)

*“I would say you’ll be a little more aware whether or not you’re showing as much PDA in a homosexual relationship based solely on the fact that people react to it a little bit differently... If people see a straight couple holding hands they won’t take that second look whereas if they see a gay couple holding hands or being flirty they’ll take a second look at it... It’s kind of standing out”*

– Timothy (Bisexual)

This self-policing of sexual expression is linked to a larger, much more complicated, social problem of queer people not feeling welcome or comfortable in public spaces. Beyond intimate displays of affection, nearly half of the respondents try to conceal their sexuality in an attempt to appear “straight” while in public environments as a strategy of self-protection. This was a way to silently cope with the fear of being victimized and harassed in straight-dominated social spaces. For instance, as Alfred explains, although he was open about his sexuality to many of his friends, in public he would “put on an act as if I’m straight”. Overall, concerned that they would be “clocked” on their non-heterosexuality, many of the participants attempted to conceal their queer identity in order to safely navigate public spaces:

*“I think the habit of always checking ‘am I walking gay’, ‘am I standing gay’, ‘am I saying something that sounds gay’ in a very public environment is something that’s been with me since I kind of figured out I wasn’t straight. It’s hard to lose that behaviour. It’s kind of like an internalized homophobia in that sense. I’ve accepted that this is who I am, I can’t change that. But taking people’s opinions about me and shoving them aside is a very hard thing to do after training myself to do it for so long.”*

– Matthew (Gay)

*“If I was flamboyant [and] people could tell... I would definitely hide it. Which is really sad now that I say it out loud. But it’s just the world of today... [Until the point where I came out this year] I would talk about girls with guys, I took a girl to prom, I*

*had to tell all those lies, right? So I was never victimized but only because everyday I had to kind of lie... I'm not a very flamboyant person... I can choose if I'm going to tell someone or not. But a lot of people can't choose. A lot of people get judged and don't have a choice. So I kind of have [that] luxury... Some people can't even hide it..."*

*– Samuel (Gay)*

As a response to their exposure to verbal forms of harassment and the resulting vulnerability many participants expressed within their interviews, it appears perpetual angst led numerous participants to perform a constant self-surveillance of how they expressed themselves in both personal and professional settings. This self-regulation was much more prevalent among the male participants who felt pressure to embody traditional forms of masculinity. While all participants expressed an intention to disclose their minority sexual identity at some point in their professional careers, those who self-described themselves as less stereotypically “gay” believed they were better equipped to navigate their future workplaces. Appearing to be a way of life and a rational coping mechanism for many, these individuals believed the more “straight” they acted, the greater chance they had at gaining the respect of their future colleagues and coworkers.

#### *4.3.3 EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES*

While the root problem facing this stigmatized population lies beyond the classroom, it is clear that gay and bisexual students continue to face unique challenges throughout their educational careers. The data collected from those interviewed indicates that the hardships arising from heteronormative and hostile school environments continue to greatly impact the lives of LGBTQ students. While many had high school experiences characterized by feelings of isolation and social rejection, virtually all participants described their post-secondary institution as an unexpected social environment of acceptance and support. As a general theme, it appears queer visibility and campus social climates improved as participants pursued higher education.

##### *4.3.3.1 SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES*

Widespread prejudice and institutionalized heteronormativity within secondary schools produce unique challenges for gay and bisexual students. Commonly described as an



environment with little to no LGBTQ visibility, high school was often viewed by participants as a time plagued by peer intimidation and feelings of insecurity. Few participants were open about their sexuality in high school for fear of being victimized. As Timothy explains, “I didn’t feel like [high school] was the proper time for me to come out... I didn’t want to be defined just by being bi”. For many, “downplaying” one’s sexuality was a response to the lack of queer visibility or representation within secondary school environments. For instance, Harvey, who attended a denominational high school in Ontario, stated:

*“High school was tough... It was not a very accepting environment. We had fourteen-hundred students and I couldn’t name one person [who was out]. At my high school [LGBTQ topics] just wasn’t talked about at all. So it wasn’t necessarily a hatred for gay people. It was just kind of like... we don’t talk about it”*

– Harvey (Gay)

In terms of victimization and school-based harassment, many participants appeared disappointed in their secondary school’s ability to combat sexuality-based peer bullying. Incidents of homophobia often went unacknowledged and unchallenged. Unable to turn to teachers and administration for support, many respondents reported feeling helpless and unsupported. The tendency of school officials to ignore the homophobic-nature of the bullying only reinforced LGBTQ student invisibility and greatly impacted the secondary school experiences of many participants.

*“The faculty didn’t necessarily do anything about [the homophobic bullying] apart from what they would do for any other kind of bullying, right? They would just kind of all be lumped in the same. Whether you call someone a ‘fag’ or whether you call someone an ‘idiot’, they would deal with it the same way... just ‘don’t do that’, ‘stop it’ kind of thing. It wasn’t necessarily addressed apart from anything else”*

– Harvey (Gay)

From participant reports, it appears homophobic bullying remains a very real contemporary problem in Canadian schools and leaves many students vulnerable. Among the participants, even the possibility of addressing their victimization with school administrators was met with a fear of potential backlash from their peers. In anticipating no positive change, many students appeared to, quite frankly, roll with the punches.

*“There was absolutely nothing done [about the bullying] until I had gone through the whole process of requesting to be transferred... all they could do was ‘oh, who*

*was it? Let's deal with it' to save their own asses type of thing. At that point telling you a name is doing nothing about the environment. All that's doing is creating more hatred towards me for having that kid punished"*

*– Anderson (Gay)*

*"So what are you going to do? Go to the principal and say 'oh, so and so called me gay'? You're not going to get anything productive out of it because you bring them to the principal to talk about it and [they say] 'oh, we're just playing around'... those situations never go anywhere. I feel like the people who did get [verbally targeted because of their sexuality] handled it pretty well and kind of just brushed it off..."*

*– Timothy (Bisexual)*

Similar to the effects of strained family relationships and experiences of street harassment, exposure to school-based bullying appeared to cause many participants to develop an anxiety over how their sexual identity is perceived in public spaces. Often feeling helpless, it was clear many of the participants had begun to expect and accept a certain degree of hostility and homophobia that extended beyond the classroom and into larger society. Affecting both confidence and self-worth, those who had either encountered or witnessed a high-degree of peer-to-peer bullying were more likely to anticipate encountering workplace hostility following graduation. Arguably, the long-term effects of peer-to-peer bullying helped shape the expectations of the participants as they prepare to enter the Canadian labour market.

#### 4.3.2.2 POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Overwhelmingly, it appears many participants waited until after high school to publically disclose their sexual identity. Commonly described as a more accepting and inclusive environment, post-secondary institutions were viewed very positively among those interviewed. In comparison to their high school experiences, attending a college or university was often seen as an opportunity to express one's sexual identity for the first time. Post-secondary institutions relieved many of the participants from the constraints and vulnerabilities associated with living in their hometowns and the hostile climates they were subjected to while attending high school.

*"Once you get to university you pretty much have a clean slate. I come from a small town where everybody knows each other. Once I got to university, I got a fresh start. I could be more open... Coming to university was the point where I was like 'okay, this is my opportunity to really be who I am.'"*

*– Timothy (Bisexual)*

*“The social climate has changed a lot. I’d say in middle school people didn’t even understand what [homosexuality] meant. In my high school there was a lot of homophobia and misunderstanding. First year university was a big change; I was not expecting it at all. Everyone was so accepting, so open, and so understanding”*

*– Samuel (Gay)*

The acceptance found while attending post-secondary institutions was particularly meaningful among the two international students interviewed. According to these individuals, Canada was specifically chosen as the location for their post-secondary education. Viewing Canada as a queer-friendly country, Marsha, a foreign exchange student from France, and Michel, an international student from China, explain:

*“Compared to my home country, I’m more willing to disclose [my homosexuality] in Canada. I think Canada provides a cultural environment that is generally more accepting. Attending university in Canada, [I’m] far away from home. I am not out to my parents, so while I am in Canada they do not know a lot about my personal life and I’m more willing to disclose my identity here... In China there’s less acceptance.”*

*– Michel (Gay)*

*“I think, unconsciously, the reason that drove me to Canada was because I thought I could be free here. So now that I’m here I feel like this is my chance to be bisexual in a non-violent environment. As opposed to where I live, I do not feel safe... I was in Montreal a few months ago and I stayed in the Village. There were LGBT flags all over. I was like, ‘what is this country?!’”*

*– Marsha (Bisexual)*

Virtually all participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences while working towards their post-secondary degrees. It was common for participants to reference increased LGBQ visibility in the form of campus posters, student clubs, and university-run diversity initiatives when describing their experiences so far. Viewing their post-secondary institution as a sort of safe-haven, many respondents reported their college or university campus as the first place they ever felt comfortable expressing their sexuality in public.

*“I was amazed at how accepting everybody was [in university] ... when I’m on campus I have no problem holding hands with my boyfriend, hugging him, kissing him, when we’re separating going to classes or whatever. I have no problem doing that. But that changes when I’m at the mall for example... But on campus I have no problem with it.”*

*– Harvey (Gay)*

The queer-positive environments of post-secondary institutions facilitated a sense of safety among the participants, allowing them to express themselves without fear of harassment or ridicule. Often providing a chance to befriend other members of the LGBTQ community, it appears secondary institutions fostered a sense of personal growth. For the first time, many of the students interviewed had an environment where they gained confidence in their identity as a queer person. However, this appears to be strictly limited to the boundaries of the campus. As reviewed earlier, many participants reported strictly regulating their sexuality in other social spaces. While heteronormative high school environments are still a very prominent problem facing gay and bisexual students today, the study's participants appear to have found refuge in college and university campuses.

#### 4.3.4 PREVIOUS WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

The majority of participants held either part-time positions while working towards their post-secondary degrees, or had acquired full-time positions during the summer breaks. After conducting participant interviews, it was clear their previous workplace experiences had shaped their expectations of joining the paid labour market. Fearing discriminatory treatment and being rejected by their coworkers, very few participants reported having actually disclosed their sexual identity while at work. Judith felt that disclosing her sexual identity could undermine her position of authority as a manager. As Judith explains, "I didn't feel comfortable [disclosing my identity]... that's not something they need to know about me and I don't want that to impact [anything]".

Among the few participants who did disclose their sexual identity in the workplace, the experiences were mixed. For example, Harvey, who spent the summer employed as a construction worker, recalled his previous work environment as extremely hostile and unwelcoming.

*"I work for the city [as] a construction worker in the summer. It took [my coworkers] about a month to find out [I was gay]... I'll walk up to them and say 'hello' and they just kind of look at you until you leave. This is my second year [working this job] so I was running a crew... I would have [crew members] not do what I wanted them to do and there was no other reason for that other than the fact I was gay... They wouldn't listen [to me]... If I walked into the lunch room at the*

*wrong time they'd be talking about me being a fag, laughing about whatever... It just made the work experience a lot harder than it had to be"*

*– Harvey (Gay)*

For fear of making the work environment more hostile, a few participants expressed reservations about seeking help from higher management. As Harvey explains, "If I say nothing, it continues to happen... [If I say something] I'm gonna be the guy who complains... so now I'm working in a hostile environment. You really can't win". Comparatively, Anderson, who identifies as gay and has been employed at a retail pharmacy store since his freshman year of high school, believes his sexual identity has had little to no impact on his experience so far in the workplace. While stating his sexuality has had no bearing on his previous interactions with his supervisor or coworkers, he did admit to experiencing homophobic behavior at the hands of customers.

*"I am really fortunate, I've worked the same job since I was fifteen and I've always had a really good employer. I've gotten many promotions since the time I've been there and I feel like [my sexuality] has never held me back. My coworkers are all pretty accepting people... I've been a supervisor for a long time [and] I've had to kick people out of the store for stealing, trying to beg for money from other customers, that type of thing... and their go-to the second I kick them out is 'faggot', 'grow some facial hair before you tell me what to do', that type of thing... when [customers] are looking for something to put me down they always choose that I look like a gay individual"*

*– Anderson (Gay)*

Interestingly, while many of the students interviewed were concerned about potential mistreatment from employers, management, and colleagues; several participants also feared mistreatment by customers, clients, and patients. As expressed by Harvey, an aspiring lawyer, "I'm a little worried... being a lawyer you have clients. Am I gonna have somebody come in and see a picture of my boyfriend on my desk and say 'I don't want you, I want somebody else' because of that?" This was shared among other participants who desired to work in fields that involved client interaction or patient care such as medicine and law.

Among those with previous work experience, only a few participants had disclosed their sexual identity in their workplace. Nonetheless, the responses collected from each of the participants shed light on some of the challenges gay and lesbian post-secondary students have encountered so far in the Canadian labour market. Overall, it was common among participants to report feeling vulnerable to verbal forms of harassment and workplace hostility. Recalling their

previous experiences within the labour market, some participants believed their sexuality had negatively impacted their relationships with coworkers, and some holding positions of authority felt their queer identity could undermine their leadership. Overall, it was common for participants to consider management unsupportive in resolving altercations with coworkers.

Those who had not had negative experiences felt more optimistic. As explained by Timothy,

*“...No one’s really had an issue with [my sexuality]. So had I experienced something like that I believe that I may be more inclined to be a little more apprehensive about being open in my [future] workplace environment. However, since I haven’t I’m not too concerned about it.”*

– Timothy (Bisexual)

Generally, it appears the apprehensiveness many participants expressed when discussing their professional futures was at least partly influenced by their previous experiences in the Canadian labour market.

#### 4.3.5 MICROAGGRESSIONS: TOLERATING EVERYDAY HOMOPHOBIA

Nearly all the students interviewed reported encountering homophobic remarks and heterosexist epithets on a daily basis. Constant exposure to microaggressions targeting members of the queer community was so common that many of the participants appeared desensitized. Homophobic language from classmates, family members, and friends was witnessed so frequently that many no longer took offence. Microaggressions in the form of using the terms ‘homo’ and ‘gay’ to describe something negative, or calling another person a ‘fag’ or ‘faggot’, was viewed light-heartedly and arguably harmless.

*“I do hear the phrase like ‘that’s so gay’ or things like that on campus all the time. But you have to tell yourself that they’re not saying that to offend you that’s just a part of their vocabulary... everyone thinks they can use that word where they’re not being mean or anything.”*

– Jodie (Bisexual)

*“As seen typically in a lot of straight male groups, you hear comments [such as] ‘that’s so gay’... if they’re insulting [someone] ‘oh, he’s such a cocksucker’... little innuendos that way which I never took as a personal offence. I don’t know if it was just something that occurred so often or something you just get used to... it doesn’t*

*really phase me those little comments... I've always known it as a part of society so I've never been conditioned to be defensive about it or take anything from it because I've just known it as two guys joking around... I've grown up with it, I understand it, I don't take offense to it."*

*– Timothy (Bisexual)*

*"... I don't want to hear [the word 'faggot'] but at the same time, I don't really care. Do you know what I mean? I'm pretty good for that... It's part of our society and it's horrible but people say it and as long as it's not being used to directly harm me I don't normally make a big scene about it. Especially if it's somebody in my family"*

*– Anderson (Gay)*

This relentless targeting of queer sexuality, which often went unquestioned and unchallenged, appears to have caused many participants to develop a proverbial thick skin that allows them to accept the pairing of a piece of their identity with an expletive or derogatory adjective. These microaggressions are just one example of the constant homophobia the study's participants faced on a daily basis. Used to target the queer population, letting these instances of subtle, and quite arguably socially-approved, expressions of homophobia go unchallenged further marginalizes those belonging to the LGBTQ community.

Looking closely at the data, it is evident that many of those who no longer "took offense" to these microaggressions and prejudicially-charged slurs have yet to fully disclose their sexual identity to those around them. Perhaps these participants do not realize the very influence this constant, yet subtle, attack on their marginalized identity has on their very lives. What's more, perhaps these individuals do not recognize the very influence these experiences have had on shaping their current concerns of joining the paid labour market.

#### *4.3.6 LACKING CONFIDENCE IN CURRENT PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION*

Many participants appeared to lack faith in the current legislation supposedly safeguarding sexual minority men and women from workplace discriminatory treatment. Compared to the previous generations of queer people before them, the twelve students who participated in this study share the privilege of entering a labour market that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual identity. However, despite these legislative protections, it appears gay and bisexual post-secondary students are apprehensive and share concerns about joining a potentially hostile labour market. Specifically, in light of the data, gay and bisexual post-secondary students within Canada

carry a significant degree of concern that their non-heterosexual orientation will impede their chances of professional success while questioning the effectiveness of current anti-discriminatory legislation.

*“I don’t feel that putting in a regulation will get rid of their prejudice. I would say [the current anti-discriminatory protections] may be a little more decorative. Just because they implement a rule doesn’t mean they’re going to treat everyone fairly and equally. Like, if they did have an issue finding out if someone was gay, [employers] wouldn’t fire them because they’re gay, you’d fire them because ‘oh, you’ve been slacking off’. You’d find other ways.”*

– Timothy (Bisexual)

*“At the end of the day unless you really have a big thing... how do you find those supports? How do you take action? I think that’s a problem a lot of people have whether it is in high school, university, or the workplace. How can you go to your manager or boss and put yourself in a situation where you’re completely vulnerable... you don’t know how they’re going to react. All the support systems are in place... but I feel like people aren’t educated enough to know exactly how to approach a situation when it happens because the whole fear of being yourself, being who you are can affect your job, your career. I feel like a lot of people don’t take that leap of faith to take action because they’re already insecure, they’re already closeted, they’re already all these things...”*

– Samuel (Gay)

In questioning the enforcement and implementation of these protections, many participants expressed concerns about noncompliance.

*“I know there are policies that protect me but at the end of the day they’re going to judge you. So I think policies are great to start with but... if a person has a prejudice in the back of their mind, even though there is a policy, that might get calculated into whether or not they hire you, if they choose to promote you, whatever it is. I feel like prejudice just exists... we’re more accepting [but] I think there’s a long way to go”*

– Jodie (Bisexual)

*“I think [the legislative protections] are definitely important, I think even for people to understand that it is at least law that I can be who I am... But then again, how do I use it? Is it actually going to help me? If I take action... is it worth it? Especially for me where I have all these big dreams and aspirations, is it worth being myself if it’s going to cost me my job?”*

– Samuel (Gay)

Anticipating instances of workplace discrimination and harassment, many participants feared that, although legislation was in place, it would be challenging to enforce. For them,



balancing the desire to live authentically with the desire to achieve their professional aspirations was a difficult burden. Nevertheless, many participants expressed their intention to disclose their sexual minority status in their future workplace. Despite their concerns, participants appeared to agree that the presence of the anti-discriminatory protections provided a considerable degree of comfort and are a necessary step in achieving an inclusive labour market.

#### *4.4 CONCLUSION*

This chapter has reviewed the major themes that have emerged from the interviews conducted on twelve sexual minority students currently attending a Canadian post-secondary institution. Overall, the data provides evidence that gay and bisexual post-secondary students are concerned their queer sexual minority status will impede their chances of professional success. Moreover, there is evidence that the apprehensiveness many of the participants have about joining the labour market is quite arguably a direct result of their previous professional and personal experiences with sexuality-based prejudice and harassment. Those who had little to no experience with sexuality-based hardship reported being more optimistic about their future labour market experiences. Finally, although viewed as a necessary prerequisite, nearly all the participants lacked faith that the current anti-discriminatory and equal opportunity legislation would shield them from workplace harassment and mistreatment. The following chapter will discuss the significance of these findings in more detail.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the expectations and potential anxieties sexual minority post-secondary students hold of joining the paid labour market. Through an analysis of the narratives provided by twelve gay and bisexual men and women, this study was guided by the following research question: *despite being a protected class under the Canadian Human Rights Act, do post-secondary gay and bisexual sexual minority students hold anxieties about joining a potentially heteronormative workforce?* Within this chapter, a brief summary of the study's findings is provided and linked with the existing literature. Following this review, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the study's limitations and a discussion of the social and policy implications while proposing areas for future research exploration.

#### 5.1 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

When exploring the perturbation sexual minority students hold about joining the paid labour market it is crucial to recognize how this population has historically been subjected to systemic and interpersonal forms of discrimination. As outlined within the literature review, this discrimination continues to impact the day-to-day lives of sexual minority men and women to this day. By investigating the lived experiences of these individuals, and the fear they have of potentially experiencing identity-based forms of discrimination within the workplace, the findings illuminate how previous experiences shape current concerns and anxieties. Interviews with the twelve participants revealed gay and bisexual young adults experience many difficulties both within the workplace and larger society.

In reference to disclosure patterns, the majority of those interviewed had only partially disclosed their sexual identity. Among those participants who did not personally encounter experiences of sexuality-based discrimination, it was common among these individuals to have witnessed instances of discrimination faced by others. Furthermore, inexperience with sexuality-based forms of harassment and mistreatment was seen to be influenced by one's disclosure

status. The participants who had little to no experience with sexuality-based hardship recognized that this could be due to the fact that they were not publically open about their sexual identity in certain environments. As a way of shielding themselves from the discrimination they often witnessed, it was common among many of the students to selectively disclose their sexual identity in certain contexts over others.

In exploring the lived experiences of these participants, the majority of those interviewed reported feelings of vulnerability in public spaces. Having been exposed to various instances of street harassment and victimization, many feel the need to continuously regulate their sexuality in public settings. In reference to secondary school experiences, while only half of the participants reported experiencing episodes of sexuality-based peer bullying, nearly all respondents recalled witnessing a friend or fellow classmate victimized because of their known or perceived sexual identity. Finally, it was common among roughly half the participants to report having previously worked in hostile environments, often having either experienced or witnessed sexuality-based discriminatory treatment within the workplace.

Despite an optimistic outlook among two participants (Timothy and Neil), the majority of the participants, regardless of homosexual or bisexual orientation, fear their sexuality will negatively impact their professional futures. As predicted, these concerns may be indicative of previous exposure to personal or observed discrimination. It was found that sexual identity played a significant role in shaping the career aspirations of many of those interviewed. Specifically, a few of the participants appeared to gravitate towards fields traditionally dominated by the opposite sex. In particular, many of the gay and bisexual men interviewed consciously avoided certain occupations they perceived to be hyper-masculine such as the trades or traditionally male-dominated fields. This finding is mirrored in Antecol and colleagues (2008) research on occupational sorting among members of the queer community. According to the authors, in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts, gay men are more likely to join traditionally female-dominated careers and are less likely to hold positions in architecture, engineering and construction whereas, "... lesbian women were more likely to be in male-dominated occupations, and less likely to be in female-dominated occupations" (Antecol et al., 2008).

Previous experiences of discriminatory treatment among these participants appears to have caused the majority of those interviewed to develop a certain degree of vulnerability which

in turn leads these individuals to fear their sexuality will negatively impact their chances within the Canadian paid labour market. The results support current literature that finds that, when making career decisions, sexual minorities often consider the likelihood of experiencing workplace discrimination and coping strategies when planning their professional futures (Chung, 2001). Furthermore, although aware of their legislative protections, the data reveals that many of the participants lacked faith in the effectiveness of these protections. Despite these reservations, the presence of anti-discriminatory legislation was comforting among nearly all of the participants. However, it is clear from the widespread accounts of discrimination reported by the participants, homophobia and societal hostility continues to be a reality for many members of the Canadian queer community.

## *5.2 CONTRIBUTION TO CURRENT LITERATURE*

A growing number of studies focus on the labour market outcomes experienced by LGBQ individuals (see for example Carpenter 2008; Brand, 2008; Tilcsik et al. 2015). Members of sexual minorities appear to be discriminated against during the hiring process, are segregated into certain jobs, are denied promotions, and often experience income disadvantages (Tilcsik 2011; Waite and Denier 2015; Green, Payne, & Green, 2011). Heteronormative workplace environments can make LGBQ individuals uncomfortable, and at times are downright hostile, such that many individuals do not feel they can safely reveal their sexual identity to coworkers (Williams & Giuffre 2011; Fidas & Cooper 2014). Although not necessarily aware of this literature, the participants in this study were, nonetheless, concerned about their future labour market experiences and anticipated difficulties. Some sought to mitigate these challenges by seeking out more inclusive work settings, and being both strategic and selective of to whom and when they disclose their identity within their workplace. These strategies have been well documented in the literature (Connell 2012; Baumle et al., 2009). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the majority of the participants in this present study intended to be out within their future workplace despite their numerous reservations.

The literature has also documented the bullying and school-based peer harassment that was familiar to many of the participants (Rivers, 2004; Daley et al., 2008; Evans & Chapman, 2014). This study shows that such experiences have lasting consequences that affect sexual

minority men and women long after the bullying stops. The participants who had been bullied, or witnessed others being bullied, were more likely to worry about their future job prospects and labour market experiences following graduation. In an effort to minimize anticipated workplace conflict, many of the participants sought careers in professional fields they believed to be more LBGQ-inclusive and accepting.

Furthermore, there is some support for the findings of Tilcsik, Anteby, and Knight (2015) concerning occupational segregation in this present study. The authors argue gay men and lesbian women gravitate toward occupations that provide task independence and fields that are traditionally dominated by the opposite sex in an attempt to avoid experiences of sexuality-based workplace discrimination. Parallels may be seen in this study; for example, participants Matthew and Alfred both sought work that involved minimal coworker interaction and Anderson had a particular interest in the female-dominated field of nursing. Furthermore, among the male participants, there was a tendency to avoid hyper-masculine and traditionally male-dominated professions as they were viewed as less welcoming and more hostile. This can be seen in both Harvey and Anderson's desire to avoid careers in the physical trades. Nonetheless, the men and women in this study were interested in a wide range of careers, and hence it is not entirely clear that sexual identity shaped participants' career choices in every instance.

Overall, research on this topic in Canada has been sparse and much of the existing literature has focused on the outcomes of adults in the labour force. There is a dearth of research on the school-to-work transitions of LBGQ youth. Given the challenges faced by youth in the labour market, and empirical evidence of labour market discrimination and wage disadvantages for LBGQ workers generally, there is reason to believe that the transition may be quite challenging and stressful for the emerging generation of queer youth.

Research has only begun to explore how life experiences shape occupational choices of young adults belonging to the queer community (see Tilcsik et al. 2015). Today's sexual minority young men and women, unlike the previous generations of queer people before them, are at the forefront of entering a labour market that legally protects their stigmatized identity. However, despite these legislative protections, previous literature has shown that those belonging to the LBGQ community still experience many difficulties both within the workplace and larger society. Although workplace discrimination faced by older generations of sexual minorities has

been documented, research exploring the concerns and anxieties of sexual minorities belonging to younger cohorts is limited.

This study, I believe, adds to our understanding of the relationship between anticipated workplace anxiety and queer identity. Investigating how sexual minority status shapes career decisions and perceptions of joining the Canadian labour market, this study has explored how sexual minority men and women uniquely approach the workforce. It was found that a clear majority of those interviewed were apprehensive about their professional futures. Participants reported that their sexuality had influenced both their professional aspirations and their expectations of the Canadian paid labour market. Providing a possible explanation, the data indicates that past experiences with prejudice greatly influenced whether or not participants had concerns about entering the Canadian workforce following the end of their studies.

### *5.3 LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH*

While I believe this study contributes to our current understanding on the experiences of gay and bisexual young men and women, it is important to recognize a number of shortcomings this study does possess. As reviewed, my study proposes that previous experiences with discrimination and identity-based hardships influence how sexual minority post-secondary students presently perceive the Canadian labour market. When considering the results, it is important to note that investigating the experiences among this population can be complicated by their sexual minority status.

For instance, unlike sex, race or ethnicity, sexual identity cannot be identified through outward biological or physical appearance alone. As Robinson (2002) states, when discussing sexual identity as an invisible identity status, “unlike more visible identity differences, sexuality is often not readily recognised and is often assumed to be heterosexual, if not openly stated otherwise” (Robinson, 2002: 427). This creates many methodological obstacles for researchers investigating this population. When researching a group that possesses an invisible stigmatized identity, such as sexual minorities, it is important to consider the possibility that individual lived experiences are influenced by disclosure patterns. Therefore, for example, inexperience with discrimination may not be indicative of a tolerant professional climate but a consequence of the participant’s sexual orientation not being known. As such, it is possible that participants’ self-

reports, especially among those who were not open about their sexuality or whose sexual identity was not known publically, provide a conservative estimate of the hardships and discriminatory treatment sexual minorities face on a daily basis.

Furthermore, this study is limited by its focus on a very specific, and arguably quite privileged, group of sexual minority men and women. By investigating students currently enrolled within a post-secondary institution, the sample of the study consisted only of youth who have had the privilege and opportunity to attend higher education. Therefore, these students had either the financial support of their families or access to government assistance that allowed them to pursue their educational and career aspirations. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the findings drawing from this study pertain to only a particular group of sexual minority young men and women. Previous literature on adolescent members of the LGBQ community reveals this population is at an increased risk of homelessness and familial rejection (Dysart-Gale, 2010), are more likely to dropout of high school (Herr, 1997), as well as face high rates of suicidality (Garofalo et al., 1999) and substance abuse (Marshal et al., 2008). The sample within my study likely does not contain people who experience this. Therefore, it is in no way representative of the experiences of all sexual minority youth.

Although beyond the scope of this study, the findings are further limited by the sample's lack of both racial and ethnic participants. In reference to generalizability, the study's sample was racially homogenous with the majority of the participants being of Caucasian descent. While this study extends our knowledge on sexual minorities and their involvement within the labour market, further research is required to explore the experiences of sexual minority men and women of colour who likely experience multiple and compounding oppressions. These investigations are crucial to understanding the complicated relationship between race and sexuality and how the intersection of these identities impact racially marginalized queer men and women when preparing to enter the labour market. Beyond race and ethnicity, further research is also needed on queer individuals living with disabilities, aboriginal sexual minorities, among others. These investigations are necessary to shed light on the hardships queer individuals with multiple and intersecting oppressions face both within the labour market and larger society.

In recognizing the limitations that arise from the study's exclusive focus on homosexual and bisexual sexual identities, the findings within this research investigation are exploratory in nature and merit further investigation. Specifically, the current literature is limited in that sexual

minorities have been viewed collectively rather than considering individual differences between sexual identities. This has led to an oversimplification of the hardships faced by sexual minority men and women (Gates & Viggiani, 2014). In viewing this population as a homogenous group, researchers have wrongly assumed all members of the LGBQ community share similar experiences. Although my research contains hints that some experiences vary by sexual identity, these variations could not be adequately explored due to the study's small sample size. It is proposed that future research endeavors explore these distinctive challenges and hardships to address this ambiguity in the literature. If future investigations avoid treating the LGBQ community as one large collective group, researchers will be better equipped to understand the unique challenges facing the members of the queer community.

#### *5.4 STRENGTHENING CURRENT PROTECTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS*

In addition to investigating how gay and bisexual post-secondary students perceive the Canadian labour market, this study has also explored how these students regard the existing anti-discriminatory legislation supposedly safeguarding their professional futures. As reviewed, it was found that many of the participants were skeptical of these protections. The data illustrate that further investigations are needed in order to specifically review these policies in terms of both usefulness and enforcement.

Resistance and backlash to equal opportunity and LGBQ-inclusive workplace policies have been well documented (Button 2001; Mizzi, 2013). While a certain degree of resistance is expected when introducing any diversity initiative, properly addressing this resistance is a necessary step of any successful diversity effort. Specifically, opposition to LGBQ-inclusive policies commonly takes the form of 'passive resistance' which is defined as the "... marginal cooperation, lack of involvement, and excuse making when asked to carry out diversity policies" (Hill, 2009: 39).

Unsurprisingly, it appears the students within the study viewed the current anti-discriminatory protections as both comforting and limited in certain circumstances. Having faith these policies would shield them from more severe forms of workplace abuse and harassment, many were concerned other, less serious, instances of homophobia and discriminatory treatment would be swept under the rug and would leave them vulnerable. In other words, the results from



this study suggests that preventing sexual minority employment discrimination requires more than the mere presence of inclusive workplace policies. In order to best foster inclusive workplace environments, and an accepting labour market more generally, efforts are required to increase the impact of these legislations and policies.

Exploring the importance of queer-focused diversity initiatives, Hill (2009) states that when seeking to improve the workplace climate for LGBTQ employees, proper training on these initiatives must occur in conjunction with any policy implementation. According to the author, successful LGBTQ-inclusive policies must strive for a goal beyond that of mere tolerance. Implementing policies that encourage employees to tolerate minority groups only further normalizes heterosexuality within the workplace and places queer sexualities at the social peripheral. As discussed in the literature review, despite public belief, sexuality is a basic feature that belongs to all professional settings. Heteronormative practices within workplace environments oppress all non-heterosexual sexualities and significantly influence workplace policies and social interactions (Williams & Giuffre, 2011).

In order to properly combat workplace heteronormativity, successful diversity efforts must be "... based on the realization that *everyone* has sexual orientation and gender identity (gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, and queer), while also recognizing that everyone has race, gender, and so on" (Hill, 2009: 47). Addressing heterosexist and homophobic workplace cultures goes beyond legal interventions alone and requires more than the mere presence of inclusive workplace policies. The results from this study have many implications for both policy makers and legislators alike. It is clear from the data that further investigations are needed in order to specifically review current legislative and policy protections in terms of both usefulness and enforcement. Subtle forms of homophobia and mistreatment are common and the participants fear this will leave them vulnerable in their future workplaces. Equal opportunity policies cannot be mere "window dressings" that companies employ to create the illusion of acceptance. To best address the concerns of the study's participants, employers must not only be knowledgeable but also trained to handle and prevent discriminatory treatment in order to successfully foster inclusive environments.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the study's major findings while suggesting avenues for future research. Overall, the results of the study point to a relationship between anticipated workplace anxiety and queer identity while uncovering how gay and bisexual post-secondary students perceive existing legislative protections and view the Canadian labour market in regards to acceptance and equal opportunity. Nearly all of the students who participated in the study appeared apprehensive of joining the labour market and feared their minority sexual identity would impede their chances of professional success. Their concerns are reflected in this statement by Timothy, a third-year university student,

*"I want to be known for more than my sexuality. Because realistically I am more than my sexuality. I don't want that to be the defining point to anyone about who I am or what I am capable of."*

*– Timothy (Bisexual)*

By reviewing the study's limitations, this chapter has highlighted the salience of using an intersectional approach when investigating sexual minorities within the Canadian labour market. Further academic exploration is encouraged in order to better understand the experiences that shape the professional aspirations and expectations of *all* sexual identities beyond that of homosexuality and bisexuality. Additionally, this chapter has also advocated for a more critical evaluation of the current legislative protections supposedly safeguarding this stigmatized population. In doing so, policy makers and legislators will be more equipped in fostering cultures of acceptance within the paid labour market to hopefully counter the reservations sexual minority post-secondary students currently hold of joining the Canadian workforce.

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APPENDIX 1

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE



Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board  
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Tracey Adams  
Department & Institution: Social Science\Sociology,Western University

NMREB File Number: 108114  
Study Title: Workplace Expectations of Post-Secondary Sexual Minority Students

NMREB Initial Approval Date: June 15, 2016  
NMREB Expiry Date: June 15, 2017

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Letter of Information & Consent		2016/06/09
Western University Protocol		2016/05/31
Instruments	Interview Questions - Received May 27, 2016	
Recruitment Items	Recruitment Poster - Received May 27, 2016	

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer: Erika Basile \_\_\_ Nicole Kaniki \_\_\_ Grace Kelly  Katelyn Harris \_\_\_ Vikki Tran \_\_\_ Karen Gopaul \_\_\_



## APPENDIX 2

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### → Background Information/Sexual Identification

- What are you studying? What drew you to this area? How far along are you in your program? How old are you?
- How do you sexually identify?
- Have you publicly acknowledged your sexual identity (ie. “come out”)?
  - o **Yes:** Are you partially or fully out? At what age did you publically come out? What factors influenced you to come out at this age compared to earlier? How did you come out? Do you regret not coming out earlier/later?
    - Can you tell me about the experience of coming out to family and friends? How did that go for you? Were you out in high school? What was it like to be out in high school?
  - o **No:** What factors influenced you to not publically disclose your identity? Are you partially out (ie friends but not family)? Do you plan on publically disclosing your sexual identity, either partially or fully, at some point later in your life?

#### → Family Experiences & Relationships

- Do you believe your sexual identity (perceived or otherwise) has influenced your relationship with your family (immediate or extended)? Do you believe your family, along with their values and beliefs, has had an influence on your decision of whether or not to publically disclose your non-heterosexual identity?
  - o **Disclosed:** Are your family members supportive of your sexual identity? Was this always the case?
  - o **Non-Disclosed:** Do you know how your family perceives the LGBTQ community? Do you believe your family members would be supportive of your sexual identity? What factors are preventing you from coming out to them?

#### → Day-To-Day Experiences

- Do you feel like you have to regulate your sexuality in public settings (such as walking down town, at the mall, coffee shop etc)?
  - o Such as to avoid public displays of affection with a significant other?
- Do you feel vulnerable in public settings for potential sexuality-based victimization?

#### → Educational Experiences

- Do you believe your sexual identity (perceived or otherwise) has influenced your experience in school (either elementary/high school/post-secondary)? Have you experienced any adverse/negative experiences throughout your educational career?
  - o Peer-to-peer sexuality-based bullying (witnessed or subjected to)?
  - o Reactions or remarks from faculty members?

- Primary (Elementary), Secondary (High School), Tertiary (College/University) differences?
- **[If out]** did you make a conscious decision to come out at a particular point in your educational career? Do you find that the general perception of the LGBTQ community varies by educational environment? (Has the social climate changed in any way?)

→ **Workplace Experiences**

- Do you believe your sexual identity (perceived or otherwise) has influenced your experience so far in the workplace?
- Have you experienced any adverse/negative experiences throughout your **professional/work** career?
  - Summer/Part-Time Previous Employment: witnessing or subjected to sexuality-based forms of discrimination by coworkers/superiors?
  - Was any action taken (individual reprimanded)?

→ **Anticipated Workplace Experiences**

- Do you believe the previous experiences discussed above have affected you as you prepare to enter the workforce? Have you thought about this?
  - Consider aspects such as: choosing an employer, field, preparing a resume (omitting signalers to your sexual minority status such as a Gay-Straight-Alliance club involvement).
- Have you considered your professional future? Has this influenced your career decisions (occupation, studies, desired city)? Do you plan on being "out" at your future workplace?
- Do you believe your career goals have been influenced by your sexual orientation? In other words, do you believe your minority sexual status has had an affect on occupations you believe to be potential/suitable for you? In other words, do you feel limited because of your sexuality? Are you anticipating sexuality-based workplace victimization?
- Given that homosexual and bisexual men and women are legally protected against workplace discrimination in Canada, do you feel you will be protected in your future workplace? Are you aware of these protections? How do you perceive the current anti-discriminatory legislation?

**Concluding Question:** Is there anything I haven't asked or we didn't get a chance to touch upon that you would like to discuss?

- Such as a previous experience, ongoing anxiety, personal opinion etc.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Name** *Kyle Carmelo Militello*

**Education** Master of Arts, Sociology  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
2015-2017

Bachelor of Arts, Honors Specialization in Sociology  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
2011-2015

**Academic  
Employment  
Experience** Teaching Assistant  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
September 2016-April 2017

Teaching Assistant  
King's University College, London, Ontario  
September 2016-April 2017

Teaching Assistant  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
September 2015-April 2016

**Honors and  
Awards** Canadian Sociological Association's Outstanding Graduating Student Award  
2016

Sociology Undergraduate Award  
2015

Social Science Student Leadership Award  
2015

Dean's Honor List  
2013-2015