ABSTRACT

OAKLEAF, LINDA LOUISE. Managing Identity: The Experience of Residential Summer Camp Staff Who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender. (Under the direction of Dr. Karla A. Henderson).

Each year thousands of emerging adults, age 18 to 25 years, work at residential summer camps in the United States. Residential camp shares few attributes with other workplaces. Unlike most places of work, staff members at summer camp live with their coworkers and within close proximity to the children in their care.

Some camp staff are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Little research has addressed LGBT staff members in organizations that provide leisure services for youth. The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) or non-heterosexual. The study examined the meanings that LGBT staff attached to their camp experience and in what ways staff members’ LGBT status affected their camp experience.

Participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 years, had worked at residential summer camp within the past three years (2007-2009), and identified as LGBT or non-heterosexual. Participants were recruited through LGBT organizations and through snowball sampling. There were 28 study participants including 24 females, 3 males, and one individual who identified as gender queer. The goal of sampling for this study was to reach theoretical saturation. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews.
that lasted about an hour. Grounded theory methods were used to analyze the data through coding, comparison, and creating memos and diagrams.

Several themes emerged from the data, and one unifying concept tied the themes together – managing an LGBT identity at camp. LGBT staff at residential summer camp managed their LGBT identity on a day-to-day and sometimes a moment-by-moment basis. The work included positioning oneself against stereotypes, controlling the disclosure of LGBT status, and interpreting others’ cues before speaking or acting. Staff managed their LGBT identity using strategies to reduce the impact of homophobia or heteronormativity on themselves. The work of managing identity was affected by the residential camp context, staff members’ prior experience at camp and outside of it, disclosure or non-disclosure of LGBT identity, and the atmosphere at each camp for LGBT staff.

Staff members were more focused on daily life at camp than on the process of identity management. However, staff members’ LGBT identity was inextricable from their role identities as camp staff. The residential summer camp context also resided within a larger context of homophobia and heteronormativity in society. Existing homophobic and heteronormative structures at camp and in society dictated that staff members actively manage their LGBT identity.

Heteronormative structures that framed heterosexuality as an accepted norm and an LGBT identity as a sexualized or politicized other sometimes had the effect of hiding discrimination from view, especially when LGBT staff members themselves took on
heteronormative attitudes. The amount of labor and stress associated with maintaining an LGBT identity was lessened at more LGBT friendly camps. Factors such as prior experience with homophobia or maintaining non-disclosure also increased the work necessary to maintain an LGBT identity at camp.

A more homophobic atmosphere at camp increased the burden of identity management, but LGBT identity management was present at all camps, including those that were the most LGBT friendly. LGBT staff members may not be able to relinquish identity management as long as summer camp exists within the context of a homophobic and heteronormative society. However, the actions of the most supportive camps in this sample demonstrated that camp administrators can work to counter homophobic and heteronormative attitudes and practices.
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Managing Identity: The Experience of Residential Summer Camp Staff Who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

To my mom, Patricia M. Oakleaf (1937-1998), who taught me by example to love learning and to Murphy Oakleaf (2000-2010), a good dog.
BIOGRAPHY

Linda Oakleaf was born and raised in Chicago. She spent a decade working in academic libraries as a paraprofessional before deciding to pursue a degree in parks and recreation. She moved to North Carolina and later completed her Bachelor of Science in Parks and Recreation Management at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee. Linda received her Masters of Science in Recreation Administration from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill.

Linda has extensive experience at residential camps. She spent several years as a staff member, and then directed both residential and day camps for six years. As a lesbian, Linda has had a range of experiences as a camp staff member. In the late 80’s, she and other staff were asked not to return to camp the next year because of their sexual orientation. Linda has also worked at camps where she was allowed to disclose her status as a lesbian.

In 2006, Linda enrolled in the doctoral program at North Carolina State University. Her research interests focused on outdoor recreation, particularly organized camping. She has enjoyed having the opportunity to teach throughout her graduate education. In addition, Linda has been working with the North Carolina Zoo as an environmental educator. She has also helped the education department create and implement an evaluation plan and has instigated studies to help the zoo understand the visitor experience.
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I much appreciated all of the sage advice that Deborah Hooker offered over coffee. I am glad that the dissertation gave me the chance to extend my time with her beyond our Feminist Theory class. I also benefited from the advice Judy Peel gave me about teaching while I served as her TA for the Sport Marketing course. Heidi Grappendorf and I had the chance to sit down early in my project, and I hope that I have been able to employ some of her ideas. I also appreciated Heidi’s thoughtful comments during my dissertation defense.

I wish to thank Deborah Bialeschki, who sat through a dry run of my still-rough dissertation defense while attending NRPA’s Congress. Congress is always a busy time, and I appreciated her willingness to sit down and let me practice on her. Her comments helped me greatly improve my presentation. More importantly, she encouraged me to think about my project in a new way. Sometimes it takes a new voice saying the same thing in order to get through. The result of some of that thinking is now incorporated in Chapter 5.
Finally, I wish to thank my beautiful wife, Becky Richendollar. I was in school when we began dating in October of 2001, and I don’t think she really planned to be supporting me as a student for the next decade. Through everything, Becky has been my first critic and my greatest cheerleader. Without her unwavering support, I simply could not have come this far.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE STATEMENT

Each year an estimated ten to twelve million children and adults attend day and resident camps in the United States (American Camp Association, 2007). The American Camp Association estimated that more than 12,000 summer camps in the United States employ more than 1,200,000 adults each summer. Ball and Ball (2004) defined camp as an institution that “provides a group living experience, with trained leaders who facilitate that group and community experience and utilize the outdoor surroundings to accomplish the mental, physical, social, and spiritual outcomes and goals of the sponsoring body or owner” (p. 19). Most camp programs focus on the summer but organized camp program opportunities may be available year around.

Camps serve adults, families, and children, and provide activities that accommodate a range of interests. At day camps, campers generally participate in activities during the day and return home at night. In contrast, campers at residential camps may stay overnight for between three days to ten weeks. Campers most commonly attend residential camps, however, for one week (Bialeschki, 2006).

The roles of camp staff members also vary widely. Counseling staff members share the same living area with campers. Program, administrative and support staff members generally do not. Program specialists teach skills such as canoeing, arts and crafts, or tennis.
Administrative staff members act as supervisors to other staff. Support staff work in areas like the kitchen and may have little contact with campers.

Organizations that provide summer camp generally articulate the purpose of their programs in terms of beneficial outcomes for the camper. Beneficial outcomes for the camper might include increased social skills, positive values, or increased spirituality (Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Most of the research about summer camp has focused on outcomes for campers rather than on the experiences of camp staff (Schafer, 2007). However, some literature has focused on staff outcomes and has generally shown positive outcomes for staff members from their work at summer camps.

Although not every staff member has a positive experience, camp has had profound and lasting positive effects on many staff members (DeGraaf & Glover, 2003). For example, staff members have reported that camp increased their confidence, maturity, and problem-solving ability (Garst et al., 2009). In addition, summer camp staff have reported that they were able to transfer the skills they gained at camp to other settings such as school or work (Ferrari & Digby, 2007).

Most of the staff members at summer camp are emerging adults (Crossen & Yerkes, 1998). Arnett (2000) proposed the term *emerging adults* to describe young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years. He argued that this age group deserved increased attention and its own designation because of structural changes in industrialized nations that delay attainment of full adulthood status. The ages of 18 to 25 years represent a period of
transition for emerging adults and especially if they attend college full time. If they are working, emerging adults may not have settled into a job related to their chosen career. Further, the average age of marriage in the United States is 27 years for men and 25 years for women (United States Bureau of the Census, 2004). Emerging adults who have not yet married have not reached what is traditionally defined as an important marker of adult status. When asked whether they felt like they had reached adulthood, 46% of respondents age 20-29 years indicated that they had not, as compared with 14% of 30-55 year-olds (Arnett, 2001). Emerging adulthood serves as an important time of transition for everyone. For those lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) individuals who come out during emerging adulthood, this period takes on added significance (D'Augelli, 2003).

At camp, LGBT staff members have much in common with their heterosexual counterparts. However, they may differ from straight staff members in both the effects they have on campers and the effects that camp has on them. LGBT staff must negotiate disclosure, often called coming out, and decide whether and to whom they should disclose their sexual orientation. This disclosure may be more difficult at residential camp because staff members live with their coworkers. For example, studies about LGBT athletes have found that the close proximity of locker rooms and staying together on road trips increased athletes’ fearfulness and made the process of disclosure more difficult (e.g., Anderson, 2002; Caudwell, 2006).
LGBT staff members generally need to negotiate their level of disclosure regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity status. Sexual orientation refers to whether one’s emotional, sexual, or romantic attraction is towards people of the same sex, a different sex, or both. Some individuals who are attracted to members of the same sex reject labels such as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Gender identity is not related to sexual orientation. Gender identity refers to the category that individuals use to describe how masculine or feminine they consider themselves. When gender expression or gender identity is different from the gender that the individual was assigned at birth, they are transgender. Some transgender individuals do not consider themselves to be masculine or feminine, preferring a more fluid concept of gender that does not recognize a gender binary.

Few researchers have examined lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) camp staff or LGBT staff members within any youth-serving leisure services organization. However, Henderson (1995) argued that leisure service providers had a responsibility to treat LGB employees equitably. She suggested that for leisure services organizations to treat LGB individuals equally with their straight peers, it was necessary to remove the silence that surrounds LGB issues.

A lack of studies requires drawing evidence from other fields. Most research about LGBT childcare workers focuses on K-12 teachers. For instance, Jackson (2007) examined how LGB (lesbian, gay, or bisexual) teachers were able to incorporate their LGB identity into
their teaching identity. LGB teachers who had incorporated their LGB identity into their teaching reported that they were better equipped to address issues of diversity and that they felt freer to reach out to LGBT students and children of LGBT parents. LGBT summer camp staff may see similarly positive effects related to their identity.

The reception that LGBT staff members get from others in the workplace may affect their well-being. Griffith and Hebl (2002) found that gay men and lesbians who came out at work reported higher levels of job satisfaction. Smith and Ingram (2004) found that individuals who experienced higher levels of discrimination also reported higher levels of depression and psychological distress. As in other settings, summer camp staff members may be affected by the levels of discrimination against LGBT individuals at camp.

Some camp directors have been grappling with what to do about their LGBT staff members. In an advice column for camp directors, (Ditter, 1995) “Concerned Director” wrote to ask for help because one of the camp’s best staff members had just come out to the director as gay. In the letter, the Director considered simply firing the staff member, but stated that he or she hesitated to fire such a good staff member. Concerned Director also worried about repercussions from parents if they found out that the camp employed a gay staff member. Ditter replied that there was no need to fire the staff member, as long as he “is not simply using his sexuality as a cause” and does not make “public statements” about his sexual orientation.
Ditter’s response to Concerned Director raises questions about whether heterosexual staff members would be subject to the same scrutiny regarding what topics they may discuss with campers. For example, in a later column Ditter (2002) was asked how to deal with male campers who were quizzing their counselors about girls. In that column, Ditter suggested that counselors could preempt discussion about sex by talking about healthy relationships between men and women and the potential such relationships have to enhance one’s life.

When juxtaposed, these two columns show a difference in how Ditter advised camp staff to handle disclosures about their relationships. Ditter suggested that a gay staff member who makes “public statements” should be fired, whereas a straight staff member who teaches campers about healthy relationships is doing his or her job. In both columns, Ditter’s stated objective was for the counselor to shift the discussion away from sex. Heterosexual staff members who follow Ditter’s suggestion to redirect inappropriate discussions about sex to the topic of healthy relationships will likely make a “public statement” about their sexual orientation.

The discrepancy between the two reactions to the discussion of relationships at camp demonstrates the effect of homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. Homophobia can be defined as a set of attitudes or beliefs that support negative stereotypes and ideas about people who identify as LGBT (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978). Heterosexism refers to discrimination based on perceived sexual orientation or gender
identity. Research about heterosexism has largely focused on overt forms such as violence or open hostility, but Swim, Pearson and Johnston (2008) found that less overt forms of heterosexism such as negative comments and gossip were part of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals’ daily experience. LGB individuals in Swim et al.’s study stated that fear of such incidents frequently governed their behavior even when they did not experience it directly. *Heteronormativity* refers to a societal understanding that privileges heterosexuality (Krupat & McCreery, 2001). Under heteronormativity, heterosexuality serves as a norming agent, and anything else is defined against that norm. The prevalence of heteronormativity has the effect of “othering” (i.e., marginalizing a group by emphasizing differences) LGBT individuals, and in some cases categorizing them as deviant. Heteronormativity is based on an active disavowal of homosexuality within culture. Heteronormative ideas about behavior are pervasive and closely connected to gendered behavior norms (Nielsen, Walden, & Kunkel, 2000).

Attitudes towards LGBT individuals may be shifting, and sentiments reflected in Ditter’s (1995) advice column may have changed. Ditter himself might give different advice now than what he provided in his 1995 column. However, literature about LGBT staff at camp or within other leisure contexts seems to be absent. Garst et al. (2009) found that summers at camp provided the setting for transformative experiences. However, the authors suggested that more research needed to be done among camps from other
demographic categories, since most studies have focused specifically on heterosexual Caucasian staff members.

If summer camp has the potential to change the lives of staff members, exploring the experience of the LGBT and non-heterosexual population further appears to be worthwhile. My study may add to the understanding of the workplace experience of LGBT staff and have implications for other leisure settings. Increased understanding can be used by employers to make their workplace a more welcoming environment, which in turn has the potential to increase levels of satisfaction and commitment among employees (Button, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

My study used phenomenology as its theoretical framework. Edmund Husserl, a mathematician turned philosopher, developed phenomenology in the early twentieth century (Husserl, 1913). Phenomenology was a response to the increasing dominance of positivism and the scientific method as the only legitimized mode of inquiry (Levesque-Lopman, 1988). While originally proposed within the discipline of philosophy, phenomenology has always focused on science and how the practice of science affects knowledge acquisition. Social scientists from many disciplines have adopted phenomenology as a framework for understanding behavior. Phenomenological research seeks to understand and describe participants’ lived experience (Levesque-Lopman, 1988). The lived experience means that individuals who have had personal contact with a particular
phenomenon are in the best position to describe the phenomenon to others. Researchers who use phenomenology center their inquiry on the participant (e.g., LGBT residential camp staff members in my study) and their view of the phenomena under study (e.g., the camp experience in my study). Within social science, phenomenology is most often used to answer questions about meanings (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). As such, phenomenological researchers seek to learn what is central, or the essence of the phenomena under study (Donalek, 2004). I used the phenomenological perspective to focus on the experience of LGBT or non-heterosexual camp staff and the meanings that they attached to the camp experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) or non-heterosexual. The study examined the meanings that LGBT staff attached to their camp experience and in what ways staff members’ LGBT status affected their camp experience.

Previously, little research to addressed LGBT staff members in youth-serving leisure settings. Findings from the existing literature about LGBT teachers may not translate to a residential camp setting where staff members must manage their LGBT identity while living with the youth they serve and with coworkers. My study aimed to fill that gap in the literature and to help broaden the understanding of staff members’ experience at camp by adding information about LGBT staff.
Delimitations

My study focused on the experiences of individuals who self-identified as LGBT or non-heterosexual and had worked at a residential summer camp within the past three years (2007-2009). Researchers identify sexual minorities for their studies in various ways. While some studies (e.g., Ross, Mansson, Daneback, & Tikkanen, 2005) use sexual behavior as the criterion for selection, such as “men who have sex with men” (p. 131), my study used self-identity as the criteria for participation. This definition excluded individuals who engaged in sex with people of the same gender but who identified as heterosexual.

Some individuals reject labeling their sexual orientation or gender identity altogether. Focusing my study strictly on individuals who identify themselves as LGBT had the effect of leaving out those people who identify as sexual minorities, but do not identify as LGBT. To address this concern, I also included staff who identified as non-heterosexual rather than lesbian, gay or bisexual. Transgender individuals frequently identify as heterosexual, but that identity would not have disqualified them from my study.

Participants in my study were emerging adults, between the ages of 18 and 25 years, which represents the most common ages of camp staff. Selecting participants from this age group increased the likelihood that staff members would be at a similar developmental and life stage. Since I reached out primarily to college campus organizations, my sample consisted of mostly college students. Summer camp staff members between 18 and 25
years also tend to be college students who are able to take their summers off from school to work at camp.

Conclusion

Previous literature has established that summer camp can be beneficial for staff members. However, research had not addressed the experience of LGBT summer camp staff members. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), or non-heterosexual. I used phenomenology as a theoretical framework to explore the lived experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identified as LGBT or non-heterosexual. The following chapter will review previous research as it related to my study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of Chapter Two is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature as it related to summer camp staff and the research paradigm and framework that I use in my study. The early part of the chapter focuses on summer camp and the emerging adults who work there, and also explores literature about sexual orientation and gender identity. An additional section about emotional labor was added after analyses showed this labor was part of the camp staff experience. The final part of this chapter explores the literature related to interpretivism and phenomenology and outlines my reasons for choosing the paradigm and framework.

I used phenomenology as a framework to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identified as LGBT or non-heterosexual. My study examined the meanings that LGBT staff members attached to their camp experience and in what ways staff members’ LGBT status affected their camp experience.

Summer Camp Staff

Summer camps have been part of the landscape in the United States since the late nineteenth century. The first camps served only boys primarily from affluent families. However, camp missions soon broadened. Camps began to serve youth from many income levels, and organizations began providing more camps for girls (Paris, 2008). From their earliest days, camps positioned themselves as a solution to the perceived dangers of living
in an urbanized environment. From the 1880’s until today, summer camps have promoted and subscribed to a belief that spending time in nature is good for children (Van Slyck, 2006).

Although most of the research has focused on campers, camps can positively affect the emerging adults who work there (Ferrari & Digby, 2007; Powell, 2004). In considering possible directions for future research, Henderson, Bialeschki and James (2007) suggested that summer camp might facilitate the growth and development of staff members who are emerging adults, and that researchers should focus more on this possibility. Spending a summer at camp may have just as deep or maybe a deeper impact on staff members than campers. Campers attend residential camps for as little as a week or a few days. Staff members generally stay at camp for the entire summer. Garst et al. (2009) conducted focus groups with staff members 18-28 years old who had at least five years of camp experience. Staff members in the authors’ study related deep personal changes that had come about because of their time at camp, including increased confidence, maturity, and problem-solving ability. Staff members also stated that working at camp had changed the direction of their career plans. Ferarri and Digby (2007) also found that camp impacted staff members’ choice of career. Some staff felt encouraged to seek employment in childcare settings, while others discovered that they would rather avoid working with children. Bialeschki, Henderson, and Dahowski (1998) also found that some staff gained specific technical
outdoor skills that they could use to seek other employment, while other staff members gained administrative experience with issues such as safety and risk management.

While some researchers have found camp provides benefits to the staff members, the residential camp setting can also include some stressors. In an interpretive study of the experiences of staff members at one residential camp, L. J. Smith (1985) found that staff members were affected both positively and negatively by factors such as camp administrators, campers, other staff, and the staff members’ own role at camp. In particular, staff cited the difficulty of both living and working with other staff members, having little free time, and needing to constantly be “on” in front of the campers. In the words of one staff member:

It is a combination of factors. I guess the long hours, being here for so long, the monotonous nature of what one is doing now, the responsibility that you have all the time for the kids, and the fact that you can’t go home at night and be done with what you are doing. (p. 64)

In spite of these stressors, each one of the staff members in L.J. Smith’s (1985) study stated that their experiences at camp were mostly positive. Staff members said they had grown and matured from the camp experience as a result of learning to cope with the more stressful aspects of camp. Former camp members in James’ (2004) study also reported that they had grown in part because of meeting daily challenges at camp. The staff members
that James interviewed also stated that camp provided them with more leadership opportunities than they had access to in other settings.

Much of the research about summer camp staff has found that staff members valued the relationships that they built with campers. For example, staff members in L. J. Smith’s (1985) study reported that they particularly enjoyed working with campers. In Dworken’s (2004) study of current and former camp staff members, more than 86% said that getting the chance to work with campers was one of their motivations for working at camp.

In addition to working with campers, several researchers (e.g., Bialeschki, et al., 1998; L. J. Smith, 1985) have found that friendships constitute one of the most important benefits of working at camp. The friendships that staff members make at camp can sometimes last for years after camp is over. Dworken (2004) surveyed former camp staff members who had last worked at camp as much as 40 years previously. The author found that staff who had worked at camp more than fifteen years ago still had on average 2.78 friends from when they worked at summer camp.

Summer camp, especially residential camp may provide fertile ground for identity formation. Sales and Saxe (2004) suggested that “camps are structured to be socializing agents (p.14).” The structure of the camp setting encourages those who attend to adopt new identities and new behaviors. Staff at residential camps are living away from home in an outdoor setting often markedly different from their usual environment at home. Such
settings may help encourage staff members to try new opportunities, and to take on new role identities.

*LGBT Staff at Camp*

Staff members who are exploring their role identities at camp may include an exploration of their sexual orientation. Whether they come out to themselves at camp or already identify as LGBT, summer camp staff members must manage their LGBT identity in a camp setting. Summer camp staff members likely are affected by how they negotiate their sexual orientation or gender identity at camp. For example, LGBT camp staff who disclose their status or are perceived to be LGBT may risk their jobs. No federal law protects workers from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Local laws do not cover the gaps. Only 20 states provide protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation and of those 20, only 12 states include protection based on gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, 2008). Staff who experience discrimination at camp may risk more than just losing their job. Researchers (e.g., Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; N. G. Smith & Ingram, 2004) have found higher levels of discrimination in the workplace was associated with higher levels of psychological distress for LGBT employees.

Most summer camp administrators expend great effort regulating sexuality at camp. Camps have policies about relationships, sexuality, and even hugging (Shelton, 2004). Such policies are frequently aimed at controlling heterosexual sexual relationships. Same sex sexual relations may get ignored or disproportionately penalized. Since society has
constructed lesbian, bisexual, and gay identity as being wholly sexual, being openly LGBT usually is not be considered a good role model for children. For instance, teachers who mention their same-sex partners have been viewed as inappropriately discussing sex in the classroom (J. R. King, 2004).

Camp cultures vary widely. Some religiously affiliated camps state as their policy that they do not hire LGBT individuals nor allow LGBT campers to attend their camps. For example, a set of camps run by Brookwoods states on their website:

Certain behaviors are expressly prohibited in Scripture and therefore should be avoided by members of the Brookwoods, Deer Run, and Moose River Outpost community. They include theft, lying, dishonesty, gossip, slander, backbiting, profanity, vulgarity (including crude language), sexual promiscuity (including adultery, homosexual behavior, [italics added] premarital sex), drunkenness, immodesty of dress, and occult practices (Brookwoods, 2010).

In contrast, other camps expressly serve LGBT children or the children of LGBT parents (e.g., COLAGE - Children of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere, n.d.). The American Camp Association has expressly refrained from taking a stance about sexual orientation or gender identity, saying that camps should be guided by their own missions (M. Mayo, 2003; Miller & Conrad, 1996).

Little research has been conducted about LGBT summer camp staff. Reports about their experiences have remained anecdotal. However, a significant body of literature
focuses on LGBT teachers who teach K-12. Teachers frequently state that they are afraid of losing their jobs and they remain closeted (i.e., not disclosing their LGBT status) and do not mention gay issues in the classroom as a result (J. B. Mayo, Jr., 2008). Although less than half, a portion of the American public continues to believe that LGBT teachers should not work with young children. In 2005, a national Gallup poll found that 42% agreed that “homosexuals should not be hired” as elementary school teachers, as opposed to 54% who said that they should (Gallup, 2005).

One reason that people may wish to bar LGBT individuals from working with children stems from the stereotype that LGBT individuals are more likely to be pedophiles. This stereotype persists in spite of evidence that it is untrue (Jenny, Roesler, & Poyer, 1994). J. R. King found (2004) that gay men sometimes have a particularly difficult time in the classroom because of the higher level of surveillance of men who work with young children. According to King, many gay male teachers feel like they made an implicit bargain not to speak about LGBT issues or about their own identity in exchange for working in the classroom with young children.

Jackson (2007) found that K-12 those teachers who were out at school were best able to incorporate their LGBT identity into their teaching and use it to their advantage. Most teachers that Jackson spoke with reported bringing some facet of their LGBT identity into the classroom, whether they were closeted or out in the classroom. Many LGBT teachers stated that because of being LGBT, they particularly focused on creating a safe
environment for all students. The teachers also reported that they sought ways to incorporate social justice issues into the classroom on a regular basis. Teachers who were out stated that bringing their whole selves into the classroom made them better teachers.

Similar to Jackson (2007), Atkinson and DePalma (2009) discovered that being out in the classroom helped teachers be more effective because it allowed them to speak openly and positively about LGB topics. Teachers who disclosed their LGB status helped students connect LGB issues to a person of authority whom they respected. The authors found that it was more difficult to interrupt anti-gay slurs in the classroom without also talking positively about gay people. Waiting for students to use *gay* as an insult and then banning that use was the most common strategy. However, this strategy did not change how students used the word. Instead it made *gay* a *bad word*, which only served to inscribe it with more power. If teachers wanted *gay* to lose its power as an insult, it must “be allowed to acquire new, positive and intelligible meanings and associations” (p. 25). The most effective way to gain those associations was to talk openly about gay people and gay topics in affirming terms. The authors pointed out that this strategy was unavailable to closeted teachers, who had to be careful about disclosing their status.

Another strategy that was not available to closeted teachers was to make LGB individuals seem *ordinary*. DePalma and Atkinson (2009) found that by disclosing their LGB status and discussing their lives in daily interactions with students, LGB teachers could reduce the power of anti-gay insults. Commonplace discussion of same sex partners in
terms that were similar to other teachers’ straight relationships allowed students to view being LGB as *ordinary* rather than stigmatizing. The strategy, while effective, did require LGB teachers to disclose their status to their students rather than remain closeted and pass as straight.

Teachers who are closeted spend time and energy managing a straight façade. The energy necessary to maintain this façade has the potential to detract from their teaching. J. B. Mayo, Jr. (2008) found that this energy expenditure was not limited to teachers who were closeted. For all of the gay male teachers in Mayo’s study, the energy levels necessary for gay teachers to manage their identity was “immense and potentially inhibits gay teachers’ primary roles at school” (p. 9).

While LGBT teachers and summer camp staff all work with children, their situations differ because of the differences between school and summer camp. Closeted teachers in Jackson’s (2007) study expressed their concerns about dealing with parents. Residential camp staff may be insulated from such concerns because their interaction with parents is generally limited to times when campers are picked up or dropped off. Although staff spend more hours during each day with campers, summer camp staff members generally have contact with their charges for fewer total days than teachers. Teachers in K-12 generally teach their students for nine months out of the year. Campers most frequently stay at camp for only a week (Bialeschki, 2006), but even the longest camp sessions last only for the summer.
Emotional Labor

This section was added to the literature review after data were analyzed because of its relevance to the findings. As part of their job, summer camp staff members are expected to take on an upbeat camp counselor persona. L. J. Smith (1985) found that camp staff members were expected to be on and display a particular kind of over-the-top excitement about camp and camp activities. Hochschild (1983) described what she termed “emotional labor,” which she defined as labor that “requires one to induce or suppress feeling to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (p. 7). For camp staff, the assumed attitude of enthusiasm is intended to produce corresponding excitement in campers.

Hochschild (1983) suggested when an individual is consistently required to display emotions that they do not actually feel, they may become alienated. Erickson (1991) found those in jobs with the highest amount of autonomy suffered fewer effects from performing emotional labor than those with the least amount. The effects of performing emotional labor may be highly dependent on the workplace, the work, and the emotions involved. Some employers are coercive in their expectations of employee displays of emotions, but in other situations the employees may value the ability to display appropriate emotions as defined by their role in the workplace. For example, Shuler and Sypher (2000) studied 911 emergency telephone operators. Operators were expected to engage in emotional labor by projecting a neutral tone during 911 calls. For many of the 911 operators, maintaining
emotional control was not alienating because they viewed their labor as a part of an altruistic sense that they were providing an important and valued service.

Age is another factor that moderates the effects of emotional labor. Kruml and Geddes (2000) found that older workers were better at displaying the required emotions while on the job without suffering any ill effects. The consequences of emotional labor at camp may be mixed depending on how closely staff members’ real emotions align with the ones they are required to display and how much autonomy they have. They also may be younger (i.e., as emerging adults) and less experienced with managing their emotions in the workplace.

Emerging Adults

Camp staff members are likely to be between the ages of 18 and 25 years (Crossen & Yerkes, 1998). Some researchers have termed this age range as late adolescence or young adulthood (e.g., Kamptner, 1988; Nell Fullinwider-Bush, 1993). However, I chose the term emerging adulthood, as advocated by Arnett (2000). Arnett argued for this terminology because of its descriptive utility as a means to distinguish the age group, but more importantly because individuals in this age group were unlikely to fully identify as adults. Instead, the majority of the young people in this age group articulated an in-between status of not being fully adult while not being adolescents either. In his groundbreaking theories of developmental stages, Erikson (1968) did not include a category for emerging adults, but he did suggest that young people in industrial countries might enjoy an extended adolescence
because of cultural factors that extend education and delay expectations of taking on adult roles. These cultural factors have intensified over time, as the rate of college attendance and the average age for first marriage has increased.

Arnett (2006) suggested that emerging adults are likely to share a set of characteristics related to their developmental tasks. Although Arnett acknowledged that these characteristics were not unique to emerging adults, they nonetheless were found to be more pronounced in this age group. He listed five characteristics: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and a sense that this time in emerging adults’ life is an age of possibilities.

Arnett (2006) stated that emerging adults often use this period of their life to explore different aspects of their identity especially related to their career and relationships. Since emerging adults are often engaged in identity exploration, they often feel a sense of instability. In addition, many of these young people are also in financially precarious situations. Arnett said that people in this age bracket spend more time focusing on themselves than those of other ages. Finally, emerging adults lack a settled identity, especially role identities related to career and family. Emerging adults often perceived this lack as an opportunity to consider a range of possibilities before they were expected to take on settled, fully adult roles.

Emerging adults, therefore, have several developmental tasks on the way to identify as fully adult. One important task relates to learning to initiate and maintain romantic
relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). As emerging adults get older, the main focus of their emotional energy often shifts from their friendships to romantic relationships (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009). The change in focus may help emerging adults increase the quality of their romantic relationships. High quality romantic relationships can serve as a developmental marker in emerging adults (Collins & Sroufe, 1999).

For LGBT individuals, emerging adulthood sometimes coincides with the process of coming out to oneself. However, Grov, Bimbi, Nanín and Parsons (2006) found that many emerging adults already identified as LGB before entering emerging adulthood. The authors found that men ages 18-24 years had come out to themselves on average by age of 15 years. Women ages 18-24 years reported coming out to themselves on average by the age of 16 years. Thus, while emerging adults are often still forming a fully adult identity, but many LGB individuals in this age group may potentially have an LGB identity of long standing.

Although Arnett’s (2006) model of emerging adulthood has been widely adopted in the United States, some researchers have reservations. For example, Hendry and Kloep (2007) strongly criticized Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood. They agreed about significant demographic changes in western society, but argued that those changes have impacted affluent youth disproportionately. They suggested that Arnett’s rosy interpretation was suspect because his samples have been predominantly affluent, middle-
class students. Hendry and Kloep’s samples from Wales included young adults who were from less affluent backgrounds. These respondents expressed that many “choices and possibilities were available but not for them, and this was unlikely to change in the near future. Members of this group not only lacked adult skills but also felt bitter and alienated from society” (p. 77). The authors’ strongest critique of Arnett’s model was that it is based on age rather than other factors. In Arnett’s model, everyone becomes an adult eventually. Hendry and Kloep argued that not everyone attains adulthood upon age 25 years, and that some people may not achieve markers of adulthood at all. Instead of age, they suggested that developmental models should be built on an understanding of human behavior within cultural contexts, and should be more dynamic. In spite of these critiques, I considered the emerging adult model to be the most appropriate for my study. As with Arnett’s studies, the participants in my study were comprised of mostly college students whose development, including their sexual orientation and identity, likely happened within similar cultural contexts.

Sexual Orientation and Identity

LGBT staff members at camp may have only newly come out to themselves (i.e., begun to identify as LGBT), or they may have identified as LGBT for several years. A study of lesbian and bisexual women ages 14 to 21 years found, for example, that the average age at which they self-identified as lesbian or bisexual was at 16 years (D’Augelli, 2003). Some
individuals, however, may come out to themselves while at summer camp. Sexual orientation emerges differently from individual to individual.

Theories about how sexual orientation develops have changed over time. Early theories largely focused on lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals rather than heterosexuals and failed to consider transgender individuals at all. Most recent theories are based on Cass’ (1979) psychosexual model of sexual orientation identity formation. Cass envisioned a coming out process that began on the individual level, with a burgeoning awareness of sexual attraction to members of the same sex (i.e., identity confusion). Initial awareness of sexual attraction was followed by a period of questioning, and then increasing levels of identification with the group. Cass’ model is similar to many development models of the period in that it views normative human development as a linear progression through set stages.

Although Cass (1979) did state that people might linger in one stage or perhaps regress, stage development models imply that most people move from one stage to the next in an orderly fashion. Stage development models also imply that someone who is at a lower stage is disadvantaged compared to someone at a higher stage, and that once an individual has gone through all of the stages, he or she will retain that identity permanently.

Research indicates that sexual orientation is fluid rather than stable for many individuals, especially women (Kinnish, Strassberg, & Turner, 2005). In a longitudinal study of non-heterosexual women age 18-25 years, Diamond (2003) found that just under half of
the study participants identified themselves differently after five years. Twelve percent identified themselves as heterosexual, while the others continued to think of themselves as non-heterosexual, but changed their identity among the options of lesbian, bisexual, or unlabeled. Diamond’s findings may indicate that a changing identity regarding sexual orientation may be normative rather than exceptional. Rather than discovering an unchanging true identity as in Cass’ (1979) model, almost half of the individuals in Diamond’s study changed how they identified.

Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) created an alternative to stage theories of development in which an individual discovers and accepts a “true” identity that he or she had not of previously. The authors advocated for envisioning the process as a dialogue “between the individual and the social environment, and that the meanings the individual gives to these factors influence the development of self-constructs and identity” (p. 1).

Horowitz and Newcomb developed a better model than previous stage development models of sexual orientation like Cass’ (1979) because it allowed for greater complexity and did not assume that everyone has an underlying, real identity that they need to discover. Unlike older models, Horowitz and Newcomb viewed sexual orientation as a process rather than a product. They argued that individuals make sense of their actions, experiences, and feelings within the context of their social environment. Conceptualizing sexual orientation as fluid rather than fixed, Horowitz and Newcomb’s model allowed for the flexibility to understand complex processes that varied widely. This model helps theorists place identity
related to sexual orientation into a wider societal context. Their model used desire, behavior and identity as separate constructs that together can help a person conceptualize his or her sexual orientation. Rather than seeking a developmental endpoint, this model assumed that sexual orientation would continuously evolve throughout a person’s lifetime.

Given that sexual orientation is somewhat fluid and difficult to define, researchers who are interested in sexual minorities are faced with a definitional problem. Some researchers, especially those in the field of public health, have relied on behavior to determine who is appropriate for their study. They may define their sample as men who have sex with men. From a public health perspective, this definition makes sense. However, my study focused instead on individuals who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or non-heterosexual. My study did not focus on behavior. If sexual orientation and gender are conceptualized as cultural constructs, then determining who qualifies as a LGBT individual for inclusion in a study is impossible. My response to this quandary was to ask potential participants how they identified and to limit my sample to those individuals who self-identified as LGBT or non-heterosexual. This technique was also in accordance with phenomenological research, which selects those participants who have experience with the phenomena of sexual orientation and gender identity related to the research question (Becker, 1992).
Gender Identity

The language about gender identity can be somewhat complex. To ensure clarity, I use definitions that are largely similar to Pfeffer’s (2010). Gender queer and transgender are umbrella terms for a person whose gender expression or gender identity does not match the sex that the individual was assigned at birth. Gender identity refers to the gender category that an individual uses. Some transgender individuals do not align strictly with “male” or “female,” rejecting adherence to a gender binary, or preferring a more fluid concept of gender. Gender identity is separate from sexual orientation. As with anyone, a transgender individual may identify as heterosexual, queer, lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and may have romantic relationships with other transgender or with non-transgender individuals.

In the workplace, transgender employees have few protections (Human Rights Campaign, 2008). Companies are increasingly implementing more equitable policies for their transgender employees but a similar push has not occurred within the camp industry. Equitable policies for transgender individuals assure that employment status is not dependent on gender expression. In addition, companies provide transgender friendly workplaces also admit transgender individuals into gendered spaces within the workplace that match the gender with which they identify.

Transgender individuals often encounter difficulties when spaces are segregated by gender, such as restrooms (Barclay & Scott, 2006; Schilt & Connell, 2007). Similarly,
residential camps often have living areas that are segregated by gender with rules about what hours staff members of particular genders are allowed to be present. Colleges and universities often have similar rules and gendered spaces in their dormitories. Such rules create problems for transgender individuals whose legal sex does not match the gender with which they identify. According to Tilsley (2010), some colleges and universities are implementing policies that are friendlier for their transgender students by adding gender neutral bathrooms and dormitories that are not sex segregated. Nevertheless, these practices are not pervasive.

Coming Out

Children are generally raised with the expectation that they will be heterosexual. Thus, lesbian, gay and bisexual people must first come out to themselves in a process of self-realization about their non-heterosexual sexuality. Muñoz-Plaza, Quinn and Rounds (2002) conducted a retrospective study, asking young adults about the process of coming out to themselves. The young adults reported that they had few supports during their coming out process. They highlighted the importance of the supports they did have especially when their support came from other individuals who were LGBT. Similarly, Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl, and Malik (2010) found that LGB youth reported that their strongest source of support during the coming out process was from LGB friends. The LGB youth in the Doty et al.’s study were able to draw on a larger circle of family and friends for support with other problems, but the youth reported limited support for stressors related to being
LGB. The limited support increased the importance of LGB friends. However, not all youth reported having access to non-heterosexual friends.

The coming out process can also extend to disclosing one’s status to friends, family, or coworkers. When used to describe disclosure to others, coming out can cover a number of activities ranging from an active declaration of one’s sexuality through a passive process of allowing others to discover the information (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). As people go through their daily lives, they frequently disclose information that can signal to others their sexual orientation. Such disclosure does not necessitate a declarative statement. Instead, a person can disclose his or her sexual orientation by discussing what he or she did that weekend, or by having a family picture on his or her desk. Conversely, one can often remain closeted either by omitting those details from conversations with co-workers or else by changing the details to conform to an assumed heterosexuality.

In a study of LGB teachers, Griffin (1992) found that closeted teachers had a heightened awareness of how the details they dropped into conversations might serve as a clue to their sexual orientation. However, Griffin also found that the presence of heterosexual assumption in LGB teachers’ straight peers meant that teachers could remain closeted without needing to lie about their sexual orientation. Heterosexual assumption means that everyone is assumed to be straight without a strong indication otherwise.

Being closeted or out to others is not a binary status where one is either out or not, nor is it static. Instead, most LGB individuals are out to varying degrees within different
contexts and being out may shift over time. A person may be entirely out to their friends but closeted to their family members or might disclose their identity to select people at work but not everyone (Mosher, 2001). In some cases, a person might allow others to assume that he or she is LGB, but never openly discuss it. While simply letting others figure out one’s LGB status may seem passive, an LGB individual may actively decide not to work at hiding their sexual orientation. In Griffin’s (1992) study of LGB teachers, educators who allowed others to guess their LGB status rather than directly disclosing it said that they viewed it as a compromise between their fears about the deleterious effects of being out in the workplace and their sense of personal integrity and honesty.

Choosing how, when, and whether to come out to coworkers can be difficult for LGB employees. Sometimes workers choose to remain closeted even when they consider their place of work to be LGBT friendly (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009). Coming out to others may have both positive and negative results. The consequences of coming out at work can be affected by the attitudes of co-workers or management and by formal or informal company policy (Badgett, 2001). Being out at work makes LGB workers more likely to express commitment to their organization, and to express higher job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Employees also perceive less discrimination at work where there is a higher proportion of out supervisors and co-workers (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Employees reported similar rates of heterosexism at work regardless of their race or gender, but
employees who worked primarily with males or had male supervisors were more likely to report discrimination based on LGBT status (Ragins, Cornwell, & Miller, 2003).

Woods (1993) proposed that gay males used three strategies to manage the disclosure or non-disclosure of their identities in the workplace. Button (2004) found that lesbians also used the same three strategies. Gay men and lesbians either counterfeited a straight identity, avoided any discussion of topics that might reveal sexual orientation, or integrated their LGBT identity into the workplace by including details in everyday conversation that would reveal their sexual orientation. The strategies fell on a continuum. Individuals who were more closeted more often counterfeited a straight identity whereas individuals who were more out generally integrated their identity into daily conversation. Each strategy, however, might be used by any given individual at least some of the time. Button found that lesbians often used various strategies in combination. Someone who generally avoided discussions that would reveal their sexual orientation might switch to counterfeiting a straight identity in particular circumstances. Another individual who normally integrated their identity might use the counterfeiting strategy with particular coworkers.

LGB workers who disclose their sexual orientation may face discrimination, verbal harassment, or social exclusion (Badgett, 2001). In a review of the literature, Leon-Guerrero (2005) reported between one quarter and two thirds of LGB workers reported that they had lost a job or missed a promotion because of their LGB status. A constant background sense
of fear may affect LGB workers more extensively than actual discriminatory incidents. In an earlier review of the literature, Croteau (1996) found that fear of discrimination was “a primary feature of the subjective accounts of participants’ experiences at work” (p. 199). Similarly, Jackson (2007) found in her study of K-12 teachers that all of the study participants stated that they were impacted because of their fear of discriminatory or negative reactions of students, parents, teachers, or administrators.

For individuals who decide to come out at work, the process can be fraught with tension for both LGB workers and their straight co-workers. In King, Reilly and Hebl’s (2008) study of coming out at work, heterosexual and LGB workers had different reactions to the coming out process. Heterosexuals perceived coming out to be a disclosure of highly personal information, but LGB workers did not necessarily consider disclosing their LGB status to be as personal. If the straight co-worker did not believe that their relationship with their LGB co-worker was close enough to merit personal disclosures, they expressed anxiety. Conversely, some straight people expressed hurt when their LGB co-workers held back information about their sexual orientation because they felt like it meant that their co-workers did not trust them.

Regardless of whether LGBT individuals disclose their status at work, they still must expend the time and emotional energy on deciding how to manage their identity. Tasks associated with identity management are not limited to coming out to others. For instance, LGBT individuals must also decide how to position themselves in the face of existing
stereotypes. Those stereotypes can form a lens through which others view and judge the behavior that they witness. For LGBT individuals who work with children, they may feel the need to look “safe,” to contradict the stereotype that LGBT people are child molesters (Jackson, 2007; J. R. King, 2004).

Because of the fluidity of coming out and the various issues associated with it, studying the phenomena is not easy. However, the research paradigm I chose seemed to provide one way to explore the complex issues associated with being an LGBT or non-heterosexual camp staff member.

Choosing the Research Paradigm

Research is a knowledge-building project. Researchers should be concerned with both how they know things (i.e., epistemology) and also what the nature is of what is known (i.e., ontology). Kuhn (1970) suggested that scientific disciplines are governed by paradigms, although they are often unacknowledged. Paradigms serve as a framework and as an overarching world view from which individuals and disciplines operate. According to Kuhn, paradigms govern what questions are considered to be valid concerns of a discipline, how researchers ask those questions and which answers the discipline considers acceptable. When paradigms shift, it reveals how the process and products of previous research had been affected by researchers’ world views. Kuhn discussed the development of astronomy as it shifted from Ptolemy’s geocentric system to Copernicus’ heliocentric model of the universe as an example of paradigm shift. Letting go of the idea that the earth
was at the center of the universe significantly changed the questions that scientists could ask, and allowed scientists to make major strides.

**Interpretivism**

Since paradigms affect the entire research process, it is incumbent on researchers to understand and openly acknowledge the paradigmatic views that they have adopted. My study employed an interpretive research paradigm. Interpretivists believe that they are replacing the positivist and post-positivist paradigm with “less certain forms of knowing” (Y. Lincoln, 1990, p. 80). As researchers, interpretivists seek to understand truth(s) rather than a singular Truth. Interpretivists deny the utility of a single “objective” viewpoint and acknowledge the validity of multiple perspectives. Seeking just one aspect of truth affects the methods and the analyses of interpretivist researchers. Further, researchers from within an interpretive paradigm consider knowledge to be socially constructed. They believe the process of making meaning to be a dialogue in which people in groups construct shared meanings. Within this understanding, the purpose of research is not to learn about a singular knowable reality, but rather to understand a particular context (Willis, 2007).

Interpretivists frequently emphasize the importance of understanding the individual’s own subjective meanings and their experience of the phenomena under study (Samdahl, 1999). Attention to the individual is one aspect that distinguishes interpretive study from positivist and some post-positivist research, which aggregates responses for the purpose of statistical measurement, including dropping respondents whose answers lie too far outside the norm. Reliance on the individual has sometimes been criticized because
many interpretivists do not focus enough on how underlying societal structures affect individual meanings and experience (Schwandt, 2007). Nevertheless, interpretivists can and do concern themselves with the ways in which an individual’s meanings relate to the specific context in which they were generated and to the ways in which meanings are negotiated with others (Greene, 1990).

My study used an interpretive framework to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identify as LGBT or non-heterosexual and to examine the meanings that LGBT staff attach to their camp experience. I believe that the interpretive framework was the most appropriate for my study for several reasons. First, the framework matched my own world view. Researchers’ choices are necessarily governed by their view about what is real, what humans are capable of learning, and what methods are best. In addition, research paradigms and methodologies should match the question studied. Although some researchers criticize grounded theory for being too positivist in nature (Thomas & James, 2006), it has been widely used in interpretive research (e.g., Churchill, Plano Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Creswell, & Ontai-Grzebik, 2007). The interpretive paradigm emphasizes understanding the meanings that people attach to phenomena. I was interested in the phenomenological meanings that LGBT camp staff attach to their camp experience, so the interpretive paradigm seemed the most appropriate choice.
Phenomenology

The phenomenological approach can help researchers make sense of how people attach meaning to a given experience or phenomena. Within the interpretive paradigm, my study used phenomenology as the framework for exploring the experiences of LGBT staff at summer camp. Schwandt (2001) defined phenomenology as:

Careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life (the life-world), a description of 'things' (the essential structures of consciousness) as one experiences them. These 'things' that people experience include perception (hearing, seeing, and so on), believing, remembering, deciding, feeling, judging, evaluating, all experiences of bodily action, and so forth. (p. 114)

Phenomenology began and has continued as a branch of philosophy, but it has been adopted by social scientists as a theoretical approach that can be used to frame the process of researching and understanding the human experience. Phenomenology was first articulated by the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1913) in the early twentieth century. Husserl initially sought to construct a philosophical and conceptual foundation for arithmetic (Kockelmans, 1967). From these initial investigations into the basis for logic, Husserl eventually founded a new branch of philosophy in response to his concerns about how mathematical and scientific knowledge was constructed.
Phenomenology rejects the idea that science can describe the world from an *objective* view, outside of the context of the human mind. Husserl (1970) suggested that a gap was widening between how scientists, particularly social scientists, described the world and how individuals experienced it. Husserl felt that a forced attitude of objectivity among scientists accounted for part of that gap, and that instead scientists should seek to connect with the *life-world* that people ordinarily experience. Husserl stated that a scientist “is in the scientific attitude, thinking with the horizon of his theoretical end. The rest of the world... lies outside his interest” (p. 383). Instead of falling in this trap, Husserl suggested that scientists and philosophers might try to understand the life-world, “seek to get to know it, as what it is and how it is in its own mobility and relativity, [and] make it the subject matter of a universal science” (p. 383).

In response, some social scientists have adopted phenomenology as a theoretical approach. Within social science, phenomenology has been used by researchers seeking to understand the essence of a phenomenon. Essences are something “that do not necessarily exist in time and space like facts do, but can be known through essential or imaginative intuition involving interaction between researcher and respondents (Grbich, 2007, p. 84). Phenomenology is most often used in research to study people’s everyday experience, and to bring forth the individual point of view as much as possible. Each individual’s experience will help the researcher pull together the core characteristics that form the essence of phenomena.
Some leisure scholars have used a phenomenological framework for their research. For example, Schmidt and Little (2007) explored the experience of spiritual leisure through a phenomenological lens, and Kivel and Kleiber (2000) examined leisure as the context for the formation of gay and lesbian identities in youth. Schmidt and Little stated that they wished to use phenomenology to understand spirituality as part of their study participants’ daily experience. Phenomenology allowed them to place “the conscious, lived, individual experiences of the respondents” (p. 227) at the center of their study. Kivel and Kleiber used phenomenology to gain insight into the role that leisure played in gay and lesbian adolescents’ identity formation. Through adolescents’ stories, the authors found that the context of leisure helped gay and lesbian youth integrate being gay or lesbian into their larger identity. Kivel and Kleiber argued that phenomenology was especially compatible with research that relied on narratives of past events. They stated that it had assisted their own investigations by allowing them to focus on individual stories and to distill multiple stories and find the essence of the LGB youths’ experiences with leisure.

My study examined the phenomenon or experience of LGBT and non-heterosexual residential camp staff between the ages of 18 and 25 years. As described in this literature review, there is great potential for personal growth at camp for summer camp staff. Summer camp staff members who are emerging adults may be developmentally poised to grow into a stronger sense of identity. Emerging adults especially develop their role identity as it relates to career and relationships. LGBT emerging adults frequently spend this period
of their life consolidating their sexual orientation. The literature suggests that many LGBT
individuals have a different experience of their workplaces than their straight counterparts,
but little research has examined LGBT staff members at summer camp or any youth-serving
leisure context. The next chapter will describe the methods used in my study to examine
the experience of LGBT summer camp staff.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the strategies I used in the process of conceiving and carrying out my study. An interpretive paradigm and a phenomenological framework served as a background for my methodological decision making process. Interpretivists focus on understanding an individual’s subjective meanings, and phenomenology focuses on discovering the center or essence of a phenomena. I chose strategies that facilitated theorizing about the essence of the residential summer camp experience for LGBT staff members based on individual perspectives expressed in in-depth interviews. In this chapter, I describe how I reached and chose study participants, created an interview guide and collected data. I describe grounded theory and how I used grounded theory strategies to analyze my data. In addition, I discuss my data analysis process, trustworthiness, and research quality.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers working with human subjects should consider the effects of the research and publication process on their participants, and take steps to anticipate and prevent any adverse effects. Confidentiality is important, especially where the disclosure of participation in a study can harm participants. Since a stigma is attached to being LGBT, and LGBT persons are sometimes subject to being fired for their sexual orientation, it is especially incumbent on researchers to ensure that LGBT people in their studies are not
identifiable (Meezan & Martin, 2009). All names and identifying information of study participants and any other names mentioned during my interviews were changed in the transcripts. Participants were given pseudonyms chosen from a list of the most popular names for babies born in 1989. Names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and their pseudonyms were kept in a spreadsheet that was secured with a password and stored on a computer that was also secured through password. The original recordings were kept in a locked cabinet in my home, except for the brief period that they were on my computer while transcribing. All original copies of recordings and contact information were deleted at the conclusion of the study.

Study participants were provided with a consent form at the time of the interview (see Appendix A) that included a full description of the study and all protocols for handling data. In case participants had any questions or concerns about the study, I provided my contact information as well as that of the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB). I e-mailed the consent form prior to each interview so that study participants had a chance to read it and could retain it.

As part of the process of ensuring that my study met established ethical standards, I submitted an application to the IRB at North Carolina State University. The IRB required changes from my original application (Appendix B), resulting in my final version (Appendix
C). Once I had made all of the changes that IRB required, I received approval and could begin my study (Appendix D).

Most of the changes IRB requested simply clarifying my intentions, but they did ask me to modify part of my sampling procedures. For the study I used snowball sampling. IRB did not allow me to collect contact information for prospective participants. Instead, IRB required me to ask participants that I had interviewed to forward information about the study to potential participants so that they could contact me directly. The IRB requirements may have had the effect of limiting my sample to the most motivated people who took the initiative to make contact with me.

Sampling

My sample included 28 study participants with 24 females, 3 males, and one individual who identified as gender queer. The goal of sampling for my study was to reach theoretical saturation. When additions to the sample result in confirming the theorizing that is being developed, rather than adding new insights, the sample size has reached saturation (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Studies reach saturation by adding new participants until their contributions seem redundant and no longer add to the conceptualization of theory.

My study relied on theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is sampling that is driven by the formation of theory. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to ensure the researcher can create theory that is based on sufficient data (Draucker, Martzolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). Until there are enough data to fully ground theorizing, the researcher needs to
recruit additional participants who may be able to contribute to a more complete understanding. Theoretical sampling requires analyses immediately, so that the sampling can be responsive to the ongoing needs of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher’s process of theoretical sampling should be systematic and well documented so that readers can judge whether to apply the theorizing to other contexts (Finch & Mason, 1999). In the following section I explain the details of my sampling process.

Participants

The participants for my study were individuals who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or non-heterosexual, and who had worked at a residential summer camp within the prior three years (2007-2009). Only people between the ages of 18 and 25 years qualified for my study. Before being accepted into the study, I asked each participant whether they met these criteria. To reach a broad range of camps, I limited the number of staff members who worked at the same camp to a maximum of two. After two interviews were arranged, no further individuals from that camp were accepted.

The original call for participants sought people between the ages of 18 and 24 years who had worked at residential camp within the past year. The criteria seemed to limit the potential pool of study participants. After a month of recruiting yielded only five participants, I expanded the requirements to include staff members who had worked at residential camp within the last three years. I also adjusted the age range by one year and began to accept people who were 25 years. Nevertheless, most study participants did
match the original criteria. Twenty of twenty-eight participants met all of the original criteria, were between the ages of 18 and 24 years and had worked at camp within the last year. One participant was 25 years old. One participant was Latino and another participant was African American. All other participants were Caucasian. Five study participants had worked at camp within the last two years. One participant had last worked at residential camp three years ago.

I contacted LGBT organizations on college campuses, seeking members who had worked at camp within the past three years (2007-2009). I chose this route because some camps do not allow LGBT staff members, and if I had asked camps to distribute my appeal, my sample may have been limited to individuals who worked for the most LGBT friendly camps. Instead, I asked campus LGBT organizations to forward an e-mail (Appendix E) and attached flyer (Appendix F) to their members. At the time of my study, 108 community colleges, colleges, and universities were in North Carolina. Using the search engine Google to do a site-specific search, I searched each college or university website for information about student LGBT organizations on campus. I did a similar search on the social media site Facebook. When I was unable to obtain contact information through this method, I contacted the Student Affairs department to determine whether an LGBT student club existed. In no case did speaking with representatives from Student Affairs result in contact with a group that I had not found through an online search, but it did yield information about former groups that had disbanded. On three occasions, I visited the LGBT center on
campus to make contact with officials and LGBT students. In total, I contacted 32 LGBT organizations on 28 college campuses in the state of North Carolina, which represented every active campus LGBT organization that I was able to uncover. Three of the groups who did not respond to my original phone calls and e-mail later passed on information once one of their members had interviewed with me. I also sent the e-mail and flyer to LGBT organizations throughout the state that focused on work with populations below the age of 25 years. Where contact information was available, I followed up with telephone calls.

I also asked participants to connect me with other LGBT or non-heterosexual camp staff members. After each interview, I sent an e-mail and flyer to my study participants. I also sent out two mass reminders to all participants asking them to help me reach out to people who might be interested. As per instructions from the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the use of Human Subjects in Research (IRB), I asked participants to forward information about my study to potential participants. IRB did not allow me to ask current participants to provide me with contact information of potential participants. Using this sampling procedure allowed potential participants to choose whether they wished to contact me about my study. I asked participants to give or e-mail copies of the flyer to anyone they thought was appropriate for my study. I provided study participants with an electronic version of the flyer for use in e-mailing it out. Several participants stated that the electronic version of the flyer was not helpful, since they could not send attachments via Facebook, and Facebook was their primary means of staying in
contact with other camp staff. I also provided study participants with a plain text version that they could copy and paste into Facebook messages. However, I am unsure how many participants used it when they referred people to my study. Based on questions that some participants asked, I suspect that many did not.

Soliciting participants through LGBT organizations may have limited my sample to the most out members of the LGBT community. In an effort to reach individuals who were more closeted, I asked each participant specifically if they knew anyone who was closeted who would meet the criteria of the study. Including this request during snowball sampling yielded at least two participants who might not have been included otherwise.

In memos written during early analysis of the 21st and 22nd interviews, I noted that coding the new data did not seem to be adding substantially to the analysis. For example, Courtney was my 22nd interview. Asked about what was the most difficult thing about camp, Courtney said that it was the “24/7 work schedule,” and that the schedule was hard on her body. The memo that I wrote while coding the data read in part, “while this anecdote is interesting, it does not seem to add anything new to my analysis. Nobody else mentioned wear and tear on their body because of the schedule, but several people had already stated this, even using the phrase, 24/7 to describe their work.” One concern I had at this point in my data collection process was that Girl Scout camps made up a high proportion of my sample. Although differences existed among Girl Scout camps, I wanted more diversity in my sample. Several participants had worked at multiple types of camps,
but the last eight people I accepted into the study had worked most recently at non-Girl Scout camps. When all of the data were collected, fifteen of the study participants had worked most recently at a Girl Scout camp, but five of those had also worked at other types of camps within the last three years. Table 1 lists the participants’ pseudonyms and the type of camp where they worked most recently.
Table 1. *Participants, Most Recent Type of Camp, and Age*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Type of camp</th>
<th>Age at time of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>18 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>18 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>23 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>YMCA</td>
<td>23 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>24 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>25 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>22 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>22 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Private academic</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Quaker</td>
<td>19 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>22 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>23 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>25 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>UCC</td>
<td>24 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>24 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>23 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>24 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>22 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>Girl Scout</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

After potential participants contacted me, I screened them to ascertain whether they met the criteria for inclusion in the study. I then e-mailed the study participants a consent form (Appendix A) before we met so that they could read it and retain a copy. When participants sat down for the interview, I asked them to read the form and sign it before the interview began. All copies have been retained and are stored in a locked cabinet. Once I obtained written consent, I conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews with participants. Interviews lasted 40 to 90 minutes, with a median time for the interviews of 50 minutes. Participants chose the location for the interviews. Choosing the location hopefully helped participants feel more comfortable. As described in the consent form, participants were encouraged to select a location where they felt able to speak freely without concern of being overheard by others.

I recorded and later transcribed verbatim each interview. In the transcript, I altered all names and identifying information of anyone discussed during the interview. I gave participants pseudonyms taken from the top 50 names for babies in 1989. Place names were changed to names that described the region, e.g., Small Southern Town. I transcribed each interview as soon as possible. Once transcribed, I began open coding so that my analysis could inform later interviews. I kept a researcher notebook about the ongoing research process, including post-interview impressions. After each interview, I jotted down notes that included my general impression, things that struck me as interesting, and
whatever details that I could recall. The notes typically filled one or two pages. For example, after my interview with Heather, I noted some technical difficulties I had with my recorder. I also commented on what she had said, noting “She really didn’t talk about campers much. At all. It was a real contrast to other interviews, where people talked about campers and what they did with them, why they liked them, etc.”

Entries in the journal were treated as data and coded. The notebook, as recommended in Lincoln and Guba (1999) included a daily log and description of the logistics, a diary with my personal impressions, a description of evolving ideas, and a methodological log that described decisions and changes made in relation to methodology. At the conclusion of the interviews, study participants were asked whether they were willing to be contacted for further questions to help me in clarifying the ongoing analysis. Participants were informed that further contact was not expected to extend beyond 30 minutes. If they stated their interest, I made a note that they had indicated their willingness to be contacted later.

Late in the study, two participants were selected and contacted for a second round of interviews that served as member checks, which is “a term for soliciting feedback from respondents” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 187). Participants were chosen for member checks based on the depth of insight and information that they had provided during their first interview. Both participants were given the option to speak with me by phone, but each chose to meet with me in person. The second set of interviews took around 30 minutes each. Like the
original interviews, member check interviews were held at a location of the participants’ choosing. Interviews were structured as informal conversations. I showed the participants the illustration depicting my model as a jumping off point for discussing the findings.

The additional data helped me clarify some points that I had questions about and also led me to consider new interpretations of the data. For instance, Elizabeth had worked at a camp where she was not allowed to disclose her LGBT status to campers. She, like several other participants, had reported that camp was an “open” atmosphere while also reporting instances that indicated otherwise. Elizabeth described the rules about all staff members not disclosing “details about their love life” to campers. If a female staff member had mentioned a boyfriend, she would not have had a problem, but a female staff member who mentioned her girlfriend would be reprimanded. Since several participants had both reported unequal treatment while describing camp as an LGBT-friendly atmosphere, I specifically asked Elizabeth in our second interview to speculate on why I had gotten such responses, including hers. Elizabeth said that “having to lie” did not matter as much to her because she worked with campers for only a brief time. She contrasted this with her work in the school system, where she predicted that she would have problems once she got married to her girlfriend because “teachers talk about their husbands all the time.” Prior to this second interview with Elizabeth, I had not considered the short-term nature of camp staff members’ relationships with most of their campers.
Interview Questions

The list of questions and probes in the proposed interview guide (Appendix G) were used as a tool to help encourage dialogue that informed the analysis. Within phenomenological research, interviews should be structured to encourage participants to recall in detail and to tell stories about their experiences (Grbich, 2007). I prepared participants for this approach by explaining that I was interested in hearing their stories about their experiences at camp. I used the suggested probes in the interview guide adaptively, depending upon the appropriateness to each interview. I did not strictly adhere to the guide, although I generally kept the wording somewhat close to the original. Frequently topics came up during the interview that I explored with additional questions I had not included in the guide. For example, one participant stated that as a camper she had not known of any LGBT camp staff at her camp, although she later learned that there was. As a follow up, I asked what she thought the campers knew about her sexual orientation.

As part of the post-interview notes in my notebook mentioned earlier, I addressed how well the interview guide seemed to direct the conversation and whether I wished to consider changes to the interview guide for subsequent interviews. Concurrent with my interviews, I engaged in early open coding and analysis of interviews that had already been recorded and transcribed. The coding process allowed me to alter the interview guide to address questions that arose during analysis. Some of the memos that I wrote while coding also reflected on the interview guide and possible changes. Any changes to the guide were
included in my research notebook, along with explanation and reflection about the reasons for the changes. The final interview (Appendix H) guide includes the additional questions added during the course of the interviews as well as the questions I kept.

The questions that I added all sought to address issues that emerged as a direct result of coding. The decision about whether to disclose one’s LGBT status at camp emerged as important. In response, I added a question about whether participants were out at camp. Since I wished to understand the effect of the camp context especially, I asked participants about their level of disclosure at camp compared to when they were not at camp. In one instance, when I interviewed two participants from the same camp, the second interviewee stated that the first had been dating someone at camp the previous summer. The first interviewee had not mentioned that relationship during her interview, and I realized that I had not asked about it specifically. In addition, the romantic relationships between staff members and in some instances the “drama” that resulted featured prominently in many interviews. Thus, I added a question about dating among the staff. In later interviews, it became clear that at some co-ed camps in my sample, romantic relationships among the campers was common, so I added a question about that. I also tinkered with my final question, “What else is important for me to know to understand your experiences at camp?” Some participants added interesting information that either emphasized the importance of something that they had said or else added something new that had not been covered. For instance, during her interview, Sarah had contrasted herself with people
who wore “big rainbow belts” and “made a point” of being out. Asked whether I needed to know anything else, she reemphasized her point, saying “I really feel like my sexual orientation wasn’t a factor in it. But I know that it was for other people.” However, other participants did not add anything, and it seemed to me that for these participants the question was too general for them. For that reason, I added a probe, “What do you tell people about your experiences at camp?”

One issue that emerged from the data was that even when interviewees described the atmosphere at camp as open and friendly, participants seemed to perceive that they were treated differently than non-LGBT staff members. While almost all of the interviewees reported that they were discouraged from discussing their “personal life,” at camp, some camps and participants clearly defined “personal” differently for LGBT staff members. Straight staff members might be allowed to confirm that they were dating a member of different sex and perhaps provide a name without any sanctions. For staff members who were dating members of the same sex, the same information was considered too personal to disclose. Since some participants did not seem to notice a difference in treatment even while reporting it to me, I wanted to add a question that might clarify the issue. I began to ask, “What would have happened if a camper had learned that there were [insert orientation] at camp?” The new question did seem to bring out additional information about how each camp dealt with disclosures of LGBT status to campers. All of these efforts were part of using the grounded theory strategy.
Grounded Theory

When choosing from the methods of inquiry that are available, researchers should select a methodology that closely matches their research goals and their paradigmatic framework. I used grounded theory as the approach for building theoretical knowledge as it related to the experiences of LGBT staff at summer camp. Grounded theory uses data to generate theory. First delineated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), to build grounded theory a researcher uses a systematic inductive process that seeks to connect theory directly to the data observed. Glaser and Strauss eventually parted ways methodologically (Glaser, 1992). For the purpose of my study, I used the version of grounded theory found in Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) most recent text.

The 2008 version of Corbin and Strauss’ qualitative methods textbook stated that the authors had made some changes in response to others’ criticism of their earlier editions. In the latest text, Corbin and Strauss de-emphasized the mechanics of the analytic process. Whereas earlier editions of their text broke codes and memos down into categories, the latest edition did not maintain those distinctions. Corbin stated that she hoped thereby to keep researchers from being focused on learning from their data without worrying about categorizing the tools they used in the process. She stated that “the analytic process, like any thinking process, should be relaxed, flexible, and driven by insight gained through interaction with data rather than being overly structured and based only on procedures” (p. 12). It was my intention that the processes that I followed during data
analysis would meet these criteria of being focused on the data rather than the analysis process.

**Data Analyses**

Once transcribed, I analyzed the data using the grounded theory methods advocated by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Stated briefly, grounded theory methods involve analyzing data for concepts through coding, comparison, and creating memos and diagrams. Corbin and Strauss emphasized that an open code should not merely be a summary of a particular portion of one’s data, but rather it should be a tool for thinking conceptually. They delineated two different comparisons, constant comparison in which the researcher compares incident to incident within the data and theoretical comparison in which the researcher compares incidents in the data to incidents within the researcher’s own experience or knowledge. Comparisons can be used to help researchers “move more quickly from the level of description to one of abstraction” (p. 77). Memos and diagrams can also help with this process. According to Corbin and Strauss, memos and diagrams can and should evolve over the course of the study, becoming more theoretical in nature over time. The concepts that researchers work with also range from lower level concrete ideas to the higher level abstract conceptualizations needed to build theory. As an aid to building theory, Corbin and Strauss advocated for deciding upon a central category or theme that serves as a unifying explanatory concept. They stated that the explanatory nature of this theme distinguishes descriptive studies from ones that build theory.
During open coding, I read the data word by word and line by line and attached codes to the data that related instances in the text to a concept or category (Grbich, 2007). This process was iterative. I read each interview multiple times. Each time I read an interview, I added codes and memos and elaborated on existing memos. In addition, I read coded sections of text together. For instance, I pulled all of the sections of text coded with “drama” and looked at them. Examining coded text together often resulted in further memos and generally prompted me to go back to particular interviews. In one instance, I examined all of the sections that were coded “24/7.” I wrote a memo that stated in part, “Interesting that this participant described her job as 24/7 even though she did not live with campers.” I went back to her interview and found that she mentioned being “on call” if an emergency happened in camp. I could also see which participants’ interviews were coded in a particular way, which helped me assess whether that particular code was widespread throughout my data or limited to particular individuals.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that as part of the open coding process, researchers should ask questions of their data. Researchers should seek to understand the context for what the person is saying, and pose what if questions about what might be different under differing circumstances. Corbin and Strauss argued that researchers should ground their answers to these questions in the data. I included this procedure during my coding process. For instance, Heather stated that she did not tell campers about her sexual orientation, and that “if a camper asks you if you have a boyfriend, you have to say, ‘No.’ If
they ask you if you have a girlfriend, you can’t disclose that information.” While coding this, I asked myself questions such as, “What if she did tell campers? What impact would that have on my participant? What if she told the full truth? What if she had worked at a different camp? What if the camper were older? Younger? Openly LGBT?” Coding and writing memos often happened simultaneously. The process of asking those questions resulted in memos attached to the relevant codes. The resultant memo stated, in part, “She does not seem to consider the possibility that she would even tell campers. I wonder if that has something to do with the culture of the camp. Did it depend on the camper?” In some cases, the questions that I raised while coding resulted in me adding additional questions to the interview guide as I discussed earlier. Often, my coding of later interviews was affected by questions that I had raised for myself during the process of coding earlier interviews. The iterative process helped to ensure that early interviews were also coded in the light of such insights.

Where Strauss and Corbin’s earlier texts (1990, 1998) implied an orderly progression through defined steps, the latest edition puts more emphasis on the importance of writing memos rather than the specifics of coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The authors also dropped the sharp distinction between open codes, or concepts that “stand for blocks of raw data” (p. 198) and axial codes, which are codes that relate those concepts to one another. Instead, they stated that comparing concepts to each other and codes to the data are inherent in the whole coding process, and not limited to axial coding. I used memos
extensively because I hoped it would encourage a more complex and less formulaic analytic process.

I used memos in three ways during coding. Memos helped me develop and illuminate the properties of each code, served as a record of reflections and ideas generated by the coding process, and helped generate theory as I linked codes into categories and themes (Grbich, 2007). In addition, I sometimes added to existing memos. When I added text to my memos, I tracked the process by keeping new insights separate from the existing memo in the text. These memos on memos both tracked my evolving understanding and helped me to refine my thinking. This process was facilitated by the use of qualitative data analysis software.

*Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software*

Throughout my research process, I used the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software extensively. I kept my interviewer’s “notebook”, coded the interviews, added memos, tracked changes in interview questions, and created diagrams using MAXQDA software. Qualitative software like MAXQDA may potentially affect the research process and outcomes. This effect happens particularly when the format and capabilities of the software drives the coding process. MacMillan and Koenig (2004) argued that researchers have adopted qualitative software uncritically because they are persuaded by the “wow factor” that qualitative software necessarily improves the analysis.
Some researchers such as Grbich (2007) have expressed concerns that qualitative research can be adversely affected when researchers use qualitative data analysis software. Grbich suggested that computers and technology have cultural status in society such that using computers for analysis may have the effect of framing the results as more valid. Since computers are associated with logic and science, Grbich argued that the use of software for qualitative research may reinforce ideas about what counts as truth. Dey (1993) noted that the problem lays not with computers, but with researchers. The quality of the theorizing remains more important than the method the researcher used to manipulate the data.

Trustworthiness

Although researchers applying the interpretive paradigm do not seek to find the one and only truth, they nonetheless seek to learn about truth in at least one aspect. For researchers and for those who read and rely on research, evaluating the quality of research is important. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the substitution of several terms and ideas for those within the objectivist positivist paradigm. They advocated for this change partly because they felt that qualitative research was most often criticized on the grounds of trustworthiness. Nevertheless, Lincoln and Guba recognized that the conventional concepts used to evaluate quantitative research were inappropriate and advocated for replacing them with terms and concepts that were more appropriate. Instead of internal validity they recommended that researchers concern themselves with credibility. Rather than external validity, researchers should address the transferability of their research. They also
advocated replacing reliability with dependability and objectivity with confirmability. Each of these four criteria – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – comprise aspects of trustworthiness.

*Credibility*

To address issues of credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that researchers seek out external review of their processes. The external reviewer may bring attention to nonconfirming evidence that contradicts the analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1998). To this end, the chair of my committee reviewed several of my interviews, especially interviews about which we had questions related to the analyses. I specifically sought review of a wide range of the participants in the sample, selecting representatives of different genders, different camp types, and differing reported experiences of camp.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggested that doing a close analysis of negative cases would help establish credibility. Negative cases are those instances where participants express opinions, ideas, or incidents that differ from what others in the study articulate. Dupuis (1999) suggested that interpretive researchers would find it productive to pay more attention to the negative cases. She stated that the more common convention is to emphasize the commonalities rather than the differences between participants. In doing so, researchers minimize a possibly rich source of data and may erode the trustworthiness of their research. Examining negative cases more closely also provided me with the opportunity to understand commonalities more deeply.
I applied this principle related to negative cases to my study. For instance, although most participants said that they made friends while at camp, one of my participants stated that she did not make any friends. This led me to reexamine friendship at camp. I realized that while some staff members do make close friends at camp, for others the friendships were not as close.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that member checks could help a researcher to establish credibility. With member checks, the researcher checks in with group members about concepts and themes that arose from the analyses. The authors advocated for both formal and informal member checks. Member checking procedures can range from a researcher chatting informally with participants about the ongoing insights and analysis to a formal daylong workshop where researchers provide a summary of the analyses for a group of participants to critique and further develop. For my study, two participants were selected for member checks. They each participated in a second interview where they were provided verbally with some information about the emerging results of the analysis, and also given a paper copy of the model in Chapter Four (Figure 1). I asked to provide me with their feedback (Henderson, 2006).

Transferability

Transferability can only be seen as a rough equivalent to external validity. Studies having external validity can generalize their conclusions to other settings and populations. The concept of external validity within the positivist tradition makes assumptions about
reality that are incompatible with the interpretive paradigm. For those researchers using an interpretive approach, the world is always mediated by the human experience of a conscious subject. This assumption is the basis for interpretivists’ rejection of a single truth that represents an objective reality that is knowable. In consequence, interpretivists refrain from most claims of generalizability except as it might apply to theorizing. In its place, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested using the concept of transferability. Interpretive researchers do not make a claim that their study can be generalized, but they do create theory.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that providing thick description can help researchers address issues of transferability. Thick description means providing enough detail for readers to feel that they have an understanding of the participant’s social world and experience. Thick description is not about quantity but quality. However, Lincoln and Guba emphasized that thick description can only allow for others to judge whether the information is transferable to other contexts. They stated that researchers should not make claims that their research is directly transferable.

I used grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for my study. One object of grounded theory is to build theory that has the potential to be applied elsewhere. In my results section, I provide thick description that gives readers a clear sense of the participants’ thoughts, experiences, and emotions (Holloway, 1997) to help readers evaluate the transferability of the theory that emerges.
Dependability

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) third criterion for trustworthiness was dependability. To achieve dependability, a researcher makes decisions that afford a logical bridge from the raw data to the stated findings. Researchers need to disclose their research and analytic processes so that readers can evaluate the dependability of the research. Lincoln and Guba suggested that researchers should provide an inquiry audit trail that includes the raw data, and the byproducts and notes produced during data analysis. Audit trails can validate any claims of rigor once the study has been completed.

I kept an audit trail that included the raw data, memos, and notes that I produced during the analytic process. I kept a notebook that included ongoing impressions and ideas. I also entered notes into my notebook after each interview, describing my initial impressions as fully as possible. Entries in my research notebook were transcribed and coded like other data. The journal, as recommended in Lincoln & Guba (1999) included a dated log and description of the logistics, and a methodological log that described decisions and changes I made in relation to methodology.

Confirmability

To achieve confirmability, a researcher must verify that the analysis can be traced back to the original data. Confirmability and dependability are both verified by establishing a clear audit trail. An audit trail consists of notes on the data collection process, the raw data, and the products of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers should keep a
record of how the interview guide was created, and any changes that were made to it, as I did. Other items for the audit trail include the researcher’s notes about the data collection process, the researcher’s ideas as they evolve, codes, and the coding process. Researchers should record how codes changed over time, and how and why codes were synthesized into categories.

One advantage to using qualitative software (i.e., MAXQDA) was that producing and retaining records of the analyses was more easily accomplished. The software retained all of the original codes and memos, even once I merged codes into categories and themes began to emerge from the data. I was able to use the logbook function in MAXQDA to keep my research notebook. A date stamp function in the logbook kept track of when I added entries. In addition, I used the logbook function to track any changes to the interview guide including the reasons why I had made those changes. The MAXQDA chart making software was flexible enough that it could be used to illustrate different concepts in a visual manner. I used this function for illustrating my analyses. Making the analysis more explicitly available to readers has the effect of better allowing them to assess the trustworthiness of the results (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Since I am a somewhat visual thinker, the chart making software also helped me as I worked through each stage of the analysis. I saved each iteration of the model separately, which meant that they also served as a record of changes in my theorizing.
Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the methods and procedures I used to accomplish my research goal. The chapter included discussion of grounded theory, data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness. By addressing issues of trustworthiness, I hoped to enhance the overall utility of my study. In Chapter Four, I provide thick description to help readers judge whether the theorizing produced from the data is transferable.
In Chapter Four, I discuss the results of my study by introducing the theorizing model and the themes that emerged from my data. The model forms a framework for understanding the connections between the themes that emerged from the analyses. One unifying concept tied the themes together, *managing an LGBT identity at camp*. The work of managing identity was affected by the residential camp context, staff members’ prior experience at camp and outside of it, disclosure or non-disclosure of LGBT identity, and the atmosphere for LGBT individuals at each particular camp. I introduce each of these themes briefly and then discuss them in detail.

The first theme I discuss is the *residential camp context*. LGBT staff members’ experience at camp was primarily a camp experience, and the camp context affected every aspect of identity management. Subthemes related to the camp context that emerged from the data included the effect of the *daily routine* at camp on staff, the *friendships* that they formed at camp, *romantic relationships*, and the effect of both *living and working together* with other staff members. The staff members I interviewed discussed the emotional labor and inherent in the *role expectations* for a staff member at residential camp, and they also reported the rewards and the difficulties that came from working with campers.

The second theme related to the ways in which *prior experience* affected both staff members’ behaviors and their interpretation of life at camp. Staff members came to camp
with ideas about appropriate behavior and attitudes about being LGBT. In addition, some staff members had experienced some form of homophobic or discriminatory behavior prior to working at camp, which affected their expectations of encountering additional discrimination. Staff members’ prior experience also influenced whether staff disclosed their LGBT status to other staff.

The third theme relates to the patterns of disclosure of LGBT identity at camp. The subthemes that emerged in relation to this theme reflect different strategies for disclosure or non-disclosure. The staff members I interviewed reported using a mix of strategies. Staff members reported lying to pass as heterosexual, limiting disclosure through omission, purposely disclosing revealing details, or “announcing” their LGBT status. Staff came to camp with prior experience or opinions about how LGBT individuals should manage disclosure. Their choice of strategies was affected by that prior experience. In addition, their disclosure or non-disclosure both affected the camp atmosphere and was influenced by the atmosphere at camp for LGBT staff members.

The camp atmosphere for LGBT individuals constitutes the last major theme that I discuss. Staff members’ experience of being LGBT at residential camp can be understood as a continuum. For example, one participant reported that he had been recruited specifically as a gay man so that he could provide campers with a gay role model. At the other end of the continuum, another participant reported nearly getting fired for being a lesbian. The camps where study participants worked each had a different set of formal and informal
rules. Two specific policies combined to affect the atmosphere at camp. The first concerned whether LGBT staff members were allowed to work at camp. The second policy centered on whether campers were allowed to know that LGBT staff members were present at camp. Staff members’ experiences seemed to cluster into three subthemes related to these policies. Homophobic camps did not allow LGBT staff members to work at camp. Tolerant camps allowed and sometimes welcomed LGBT staff members, but did not allow staff to disclose to campers that there were LGBT staff members at camp. Supportive camps did allow staff members to disclose to campers and in one case actively encouraged it. Staff members’ experiences seemed to cluster into these three groups, but the atmosphere differed somewhat between camps within the same category.

All of the major themes (i.e., the camp context, staff members’ prior experience, disclosure, and camp atmosphere) affected the work of managing LGBT identity at camp. I discuss each of these in this chapter with a final concluding section and end with a discussion of the work of LGBT identity management at camp. The framework in Figure 1 illustrates my proposed model.
The Residential Camp Context

The most salient aspect of each LGBT staff member’s experience was that they were living at camp. As shown by the model, camp is a bounded situation located in physical space and a short amount of time. Staff members spend almost all of their time, with the exception of short periods of time off, within the physical camp environment. Several features of camp affected the staff members. The daily routine at their particular camp, friendships and romantic relationships among staff members, living with one’s co-workers,
and the emotional work necessary to fulfill their role at camp all impacted staff members’ experience. Some of the staff members I interviewed also articulated the importance of their personal relationships with individual campers.

Daily Routine

Staff members’ daily routines varied based on their job descriptions and how the camp was organized. The main distinction was between staff shared a living space with campers and staff members who did not (i.e., they lived in staff housing). Counseling staff members lived with campers. Program, administrative, and support staff members generally did not.

Counselors’ days were filled with variety when they lived with campers. Counseling staff were generally responsible for getting the campers up and to breakfast on time. Meal times were usually accompanied by singing with campers. Breakfast would be followed by several program periods such as arts and crafts or archery. The content and structure of program periods varied by camp. At some camps, counselors would take their campers from one activity to the next. At other camps, each counselor was responsible for providing program options like drumming or photography that campers would select and attend individually. In that case, rather than the whole group being escorted to photography together, a few campers in each group might select it and go there on their own. Lunch was also accompanied by singing and followed by more program periods and usually included a
rest hour in the afternoon. After dinner, many camps held all-camp events, with camp-wide games or campfires.

Counseling staff lived with campers, and thus were on call even in the middle of the night to meet campers’ needs. The staff members I interviewed frequently referred to their job as being “24/7” – 24 hours per day and seven days per week. Rebecca reported that the hardest part of working at camp was that staff did not “have a lot of free time” because camp was a “24/7 job” where “you're always on call.” However, Rebecca also stated that the 24/7 nature of the job was “part of what I love about it” because of the challenge. Ashley suggested that these hours distinguished residential camp from most jobs, “Because you’re in this place 24 hours, it’s not like a regular job where you come in and do one thing and leave.” Ashley said that the busy schedule and the variety was part of what brought her back to camp every year. Matthew said that having a “twenty-four hour, seven day a week job” was difficult partly because other staff members were also on call and were not available to give each other emotional support whenever it was needed. That aspect of the job was difficult enough that Matthew stated, “there was definitely a time during the first session where I was ready to pack my bags, throw ‘em the peace sign and get on the plane.”

Program staff members (e.g., specialists such as climbing staff), lifeguards, support staff and camp administrators generally lived apart from campers. Support staff members and administrative staff had little ongoing contact with campers. For instance, Laura worked in the kitchen, out of direct contact with campers, although she did spend one week as a
counselor during drama week. Laura described her typical day as spent entirely within the kitchen, “12 hours on my feet. All three meals.” Laura said that since she did not generally work directly with campers, she “missed out on all the fun.”

Moving from counseling to an administrative or program staff position often paid better, but it potentially meant giving up the chance to have many close relationships with campers. For example, at the time of our interview, Tiffany was considering the possibility of becoming program staff the next summer. She stated that she was not sure if she wanted to “give up the bonds you get with campers.” Tiffany also stated that as a camp counselor she was sad to see her campers leave at the end of the session, and contrasted that with the experience of program staff. “It’s just nice to have 20 kids that you want to hug at the end of the week instead of three.”

Program staff usually spent their days doing the same activity all day. For example, Sarah ran the climbing program at camp, and spent her entire day at the climbing wall. “When the campers would come, we would go over safety stuff. Get them climbing. Then afterward, I would get them to help us break down. After lunch break, we would do it all over again.” For some of the staff members I interviewed, the repetition seemed like drudgery, while others enjoyed the chance to be the expert in their domain. Matthew spoke with real affection about his “photo hut.” He said that having the hut to himself and being responsible for maintaining the equipment and making photography a worthwhile program at his camp was one of the most satisfying aspects of his job. “That was my area. The
equipment was old... A lot of it was very rigged together and taped up...and knowing that I
was doing such a great job with something that I loved, that was awesome.” For Matthew,
the effort that he put forth in order to improve the photography program constituted part
of his role expectations for a good staff member.

*Role Expectations*

Each job or profession has its own set of mores and expectations for behavior. As
part of their job, summer camp staff members were also expected to fulfill a particular role
at camp. Some of the staff members I interviewed said that they were expected to put on a
particular camp counselor persona. The expectations of what it meant to be a “camp
person” came from the administration and also from the staff members themselves. As part
of the camp persona, staff members were expected to display enthusiasm and high energy
regardless of the circumstances. The purpose of this enthusiastic camp persona was to
encourage campers to become similarly enthused about camp.

The role of camp counselor also allowed staff members the space to be playful and
silly. Elizabeth stated that her job description as a camp counselor was “to motivate kids
and to be silly.” The upside of this expectation was that it provided staff members with
room to explore the playful side of their personality. For instance, Emily said that “camp is a
safe place to be silly or goofy because everyone is doing that.” Michelle enjoyed the chance
to “do kids’ stuff” like play in mud puddles, and Tiffany said that camp gave her the chance
to “make magic” with activities like setting up and then playing in a gigantic slip ‘n slide with
campers. The downside was that fulfilling the camp counselor role expectations was difficult if a staff member was tired, grumpy, or not suited to playing the role of a cheerful extrovert.

Samantha said that “as a camp counselor you’re supposed to have a lot of energy and enthusiasm and really trying to be making sure that the campers are having a good time and are enjoying themselves.” The staff members that I interviewed said that they were required to look like they were having fun even though their jobs often allowed for little sleep and limited time or privacy for themselves. Tiffany said that “when things go terribly wrong you still have to put on a face for the kids.” Even during a rainy campout when staff members were as wet, cold, tired, and hungry as the campers, Tiffany said that staff members were expected to seem enthusiastic, saying to campers, “It’s fine. It’s a water campout. Everything’s great.” Working with children all day and into the night meant that staff members were expected to be “up” or “on” any time they were with campers.

Elizabeth explained:

I’m a big introvert. And people don’t believe that about me. Because when I’m at camp, you’re up on stage, you’re singing. You get the smile and the goofy and that kind of thing. It’s acting, in a sense...If I had my choice, I’d just be sitting at the table eating dinner. You have to force yourself sometimes to go out and do those things, to be friendly when you’re not feeling friendly. And that’s being ‘on’. To be consciously aware of what you’re doing all the
time instead of just going with your emotions. If you’re tired, you have to be like, ‘I’m not tired! I’m excited.’

The expectations that staff members be “on” at all times amounted to emotional labor. For staff members who are, as Kayla said, “always really tired,” it was difficult sometimes to maintain the camp counselor persona for campers. All-camp programs that included all the campers sometimes featured rather elaborate productions with games or skits. Samantha said that she had “lots of late nights and early mornings” to plan all-camps, and that “having to get up super early and then having to be up late planning things or running events or making sure that everything was situated was just kind of exhausting.” Tiffany also said that she and other staff members lost sleep planning all-camp activities. “It gives us a little less sleep, but it makes it more fun. It makes the campers have a better time.”

The staff members also had fun during all-camp activities. Staff members in my study described taking part in all-camp activities that included lip-synching to pop songs, playing Quidditch, and dressing up as pirates or unicorns. Some staff members especially valued this aspect of summer camp. Staff not only had permission but were expected to be silly for the benefit of the campers. Much to the amusement of her campers, Elizabeth once spent an entire day wearing an inner tube and gigantic sunglasses. She said that camp did not “feel like work.” It “felt like playing and having fun.” Brittany said that she was able to
bring out a different side of her personality. At camp she “could be this really huge excited version” of herself.

Over-the-top silliness defined “cool” at camp, which allowed staff members who might not be considered cool at home to have a different experience. Jessica said that she really liked this aspect of being a camp staff member. She said that the campers thought that “everything” she did the “kids think is cool.” The campers were even impressed when she taught her campers the Thriller dance, an activity that Jessica said that her peers outside of camp might consider somewhat uncool. Some of the staff I interviewed who had been campers were attracted to working at camp specifically so that they could be “cool” like their counselors had been. Amanda said that she thought her camp counselors “were the coolest people.” When she was old enough to be a camp counselor herself, Amanda said she “wanted to do that for kids” if she could.

Not everyone appreciated a camp culture that encouraged staff to be silly. Sarah said that she found it “weird,” and that as a result she was not able to make many friends with the other American staff at her camp. “There was one staff member, and she would [be silly and] growl at kids. And I just can’t connect with someone like that.” Sarah said that as a result of her discomfort she connected much better with the international staff members who acted differently than did the “weirdos” among the American staff. Michael also did not seek to take on the camp counselor role. He worked at a drama camp, and preferred to see himself as an instructor rather than a traditional camp counselor.
Living and Working Together

As stated before, staff members at residential and work side-by-side with their co-workers for weeks at a time, generally with only one or two evenings off per week and perhaps a full day off once a week. Staff members at camp had little privacy, and the constant contact sometimes made staying closeted more difficult. Brittany said that she decided to address the living situation directly. She came out to her co-workers as queer, saying, “Look. Here’s the deal. I’m gonna be living with you. You’re gonna hear me talk to my girlfriend on the phone.”

Some of the staff members in my study stated that because of the close working situation, they were more cautious about coming out at camp. For instance, Ashley said that she took her living situation into consideration when she determined whether to come out at camp. “The fact that you’re living with people 24/7 comes into play at camp. ‘Cause if you meet somebody [away from camp], you might not see them again forever or for a week. Even if you see them every day, you don’t live with them every day.” If one of her co-workers did not approve of Ashley because she was gay, the consequences for coming out to a disapproving or homophobic co-worker would be magnified because they were in such close proximity. Melissa also felt that living with her co-workers affected the process of coming out to others at camp,

When you’re working at a camp it’s not like you can just walk away from the person once they know. You’re with them 24/7 for the rest of the summer.
So there’s a different kind of, ‘I need to be sure this person’s going to be okay with it before I tell them.’

For employees in a job where they go home at night, the line between home and work is more clearly drawn. At residential camp, staff members did not have the luxury of making such clear distinctions. Living with one’s co-workers complicated the work of managing identity for LGBT staff primarily through affecting disclosure or non-disclosure of LGBT status. Disclosure carried additional risk because of the increased amount of time that staff members might spend with a homophobic coworker as compared to jobs that did not require staff to live with each other. Conversely, non-disclosure was made more difficult because the living situation allowed for less privacy than other jobs.

**Friendships**

Living and working closely together fostered the formation of friendships among staff members at camp. Camp staff in my study affirmed the importance of their relationships with fellow staff members. While not everyone I interviewed made close friends at camp, many staff members judged the success or failure of their summer based on how close the staff became over the course of the summer. The presence or absence of friendships among staff members played a key role in how staff members evaluated the overall cohesiveness of the staff.
Many of the staff members I interviewed stated that they made some of their “best friends” through camp, although some said that they did not make close friends with other staff members. Carlos said that he had met “the majority” of his friends through camp. Courtney also had met some of her “best friends” at camp and was a member of the wedding party in other staff members’ weddings. Staff members who did make friends said that their common experiences at camp during stressful times and funny situations made it easier to make lasting friendships. Ashley had attended her camp as a camper, and had spent part of her summers for the last “nine or ten years” with other staff members. She said that camp supplied them with “inside jokes and stories” of “crazy things” that they had done together. For Ashley, knowing that camp would last only for the summer meant knowing that, “you don’t have a lot of time and it’s intense.” She said that she became closer with her friends more quickly because she knew their time at camp was so short.

With the exception of Brittany, who never felt like she fit in at camp, the staff members in my study all said that they made friends at camp. Not all friendships were particularly close. Many of those I interviewed discussed the conflict they had with other staff members, saying that their friendships sometimes suffered because their friends at camp were also their co-workers and roommates. As Ashley said, “The people are fun and the people are also the one thing you can hate sometimes.” Ashley said that living and working with other staff members created conditions for conflict. Laughingly, she said, “When you’re around them enough, someone will get on your nerves.” Amanda also
described how living and working together sometimes meant that friendships were closer than they might be otherwise because of all the time staff members spend together. However, she added that established friendships were sometimes tested when friends had to work together. “You might get along with them fine and be pretty good friends and then you work together and you just find out that you cannot work with that person.” Jessica said that it was difficult for staff members to separate their professional from their personal relationships. She noted that when other staff members did not “do their jobs,” and slacked off instead, it caused conflict that spilled over into friendships. She said that the working relationship “influences your personal relationship because you’re living with these people.”

Romantic Relationships

Separating the personal from the professional was also difficult where romantic relationships were concerned. At most camps, the presence of romantic relationships among staff members was tacitly acknowledged and allowed by camp administrators so long as the relationships did not interfere with staff members’ work. I use the term “romantic relationships” to refer to relationships based on intimacy, sexual contact, or love between staff members. I am using it broadly to cover all types of relationships, from long-term relationships to ones that lasted, as Matthew put it, “all of seven hours.” The term refers to relationships with others of the same or different sex. Some staff members came to camp with their significant others, while other staff began their romantic relationships with other staff members while at camp.
Every participant said that some of the staff members at their camp were in romantic relationships with each other. At the co-ed camps in this sample most of the couples were of different sex, while at girls’ camps the couples were most often of the same sex. Some staff members stated that they had met long-term partners at camp. For instance, Courtney reported that she was engaged to a woman she had met at camp.

Some staff members came out to themselves or began their first same sex relationship at camp. The atmosphere at camp for LGBT staff members affected such staff members’ coming out process. Staff members who came out to themselves in the context of a homophobic camp setting felt more isolated by their coming out experience. Staff members who came out at camps where there were other out LGBT staff members said that they felt fortunate because they were able to talk about the experience with other people who were LGBT. For instance, Sarah said, “I figured everything out when I was at camp. That was the first time I was away from home. I went to a conservative high school and I didn't know anyone who was out.” When she got to camp, Sarah met her first girlfriend as well as other LGBT staff members. As a result, Sarah said “Since I discovered it for myself in that context, it was easier for me to be out in that context. At home, I just didn't want to risk it.” Sarah’s time at summer camp made it easier for her to come out to herself and others.

However, not all romantic relationships at camp proceeded smoothly. The staff members that I interviewed often used the word “drama” to refer to the interpersonal
conflict that sometimes resulted because of romance between staff members. Drama happened when couples talked obsessively about their relationship to their friends, got jealous, broke up, or cheated on each other. In some ways, the descriptions of drama sounded similar whether staff members were talking about relationships between same sex or different sex couples. For example, Samantha described drama between heterosexual couples this way:

Two people who are co-counselors who are hooking up with the same guy.

Or one really likes him and finds out that he’s doing something with someone else. Or a couple is having a fight in the middle of the day when there are campers there.

Rachel described “dyke drama” in similar terms, “So and so are dating. So and so broke up because now she’s dating her. And in fact, we’re all sleeping within 100 yards of each other.” The drama may have been the same regardless of sexual orientation, but for individuals working at camps where they were expected to remain closeted to the campers, having a relationship at camp added an element of risk. If campers found out about the relationship, then staff members faced additional sanctions because, in effect, they broke two rules rather than one. Most staff members said that there were rules against letting campers know about romantic relationships between staff members. However, same sex couples who disclosed their relationship simultaneously broke the rule against disclosing any romantic relationship and a second rule that they could not let campers know that they
were lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The sanctions for breaking rules about disclosure could be serious. Referring to same sex couples at camp, Courtney said that some staff members had been fired because they had been unable or unwilling to hide their relationship from their campers.

Have your fun. Just make sure that it’s not obvious or known... And they don’t understand that and so they always want to be next to each other.

They want to hug each other. We’ve had to fire staff because they just don’t understand that. They can’t get it through their heads that you can’t do that in front of children.

Some of the older staff members stated that they no longer engaged in drama. They considered part of their role at camp to mentor to younger staff members specifically about romantic relationships. For example, Elizabeth said that she had once dated at camp but no longer did. Instead, she dispensed what she called “mom advice.” She counseled staff members not to take their romantic relationships at camp seriously.

Some staff members said that they felt like having a same-sex relationship at camp meant a higher level of scrutiny of their behavior by camp administrators. The behaviors that Courtney said led to firing – sitting next to another staff member and hugging – were common at her camp among staff members who were just friends. However, when staff members were known to be in a romantic relationship, their behavior sometimes seemed to be interpreted differently. For example, Danielle worked at a camp with her girlfriend,
where “there were all of these guidelines” about what conduct was allowed. Danielle stated that she understood the need for rules, but that she “felt like if we had been a heterosexual couple, it wouldn’t have been that big of a deal. There were days when our director would ask us not to be seen talking.” Heather also worked at camp with her girlfriend. Heather had been hired with her girlfriend, and specific rules were to be followed at camp. Heather said that she felt like the camp director was especially strict with them because they were lesbians rather than heterosexual. After several warnings, Heather felt like she and her girlfriend could not be “within five feet of each other.”

Although the written rules might be the same for all relationships at camp, at many camps the presence of same sex couples was perceived as automatically more controversial than the presence of couples of different sex. When camp administrators thought that the presence of same sex couples was controversial, the unwritten expectations for staff members in same sex couples at camp were affected. Camp administrators often framed their concerns in terms of protecting campers.

Campers

Few questions in the interview guide referred specifically to campers. Unprompted, many of the staff members I interviewed said that they enjoyed working with campers, and that they considered the relationships they formed with campers to be one of the best parts of the job. Some staff said little about campers in their interview, focusing instead on the relationships they formed with other staff members. Other staff members said that their
interests did not make a good match for the campers that they were working with. For instance, Sarah said that her camp was a “great camp” but that she would prefer to work at a camp with more diversity, and that she would rather work with boys than girls.

Several staff members emphasized the importance of providing campers with a good experience. For some of the staff members I interviewed, having fun with the campers was not enough; they wanted to make an appreciable difference in campers’ lives. Amanda said that she was glad she could make a “huge impact” on her campers. Amanda thought that it was “really cool to affect someone positively,” but she also worried about the negative impacts that staff members could have on campers. Amanda said that it was “great” to be influential, but “also it’s scary” because “if you do one thing wrong,” then that might affect the campers adversely. Danielle pointed out that “small things really do add up” to make a difference for campers. She “really enjoyed” making a difference, and listed it as one of the best parts of being a camp staff member. Similarly, Emily stated that she wanted to “make a difference for the campers” because when she had been a camper her counselors had “made such a difference in my life.” Melissa said that it did not take much effort on the part of staff members to make a material difference for campers. She tried to reach out to campers who were “closed off for whatever reason” by sitting and having a one-on-one conversations with them. Melissa said that in doing so, she “really connected with one of the campers. And it was just so rewarding that it didn’t even occur to me not to come back the next year.”
While staff said that they especially valued their relationships with campers, some stated that their LGBT status made it more difficult to work with children because of stereotypes that LGBT individuals are more likely to sexually abuse children. Staff members often reported that camps had policies in place for everyone to follow that were aimed at reducing claims of sexual abuse by children. Staff members sometimes found these policies to be inconvenient. Michael said that a policy in place at his camp stated that staff members “do not touch children at all,” even to correct a camper when teaching a particular dance move. Melissa said that at her camp, staff members were not allowed to be alone with campers. She felt this rule “gets ridiculous when a camper is sick in the middle of the night” and she had to “drag other people out of bed” to help her with the camper.

Identity management by camp staff was complicated by perceived suspicion that all LGBT individuals molest children. Even at camps described by staff as “open” and “accepting,” the staff members that I interviewed sometimes expressed concerns that parents would find out about LGBT staff members. Amber pointed out that lesbian camp staff members were vulnerable to accusations, saying “you can’t be a lesbian counselor at an all-girls camp” without someone suspecting the staff member of molesting the campers. Heather felt that “a mom won’t feel comfortable with their kid being at a camp with a lesbian.” Heather listed it as the “number one worry of lesbians working at camp.” She said that she was especially careful not to be alone with campers so that she would always “have a witness.” Heather considered herself the most visibly lesbian staff member, or as
she put it, “the most butch one on staff.” For that reason, Heather felt that she was “the one that’s gonna get blamed.” However, Jessica related an incident in which a staff member had been dismissed when she was caught having an inappropriate relationship with a teenage boy at camp. Prior to the incident, the staff member had come out to the other staff members as bisexual. Jessica said that the episode may have “hurt people’s perceptions of bisexuality” by confirming the stereotype that casts LGBT people as sexual predators. As a result, Jessica said that she was more cautious about coming out as a bisexual to other staff members at camp.

In addition to the stereotype that LGBT individuals sexually abuse children, staff also referred to the stereotype that LGBT individuals could cause a child to become LGBT by associating with them. LGBT identified minors at camp sometimes particularly affected LGBT staff members. Brittany said that she considered herself to be vulnerable to sanction if one of her campers decided to come out, “because if a girl comes home from camp and say, I ‘have a crush on a girl,’ they’re not gonna accuse the straight staff of turning her.” Brittany said that she let her straight co-workers handle such camper situations because they were less vulnerable to accusations.

At camps where staff members were not allowed to disclose their identity to campers, the presence of LGBT campers made it more likely that the presence of LGBT staff members would be discovered. For instance, Heather said that when she had been a CIT (Counselor in Training) and nominally a camper, she was able to detect the presence of
lesbians on staff because of her “gaydar.” Rachel also said that as a camper she was aware of staff members who “were together,” even though staff members were not allowed to disclose their LGBT status to campers. Amber said that she had come out to herself while she was still a camper. The stricture against allowing LGBT staff members to disclose their identity made Amber feel isolated. As a teenager, Amber “wanted to ask” staff members about what it was like to be a lesbian, “but there were camper-counselor boundaries,” and she “knew people who got in trouble because campers found out.”

Staff members reported that having meaningful relationships with campers made them feel that they were making a difference in kids’ lives. For many, making a difference for campers constituted one of the most satisfying parts of their job. However, their LGBT status complicated their relationships with campers. As LGBT individuals, staff said that they risked being accused of sexual abuse or of “turning” campers away from being straight. The potential for accusations concerned some staff members and affected their strategies for managing their LGBT identity at camp. Staff members’ estimation of how vulnerable they were to such accusations was related to their prior experience with homophobia.

Prior Experience

Staff experiences of being LGBT at summer camp were set within the context of their prior experience with their family, their community, and the larger society. Some staff members experienced camp as a place that was more open and affirming than their homes and their families, while others found the opposite to be true. In either case, staff members
came to camp with expectations about what kind of treatment they would receive and with existing strategies for managing their LGBT identity based on their experience in other contexts.

Some staff said that the atmosphere at camp was “more open” and LGBT friendly than their home community. For example, Melissa worked at a camp that was more liberal than the community in which she had grown up. Melissa said that at camp she came into contact with people who had positive attitude towards LGBT people for the first time. For Melissa, working in an LGBT-friendly atmosphere was life changing:

I mean, I grew up in a very conservative area. And being in a camp that’s more liberal was really eye opening. I was completely closeted the first year. And by the second year, they were so LGBT friendly at this place that I was able to come out to the majority of the people I worked with there. And just see like a completely different side of the type of people who were in my area because I hadn’t run into them before.

Melissa said that because of the time she spent in a place where she felt “affirmed and accepted,” she was able to be more comfortable with herself than she would have otherwise. She said that her summer at camp came at a critical time when she was just coming out to herself. For Melissa, her time at camp was “very very important for me to be able to become comfortable with myself.” Melissa stated that once she left camp, she was able to take that sense of being accepted
with her into other contexts. Camp provided her with acceptance and support that Melissa said was not available at home.

Christina was also more comfortable with disclosing her status at camp than at home. Christina said that she came out to herself at camp, and that, “since I discovered it for myself in that context, it was easier for me to be out in that context.” Christina stated that “at home, I just didn’t want to risk it. I’m not really out to my church even though I’m out at my church camp.” Christina said that she had gone to a “conservative high school” where she could not come out and that she worried about how the members of her church would react if she disclosed to them that she was a lesbian.

The staff members I interviewed occasionally made explicit connections between their strategies of managing their LGBT identity at home and their strategies as camp staff members. For instance, during the school year, Brittany taught theatre. She said that she was careful not to come out to her children at school because she feared losing her teaching license. At camp, Brittany said that she was particularly careful not to say anything that would disclose her LGBT status to campers because she did not want the information getting back home. Brittany stated that “as a queer person who works with kids” she was “constantly paranoid” because “if anything were ever to happen, I would never work again.”
For some staff, the process of disclosure was not markedly different at camp than within other contexts. Sarah said that she did not have a problem at camp because she did not make a “big deal” about it either at camp or at home. Because she did not make an issue of it, she felt she “got off easy.” Lauren was only out to “one or two people” at home, so being closeted at camp was similar to her behavior at home. Ashley said that she used the “same process” she uses in “everyday life.” She assessed the specific person she was talking with and then tried to think about the possible consequences of an adverse reaction from that person.

Staff members did not come to camp as a blank slate. Those who came out to themselves while at camp arrived with ideas about what constituted appropriate behavior for people who are LGBT. Staff members framed their experience at camp by comparing or contrasting their treatment to the treatment they get in their home communities, their family, or at school. Staff members who had previous experience with unfriendly atmospheres or discrimination were more wary about disclosing their LGBT status. For some staff, their experiences at camp subsequently affected their strategies related to disclosure in succeeding years both at home and at summer camp.

Level of Disclosure

One important outcome of the identity management process was a decision whether to disclose one’s LGBT status. Coming out is not a dichotomous choice of being in or out of the closet, but rather a dynamic process that involves daily decision making about
how much to disclose and what strategies to use for disclosure. Disclosure to others (or not) emerged from the data as constituting an important feature of the camp experience for staff members. The coming out process or the choice to remain closeted differed depending on the audience. Choices differed for LGBT staff based on whether they faced campers, CITs (Counselors in Training), JCs (Junior Counselors), or fellow staff members. At many camps in my study it was allowable for staff to be openly LGBT among staff members, but disclosing the presence of LGBT staff to campers was strictly against the rules. Some camps did not allow LGBT staff members to work there, while at other camps they were allowed and in one LGBT staff members were expected to come out to the campers. In other cases, staff members might choose to disclose their LGBT status only to coworkers who were friends.

For LGBT staff, the process of disclosure affected their camp experience. Some staff members were closeted their first year but then came out to other staff members in subsequent years at the same camp. For example, Melissa said that she was closeted in “most aspects” of her life prior to coming to camp. The first year she worked at camp, she was closeted there too. However, she decided to come out the next year because she realized that “a third of the staff were gay” and she was “being ridiculous about it.” When she came out, she found that she had a completely different experience of summer camp. Melissa stated, “I think I became a lot closer with the staff the second year. When you’re not hiding something, you can build a much more trustworthy relationship with people.”
LGBT staff used multiple strategies for either coming out to others or staying closeted. They often mixed those strategies depending on who they were interacting with. Broadly stated, the strategies fell into the categories of actively lying to pass as heterosexual, staying closeted through omission, talking about one’s life without explicitly disclosing LGBT status, and actively announcing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Staff members negotiated their disclosure or non-disclosure within the context of their prior experience as an LGBT individual, their personal style of communication, and the atmosphere at their particular camp for LGBT staff. The presence of other out LGBT staff members also affected staff members’ own strategies and their assessment of the camp’s atmosphere.

Lying

Lying was a strategy that some staff said that they tried to avoid. For instance, Samantha said that while remaining closeted, she tried “not to blatantly lie about stuff.” Lying is generally not acceptable according to social mores, although some lies are considered more serious than others. Friendships are partly based on the disclosure of personal information, so it is considered especially unacceptable to lie to one’s friends. For this reason, some staff members made a sharp distinction between their strategy of omission and others’ strategy of actively lying.

Nicole worked at a camp that employed LGBT staff members, but she described herself as still “partially in the closet” about her bisexuality. Nicole said that she only came
out to others when she knew for sure that they were also LGBT. For that reason, Nicole lied to her camp director about being in a romantic relationship with another female staff member. When asked about the relationship, Nicole “told the head honchos, ‘I just broke up with my boyfriend, and now you think I’m dating so-and-so?’ I was dating her. I just needed to cover my tracks.”

Lauren used the strategy of lying most extensively. When Lauren was working at a camp that explicitly prohibited LGBT staff, she was suspected of having a relationship with another staff member. She was called into the director’s office and directly confronted about the rumors. Lauren said that she felt that her job at camp and her reputation with people at home were on the line. Many of the campers at Lauren’s camp also attended her church and knew her neighbors. In response, Lauren chose the strategy of actively lying. Lauren was a long-term staff member at the camp, and she mobilized her friends to help counter the rumors about her relationship. “Of course my friends denied everything. I was like, ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’” When she reported this story, Lauren seemed to be embarrassed about the lie. She said that lying was “probably bad” but that she felt like she had no real choice.

Omission

Rather than lying, some staff who were closeted at camp omitted revealing details from conversation. Some staff members framed omission as being better than an outright lie. However, Heather did not make a distinction between omitting information or lying. She
said that when campers asked her about whether she had a boyfriend, her options were to either “lie and say yes” or to omit the truth with a “lie and say no.” For some staff, directly lying outright contradicted their sense of self as generally truthful persons. Others stated that they were concerned about lying and its effect on their friendships if their friends later found out the truth. Elizabeth had not yet come out to herself her first year at camp. She said that she had been oblivious to the presence of the many lesbian staff members. When she found out that one of her friends at camp was a lesbian and had not told her, Elizabeth felt betrayed, “I found out that R. was a lesbian. I was like, ‘What?’ I had been talking to her for two weeks and now I felt like, not that I had been lied to, but still.” Samantha tried to avoid making others feel similarly betrayed by omitting details without actively lying to her coworkers. Samantha used “gender neutral pronouns,” and would refer to dates as “hanging out with someone” without disclosing gender. She said that she chose to omit details rather than to lie because she “wanted to be able to not have people come back to me and feel angry that I hadn’t told them” if they later found out the truth.

Another way that staff members omitted the truth without actively lying was to argue that nobody had asked them directly. For example, Matthew was closeted at camp, with the exception of two other staff members whom he told directly. Matthew suggested that some people might have known anyway, and that he would have told them the truth if they had asked:
If some people assumed, no one ever asked me about it. It was never a big deal... If my co-counselors would have asked, depending on who they were, but a good majority of them, I would be honest with them and tell them.

The strategy of waiting to be asked put the onus of disclosure on whether the other party asked the right questions. It was clear that omitting the full truth was one type of lying, but some staff members chose this strategy and distinguished it from outright lies because they saw it as a more socially acceptable form of lying.

**Disclosing Revealing Details**

Some staff chose to come out by casually revealing details about their lives in the course of normal conversation. A staff member using this technique might talk about current or past partners, exploits at a gay or lesbian bar, or conflict with parents about being LGBT. Courtney was one of the staff members I interviewed who reported revealing information that indicated her sexual orientation as a way of obliquely disclosing that she was a lesbian. Courtney said that she came out “just in conversation with people, coming to my apartment or things like that. It just became known.” Some staff members directly contrasted this strategy with “announcing it.”

Letting others find out through everyday conversation had the advantage of being similar to how heterosexuals reveal their sexual orientation. Heterosexuals do not come out at all. Instead, they just talk about their lives. Elizabeth said that she would have a conversation where she mentioned her “ex-girlfriend.” Since Elizabeth had a boyfriend the
previous summer, people were sometimes startled to learn that she had a girlfriend.

Elizabeth said that when people expressed surprise, she would respond, “Oh, yeah, that’s so last year. How do you not know that about me?”

Rachel, who identified as gender queer, used female pronouns at a girls’ camp, but used male pronouns when not at camp. Rather than announce it, Rachel revealed her status as transgender through conversations with other staff members,

And so I was talking about the fact that outside of camp, I was a boy. Some of the staff were weirded out. And then some of the staff were fantastic. A bunch of my friends on staff would switch pronouns on the weekends... And so I came out over that summer. I mean, not any big sort of way. Just as conversations happened, that sort of thing.

For Rachel in particular, her gradual process of disclosing her transgender status to other staff members was only possible because she openly negotiated her status with the camp director before camp.

And so I sat down with the camp director and we had a conversation about what pronouns am I going to use at camp. And what we came up with together was that if you use male pronouns at camp, you’re going to be asked to take up male space at camp. So by the regulations, at least at our camp, but I think it’s pretty widespread as far as girls’ camps go, if you are a male, you cannot be in units after dark. She was like, “Okay, if you want to
use male pronouns, that’s totally chill. You’re totally going to be hired. But then you’re going to have to follow the same rules that the maintenance guys do.” She totally left it up to me... And I opted to use female pronouns. Just because, you know, I’d always been a girl at camp and I didn’t feel any strong need or desire to do any different. My partner at the time [also transgender] did the same thing. So. That was that.

Staff members who disclosed their identity by revealing details sometimes found that it did not surprise their coworkers. The coworkers already knew about their LGBT status.. Elizabeth said that people on staff would “usually hear it from somebody else.” She said that she “didn’t have to tell anybody. They all told each other.” Figuring out who was and was not LGBT at camp was sometimes the subject of a playful game of making lists. The year that Danielle worked at an LGBT-friendly camp, she said that her camp “had a gossip problem” and that “someone had made a list of everyone at camp who was [LGBT].” Laughingly, Danielle said that she was “on the list.” Rachel also worked at a camp where there was a whiteboard “with two columns... There would be a straight column and a queer column” and over the course of the summer, “people would move back and forth between them.”

For the LGBT staff members in my study, discussing revealing details was seen as less confrontational. It allowed staff members to provide context for the disclosure. It was a kind of truth telling that included the details that those who were more closeted omitted.
from their conversations at camp. However, it lacked the specificity of declaring or announcing one’s LGBT status.

**Announcing LGBT status**

Some staff members did explicitly announce their LGBT status, generally during staff training. Jessica said that she would never “announce” her sexual orientation by introducing herself as, “Hi, I’m Jessica, I’m a bisexual.” She was slightly joking in her tone and implied that her example was ridiculous since nobody would ever do such a thing. Similarly, Megan said that she would “never wear a ‘Hey, I’m gay!’ shirt at camp.” However, Brittany reported that she did announce her identity as a lesbian during staff training. Brittany said that she wanted to make her sexual orientation clear to everyone during staff orientation so that she would not have to worry about disclosing her sexual orientation later. Brittany said that she had decided that coming out directly was the simplest solution.

So I was like, fuck it, [I said] “Hi. I’m Brittany. I’m queer. I’m a Girl Scout. I’m also a princess. And I really enjoy candy. And that’s who I am. And that’s what you need to know because you’re bunking with me. What’s up?”

Brittany was not the only participant who came out to other staff during orientation. Some camps provided diversity workshops during their staff orientation that expressly encouraged staff members to come out. Activities during staff orientation that included LGBT issues as a dimension of diversity provided for a structured form of “announcing it.” Kayla came out to other staff members at orientation by telling the whole staff during an
activity. During staff training, Kayla’s camp held a diversity workshop that discussed topics that included race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. Staff members were encouraged to “break down how you identify and discuss it,” and in that process Kayla came out to staff and supervisors at camp.

Carlos also came out to everyone at a workshop focused on diversity issues. He worked at a camp with a social justice theme which was probably the most LGBT friendly in my study. The goal of the camp was to encourage campers to consider issues like racism and homophobia and to equip campers with tools to create social change in their communities. Carlos was the only participant who reported that camp administrators at his camp actively recruited LGBT staff. Carlos stated that the directors felt “the more diverse the staff, the more successful the program is.” Carlos’ workshop happened during camp rather than at orientation, and it included both campers and staff members. Campers attended workshops throughout the one-week camp devoted to a particular issue related to diversity. The LGBT workshop at Carlos’ camp was designed to make campers and staff identify with LGBT individuals who were subject to harassment, employment discrimination, and to anti-LGBT violence.

Carlos said that LGBT staff who were out to the camp directors were expected to come out to campers so that they would have the chance to connect with an adult who identified as LGBT. Prior to the workshop, Carlos also came out to the campers who lived within his cabin. Carlos said that in spite of working at a camp devoted to social justice,
coming out to the campers in his cabin made him nervous every year because he never knew how his campers would react. At times campers reacted badly, and it took careful intervention before Carlos was able to make the campers feel comfortable again.

For Carlos, at the most LGBT friendly camp in my sample, the act of announcing one’s status also carried with it a sense of risk. LGBT staff members who announced their status were unable to calibrate their disclosure to their estimate of others’ likely reaction. As an identity management strategy, coming out to all staff members at camp did have the effect of eliminating gossip about LGBT status. Staff who used this strategy were aware of what others knew about them and retained a measure of control that others sometimes failed to achieve. Those staff who announced their status did not unexpectedly find that other staff members were unaware, as sometimes happened for those who chose more gradual methods of disclosure. Finally, individuals who chose this method staved off the possibility of getting close to someone who was not comfortable with their LGBT status, only to lose a friendship when the other person found out.

Each staff member in this study sought to control who found out about their LGBT status and how others learned of it. Staff who sought to pass as heterosexual either lied or else omitted relevant details. Staff members who wished to disclose their status either discussed matters that revealed their identity or else announced their status explicitly. Staff members’ decision whether to disclose their status was affected by the atmosphere for
LGBT staff at their camp. Conversely, the atmosphere at camp was influenced by the presence or absence of openly LGBT staff members.

Atmosphere at Camp for LGBT staff

Each camp in the study provided a different atmosphere for the LGBT staff members who worked there, and in some instances the atmosphere at a particular camp changed with new camp directors. Formal policy, informal practices, and supervisor attitudes affected the atmosphere at camp for LGBT staff. As has been stated, the atmosphere at camp was also affected by the presence or absence of out LGBT staff members. Based on the atmosphere of each organization, as well as camp policies and practices, camps fell into three groups: homophobic, tolerant, or supportive. These categories emerged from the data because staff members’ experiences seemed to cluster based on both written and informal policies at camp. I will briefly describe each category below and then discuss each category in depth.

While camps in my study fell on a continuum, differences in written and stated policies provided the most important distinction among camps. Camps in each of the three categories provided different levels of sanctions against staff members who came out. These sanctions (or their absence) dictated what was allowable for the staff members who worked at the camp. Homophobic camps had a stated policy that LGBT staff could not be employed. Tolerant camps allowed LGBT staff to work at camp, but staff members were not allowed to disclose the presence of LGBT staff members to campers. Supportive camps
allowed LGBT staff members to be open about their LGBT status with staff members, campers, and parents.

Readers should keep in mind that the three categories do not address how LGBT campers were treated. During a second interview with Samantha, one of my key informants, she pointed out that this classification system did not address how her camp treated LGBT campers. Samantha worked at a camp that I had classified as homophobic. Samantha stated that while “the Diocese would have problems” with LGBT staff members working there, one camper who openly identified as a lesbian had been handled carefully by camp staff so that the camper would not think that there “was anything wrong with it.” Although assignment to each category depended on the camp’s written or stated policy, camps within each category might be more or less LGBT friendly, and individual staff members’ estimation of how friendly an environment might be was often influenced by their comfort level with disclosing their LGBT status both at camp and at home. Therefore, although the camp might have a particular assigned status, the individuals at a camp might be quite different in their friendliness toward LGBT staff.

**Homophobic**

The most homophobic camps included in their written or stated policies that no LGBT staff members could be employed. Homophobic camp policies ranged from having a written contract that stated homosexuality was incompatible with employment at camp to a camp where the camp director stated that LGBT staff would be “a problem” and not
allowed. Only three of the camps in this sample met this criterion. Staff who worked at homophbic camps remained entirely closeted or faced consequences including the possibility of being fired. Each of the three staff members told a different story about their time at these institutions.

Danielle worked at a Christian camp where her contract expressly forbade LGBT staff members, and the staff manual similarly stated that LGBT staff members would be terminated from employment. Nevertheless, during the course of conversation with her direct supervisor, Danielle mentioned that she was struggling with her sexuality. Danielle’s unit leader reported her struggles to her supervisors. Danielle said that because she was not “directly acting” on her impulses, and because she was a good staff member, the camp made an exception and did not fire her. Instead, the director placed restrictions on the relationships that Danielle had with other female staff members. The director also required that Danielle meet with her weekly. During that summer, Danielle was not allowed to hug female staff members. Instead, Danielle “kept [her] distance from other female staff... if they got too close.” Since staff members commonly hugged each other, this restriction adversely affected Danielle’s relationships with other staff members at camp. Danielle said that not being able to hug other staff members “made it really hard” because she was singled out as different.

During Danielle’s weekly meetings with the director, they would go over each of her relationships with other staff members, and identify behavior “that could be a potential
risk.” She and the director would discuss each week whether Danielle was attracted to any of the female staff, “then Bible scripture would be brought in and we would pray about it.” Danielle said that the summer was difficult enough that “part of me just always wanted to be fired for it so that it could be over.” However, Danielle said that she was “very anti quitting a job” and that she resolved not to leave on her own. In spite of her treatment at this camp, Danielle did reapply to work the next year but learned that she had “basically been blacklisted because of everything.” She came close to deciding not to work at any camp again, but found another camp through a friend. The new camp had a written equal opportunity statement that included sexual orientation. In choosing the new camp, Danielle said that she “made a point to make sure that it wasn’t something that was going to become an issue.” Danielle went on to work at various camps for the next four years. She said that she continued working at camp because she “didn’t want to give up on something that I knew I wanted to do.” Danielle said that she learned from her time at her first camp to carefully assess how LGBT friendly an organization was before she went to work there.

Like Danielle, Samantha worked at a Christian camp that did not allow LGBT staff. At Samantha’s camp, the restriction was not as clearly stated in the written policy. Instead, the policy was disclosed to Samantha more informally. During Samantha’s first week at camp, someone asked the director what he would do “if there was a gay counselor living in a cabin.” The director said that having a gay counselor in the cabin probably would not be okay with the Diocese, although it did not bother the director personally. At the time,
Samantha was not living in the cabins with campers, but lived elsewhere in camp because she was program staff. So Samantha asked, “What if they weren’t in the cabin?” Her director indicated that other LGBT staff members would not be acceptable either. After this exchange, Samantha decided that she needed to remain entirely closeted while at camp.

One factor in Samantha’s decision to remain closeted was the knowledge that she had no legal recourse if she were fired, “Since it’s a religious institution, a private employer, non-discrimination stuff didn’t apply to them so they could fire you for any reason.”

Samantha decided to stay closeted even with her closest friends at camp. Since Samantha had been a camper at this camp since she was seven years old, she had friends on staff that she had known since childhood. Samantha reported that she was left with little support as she struggled with her sexual orientation that summer. She said that it was “awkward” to keep that information from her friends. Samantha said, “I was struggling to figure out my own identity. To not be able to have those conversations with anyone that I was around was really tough.” Months later, one of Danielle’s friends asked why Danielle had not turned to her for help. Danielle apologized, saying “Sorry I didn’t tell you, but that didn’t seem like much of an option at the time.” Instead of reaching out to friends that she had known for years, Samantha remained closeted and as a result, felt isolated at camp.

Samantha did not remain closeted to other camp staff members once the summer was over. During the school year, Samantha updated her status on the social networking site Facebook to indicate that she was a lesbian and in a relationship with a woman. Since
many of her coworkers were her friends on Facebook and could have seen her status, Samantha felt that she had come out generally to people at camp in this way. Like Danielle, Samantha applied to work at the same camp again the next summer. She said that she reapplied because “camp was such a big part of my life... I love this camp so much and I love working with kids, and this is just one small issue. This is not what camp is about.” Camp administrators sent Samantha a letter that said that she was not hired for the position she applied for, but was never given further explanation. Getting this treatment from a camp she had attended since the age of seven left her wondering “if there were something more to it,” but there was no way for her to know. Samantha did an internship instead of working at camp that summer, and has since moved on.

Like Samantha, Lauren worked at the same camp she had attended as a camper. Just as with Danielle and Samantha, Lauren was in the process of coming out to herself at camp. Lauren began a relationship with another staff member, and rumors started to circulate about the two of them. One day Lauren and her girlfriend were called into the director’s office and told that they needed to act more appropriately in front of the campers. Lauren stated that she and her girlfriend had not done anything that other staff did not do—hugging was a common practice among the staff there. She speculated, “Maybe it was the way we hugged. I don’t know. I don’t know what it was. Maybe they sensed it.” After the meeting with her director about “PDAs” not being “appropriate”, Lauren felt that her job was at stake. In the wake of their meeting with the camp director, Lauren and her girlfriend
reduced the intensity of their relationship. As discussed before, Lauren felt compelled to have her friends lie on her behalf. Lauren said that she felt bad about that, but “I was scared that I would be judged,” and that it would “affect my job.”

As with each of the other staff members who worked at the camps classified as homophobic, Lauren applied to work at the same camp again the next summer. Unlike Danielle and Samantha, Lauren was hired the next summer and even promoted into a new position. Ultimately, however, Lauren decided not to work at that camp again because of the homophobic atmosphere. She said that deciding not to work at this camp was a particularly difficult decision because Lauren had been a camper there since the third grade. Lauren said that she had been “crying about it,” but that she was worried that if she went back, the rumors would start again. Since her friends and family sent campers there, being outed at camp would have had the effect of outing her in her community at home. Lauren went on to work at a day camp where they were “more accepting,” and she later volunteered some of her time at a residential camp where she could disclose her identity.

Acknowledging the irony with a laugh, Lauren said that the best part about being at camp was “Being yourself. I mean. To an extent.”

Homophobic environments can be stressful and emotionally draining for LGBT staff members. The need to remain closeted meant that LGBT staff members at the most homophobic camps really could not be themselves. Rather, they could be, but only “to an extent.” As a result of the homophobic environment they worked in, each participant was
isolated during part of her coming out process. In addition, participants stated that being closeted had adversely affected their friendships at camp, which served to further isolate them. However, each participant also stressed that she enjoyed her time at camp, and that her love of camp motivated her to apply to return to camp the next year. As Danielle said of her time at camp, “I grow every summer and I just walk away stronger from it.”

**Tolerant**

While some camps had written policies that were expressly anti-LGBT, most of the staff members in my study worked at camps that I labeled *tolerant*. Tolerant camps allowed LGBT staff to work there. Conditions at tolerant camps ranged from camps that had no openly LGBT staff members but also no policy against their presence to camps where out LGBT staff formed a significant portion of the total staff. At tolerant camps, staff members could disclose their LGBT identity, but only to other staff members. In contrast to the policies and practices at supportive camps, staff members at tolerant camps were not allowed to let campers or other minors at camp like Counselors in Training (CITs) know that LGBT staff members were present at camp.

Staff members at tolerant camps generally described their camp as being an open and welcoming atmosphere for LGBT individuals. Some staff remained closeted, but many staff members at tolerant camps were out to their coworkers and supervisors. However, the requirement that staff members not disclose the presence of LGBT staff members to campers sometimes caused problems for LGBT staff.
Many camps had policies against disclosing personal information to campers. Topics that were considered to be personal most often included any discussion about sex or sexuality. At tolerant camps, the definition of conversations that were too personal often included anything that disclosed staff members’ LGBT status to campers, but not conversations that disclosed that staff members were straight. For example, Amanda’s camp had a policy against disclosing personal information to campers. The policy did not allow staff members to let campers know whether staff members were in romantic relationships. The policy was written to include both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Although it seemed evenhanded, the policy was applied differently for straight staff members. Amanda described:

The person in charge was one of my counselors when I was a camper. She was engaged and she wore her rings and the campers asked her about it a lot. She would say, ‘Yes I’m engaged’ and she could tell them about it. So I guess the rules would be a little different because if a straight member was asked they could say they had a boyfriend, but if I was asked I would just say no. It wouldn’t be acceptable or like allowed for us to say, ‘Yeah, I have a girlfriend actually.’

In spite of the differences, Amanda said that she felt that the atmosphere at camp for LGBT staff members was “generally good.” Every one of the staff who worked at tolerant camps spoke positively of the atmosphere for LGBT staff members. They reported
incidents that seemed to indicate differential treatment for LGBT staff. However, the staff members I interviewed did not seem to consider the incidents to have a negative effect on the general atmosphere for LGBT staff.

In some cases, the staff members themselves felt that it would be wrong to come out to campers or to let them know about an existing relationship with a member of the same sex. The staff members that I interviewed made three different arguments about why staff should not come out to campers. One view suggested that disclosing sexual orientation or the presence of a same sex partner was tantamount to disclosing personal details about one’s sex life. Another position was that coming out to campers would have adverse consequences to the camp because of potentially angry parents. Finally, some staff members that I interviewed suggested that disclosing the presence of LGBT staff was distracting to campers. Campers should be focused on the innocent fun of being at camp, and campers who learned about LGBT staff members would be distracted to the point that their camp experience would be adversely impacted.

Some staff members I interviewed equated coming out to campers with disclosing details about their sex lives. Jessica’s co-ed camp had a policy against disclosing personal information to campers. Speaking in support of the policy, Jessica said that campers “had no business knowing what goes on behind closed doors.” At Jessica’s camp, some LGBT staff did come out to campers, but they could only do so on the last day of camp and only if they had no intentions to work at camp again. She said that she had not disclosed her status
because, “I wanted to come back this summer, [and] I didn’t want my girls knowing and then spreading it around the camp.” While LGBT staff could only reveal a same-sex relationship at the end of the campers’ session and only then if the staff member did not plan to return, Jessica related a story about a straight couple where the male staff member colluded with the campers to get his girlfriend out of the room, and distract her so that he could cover her room in roses. Jessica noted that involving the campers in this endeavor was against the official policy. She said, “The official response was, ‘You should not do that.’ But the unofficial response was, you know, [the supervisors] were both single straight women and were like ‘I wish I had a boy to do that for me.’”

When staff articulated the justification for the policy of not being out to campers, they sometimes framed it in terms of parental reaction. Heather said that if campers had learned about the presence of lesbian staff members, it would have caused problems for the camp. Heather said that she did not want to “scar” the campers by disclosing that she had a girlfriend. Female staff members at Heather’s camp were allowed to say that they had a boyfriend, but if the campers were to “go home and tell their mommy that one of their camp counselors has a girlfriend”, that “would cause a whole bunch of trouble.” Danielle said that there had been problems with parents about the presence of lesbian staff at a tolerant camp where she worked. Parents at camp had noted staff members “hugging too long,” and as a result the staff members were urged to be more careful about not allowing campers to know of the presence of LGBT staff.
A few staff suggested that it would be distracting for campers if they knew about LGBT camp staff members. Several staff stated that campers frequently speculated and paired staff members up into different sex couples that may or may not have actually existed. Camper speculation along these lines amused staff members, especially when the individual in question preferred members of the same sex. Courtney said that “the campers always try to guess but they’re always wrong. I was married to eight different people and I had a house and a dog and everything.” Kayla said that trying to determine which staff members were dating was “a game” to the campers. She said, “Sometimes they get it right and sometimes they get it wrong. Sometimes we would play along” because it was funny.

At Matthew’s camp, the campers also speculated about relationships between staff members. The girls’ cabins, in particular “were notorious” for making lists of which staff members were in relationships. Matthew felt that if his campers knew about his relationship with a female staff member, it would be distracting, but not as distracting as a same-sex relationship. Matthew stated that although staff members were told not to let campers know about romantic relationships among the staff, there “weren’t any consequences” if campers found out about them. However, Matthew argued that if campers heard about an LGBT staff member at camp, it would be so distracting that the campers would not learn anything “because they’re asking the wakeboard teacher about, ‘Hey, did you hear about this?’” He speculated that it “would be such a huge topic at camp
that it would take several days” for the campers to be able to focus on camp activities and that it would “ruin camp.”

The argument that same sex relationships among staff members could be so distracting that they would “ruin camp” was predicated on the perhaps faulty assumption that campers were innocents who were not already familiar with individuals in same sex relationships. This belief also revealed an unstated assumption that heterosexuality was in-bounds and worthy of discussion (i.e., camper’s list-making), but that discussions of same sex relationships were out of bounds and not fit for children. Along these lines, Heather said that staff could not let campers know about lesbian staff members at camp because their interactions with campers had to “be PG [rated].” Comments such as these from staff reflected their ideas that the mere mention of the existence of LGBT individuals was inappropriate for children. When implemented as policy, staff members at some camps were subject to stronger sanctions for revealing same sex relationships than those in relationships with members of different sex.

At tolerant camps, the existence of these sanctions did not seem to strongly affect the assessment of the atmosphere at camp. Perhaps the staff I interviewed felt that the sanctions were unimportant because they felt comfortable at camp. Jessica felt that camp was “a really open atmosphere.” Although she did not participate, gay and straight staff members from Jessica’s camp sometimes went to gay clubs together. For Jessica, an indicator of that open atmosphere was that she could “gossip with my co-counselors about
dates I went on with girls.” During our second interview, I asked Jessica to imagine what camp would be like if she were allowed to come out to campers. She said it would be a lot better, and that “what would be different is that you don’t have to think about it all the time.”

Some staff members seemed to be measuring their experience against what they might have expected to find at the most homophobic camps. Asked about the atmosphere at camp, Amanda said that she had never been “harassed about it.” Similarly, Courtney said that she felt that camp was a friendly atmosphere because “there wasn’t controversy” about the presence of LGBT staff members at camp. Some staff compared camp to their home community. For example, Jennifer said that the atmosphere at camp was “very comforting. I always thought I had to hide it before,” but “the directors were so welcoming” that Jennifer described the camp atmosphere as “very open.” However, staff members “couldn’t mention anything [about being LGBT] to the campers.” The most important part of feeling comfortable related to their relationships with peers and supervisors. If being LGBT did not cause significant conflict with either of those groups, the staff members I interviewed reported that they were in a positive situation at camp. However, some issues existed regarding individuals who were campers but involved in staff roles.

*Counselors in Training and Junior Counselors.*

Counselors in Training (CITs) were generally 15 – 17 years old, unless the camp also had Junior Counselors (JCs), who were usually 17 years old. CITs and JCs were usually
considered campers and treated as such. CITs and JCs were also old enough that they often formed friendships with staff members – many of whom were only a year or two older. Staff members said that because they were older, Counselors in Training or Junior Counselors were the most likely to realize LGBT staff members were at camp. The presence of CITs and JCs was particularly challenging for LGBT camp staff when staff members were not allowed to disclose their identity to the campers.

As minors with greater responsibilities than most campers, CITs and JCs blurred the lines demarcating campers from staff. Jennifer referred to the distinction as a “weird line with the CITs” who “were really old enough to figure it out” and realize that there were LGBT staff members at camp. Since they were older, CITs and JCs were also more likely to catch on to references and subtexts that younger campers missed. In addition, some CIT or JC programs last longer than was typical for campers. Sessions that extended for several weeks or the entire summer gave the CITs and JCs more time and opportunity to form close relationships with staff members and to gain access to camp gossip. Staff members sometimes disclosed their own LGBT status or that of others at camp to CITs or JCs because they were friends. Megan had been a CIT director and stated that “one of the hardest things about working with CITs [was to keep] staff from imparting knowledge to them that they didn't need to know,” such as the presence of LGBT staff members at camp. CITs and JCs were also old enough that some of them were questioning their own sexual orientation or
gender identity or else had already come out as LGBT. Some of the staff I interviewed stated that CITs and JCs who were LGBT themselves noticed cues that others might have missed.

When CITs and JCs learned or guessed about the presence of LGBT staff at camps that required camp staff to remain closeted, their knowledge sometimes affected both the staff and CITs adversely. In some cases, CITs guessed about staff members’ LGBT status because the CITs themselves identified as LGBT. Elizabeth said that at her camp, the CITs who were out or just questioning their sexuality frequently “start making a list. They always make a list of who [on staff] is [LGBT] and who isn’t. That’s the big game that they play.”

The CITs’ playful list-making was reminiscent of staff members’ list-making at other camps, but the CITs’ status as quasi-campers changed how the lists were interpreted by camp administrators. CITs at Elizabeth’s camp got in trouble if the lists were found, but the problem was compounded if a staff member confirmed the information on the list and “told the CIT something they weren’t supposed to tell them.”

Since CITs and JCs may be only one or two years younger than staff members, the boundary between staff and camper was often unclear. Amanda said that at her camp, “in a lot of cases, the JC will know that the counselor is bi or gay because they knew them before [camp]” because they had been in school together. The policy that staff members could not discuss the presence of LGBT individuals at camp made it harder for JCs who were themselves LGBT. Amanda was closeted to staff members when she was a junior counselor. She said, “I didn’t talk to the counselors because I knew that they weren’t supposed to
know and I wasn’t supposed to talk about it.” Jessica said that not being allowed to speak with staff members about her sexuality made her feel isolated because of so few other JCs that summer.

Staff members perceived tolerant camps to be a good place to work. However, the rule against allowing campers to know about LGBT staff members meant that staff members were required to engage in identity management strategies that limited disclosure. Such strategies require more work. Since staff at tolerant camps faced negative consequences for disclosure to campers, their situation was more tenuous in comparison to staff at supportive camps.

Supportive

The ability to disclose one’s LGBT identity to campers was a distinguishing feature of camps classified as supportive camps compared to tolerant camps. The practices at supportive camps ranged from a camp where some staff members were out to campers to a camp that actively recruited LGBT staff members to provide campers with LGBT role models. The salient difference between tolerant and supportive camps emerged from the data because being allowed to disclose one’s identity to campers seemed to remove entirely the threat of being dismissed because of the disclosure of one’s sexual orientation. While some of the tolerant camps presented information about diversity during their staff training, none of the camps classified as tolerant provided training for their staff members specifically about how to be sensitive to LGBT issues. Conversely, three of the four
supportive camps in my study provided diversity training for their staff members that included LGBT issues. Four staff members worked at four different supportive camps represented in this sample. Although these participants worked at different camps, similarities were evident among all of their stories.

As stated earlier, Carlos worked at a camp with a social justice theme. Since Carlos’ camp held workshops for campers about LGBT issues, the camp specifically sought to hire LGBT staff members so that they could discuss their personal experience of oppression with their campers. At Carlos’ camp, the question was not whether it was permissible to disclose one’s identity to campers, but whether it was okay for a staff member to stay in the closet. Carlos stated that if someone was not out to the camp director, he or she would not be expected to disclose his or her identity to campers. If the director knew about an LGBT staff members’ status, however, that staff member would be expected to come out to campers so that the camp could provide campers with good role models who were LGBT.

Although Carlos worked at a supportive camp and was out to the campers, he sometimes felt uneasy in his relationship with campers as an out gay man. The campers at Carlos’ camp were all high school students, and Carlos lived in a cabin with six male campers. Each summer, Carlos worried about what effect it would have on the campers living in his cabin when he came out to them. Carlos said that he tried to act in ways that were less stereotypically gay to make it more reassuring for his adolescent male campers, who might be worried. Carlos said:
This is a camp about inclusion, but in order for them to like get to that level, they need like one or two days to talk about the issues before they can really like start grasping it... I was kind of scared. It’s a feeling I have every time... I feel like I have to masculine up a little bit... so that people aren’t like, ‘Oh my god! Gay!’

Carlos’ impulse to “masculine up” represented an LGBT identity management strategy that took advantage of the links between visible gender identity and presumed sexual orientation. Unless an individual violates gender norms, he or she will be presumed to be heterosexual. While Heather was concerned about being visibly lesbian because of being “the butch one,” Carlos sought to seem less threatening (and implicitly less gay) by assuming a more masculine demeanor.

Carlos managed his outward identity as a gay man as a self-protective measure. Confronting homophobic campers made Carlos nervous because it was an unpleasant part of his job. By acting more masculine and less stereotypically gay, Carlos sought to reduce the likelihood of a hostile reaction from his campers. Carlos’ need to manage his identity in this fashion illustrated the limitations faced by camps that wish to create a safe space for their LGBT staff members.

However, Carlos was accomplishing two tasks at the same time when he managed his identity by acting less overtly gay. Carlos actively used his identity management as a tool
to reach out to his campers. While his identity management served to reduce conflict, Carlos’ main goal was to more effectively address his campers’ homophobic attitudes.

Although Carlos’ camp was devoted to social justice, Rachel worked at a camp that did not include social justice as part of its overall mission. In concert with her camp director, Rachel instituted a weeklong program that focused on social justice. The program did not have a component that focused specifically on LGBT issues, but rather focused mostly on racial and ethnic diversity. For the youngest campers, the program talked about making new friends, but the older campers took a “critical look at the world we live in” and applied this worldview to camp and with the goal of discovering ways to make camp a more just place.

At the time that Rachel instituted this program, she identified as male and used male pronouns while at home. She has since detransitioned and now uses female pronouns. As discussed earlier, Rachel had decided not to take up male space at camp and used female pronouns while working. She made this decision after extensive discussions with her camp director prior to camp. At a camp that Rachel described as “the gayest place on earth,” Rachel stated that when her sexual orientation came up with campers, she “would answer honestly.” Rachel worked out ground rules with the camp director which said that identity at camp was separate from sex or sexuality. Rachel said, “If we’re talking about identity fine. Knock yourself out. If you’re talking about what you’re doing [in bed], probably not so fantastic.” Rachel said that this rule did not have universal support among the staff.
members at camp. “Straight staff would kind of cringe and occasionally express concern if queer staff mentioned a significant other,” but the camp director insisted on the distinction between discussing identity and discussing sex. Rachel’s camp was the only one in this sample to make such a distinction.

The LGBT friendly atmosphere at Rachel’s camp was made possible by a specific camp director that Rachel worked with, rather than the sponsoring organization. The first director Rachel worked with was instrumental in defending LGBT staff members against the expectation that they should remain closeted to campers. This director also worked closely with three different transgender staff members to ensure that they stayed within the rules about male staff at a girls’ camp and also were free to express themselves as their preferred gender while at camp. When a new director took charge, the atmosphere changed. The expectations about what conversations qualified as “camper appropriate” also shifted. The new director expressed concern that girls in the social justice program were talking about identity, although the program did not focus on LGBT identity. Over time, Rachel’s relationship with the new director deteriorated and ultimately the director asked Rachel to leave camp for reasons seemingly unrelated to Rachel’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Kayla worked at a Quaker camp where she had been a camper. She described her camp as “an open society where you could express yourself however you wanted.” Kayla stated that there were many LGBT staff members at her camp, and that it was allowable for
staff members to disclose their identity to campers. She said that it was not necessary for staff members to be out to campers, and that “you can [tell campers] if you want to. If you don’t, that’s fine.” Most LGBT staff members at Kayla’s camp did not choose to come out to campers. She said, “I didn’t hide it but at the same time I didn’t flaunt it.” Kayla’s reticence may have been related to her conservative family and community background, where it was “harder” for her to be a lesbian than it was at her camp, which was “more open.” While Kayla did not usually come out to campers, she did make an exception with one camper who “was trying to figure himself out.” She said that she made the exception in his case because she wanted her camper to “have somebody kind of help [him] be honest.” Kayla said that it was important to her that the atmosphere at camp was “open” enough that campers could express themselves fully. Kayla thought that being a place where campers were “happier to be there because they could be who they really wanted to be” was one of the most important qualities of her camp.

Like Kayla, Melissa worked at a camp where she was allowed to disclose her sexual orientation to campers, but generally chose not to come out to them. During her first year at camp, she was entirely closeted. The second year Melissa began disclosing her status as a lesbian. She said that “it was a known thing” but that “it wasn’t ever explicitly discussed.” For Melissa, camp was a real change from her home environment, which was more conservative. Melissa’s camp did not provide diversity training that included LGBT issues. Melissa said that the lack of diversity training “turned out to be something that should have
been discussed because one of [the staff members] was pretty homophobic.” The lack of training became a problem when the staff member made insensitive comments about a camper who had two moms. “Just really inappropriate stuff...that should have been addressed in staff training.” Melissa was not out to this particular camper because “such a high proportion of people who were there was gay. It just didn’t really matter.” She stated that the camp was considering instituting a week of camp specifically for children of LGBT parents.

The staff members at supportive camps did not need to worry about inadvertently disclosing their LGBT identity or being outed to campers. Camps with supportive policies for their staff members also positioned themselves to support campers more effectively who were questioning their sexual orientation or had already come out as LGBT. LGBT camp staff that were out to campers were also able to support campers with LGBT parents in ways that staff members at tolerant camps were barred from doing. Rachel said that because she was out at camp, she “had the opportunity to be a very positive role model to CITs who were queer.” Brittany, who worked at a tolerant Girl Scout camp and was unable to come out to campers, expressed:

‘Okay, here's a strong straight woman that does this. Here’s a strong straight woman that does this. Here’s a strong straight woman that does this.’ That’s fucking great. But one day [campers are] gonna ... realize that they aren’t
those strong straight women. You know? And then where are they going to find community?

For the most part, staff members at supportive camps used similar, positive language to describe the atmosphere at their camps as did those at tolerant camps. The staff members I spoke with who worked at either tolerant or supportive camps experienced camp as an open atmosphere where they were valued as staff members regardless of their LGBT status. Staff members evaluated the camp atmosphere primarily by observing whether staff members could come out to fellow staff members without suffering any negative consequences. Staff members’ evaluation of the atmosphere at camp affected how they managed their LGBT identity.

Managing Identity

Staff engaged in the work of managing their LGBT identity, therefore, regardless of whether they worked at a homophobic, tolerant, or supportive camp. The experience of being LGBT at a homophobic camp took the largest emotional toll, and necessitated the most work. Staff members at the most supportive camps, however, also managed their LGBT identity in the face of occasionally homophobic staff or campers.

LGBT staff members at camp managed their identity in an effort to reduce the effects of homophobia and heteronormativity for themselves. LGBT staff members engaged in identity management at all types of camps because homophobia and heteronormativity were present in some form at each camp. At overtly homophobic camps, identity
management necessitated staying entirely closeted or facing the possibility of being fired. At tolerant camps, the cost of missteps was lower. Staff members at tolerant camps were enjoined from letting campers know about LGBT staff, but identity management efforts were mostly aimed at reducing conflict with homophobic coworkers. At most supportive camps, LGBT staff members had the weight of administrative approval to help deal with occasional homophobic incidents.

Since LGBT identity management at camp usually was a preemptive strategy, the staff members who used it were engaged in a constant guessing game about how much homophobia they might encounter, who the perpetrators might be, and what form it might take. Staff members who had encountered more homophobia in the past might take more precautions in their identity management strategy. Thus, prior experience of homophobia made staff members more reluctant to disclose their LGBT status.

Managing identity represented work that was unrelenting whether it was overtly recognized or not. Staff members managed their LGBT identity through their appearance, their conversations, and actions such as avoiding being left alone with campers. For the most part, LGBT staff members did not seem to notice or acknowledge the effort that they put into managing their identity at camp. However, the scope of her effort became plain when Jessica was asked to imagine a more supportive environment and said, “what would be different is that you don’t have to think about it all the time.”
Conclusion

The LGBT summer camp experience was for the most part similar to the experiences of straight counterparts. Like all staff, the LGBT residential camp staff members in my study played games, got insufficient amounts of sleep, and comforted homesick campers. In their interviews, summer camp traditions and rituals loomed large. However, the staff members in my study were affected by their LGBT status. LGBT summer camp staff spent time and energy actively managing their identity.

The strategies that camp staff used to manage their identity were affected by their own prior experience as LGBT individuals as well as the camp atmosphere and context. Staff members made decisions daily about whether and when to come out, but the work of managing their LGBT identity was not limited to making decisions about disclosure. LGBT camp staff members also needed to assess the atmosphere at camp, which directly affected their experience at camp. Openly homophobic camps disallowed LGBT presence altogether, but even at tolerant camps sanctions occurred when their LGBT status was disclosed to campers or parents. At the most supportive camps, LGBT staff members needed to manage their identity in the presence of less accepting campers or staff members. Societal expectations of LGBT individuals shaped the expectations of camp administrators and informed camp administrators’ concerns about parental reactions to the presence of LGBT staff at camp.
Specific attributes of the summer camp environment affected LGBT staff members. The presence of minors at camp meant that summer camp staff were particularly affected by stereotypes of LGBT individuals as licentious sexual predators. Since residential camp staff live with their co-workers, the presence of homophobic co-workers affected LGBT staff more than they might in a traditional job where they went home at night. Living and working together also meant that romantic relationships were more apparent and affected co-workers more directly.

The staff members in my study said that residential camp challenged them to grow as individuals, to become mature, responsible, and good role models for the children at camp. The task of managing their LGBT identity within the camp context added another dimension to the challenges at camp, but did not remove these benefits.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In Chapter 5 I discuss the implications of my results. The purpose of my study was to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), or non-heterosexual. The study examined the meanings that LGBT staff attached to their camp experience and in what ways staff members’ LGBT status affected their camp experience. Findings from my study indicated that LGBT staff members engaged in identity management as a strategy to limit potential harm caused to them by heterosexist and heteronormative structures at camp. In this chapter I discuss LGBT identity management at summer camp, the themes that emerged from the data, and how each theme affected or was affected by identity management.

Emerging Theory – LGBT Identity Management at Summer Camp

The data from my study suggested that the experience of LGBT residential summer camp staff members was affected by their LGBT status. However, the residential camp experience for LGBT staff members was primarily a typical camp experience. While being LGBT affected how staff members experienced some things at camp, most of what they experienced was related to being at camp rather than being LGBT. Like their straight counterparts, LGBT staff members spent their summers at camp singing songs, playing games, and failing to get enough sleep. Unlike their straight co-workers, however, LGBT camp staff members needed to manage an LGBT identity in the context of a homophobic
and heteronormative culture that extended beyond camp but also included summer camp as an institution.

LGBT staff members at residential summer camp did the work of managing their LGBT identity on a day-to-day and sometimes a moment-by-moment basis. They accomplished this work by positioning themselves against stereotypes, controlling the disclosure of their LGBT status, and interpreting others’ cues before speaking or acting. My conception of identity management within the camp context is more expanded than is often found in the research literature, which generally limits identity management to choices surrounding the disclosure or non-disclosure of LGBT status (e.g., Griffin, 1992; K. Schmidt, 2008).

As part of their management strategies, LGBT summer camp staff members were generally careful about their words and their actions. Staff maintained vigilance in a preemptive bid to minimize the effects of homophobia to themselves. Since LGBT identity management strategies reflected staff members’ anticipation of possible events rather than their reaction to homophobic incidents, they reflected staff members’ fears and worries. These findings were similar to Swim, Pearson, and Johnston (2008), who found that LGB individuals mostly encountered less overt forms of homophobia, but that the fear of homophobic incidents governed staff members’ behavior.

Staff members I studied at camp encountered homophobic incidents infrequently. Instead, they more often encountered issues related to homophobic and heteronormative
structures at camp. LGBT staff members were more governed by the fear of incidents rather than the incidents themselves similar to what Swim et al. (2008) found. Residential camps operated in the context of a homophobic and heteronormative society, which required staff to be vigilant about managing their LGBT status.

Several themes emerged from the data that affected the work of managing an LGBT identity at camp. The themes included the residential camp context, staff members’ prior experience, staff members’ level of disclosure of LGBT status at camp, and the atmosphere at camp for LGBT individuals. In this section, I discuss each theme and its implications. The model introduced in Chapter Four (Figure 2) provides a visual representation of my theorizing and the interrelationships of the themes.
Residential Camp Context

The summer camp experience for LGBT staff members was first and foremost a summer camp experience. While navigating the daily routine at camp, summer camp staff members fulfilled their role as camp counselors, worked with campers, made friends, and dated. Staff members that I interviewed stated that they had grown and matured because of their time at camp, which supported Garst et al. (2009), who found that camp staff
members reported an increase in confidence, maturity, and problem-solving ability that they attributed to having served as camp staff members.

LGBT staff members, like all staff members, were expected to take on a persona as a “camp person.” Camp people were expected to be enthusiastic and high energy, especially around the campers. This emphasis constituted emotional labor, as staff members were required to maintain this persona regardless of whether staff were tired and unenthused. First described by Hochschild (1983), emotional labor is work that requires an employee to suppress his or her own emotions to produce a specific emotion in others. Staff members that I interviewed were required to display a high level of enthusiasm around campers so that the campers would become enthusiastic about camp. Several staff members said that the requirement to simulate enthusiasm when they did not feel it sometimes made their jobs more difficult. L. J. Smith (1985) had similar findings in her study of camp counselors’ experience. Her study participants used the same language when they talked about the need to be “on” around campers. As in my study, Smith’s participants reported that they were expected to simulate positive emotions around campers when they were tired, stressed, or simply not excited to be at camp that day. However, staff members in my study also stated that taking on a camp persona allowed them to explore different sides of their personality. In particular, staff members were expected to be playful and silly. Some staff members said that being playful was part of what appealed to them about working at camp.
Staff members’ relationships with campers were not limited to being playful. Several staff members stated that working at camp gave them the chance to make a positive difference in campers’ lives. Some saw their work as a chance to give back to a camp that had helped them as youth. For many staff members, making personal connections with campers who needed them suggested that their work at camp was important and meaningful. L. J. Smith (1985) also found that camp staff members valued their relationships with campers and were proud of being able to make a difference in campers’ lives.

Since camp staff worked with children, the homophobic stereotype that all LGBT individuals were sexual predators directly affected LGBT staff members at camp. Some staff members worried that their LGBT status might make them natural targets for accusations of abuse. In response, a few staff purposefully positioned themselves against the stereotype by altering their behavior and ensuring that they were never alone with children. Some research about teachers has also found that they took steps to seem more harmless because of the stereotype that LGBT individuals molest children (e.g., Jackson, 2007; J. R. King, 2004).

In addition to their relationships with campers, staff members also highlighted the importance of their relationships with other staff. Prior research about summer camp staff (e.g., Bialeschki, et al., 1998; L. J. Smith, 1985) found that friendships were an important part of the summer camp experience. The data from my study support those findings. Many staff members that I spoke with said that they made good friends at camp. Some people
described friends they made at camp as their best friends. The intense nature of the camp experience, the awareness that camp would last only for the summer, and living in close proximity to one another helped to facilitate strong friendships.

Although existing research has addressed friendships among staff members at camp, little research has addressed romantic relationships, which comprise an important part of the residential camp context. Romantic relationships at camp were common. Each participant in my study reported that they occurred at his or her camp. In his book about sexuality at camp, Shelton (2004) stated that based on his conversations with camp directors, he believed that staff members were commonly engaging in sexual relationships at camp. The findings in my study supported Shelton, as staff that I interviewed indicated that they and others routinely engaged in sexual and romantic relationships.

Learning to manage romantic relationships is a developmental goal for all emerging adults (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). Some staff members came out to themselves or began their first same sex relationship at camp. For such staff, their romantic relationships at camp played a pivotal role in their development as lesbian, gay, or bisexual individuals. The camp atmosphere and the presence of other out LGBT staff affected staff members’ coming out experience. Staff members who came out at homophobic camps felt isolated from their coworkers and had a more difficult time. Staff members who worked at camps where there were other out LGBT staff said that they valued being able to talk with others about their coming out experience. These findings are in line with Muñoz-Plaza,
Quinn, and Rounds (2002), who found that when LGB youth knew other LGBT individuals, it their coming out process was greatly eased. In their study and mine, the difference between knowing other out LGBT individuals comprised the difference between coming out alone and coming out into a community.

Sometimes romance at camp caused conflict. Staff members commonly used the term “drama” to refer to fallout from romantic relationships at camp. Drama happened among both same sex and heterosexual couples, and was described in similar terms in either case. Examples of drama included staff members who were newly together and infatuated, jealousy between staff members, infidelity, fighting, or breaking up.

Managing an LGBT identity became more complex for those staff members who dated members of the same sex at camp. Since staff members lived at camp, limiting disclosure of a relationship with another coworker took a great effort. At homophobic camps that did not allow LGBT staff members, dating members of the same sex was especially risky since disclosure or discovery of the relationship could lead to being fired.

Tolerant camps did hire LGBT staff members but did not allow campers to know that these staff were present. At such camps, being in a romantic relationship with members of the same sex sometimes increased the risk that campers would find out about LGBT staff at camp. Older campers such as Counselors in Training (CITs) and Junior Counselors (JCs) were especially likely to find out about LGBT staff members at camp because they sometimes
gained access to camp gossip through friendships with staff members who were close in age.

Identity management for LGBT staff members at camp was affected by various aspects of the camp context. The presence of minors at camp complicated identity management for LGBT staff, both because of the existing stereotype that conflates LGBT individuals with pedophiles and also because some camps barred staff members from disclosing their LGBT status to campers. Staff members who were closeted to staff or campers found the task of identity management to be more complex because of an increased need for caution in their speech and actions. The additional caution sometimes adversely affected staff members’ relationships with campers, but more often affected staff members’ friendships and romantic relationships. Prior experience with homophobia also sometimes made staff members more careful.

Prior Experience

LGBT staff members’ prior experience influenced their actions and their interpretation of events at camp as well as their strategies for identity management. Since identity management strategies depended on an individual’s assessment of how likely they were to encounter homophobia, prior experience with homophobia encouraged more caution on the part of LGBT staff members. Prior experience especially affected staff members’ decisions about disclosure. In Griffith and Hebl’s (2002) study, LGBT individuals who were out to fewer people at home were more reluctant to come out to their
coworkers. Staff members in my study also followed this pattern. In some cases, prior experience with homophobia was a more important determinant of staff members’ behavior than the atmosphere at his or her particular camp. For instance, one staff member at a supportive camp remained entirely closeted her first summer in spite of the camp being LGBT friendly because she was afraid of encountering homophobia if she disclosed her status.

Staff members’ previous experiences at camp also affected their identity management strategies. Some staff members said that having worked previously at an LGBT friendly camp made them more likely to disclose their status to other staff members the following summer. In addition, some camps afforded their LGBT staff members their first experience of a welcoming environment and their first encounter with peers who accepted their LGBT status. Staff members said that expressing themselves more authentically at camp was often easier. Stevens (2004) similarly found that college students who were able to experience a welcoming environment and an LGBT friendly support network were able to feel more comfortable with their LGBT identity.

Other camps were less LGBT friendly. Some staff members who had experiences at homophobic camps said that after leaving those camps they specifically chose to work within more LGBT friendly environments. Prior experience at homophobic camps also made some staff members more cautious and less willing to disclose their LGBT status within their new, more friendly camp environment after seeking employment at a different camp.
Disclosure

Each person that I interviewed indicated that he or she had a specific strategy or a suite of strategies for managing disclosure of their LGBT status. Most staff members sought to control who learned about their LGBT status and how they learned of it. Concerns about others’ possible homophobic attitudes may drive the process of either coming out to others or remaining closeted (Griffith & Hebl, 2002), and my study uncovered these concerns. Wherever possible, most staff members disclosed their LGBT status only to those who were the friendliest towards LGBT individuals. Staff said that they read behavioral cues to determine who might be LGBT friendly, but this process was guesswork. Some staff members said that they worried about guessing wrong and coming out to someone who did not approve.

Managing identity became an onerous task for the staff members I interviewed who were completely closeted at camp. Griffin (1992) also found that being closeted from others at work necessitated constant effort. Teachers in Griffin’s study who were closeted switched pronouns when talking about past and present significant others, refrained from talking about what they did on weekends, and were careful not to mention a significant other’s name too often. Participants in my study reported that being closeted required maintaining the same care in their speech.

Staff members at camp used strategies to control disclosure of their LGBT status to others. The strategies that they chose varied based on the reaction that they expected.
These strategies included lying, omitting information, disclosing revealing details, or directly announcing their LGBT status. Woods (1993) and Button (2004) found similar strategies when examining disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace. The workers that Woods and Button studied either counterfeited a straight identity, avoided the discussion of anything that might reveal sexual orientation, or integrated their LGBT identity into their workplace. As in my study, Woods and Button found that workers used various strategies depending on the situation. LGBT camp staff members tried to read others’ cues correctly to choose the strategy that was most appropriate. For example, some camp staff members would disclose their status to most of the staff, but remain closeted to those staff members that they considered to be the least friendly. Other staff disclosed revealing details to most staff, but directly announced their status to a coworker if this strategy proved to be too subtle.

If LGBT staff misread others’ cues and came out to a staff member who disapproved, they literally had to live with their mistake because of the housing situation at camp. The camp staff members interviewed in my study sometimes expressed their hesitation to come out to their co-workers for fear of making their living situation untenable. Several staff members in my study said that they tried to make certain that the other staff member would react positively before disclosing their status specifically because they worried about living with someone who had reacted badly.
Disclosure was affected by the atmosphere at camp for LGBT staff members, but the presence or absence of out staff also influenced the camp atmosphere. Good treatment of other out staff members provided the clearest evidence that disclosure of one’s LGBT status would not be penalized. Staff used the presence of out LGBT co-workers or supervisors as one of their primary hallmarks of an LGBT-friendly atmosphere. This finding is in line with Ragins and Cornwell (2001) who found that employees perceived less discrimination in workplaces with a higher proportion of openly lesbian or gay supervisors or co-workers. K. Schmidt (2008) also found that the presence of out coworkers made lesbian employees feel safer regardless of whether they disclosed their status. The presence of other out staff members at camp encouraged LGBT staff members to disclose their own LGBT status. Some staff members in my study stated that they were reluctant to disclose their status at first but then came out after observing that other out staff members were treated well. The presence of out staff members created a more LGBT friendly atmosphere at camp.

Atmosphere at Camp

Each camp provided a different atmosphere for the LGBT staff members who worked there, which further impacted how they managed their identity. The atmosphere at camps in this sample fell on a continuum with some camps barring LGBT staff members from employment and other camps specifically seeking to hire them. Staff members’ experiences clustered based on two policies: whether camps hired LGBT staff members and whether staff members were allowed to disclose the presence of LGBT staff to campers.
assigned camps to the categories of homophobic, tolerant, or supportive based on their policies. Homophobic camps did not allow LGBT staff members to work at camp. Tolerant camps allowed LGBT staff to work there, but did not allow campers to know that LGBT staff members were present. Supportive camps allowed campers (and by extension, their parents) to know about the presence of LGBT staff members at camp.

_Homophobic_.

LGBT staff members at homophobic camps either stayed entirely closeted or faced the possibility of sanctions that included being fired. The policies at the three homophobic camps differed. They ranged from one camp with a written contract which barred LGBT staff members to another where the director stated that LGBT staff would be “a problem” at camp and thus could not be employed there.

As was stated earlier, the work of managing disclosure intensified when staff members were entirely closeted. The need to remain closeted created a source of stress and fear for all LGBT staff members at homophobic camps. Other researchers have had similar findings. Ragins and Cornwell (2001) found that workers who feared more negative consequences for disclosing their LGBT status reported higher levels of stress. Staff members at homophobic camps in my study reported feeling stressed and fearful that people would learn about their LGBT status. Staff members at tolerant camps who were closeted to other staff members also reported that they worried about others finding out about their LGBT status, but did not report the same intensity of fearfulness as staff at
homophobic camps. Camp staff members also said that the need to remain closeted made forming friendships more difficult. As a result of their non-disclosure closeted staff members felt isolated from the rest of the staff.

In spite of difficulties, staff members who worked at the most homophobic camps in this sample emphasized that they enjoyed their time at camp. Every staff member at a homophobic camp in this sample reapplied to return to their camp the following year, although none of them worked at the same camp again.

The willingness of staff members at homophobic camps to reapply for the next summer surprised me more than any other finding. However, all three staff members had attended their camp as a child. Each staff member expressed how difficult it was for them not to return the next summer to a camp they loved. The staff members at homophobic camps paid the price of more difficult identity management because of their love for camp. For these staff members, returning to a camp that they cared about was more important than working in an LGBT friendly environment.

The staff members who worked at homophobic camps spoke about their experiences as LGBT staff members with distress. However, the staff members also prioritized other camp benefits over working in an LGBT friendly environment. The staff members cared about their camps and said they felt valued because they considered themselves to be good at their jobs. They indicated that the focus of their camp experience was on the campers rather than on their LGBT status.
Staff members at homophobic camps managed their LGBT identity in the context of an openly hostile work environment. Managing one’s LGBT identity at camp can be difficult under the best circumstances. Staff members at homophobic camps faced the most serious consequences for disclosure in an environment in which no out LGBT staff members provided support. LGBT staff members at homophobic camps reported the highest levels of fear, and said that being closeted adversely affected their friendships.

**Tolerant.**

I assigned the label of tolerant to camps that hired LGBT staff members but did not allow staff members to disclose the presence of LGBT staff to campers. Most of the camps represented in the sample for my study were tolerant camps. Staff members at tolerant camps described their camps using the terms “friendly” and “open” but some of those same staff members described policies that were applied differently to LGBT staff.

At tolerant camps, campers were not barred from knowing about the presence of straight staff members; because of heterosexual assumption, all staff members were presumed to be straight. Straight staff members indicated that they were currently or had been in relationships with members of a different sex were not perceived to be disclosing their sexual orientation, although they were. However LGB staff members who discussed having had relationships with members of the same sex were considered to have disclosed their sexual orientation and to be talking about sex, which they were not. The effect of the differing perceptions was that ostensibly evenhanded policies were not applied fairly.
between straight staff and LGBT staff members. The double standard meant that staff members were reprimanded when campers learned about the presence of LGBT staff members. No equivalent offense was apparent for straight staff.

Many tolerant camps also had restrictions against staff members discussing personal matters with campers. The definition of what was considered personal varied between straight staff members and those who were LGBT. For the most part, straight staff members were allowed to disclose that they had a girlfriend or boyfriend, and husbands and wives openly lived and worked together at camp. Staff members at tolerant camps did not report any instance where staff who were dating or married to members of the same sex were allowed the same latitude. LGBT individuals were sexualized (Gust & Warren, 2008), and sexual topics are not considered to be appropriate for children. The disclosure of one’s LGBT status was considered personal information that should not be discussed with campers. The policy had the effect of silencing staff members about LGBT issues. In an atmosphere where heterosexuality is normative, silence on LGBT topics sends a message to children that reinforces the stigmatization of those who are LGBT (Ferfolja, 2007).

When staff members were not allowed to discuss the presence of LGBT staff members the possibility of active interventions in homophobia and heteronormativity at camp were foreclosed. The possibility of making LGBT identity ordinary was removed. DePalma and Atkinson found that LGB teachers (2009) could reduce the incidence of homophobic slurs in their classrooms when they discussed their same sex partners in the
course of everyday conversation. Simply banning anti-gay epithets was less effective
(Atkinson & DePalma, 2009) because it left LGBT issues intact as a taboo topic. This situation
appeared to be the same at camps.

Some staff in my study made their own arguments for why LGBT staff members
should not disclose their status to campers. Several staff members suggested that disclosing
their sexual orientation to a camper was tantamount to discussing sex. This reflected a
heteronormative attitude, since being openly gay necessitates the disclosure of no more
personal information than does being openly straight. The staff members did not believe
that their straight coworkers were disclosing their sexual orientation or sharing personal
information when they discussed significant others of a different sex.

Often the policy to keep campers from learning about LGBT staff members was
framed by staff as necessary to keep parents from learning about their presence. Some staff
that I interviewed felt that parents would equate LGBT staff members with child molesters,
and pull their children out of camp. Whether angry parents would have caused a mass
exodus from camp because of the presence of LGBT staff was difficult to know. The effect
on each camp might depend on the prevailing attitudes of camp families. In 2005, a national
Gallup poll found that 42% of respondents said that “homosexuals should not be hired” as
elementary school teachers, while 54% stated that they should (Gallup, 2005). Some of the
staff members in my study did relate isolated incidents of angry parents who had learned
about the presence of LGBT camp staff. None of the incidents seemed to have caused
lasting harm to the camp in question. In addition, none of the staff at supportive camps, where LGBT staff members could disclose their identity to campers, related any incidents with angry parents. The isolated nature of incidents at tolerant camps and the lack of them at supportive camps suggested to me that the fear of angry parents may have been disproportionate to the harm that they would have caused.

When individuals or institutions adopt heteronormative attitudes or policies, the process of privileging heterosexuality is rendered invisible. As several staff members pointed out, the policy at tolerant camps of not allowing LGBT staff members to disclose their identity to campers robbed children who were questioning their sexuality or those who already identified as LGBT of positive adult role models. Some staff stated that when they had been campers, they felt more isolated because their counselors were closeted at camp. The staff who had been former campers said that they wished they had been able to talk with LGBT camp staff. Children of LGBT parents were also poorly served through this policy. Privileging heterosexuality as the norm may have contributed to camps’ neglect of the needs of these campers.

In spite of sometimes being treated differently, staff members at tolerant camps each described their camp as being LGBT friendly. Many staff did not seem to notice a discrepancy between the differential treatment that they reported and the description of their camp as LGBT friendly. This finding is similar to Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger (2009), who interviewed LGB individuals who worked at self-described gay friendly workplaces.
Although the participants in the study all described their workplaces as gay-friendly, the actual conditions at their place of work varied. Many of their study participants stated that they could not be visibly LGBT in their workplace, including one participant who said that she needed to “tread lightly (p.36)” and was unable to mention her sexuality because it would make the people she worked with uncomfortable. Williams, et al. termed such workplaces as the “gay-friendly closet,” where LGB individuals were allowed in the workplace, but only if they were rendered invisible through heteronormativity. Staff members at tolerant camps might also be considered to inhabit a gay-friendly closet. Since heteronormativity works by virtue of defining heterosexuality as normal and anything else as other, staff members who themselves adopt heteronormative attitudes may have failed to note discrepancies in how they were treated.

Staff members who worked at homophobic camps experienced homophobia most directly since LGBT staff members at such camps were subject to being fired because of their LGBT status, an inarguably homophobic practice. Staff members at tolerant camps were aware of the existence of such camps and some staff explicitly compared their camps to homophobic camps when assessing the atmosphere for LGBT staff at their camp. The favorable comparison had the effect of minimizing the existence of homophobic policies and practices at tolerant camps. In this way the existence of homophobic camps provided cover for homophobic practices at tolerant camps because such practices were arguably better than a more homophobic alternative.
LGBT staff members at tolerant camps managed their identity in an atmosphere that was not as repressive as homophobic camps. Since tolerant camps required that staff members remain closeted to campers, part of the task of identity management required engaging in strategies that limited disclosure. While some staff members at tolerant camps remained closeted, others disclosed their status to the entire staff. Many of the strategies to limit disclosure were the same at homophobic camps as at tolerant camps, but staff members did not report the same levels of fear. The playful practice of creating lists of which staff members were LGBT suggested that being LGBT at tolerant camps was not an entirely serious matter. The somewhat speculative nature of the lists also suggested that even for out staff members, determining others’ LGBT status was not easy. In spite of occasional homophobic incidents and heteronormative expectations, LGBT staff members at tolerant camps described their camps as LGBT friendly. These descriptions, however, were different from those at fully supportive camps.

Supportive.

Supportive camps both hired LGBT staff members and allowed them to disclose their LGBT status to campers. LGBT staff members at supportive camps encountered a range of practices, from a camp where some staff members were out to campers to a camp that purposely hired LGBT staff to help provide program related to LGBT issues. When staff members were allowed to disclose their identity to campers, the threat of being dismissed because of the disclosure of one’s LGBT status was entirely removed.
Some supportive camps still prohibited staff members from discussing “personal” information with campers, especially discussion of anything that related to sex. However, the disclosure of sexual orientation was not considered personal. The camp director at one of the supportive camps made an explicit distinction between staff members disclosing the details about their sex life and staff members disclosing their sexual orientation. The former was considered inappropriate to discuss with campers, but staff members were free to disclose their sexual orientation.

Managing identity at supportive camps was easier in the sense that there were no job-threatening consequences for disclosure. Although the camp administration may have been supportive, individuals at camp sometimes were not. The presence of homophobia and heteronormativity still necessitated LGBT identity management at supportive camps, but the supportive structures at such camps reduced the impact.

LGBT staff members at homophobic, tolerant, and supportive camps all managed their identity in anticipation of encountering homophobia. Heteronormative structures that framed heterosexuality as an accepted norm and an LGBT identity as a sexualized or politicized “other” sometimes had the effect of hiding discrimination from view, especially when LGBT staff members themselves took on heteronormative attitudes. The amount of labor and stress associated with maintaining an LGBT identity was lessened at more supportive camps. Prior experience with homophobia and maintaining non-disclosure also increased the labors that staff members needed to maintain an LGBT identity at camp.
Homophobia, Heteronormativity, and LGBT Identity Management at Camp

Heteronormativity is deeply embedded in the culture within the United States (Nielsen, et al., 2000). Thus, the residential summer camp context resides within a larger context of homophobia and heteronormativity. Since heterosexuality is cast as the norm and other sexualities as other, the presence of heteronormativity has the effect of limiting the perception of what is possible (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009). Many of the staff members who worked at tolerant camps did not even seem to consider the possibility that camp staff members could be out to campers and could discuss LGBT issues with them. Common sense understandings based in heteronormative attitudes limited the imagination and served to hide the presence of homophobic policies that penalized LGBT individuals for infractions that had no equivalent for straight staff (e.g., coming out to campers).

The labor that staff members engaged in to manage their LGBT identity at camp was only necessary because of the presence of homophobia and heteronormativity. Straight staff members generally would not have needed to be concerned with the issues that caused LGBT staff to engage in identity management. For example, straight staff members do not worry about what would happen to them if their campers identified as heterosexual. Similarly, straight staff members do need to be concerned, nor do they likely think about whether parents would pull their children out of camp because of the presence of heterosexual staff members. Some LGBT staff members did worry about such issues, and sought to minimize the effects of such concerns through LGBT identity management.
strategies. Since the purpose of identity management was to reduce the impact of homophobia or heteronormativity, LGBT identity management would be unnecessary in the absence of homophobic or heteronormative structures and attitudes.

As long as the summer camp context resides within a homophobic and heteronormative society, LGBT staff members will manage their identity to minimize its effects. As such, LGBT staff members may not be able to relinquish identity management so long as summer camp exists within the context of a homophobic and heteronormative society. However, measures taken at supportive camps in this sample demonstrated that camps can work to counter homophobic and heteronormative attitudes and practices.

Limitations

Despite these important findings, my study had several limitations. The most important limitations were related to my sample. I interviewed 28 participants, but my sample largely consisted of females. Only three males and one participant who identified as gender queer were interviewed. I also recruited only one transgender participant.

Ragins, Cornwell and Miller (2003) found that gender did not affect how much discrimination LGB employees reported. However, J. R. King found (2004) that gay men reported that since men who worked with young children were already under suspicion for possible sexual abuse, being gay only made others more suspicious. Possibly larger samples of males would have helped shed light on whether males managed their LGBT identity differently from females at camp.
Transgender individuals commonly have difficulty because of gender segregated spaces (Barclay & Scott, 2006; Schilt & Connell, 2007), and residential camps often include living spaces, showers, and bathrooms that are segregated by gender. It is possible that transgender staff members at summer camp may be affected by the gender segregation at camp. With only one transgender participant, my study may contribute little understanding of the experience of transgender staff members at residential summer camp.

The types of camps represented in this sample constituted another limitation in my study. For example, no boys’ camps were in the sample. Maybe, with more male staff members, the experience of LGBT staff members at boys’ camps is different from the staff represented in my sample. Ragins, et al. (2003) found that LGB employees reported encountering more homophobia in the workplace when supervisors were male or when coworkers were mostly male.

These limitations may have influenced some of the implications for management. Administrators seeking to use the theorizing in this study should consider the result of my study in light of the limitations that were present.

Implications for Management

Camp administrators understandably focus on maximizing the benefits that they provide to campers. However, the emerging adults on staff can be important beneficiaries of camp programs. Many of the staff members I interviewed said that camp provided them with challenging and meaningful work that encouraged them to grow and mature. This
section concludes with policy recommendations for camps that wish to provide environments that are LGBT friendly.

Benefits of a Supportive Environment

Camps that provide a supportive environment for LGBT staff members can benefit both staff members and campers. Employees in LGBT friendly environments exhibit better mental health (N. G. Smith & Ingram, 2004) and workers who are out to more coworkers have been found to be more committed to their organization and have higher levels of job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Results from my study indicate that a supportive environment also lessens the necessary energy and effort required to manage LGBT identity at camp. That effort can then be put into ensuring positive outcomes for campers.

Emerging adults who work at camp are usually at a pivotal time in their development. For many emerging adults, summer camp is their first job. For others, it may be their first extended stay away from home. Some staff in my study said that their experience at summer camp introduced them for the first time to an LGBT friendly environment where they felt like they could be themselves. Encountering an LGBT friendly environment can help LGBT individuals who are newly out to themselves to feel more empowered and more comfortable with their LGBT status (Stevens, 2004).

In a supportive environment where LGBT staff members can disclose their status, LGBT or questioning campers can connect with a positive role model who is also LGBT. The acknowledged presence of LGBT staff can help children of LGBT parents feel more welcome
at camp. Straight campers may also benefit from knowing an openly LGBT adult. The supportive environment would serve all campers, but perhaps most strongly affect those campers and CITs who identify as LGBT or questioning. LGBT and questioning youth benefit when they are able to have adults who are LGBT as positive role models (Muñoz-Plaza, et al., 2002).

Finally, a camp that is supportive of LGBT individuals has the potential to be a more just and equitable environment for staff and campers. Organizations sometimes describe their camp as an intentional community. As an intentional community, camps can decide that they value all of their community members regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The outcomes suggest some policy recommendations for creating a more supportive camp for LGBT staff and campers.

Policy Recommendations

Camp administrators may wish to carefully assess their policies and how they are applied. Examining policies and procedures can address both written policy and the formal and informal ways in which policies are applied. Some staff members stated that they learned about LGBT policies and procedures through written policies and staff orientation. However, staff members also learned about what was allowable through informal channels such as casual conversation and observation of the behavior of supervisors and other staff members.
Since creating a positive environment for LGBT staff and campers has the potential to provide many benefits, camp administrators may wish to take positive steps to create a more LGBT friendly environment. Some of the suggestions, such as those related to health coverage for same sex partners, may need to be addressed at an organizational level. Camp administrators may be in a position to request or advocate such changes but may not be able to implement the recommendations themselves. Depending on the atmosphere within each camp’s sponsoring organization, some of the recommendations in this section may be controversial. Based on the findings of my study, as well as other sources, I would like to suggest the following policy recommendations.

First, camp administrators may wish to include sexual orientation and gender identity in their Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement. Two staff members in my study stated that they checked for the presence of an LGBT inclusive EEO when deciding where to apply. Schmidt (2008) found that workers often use EEO statements as well as other written policies as a marker to tell potential employees about the culture of the organization.

Another recommendation would be to include sexual orientation and gender identity in the organization’s anti-harassment policy and bullying policy. Including such protections the camp’s written policy sends a message that harassment or bullying based on sexual orientation or gender is unacceptable. The policy would also benefit both straight and LGBT youth at camp, since bullying often uses anti-gay language, and anti-gay bullying
has been found to be more distressing to youth regardless of sexual orientation (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008).

I also recommend allowing LGBT staff members to disclose their LGBT status to youth at camp as well as to their parents. As one of the directors at a supportive camp in my study did, administrators can make a clear distinction between discussing sexual or gender identity and discussing sex. This distinction would have the effect of eliminating many of the disparities that come with a policy that allows straight staff to disclose their sexual orientation but restricts LGBT staff members from doing the same. In addition, this change in policy would allow LGBT staff members to serve as role models for the LGBT youth who attend camp.

Diversity training that covers LGBT related issues can help to equip staff with the knowledge and understanding that they need to work with LGBT or questioning youth and with children of LGBT parents. This training can help staff members be more effective with campers and also signals to staff members that LGBT individuals are valued at camp.

Since residential camps are frequently highly gender segregated living spaces, camps would need to negotiate allocating spaces to be inclusive of transgender staff and campers. Colleges and universities have dealt with similar issues by providing access to gender neutral restrooms and changing their rules and regulations (Tilsley, 2010). Schlit and Connell (2007) found that access to physical spaces like bathrooms, showers, and locker rooms can be an important part of inclusiveness within the workplace. However, the authors also
found that being admitted into gendered social spaces at work was important to their participants. Camp administrators can deal with both issues by being forthright and flexible and reaffirming their commitment to inclusion.

All but one staff member in my study were seasonal employees and not eligible for the benefits extended to full time staff members. However, camps do employ full time staff. Camps may wish to include domestic partnership benefits for full time staff members. Domestic partnership benefits often include health insurance, dental insurance, and life insurance. Since same sex marriages are not currently recognized nationwide, domestic partnership benefits can help fill the gap. Organizations that are located in states that recognize same sex marriages may need to discuss same sex partnership benefits with their insurance provider to ensure that employees and their families are covered. Other benefits for full time staff members like bereavement leave often define specific family relationships to qualify. Agencies that have these policies may need to examine them to be sure they are equitable. Policies about who may live with a full time staff member at camp can also be examined to ensure that they are fair to full time staff members of any sexual orientation.

Finally, camp administrators may wish to advocate for change within the profession of organized camping. One avenue for change resides with the leadership of the American Camp Association (ACA). The ACA is the largest professional organization for camp administrators and sets accreditation standards for the camp industry. The ACA has stated as its position that camps should decide for themselves whether to employ LGBT staff
members (M. Mayo, 2003; Miller & Conrad, 1996). Discrimination against LGBT individuals is not a bar to ACA accreditation. In addition, the ACA has not yet taken a leadership role to advocate that camps train staff about LGBT related diversity issues. The ACA’s accreditation standards do suggest that camps provide staff members with training about issues related to race/ethnicity “to help staff recognize and value individual differences within groups, particularly in relation to the camper populations served (American Camping Association, 2007, p. 151).” The accreditation standards also suggest that camp administrators should recruit and hire staff and administrators who reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the camper population “to provide staff members as role models and resources for minority populations served” (p. 151). LGBT campers would also benefit if the ACA encouraged camps to provide diversity training that included LGBT issues and to recruit LGBT staff members to serve as role models.

Future Research

In addition to policy issues, researchers should continue to explore summer camp and summer camp staff members. For example, future research could address romantic relationships at camp. While some research about summer camp staff members has found that friendships represent an important part of camp for staff members (e.g., Bialeschki, et al., 1998; L. J. Smith, 1985), little research has examined romantic relationships at camp. Research about romantic relationships could explore both positive and negative
consequences of romance at camp and need not be limited to staff members who identify as LGBT.

Future research about LGBT staff members could focus on transgender staff or campers. Transgender individuals are underrepresented in much research, and the population has been almost entirely neglected within the field of leisure research. Transgender individuals often have difficulties when facilities are segregated by gender, especially if their appearance does not conform entirely to societal expectations of gender (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Living spaces in residential camps are also generally segregated by gender, so transgender staff members and campers would have similar problems. Increased understanding of the transgender populations in leisure settings such as summer camp would potentially help practitioners provide appropriate services to constituents and help administrators manage more appropriately. Transgender campers were among the topics covered in two of the American Camp Association’s (2009, 2010) newsletters. The articles were written in response to camp administrators’ calls to the ACA hotline about what camps should do when faced with transgender campers. Additional research may help camp administrators as well as leisure service providers in other settings when serving transgender youth. For instance, children’s activities are often explicitly or implicitly segregated by gender, but research has indicated that transgender youth express interests that are not limited to those expected for either male or female youth (Grossman, O’Connell, & D’Augelli, 2005).
Another avenue for future research regards the position of LGBT camp administrators. Since my study focused on emerging adults, most staff members were line staff or mid-level administrators. However, some staff members stated that camp directors who were LGBT had a more difficult time than they did and that their directors were forced to be more closeted than the rest of the staff. Since camp directors serve as the main representative of the camp, LGBT directors may be in a more vulnerable position. This area merits further research. In addition, staff members in my study indicated that camp directors had a great influence over the camp’s atmosphere for LGBT staff. Camp directors’ influence on the atmosphere at camp could also be explored to learn more about their attitudes towards LGBT staff.

Additional research could also be directed towards policy. Researchers could examine which policies have the most impact, positive or negative, on LGBT staff and campers. Researchers could also assess what policies currently exist and how those policies are implemented. The findings from my study indicated that much policy, including written policy, is communicated to staff members through informal means such as casual conversation. Further research could examine what does and does not get transmitted through such informal networks.

Finally, future research could focus on parents. Staff members in my study expressed fear that parents would not approve of LGBT staff members and that if parents knew about the presence of LGBT staff members, they might pull their children out of camp.
Research about parental attitudes towards LGBT summer camp staff would allow camp administrators to make decisions based on a better understanding of parental attitudes towards LGBT staff. In addition, future research could explore the accuracy of camp administrators’ estimation of parental attitudes towards LGBT staff.

Conclusion

The time and effort that staff members invested in LGBT identity management were mostly aimed at minimizing the chances that they would suffer the consequences of others’ homophobia. In the absence of any concerns about homophobia, LGBT staff members might not have engaged in most of the behaviors associated with identity management. Staff members at the most supportive camps engaged in less labor to manage their LGBT identity at camp.

Whether staff members were teaching songs, dressing up for skits, or eating unpalatable food, each LGBT staff member was focused on the camp experience. However, staff members’ LGBT identity was inextricable from their role identities as camp staff. Existing homophobic and heteronormative structures at camp and in society dictated that staff manage their LGBT identity. This LGBT identity management at camp was affected by the residential camp context, staff members’ prior experience, staff members’ level of disclosure, and the atmosphere at their particular camp for LGBT individuals. My study provided important information about the LGBT experience at camp. My theorizing has the potential to be applied to other youth-serving leisure based settings.
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APPENDIX A - Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

The experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender

Principal Investigator: Linda Oakleaf, lloaklea@ncsu.edu
Faculty sponsor: Karla Henderson, kahender@ncsu.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, (LGBT) or non-heterosexual. The study will examine the meanings that LGBT staff attach to their camp experience and in what ways staff members’ LGBT status may affect their camp experience.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute in-person interview. The interviews will take place at a location of your choosing. This should be a private place where you feel free to speak openly without being overheard. The initial interview will be audio-recorded and I will also be taking notes. All audio-recordings will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and a password protected computer. All labels will use pseudonyms.

At the conclusion of the interview, you will be asked whether you are willing to be contacted later by e-mail in order to set up an additional interview. This second interview will be done via telephone by the researcher to help her understand or clarify your responses from the initial interview. Further contact is not expected to last more than 30 minutes. If you do desire to participate in this second interview, you should arrange to take your phone call in a private place where you feel secure and can speak openly. If you do not wish to be contacted at a later date, you should know that this initial interview will still be an important addition to this research.

Risks
Some of the topics discussed may create slight discomfort or stress but I anticipated this to be minimal. To reduce the risk of being overheard we are meeting in a private location where this worry may be minimized. If you agree to a follow-up interview, and I call you, I will encourage you to have the phone conversation in a private location. Also, to reduce potential risks, all identifying details such as your name, the name of the camp, or the camp’s location will be changed for any reports or publication of this research. You and your camp will be provided with randomly chosen pseudonyms. The camp location will be reported in any publications very generally (for instance, “Camp Happytimes, in the southern United States…”).
**Benefits**
No direct benefit is expected, however there is little known about LGBT summer camp staff or indeed LGBT staff in other leisure settings. An increased understanding of the experience of LGBT staff at summer camp may help camp administrators support LGBT staff members more effectively.

**Confidentiality**
The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and in a password protected computer. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. In addition to this Consent form, you will NOT be asked to write your name on any other study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. Your signed consent form will be stored in a locked cabinet, separately from any study materials. All participants will be given a randomly chosen pseudonym, which will be used in transcripts of your interview and in any publication. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records. At the conclusion of the study, transcripts and recordings from your interview(s) will be destroyed. FYI: The conclusion of the study may extend beyond the dissertation to the publication of the study.

**Compensation**
You will not receive anything for participating.

**What if you are a NCSU student?**
Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

**What if you are a NCSU employee?**
Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

**What if you have questions about this study?**
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Linda Oakleaf at lloakle@ncsu.edu, or 336-460-2032.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

**Consent To Participate**
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject’s signature__________________________________________ Date _______________

Investigator’s signature________________________________________ Date _______________
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION (Administrative Review)

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. **Date Submitted:** 7/2/09
2. **Title of Project:** The experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender
3. **Principal Investigator:** Linda Oakleaf
4. **Department:** Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management
5. **Campus Box Number:** 8004
6. **E-mail:** lloaklea@ncsu.edu
7. **Phone Number:** 919-827-1206
8. **Fax Number:** 919-515-3687
9. **Faculty Sponsor Name and E-mail Address if Student Submission:** Karla Henderson, kahender@ncsu.edu
10. **Source of Funding? (required information):** No funding
11. **Is this research receiving federal funding?:** No
12. **If Externally funded, include sponsor name and university account number:** N/A
13. **RANK:**
   - Faculty
   - Student: Undergraduate; Masters; or PhD
   - Other (specify): 

As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

**Principal Investigator:**

*Linda Oakleaf*  
(typed/printed name)  
Linda Oakleaf *  
(signature)  
7/2/09  
(date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the principal investigator of record.

**Faculty Sponsor:**

*Karla Henderson*  
(typed/printed name)  
Karla Henderson *  
____________________  
(signature)  
7/2/09  
(date)
*Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature

PLEASE COMPLETE AND DELIVER TO:

joe_rabiega@ncsu.edu or Institutional Review Board, Box 7514, NCSU Campus
(Administrative Services III, Room 245)

****************************************************************************

Project Description: (Describe your project by providing a brief summary and answering the requests for information below).

1. Project Summary. Please make sure to include the purpose and rationale for your study as well as all study activities:

Summer camps have been a part of the American landscape for well over a century (Paris, 2008). Most of the research about camp has focused on campers (Schafer, 2007), but there has been a continuing thread of research about camp staff (Smith, 1985). Camps are staffed mostly by emerging adults, those between the ages of 18 and 24 years (Crossen & Yerkes, 1998). Research about camp staff has found that camp can be a site for staff members’ growth as they make friends (Bialeschki, M. D., Henderson, K. A., & Dahowski, K., 1998), increase their confidence, maturity, and problem-solving ability (Garst et al., 2009), and make decisions about their future career (Ferarri & Digby, 2007).

Little of this research has examined whether particular demographic characteristics might be related to staff members’ camp experience. Specifically, little research has examined lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) camp staff or LGBT staff members within any leisure services organization. Researchers have found that LGBT teachers can have a difficult time particularly because their work involves caring for children (e.g., Jackson, 2007). Camp staff members share this characteristic, but the context of summer residential camp may be sufficiently different that the research on teachers may not apply.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) or non-heterosexual. The study will examine the meanings that LGBT staff attach to their camp experience and in what ways staff members’ LGBT status relates to their camp experiences. I will use in-depth, in-person interviews to examine the LGBT staff experience.

2. Description of participant population, including age range, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and any vulnerable populations that will be targeted for enrollment.

The participants for this study will be individuals who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or non-heterosexual, and who have worked at a residential summer camp within the last year. Only participants between the ages of 18 and 24 will qualify for this study. Before being accepted into the study, all participants will be asked whether they meet these criteria. A maximum of two staff members who worked at the same camp together will be permitted to participate in the study. After two have been accepted, no further participants from that camp will be accepted.
3. Description of how potential participants will be approached about the research, and how informed consent will be obtained. Alternatively, provide an explanation of why informed consent will not be obtained.

Rather than contacting summer camps, I will contact LGBT organizations on college campuses seeking members who have worked at camp in the last year. I will ask the campus-based organizations to forward an e-mail and flyer (attached) to their members. Where possible, I will follow up by attending an organizations’ meetings to make an appeal in person.

Campus selection will be based on proximity, beginning with NCSU and colleges nearby and working outward geographically. I will also recruit participants at North Carolina Pride, using the same flyer that I will send to campus organizations. I will also use snowball sampling, asking participants for help with connecting with other LGBT or non-heterosexual camp staff members.

After initial contact and screening, participants will be provided with a consent form that includes my contact information as well as that of the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the use of Human Subjects in Research. Participants will be asked to read the form and sign it before the interview. Participants will be given a copy of the form to refer to if they have questions later. (See attached form)

4. Description of how identifying information will be recorded and associated with data (e.g. code numbers used that are linked via a master list to subjects’ names). Alternatively, provide details on how study data will be collected and stored anonymously (“anonymously” means that there is no link whatsoever between participant identities and data).

I will tape record and later transcribe each interview. All names and identifying information will be changed in the transcripts. The original recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. Digital copies will be kept on my computer only while transcribing. After transcribing, copies will be deleted. The computer that I will use to transcribe interviews is secured through a password.

5. Description of all study procedures, including topics that will be discussed in interviews and/or survey instruments.

Once I obtain written consent, I will conduct face-to-face, in-depth interviews with participants. Interviews will take between 60-90 minutes each. The proposed interview guide is attached. Participants will choose the location for the interviews. This opportunity will hopefully help participants feel more comfortable. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants will be asked whether they are willing to be contacted for further questions to help me in clarifying the ongoing analysis. If they state their willingness, some participants may be contacted by telephone. Further contact is not expected to extend beyond 30 minutes.

6. Will minors (participants under the age of 18) be recruited for this study:

No
7. Is this study funded? No. If yes, please provide the grant proposal or any other supporting documents.

8. Is this study receiving federal funding? No.

9. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project? No.

10. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? No.

11. **HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING**

*Please consider taking the [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative](https://www.citiprogram.org) (CITI), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.

12. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

   a) If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.

   b) Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.

   c) Please provide any additional materials (i.e., recruitment materials) that may aid the IRB in making its decision.

*If a survey instrument or other documents such as a consent form that will be used in the study are available, attach them to this request. If informed consent is not necessary, an information or fact sheet should be considered in order to provide subjects with information about the study. The informed consent form template on the IRB website could be modified into an information or fact sheet.

**The Following are categories the IRB office uses to determine if your project qualifies for exemption** (a review of the categories below may provide guidance about what sort of information is necessary for the IRB office to verify that your research is exempt):

**Exemption Category:** (Choose only one of the following that specifically matches the characteristics of your study that make this project exempt)

- [ ] 1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

*Please Note- this exemption for research involving survey or interview procedures or observations of public behavior does not apply to research conducted with minors, except for research that involves observation of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed.

3. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

4. Research, involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

5. Not applicable

6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration, or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.

Principal Investigator:

Linda Oakleaf  
(typed/printed name)  
Linda Oakleaf *  
(signature)  
7/2/09  
(date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the principal investigator of record.

Faculty Sponsor:

Karla Henderson  
(typed/printed name)  
Karla Henderson *  
(signature)  
7/2/09  
(date)

*Electronic submissions to the IRB are considered signed via an electronic signature.
Project Description: (Describe your project by providing a brief summary and answering the requests for information below).

12. Project Summary. Please make sure to include the purpose and rationale for your study as well as all study activities:

Summer camps have been a part of the American landscape for well over a century (Paris, 2008). Most of the research about camp has focused on campers (Schafer, 2007), but there has been a continuing thread of research about camp staff (Smith, 1985). Camps are staffed mostly by emerging adults, those between the ages of 18 and 24 years (Crossen & Yerkes, 1998). Research about camp staff has found that camp can be a site for staff members’ growth as they make friends (Bialeschki, M. D., Henderson, K. A., & Dahowski, K., 1998), increase their confidence, maturity, and problem-solving ability (Garst et al., 2009), and make decisions about their future career (Ferarri & Digby, 2007).

Little of this research has examined whether particular demographic characteristics might be related to staff members’ camp experience. Specifically, little research has examined lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) camp staff or LGBT staff members within any leisure services organization. Researchers have found that LGBT teachers can have a difficult time particularly because their work involves caring for children (e.g., Jackson, 2007). Camp staff members share this characteristic, but the context of summer residential camp may be sufficiently different that the research on teachers may not apply.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of residential summer camp staff who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) or non-heterosexual. The study will examine the meanings that LGBT staff attach to their camp experience and in what ways staff members’ LGBT status relates to their camp experiences. I will use in-depth, in-person interviews to examine the LGBT staff experience.

13. Description of participant population, including age range, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and any vulnerable populations that will be targeted for enrollment.

The participants for this study will be individuals who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or non-heterosexual, and who have worked at a residential summer camp within the last year. Only participants between the ages of 18 and 24 will qualify for this study. Before being accepted into the study, all participants will be asked whether they meet these criteria. A maximum of two staff members who worked at the same camp together will be permitted to participate in the study. After two have been accepted, no further participants from that camp will be accepted. The researcher will interview between 30 and 40 participants.
14. Description of how potential participants will be approached about the research, and how informed consent will be obtained. Alternatively, provide an explanation of why informed consent will not be obtained.

Rather than contacting summer camps, I will contact LGBT student organizations on college campuses seeking members who have worked at camp in the last year. Campus selection will be based on proximity, beginning with NCSU and colleges nearby and working outward geographically. I will ask the campus-based organizations to forward an e-mail and flyer (attached) to their members.

The recruitment flyer will also be used during snowball sampling. Specifically, I will ask participants to help me connect with other LGBT or non-heterosexual camp staff members. Participants will be asked to give, or e-mail copies; of the flyer to anyone they might think may be appropriate for my study. I will provide them with an electronic version of the flyer for use in e-mailing it out. This type of snowballing will allow for potential participants to choose if they want to contact me or not. To confirm my intended process, I will not ask any participants to provide me with any one’s contact information; I will wait for potential participants to contact me.

After initial e-mail contact and screening (attached), participants will be asked to set up a time and location for the interview. Participants will be provided with a consent form at the time of the interview that includes my contact information as well as that of the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the use of Human Subjects in Research. Participants will be asked to read the form and sign it before the interview. Participants will be given a copy of the form to refer to if they have questions later. (See attached form) Part of the purpose of the informed consent is to ask participants’ if they would give their permission for me to contact them for a follow-up interview. The purpose of the follow-up is to clarify any information that was discussed at the initial interview.

15. Description of how identifying information will be recorded and associated with data (e.g. code numbers used that are linked via a master list to subjects’ names). Alternatively, provide details on how study data will be collected and stored anonymously (“anonymously” means that there is no link whatsoever between participant identities and data).

I will tape record and later transcribe each interview. All names and identifying information of anyone discussed during our interviews will be changed in the transcripts. Names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses and their pseudonyms will be kept in a spreadsheet that is itself secured with a password that is in turn stored on a computer that is also secured through password. The original recordings will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. Digital copies will be kept on my computer only while transcribing. After transcribing, copies will be deleted. The computer that I will use to transcribe interviews is secured through a password.

16. Description of all study procedures, including topics that will be discussed in interviews and/or survey instruments.

Once I obtain written consent, I will conduct face-to-face, in-depth interviews with participants. Interviews will take between 60-90 minutes each. The proposed interview guide
is attached. Participants will choose the location for the interviews. This opportunity will hopefully help participants feel more comfortable. As described in the Consent Form participants will be encouraged to select a location that they feel they will be able to speak freely without having to worry about being overheard by others.

At the conclusion of the interviews, participants will be asked whether they are willing to be contacted for further questions to help me in clarifying the ongoing analysis. These questions will be related to the original research question, and will seek to illuminate an issue that needs to be further explored because it is difficult to understand solely from the original interviews. They will be informed that further contact is not expected to extend beyond 30 minutes. If they state their willingness, I will have the option of contacting them if I need to. The follow-up interview be done by phone and I will ask the participant to arrange to have this phone conversation in a place where they can speak freely, without being overheard.

As stated above, contact information for all participants will be kept in a password-secured Excel spreadsheet that is on a computer that is also secured by password. At the conclusion of the study, the data will be destroyed. The conclusion of the study may extend beyond the dissertation to publication of the study.

17. Will minors (participants under the age of 18) be recruited for this study: 
   No

18. Is this study funded? No. If yes, please provide the grant proposal or any other supporting documents.

19. Is this study receiving federal funding? No.

20. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project? No.

21. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? No.

22. HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING
   *Please consider taking the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.

12. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

   d) If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.

   e) Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.
f) Please provide any additional materials (i.e., recruitment materials) that may aid the IRB in making its decision.

*If a survey instrument or other documents such as a consent form that will be used in the study are available, attach them to this request. If informed consent is not necessary, an information or fact sheet should be considered in order to provide subjects with information about the study. The informed consent form template on the IRB website could be modified into an information or fact sheet.

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Exemption Category: (Choose only one of the following that specifically matches the characteristics of your study that make this project exempt)

☐ 1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

☒ 2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

*Please Note- this exemption for research involving survey or interview procedures or observations of public behavior does not apply to research conducted with minors, except for research that involves observation of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed.

☐ 3. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

☐ 4. Research, involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

☐ 5. Not applicable
6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration, or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
From: Carol Mickelson, IRB Coordinator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: August 28, 2009
Project Title: The Experience of Residential Summer Camp Staff who Self-Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender
IRB#: 1028-09-08

Dear Ms. Linda Oakleaf:

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. **This protocol will expire on August 14, 2010 and will need continuing review before that date.**

NOTE:

1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.

2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.

5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,

Carol Mickelson
NC State IRB
SUBJECT: Research about current or past summer camp staff who are LGBT

Hello,

My name is Linda Oakleaf, and I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University. I am doing a study about LGBT summer camp staff as part of my dissertation.

I wish to reach out to potential participants through student LGBT groups and gay-straight alliances on college campuses. Some of your members may either have been summer camp staff members or else know someone who has worked at residential camp recently. I am hoping that you would be willing to forward this e-mail and the attached flyer to your members.

I have attached the flyer that I'm using to recruit participants to my study. I appreciate your willingness to forward this on to anyone who might qualify or might have contacts who would be appropriate for my study. I'm looking for people who identify as LGBT or non-heterosexual. Participants must be between the ages of 18 and 24, and they need to have worked at a residential camp in the last year. I'm as interested in people who are closeted as those who are out.

I plan to make the interviews both friendly and conversational. I'm looking forward to hearing those stories about camp!

Thanks in advance for doing this. Please let me know if you need any further information about me or about my study.

Sincerely,

Linda Oakleaf

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Linda Oakleaf
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management
North Carolina State University
336-460-2032
lloaklea@ncsu.edu
LGBT Summer Camp Staff

Volunteers needed for a research study about the experience of LGBT or non-heterosexual staff at summer camps.

Who is eligible?
Individuals who are 18-25 who:
- Have worked at a residential or sleep-away camp within the last three years
- Identify oneself as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or non-heterosexual

How will research be conducted?
Should you choose to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one 90-minute interview to share your thoughts and opinions in your own words. During your confidential interview, you will be asked to relate and reflect on your experiences as a staff member at summer camp.

How can I learn more about volunteering?
Complete information about the study will be provided before you participate, and any questions you may have about the research will be answered.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please call Linda Oakleaf at 336-460-2032, or e-mail her at lloaklea@ncsu.edu.

Please pass this on if you know someone you think might meet the criteria for participating in this study.

Thanks!
APPENDIX G - Proposed interview guide

Background question:

- Tell me a little about yourself

Primary questions:

- Tell me about your experience as a staff member at [insert camp name]

Possible probes

- What were your experiences of camp as a child?
- Describe the camp where you worked most recently
- What was your role at camp?
- How did you come to work at camp?
- What did you like most about working at camp?
- What would you have changed about camp if you could?
- What kinds of conflict did you encounter at camp?
- Describe a typical day at [camp name]
  - Was this what you expected?
  - How so/how not?
- What sorts of things did you do in your time off?
- Describe some of the significant relationships you had with people at camp
  - How did your relationships with them change over the course of the summer?
• Who were your best friends at camp?
• Which people (if any) have you maintained contact with?
  o What determined who you did or did not maintain contact with?
• What was the atmosphere at [camp name] like for [insert orientation using respondent’s language]?
  o How did that affect your camp experience?
  o How were other people’s experiences different?
• Were there other people with your sexual orientation (that you knew about) at camp?
• How would you say your experiences as [insert orientation] affected your work as a camp staff member?
• What was the atmosphere at [camp name] like for [insert gender using respondent’s language]?
  o How did that affect your camp experience?
  o How were other people’s experiences different?
• How would you say your experiences as [insert gender identity] affected your work as a camp staff member?
• What else is important for me to know to understand your experiences at camp?

Additional background questions (if not already addressed)
• How would you describe your sexual orientation?
  o How has your sexual orientation changed or remained the same over the years?

• How would you describe your gender identity?
  o (Gender identity can be defined as a person's self-concept as being male and masculine or female and feminine. Some people define themselves as being without a gender, or as having a gender that is neither masculine or feminine.)
  o How has your gender identity changed or remained the same over the years?
APPENDIX H - Final interview guide

Background question:

• Tell me a little about yourself

Primary questions:

• Tell me about your experience as a staff member at [insert camp name]

Possible probes

• What were your experiences of camp as a child?
• Describe the camp where you worked most recently
• What was your role at camp?
• How did you come to work at camp?
• What did you like most about working at camp?
• What would you have changed about camp if you could?
• Describe a typical day at [camp name]
• What sorts of things did you do in your time off?
• Describe some of the significant relationships you had with people at camp
  o How did your relationships with them change over the course of the summer?
• Who were your best friends at camp?
• Which people (if any) have you maintained contact with?
  o What determined who you did or did not maintain contact with?
• What was the atmosphere at [camp name] like for [insert orientation and/or gender identity using respondent’s language]?
  o How did that affect your camp experience?
  o How were other people’s experiences different?

• Were you out at camp?
  o How does that compare to when you’re not at camp?

• What would have happened if a camper had learned that there were [insert sexual orientation and/or gender identity] at camp?

• Were there other people with your sexual orientation (that you knew about) at camp?

• How would you say your experiences as [insert orientation] affected your work as a camp staff member?

• Tell me about dating among the staff.

• What else is important for me to know to understand your experiences at camp?
  o What do you tell people about your experiences at camp?

**Additional background questions (if not already addressed)**

• How would you describe your sexual orientation?
  o How has your sexual orientation changed or remained the same over the years?
• How would you describe your gender identity?
  o (Gender identity can be defined as a person's self-concept as being male and
    masculine or female and feminine. Some people define themselves as being
    without a gender, or as having a gender that is neither masculine or
    feminine.)
  o How has your gender identity changed or remained the same over the years?