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By

Dustine J. Thomas. M. Ed.
December, 2010

QUEERING SILENCE:
A NARRATIVE LOOK AT THE PARALLEL STORIES OF LGBT AND
HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO:
THE FACULTY OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT IN THE REQUIREMENT FOR
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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Acknowledgment

Helen Keller once said “When one door closes another opens. But often we look so long so regretfully upon the closed door that we fail to see the one that has opened for us.” Though I have had plenty of reasons in my life to look at the closed doors of my past it is through the strength of those around me that I am able to see the one which opened and allowed me to write this paper.

I would like to thank my Aunt Pat for giving me a way to see music differently, through this lesson I have had the pleasure of also seeing the world differently.

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Family is a funny word. I remember learning how to spell it by learning the saying father and mother I love you. The reality is that family is so much more than father and mother. Family is the people related to you who support and encourage you to chase your dreams. But family is also the people who come in your life asking nothing in return who do the same for you. When I measure my family this way I am fortunate to say I have a village to support and protect me, for that I am grateful.

As for friends, they come and go. They appear in the hour we need them most and they leave us when our time is done. However, some stay forever. Magically appearing when we need them the most, to love, to support, to give, and to encourage. I am grateful for those friends, Corinne and Carl who seem to always appear with perfect timing.

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Abstract

We are told from an early age not judge a book by its cover. This idiom is the perfect way to look at my research; it expresses the idea that what we present on the outside is, many times, a cloak to hide what is really inside. As I began my journey, I turned to Deborah Britzman (1998) and her notion of “other” and how this plays out in the school setting for two particular groups. These two identities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) and Hard of Hearing (HH), fall into the category of “other” just as many other groups do; however, these two groups have a unique ability to hide the inner pages of their stories and pass for something they are not in other words, their otherness is invisible. This invisibility makes possible the notion of “passing” between multiple cultures, yet members lack the ability to belong completely to any one group.

Through the method of narrative inquiry I examine these identities and the similarly shared stories they possess. The idea of living and telling and re-living and re-telling (Craig, 2007) lends the voice of experience, giving merit to the struggles of those youth who suffered throughout their journey in the education system. The methodology of narrative inquiry provides empowerment not only to the participants and researcher but also the reader (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative provokes thought, thought provokes conversation and conversation provokes change.

It is the aim of this research through narrative inquiry to broaden the field of LGBT studies and to give voice to the HH group, which currently has no voice in the research arena.

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Chapter 1: A Narrative Lens

“the only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes”

- Marcel Proust

Introduction

An important thing to note before this journey begins is that every person's life is full of difficulty and struggle; the relative severity of this struggle is impossible to empirically gauge. The simple fact is that each of us believes that the struggle he or she faces is difficult, and it is in the difficulties of one's life that one finds and defines one's character. This particular story, the subject of this research, is filled with difficult struggles that can in many ways, be shared by others. However, I would like to start with a story that explains my reason for being able to face the past, the present and the future. It is the story of my greatest passion and how I came to find it in an unusual place.

I must state up front that I was born profoundly deaf and struggled all my life with gaining and losing hearing. This is the reason my passion and this story are so important to me. Starting very early in my life my Aunt Pat, the woman who raised me, wanted to share her passion with me. That passion was music. She grew up in an era in which music was changing, growing, morphing, and bringing voice to strife. I must have been only a few weeks old when she decided to start a family tradition that would become my saving grace. Every Sunday afternoon, my aunt pulled out all her 45 records and played them for me. As she listened to the music she would hold me in her arms and dance around our apartment living room. We did this every Sunday afternoon. One can only imagine the devastation she faced when she found out I was deaf.

My aunt had a choice, she could give up on sharing her passion, her security blanket or she could find a new way to share that passion. I am happy to say that she chose to find an alternative way to share music with me. Instead of giving up, she cranked it up. She put me on the speaker and when I got too big she placed my hand on the speaker. As I grew up, I could feel the music flow through my body as it vibrated the floor. Even though my aunt and I experience music differently we share a great passion for music and marvel at the ability it has to comfort us and give us both the security we seek.

We spent every Sunday afternoon doing this, but the passion for music was not the only thing I learned from this experience. I also learned that we can do anything we want to, it just may happen differently. This story takes me back to the quote at the beginning. My aunt did not choose a new landscape for me; instead she chose to give me new eyes or ears to see that landscape.

Story Telling

I have always had a way with telling stories; I suppose this facility stems from the way I learned to speak. Reading and writing were never the goals in my early education, everything I did as a deaf raised in the hearing world was focused on perfecting my speech. Therefore, storytelling became a way for me to practice my speech. When I got older, I worked at a girl scouts camp and was considered the resident storyteller. Every night I would go from one dorm unit to the next and tell stories to the campers. It became the favorite time of the day for me and for many of the campers. The campers were never aware of my hearing issue. For them, my stories were like theater. I was able to animate the stories with passion and language.

The art of telling a story does not just lie in the words of that story but in the substantive and aesthetic message it conveys to readers'. I can recall the first time I explained what music was to me, after a friend asked me to explain it to her. For many, this question is easily answered, but for a deaf person, it can become a complex and challenging explanation.

Music, to a hearing person is a harmonic sound that pleases one's sense of hearing but. For a deaf person, music is something totally different. As I pondered the question, what music meant to me as a deaf person, I began to close my eyes, and I asked my friend to do the same. I took a deep breath and began to tell the story of music not from the sound perspective but from the viewpoint of vibrations. I began to describe the waves of the beat that are absorbed by my skin, the pulsing vibration of music in my heart, music in my veins. I continued to describe the emotion that arises in me when I feel the pulse run through my blood, as if the music has become part of my very being. As I finished the story, both my friend and I were exhausted, and she swore she had heard the symphony playing in her head. This small narrative illuminates the power of the story. There was no music playing, but the power of emotions allowed my friend to hear what I felt.

It is most natural for me to turn back to the art of storytelling to tell the stories of those people, like me who have never had a real voice in life. I suppose I found refuge in telling stories about others to keep from having to tell my own. It was the great escape that allowed me to have any identity I wanted without facing mine. Little did I know that through all these years I was building my story to share.

The idea that we can learn through the power of experience (Dewey, 1938) and storying (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), led me to seek out the narrative inquiry research method. In this research study narrative inquiry begins in the lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), of the participants and gives voice to the stories and opens up new possibilities of living and telling in the future.

Erik Erikson (1963), explains that we gain understanding of self by moving through the narrative of life (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Dan McAdams (1987, 1988, 1990), expands upon Erikson's work to state the "narrative that we forge of our life experience is in fact our identity" (Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 177), and that identity is not stable, but a fluid concept, changing with the stories we live and tell and those given back to us in return. McAdams continues to say that the narrative is the "fundamental way in which we know ourselves" (p. 177). Through the narrative I intend to bring out the identity of my participants as well as my own to gain understanding of self and more importantly the understanding of place in the greater societal identity.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), expand on Dewey's notion of experience and the role of the narrative in the expression of those experiences. According to Clandinin and Connelly not only do we learn through experience; we think and live through the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Our everyday experiences are embedded in our narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and "names a fundamental structure and quality of experience, both personal and social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 2). In light of this understanding, the telling and retelling of narratives become key to both the personal and social growth in the educational experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989).

They have noticed:

when experience moves in from the contextual shadows and becomes more central to theorizing and to altering practice, it often comes under a kind of suspicious criticism. From the point of view of inquiry, it may be seen as a term that violates many researchers' notions of academic appropriateness.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 3)

The direct connection between the lived experiences of participants and the development that comes from them is an important part of the research process. When one allows numbers to make the decisions the voice, the experiences, the humanity of the research is removed. Do to the topic I am working with numbers could never tell the story alone and requires the lived experience to bring depth to the issue at hand with invisible identities such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) and Hard of Hearing (HH).

Regarding criticism of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly state that the “ideological objection is essentially sociological and critical in origin and roughly speaking comes from the view that social organization and structure rather than people and experience are the appropriate starting points for educational inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 4). It is through the startling numbers seen in suicide, substance abuse and bullying that I desire to know and share more of those experiences, but without the story I believe the point is meaningless. I am one of those individuals who have to put a name to a face and that are what telling and re-telling these stories is about. They also reference the argument that “experience is too comprehensive, too holistic and therefore an insufficiently analytic term to permit useful inquiry” (p. 4). However, one must consider that, experience provides one the ability to relate better to the phenomena being investigated. Clandinin and Connelly (1989) state that the

relationship of past and future “may be more or less passive or active; more or less an experiential ‘undergoing’ or a ‘trying’” (Dewey, 1916, p. 139 cited on p. 5). At any given point in life our past and our future come together in the choices we make in new experience, from each we learn something new thereby improving our ability to manage future incidents. They go on to state that the central significance of the study of narrative inquiry is that the study of experience “as a figure is simultaneously the study of time as a figure as they go together as one” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 5).

Dewey (1938) expressed the idea of time in the notion of “continuity” which is one of the two criteria of experience stated by Dewey, and which is a reference to the “succession of situations within which experience occurs. Without continuity there is no such thing as experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 5). Again this continuation of the lived experience brings depth and knowledge to future situations that could not occur if we ignored the fluidity of one situation with another. For my participants, each situation ties to the next in the way they cope with who they are as well as develop the identity they are now. Experience “is what it is, in part, because of what is brought to it, via prior experience, and, in part, because of its influence on the future brought about by the alternations that occur in what Dewey calls the internal and environmental conditions of an experience.” (p.5) The lived experiences I share in later chapters as well as those of my participants are directly linked to our actions from one to another. Self removal and isolation come out of reaction to an experience in which a negative act against one has occurred. The sharing of this experience with others allows me to, not only show a pattern of experiences, but to also create lasting questions in the minds of the readers.

Clandinin and Connelly (1989) state that there is “more to the idea of time in Dewey than a first reading of continuity might suggest, that is, a suggestion of an endless sequence of experiences” (p.5). Though my future may be questionable the fact that I have had the constant comfort of a single experience, in music, spanning over the course of my life will allow me to face the future willingly. That one event early in my life has helped shape my ability to handle the strife of life because it continues to provide me the coping skills needed to navigate. For my participants especially those who are HH, the continual negative experience has shaped not only a lived story, but also a cover story that will equally appear in their experience further supporting the importance of lived experiences.

Narrative as a Process of Storying

According to Riley and Hawe (2005), narrative inquiry is used in the examination of “the way a story is told by considering the positioning of the actor/storyteller, the endpoints, the supporting cast, the sequencing and tension created by the revelation of some events, in preference to others” (p. 1). Since my research is so influenced and intertwined with my own personal story, the use of narrative inquiry becomes vital to the production of awareness around the issues discussed in this paper. The events, the participants, and I become the key players in this greater narrative.

Additionally, this method provides “special insights into the complexity of community intervention implementation over and above more familiar research methods” (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p. 1). As I examined the stories and overlaid them the emerging themes could only be expressed through the connection of the lived experiences and the research supporting them. When dealing with human emotions,

stereotypes, and personal perspectives, storytelling becomes the most powerful tool in educating and notifying the greater community of the problems facing our students.

Riley and Hawe (2005) continue that the words ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ are “often used interchangeably, but that they are analytically different” (p. 1). The difference is in relation to “where the primary data ends and where the analysis of that data begins” (p. 1). The role of the researcher is to interpret the stories told and to conduct an analysis of the “underlying narrative that the storytellers may not be able to give voice to themselves” (p. 1). This concept directly connects with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and their explanation of narrative as the phenomena and the method as a way of understanding. So often, the individual members of the groups participating in this research (LGBT and HH) do not have a voice. These individuals hide behind the norms of mainstream and fall through the cracks.

As a process of looking at these narratives I have chosen to look at the style of paralleling the stories as a way to convey the narrative method (Craig C. , 1999). I will lay the stories of the participants side-by-side, along with my own story, in search of emergent themes. The idea of emergent questions and themes is an intricate part of the narrative inquiry method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is characterized by “movement from experience to researcher and practitioner field notes, transcripts, documents and descriptive storying of the experienced narrative, to a mutual reconstruction of a narrative account” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p.13). Clandinin and Connelly (1989) suggest that it should be clear that the narrative inquiry process is “not a linear one. There is data collection... and

further narrative reconstruction. The narrative inquiry process itself is a narrative one of storying, restorying, and restorying again” (p.14).

Narrative inquiry method does not follow scientific method and does not begin with a specified question and set of hypotheses; instead, narrative inquiry begins “with an interest in a particular phenomenon which could be understood narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p.14). In the case of this study, my own experiences drove me to investigate the stories of others to bring about awareness of those students sitting in the class who hide their identities thus becoming invisible. Clandinin and Connelly (1989) report that in the construction of narrative accounts, “ways of telling an individual’s story as embedded within particular cultures and histories are offered. In narrative inquiry the individual is shaped by the situation and shapes the situation in the living out of the story and in the storying of the experience” (p. 15). As I hope my research will show, the participants’ experiences shape again not only their true identity but the cover stories created to protect that identity.

Clandinin and Connelly (1989) further state that,

these interpretations are offered because one of the main functions of research from a narrativist point of view is to foster reflection and restorying on the part of participants. The first and central contribution lies in the interactive relations between practitioner and researcher which leads to a mutual, collaborative telling and retelling of the participants, both practitioner and researcher stories.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p.15)

Due to the similarities shared with my participant an open and honest conversation was capable of occurring. This research was a collaboration between my participants and I that enabled me to reveal heart wrenching stories of the realities facing individuals such as themselves.

Narratives are written by researchers for “a larger audience than their participants...” or that of themselves and other practitioners (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p.16). They state that “the question of rendering an account for the larger audience raises issues around the ways in which researchers should write accounts of narrative inquiry and the ways in which such accounts should be read. Part of the concern in narrative inquiry is with audience...” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p.16). Therefore narrative researchers need to “concern themselves with issues of representation and audience” (p. 16).

As the narrative research account is read, “the intent is to foster reflection, storying and restorying for them (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998). When dealing with the construction of identity it is imperative to reflect on the experiences in one’s life and the impact they had in order to grow and strengthen self awareness. Also, for those dealing with identity issues, especially invisible identities, the reader might find comfort and support in the restorying of others who have faced similar situations in their own lives.

When individuals read a narrative, they are drawn into the story, and they “find a place or way of seeing through participating in the story” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p.17). By drawing on emotions the stories in this study give the reader a sense of what it is like to be treated in hateful and malicious ways. The completeness of a story is stated to lie within the “immediacy and which narrative is able to render the concrete particularities of experience” (p.17). Due to this, when re-telling the participants’ stories I chose to give the whole story instead of snippets, aiding in the power of the lived experience. The narrative form is important in that the “aesthetically reproduces

the temporal tensions of experience, a moving present tensed between and every moment embracing a memory of what has gone before and an activity projected underway.” (Crites, 1975, p.26 cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.17)

The practice of collecting the narratives of others revolves around the trust relationship between the researchers and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This trustworthiness does not come lightly or easily as it is a process that takes time to build through communication or conversation with the participants (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Through these conversations a process of analysis and interpretation develops that allows a reliving and restorying of the participants’ lives (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). As the process continues through multiple meetings and conversations, meaning emerges thereby allowing themes and issues to unfold (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). I believe that the connection made between the participants and my own stories encapsulate the true feelings of the participants as they relived each experience.

I stress the importance of voice in my research and the relation of voice to the methodology of narrative inquiry because it is my belief that without the stories of those who are silenced by the majority there will never be an understanding of those who are different. Denmark (1994) states, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (p.6). Each individual is unique; by relating personal experiences in a story, one presents one’s point of view in a manner that enhances understanding.

Kramp (2003) states that “narrative inquiry serves the researcher who wishes to understand a phenomenon or an experience rather than to formulate a logical or

scientific explanation. The object of narrative inquiry is understanding” (p.104). The “narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience...narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, cited in Wilson, 2007, p.18).

The work of Reid and Robertson (2005) states that narrative research in the form of:

Exploring lived experiences, as relayed through personal stories could enable researchers to understand unique aspects of leisure. Living, then telling stories, and reliving experiences through retelling stories arguably provides insight into quality of life. Narrative inquiry is about understanding lived experience, facilitated through interaction between the participants and the research in a particular context.

(Reid & Robertson, 2005)

Due to the personal connection I have with the research topic, my ability to connect and bond with the participants and understand their stories was increased. The time spent getting to know my participants was considerably shorter due to my forthright approach of sharing my own identities.

A key component, of not only my research but also the process of this methodology, is the relationship that is created between the participant and researcher. Laine Chan (2005) takes the concept of relationship laid out by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and builds collaboration with her participants. Chan (2005), states, however, that a relationship involves more than just “negotiation of writings and interpretations” (Chan, 2005, p.47). It involves the process of negotiating the relationships themselves (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 157). The building of relationships was vital to my research due to the nature of inquiry; a close working collaboration was important to my process and key in the success of the research.

Characters

To conduct an in depth study of the educational experience of LGBT and HH students I have chosen to work in relationship with four participants. My participants include two LGBT individuals between the age of eighteen and thirty and two HH individuals between the age of eighteen and thirty. My preference was to find a male and female participant for each category however that proved to be more difficult for the LGBT group.

Due to the nature of the research and questions that I asked, I decided that selecting participants over the age of eighteen would allow me to find participants more willing to share their stories without fear of retaliation. I chose to cap the age at thirty because I believe that the closer the participants were to school age, the more relevant their stories would be to this research.

The process of collecting data can quickly become overwhelming therefore, I have chosen a few tools to use in order to access and analyze the stories of my participants. These tools and their methodologies are explained below.

An Open Ended Questionnaire

The first tool I chose is a survey. Although they are not usually used in narrative inquiry, I believed that a survey would allow me to gather basic information to build upon. These particular surveys were not for a statistical purpose; rather, they served as more of a questionnaire to collect possible themes for further discussion. There were two versions of the survey, one for each participant group (LGBT and HH); each survey consisted of ten questions. The two versions of the survey varied only in the questions relating to the uniqueness of the two groups.

I have chosen to do two separate surveys so that the two groups are not influenced or confused by questions that do not relate to them or to their experiences. Some of the questions that differed were: for the LGBT participants, When did you come out? – and for the HH participants, Do you sign at all? The majority of the questions however were the same such as; did you experience bullying during your education experience? What was your perception of your teachers' behavior towards you? When did you realize your difference in the school setting?

All of the questions in the surveys are open ended and required more than a simple yes/no answer. I attempted to ease the participants into the survey by asking less sensitive questions at the beginning and more difficult ones at the end. This progression of questions allowed the participants to become more comfortable and more willing to reveal their stories by the end of the survey.

See appendices A

Interview/Conversations

The next step in the process of collecting the participants' stories was the development of a relationship between the participants and me. This development started with an informal meeting during which the participant and I talked about the participant's life and the stories he or she wished to share. Though I had a few pre-selected questions for the interview the purpose of the first meeting was to build the relationship of trust (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007).

In accordance with the guidelines of human subjects and research protocol there were a total of four, one hour interviews. It was my hope to honor the process of narrative inquiry by using this time not only to collect their stories but also to build the

necessary relationship of trust (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). I could not know in advance all of the questions that were asked because in true narrative inquiry fashion the questions emerged from the process of storying (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Due to the topics discussed the participants requested the interviews not be recorded, therefore, during the course of the interviews notes were taken. In the case of accurately getting stories the participants would either write them down or say them slow enough to be written down. These field notes were taken in color coded notebooks with their codenames written on the inside. These are being stored in my office closet.

Journals

I have never been very good at keeping a journal. When I was young, my mother found my journal and used what was written in it, the experiences and wonders and wonders I had chosen to write about, to emotionally abuse me. In my journey to understand narrative inquiry, I have begun the process of keeping a journal for learning and research purposes. Journaling is still not a strong suit but it does provide me insight into the connections between events in my life recently. For that reason, I asked my participants to keep a journal during the research process to help them with making connections from the past to the present as they retold their stories.

Journal entries allowed the participants to see significance in the events of their lived experiences and develop their own questions about their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Just as questions emerged during our conversations questions emerged in the conversations they had with themselves in their journals providing, a deeper and richer story of their lives and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I asked them to bring these journals with them when we meet to talk about the connections they see. I also hope that these journals will help them remember events they may have forgotten while telling their stories in previous interviews. It is not my goal to have the participants turn over their journals at the end of the process but to use them for self-reflection. In a way, the journals became their autobiography tool in their life story.

Email follow-ups

I used email correspondence to follow up with my participants after the interviews have been conducted. The purposes of these email communications were to ensure accuracy in the retelling of their individual stories. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to assimilate the participants' stories in the embedded research, to give support and meaning to what they had to say, to ensure that their individual voices were heard in a meaningful way; to accomplish this meaningful assimilation, I had to guarantee the trustworthiness of the research by communicating with my participants and not placing my interpretation on top of their stories. It is the true representation of the "real" story that provides validity to the research being performed (Mishler, 1990).

My Hope in Storying

As I return to the beginning and the importance of story-telling, I am reminded of the words of Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, who wrote "we breathe, we think, we conceive of our lives as narratives". The art of storytelling begins with self and expands to group. Storytelling starts with the subtlety of placing the players, setting the scene and then unfolding the action. When fictional stories are told, the characters' lives twist and turn at the authors' disposal, but in the narrative, the players and the author work

together to compose a work that grows from event to event until the life is revealed for the reader to start the process all over again.

To return to Dewey (1938) we are shaped by the experiences we have, and we learn and grow from each future one. When we choose to share those experiences we become part of the larger story; the story of our society (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The purpose of this research, this story by way of narrative is to influence that greater story of our society and to change the readers as they lay their own personal experiences over the participants' stories and mine (Craig C. , 2007). It is with great care that I worked with these stories to share an honest look at the lives of those who have lacked a forum to share their voices.

For me, there is no other method of sharing life's experiences outside of telling the stories that develop in life. Story-telling starts at a young age when our parents read children's books to us at night. Many cultures choose story-telling as a way to pass their history down to future generations. The most important lessons in life can come from the stories we hear or read. It is my wish that this story will be one of those important lessons that will help others understand themselves and the people around them.

My hope is to give the readers new eyes that they might see the children in front of them not as a sea of kids but as individuals seeking multiple landscapes through their own experiences.

Chapter 2: Tools for Understanding

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting the different result.”

- Albert Einstein

Introduction

Though I have lived my life as a story I have not always been able to give reason to those experiences. However, as I began this process I found myself reading those individuals such as, Kincheloe (2005), Freire (2006), hooks (2003), Britzman (1998) and more realizing the meaning behind the scenes. I looked in multiple directions for explanations to fit the feelings I had as I developed my identity. My search for explanations led me to three particular areas in which I build my research on, Social Identity Theory, Social Justice Education, and Critical Pedagogy. Before telling and re-telling the experiences shared by the participants and me, I would like to speak about these topics.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory presents an ideology that examines how identities are created (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to early research within this theory, every social group has its own form of internal discrimination. Each individual within a group is assigned one or more labels, such as “Deaf,” based on the physical handicap which disables hearing, or “Gay,” which refers to someone of a homosexual orientation within a larger group of heterosexuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Each outside (societal) label has an impact on an individual’s concept of self, effectively raising or lowering his or her self-image. These labels allow individuals who share the same label to band together in order to further develop their own unique identities away from the labeling and discrimination of the larger group, which may view them as abnormal (McLeish &

Oxoby, 2007). The possibility to flourish becomes a reality. However, when individuals migrate outside of these smaller groups into the larger population (mainstream society), their individual identities are again viewed in a discriminatory manner (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

One way to examine deaf and LGBT identities using the Social Identity Theory is to look at the entire classroom as one group with several subgroups situated within. If the majority of the class is heterosexual, the one LGBT student will struggle to find his or her identity within the larger group. However, if there are more than one LGBT students in the group, or deaf students for that matter, those students will establish a stronger sense of identity through the smaller subgroup, which performs the same functions as the larger group. The strength in belonging or knowing that one belongs to any group increases the validity of self-identification in a social setting such as the classroom (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). The process of identifying oneself can go in the opposite direction. There is the possibility that a LGBT student will try to identify with the larger heterosexual group, an occurrence known as misidentification, which refers to an individual defining his or her group membership outside the group situation (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Misidentification originates in the need to identify with the positive group (the higher status group) instead of his or her own group, which may be seen in a negative light. Both my LGBT participants stated they did just enough to appear that they belonged to the larger heterosexual group in school.

Numerous studies have proposed that one of the bases for all contemporary, friends, and parent associations is the students' personal assessments. These assessments vary with gender and cultural norms. Adolescents tend to calculate the

worth of their relationships and associations on the basis of friendly social ambience from their contemporaries (Moran & Eckenrode, 1991), communal approval (Harter S. , 1989), as well as the reputations that are given to adolescents by their friends and other contemporaries (Harter, 1989; Miller, 1990). Mark and Karen based their personas on the norms and social settings of their schools and communities in order to fit in with the larger group.

So how does Social Identity Theory play out in the classroom on a daily basis? The application of Social Identity Theory is tied directly back to Critical Pedagogy. There are countless examples of school being the place that promotes the norms that perpetuate a hatred of others who are different. The words of bullies have too long gone unnoticed, and the number of reports of bullying against labeled and perceived gay students has increased (GLSEN, 2010). This heightened level of bullying is leading to more cases of depression and anxiety in students with differences. While an adolescent is developing identity, this anxiety turns to negative self worth (Slee, 1995). It could be that the question to ask is, given the innate nature of behavior among groups in a social setting, how do we as critical educators help develop more positive identities among those who are different?

Many researchers have highlighted that the most important component of education that is lacking in the education setup in developed countries is the promotion amongst the students to analyze and critically think about topics inclusive of all angles and opinions in order to come up with a concrete conclusion for themselves (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Steen (1987, p. 251) and the Education Commission (cited in Baron & Sternberg, 1987, p. x) carried out their own examination

of critical thinking in education and both concluded that as students are encouraged to achieve higher grades and study the fundamentals, the pattern amongst students is a decline in the construction of critical thinking. Unless critical thinking abilities are instilled in students, there is very little hope of encouraging a positive and tolerant approach towards students with a disability or a different sexual choice. Educators and teachers need to bring a change in the curricula.

When they refuse to question the status-quo, educators are complicit in the failures of the system. Teachers are directly in touch with the needs of students, and, therefore, their input is considered vital. Educators' opinions regarding curriculum design and pedagogy approach can assist policy makers. Unfortunately, due to the increasing workloads of educators, they are often unable to assist in the process of making these profound decisions about curriculum design and pedagogy approach. Both teachers and principals should be given additional training so that they can easily transition to their new roles and perform their tasks more effectively.

According to Finkel and Bollin (1996), teachers are the ones who need to make the greatest change in curriculum, and they need to do so with the help of governing bodies in order to instill the curriculum change not just in one school but in all schools around the country. The dominant society's viewpoint is entrenched in the field, further exacerbating the problem. The greatest potential for change could be in teacher-preparation programs in responsive universities. These curriculum changes must start in the classrooms of future teachers where the core of the education discipline should be taught so that future teachers can learn to acknowledge the importance of recognizing identity and social groups within the classroom (Finkel & Bollin, 1996).

Hill (2006) found that nearly half of new teachers and principals were ill-prepared for their jobs and required additional training. Allen (1993), in her study, found that teachers were not always very willing to participate in the school's overall decision-making process. She pointed out that the levels of teacher participation can increase twofold if they are trained to become more opinionated, more willing to participate, and more willing to welcome participation from different stakeholders, to believe in one's own ability to take a stand on the educational values they believe in, to become more interactive and communicative as well as more adaptable to finding information on areas they have not previously been familiar with, and, finally, to find ways to form their personal philosophies without allowing their opinions and philosophies to be trampled by others around them (Allen, 1993).

Similarly, other studies (Kreisberg, 1992; Nias, 1989) have found that teachers often hesitate to have constructive or critical discussions with other teachers or administrators about inclusive education. Furthermore, these teachers were also seemingly reluctant to take the leading roles in making decisions involving the structure of curriculum and other areas. Nias (1989) found this problem and explained that participation levels could increase with a boost in the level of empowerment amongst the teachers, i.e. an increase in the authority given to them. In her study, Kreisberg (1992) goes on to say that empowerment will rid the teachers of the hesitancy they feel due to their prior experiences or lack thereof with the decision making process and will make their overall demeanors and attitudes more confident and comfortable under different and challenging circumstances (Kreisberg, 1992).

Finkel and Bollin (1996) did a study with university faculty members who engaged in a weekly facilitated meeting. During the course of these meetings, the topics covered included race, class, and gender issues in response to academic writings of authors such as bell hooks. The study asked its participants to incorporate more class discussion, which pulled out the different subgroups from their hiding spots within the larger group. Once the various subgroups were exposed, the students, themselves future educators, were able to expose the discriminations held against these subgroups. Once they recognized the subgroups and the discriminations, the future teachers were able to look for different methods of handling multiple situations and individual identities.

It is important to remember that each child could be a member of multiple subgroups. For example, special education students should also be treated as their other identities such as race and gender (Grossman, Beinashowitz, Anderson, Sakurai, Finnin, & Flaherty, 1992). This holds true for students with different sexual orientations; they should be acknowledged for their various identities and then treated and taught accordingly, based on the collaboration of those identities. It is imperative for this kind of teaching environment to start in grade school and carry throughout the student's educational career in order to present a solid foundation for these identities to grow and flourish.

One problem with the existence of different cultures all over the world is that it becomes extremely difficult for the migrants from those cultures into a different cultural group to strike a balance between their own cultural principles and standards while surviving amongst a majority group who might have conflicting traditions. The students in the minority have the difficult task of finding their identity within the

possibly conflicting frameworks of the culture that their parents are teaching them and the majority culture that they have to come across in their social interactions. This influence of the conflicting social culture is one of the reasons that the migrant children seem to have more clashes and disagreements with the standards of their parents' culture (Szapocznik & Kurtz, 1993). In some ways, this culture clash is also a problem for the hard of hearing participants in this study who are trying to fit within the confines of both their families' hearing identity and the hearing world.

When Knafo and Schwartz (2001) conducted studies over a few generations, the results they got showed that the earlier generations showed higher adaptation and tolerance for their parents' immigrant culture while the later generations showed more openness towards the majority social culture. Other research studies came to the same conclusion (Phinney et al., 2000; Rosenthal et al., 1996). This shift in culture identification is one of the main reasons that one sees a rise in detached parent-child relations and parent-child clashes or disagreements amongst minority ethnic groups. Rachel, being my only participant with a strong family ethnic culture, continually spoke of this clash with her parents over her difference. This parental clash in turn increases work for teachers and educators as they struggle to allow students their right to individuality while at the same time respecting the students' families and peers.

Social Justice Education

There are several educational theories that concern the formation of each individual's identity within the context of the classroom. Theories based in Social Justice Education put forth the concept that education should reflect the changes of the social movement which strives for liberation. According to Freire (2006), "Liberation is

a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2006, p. 79). All students face challenges within a classroom setting based on their individual differences; these challenges can make living and learning within the classroom environment difficult for any student, but, for those who are considered on the fringes or marginalized, schooling is particularly difficult.

In many cases, the education system fails to fulfill the multiple definitions of the term “identity.” In most cases, classrooms fail to acknowledge and support the various cultural identities within their walls, especially those identities that are not visible (Cribb & Gerwitz, 2003, p. 15). The concept of increased authority given to teachers, community members, and/or other communal third parties is an imperative element, as it helps in the attainment of inclusive practices within the schools. This increased authority allows the overall environment within the school to remain focused, professional, interactive, flexible, and confident and encourages increasing willingness amongst students from different cultural backgrounds to participate. Hill (2006) found that autonomous schools have greater flexibility to respond to student needs, and, with time, teachers and principals will adapt and change their teaching and management styles according to student needs (Hill, 2006).

Many identities that are developed within a classroom tend to be based on social class differences such as rich and poor; yet there are other factors even beyond the socioeconomic which help foster individual identity as well (Epstein D. , Hewitt, Leonard, Mauthner, & Watkins, 2003).

McGee, Feehan, Williams, and Anderson (1992) pointed out that the personal traits of students determined their levels of growth, social activity, and knowledge.

Numerous studies, therefore, have incorporated factors such as the age, gender, health status, gender choices and race/ethnicity of the adolescents in their analyses. Asher and Wheeler (1985), along with most other researchers, believe that the concept of a “loner” is caused by general social denunciation. Most studies have also confirmed that this denunciation, along with familial clashes and parental dissatisfaction, provokes depression among students (Goodyer, 1992; Mitchell and Rosenthal, 1992; Topol and Reznikoff, 1982). Grossman et al. (1992), suggests that this emotion of loneliness can be avoided if there is a definite and constant flow of communication between the parent and child and if the child, as a student, is able to form a strong, healthy and constant association with a non-parental grown-up such as a teacher.

Most studies concluded that the phenomenon of depression first showed signs in the early adolescent age and its increase or decrease was then dependent upon the type of personal and societal adjustments that an individual made in his or her school years (McGee et al., 1992). These adjustments or changeovers can be seen in the stages where the individual is entering puberty, getting admitted into schools, changing schools, going to college, rising in the social circle of friends, exhibiting a higher level of independence, and developing differing viewpoints from the parent, etc (Eccles, et al., 1993).

Another factor that can cause depression and low self-confidence amongst youth is the existence of a disability, such as deafness, or the poor health of either the youth or a close family member. Numerous studies have shown that adolescents who view their health as less than what is needed or have encountered a perilous disease or disability have experienced higher levels of depression (Gore et al., 1992; Gortmaker et

al., 1990; Roberts and Sobhan, 1992). The fact is that when disability or poor health occurs, there are fewer opportunities for the affected students to have normal or consistent peer exchanges, especially when there is minimal to no input from the teachers, and this lack of opportunity can lead to social isolation and, consequently, depression.

A number of inherent and communal factors seem to be the cause for higher depression levels among homosexual females between the ages of 14-15 (Petersen et al., 1993; Jacobson and Rowe, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus, 1994). The studies have been unable to distinctly conclude whether the school and neighborhood factors that cause depression are different for homosexual males and females. Simons, Johnson, Beaman, Conger, and Whitbeck (1996) concluded that homosexual males were far more vulnerable than females to the neighborly elements that caused depression. Higher levels of depression, coupled with a lack of acknowledgement from teachers, prohibit students from developing appropriate coping strategies and leads to the students using marginalization or separation as a coping tactic in order to avoid confrontation and aggression from their peer circle (Simons et al. 1996).

The factors contributing to higher levels of depression include invisible differences, such as sexual orientation, which separate some children's experiences from those that are considered "normal" within the conception of their classroom's projected identity. Theories grounded in social justice would posit the concept of protecting these unique identities from the backlash against them. One way of doing so is helping individuals with these identities to deal with the depression they feel due to seclusion.

One cause of depression could be the presence or occurrence of unfavorable incidents that the depressed adolescent will mainly blame on his own personal traits, consistent habits and social structures. Depression is normally caused in these situations by a chain of thought wherein the individual misreads the incidents and links them to his or her own traits and abilities (Brightman, 1990; Siegel and Griffin, 1984; Teasdale and Dent, 1987; Weisz et al., 1987). This negative association can also cause depressive inclinations to turn suicidal (Kashani et al., 1989; Rotheram-Borus and Trautman, 1988; Topol and Reznikoff, 1982).

Education with Social Justice in mind could create a learning community where every viewpoint, opinion and approach is not only respected but also understood. bell hooks (2003) speaks of an incident in which an openly gay guest spoke with her class and was confronted by blatant discriminatory remarks from the students. This is a common occurrence in classrooms, but the manner with which hooks handled it was not. She used the opportunity to build a community of love and respect in which Social Justice could flourish (hooks, 2003, p. 136).

This of course can be done with the use of Cooperative Work Groups (CWG) which instigates an environment for communication to take place between students who have similar goals (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998). The idea is to focus on the similarities without overlooking the differences. When students from different ethnicities or with different sexual preferences realize the similarities of their goals and thoughts, their overall approach towards each will be less aggressive, which in turn will help them to deal with depression and low self-esteem levels.

One of the most useful and comprehensive studies was conducted by Johnson, Johnson, and Johnson-Houbec (1998); the researchers were able to define five primary components that assist in the creation and facilitation of cooperative working groups (CWG). These five components are:

- Teamwork and interpersonal competencies; this implies that one makes all the decisions after a mutual understanding, improved listening and talking abilities, being individually accountable for one's action etc.
- Cooperative communication style; means that all members of the group think and act in a way that shows that they are cooperative and accommodating of one another's views.
- Positive co-dependency; this means that all members are able to trust one another and believe that they are all aiming for the same goals using the same strategy.
- Individual accountability; this means that all members should understand the consequences of their actions or inactions and should take full responsibility for them.
- Group examination; this means that assessing and evaluating the success of a particular group in relation to other groups and in relation to the specific aims and objectives of this group

(Johnson, Johnson, and Johnson-Houbec, 1998).

A number of scholars have found that the aforementioned factors are fundamental for successful execution of cooperative work groups aimed at decreasing depression amongst students who have a disability or a different sexual lifestyle. These factors also tie back to the use of critical thinking skills discussed earlier to ensure respect for difference.

Every child has a spirit that is manipulated, molded, and shaped by his or her experiences in the classroom and, as these stories have shown, in every aspect of their lives. People in mainstream society often get caught up in the lifestyles associated with a gay and lesbian identity but forget that it is a life first and most importantly (Blumenfield & Lindop, 1995). The attempted suicide rates given earlier in this paper

show that the questioning of identity plays an important role in the development of youth in the education system. More education on the existence of “other” identities and respect for those identities are needed in order to reduce the devastating issues that plague individuals from “other” identities.

In Fairfax County Virginia, the leaders of the community have made the decision to move in a forward direction on this issue and have implemented a family-life education program that includes homosexuality and addresses homophobia (Blumenfield & Lindop, 1995). In many states, school districts are allowing groups to organize and meet based on their sexual identity. At one point in time, the Houston Independent School District supported groups in which gay students could participate at the campuses of at least two of the high schools. Currently, the only organization for gay students in the state of Texas is in Dallas, where there is a thriving gay community. The occurrence of school-sponsored clubs for LGBT students is rare and exclusive to large urban centers according to the Gay-Straight Alliance (GLSEN) organization (<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/home/index.html>, 2009). With more than forty local chapters, the GLSEN is attempting to help fight discrimination and abuse against openly gay students across the nation.

Both the concepts of critical pedagogy and social justice education develop different kinds of critical thinking skills amongst students. The use of critical pedagogy in an educational structure allows students to analyze and question set principles and authorities and develops a different format of critical thinking than the one developed through social justice education. By contrast, social justice education aims to change

the authoritative structures and principles that exist in the education sectors for the identification and formation of student identities.

Critical Pedagogy

Whereas social justice education attempts to change authoritative methods used in education in order to help develop different identities, educators working from a critical pedagogy framework encourage students to question authority and achieve their own unique version of critical consciousness.

[Critical] pedagogy...signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities...Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power

(Giroux H. , 1994, p. 30)

As with social justice theory, this practice originated with class being the main component for the division of cultural identities but was later adopted by queer and special education theories. One of the main components of critical pedagogy is the empowerment of students to become critical thinkers so that they will be able to engage in the “continuous improvement and transformation of self and reality” (Kincheloe, 2005). The very existence of critical pedagogy aims at alleviating the pain and suffering caused by the oppression of those individuals whose identity does not fall within the normal guidelines set by society (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical pedagogy requires students to understand that there are multiple facets to oppression, and these facets go beyond class differences without diminishing their importance (Macedo, 2006).

Critical pedagogy allows students to empower themselves outside the norm. This practice would benefit LGBT students in creating stronger identities and would

lessen the homophobic tensions in heterosexual students by encouraging realization of the oppression involved with homophobia. An example of the implementation of critical pedagogy in order to lessen the tensions between identity groups is the learning community created by bell hooks (2003). The community learned the impact of viewpoints and the potential damage individuals can have on others' self-esteem and well being (hooks, 2003, p. 136).

Because it concerns all aspects of the classroom, critical pedagogy is an efficient way to open the minds of students concerning the oppression and identity crisis faced by many LGBT students,

Critical pedagogy is primarily concerned with the kinds of educational theories and practices that encourage both students and teachers to develop an understanding of the interconnecting relationship among ideology, power, and culture... [that] challenges us to recognize, engage, and critique (so as to transform) any existing undemocratic social practices and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social identities and relations

(Leistyna & Woodrum, 1995, p. 23).

This practice allows the entire classroom to become more accepting of each student's identity, which will further nurture the development of LGBT identities as well as Deaf identity.

Conclusion

Throughout the following research I look back at these areas as a foundation in creating this research. I ask the participants to examine their experiences and the impact those experience have had on who they are today. I will also reflect on my own experiences. As I conclude the research I will return to these ideas to express the importance of changing our education system to assist those students who are invisible.

To ask the reader after reading the research to examine their own practice to ensure he/she sees every child sitting in front of them.

Chapter 3: A World of Silence

“Every one of us is different in some way, but for those of us who are more different, we have to put more effort into convincing the less different that we can do the same thing they can, just differently.”

- Marlee Matlin

Introduction

I was born profoundly deaf, I heard nothing. In the article, “‘Born deaf’ Need Not Mean ‘Always Deaf,’” Judy Siegel-Itzkovich (2007) explains that studies relating to communication disorders assert that “some children who are born deaf ‘recover’ and do not require surgical intervention[; that] ...most babies born deaf are referred for a cochlear implant.” (Jerusalem Post, June 2007) There are two main cases of congenital deafness: the lack of receptors, or hair cells, in the inner ear (when present, these receptors convert sounds into pulses and activate the auditory nerve) and nerve malfunction (occurring in an otherwise normal inner ear, occasionally the nerves are not able to receive and transmit the receptors’ pulse information to the brain).

Many doctors, including the one my mother contacted, routinely recommended surgical treatment for children who are born deaf. When a child is diagnosed as deaf, a doctor typically recommends a cochlear implant, a surgically-implanted electronic device that will directly stimulates the child’s auditory nerve. This procedure was not available at the time of my childhood diagnosis, but a different surgery was recommended.

Until I was eighteen months old, my parents thought I was normal; everything changed when I was diagnosed profoundly deaf. To my mother, I went from being a happy, normal child to a defective, broken one. My mother immediately took action to rectify the problem through surgery, to bring me back to the realm of normal. Her stated reason for this action was that she wanted to provide me with the possibility of a normal life; however, it is my belief that she wanted to prevent me from being an outsider. As an outsider herself, she did not want to

add to her burden by having a child that would bring even more shame to her life.

In addition to school, the family significantly contributes to the child's educational outcome, as well as his self-acceptance. Patrick W. L. Leung and Kim S. F. Kwan (1998), Department of Psychology point out in the study, "Parenting styles, motivational orientations, and self-perceived academic competence: A mediational model":

...Recent research has identified several parenting styles of significance. First, there are authoritarian parents who place high demands on the behavior and performance of the children, enforced by strict, sometimes harsh, discipline. They are highly controlling, making all the decisions and arrangements for their children. Second, there are authoritative parents who also make demands and set limits. However, these demands and controls are wielded through reasoning rather than authority, coupled with provision of clear guidance and necessary assistance. Although these authoritative parents are closely involved in the lives of their children, they also grant them an appropriate level of autonomy, encouraging children to take responsibility and regulate themselves (i.e., autonomy support). Finally, there are neglectful parents who are simply unavailable to their children, failing to be either involved, controlling, or supportive of self-regulation.

(Leung & Kwan, 1998, p. 7).

My mother ascribed to the first form of parenting, making all the decisions based upon her own image and needs. Because of my mother's authoritative style of parenting, it was (and is) very difficult for me to accept myself as an independent being, and my mother still feels shame and anguish in her response to my true self. Her constant dictation of identity led to confusion of self and her harsh punishments on the occasions that other people became aware of my deafness were, at times, painful.

Once the surgeries began, there was no stopping them as the quest to make me normal was well on its way, and the reality of my condition was firmly setting in. At the age of six, I started speech therapy, through which I perfect elocution, concealing the truth about my hearing and about my true identity. It is important that I, clarify that

until I was six, I did not hear; and, once the surgeries enabled me to hear, it was not normal hearing. As a matter of fact, I will never experience normal hearing. When I was nine, my mother was informed that I had a degenerative disease, and I would again be profoundly deaf by the age of thirty. My mother immediately dismissed this information, and it was never discussed again.

There were many times in my life when I would question my hearing and what the future would bring. My mother took me to the doctor every time I got an ear infection. When the doctor would ask about a hearing test, she would say she did not have time today but would schedule one. In fact, she would never schedule one and I would never have one. In some ways, my mother kept me from morphing (Hall, 1996) into the person I was to become.

In the article, "Serving clients with hearing loss: Best practices in mental health counseling," Lisa Fusick (2008), Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, states that the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) reports more than 28 million Americans experience a degree of hearing loss. "Three out of every 1,000 infants are born with a hearing loss, the most prevalent birth defect in the United States" (Fusick, 2008). A myriad of factors differentiate individuals with hearing loss. These factors include the degree of hearing loss the individual experiences; his or her age at the onset of deafness, whether he or she uses assistive devices, and the particular means he or she uses to communicate. Individuals who experience hearing loss differ in the age of onset of deafness, and their ethnicity, economic status, gender and sexual orientation also regularly differ.

In the book, *Deafness and mental health*, John C. Denmark (1994), an Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at the John Denmark Unit, Mental Health Services of Salford NHS Trust, who first developed psychiatric services for deaf individuals and the UK, explains that Pedro Ponce de Leon (1520-1584), a Benedictine monk, is reportedly the first individual to attempt to teach a few, carefully selected students. It was not until two centuries later, however, that the teaching of the deaf became a requirement. During the 1760s in France, after Charles-Michel de l'Épée became aware that deaf individual who did not communicate verbally could communicate effectively with each other by sign language, he began to teach deaf children by using sign language to communicate (Denmark, 1994).

About this same time in Germany, Samuel Heineke (1729-1790) used a purely oral/auditory approach to teach deaf children. “Thus began the controversy between the ‘oralists’ on the one hand and those who believed in the use of sign language on the other” (Denmark, 1994, p. 14). Heineke argued that deaf children had to speak and lip-read if they were to secure their place in society, that using sign language would handicap them. By the nineteenth century schools for deaf began to develop throughout America and Britain. The schools implemented various methods for communication.

In Germany, pure methods have been used since the time of Heineke. In Britain, some schools used oral methods while others used sign language until, towards the end of the last century, most schools adopted a purely oral/auditory approach. The French ...totally converted to the oral system after 1890.

(Denmark, 1994, p. 14-15)

A number of factors need to be taken into consideration in regard to educating deaf children. A deaf child's education may be complicated by the fact that his or her

degree of deafness may vary at times; though it frequently deteriorates, it may sometimes improve. Some factors that need to be considered regarding the education of deaf children include:

- Age of onset
- Degree of deafness
- Deaf children with disabilities
- The family

(Denmark, 1994).

When a child experiences deafness from birth or early age, his or her development will be affected. The child who is born deaf or who becomes deaf before developing speech and language has a sensory deficit, while the child who becomes deaf after developing speech and language suffers a sensory deprivation. Although my deafness was from birth I did not suffer from sensory deficit, however, on occasion I experience sensory deprivation. Deafness may range from a partial loss of hearing in one ear to bilateral profound deafness. Deafness may vary from time to time, and may progress in severity or be static. Profound deafness, according to Denmark (1994) “should be used to describe deafness of such a degree that the child is unable to understand speech even with amplification” (p. 19). This definition could help eliminate confusion regarding the term “profound”.

When a child has a disability, his or her education is generally more challenging. “Visual and motor difficulties are...not uncommon in some deaf children [who] have specific language disorders” (Denmark, 1994, p. 20). While visual difficulties interfere with the reception of communication, motor difficulties may affect the child’s ability to express himself using sign language. In addition, specific language disorders may adversely, affect the child’s total language development. In

spite of the usual challenges my unique ability to overcome through lip reading and my teachers' lack of movement made my experience a little easier, still not without some challenges.

As parents constitute the most potent force in a child's development, it is vital that parents of deaf children be given realistic, yet optimistic advice. When this advice is not given, it may lead to the parents feeling guilty, being overprotective, or overtly rejecting the child. In my case, my parents were given an optimistic solution; however, the ultimate failure of that solution left my mother ill prepared to assist in my development. Marital and other family problems commonly result from challenges related to the deaf child. In college I had several friends who came from hearing homes and the struggle to deal with their deafness created many problems. The following excerpt, which relates familiar steps parents of deaf children may experience, comes from "The Education of Deaf Children":

- Oralism
 - Failure, and
 - "Oh my God why didn't someone tell me before..."
- (Denmark, 1994, p. 21).

Rather than perpetuating an impossible dream in regard to the deaf child's future prognosis, many parents report they would prefer that professionals truthfully advise parents regarding new modes of communication, such as sign language. I am always contemplating how my development would have turned out if the doctor had given my parents options.

Too often, along with not being adequately informed regarding their prognosis, individuals with hearing loss experience isolation within their communities, homes, schools and workplaces. Individuals with hearing loss generally confront common

challenges. These include “communication problems, inequitable access to health care and education, low literacy, and underemployment. As a result of familial and personal conflicts, spoken or unspoken, and peer and societal discrimination, individuals with hearing loss often feel inadequate and alone” (Fusick, 2008). Some individuals with hearing loss may have few resources or little means of support, yet they still have to acculturate to the hearing world.

This acculturation may contribute to the HH individual losing a sense of his or her personal identity and group identification. Individuals experiencing hearing loss who are also members of other fringe groups, such as LGBT, or who are immigrants or minorities or who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds may, in particular, experience a loss of identity. The lowered sense of self-reliance these individuals may experience may contribute to poor self-esteem. In addition, these individuals may adopt self-defeatist and self-handicapping strategies. These strategies may further contribute to the individual experiencing negative self-fulfilling prophecy. Ultimately, a high external locus of control for individuals with hearing loss may result in depression, learned helplessness, and suicidal behavior (Fusick, 2008).

The first six years of my life were void of any “typical” language development. Deaf/HH children of all ages suffer a lag in their language and communications skills, and this lag delays the formation of self-awareness. “When children are delayed in developing language, this may lead to a delay in their understanding that everyone has an interior mental state and that these mental states differ” (Lundy, 1999, p. 1). Hearing children are able to listen to the adults around them communicating about the self; because of this, hearing children are better able to grasp the idea that not everyone feels

or thinks the same and that people have various identities, which may or may not coincide with their own, (Peterson & Siegal, 1995).

This early understanding of the differences between people begins as early as pre-school in normal hearing children, along with the beginning stages of understanding that objects can exist outside of their direct peripheral vision (Flavell & Flavell, 1995). Normal hearing children continue on to develop a keener understanding of the human mind, and grasp that each individual mind differs from another each mind has its own identity. However, the development of this concept can be delayed for deaf/HH children. If a deaf child has, hearing parents the issue becomes more complex (Schick & Gale, 2009). I must point out that research shows that the concept of identity is not significantly delayed compared to hearing children, if the parent(s) of the child is(are) also deaf (Lundy, 1999). Due to similar experiences, deaf parents of deaf children are able to reassure their children and foster the growth of a stronger identity. Unfortunately, there is a much bigger delay in the development of identity for a deaf/HH child whose parents who do not share the same experiences as their child (Steeds, Rowe, & Dowker, 1997).

Deaf/HH children with normally hearing parents, as well as deaf/HH children in a classroom full of normally hearing classmates, are forced to deal with their own experiences alone with the knowledge that they are the only ones feeling that way (Lundy, 1999). Many deaf/HH children in both situations have trouble even understanding the concept that others have different feelings and identities. Complex issues including a difficulty understanding other people's motives and objectives, could result, and these issues could further distance them from their family members or

classmates. Therefore, they are forced to deal with trying to understand the collective human identity, and their own individual identity on their own, with a much-distorted sense of the human mind (Peterson & Siegal, 1995). As the deaf/HH child grows, these issues turn into insecurities and the improper formation of individual identity. In my case, the truth and reality of who I was became a fake, a copy, and a mere reflection of normalcy, a reflection of someone else's identity that I saw when I started speech therapy and began to develop my sense of self. It has been said by many doctors that I have a gift for language, and maybe that is because I never heard my own voice. I rely completely on the movement of the mouth to create sound. My tone, pitch, and volume continue to be a struggle.

My reliance on the movement of the mouth enables me to mimic accents. No matter where I go, after several days of being around people who speak with an accent, I pick it up. This comes from my days of speech therapy and not hearing the sounds I make. I read lips, and accents come from the movement of the mouth and lips. Context becomes everything when you are reading lips and following a conversation. There are words that I cannot say properly because the mouth movement is all the same; for instance, it does not matter who says the words pen or pin, I must use the context of the sentence to know which is being used. This reliance on context is another reason there is a delay in self-awareness in deaf/HH children. Knowing the context is not instinct, it is taught; but if you have a child who cannot hear the words the context becomes harder to set (Lundy, 1999).

School of Shame

School was the most difficult place for me, not only because it was a small southern all-white school whose students were brought up in the habit of discrimination, but also because I was removed from my group of thirty classmates daily to participate in the four-hour rigor of speech therapy. The typical session went as such:

I would enter the room and walk around to look at the pictures posted on the wall. Once I was finished the speech teacher and I would walk back around the room saying what the picture was, tiger, cat, dog, child, and so on. Once we were finished I would sit in my desk with the teacher facing me. We would begin our “drills”. It started with the alphabet and moved to basic words. I would watch her say them, then I would say them, then we would say them together. If I could not say the word I would first place my finger in front of her mouth and feel the air pattern. Then I would put my finger on her lips and she would say the word over and over. I would then start saying it with her still keeping my finger on her lips. After an hour or more I would begin to read. I usually spent the last one and half hours reading books.

- Dustine Thomas

This is not how things are done today, but it was my life for several years. The biggest problem with the process was that everyone forgot to tell me what it all meant. As I read the books, I read them to speak, not to comprehend. An important lesson was forgotten, one that is key to critical pedagogy and social education: contextualization. As Kincheloe (2005) points out, context is more important than content (p. 33). It really does not matter that you can read if you can not relate what you read to anything else. This inability to relate was my problem early on. The emphasis was not put on context or, I would argue, even on content, but on presentation. My inability to place the words I was learning to say in context placed me on the outside of most social settings leaving me alone and filling me with shame. This ability to see what was occurring around me

was instinctual; however, the ability to understand my role and the roles of everyone else was skewed.

In the study, “Deaf Parents' Perspectives on Deaf Education,” Carlene Thumann-Prezioso (2005), Research Associate with the Gallaudet Research Institute, part of the Signs of Literacy Research Team at Gallaudet University, asserts that in the educational programs for most deaf students, many of the deaf individuals, as well as many deaf parents, do not feel they are adequately represented. Dr. Stephan Nover’s, founder of the Center for ASL/English Bilingual Education Research at the New Mexico School for the Deaf, statement made more than 25 years ago, reflects the current, general consensus noted by many deaf individuals: “[Deaf people] want control over educational institutions serving deaf children, curriculum reform to make Deaf cultural retention an important factor in their education, and Deaf community empowerment to strengthen the three-way partnership between the Deaf community, parents, and educational systems” (Nover, as stated in Thumann-Prezioso, 2005, Conclusion section). The deaf parents, who participated in the study by Thumann-Prezioso considered themselves experts regarding what works best for their deaf children's education.

This study also reports that many deaf individuals experience frustrations when schools for the deaf do not respect and utilize their knowledge and expertise. Deaf parents, as well as hearing parents, of deaf children expect the schools to provide the best education possible to empower their deaf children to grow up to be successful deaf adults; however, parents of deaf children often find that they may not be able to depend on schools for the Deaf to do what proves best for the deaf students. Because they have

lived the deaf lifestyle and are aware of one's self in the realm of deafness and what being deaf involves, deaf parents consider themselves as the best models to know what is best for their deaf children.

This awareness of one's self and one's role constitutes an important part of identity development. Erik Erikson (Erickson, 1985) explains this process of awareness through the bridge that connects the child's experience with the parents' images to give cultural meaning to the event. His example is of a child walking for the first time; the cultural connotations of going far are conveyed to the child. A context is set for the child in regard to the experience. This context and the connotations conveyed children help them develop a strong self-esteem and allow children to define themselves in the larger societal picture (Erikson, 1985, p. 235). When a child is unable to achieve these understandings of context and the greater connotations of society, the child's self-esteem suffers, and the child develops an inability to relate or identify with the larger group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

Georgia School

The town and school were homogenous, white and non-disabled, and it was certain that I would stand out as different and worthy of ridicule. Everyone in my grade knew I was different; I was an outsider who spent part of the day with them and the other part of the day with the "slow kids," a group of ten students from all grade levels. The more alike the rest of the students were, the more different I seemed in comparison. The instinct to dismiss that which is different is part of the larger construct of developing a social identity. We are taught early on to find the similarities among us and remove or dismiss the difference (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, p. 64). In order to

simplify our environment, we seek likeness to speed up our process of searching for objects; this process of simplification is applied to our process of identifying the larger mainstream group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

The social isolation I experienced, according to Lynda Juall Carpenito-Moyet (2006) in the book, *Nursing diagnosis: application to clinical practice*, may evolve from a number of situations. It consists of a “state in which a person or group experiences or perceives a need or desire for increased involvement with others but is unable to make that contact” (Carpenito-Moyet, 2006, p. 734). During this time in my childhood, I was unable to interact with others nearby, and as a result, I often felt sad, useless, rejected. I avoided eye contact and was preoccupied with my own thoughts and memories.

The other kids in my class would point and laugh at me as the speech teacher came to get me from class. This labeling and perpetually dismissive behavior shown to me by the other students further undermined the expectations, mine and others’, for my academic performance (Kincheloe, 2005). As the years passed, I was invited to fewer and fewer parties. Our class was small: thirty students made up the entire grade. I felt as if everyone knew each other; everyone went to the birthday parties, except me.

Most of the other girls would wear the same color on the same day. I would see them talking about what they were going to wear the next day over lunch. I was a very quick learner when it came to reading lips. As I look back, the experience of being an outsider provided me the space for social comparison. The demonstrated attitudes and opinions of my fellow students provided me the tools to assess my own position in the class and my worth in the larger group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, p. 75).

My teacher was no better; she treated me as if I were stupid and incapable of learning. My speech problem was not a matter of hearing to her and to the other students but a matter of retardation. During the 1970's, the general belief in the field and the results of studies showed a bias by teachers to underestimate deaf/HH students' academic achievement based on their language ability, as if deafness were a learning disability (Grossman H. , 1994). I recall my aunt telling me a story of when she and my mother met with the teacher. The teacher addressed only my mother, and what she had to say was simple: I would never amount to anything. She went on to tell my parents that I would never be better than a "C" student in math. As it turned out, I never made below a "B" in math; however, the teacher's prejudice toward my academic ability was perfectly clear.

The lack of compassion and acceptance from the teachers helped inform the attitude of the students, who looked at me as though I were a freak. I could perceive no option except to work harder and harder to become normal and fit in. My teacher lacked the qualities of a democratic educator; her goal was not to remove the existing structures of domination but to reinforce the oppressive hierarchies of this small Klan town (hooks, 2003). This white teacher, living in a white community, held tight to her habits of prejudice and applied her prejudice to anyone around her who was different. I was a vulnerable target of the teacher, and she humiliated me every chance she got (Kincheloe, 2005). This bias towards the other is common (Grossman, 1994) especially in small towns where there is little diversity. My teacher had an opportunity to use my difference as a way to discuss diversity. She could have chosen to point out the

similarities we all shared, to help combat the prejudices among the class (Grossman, 1994).

I believe it was the inculcation of the dominant culture in this town that blinded the teachers, administrators and other students from seeing the oppression and marginalization of me (Kincheloe, 2005). I was deemed different and would never stand up to their ideas of normalcy. The homogenous nature of the town perpetuated the oppression by the larger social identity (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). In this town, membership in the larger identity of the town was as valued-laden as the norms set by the social identity (town identity).

The image of the town rested in the dominance of likeness and the oppression of those who did not belong. If you were to ask the members of the town if it was a good place to live, they would all agree that it was because they believed in the image of the social identity. However, the townspeople's inability to see the reality of the situation and the actions of its members hindered the growth of the social identity and the individual identities of its members (Eiser & Smith, 1972 as cited in Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, p. 74). In this case, the perceived belief was that the town identity was the positive and desired identity; however, the violence and hatred that stemmed from this identity was, in fact, negative. Regardless, there is a strong appeal to belonging to the larger group, and we try our best to belong despite what we know.

Some of the idiosyncrasies associated with my hearing impairment/deafness, such as not hearing the teacher when my back was turned, chewing with my mouth open, and walking with a heavy step down the hall were seen as evidence of deficiency rather than as a display of difference (Kincheloe, 2005). I was the conflict in the

comparison of social identity in which the dominant group seeks similarity and oppresses the outliers interpreting all differences as deficiencies (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). My difference became a reminder of what the town and its members were about, purity.

I can recall an incident that occurred one day while I was playing in the schoolyard during recess like the other children. I was crossing the monkey bars and playing around trying to pull myself up past the bar. My back was turned away from the teacher, and I was unaware that she had called us to return to the building. The teacher was fully aware of my hearing limitations; however, instead of coming over and informing me that playtime was over, she sent a student to retrieve me. The boy came running over and yanked me down, and in the process I bit straight through my tongue. I ran toward the teacher, gushing blood, and her response was that it was my own fault for not listening to her when she called. This treatment was not uncommon for me during my years in Georgia. In this instance, I learned my place in the greater social identity.

Texas Schools

When I was ten years old, my family moved to Texas, and my mother decided that the school would not be made aware of my hearing impairment. Instead, it was my responsibility to function as a normal kid and adapt to my situation. I do not know her real reason for this decision, but I have learned from my reading that belonging to the larger social identity is important to the development of self-esteem (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994), and self-esteem is something neither my mother nor I had.

By the time we moved to Texas, I had learned to hide my shameful secret and pretend to be just like everyone else. Though my reading and writing skills were well under par for fifth grade, I fit in surprisingly well and concealed my problem from everyone. My ability to read lips and to write without looking at my paper allowed me to sit in class like everyone else, mindfully “listening” to what the teachers had to say. I experienced the perfection of the banking system Freire (2006) discusses in his work. I was a vessel for knowledge to be poured into without question. I blissfully sat as though I fully understood what was going on, just as the teacher stood at the front of the room blissfully spouting out the information she had to give.

When seats were assigned, I politely asked my teachers if I could sit at the front so I could pay full attention to what they were saying. In reality, it was imperative that I sit in direct view of the teachers’ lips to clearly follow what was being said. My actions ensured my proper place in the larger group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). I was gaining the support of the teacher by being an excited learner. At the same time, I was reading the social group to gain access and placement in the class, school, community and society (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

Both my elementary and middle schools in Texas were designed in an open-concept style. The classes were held in large, open rooms without walls to separate the different classes, and the cacophony was overwhelming and distracting to me. It is estimated that ten to fifteen percent of young children have some permanent hearing loss (Department of Communication Disorders, University of Minnesota). These students require an environment with lower background noise levels and higher signal levels. Hard of hearing students suffer in their writing skills due to their inability to

hear and associate speech sounds to the letters they are required to write (Department of Communication Disorders, University of Minnesota). I routinely found myself struggling during writing lessons, especially when the teacher would make the request out loud. As I stated before, I was a good lip reader, but I still had difficulties in the loud environment. When I was in school, I was able to take in sounds but had trouble processing the sound and assimilating it as recognizable speech. This partial hearing is a common experience of deaf people and has been mentioned by Marlee Matlin. The open concept classroom style was a nightmare for me during the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

I recall an incident in fifth grade when my teacher called on me when I had my head down and was looking at the paper. My teacher kept calling my name and eventually came over to my desk. She tapped on the desk and sent me to the nurse's office for a hearing test. The nurse called my mother who told the nurse I had an ear infection and was being treated. When I got home, my mother punched me for almost getting caught. I quickly adjusted to the distractions of the open classroom and never slipped up again. However, I believe my adjustments only worked because I played such a good student that the teachers ignored me. I was obedient and quiet, and I turned my work in on time.

Another reason that my hearing difficulties went unnoticed is that my teachers firmly believed in standing at the front of the class and lecturing for the whole period. It truly took little to no effort on my part to read my teachers' lips, once I learned to manage the background noise. They were, as Freire (2006) would say depositors of information, and I was the collector of whatever they poured out. I was a well-

behaved, above-average student in a class of more than thirty students. I always turned in my homework and never talked in class. I was that perfect student who never got looked at twice by my teachers. I played the game very well.

It is important to point out that I was not just a victim of the system but a willing participant. My desire to be a part of the larger group kept me from standing up and demanding change (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). I lacked the inner strength to pursue and my teachers lacked the inner strength to provide a safe place where liberation from oppression could occur for me (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical thinking and questioning were not practiced in a liberating way. Questions were asked and answers were given so that the norms of society would be perpetuated and oppression maintained (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 72). Kincheloe (2005) suggests that this method of question and answer is part of the culture of positivism (p. 79). He goes on to explain that the type of education system developed out of this positivism is one of regulation, so that the norms of society are maintained (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 79). I understand that as a child I could not come to these conclusions on my own, but I could still have stood up for myself and said no to the community around me.

At the same time, the social aspect of school was increasingly more difficult to navigate, due to my hearing issues. The “smart kids” viewed me as incapable of keeping up with them, and the other students thought I was a snob who did not want anything to do with them. I would constantly look around as I walked down the hallways so that I would not offend anyone in case they spoke to me and I did not hear them. My attempt to become part of the greater identity meant I had to give up some of those characteristics that made me, me (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). This sacrifice of

self is one of several alternatives, according to social identity theory, to change one's status in a group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, p. 79). At the time, it seemed that this behavior was my only option; I was so eager to please everyone, but now it seems to me that I wasted my time pretending to be someone else. I had morphed my identity into something I thought I was supposed to be for everyone else and lost sight of the person I really was: a hard of hearing person who desired to belong and be accepted for that.

I think my inability to face myself in school, coupled with the lack of concern on the part of my teachers, made it easy for me to be someone else. In all honesty, school was the easiest place to lose myself. With over four thousands students in attendance at the school, it was easy to slip through the cracks. I saw my assigned counselor once to plan out my future courses. I walked down the halls smiling, faking who I was, but all the while I was internally boiling over and dying to explode and expand the essences of who I wanted to become.

If only people knew what I was capable of, I might have found peace inside the walls of my high school. I would not have been the dumb girl in advance classes; I would not have been the snob who did not speak to people in the halls. I would have been the deaf/HH girl who was very friendly when approached and touched on the shoulder to initiate conversation; I would have been the deaf/HH girl who could count on her classmates to help her understand concepts when the understanding of others' speech eluded me. I perhaps even could have been that cool girl who played an instrument even though I did not hear it.

Social identity theory states that there are four methods of dealing with the larger group. The first one, the one I chose, was to remove all that made me different and join the larger group. The second strategy is to redefine nonconforming areas so as not to be a negative. The third method involves changing the comparison dynamics, and the fourth is to compete for dominance. This fourth strategy leads to conflict and clash (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Regardless of the strategy chosen, when an individual, instead of a subgroup goes up against the larger group, an internal conflict occurs and self-definition becomes lost. Taylor and Moghaddam (1994) go on to say that if a member of the subgroup does not have the ability to perceive his or her role in that group he or she will not be able to change his or her status in the larger group situation (p. 79).

My school successes and personal failures were due to the system of education I encountered. I was a good student, successful by the state standards; however, I was a failure because I never learned. I had facts in my head that were poured in by the education system. I knew the importance of dates and battles. I knew how to count, multiply, divide and equate. I knew who the so-called literary greats were. I knew how to pass a test. What I did not learn was how to think, feel or express who I was.

I did not learn to question at school. I did not learn to stand up in school. I did not learn how to dialogue. I realize that it is not uncommon for any student being educated in the “banking system” not to be able to participate in true dialogue. In a way, I was similar to the students bell hooks (2003) refers to when she talks of giving up hope. I really did not encounter a democratic educator or a subculture of resistance

that could help me truly express my identity. Though I did not drop out, I did shut down and “lose heart” as bell hooks (2003) says.

However, had true dialogue existed in my classrooms, and had the students and teachers engaged in critical thinking, maybe the more tolerant education that both Kincheloe (2005) and Freire (2006) speak of would have occurred. Perhaps my self-awareness and my ability to develop an identity would have brought about personal success. I could have found a community or the spirit of community (hooks, 2003).

Isolation from Community

The saddest part about this shame I took on over the issue of my deafness was that I had isolated myself from another world, a world that accepted this challenge not as a disability or difference but as a unique capability to feel and live more completely and passionately. I was so immersed in the world of the hearing that, when given the chance to embrace myself and my secret, I chose to turn my back on my identity and thus disregard a resource of strength and community. My ingrained ignorance and contempt for those who were different, and ultimately my contempt for myself, prevented me from truly accepting and tolerating who I was inside. Thus, the fear of being on the outside of normalcy becomes the driving force in formulating the self.

My first introduction to the Deaf community, which occurred when I was twelve, is an example of my isolation and rejection of others like me. My family attended a LGBT Church in which a small group of the congregation was deaf. Though I was fascinated by their interaction with each other, I knew that they were different and that I would not be allowed to be a part of their group. My mother shunned them and shunned me whenever I tried to communicate with them. I would secretly interact

with them when my mother was not looking, but I never let on to anyone that I was anything like them.

Again, the notion of belonging to a subgroup that was viewed in a negative light by the larger social identity drove me to take the strategy of immersion into the larger group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). I not only hid the characteristics I shared with the subgroup, I took on the prejudicial attitudes of the larger group to ensure my status and the continual oppression of those in the Deaf subgroup (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). I played into the stereotypes of mainstream society and ridiculed those in the Deaf community who did not choose to learn to speak like I did (hooks, 2003). I had not made that choice for myself; my mother made the choice for me; however, I came to believe, in my own self loathing, that if I could do it, so could they. The question became, why can they not just assimilate? At that time, I was unaware of the larger battle going on between the Deaf community and the hearing or mainstream social identity; in this battle, the Deaf community employed the fourth strategy of social identity theory: conflict in an effort to change (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, p. 79).

When I went to college, I found a place where my secret about my hearing could be expressed and where I would not have to hide behind the perfect inflections of my voice. I joined the Deaf Education Department at Lamar University and began to immerse myself into the Deaf community. I began to learn sign language and to speak with my natural voice, a deaf voice that few had heard before. I found myself trying to join the subgroup I had previously despised and abandoned. I cannot say what made me change my behavior and attempt to join the group I belonged to by birth, but I began to identify myself with this subgroup, the group with which I shared the most

similarities (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). I went to local Deaf functions; during my second semester in the program I went to a Deaf conference in Connecticut. I developed a sense of pride in who I was and what it meant to be Deaf. I discovered that those bizarre habits I had as a child were simply traits of my deafness and quite normal in the realm of the Deaf world.

I remember sitting in a Deaf Culture class in which the professor spoke of the characteristics of the Deaf community, which defines deafness not as a disability but as a culture. Deaf culture is equipped with “a distinct folkloric tradition” including performance art, storytelling, and history (“Welcome to Culture and Community”). For the first time, I began to see that there was an identity within me that was Deaf, not disabled, and definitely not something to be ashamed of. I discovered that the faces I made when I talked and those that others around me made when they talked were normal, for the Deaf world; that in the Deaf world, it was acceptable to dramatize each statement; that it was acceptable to move with passion and expression in ways that I never thought I could, or should; that I could forget all the rules and regulations of the hearing world and be free. In my case, freedom means the freedom to be loud.

Navigating Sound and Silence

However, despite all the great new encounters, a conflict arose because I teetered between the two societies, Deaf and hearing. I sought to bridge the subgroup and the larger group in ways that were not going to be acceptable to either. The strategy of conflict which relates to competition by the subgroup to the larger group (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994) was greater than I knew at the time. According to

Taylor and Moghaddam (1994) there must be cohesiveness among the subgroup in order to compete with the larger group (p. 79).

I was asked by the Deaf students to choose one or the other, Deaf or hearing. It seemed that despite having found a group in which I finally felt that I belonged, I was placed back on the fringes of not one but two societies that had definite ideas of what normal was. Choosing Deaf culture means bonding with others who use American Sign Language or its variations. Not all persons who use sign language choose to identify as Deaf. The National Technical Institute for the Deaf explains, “People who describe themselves as ‘hard of hearing’ or ‘deafened’ do not see themselves as members of the Deaf culture. Some may know sign language but their primary language is English” (National Technical Institute for the Deaf).

It is important to point out that the deaf community is also unaware of the reality of the “other” and lacks the ability to accept those outside the deaf world; this lack of acceptance may be a defense mechanism or simply a prejudice towards those who are not like them. “I don’t see the point in spending my time with people who are not going to be able to relate to me and I’m not going to be able to relate to them. We are from different worlds, so I think I’ve had enough of that in my life” (Bourdieu & Peterson, 1977, p. 471). Either way, the intolerance of the Deaf community for those who are unwilling to fully embrace the Deaf community is as potent as the intolerance of those who look down upon the Deaf community and simply see a group of people with a shared disability. It is acceptable to be hearing and to work in the world of the Deaf as an interpreter or educator, but it is considered unacceptable to be deaf and to refuse to give up all ties to the hearing world or hearing identity. The idea of not being

“deaf enough” is often taken to heart by those who are hard-of-hearing and has been an internal battle among this subgroup (Smith & Bienvenu, 2007, p. 61).

There are those in the area of Deaf Studies who look towards feminist theory in order to gain insight in developing a Deaf Identity theory. Smith and Bienvenu (2007) point out some important similarities between the feminist movement and the Deaf movement. In this particular article, Smith and Bienvenu (2007) are not specifically discussing those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, in other words, those who may be considered not “Deaf enough;” rather, their article focuses on racial differences among Deaf people; however, the arguments made in the article may be applied to those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Often, in the process of uniting to battle the larger group, a blanket of heterogeneity is applied to the subgroup and all other differences within are removed (p. 61). Suddenly, an oppressive hierarchy is created in the subgroup, in which “being ‘Deaf’ is privileged over other subordinated identities in the Deaf community” (Smith & Bienvenu, 2007, p. 61). Those who are not “Deaf enough,” those who sit on the fringe of this community as deaf or hard-of-hearing, may find that they have to struggle to belong to the subgroup. Though valid, the arguments made in this article tend to marginalize deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals as being something different and outside the “real” Deaf community.

At the age of twenty eight, I decided to get hearing aids. I suppose part of the reason behind this decision was an attempt to return to the hearing community and gain full acceptance as hearing. Even though I had left Lamar a few years earlier, the bitter taste left in my mouth was strong enough to drive me away from the Deaf world. Towards the end of my time there, the struggle to conform grew, and I could not

understand why I had to give up the only thing I knew, hearing. I talked often to my friends who said it was my responsibility to take up arms, as it were, for the fight against the evil realm of hearing. The pressure was overwhelming, and I worried about the impact letting go would have on my life and my family. In the end, I gave up the Deaf world and Lamar in search of peace somewhere else.

I am sure, in their own way, my parents did what they did (raising me as a hearing person) to protect me and give me a normal life. But, in the long run, I wonder if they just created a situation in which I would never fully belong to any community, hearing or Deaf. The fear of not belonging (Erikson, 1985) that my mother instilled in me most likely prevented me from letting go and belonging to the Deaf world. Along with the fear my mother placed in me over belonging I encountered many disappointing experiences among both groups, hearing and Deaf, that inhibited my ability to trust and let go in order to join the subgroup I most identified with (Erikson, 1985).

At the same time, my struggle in life to belong to the hearing world, even with hearing aids, has proven to be just as isolating. This isolation comes from the fact that I am so high-functioning that I have spent my life as if I were hearing and have been treated as such, and I have become exhausted and withdrawn by the journey. I ask myself every day, would I have been better off if my parents did not find out I was deaf until it was too late? Could I have found peace in the self that had not been torn from the start?

I remember waking up on my thirtieth birthday wondering if the doctor had been right. I wondered if the day of reckoning had come when I would have to face myself in the mirror and see an identity I had spent most my life running from. That

day passed, and so have other birthdays, but each one brings me closer to a future of silence. I fear that if I do not find and embrace my deafness before it comes, I will lose any chance of self-awareness in this area of my life.

Recently, my situation was further complicated when I discovered that I am a perfect candidate for a cochlear implant, a device that to some is a God-send and to others is the cause of the genocide of Deaf culture (Woodcock, 2009). This controversy is based on belief in the Deaf world that deafness is a culture and that the use or implantation of a cochlear implant cleanses the mainstream social identity of any diversity and controls the size of the subgroup being oppressed by the larger group (Woodcock, 2009).

The “Cochlear Implants Fact Sheet” (2009) reports that a cochlear implant, which consists of a device that directly stimulates the auditory nerve, bypasses the damaged hair cells in the individual’s cochlea that prevent sound from reaching the vital nerve that facilitates hearing. In 1985, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved cochlear implant devices for adults. In 1990, the FDA approved the implant for children. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders reports that out of the approximately 14,000 individuals who have received cochlear implants in the United States, almost half are children. Worldwide, more than 30,000 individuals have received cochlear implants (*Cochlear Implants Fact Sheet*, 2009). Although the implant does not restore the individual’s hearing, it allows him or her to perceive sounds.

Early hearing detection and intervention (EHDI) programs regularly identify children who may benefit from cochlear implants. The cost of cochlear implants once

prohibited some parents of deaf children from pursuing the operation. The typical cost for the cochlear implant procedure, “including the post-operative aural rehabilitation process exceeds \$40,000. However, cochlear implantation consistently ranks among the most cost-effective medical procedures ever reported, according to research completed by the Johns Hopkins University and the University of California-San Diego” (*Cochlear Implants Fact Sheet*, 2009). Studies argue that benefits exceed costs as implantation may result in a net savings of more than \$53,000 per child. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the projected lifetime cost for a child with profound hearing loss prior to language development exceeds an average of \$1 million.

In the article, “Cochlear Implant Benefits in Deafness Rehabilitation: PET Study of Temporal Voice Activations,” Arnaud Coez et al., (2008) report that although some individuals may experience poor results without any clear explanations after having a cochlear implant, the implants may, in fact, improve the medical and social prognosis for individuals who experience profound deafness. Coez, explains:

Cochlear implants restore an auditory sensation that can be used and integrated by the neural system of humans through the electrical stimulation of auditory nerve fibers Cochlear implantation is usually required when traditional hearing aids, which use residual ear function, fail. Most patients are able to use this new artificial code, and the social and the medical prognosis of profound deafness is now notably improved. Nevertheless, cochlear implantation performance varies widely from simple noise detection to full comprehension of speech. Many factors-including duration of deafness, age at implantation, mode of communication, duration of device use, and coding strategy-are suggested to interact with cortical map organization and to influence the final results.

(Coez, et al., 2008)

Results in individuals who have cochlear implants are not completely consistent. Consequently, “clinical practice recommends detection and rehabilitation of

the auditory impairment as early as possible to keep the functions of brain areas specialized for auditory networks” (Coez, et al., 2008). A number of studies also propose that the need exists to develop a prognostic tool to gauge how effective the cochlear implant proves to be for deaf individuals.

Dave Tenenbaum (2010) reports in the University of Wisconsin news report, “Study: Second cochlear implant can restore two important facets of binaural hearing,” that two implants are reportedly better than a single implant. A “key to that improvement comes from the ability to detect the source of the sound” (p. 1). Tenenbaum reports that Ruth Litovsky, an associate professor of communicative disorders and director of the Binaural Hearing and Speech Lab at the Waisman Center found that adults, even if deaf since early childhood, could differentiate between sound intensities after receiving two cochlear implants. Adults who had lost their hearing when they were older children or in adulthood, particularly if they experienced normal hearing prior to their deafness, were able to detect subtle differences in the timing of sound arrival at their ears. This confirms that individuals who have been deaf for decades may retain sensitivity to important binaural cues.

Even if a cochlear implant allows me to belong more fully to the hearing community, the moment I take the device off, I will be deaf. This kind of deaf is pure silence. There will be no ringing, no humming, no sound. True silence, not deaf silence where noise still invades my brain, will become a way of life. What I have to decide is whether I will identify myself as hearing, and consider my deafness to be only a medical condition, or identify myself as Deaf, and consider my deafness to be an important part of who I am rather than an obstacle to overcome.

The problem is that I have never experienced either the hearing or the Deaf world with success, and having to pick one scares me to death. As I mentioned earlier, I have had sound for a long time now, even if my brain cannot compute it all correctly. I am not sure I could handle the silence that would come when I removed the implant. At the same time, I am not sure I could handle giving up everything I know for a cause. To have to pick a side and stick with it for the rest of my life is something I am not one hundred percent certain I can do. The fear of acceptance and belonging has always played such a big role in my identity, and to be able to go back and forth has in some ways been a comfort. Or at least it feels like one since it is all I know. But to pick a side forever and not be able to return well, I just do not know.

My Hope

During the course of this research, I hope to share the stories of others who have experienced the struggles of navigating within the subgroup of the Deaf community and the larger social group of the hearing world. The reason for sharing these stories is to bring about awareness, not only in the deaf community but also in the hearing community, about those who sit on the fringe of both groups, desperately trying to belong to any group that will take them. It is difficult enough to belong to a subgroup when you have been placed in that group beyond your own choice; it is even more difficult when you are again labeled and categorized by the subgroup you are placed in (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Perhaps this study will encourage other individuals with hearing loss, along with those who have not experienced any hearing problems, that regardless of hearing ability, each of us is a unique individual who has things to say that are worth hearing.

Chapter 4: A Queer World

“It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for something you are not”

-- *Andre Gide*

Introduction

I was born into a different kind of family. I had two moms, although my family eventually grew to include a more traditional family with my birth father and his wife, who gave me two wonderful brothers. Though my two mother family is more common now than it was in the seventies, it provided me the opportunity to experience differences in addition to my hearing challenges. Taylor Heald and Julie Taylor (2005) examine some contemporary concerns regarding the two mother familial scenario in the article, “I was raised by two moms: To many, gay parenting is a hot-button political issue, to 20-year-old Taylor, it is normal everyday life.” “According to the United States Census Bureau, one-third of all female-partner households and one-fifth of all male-partner households include children” (Heald & Taylor, 2005, Gay homes section). In 1983, Lynn, Taylor’s mother, choose to be artificially inseminated to have a child of her own and, in turn became one of the female partner households with a child.

Taylor and I share the circumstance of being raised by two mothers; consequently, he experienced many of the same discriminations and fears I confronted when growing up. Among the many myths and illusions about children raised by two-mom families, one of them asserts that the children in these families will themselves be gay. Peggy Drexler, PhD, assistant professor of psychology in psychiatry at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University and author of *Raising Boys without Men*, argues that, “Family structure has been shown to play no role in determining a child's sexual

preference.... The percentage of people raised in gay homes who are gay is the same as it is for those raised in heterosexual homes. (Drexler, as cited in Heald & Taylor, 2005, Two-Mommy...section).

Another myth about two-mom families is that the children will not be as well adjusted as their friends and peers. Judith Stacey, PhD, professor of sociology at NYU and coauthor of the study, “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” reports that from more than 50 studies on this topic, “None of them found any significant developmental differences at all between the kids of gay parents and those of heterosexual parents” (Taylor & Taylor, 2005, Two-Mommy...section).

As I grew up, the hatred I felt from the larger community that I lived in, commonly evolving from myths and illusions about two-mom families, grew; my mother’s self hatred, hidden behind the doors of our home, also grew in relation to this hatred from the community. My mother, who was not comfortable with herself as a female and a lesbian, turned her hatred inward and outward towards me. Our relationship went through many difficulties never allowing stability or nurturing to occur. Dr. Allan M. Josephson (2007), Professor and Chief, Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Louisville School of Medicine, focuses on the how emotional development relates to spiritual factors in the onset and maintenance of depression in children and adolescents in the journal publication, “Depression and suicide in children and adolescents: A spiritual perspective” (Josephson, 2007). Josephson explains that depression in children and in adolescents, such as the depression I experienced, refers to an enduring mood change with associated changes in significant aspects of daily functioning. These changes include the individual’s

appetite, attention, and sleep. Suicidal behavior, as a diagnosis, not a symptom, is linked to depression. The lack of bonding between my mother and me deprived me of the security and stability that allows for healthy development, thus giving way to depression and suicidal thoughts (Josephson, 2007).

Violent Shame

For some, sexual orientation plays no part in the development of identity; this is especially true for individuals whose sexuality coincides with the majority in a heterosexual society. The fact of the matter is that those who are not of the majority struggle to deal with the difference they feel. Discrimination and hatred fill their lives as they navigate through the multiple social constructs created by society. Just as with deaf/HH children, LGBT youth feel a sense of loneliness in their quest to develop an identity that speaks to them. Therefore, my hearing issue is not the only area of shame in my identity. I use the word shame as it is meant by Merle Rossum and Marilyn Mason, *Facing Shame: Families in Recovery*, an inner sense of insufficiency as a human being (hooks, 2003, p. 94).

I learned at a young age to conceal my sexual orientation out of fear of experiencing the retaliation that I witnessed against my parents in the early years of my life. I saw first-hand the cruelty of those who did not understand and did not want to understand that which was different from them. As I mentioned earlier, I spent the first ten years of my life in a small town in Georgia, a town run by the Klan. It was not uncommon for us to see a parade of men wearing white sheets on any given Sunday. My parents (mother and aunt) made it clear to me that these were not people to go up against, that their hatred ran much deeper than any love two people could have for each

other. I do not know that I fully understood what they were telling me at the time, but as I grew older and faced the discrimination that came with being different, I understood that it was easier to hide my identity than display it.

For a member of a stigmatized group, developing a positive self-image often proves difficult. Dr. Roberts E. Owens (1998) asserts in the book, *Queer kids: The challenges and promise for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth*, that homophobia and heterosexism depict two challenges for the self-esteem of lesbian and gay youths. From these concerns: “A teen may experience harassment and violence directly or witness others being victimized. Possibly more devastating for self-esteem are the effects of jokes and media portrayals of lesbians and gays” (p. 104). In response, some lesbian and gay youths attempt to act as heterosexuals. This effort, according to Owens, may be doomed to failure, and this failure serves only to further damage self esteem.

Owens (1998) stresses that the anxiety of living a lie may be traumatic because the individual’s facade may be revealed at any given moment. The individual must keep his or her spontaneity in check for fear that normal behavior could reflect some hint of homosexuality. Even though the individual may successfully fool others, this strategy causes the youth to be anxious and may contribute to depression and to feelings of awkwardness and shame; additionally, the hiding of the true self and portrayal of a false self contribute to the individual feeling like a hypocrite. Lauren, a college student, said that when she pretended to be what she was not that she went out with boys. When they would begin to get close, she felt “really weird” and would freak out. She would then tell the boy that she could not see them anymore.

During puberty, as the adolescent's sexual desire increases, maintaining denial requires more and more energy for individuals like Lauren. "Passing" for straight may protect a youth from the negative social consequences of living openly as a homosexual; nevertheless, it cannot protect a person from the psychological effects resulting from deliberately living a lie. Richard, who personally lived a lie to avoid social consequences admits, "I was on guard and watching everyone" (Owens, 1998, p. 105). The act of continually lying, Owens stresses, leads the individual to experience a chronic sense of shame.

In addition the homosexual's inability to self-disclose, the fear of being discovered increases his or her emotional isolation. Owens (1998) explains that a psychological cost accompanies the repression of sexual desires. When individuals compartmentalize their sexual desires, it "leads to a moratorium on developmental tasks such as identity integration" (Owens, p. 105). These individuals may also experience a constrained ability to intimately relate to others. They may suffer identity loss and disregard their personal needs and those of others

Youth identified as "queer," may fear their own homosexuality as well as its discovery. At times, to maintain their "deep, dark, shameful secret, a youth may try to limit damage by attempting to manage information and situations" (Owens, 1998, p. 109). These youths may ascribe to the motto to give others only the minimum amount of information; they may lie sometimes and be truthful only when they cannot lie.

During the time of life while heterosexual youths learn their adult sexual roles, a number of bisexual, gay, and lesbian adolescents learn how to hide; consequently, these adolescents' maturational development may not be reached until adulthood. "Within

the family, the [homosexual] youth may become secretive, less open and less honest, and in turn, less of a family member” (Owens, 1998, p, 109). Owens concludes that as homosexual youth plea for understanding and to be understood, the “growing” process may be destructive for the individual.

Consider that two out of three identified gays and lesbians have attempted suicide during their youth, and it is further suggested that students identified as gay or lesbian comprise up to thirty percent of all teen suicides (Blumenfield & Lindop, 1995). Not only do they face an internal struggle that can potentially lead to death, many identified gay and lesbian individuals face, on a daily basis, hatred from others that also can lead to death. A recent example of this danger (2008) is the story of Lawrence King, a fifteen-year-old boy in the Los Angeles Unified School District who was shot and killed for his homosexual identity. King did not shy from who he was and proudly displayed his identity every day. When he asked another male student to be his Valentine, he received his answer by way of a gunshot. Though this story may represent an extreme case, it is not the first, and nor will it be the last. Lawrence King was definitely one who sat on the fringe of society, not looking for acceptance but defying normalcy, and he paid the ultimate price for his defiance.

During my “growing” process, I do not think my parents consciously attempted to instill in me the message of shame, but it became the overwhelming voice that defined me as well as them, in my eyes. My mother’s uncertainty in her identity and my aunt’s inability to fully embrace her identity during my developing years created an environment that hindered my ability to grow into my own. I see their inability to

develop a positive identity as arising out of the constraints of society during a time when sexual orientation was a taboo subject.

In the book, *The SAGE handbook of gender and communication*, Bonnie J. Dow and Julia T. Wood (2006) explain that beginning in the 1980s, Judith Butler, a pioneer in feminist studies, investigated the independent reality of gender and, ultimately, also of sex. Her findings challenged conventional notions of gender and led Butler “to argue that gender is not natural, normal, or otherwise given. For Butler, gender is a cultural performance that arises and exists—and only can arise and exist—through ongoing embodiments that are performed over and over again” (Dow & Wood, 2006, p. 4). According to Dow & Wood, the purpose of this performance is to maintain belief in the certainty of that which is completely unreal: specifically, gender.

Dow and Wood (2006) assert that Butler’s point contends that gender only constitutes an act, albeit gender is materially performative. It is, according to Dow and Wood, “real only to the extent that it is performed” (p. 4). In other words, “gender identity-or any other kind of identity- is something that you *have* ‘only’ by doing it again and again and again” (Dow & Wood, p. 132). The process of performing gender is not completely spontaneous nor is it without boundaries and history, according to Butler and a number of others who perceive gender as performative.

Therefore, Dow and Wood (2006) argue that in a similar way that a script survives the particular actors who utilize it, gender does not belong to the individuals who act it out. Instead, gender roles are arbitrarily assigned by a society and require the complicity of each member of that society to perform his or her assigned gender role in order to achieve the reality of gender.

The relevance of Butler's work to interpersonal communication comes from her argument that performing gender is not solitary but is collaboratively, or socially, accomplished. She writes: One does not "do" one's gender alone. One is always "doing" with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary.

(Dow & Wood, 2006, p. 4).

What Butler identifies as her personal gender, she contends, perhaps appears at times as something that she authors or owns; however, Butler argues that the terms that construct one's own gender are, from the beginning, outside oneself. According to Butler, they extend beyond oneself in a sociality that does not possess a single author (Dow & Wood, 2006).

Georgia

I can recall walking in a mall in Georgia and wanting my parents to hold hands and being discouraged from, and even slightly punished for, wanting them to show affection to one another. The fact was, they could not be who they really were in public, and this idea created a great deal of internal conflict for me over the course of my life. I remember not having a lot of friends stay over, even though we had a house with plenty of bedrooms. When I did have a friend over, my mother and aunt would sleep in different rooms. I finally stopped inviting friends over, because I could not handle the embarrassment I felt over my parents' relationship. Only two of my high school friends knew about my family and did not care, allowing my parents to maintain their normal sleeping arrangements when these friends stayed over. As time passed, I watched my aunt face discrimination at work for her sexual orientation, further influencing my understanding of what it meant to be different in the face of normalcy.

Bill Bouzianis, Lisa Hallab and Dr. James P. Malcolm (2008), School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, investigate

components regarding sexual identity disclosure in the study, “Factors associated with sexual identity disclosure in the workplace by gay men and lesbians: A couples study.” Considerations include these relationships and an examination of connections between gender, relationship duration, and work disclosure.

Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm (2008) identify a number of previously unrecognized links between internalized homophobia, workplace nondiscrimination policies and sexual identity disclosure at work in gay men and lesbians at an individual and dyad level. In their study, Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm report that their participants include 86 individuals, consisting of 22 male and 21 female same-gender couples, recruited through the snowball sampling process. Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm implemented a multiple regression analysis with all predictor variables significantly correlated with disclosure. The study suggests that internalized homophobia negatively correlated and that workplace nondiscrimination policies positively correlated with workplace disclosure of sexual identity; the negative correlation of internalized homophobia was the strongest factor affecting the participants’ decision to disclose at work. Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm did not discover any significant partner effects, the impact of spouse or domestic partner, from the multilevel analysis. Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm explain that strategies aimed to reduce internalized homophobia increase workplace nondiscrimination policies at the individual level; the study suggests that this decrease of internalized homophobia and increase of workplace nondiscrimination policies potentially facilitates sexual identity disclosure in the workplace.

The study that Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm conducted relates to an investigation of factors that impact the disclosure decision. They (2008) argue that disclosing one's sexual identity possesses significant implications in regard to a person's identity. It impacts one's social and psychological well-being. Some contend that improved social and interpersonal factors draw a parallel with gay and lesbian employees disclosing their sexual identity in the workplace.

Heterosexual norms create an assumption that heterosexuality serves as the default sexual identity of employees in the majority of workplaces, Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm (2008) explain. As a result, gay men and lesbians must make a conscious decision either to disclose or conceal their sexual identity in most workplace settings and discover that the experience of sexual identity disclosure in the workplace may prove to be challenging.

Even though hiding one's individual sexual identity may sometimes appear to effectively protect one against discrimination, it may simultaneously link with various individual disadvantages. These may include a detriment to career development or reduced productivity. Disclosure, an experience that is reported to positively impact an individual's self-esteem, may impact identification and affiliation with the gay community as well (Bouzianis, Hallab & Malcolm, 2008, Work disclosure section).

Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm (2008) explain that their study, as hypothesized, reveals that internalized homophobia was significant in negatively correlating with workplace disclosure. This finding, consistent with previous research, also constitutes the largest contribution to the prediction of sexual identity disclosure. In addition, as predicted, the presence and awareness of a nondiscrimination policy associates with

significantly greater work disclosure. This proves consistent with previous findings and may be explained in numerous ways. “Nondiscrimination policies may create a more supportive environment, making it safer for employees to disclose their sexual identity, or it may be that employees self-select into organizations that have these policies in place” (Bouzianis, Hallab & Malcolm, 2008, Discussion section). Further evidence exists, nevertheless, for the connections that exist between internalized homophobia, nondiscrimination policies and work disclosure. The study that Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm (2008) conducted did not find any significant partner effects on disclosure levels, and this suggests that changes directed at an individual basis may result in higher levels of work disclosure.

Meyer (2003) suggests that the broader construct of minority stress, which is a chronic stress related to their stigmatization, incorporates internalized homophobia to represent that stress; its full resolution depends not only upon the development of an individual agency to manage social stress but also on actions that modify environments that induce stress. Ultimately, Bouzianis, Hallab and Malcolm (2008) find that efforts to help gay men and lesbians manage their sexual identity in the workplace should address processes of internalized homophobia, as well as the content and operation of workplace nondiscrimination policies. My reason for mentioning this study at all has to do with my observation of the struggle my aunt experienced in the business world. Though this study involves the workplace, I would argue that the results would be similar with youth in a school environment, stressing the importance of rectifying internalized homophobia.

Texas

According to Susan Briden (2005) “The educational system’s function as a heteronormative community creates a profound cognitive dissonance for these children [children of gays and lesbians] torn between their families and the need for acceptance by peers and teachers” (Briden, 2005, p. 15).

I remember in middle school being called queer by other students. I had never given any reason for this label; I dressed and acted just like everyone else; however, my mother worked at my middle school and was very open about her orientation. By the end of sixth grade, students in my cluster of classes knew she was my mother and knew she was gay. During the course of seventh grade the rumors that I was like my mother started and I was called everything from “lezbo” to “dike” to “queer.” I spent the rest of my seventh grade year and all of my eighth grade year trying to get rid of the label put on me by the other students.

Bullying is an issue for many in schools, not just those who are LGBT. However, it is reported that ninety seven percent of students hear homophobic remarks from fellow students (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 171). Kumashiro goes on to report that eighty percent of LGBT students experience isolation due to their orientation (p. 171). In the seventh grade, I myself pulled away from the other students to prevent the harassment that comes with being different. I recall the instant drop in invitations to stay at friends’ houses and attend their parties. Ninety percent of LGBT students and perceived LGBT students experience some form of victimization (p. 171). At one point, it became so bad, and I was being bullied in the lunch room every day by the popular girls that I started eating lunch in the counselors’ office. I would get a pass

before lunch and then walk to the cafeteria where my mother was, pick up a tray and walk straight to the office. I would not even lift my head as I walked down the hall. Despite the staggering statistics, discussion of homophobic bullying is often left out of professional development of educators (Sears, 2005).

Heterosexuality is an integral part of the school endeavor. Activities such as sex education and school dances and representations of family life in textbooks and fictional works tend to exclusively depict society's idea of "normal" and give homophobic bullying a passive arena in which to pressure and harass LGBT students (Sears, 2005). In more recent years there has been a rise in challenging this kind of subtle bullying (Sears, 2005).

Because the fabric of our society contains an intrinsic homophobia, gay and lesbian students have little to no ability to access information on what they feel and who they are becoming. This lack of information can create an internally directed homophobia in a gay and lesbian student; this homophobia turns into a feeling of sickness and shame towards oneself (Grossman, 1994). This sense of shame often causes students to hide their sexual identities, as I did.

bell hooks (2003) discusses the impact of shame on students and their ability to learn. Though her discussion applies to the African-American students, it is easily transferable to all subgroups under the oppression of the dominant culture. hooks claims that the imposition of negative stereotypes in any circumstance is a reenactment of shaming (hooks, 2003, p. 94). For those who are part of a subgroup whose characteristics are not visible, there is little to no defense mechanism, as hooks (2003) calls it. If you are a member of a subgroup that is visibly identifiable, then hooks

(2003) states you can join together to combat the assault of shaming. However, when the ability to identify other members of one's subgroup is hindered, as can be the case with LGBT students, then the shaming process becomes more difficult to deal with, resulting in the staggering statistics mentioned earlier regarding suicide attempts and suicides among LGBT students.

I did not have an advocate at the school to resolve the issue of my sexuality. Grossman (1994) discusses possible reasons behind this lack of support by school personnel. He states that it could be a justification on society's part to keep homosexuality out of the curriculum. The other possibility, according to Grossman, is a lack of courage on the part of educators to become advocates for the rights of LGBT students (p. 249). While in middle school I became aware of my difference, liking girls instead of boys; however, out of fear and other issues I decline to discuss, I did not accept or address this issue at that time.

By the time I entered high school, it was obvious that, not only would I have to hide my hearing issue, I would also have to hide my sexual orientation, as well as my mother's orientation, in order to survive the remaining years of my school career. This hiding proved to be very destructive and almost cost me my life, a familiar outcome for many LGBT students. I need to clarify that it was not necessarily my identity struggle, but my mother's, that led me to make an attempt on my life.

Dr. Harvey J. Makadon, Dr. Kenneth H. Mayer and Dr. Jennifer Potter, (2008) assert in the book, *The Fenway guide to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health*, that children may experience a range of reactions to having LGBT parents. Frequently, specific responses may be related to the age of the child or to the child's

age when parents reveal their gender status or sexual orientation. Many older children, though frequently aware of societal homophobia, appear to be adept at handling this added stress. Some teenagers may use their family structure as an excuse to act out otherwise typical problems and/or developmental issues during adolescence. Some children, wise beyond their years, understand that the negative encounters they experience at school or in the playground simultaneously hurt their parents. These children may try to protect their parents from the attacks and insults they routinely endure by specifically *not* telling their parents about incidents occurring at school. Confident, clear parenting on these particular issues may help children understand that the negative encounters they experience do not define them or their parents; neither do these encounters influence the inherent worth or dignity that individuals possess (Makadon, Mayer & Potter, 2008).

My mother's inability to cope with the reality of her identity drove her to drink. There has been a body of research done on the impact of LGBT identity development and substance abuse (Sears, 2005). Considering that my mother grew up during the fifties, a time when sexual orientation was a taboo subject, and was raised in a small mid-western town with a population of fewer than a thousand people, it is no surprise that she could not develop a positive self identity and turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism.

At the age of fourteen, I witnessed my mother attempt suicide. That day, my nightmare began, and that nightmare continued until I graduated from high school. On that day, I first heard my mother say that she hated herself, her body, and me. On that day, I realized how much my mother struggled to accept herself and how much of a

struggle it was for her to accept me for who I was: a shameful, deaf child who would never be normal. bell hooks (2003) speaks of a shaming that comes from language, from a parent to a child. When the parent verbally shames the child, as my mother did by repeatedly telling me she hated me, a reproduction of the original feeling occurs, and eventually we begin to say it to ourselves (hooks, 2003, p. 96). The continual barrage of words from my mother eventually led me to the perpetual feeling of shame over being deaf and even gay.

From the day of my mother's attempted suicide on, the battle between my mother and me grew to violent proportions. Whenever my aunt went out of town, my mother took advantage of her absence and threatened me verbally or physically. In addition to the many facets of myself that I hid from the world, I hid this abuse. My mother's hatred for herself and for me made it difficult for me to accept myself, both to accept the thing she was most ashamed of, my hearing, and to accept my sexual identity. She drove me to act as she did, to hate myself and who I was because of her own unhappiness. As one survey study shows, the ramifications of the failure of families and support systems to accept one's sexual orientation can be severe, with the reported findings indicating that "the responses were matched against the participants' histories of severe depression, suicide attempts, substance abuse and unsafe sexual behavior" (Leff, 2008). For myself and my mother, both unable to accept our own sexuality or differences, looked towards both suicide and substance abuse in attempt to deal with the real issue of acceptance.

Self Isolation

I was very successful at hiding my life, my identity, my misery, until the day my mother truly stepped over the line. This particular day will forever live close to my heart and remind me of the difference one person can make on a young person's life. It was a day like any other, with the exception that I was actually looking forward to the evening. That evening was the school orchestra's spring recital, and I was receiving an award for most improved player. I played the violin, and that year, I began to play the viola. When I arrived home after school, my mother was already drunk, and my aunt was out of town. I began to dress for the evening recital, ignoring my mother's vulgar behavior for as long as possible. I asked her to take me back to school but not to stay. That was my first mistake; had I left it alone she probably would not have come. We got in the car and began to drive to school, arguing as usual. All of a sudden, I realized we were going extremely fast—eighty in a thirty-five mile per hour zone. She was heading straight for a light pole, yelling, "I hate you and want you to die." I quickly grabbed the wheel and forced us back on the road. A struggle proceeded but somehow I was able to keep us on the road. We arrived at the school safely. Of course, I was shaken up and hysterical over what had just occurred. I went into the building and hid from the group until I could gather my composure. I thought I would be okay. I had no idea what was in store for me next.

The orchestra at my school was mostly made up of Asian students. There were only three of us that were not Asian, and it was obvious who our parents were. My mother entered the auditorium in the middle of one of our performances and stumbled to the front row to find a seat in the middle. Within minutes of sitting down, she fell

asleep and began to snore loudly enough for everyone to hear. She was nudged by the person next to her; in response, she made a scene and stumbled to the back of the auditorium to find a new seat in which she promptly fell asleep again and continued to snore. I had never experienced such shame or embarrassment. My secret life of humiliation and torture was put on display for everyone to see. After the concert was over, she made another scene over driving back home, which I refused to do with her. Luckily, I had a friend who volunteered to take me home; I am certain my mother would have killed us that night if she had driven me home.

The next day at school, everyone looked at me differently, like I was a pitiful dog that needed to be put out of its misery. It was clear to me that my life was ruined, and my mother had won. I wrote a letter to a teacher, for whom I had secretly harbored a crush and gravitated toward, explaining that I could no longer deal with my struggle. I confessed all my secrets—who I was and who I was pretending to be. As I walked down the hall to her room after school, I was confronted by another student who had heard about me being grounded for doing the dishes too loudly a few weeks earlier. He said, “It must suck to be you.” At that moment, I reached the end of my tether and collapsed in an uncontrollable fit. All that had defined me up to that moment in time was summarized in the statement, “it must suck to be you.” As I sat in the hall not far from my favorite teacher’s room, I cried harder than I had ever cried before, because I knew that day would be my last day. The halls were empty, and the silence of the building was chilling, and with every ounce of my being, I desired to die. I think my teacher knew that. She came from her room to collect my disconsolate body and soul that lay dying from dejection.

This educator took the time to listen to me. And though I was not completely forthcoming, I shared my humiliation and struggle with my mother and her hatred for herself and me. I think I sat there with her for an hour or two, crying, talking and listening to what she had to say. Her words gave me hope, and her compassion reached out and touched my heart.

She made me promise that I would not do anything to harm either my mother or myself. She then took me down to meet another teacher who sponsored the local ALANON group. I never gave her the letter, nor did I ever confess my reason for being in the hall in the first place, but her continued support and compassion gave me the strength to live beyond that day and the next.

This particular teacher is an example of the kind of educator bell hooks (2003) speaks of; she is committed to her students and, in that commitment, provides possibilities for students to see their own potential. I believe that if I had been her student earlier in my educational endeavor, I would have been a student who was able to develop a self that grew in my learning (hooks, 2003).

Susan S. Klein (Klein, 2007) purports in the book, *Handbook for achieving gender equity through education*, that for students to fully participate in school and achieve their personal academic potential, it is vital that they feel safe; that they feel part of their own school. Given they may feel detached from school, LGBT students routinely experience difficulties with victimization. These common concerns may seriously affect LGBT students' achievement in high school and may negatively influence their aspirations for further education. Klein notes:

- Murdock and Bolch (2005), in their survey of 101 LGB-identified high school students, found that greater feelings of

school exclusion were significantly related to lower grades among LGB youth.

- Russell, Seif, and Truong (2001) found that boys with bisexual attraction scored two tenths of a grade point lower than their peers.
- Kosciw and Diaz (2006) found that LGBT students who reported higher levels of harassment and assault in school related to their sexual orientation or gender expression also reported lower grades. Further, they found that LGBT youth were twice as likely to report that they did not want to continue their education than students from a general sample of secondary school students from the National Center for Education Statistics and that this difference was strongest for LGBT students reporting high levels of in-school victimization

(p. 560)

In the book, *Teacher Education: Curriculum and change*, David Hartley and Maurice Whitehead (2006) assert that as one constructs outcomes in teacher education, one needs to assess what it means to teach all students well, to assess what it means to adjust teaching practices according to the needs and interests of all children. Gloria Ladson-Billings states that the “changing demographics of the nation’s school-children have caught schools, colleges, and departments of teacher education by surprise. Students are still being prepared to teach in idealized schools that serve White, monolingual, middle class children from homes with two parents” (Ladson-Billings, as cited in Hartley & Whitehead, 2006, p. 263). The professional teacher’s image consists of one who constructs culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that is not only multicultural but also anti-assimilationist, anti-racist, socially reconstructionist and/or aimed toward social justice.

Basically, the professional teacher teaches in a way that bell hooks identifies as emancipatory and “transgressive.” “The classroom with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility” (Hartley & Whitehead, 2006, p. 263). In this possibility field,

educators have the opportunity to labor for freedom and to ensure that their minds are open. In this scenario of education as the practice of freedom, one has the chance to make certain that one's heart remains open to permit one to face reality, even as educators may collectively imagine ways to move past boundaries, to transgress.

Passing

Until the incident with my mother at the school recital, I hid my sexual identity, but not because I was ashamed of it. I believed my reason for hiding was to avoid the discriminatory acts that I had witnessed toward my family over the course of my life. However, on the day that I seriously contemplated suicide, my desire to be nothing like my mom made me realize how much I was ashamed of being gay. I thought that being gay would ruin my life just as being deaf had ruined it. I saw these two identities as plagues that would only eat away at my existence, and I could not let that happen.

The remainder of my time in school was spent trying ever harder to fit in and be "normal." I attended ALANON meetings for a while, but even within that group I could not reveal who I was. The students in that group were normal outside of the fact they lived with alcoholics. I felt as though they could never experience what I experienced because their problems were external. This is not to say that I was without friends. I had a small circle of friends who knew that my mother was an alcoholic and who opened their homes to me when my aunt was away on business. However, as close as I was to them, I still never revealed the truth. I had the friend I partied with; I had the friend who became a sister to me and now knows everything; I had the guy friend who was safe because we shared a secret, even though we did not know it at the time; and I had the friend I was in love with. She could never know, and unfortunately

we have not spoken in almost twenty years. The completion of my false identity was imperative for the survival of my being. I even went to the prom with the boy who was safe instead of with the girl I was in love with. I walked the walk and talked the talk of an everyday, average teenager—if there is such a thing. Later, when I told the friend who was like a sister about both identities (deaf and gay), she just smiled at me and said, “Well, you are still spending the night?” I will always be grateful for that acceptance and will always love her. To this day, we remain close, and though we live in separate cities, we always find a way to see each other when we can.

When I graduated high school and began to explore the sexual side of my identity, I got involved with Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). I began to speak to other youth who were struggling with their own identity and with the navigation skills it took for them to maneuver in and out of school. I yet again found a community that celebrated the individuality I hid and showed me a culture that my parents could not or would not have shown me. I flourished within this new community and made many friends who felt comfortable being different.

As time went on, I still continued to struggle with who I was—the whole package—both gay and deaf. Although I was not kicked out of this community as I was in the deaf world, I eventually drifted away, because there was still that part of me that wanted to be normal.

Ties of my Identity

Irene W. Leigh (2009) asserts in the book, *A Lens on deaf identities perspectives on deafness*, that when one claims a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (GLBT) identity, one engages in a process to affirm a minority identity

that surpasses identifying with the leading heterosexual group. Interfacing sexual orientation identity with d/Deaf identity may constitute a daunting process, “incorporating as it does the need to deal with multiple-minority status, depending on the influence of family, peers, ethnic background, cultural perspectives about sexual expression, and socioeconomic factors that can influence acceptance or rejection” (Leigh, 2009, p. 140). When individuals do not feel that they can suppress any longer their desire to affirmatively identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, individuals may find that the need to confront social taboos regarding homosexuality and transgender changes, particularly in areas that assert heterosexuality as the only permissible norm, frequently requires complex, delicate identity management.

There is no straightforward process to internalize an identity within the GLBT continuum. Leigh (2009) argues that contrary to gender and ethnic identities, which are acknowledged earlier in life, sexual orientation generally does not integrate into the core identity until later in the individual’s life situations. At that point, the need arises to accept this particular identity despite social stigma. “The coming-out experiences of many individuals who reveal their GLBT identities illustrate the impossibility of creating simple linear explanations of sexual orientation identity development” (Leigh, 2009, p. 140). As an individual expresses different aspects of sexual identity at various times, this particular process, which generally encompasses numerous changes in sexual behavior over time and place, more commonly acknowledges fluid sexual identities. In addition, the coming-out process may occur at multiple ages during the individual’s life span. The way the process evolves, “with its multiple potential transitions and vacillations in adopting a social minority sexual identity, depends

greatly on the nature of interactions between individuals and the social context” (Leigh, 2009, p. 140). Despite awareness of the different stigmas, some have framed the coming-out process as requiring that one comes out as *different* and that one integrates a sense of his or her particular difference into his or her self-perception in a positive way.

To accomplish positive integration, Leigh (2009) explains that this process requires for the individual to invest enhanced attention to the private versus the public self and to evaluate the safety of revealing his or her sexual orientation. Possessing a “solid sense of self-acceptance will facilitate the development of a comfort zone in managing such identities. This is not always easy to achieve, particularly when the end result can lead to alienation, disconnection, and internal dissonance because of nonaccepting environments” (Leigh, 2009, p. 140). If support from sympathetic peers, siblings, or significant others does not materialize or if a dearth of opportunity for self-exploration exists, these particular environments then discriminate against the individual.

With support and affirmation leading to commitment, reinforced by the presence of supportive role models that may fortify one in the face of anticipated rejection, Leigh (2009) purports that positive resolution will likely occur. In regard to the deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who identify as LGBT, Breivik (2005) quotes a deaf colleague: “Exchange the label gay/lesbian with deaf, and you’ll have a fairly good description of our situation” (deaf colleague, cited in Leigh, 2009, p. 141). From the different developmental trajectories that may occur either at discontinuous times or simultaneously, a complex picture of minority identity dynamics may evolve for both

identities. Leigh relates the following scenario for the reader to consider in order to enhance the reader's understanding of a complex picture:

Imagine a woman who has understandable speech but finds herself on the margin at parties organized by hearing friends. Her Deaf peers question whether she is Deaf or hard of hearing, which in turn engenders an internal struggle to figure out where she is on the continuum, or whether she can be both depending on context. At the same time, she may be considering whether it is the correct time for her to come out as a lesbian and whether her hearing family will still warmly keep her within their fold if she does so. Despite her strong bond with her Deaf community, they may be uncomfortable with this facet of her identity. She may also be searching for access to a Deaf community of lesbians, but if she is not in a major urban area, integrating her deaf sense of self with her lesbian identity could very well be more problematic (Leigh, 2009, p. 141).

Conclusion

The fringe of any group is not always easy to define. For those of us who sit on multiple fringes and struggle to find a balance that will bring the inner peace of self awareness, definition becomes crucial. Throughout these two chapters, I have unveiled some of the hurdles that face members of the deaf/HH and LGBT identities. I hope that as the research unfolds, I will find the answer to the question of balance and self acceptance of those identities that can hide in the shadows and that keep us on the fringe.

**Chapter 5: Shame, Passing, and the Community:
The stories behind these interrelated phenomena**

True success is based upon something other than dominating and diminishing another person

-Gail Pursell Elliott

Introduction

The idea that we as individuals can share stories separately yet equally is the message communicated by the four participants in this study. We see the stories of our lives as being unique and individual. When we are in our youth, our stories are overwhelming and consuming, making it difficult to see those around us creating the stories of their lives. At times we even create a cover story to hide the real lived story. These hidden stories are what will be discussed in this chapter as well as the covers created to hide them.

When the stories are hidden, it becomes even more difficult to find the similarities among them. Throughout this research the participants informed me of their isolation in the story, that they hid only to find, in the case of the LGBT participants, that they were truly not alone in their struggles. Over the course of this chapter, I will overlay the stories of the four participants. As I analyzed the data, three themes emerged in the stories of the participants: shame, passing and the community, and within the themes of shame and passing stories included sub-themes of home, school and their community. However, when the participants spoke of their respective communities (LGBT and Deaf) the stories were not separated into categories of home, school and their community. I will speak to each of these themes while sharing the stories lived and relived by others and told and re-told by me.

As stated in the methodology chapter, I recruited four participants. Two of the participants are self-proclaimed lesbians, Mary and Rachel. Both of these women remained closeted during their youth and did not make public their orientation until after leaving high school. The other two participants are hard of hearing. Mark has moderate to severe hearing loss with just a slight speech issue. Karen lost some of her hearing when she was young and has no speech issues. All four of the participants hid these identities from their friends and, in the LGBT youth cases, from their families as well. In order to hide these identities the hard of hearing participants created elaborate cover stories to live out in their schools and communities.

The stories discussed and shared in this chapter come from the open-ended survey, the interviews with the participants and their own writings. At times, these stories brought laughter, other times, they brought tears. Several times participants asked me not to write some of the stories they shared while other times they requested a particular story be told. The process of sharing with each participant helped give me an even greater understanding of why I am doing this. There is a certain amount of pain in developing an identity one we can all recall. For those who have a hidden identity such as my participants and I the process can be even more painful. It is in my own pain and my participants pain I share these lived stories to help others understand everyone needs a voice to be heard. This is the voice for my participants and I.

Shame

As I began to look at the stories collected, an emerging theme of shame appeared. This theme, as stated above, came in three kinds of stories, those about home,

those about school and those about the communities in which these participants lived. Shame can be defined as “painful emotion caused by consciousness of shortcomings, guilt, or impropriety” (Merriam-Webster, 2010). Bradshaw (2005) articulates that the effects of shame play a major role in developing our identities. As I analyzed the stories below, I was able to see the connection between shame and identity development, especially in my hard of hearing participants.

Stories of Shame at Home

Two of the four participants came from a two-parent home and two of the participants had parents who were divorced. All four participants have at least one sibling. The participants are the only ones in their immediate families who have these identities, and all four participants stated that part of their feeling of shame about their identity originated in being the only one in the family with that identity. Mary came from a conservative family with deep religious ties, and Rachel’s cultural heritage of strong family values not only invoked her feelings of shame but also made the acceptance of her lived and told story even more difficult. For Karen and Mark, the shame at home came not from religion or heritage but from internal isolation and difficulty in participating with their families in the ways their siblings did. Regardless of the cause of their shame at home, all four shared similar stories of shame.

Rachel recalled participating in her coming of age party where she was required to wear a dress, heels and make-up. She explained, “I was told that I would wear this dress and like it if I wanted to stay in this family”. Rachel continued to share that as she sat in her room, she overheard her mom telling her grandmother “that she did not know what was wrong with me but I had better not embarrass the family and bring shame to

their good name.” I could see the pain still echoing in her eyes as she revealed the details surrounding that event. Rachel remembered her brother coming in and teasing her about how she looked, making her feel even worse about what was happening. Throughout the night, her mother walked her around the room “showing her off as if she was a doll.” Furthermore, members of her extended family, were there pressuring Rachel to dance with all the eligible boys from school and questioning her about her social life. She said, “One aunt chased me around the room asking why I did not want to dance and at one point said ‘Are you gay?’.” Rachel looked down and said she never felt so much shame and fear about who she was. She said that night made her feel not only awkward, but “wrong.” Rachel said that night made her question why she was the way she was and how could she make it go away.

It is clear from this story that Rachel’s parents were not tolerant of their daughter’s lack of interest in the mainstream behavior of girls her age. This was a major cause of Rachel’s shame. Numerous studies have shown authentic links between adolescents’ self-esteem and parent personalities. All of the studies tend to agree that higher levels of self-respect and pride are evident when parents are helpful and loving towards their children (Gecas, 1971, 1972; Growe, 1980; Graybill, 1978; Hoelter & Harper, 1987; Holmbeck & Hill, 1986; Kawash et al., 1985; Litovsky & Dusek, 1985; Peterson, Southworth, & Peters, 1983). Studies have also shown that if parents are able to manage the habits and behaviors of children while staying away from negative emotions such as apprehension, culpability, blame, and alienation, adolescents are more likely to have higher levels of self-respect and to have a healthy relationship with their parents. These studies further show that children feel a sense of pride through being,

not doing i.e. they realize that who they are is important (Graybill, 1978; Kawash et al., 1985; Litovsky & Dusek, 1985; Openshaw et al., 1984).

For most, adolescents, a strong sense of self-respect can be effectively increased through parental assistance, appreciation, and cooperation as well as family integrity and peace (Harter S. , 1999). This link between self-respect and family has proved true for most cultures, those who are in the majority and the minority, in both, western and eastern hemisphere countries (Herz & Gullone, 1999; Scott et al., 1991; Shek, 1999; e.g., Greenberger & Chen, 1996; Hughes & Demo, 1989). Apart from parental or familial participation, social circle and acquaintances are also very significant influences on the build-up of higher levels of self-respect amongst adolescents. If both these factors are consistent and strong, then the minority groups can find ways to get past the biased impressions of the majority groups which will help them develop more confidence and self-esteem (Barnes, 1980). Sadly for Rachel neither her parents nor her extended family allowed her the opportunity to respect herself and her identity.

For Mary, a second research participant in my study, growing up was all about image. She stated, "Image meant everything to my family." Coming from a religious background, the appearance of being a good Christian was very important. This focus on the importance of image translated to Mary that who she was, a lesbian, would not be accepted. The shame that came with being gay in a religious family was overwhelming to Mary. She said that it played a major role in her own acceptance and even her self-esteem growing up. Some of her family now knows about her identity, the shame accompanying being gay has kept her from telling extended family members her secret. Mary made it very clear that she could not ever come out to some members of

her family not only because of the shame it would bring to her but because it would bring shame to her immediate family. For Mary, shame is still one of her greatest struggles.

Parent-child interaction and communication is considered very important, not only for the association of the parent and child, but also for the adolescent's self-respect. Numerous psychological studies performed by Lerner and Spainer (1978) have concluded that multiple depictions of self-concept and the assessments of one's self-esteem influence the overall communication between the parent and the child (Burns, 1982; Papini & Sebbi, 1987). Of course, communication with contemporaries and friends is also very important for the adolescent's self-respect and pride. Lackovic-Grgin and Dekovic (1990) found that during the process of communication, if both parties show emotions of confidence, reception, and support, then it is very likely that the adolescent will experience higher levels of self-respect (Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990). Unfortunately for Mary, her story, like that of Rachel, tells the exact opposite story that a lack of parental confidence, reception, and support leads to lower levels of self-respect.

Unlike Mary and Rachel, Mark's shame came from within. He informed me early in our conversation that he took on a great deal of shame with his family because he was different and could not fit in as well as his siblings. Mark, the third research participant in my study, was born with a hearing impairment and, like so many, he was the only one in his family with this issue. His parents, as he puts it, "are good parents and love me but struggled with me growing up." He told me many stories of how his parents would have to repeat things to him when they were out in public, and he could

tell they were “frustrated” even though they accommodated him. Mark told me one particular instance when he was about nine, and they were at a movie, and he kept leaning over to his mom to ask her what someone said. She would try in the softest voice to tell him what was said. Mark paused and then said that the man behind them got angry and told his mom, “next time leave the retard at home,” Mark said his mom looked at the man and said “sorry.” He told me “That was the last time I asked anyone to tell me what someone was saying during a movie.”

Similarly, I had an experience where I was making a lot of noise, trying to talk, in a restaurant and the table next to us made a comment about me and my mother responded with a “sorry” and proceeded to punish me. Unlike Mark my mother never was supportive or patient with my hearing impairment. However, like Mark I stopped talking in public when I was with my mother. I would simply shut down due to self-confidence issues. This self isolation is a common theme for both Mark and I. To this day volume is an issue for me and to this day I get confronted for it. To this day I shut down.

Mark could not tell me why his mother did not say anything and denied that his mother was ashamed, but he said that moment made him feel shame for who he was. Mark said that was a turning point for him with his family. He told me that he withdrew and remained withdrawn until his college years. However, Mark continued to claim that his family never treated him differently, and it was only after several conversations with me that he admitted that his parents sometimes hid his hearing loss as well. He began to intentionally create a new identity to cope with his hearing and speech

impediment. It was his belief that in order to be accepted as normal he was going to have to change, to pretend.

That particular conversation came when he was sharing some of his journal writings in which he recounts, “How many times my parents said nothing about me having a hearing problem.” Mark informed me, “The movie theater incident when I was nine was just one of many during my childhood where my parents failed to say why and said sorry instead.” He spoke of an instance in which he and his mom were at the store and he turned for just a minute and lost his mom. Mark went to the store clerk and asked for assistance, when his mother found him the clerk told the mother maybe she should get a leash for him. Again his mother simply replied “sorry” to the clerk and took Mark home.

It is interesting to me that even after telling these stories and recalling the moments in which his parents did this he still said his “parents are not ashamed of me, and all the feeling of shame came from within.” Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) were the first experimental interactionists who believed that the social circle and communication are key for higher self-respect where self respect is mainly determined by the opinions and viewpoints of significant others like family, friends, teachers, etc. This can definitely explain why Mark felt the need to create a cover story or pretend identity, to gain in his eyes the respect of his family and friends. The psychodynamic philosophers (Kernberg, 1970) and attachment philosophers (Bowlby, 1982) support this approach and lay great emphasis on the influence of strong association with the mother on the child’s confidence and self-esteem. Every story similar to the ones given above were about Marks’ mother, again supporting his need to pretend through the

shame he felt. Bowlby (1982) found that parenting during the early stages of childhood is extremely important, as the child will feel more confident and acceptable if he or she has been treated with love, affection, and acceptance for who he or she is (Bowlby, 1982). Though Mark's parents had been supportive and accommodating in most cases, the negative events in Mark's life, where his parents did not live up to his expectations, left a permanent scar on his identity.

As Karen, the fourth research participant in my study, revealed her home life was separated into the before and after. Karen, unlike Mike, the third participant, lost her hearing during her youth, around the age of six. As a middle child, she recalled her pre-hearing loss home as a fun place filled with lots of talking and playing in her early years. However, she paints a different home after she lost her hearing. Her loss was of severe proportions, but she was already in school and had a good grasp of verbal language skills. She was fitted for hearing aids and hid them behind her long hair. Karen's need to hid her hearing aids connects back to this idea that she need to be someone different than who she was, a cover story that created a normal person in her mind.

In Karen's own words, "the transformation in my family was like night and day." Her older siblings tired quickly of having to tell her "over and over the things they once would yell down the hall." Her younger sibling "stopped calling me over to show me things because I would not hear her the first time she called my name." For Karen, the change was drastic and immediate; however, as our interviews progressed and her journal writing continued, she later confessed to me "that it may not have been as immediate as I thought then." Regardless of the amount of time it took, Karen knew

there was a change. She shared a story involving her and her older brother when they were in their teens. For her, the narrative of her experience represented a turning point.

Karen's brother came home from practice and announced to the family "he was going to be in the starting lineup." To preface this story, after school Karen and her siblings would have snacks in the kitchen to eat before heading up to their rooms to do homework. Karen said, "That particular day I was not in the kitchen but already up stairs studying for a test. She could tell something was going on downstairs, so I went down and when I got there and asked what was going on, my brother said 'oh, nothing' and refused to tell me the good news." Karen said she begged him to tell her the story, but instead he told her, "I am tired of repeating things just for your sake, and if you wanted to know, you should have been down here like everyone else." As Karen told me this story, I could see a tear come down her cheek and could feel the pain she still has over the moment. After she regained her composure, she said, "They, my siblings, always made me feel like it was my fault." I asked Karen if she still felt this way and she said, "Yes, but I am trying to get over it." Karen also said, "My brother has since apologized for his behavior, but he still struggles with communicating with me."

As for Karen's parents, she says they always supported her but never stopped her siblings from isolating her and making her feel ashamed of who she was. She explained, "Don't get me wrong, my parents and siblings love me, but I made it difficult to communicate with, and it caused problems." I understood what she meant even though my experience was a little different. After my surgeries my mother wanted to treat me as normal (hearing) and became even less tolerant when I struggled continuing the cycle of isolation even after gain some hearing.

It is interesting to note that my hard of hearing participants took on the responsibility of shame and hardship, whereas my LGBT participants made it clear that it was the family who brought about their shame. Whatever the reason, all four felt a strong sense of shame at home in regard to their identities, and believe this sense of shame has had a long-lasting impact on their lives. As Gecas and Schwalbe (1986) point out, the home “is the place where our initial sense of self is formed through intimate, intensive, and extensive interaction with parents and other family members” (p. 37). Therefore, the negative interactions experienced by the participants led them to develop an identity lacking self-esteem.

Stories of Shame at School

In addition to the stories of shame that involved the home, each participant conveyed stories of shame relating to their educational experience. According to Bradshaw (2005), shaming has had a significant role in the education system. School was a place where all my participants felt ashamed of who they were and did everything in their power to hide their identity. As individuals move from childhood to adolescence, a shift in attachment occurs as adolescents move away from their parents and towards their peers (Furman & Buhrmesler, 1992 as cited in Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). As my participants aged they continued to experience shame at home. As they became school age a desire to be part of the mainstream school setting increased. With this increased desire came more opportunities to experience shame through bullying and isolation.

Of my two LGBT participants, Rachel was the most forthcoming with stories of torture and torment. Rachel started with stories of bullying in middle school, which

involved the popular girls ridiculing her on a daily basis for not ever wearing a dress, for not being feminine. She told me, “I grew my hair in sixth grade and never cut it again until after I graduated high school.” I had a similar experience in middle school where I had short hair and began to be bullied for it, my reaction was exactly the same, I grew my hair and did not cut it short again.

Rachel confided that she had very few friends and began to draw art to find peace. Regarding her experiences of high school, Rachel said

I did everything I could to not get noticed one way or another... I was so ashamed of who I was and what I liked that I kept my head down my entire freshman year so I would not be caught looking at a girl.

The shame that Rachel felt during her first year kept her from participating in anything. She also confided, “I tried to, you know, my freshman year.” The gesture she made while making the statement was slitting her wrist. She did not want to elaborate on the actual event but she did share the story that brought about the event. Rachel told me,

I was sitting in class looking at my teacher, she was talking about I don't know, it doesn't matter. Anyway, this girl, a cheerleader thought I was staring just a little too hard at the teacher and called me a dike. The boy next to her started to laugh loudly and the teacher asked what was going on. I lowered my head and said nothing, but the girl blurted out Rachel has a crush on you! The whole class laughed at me and all the teacher said was ‘That's enough.’ I was so humiliated and felt so bad. I just couldn't take it anymore.

This particular story ended our conversation that day and left both of us in tears. I think that in that moment when she began to cry and called an end to our conversation I felt every scar due to bullying I received in school and was unable to control the tears

that rolled down my face. All I could think was how does this happen so many times with no change. Unfortunately, I have heard similar stories shared with me over the years by other LGBT individuals who became overwhelmed by the shame produced in hiding who they are. I included.

I asked Rachel if she ever confided in any of her teachers or reached out to one. Sadly, she said, “I never felt like I could without risking it getting back to my parents.” For Rachel, her parents finding out, as she stated, “would be the ultimate act of treason against the family name.”

Research (i.e., Yang, S.J., et. al, 2006, Goddard, C., 2008) shows that bullying amongst girls takes a different form than bullying amongst boys. Girls more often have an indifferent, indirect and psychological form of aggression, which could include exclusion, manipulation of the truth, derogatory remarks, or creation of unpleasant circumstances for those whom they don’t like (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Like the incident with Rachel physical violence was not threatened but her secret was put in jeopardy by the cruel words of a popular cheerleader who could have spread any rumor she wanted. Boys, on the other hand, use a more physical approach to bullying and more often end up in individual or group fights that cause physical damage and school suspension (Elliott, 2003). This was the case with the young man recently in a local school district who was reportedly tripped while walking down a flight of stairs (O’Hare, 2010).

Bullying percentages, intensities, and frequencies seem to vary in different age groups. As common sense would dictate, the physical form of bullying is most highly prevalent amongst young school-age children, potentially because of the lack of

communication and coping skills of younger children (Craig W. , 1998). Whereas in the older school-age students, the format of bullying becomes more indirect and subtle as aspects of victimization and bias merge into the concept of bullying (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Despite the fact that physical bullying decreases with age, it is replaced by psychological and emotional bullying or victimization, which can be just as damaging to an individual's personality as any of the physical bruises. The damage can be long-term, especially for those students who constantly fall victim to bullying (Thompson, Arora, & Sharp, 2002). This turned out to be true for Rachel as well. The fact that she tried to cut her wrist and end her life implies that she was extremely hurt and ashamed of who she was.

Many studies (i.e., Kim, Y.S. et al., 2009, Klomek, A.B. et al., 2009, Herba, C.M. et al., 2008) have confirmed that there is a very strong relationship between bullying and suicide. In fact, bullying is reported to be one of the important causes of higher suicide inclinations amongst middle and high school-age children. For instance, in the UK alone, statistics show that nearly 15 to 25 students who are victims of bullying antics incline toward committing suicide every year (Thompson, Arora, & Sharp, 2002).

For Mary, her shame led her to be more active in school, and she involved herself in many activities. The majority of her stories of shame are more appropriate for the theme of passing. Mary chose to talk more about how she hid her shame rather than why she felt shame. She would stay after class and help the teacher. She would always turn her work in early. She would assist her coach with cleaning up. In Mary's mind if she stayed out of trouble no one would really look at her and think anything negative.

My hard of hearing participants shared different struggles when it came to the shame they felt in school. Both experienced bullying. Mark spoke of being teased about his speech issue, and Karen spoke about being called a teacher's pet. Both stated they never felt their life was in danger; however, this is not to say that the bullying did not take a toll on these participants.

Mark, as stated earlier was born with his hearing impairment and had a slight speech impediment, which is common among hard of hearing children. The school was made aware of his hearing issues, but few modifications were made to accommodate his needs. He does not wear hearing aids due to the type of hearing loss he has. Therefore, for him, speech was the only perceived challenge he faced in school.

Mark told me several stories of teasing in his early education. He said he remembers

I was in fourth grade and I had one teacher who constantly called on students to read out loud in class. Every time there was reading to be done, which I felt like was every day, she would go from one child to the next making them read. I hated it when she got to me. I would struggle to say every word right, and when I couldn't say a word everyone would laugh at me. I felt like every word was wrong. I hated that class.

Mark continued to tell stories of being called upon in class and struggling to give the answer clearly. However, Mark informed me during the extensive interview process that, as he reflected back on all these stories, he realized it was probably his own fear and shame that caused him to struggle with his speech. When I asked him to elaborate, he said, "When I went off to school, no one really said anything about my speech...I guess I just never gave it any thought."

I asked Mark why most of his stories involving his speech occurred so early in his education, and his response truly saddened me. He said, “By the time I got to high school, I just quit talking.” Mark told me, “I sat at the back slumped down and did everything I could to be invisible because I was just too ashamed of how I sounded.”

I engaged with him just as I did Rachel, about reaching out to a teacher. He responded with a shake of his head left to right. He then looked at me and responded, “I just couldn’t do it.”

As stated earlier, Karen did not have a speech issue and wore hearing aids, which she kept hidden with her hair. Her experiences with bullying at school came in a different form from the others; she was teased for being a teacher’s pet. Because her teachers knew of her issue, she sat at the front of her classrooms, which, to the other students, equated to her being the “teacher’s pet.” She went on to say that, because she sat at the front, she struggled to hear those behind her, so when she was older, they called her a snob.

Karen shared with me a story about her fifth grade class and how she finally had to be moved to another class. She said,

On the first day of school I came in and was assigned a seat right up front. A group of girls came in right behind me and were scattered around the room one right next to me. She was one of those girls who later became a cheerleader and miss popular. Anyway, as the weeks went by she started to notice that the teacher treated me a little different from the rest of the class. She began to tease me about being the teacher’s pet and how I was only the pet because the teacher felt sorry for me because I was stupid and on and on. When I told the teacher she said she would talk to her. After the teacher talked to her things just got worse. She teased me more and more until I could not take it anymore. I finally asked my mom to get me out of the class, and she did.

I asked her why she did not tell the girl why she needed to sit at the front of the class. She replied, “I couldn’t tell her I can’t hear, she would have made my life a living hell. It was bad enough I was being called teacher’s pet. I can only imagine the names she would have called me if she knew the truth.” This is yet another possible driving force behind Karen’s decision to create a cover story to protect her real identity.

In high school, Karen stated that the teasing went from being called the teacher’s pet to being called a snob. She said, “I would be sitting in class, at the front, and someone would ask me a question, which I would not hear. When I didn’t answer they would call me a snob.” Karen went on to say that all the years of being teased by her classmates made her very insecure. She told me “I let my fear take control and overrun me.”

I asked Karen if she reached out to any of the teachers in the school. She said, “One.” Of all my participants, she was the only one to reach out. She informed me that it was her senior year of high school and the reason she reached out was she saw the teacher signing in a grocery store. Karen went on to tell me that the teacher had deaf parents and had grown up in the Deaf community. Karen also said, “I wished I had met her sooner; it would have made a big difference in my life.” Potentially, Karen could have found confidence in her real story if she had met this teacher sooner instead of pretending.

In observing the different methods of bullying in schools in the past years, there are certain acts that seem to common across regions. Some of the most common direct and indirect forms of bullying that can be found amongst school children include:

- verbal insults and biases being voiced in a crowd,

- persuasion through intimidation to do an act that was embarrassing, manipulating the truth about someone and presenting it in a twisted way,
- spitting in someone's direction,
- using sports to be physically aggressive towards someone,
- intimidation through social exclusion,
- making anonymous and insulting phone calls,
- spreading insulting rumors, taking and hiding belongings,
- sending offensive emails or messages,
- using malicious gestures, and
- publishing offensive content on social blogs, etc.

(Thompson, Arora, & Sharp, 2002)

Rachel, who shared the most stories about bullying experienced verbal insults as shown in her previous story. She also shared that during middle school she was harassed over the phone on a regular basis by the other girls in her class. She informed me they would call her up and then chant dyke several times before hanging up. Mark, one of my HH participants, shared at one point his fellow classmates did that retard gesture (hitting a limp hand against the chest) at him. Karen reported that she was excluded from birthday parties. I myself experienced several of these forms of bullying throughout my educational experience.

In these stories, three of my four participants shared their experiences with bullying in school. For three of them, the torment of being bullied by classmates took a toll, and not one of them could tell a story about school without crying. For me, this particular section was the most difficult to hear because, with each one of them, I could only sit there watching the horrible memories come back to them and see the pain on their face.

Stories of Shame in their Community

The emergence of community as an aspect of the themes was unexpected, especially when dealing with shame. Each of the participants spoke about the notion that the shame society places on the LGBT community and disabled community drove them to feel embarrassment. This outcome came as a surprise to me since this was the one area of shame I did not share with my participants. However, their stories compelled me to believe that for them the threat was real.

Mary, who had already spoken about the image issue, gave her concerns over the public image of the gay community. She confessed that the negative image of the community by the public and her family actually made her hate herself. This hatred was so strong that she turned to substance abuse escape the pain within. The pain can be attributed to prolonged negative and unconstructive feelings of depression. For Mary, her substance abuse ended only after she came out and met someone. A number of studies have included unconstructive social factors in their analysis of the relation between depression and substance abuse and have successfully found a strong relationship between multiple social factors of depression, leading to substance abuse (Hager et al., 1971; Harris, 1971; Kaplan et al., 1984; Kaplan et al., 1980; Siegel & Ehrlich, 1989; Smart & Fejer, 1969).

Though Mary would never overtly say she had low self-esteem her actions say otherwise. The pressure of maintaining the proper image for her family's sake drove her to withdraw into substance abuse. Emler (2001) studied causes and effects of low self worth. She synthesized research on self worth and studied various factors by

analyzing the allocation of the self-worth ratios between and amongst different social groups such as spiritual, socioeconomic, secular, familial structures, and varying interpersonal standpoints or choices. The results are not very good for individuals suffering from low self esteem. She found that lower levels of self-esteem amongst adolescents, quite often, leads to lowered self worth and higher substance abuse during school years. I want to point out that Mary is the only participant who admitted to substance abuse.

With Rachel, her own community's disapproval of homosexuality made it impossible for her to come to terms with herself while in school. She says, "I couldn't even dream of being happy with who I was without hearing crap from my community." Her ethnic background as well as her religious background kept Rachel from feeling comfortable with her own identity which leads to very low self-esteem. Rachel went on to talk about the comments made in her neighborhood when a gay couple moved in. She told me,

I was hanging out when the next door neighbor came over to talk to my father. He said, hey man did you hear? Some fags are moving in down the block. Her father responded, "Are you fucking kidding me! I can't believe some fucking fags would move in here. How dare they." I immediately got sick thinking I could never be free. I would have to move far away and never come back.

Rachel was so upset by those events that she said she considered running away.

Rachel went on to say that it took years for her to get over the shame she felt that day and admitted she probably never truly has because she has had little contact with her community since leaving home. The impact of this story on her was so strong that she brought it back up another day and said, "Every time I hear someone talking

like that about gays I get sick.” Her sense of shame and low self-esteem made it impossible to stand up at the time. She knew that if she were to say anything supportive she would be kicked out of her house. As reported by the California Society for Clinical Social Work (2010) in an article by Dr. Elaine Leader 50 percent of gay youth report that they are rejected by parents and in the state of California 40 percent of the reported homeless are identified as LGBT (Leader, 2010). She also said that whenever she hears talk like that she talks back. I asked if she went back to her community and confronted those people, and she replied, “No.” I believe the shame she felt that day will never leave her, even if she can confront others now.

Numerous researches (i.e. Brack, C.J., Brack G., & Orr, D., 1994, Reitz, E. et al., 2006, Munford, M., 1984) have proposed that one of the bases for all contemporary, friend, and parent associations is the adolescent’s personal assessments. These assessments vary with gender and cultural norms. Adolescents tend to calculate the worth of their relationships and associations on the basis of friendly social ambience from the contemporaries around them (Moran & Eckenrode, 1991), communal approval, as well as the reputations that are given to adolescents by their friends and other contemporaries (Miller, 1990). Rachel’s personal assessment about her relationship with her family and community brought up feelings of shame and guilt. These feelings prevent her from going back to her community and confronting it.

For the hard of hearing participants, the shame they felt involving community had more to do with the overarching umbrella of disability than with deafness. Both participants experienced shaming situations in which they were called retarded when their hearing impairment was revealed. This kind of bullying over a long period of time

aided the participants in their desire to be a part of the larger group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This desire to hide and belong in my opinion fueled their creation of cover stories, Mark the quiet mysterious kid and Karen the snob.

Mark, who came from an affluent community, began to notice behavior changes when people in the neighborhood talked to his parents. He told me,

One time I was playing with my brother and the women down the street came up to my mom. They started talking and soon they were both looking over at me. I then saw the women place her hand on my mother's arm and shake her head. Both her and my mom had this sad look on their face. I have no idea what they were talking about but I got the sense it had something to do with my problem. I tried to ask my mom later about it and she said not to worry. The thing is that woman never looked at me the same and always acted funny around me like I was too stupid to do anything. I hated that look; it made me feel stupid.

Mark went on to show me that look. I am sad to say I was all too familiar with the look he gave, the one where a person tilts her head, frowns slightly, and then shakes her head as if she is sorry you are that way. He said that look always made him feel like there was something "really wrong" with him. Similarly I received that look from friends of my mother when I was young; I believe that it was one of the reasons my mother chose not to tell people when we moved to Texas. Her own shame over my hearing situation prevented her from telling.

Karen, who looked and sounded like everyone else, said she did not have any shame issues in her community; however, after several conversations with me, she shared a shame story that did involve a community. Karen told me that one summer she and her family were visiting an aunt and uncle in another city, the one her mother grew up in. She proceeded with this story.

Me and my cousins were out in the front yard playing and some of their friends came by and said lets go swimming. I got so excited because I love to swim. I went in the house and changed just like my cousins but when I came back they told me I could not go. My cousin's friend said, "I not babysitting some retard." At the time, I did not know my cousin had said anything to his friend about me but apparently he did and they wanted nothing to do with me. My cousin looked at me and I shrugged then he went on. As they were leaving my cousin's friend kept slapping his hand against his chest like I was retarded. I was so embarrassed and ashamed. I spent the rest of the trip inside the house with my mom and aunt.

When I asked her about the community in which her aunt and uncle lived, Karen said they were, "you know WASP." By WASP, Karen meant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. I asked Karen if she ever learned what, exactly, her cousin had told his friend. Karen told me, "I never asked because I really did not want to know."

As I talked to the participants about these stories of shame relating to their homes, schools, and communities, I asked which area of their lives had the greatest impact on their sense of shame around their identities. Interestingly enough, all except for Mark said their families and homes, that their school environments played a role, but their families had the greatest impact on the shame they felt about who they were. This is not an uncommon perception, as research (i.e., Sheck D.T.L., 1999, Supple, A.J. & Small, S.A., 2006) has consistently shown that the impact of families is the most significant on an adolescent.

There are various cases where the adolescent has developed non-productive traits or isolation such as the case for Mary and Mark. Adams and Adams (1991) supported the belief that the adolescents who were genuinely unhappy with their familial or social conditions usually looked towards easier yet destructive measures to cope with their feelings. They further state that these particular adolescents often lack

necessary problem solving skills and find it easier to turn to alternatives. It is my belief that since my LGBT participants felt they had no one to turn to for help they found the more destructive alternatives. For Rachel, living in a community and family who believed homosexuality was the worst kind of sin she was never providing coping skills. In Mark and Karen's case the types of coping skills and or problem solving skills were never provided because their families did not see their hearing impairments as a possible cultural opportunity just a medical problem. In a later study by Adams and Adams (1996) directly related negative life events involving family conflicts to cause a greater risk of depression and destructive alternatives.

One of the other aspects or causes of shame that has not been thoroughly investigated is the influence of different parenting methods and consequential self-handicapping strategies. In theory, there is enough logic presented to lead one to believe that various parenting methods or approaches have a significant effect on self-handicapping strategies and/or the development of shame. Jones and Berglas (1978) asserted that the cause of most activities and self-handicapping coping strategies was the consistent inability of parents to make the child feel supported and appreciated whenever the child was in a tough spot throughout the span of his young life. Jones and Berglas (1978) did not provide any explanation or pattern to show how they came to this conclusion, nor did they provide any suggestions on how to rectify the problem. Nevertheless, they still concluded that lack of parental support and appreciation is a critical factor leading to the formation of depression and self-handicapping strategies. The study also suggests that those adolescents who lived in such an environment and

yet were able to develop a constructive self-image would still have high levels of insecurity and would be more guarded than others (Jones and Berglas, 1978).

Passing

As I continued to analyze the data, I saw that many times the idea of shame played a role in the participants' desire to hide and pass as a member of the larger society. Each participant went to great lengths to hide his or her identity and play the game of normalcy. The stories that follow are ones of the painstaking actions these participants undertook in order to fit in. For me, these were some of the hardest stories to hear because I am well acquainted with the torment of trying to fit in, as harmless as it might appear for one to do so. As with the theme of shame, within the theme of passing, stories emerged revolving around the home, the school, and the community.

This idea of passing is about pretending to be normal, as perceived by my participants and myself. When I talk about passing I am talking about making sure I look like everyone else and sound like everyone else. For my LGBT participants' passing was about doing those things such as, growing their hair, participating in school activities, and dating in order to appear to be like their peers. For my HH participants this meant creating a cover story that would justify their inability to hear like their peers. This notion of a cover story was touched on earlier in the chapter. This section is where the majority of these cover story stories are told by Mark and Karen.

Stories of Passing at Home

The idea that one must play a game at home may be alarming to some, but, for those who hide a secret, the game is everything. My participants said that on any given

day they would have to pretend to be someone they were not just to get by. For my LGBT participants, this game was their highest priority. Both Mary and Rachel felt as though their world would end if their secret got out.

Mary, who was the least forthcoming with stories, said that she did everything in her power not to be noticed. I asked her to explain what that meant and she elaborated by saying, “I stayed under the radar. I was the good kid in the family. I always did what I was supposed to do, stayed out of trouble, kept my nose clean.” Mary struggled so much with the idea of her family finding out that she even denied her identity to herself and tried to fit in.

When explaining the emotional constraints of a depressed adolescent living in self-denial, many researchers have said that the mindset of self-denial presents an enormous hurdle for the commencement or development of other emotions (Cole & Kaslow, 1988; Gross & Munoz, 1995; Tomarken & Keener, 1998). An individual’s development of sentiments or sensitivities can be traced to his or her reactions to and interactions with those around him or her for the purpose of maintaining an affective state of being (Thompson R. , 1990). Mary found that her interactions with her family were limited and removed, and she delved into an unfavorable habit, substance abuse.

Mutual relations or network relations help in the formation of tactics that can help individuals to tackle situations for which they are unprepared or about which they feel stress (Lindahl & Markman, 1990; McDonough, Carlson, & Cooper, 1994). These tactics can be used as accurate indicators to detect how much negativity an individual brings into an association when faced with an unenthusiastic response from the other side. Mary’s strategy of living in self-denial hurt her social identity. The fact that she

displayed good manners and always tried to be the proper kid serves as an accurate indicator of how much negativity she brought into her relationship with her parents. As stated above, Mary was the least forthcoming of all the participants. One can attribute her reluctance to share her stories to the negative emotional imprints embedded in her mind by her family and by her years of living in self-denial.

In Rachel's case, the eminent threat of being "outed" to her family was so strong that she gave in to her mother's constant harping and allowed her mom to set her up with a boy from a neighboring high school. She informed me,

It was the worst experience of my life. I was so tired of my mom yelling at me for being a "tomboy" that I told her "fine set me up." She did too. She introduced me to some co-workers son from a nearby town. He came to pick me up and we went to dinner where he went on talking about how great he was and how lucky I was to be going out with him. After dinner, at a crappy restaurant, we went to a movie. I don't even remember the name of it. I sat there the whole time looking at this girl sitting in the row in front of me. She was so pretty, long black hair, with a really hot top on. Anyway, he put his arm around me while we were sitting there; he even tried to cop a feel. After the movie, he took me home. I thought "Thank God the night is over." I was wrong; he then tried to kiss me. At first, I tried to pull away but then he said, "Don't you like to kiss?" I realized I better so I did. It was so disgusting. I hated every bit of it but I just sat there and did it anyway. I think we went on four or five dates before I made up some excuse to stop seeing him. My mom left me alone for a while after that, but then tried to set me up again.

Wearing my research hat, I inquired how many boys her mom set her up with, and she there me there were four in a two-year period. I asked her how she was able to end the relationships without raising suspicions, and she said, "Luckily, my family is Catholic." It is interesting that she used religion as an excuse since she informed me

early on that she was never a practicing Catholic. In many ways she created a religious cover story to justify her lack of sexual interest in the boys seeking her affection.

Some of the practical research shows that both adolescents and young children derive their development and growth capabilities from parental attitudes towards their emotional behavior. In a study conducted by Eisenberg, Fabes, and Murphy (1996), that the researchers stated that a majority of school-age children had reduced emotional expression with the increase in disciplinary, unenthusiastic, and misery-driven reactions from their parents. In their research, Eisenberg, Fabes, and Murphy (1996) also concluded that mothers who used disciplinary approaches to their parenting were less likely to apply constructive tactics that would encourage growth but would use evasive tactics instead. Rachel's mother, with her excessive meddling in Rachel's dating life, bullied her into compliance.

The same living conditions have been observed for schoolchildren whose mothers are unhappy with their child's negative behaviors. Numerous studies have asserted that most depressed mothers tend to react in a harsh, uncooperative, and unsympathetic way towards their child's unconstructive inclinations and tend to enforce more disciplinary tactics to take control instead of trying to understand the child (Garber, Braafladt, & Zeman, 1991). In Rachel's case, her mother believed the false image of mainstream sexuality that Rachel hid behind and tried to help Rachel's dating life. Rachel was confused about her identity, and she did not feel comfortable coming out at that time in her life and did not feel comfortable talking about it to her mother. She hid her true self in order to be accepted by her family and feared that if she showed

her true inclination, her mother would use harsh disciplinary measures to control her and force her to change.

For my hearing impaired participants, the passing game was very different. I noticed their stories of passing at home had more to do with trying to fit in like their siblings with each other and their parents. This fitting in involved acting as though they understood the conversations even when they were lost. This next set of stories resonates with me personally not in a sense of dealing with my family and home life but dealing with the world in general. The ability to navigate, to pass, involves a certain ability to play along. Though I never really did this at home, I most definitely do it in every other aspect of my life.

Mark, who believes completely in his family's support of his situation, told me several stories in which he played along in an attempt to be more like his siblings. Because his hearing loss is only moderate to severe, he claims that he is a decent lip reader. It is important to note that lip reading is not an easy task, and the reality is that not many hearing impaired people can truly read lips. Most, like Mark, use a combination of sound and visual movement to follow conversations. Mark struggled with lip reading and often required statements to be repeated.

Of his time growing up, Mark said his family often "randomly said things" through the house and the rest of the family would respond from wherever they were. Mark said he used to say stuff back like his siblings. He kind of chuckled and said, "Rarely was my response appropriate." I asked him why he would respond, and he replied that it was to be like his siblings. I pressed the issue further, and Mark told me that responding to the random statements made him feel like his siblings; even if he did

not always respond appropriately, responding kept him involved in the family culture. He went on to say, “Besides, it got to be a kind of game where everybody waited for me to reply just to see what I heard or thought I heard.” For Mark, passing with his family meant belonging to his family.

Social identity theory postulates that parents have a major part to play in the development of social skills as well as the growth and use of these skills in adolescents (Cole & Kaslow, 1988; Garber et al., 1995). McDonough et al. (1994), in their study, assert that “nurturing [and we would add socializing] children requires that adults both accept and limit the child's expression of affect [and] minimize their expressions of negative affect toward the child” (p. 67). Parent-adolescent associations and communications are perhaps the only continuing learning environments where adolescents can learn their own capabilities through constant examples, guidance, and possibilities that are presented to them by their parents. All these examples can constantly change, mold, and manage the emotional growth, interactions and manifestation of adolescents.

All forms of practical research, such as progressive and scientific research, have confirmed the belief that parental or familial input and tactics/methods have a direct influence on adolescents' emotional growth or abilities. Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1996, 1997) conducted a study on the input that parents' sentiment values have on adolescents and concluded that their values were critical. This study was fundamentally a longitudinal, bio-psychosocial evaluation of three elements: parental attitudes, the extent of the adolescent's emotional adjustment abilities, and the results of the child's development. By observing and assessing these three elements, the researchers were

able to determine how the parents were able or unable to acknowledge, address, and help solve the adolescent's formations of negative and unconstructive emotions and to develop the adolescent's social and interactive abilities with contemporaries in school. Mark's interaction with his family members left a mostly constructive mark on his social identity. This is because his family allowed him a certain degree of freedom. In interacting with his family, Mark was allowed to behave in the manner he deemed most appropriate.

When Karen and I talked about this idea of passing, she again made the distinction between before and after her hearing loss. She said that before, she always fit in with her siblings and never had problems, but after, even with the hearing aids, she became isolated and felt a need to go the extra mile to fit in. She told me that she would bug her siblings all the time just so she could stay in the conversation. Karen stated,

One time my brother was sitting in the living room talking on the phone to his friend about some movie he went to see, I made a point to sit in and listen to his conversation so that when he got off I could talk to him about it. Of, course when he got off and I started to talk to him he looked at me and told me to leave him alone. That happened a lot.

I inquired into his behavior prior to her losing her hearing. She said no and proceeded to inform me, "He did that because I totally missed what the movie was." So, for Karen, as for Mark, it was about belonging and being like her siblings.

Several research studies show that the relationship between an adolescent's self-esteem and his or her need for belonging is strongly influenced by his or her family, and family can play a major role in the development of social identity (Gold and Yanof,

1985; Golombeck et al., 1987; Holmbeck and Bale, 1988; Isberg et al., 1989; Kamptner, 1988; LeCroy, 1988; Offer et al., 1982). Because Karen's family, in her mind, changed after her hearing loss, she was unable to continue forming the same kinds of relationships with her family members, and an underlying tone of not belonging became apparent in her stories. She repeated on several occasion she felt a distinct change in her families mood towards her after the loss. I would conclude from her lived experiences she felt isolated from the rest of the family which she has not recovered from.

The subset of passing at home was one area where a notable difference appeared between the responses of my LGBT participants and my hard of hearing participants. In addition, it is in this subset that a difference is seen in the level of threat to well-being felt by the participants. Whereas the LGBT participants believed being "outed" at home would be a life or death issue, and both shared that they would most likely have been kicked out of their homes, the hard of hearing participants merely saw the need to pass at home in order to feel as though they belonged in the family the same way their siblings did.

Stories of Passing at School

The need for passing in the school environment has improved some over the years for LGBT youth. Blyth, Simmons and Zakin (1985) characterized the need for belonging amongst peers as a subjective occurrence rather than an objective one. Aspirations and expectations are formed by customs and mores about the desired social status of both males and females emanating from the society. By applying this

definition, one finds that self-respect is directly proportional to the level of cultural standards an adolescent believes he/she has attained.

To my parents it was critical and to me it was necessary for me to pass at school; for my hard of hearing participants, the need to pass at school was more personal and came directly out of the shame they felt about who they were as hard of hearing individuals. All four participants, for differing reasons, felt a need to pass as normal in school.

Of all of the topics we discussed, Mary felt most comfortable talking about passing at school. She was very forthcoming in explaining to me how she navigated school and passed for “normal.” She talked about all the different clubs she participated in and the sports she played; however, she did not tell any in-depth stories. The most striking statement she made was, “The fact I knew I was different helped me academically because it made me more open-minded and accepting of other perspectives.” For Mary who struggled with her own acceptance appeared to find tolerance for others with difference. She could not directly tell me why she could accept others but not herself. However, I believe her own acceptance was not possible due to the conservative upbringing she experienced.

The most notable way that Mary played the game of passing in school was in the dating scene. Mary informed me that once she knew she was different from the other girls, she made a conscious effort to talk about boys. She would tell her friends that she thought some boy was cute just to keep from raising suspicion. When I asked

her more specific questions about dating, she said, “I did just enough.” She did only what she had to do in order to keep her secret safe.

Mary talked about the different groups in her school and said she belonged to the “alternative group.” What was interesting to me is she said she belonged to this group because she was shy. I asked if she felt safer in this group than any of the others she could have been involved with in school. She answered yes and did not elaborate. Those in the alternative group tend to appear as those who stand out as individuals with unique stories, possibly cover or possibly real.

When I asked Mary about her teachers, she said she was well liked by them because she helped them out before and after class. When I asked her if she had any crushes on any of her teachers, she said, “no,” that it was not even a possibility in her mind. In fact, she was clear that even when she had crushes on fellow students in high school, she dismissed them as “different feelings.” For Mary, passing was so ingrained in her that it took her leaving the country while in college before she would acknowledge her own feelings.

Collins (1991) found that the phase of turning from an adolescent to a youngster is the phase where identity crises occur for most children. Furthermore, it is during this transition that the adolescent starts to deal on a larger scale with psychosocial realities and starts to develop his or her tackling or coping capabilities and tactics. Compas (1987) found that this coping development phase is under-researched and rarely comprehended. Mary’s transformation occurred in high school; however, her coping came later. Frydenberg and Lewis (1994), in their study, can help to explain Mary’s

delayed coping with their finding that adolescents have a whole structure of coping tactics, and, none of those tactics are used in frequency or with consistency. Mary, who to this day cannot explain the change in her while she was away, apparently developed coping skills that eventually led to her accepting herself to some degree.

Not unlike Mary, Rachel did everything in her power to pass in school for straight. Even though she refused to wear dresses, she grew her hair out and began to wear make-up in an attempt to fit in with the other girls in her class. She told me that she would often talk about make-believe boys from neighboring towns to keep anyone from finding out the truth. For me this need to pass as straight kept me always dating. The difference was I typically dated boys who later identified themselves as gay. At the time I was unaware of their secret just as they were of mine. I suppose that is why I was successful at the dating game. There was no expectation of sex to worry about.

She relayed to me that the hardest part of it all was dealing with being in love with her best friend. She shared that she would see her every day and wanted to tell her how she felt but could not. Rachel told me a story about spending the night at her best friend's house.

I stayed at my friends a lot. I don't know if that was a good thing or not but I was happy about it at the time. Anyway, I got over there and her mom had cooked us dinner and we all sat around the table talking and laughing. I remember thinking I wish this could last forever. After dinner my friend and I went upstairs to her room to listen to a new CD she got. This was a ritual of ours. As we laid there listening to the music she started to reveal to me that she thought she was madly in love with this guy in our class. She went on and on describing him as if I didn't already know who he was. I found myself getting angrier and angrier until I blew up. I told her I was sick of hearing about him and she was never to bring it up again. I stormed down the stairs and she followed. She grabbed my

arm and said, “What’s your problem?” All of a sudden, I realized what had just happened I didn’t know what to do and I quickly lied and told her I had just broken up with a guy and was upset about it. She apologized for being so thoughtless and turned all her attention to me. I felt so bad about lying to her then telling her some bullshit story just so she wouldn’t learn the truth.

I could tell this story still bothered her so I asked if she ever told her friend the truth. Rachel put her head down and said, “Yes, and we are no longer friends.” She said her friend was upset by the fact that she had feelings for her and told her that she could not deal with it at the time. I asked her if she would do it differently if she had a chance, and she said no. “I had to be normal in school or it would have been the end of me.” This is a sad reality for LGBT youth. I related quite a bit to Rachel due to my own experiences. This was one of those instances when I sat and recalled my own experience with a close friend who I no longer speak to due to my sexuality. However, in my case it was my own fear of her reaction that forced me to walk away without revealing myself.

Rachel went on to say that she often would talk about boys to other girls in her class just to participate in the conversations; however, she stated that doing this always made her feel uncomfortable. “I always felt like I was going to get caught lying.” Both of my LGBT participants mentioned this need to talk about boys to try and hide their true desires. In doing so, both participants admitted the discomfort they felt by telling these lies and pretending to be someone they were not.

Phillips (1978) points out that adolescents who have higher anxiety levels tend to get more involved in problematic situations and raise serious mannerism concerns, that they tend to be unpopular and ostracized by their contemporaries, have inferior

levels of the self esteem, and that their grades and academic attitudes suffer a lot more as opposed to those adolescents who are less anxious. Johnson (1979) found that the academic achievements of between 10% and 30% of all schoolchildren are hampered by increased levels of anxiety. Adolescents who have lower degrees of anxiety were found to be more alert and to experience higher academic presentations and achievements and are more likely to have higher levels of self esteem (Johnson S. , 1979). Rachel was a perfect example of this. The more she pretended, and the more anxiety she felt about pretending, the more she withdrew, and her grades suffered as a consequence.

Clearly, Mary and Rachel felt a fear of being singled out in a crowd. Fear, in normal terms, can be described as a perceived or accepted response to a possible or imaginary danger or threat. However, this definition does not apply when we are considering the scientific form of fear or phobia (Gullone & King, 1993). Ollendick, King, and Frary (1989), in their study, concluded that fear was more dominant amongst infants and preadolescents as opposed to adolescents. However, the researchers could not verify and authenticate this conclusion in a later study (Ollendick, Yule, & Ollier, 1991). Byrne (2000) found that female adolescents tend to have higher levels of fear than male adolescents. He found that those adolescents who experienced higher levels of fear were also prone to higher levels of low self esteem (Byrne, 2000).

Taylor (1993) found that some of the more common fearful responses include the phenomena of panic attacks and terrors. The three common elements that cause these responses are:

- Dread of unconstructive assessment,
- Anxiety sensitivity, and

- Grievance/disease sensitivity

(Taylor, 1993).

Of these elements, Byrne (2000) found anxiety sensitivity to be directly linked to lower levels of self esteem. Anxiety sensitivity mainly comprises symptoms of anxiety leading to fear due to a certain belief that anxiety has dangerous somatic, psychological, or social penalties. Reiss (1991) in his study asserted that the basic forms of fears were the playing field for a broad spectrum of fear-stimuli and Byrne (2000) found that these basic forms of fear led to heightened levels of low self-esteem amongst adolescents. For my LGBT participants, this link between fear and low self-esteem is evident in their failure to come to grips with who they were and accept their sexual identity due to the fear of negative implications that would follow. For me the anxiety in being discovered was directly linked to the negative experiences in my youth around my mother and Aunt Pat. The fear I had around being safe made it impossible to disclose my identity in my youth.

The idea of passing has a different meaning for my hard of hearing participants. For both Mark and Karen, passing was about fitting in as normal and not “Special Ed.” I put Special Ed in quotes because, for both my participants, there is a negative connotation to the term. In schools, the stereotype associated with Special Education is one of mental inability, regardless of the child’s actual issue. This label is what Mark and Karen sought to avoid. This is also a phenomenon I also dreaded as a Special Ed. Child in Georgia. I suffered much reticence in regards to my intelligence based simply on my going to speech class every day. In this way I am thankful my mother did not inform the school district of my impairment upon arrival to Texas.

Numerous studies have shown that adolescents who are ethnic minorities, are in wheelchairs, are amputees, are overweight, or have facial disfigurements encounter social criticism and have lower self-esteem as a consequence (Bell and Morgan, 2000; Crocker et al., 1993; Lerner and Korn, 1972; Staffieri, 1967; Weiner et al., 1988; Wing and Jeffrey, 1999). This is probably why the idea of passing was about fitting in as normal and not Special Ed.

Mark, who had a slight speech issue that sounds like a foreign accent, managed the game of passing by simply checking out of the conversation. He opted, as he put it, to be the “quiet mysterious kid.” Mark claimed he started working on this persona when he was in middle school and carried it all the way through. It worked for him; he was, in his own words, “kind of cool...Everyone nodded their heads up at me or high-fived me.” For Mark, the game was fun, and he saw it as a challenge instead of an act against his hearing impairment.

However, when I asked him why he did not just tell people the truth, he said, “They would have made fun of me, like when I was in elementary school.” When I asked about the students who made fun of him in elementary school, he said, “I went to a different intermediate school than them.”

When Mark got to middle school, he had his mom get him “cool” clothes so he would fit in with the other cool kids. Our discussion eventually led to a conversation in which he described what “cool” was to him. He told me that being “cool” was wearing the same types of clothes as the athletes. Mark went on to tell me that he started working out during middle school to “bulk up.” For him, fitting in was all about equaling the athletes and staying mysterious.

In his study, Byrne (2000) found strong links between anxiety and low levels of self-respect and self-acceptance amongst adolescents. He founded his study on two theories, (1) classical turmoil theory and (2) normality theory (Byrne, 2000). Collins (1991) found that these two theories have dominated most of the subject of study on adolescents and their behaviors. Classical turmoil theory mainly concentrates on the psychodynamics of adolescents, such as issues of sexuality and personal characteristics. Normality theory tends to focus on factors such as chaos, variances, and disagreement. Collins (1991) points out that most researches that have been done in the past decade on adolescents have concentrated on two facets: (1) psychobiological (2) psychosocial domains. Byrne (2000) concluded that both of these domains have a profound impact on adolescent self-esteem.

Similarly, Dusek (1987) presented two examples that describe the aftermath of biological growth amongst adolescents. These two examples or ideals are the mediated-effects ideal and the direct-effects ideal. The mediated-effects ideal tends to rely on a very extensive spectrum that is accountable for the psychological growth that encompasses the personal, traditional, intellectual, and communal elements. By contrast, the direct-effects ideal presents a direct association between physiological alterations and psychological growth. For Mark, this direct-effects ideal is represented in his bulking up and creating a persona of cool in order to cope.

Karen described her desire to fit in as part of her need to be normal. She kept her hearing aids hidden at all times. I noticed that every time we met, her hair was down. I asked her if she ever wore it up, and she said, "Sometimes, but not too often." As we talked about her hearing aids, she opened up and confessed that she often took

them out in high school and kept them in her bag. I asked her how she was able to function in her classes without them, and Karen said, “It was hard, but I did it mostly when there was not much going on.”

Earlier in this chapter, during the section about shame at school, I discussed the shift in teasing Karen experienced as she went from being called a teacher’s pet to being called a snob. I decided to place those stories in this section, because Karen presented the stories as examples of coping, taking ownership of being a snob as part of a persona to protect her secret. She saw being regarded as a snob as a good thing, because fewer people bothered her, and the more popular girls gave her attention. The following story is an example of Karen turning her hearing issue into a popular snob persona.

I was often called a snob in high school starting my freshman year. It was because I could not hear the people behind me or when I was walking down the hall. At first, it bothered me but then I noticed that I was getting the attention of the most popular girls. They started coming up to my desk and talking to me. I was scared at first because I thought they were going to make fun of me but then they started to ask me other stuff...stuff about homework or the weekend. One day the head girl came up to me and asked if I wanted to sit with them at lunch. I was kind of excited because I thought if I sat with them no one would bully me. I hung out with them all through high school and was known as a popular girl.

The more we talked, the more I realized that she had never told the other students about her hearing issue. I asked how she was able to keep it a secret, and she informed me that it was hard and she often had to decline doing things that might give it away. Karen said that the other students would just call her a snob and move on. I proceeded to ask how she communicated with these girls and she wrinkled her nose and said, “Text,” apparently the only way any of them communicated. As Karen recalled

this story I remembered how on many occasion I was classified as a snob in high school due to my inability to recognize people behind me talking.

Karen is the one participant who reached out to a teacher, which is interesting given that she seemed to be fitting in well. As we talked about the teacher, her demeanor began to change, and she appeared to be disappointed in herself. When I commented on her change in mood, she sighed and began to talk as if the stories she had been telling me were not as great as she made them. They did happen, but, she claimed, “As great as it was to fit in, I was always afraid they would find out.” I asked what the teacher’s role in all this was. Karen gave a story to explain.

It was my last semester and I was almost out of there. In my mind, I had made it. Outside of being called a snob, which all the girls I hung out with were called, I kept my secret. Like I told you earlier, I was in the store and saw my teacher signing to an older woman. I found myself intrigued; you see I did not know anything about deaf people. I was oral, something I have learned since going off to college. Anyway, I kind of always thought she was a cool teacher, but she wasn’t mine.

The next day I went to her classroom and asked her about it, about the signing, the woman, everything. She told me the woman was her mom and that she was a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults) and then told me all about it. When she was done, she asked me if I did anything with the deaf community, I shook my head and said no, I was just wondering. I went home that night and thought about the things she told me. I went back to talk to her again and eventually I told her.

She was so encouraging. She told me that there were so many opportunities for me and that my “problem” was not really a problem. I spent almost every afternoon in her classroom talking to her about the deaf community and my hearing problem. It was really nice to finally be able to talk to someone who understood. She helped me.

After reading the story, I asked Karen how the teacher had helped her, and Karen told me that she began to accept herself after spending time with the teacher and

has now even started signing classes. Her final comment on the subject was, “I wish I had met her earlier. I think I would have learned to be more ok with myself and might have chosen a different path in high school than the popular snob.” Though I sought out the aid of a teacher I did not reveal any of my identities to the teacher, however, I did reveal my struggle with an alcoholic mother. The teachers’ response and support began to give me the skills necessary to at least deal with some of the demons I faced. I learned from the experience that it is in the support of others that we find strength. This I think was a lessoned learn by Karen but too late in her mind.

Research by Bradshaw (2005), Burns (1982) has shown that individuals who are low in confidence apply coping strategies to fit in with a group and gain the acceptance of their peers. The social identity of an individual can also be affected by his or her degree of self-respect (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). There are numerous ways that a group can promote itself to a higher status and greater popularity. Hewstone, Islam and Judd (1993) found that one of these ways is to advertise or market the group in a more creative and constructive manner than any of the other groups. This mobility can result in the popularity of the views of one dampening and wiping out the views of another group. The end result is often deprecation of the groups who do not share the same ideals and viewpoints as the popular group. Overall, adolescents are negatively affected by the popularity mobility of groups as adolescents tend to view their own self-esteem in relation to the criticism of other adolescents (Hewstone et al., 1993; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Karen’s anxiety levels lessened after she got in touch with her teacher and found out about the Deaf community.

For Karen and Mark, the idea of passing was about belonging to the popular crowd, the cool crowd; whereas for Mary and Rachel, passing was about the need to survive. Though their stories are different in nature, the message is still clear that both the LGBT and the hard of hearing participants needed to belong and, by belonging, to survive ridicule.

For instance, Stevens (2004) notes,

These students must assess the environmental norms and then figure out how they fit or do not fit into their new environments. Perceptions of the environment provide one consideration when the student decides to disclose his gay identity. Current environmental models do not make recommendations on how to address minority issues in regard to the majority environment and the incongruency that is usually inherent (p. 186).

Stories of Passing in their Community

Just as the participants felt the need to pass in their schools, they felt the need to pass in their communities, their churches, and their neighborhoods. For Mary and Rachel, the desire to pass originated in a fear of discovery. Each believed that, if discovered, she would be rejected and kicked out. Of course, this fear of rejection was based on the family; however, the need to pass was in all aspects of the LGBT participants' lives. Mark and Karen were not afraid of the possible consequences of discovery but were more concerned with the harassment they would receive.

Mary's shame was the deepest, and it drove her, more than all the others, to pass. She continually did "just enough" to keep her secret. Though she was willing to participate in this research, she admitted that she is still not out because of the possible or perceived reactions of others. She told me that it is still hard to go out and be seen

with her partner because of what people will say. Though I have seen her and her partner on several occasions, I have observed there is still some discomfort, evident in her behavior, about her orientation. The ingrained need to be accepted has continued to drive her desire to pass in the larger community.

Rachel, who shared several stories about maintaining her secret in the community, admits that she has now rejected her cultural community and come out. The following story caught my attention and is, in her own words, “the reason I came out.”

I was going to the club with some friends and we walked in front of a local gay bar. Standing outside were these two drag queens, I thought they were pretty but my friends though they were disgusting. This one guy in our group started yelling, “fagots, fagots, go to hell you fagots.” I got really sick, but instead of sticking up for them I joined in. I began to call them fagots and telling that they were going to hell and all that stuff. I felt horrible about it but I didn’t want anyone knowing. I went to the club and got shit-faced thinking it would help but it didn’t. I have never forgiven myself for that night. It’s why I eventually came out.

Rachel’s desire to keep her secret led her to be what she hated most, a gay-basher. Taylor (1993), while conducting his study, found that the fear of being unwanted and unimportant was more powerful than any other form of fear. Elements that may influence this fear are age, gender, sexuality, among others. Byrne (2000) found gender and sexuality to be strong indicators of lower self-esteem amongst adolescents. This fear originating in gender and sexuality was true in Rachel’s case, as her desire to keep her sexual identity hidden made things worse for her, not better.

Though Mark and Karen did not express the same levels of anxiety as Mary and Rachel, they both informed me that they were always on guard and always paying

attention to avoid people finding out about them. This vigilance proved just slightly easier for Karen, due to her speech ability. The fact that both of these participants had been on guard in all their social dealings proves that they never really felt part of the crowd. They always carried with themselves their hidden identities. As previously discussed, Mark was a loner. The concept of a “loner” is caused by general social denunciation (Asher & Wheeler, 1985). Most studies have also confirmed that this denunciation, along with familial clashes and parental dissatisfaction, all provoke depression amongst adolescents (Goodyer, 1992; Mitchell & Rosenthal, 1992; Topol & Reznikoff, 1982), which leads to emotional isolation.

Mark not only took on the mysterious persona at school but also carried it over into church and the neighborhood. He recalled an incident in church, which he claims, “sealed the deal.”

It was between Bible class and church. We were hanging out in the playground area when the choir director yelled for us to come in. Of course I did not hear her because I had my back turned talking to a couple of other guys. She told us to hurry up and get in. One of the guys said “hey she is calling us in.” I looked at him and said I know but I don’t run on her time I’m on my own time. The guys said cool and we waited a couple more seconds and went in. Of course when I got home I caught hell from my mom about being disrespectful but honestly I didn’t care because I sealed the deal and I was cool. I never had to worry after that if I didn’t hear her calling. I could just stroll in a few seconds after everyone else and get a nod.

Mark’s defiance in the community got him the respect of the other kids; however, it did not get him the respect of the adults. When I asked him about exchange of respect, he said it was worth it. I asked Mark if he knew why his parents sometimes

hid his secret and sometimes told his secret. He paused a minute and then replied, “I don’t know, I have never thought about it.”

I am not sure if Mark’s family really did keep his secret, based on some of his stories. His perception of when they did and did not keep his secret was of particular interest to me; however, he could not elaborate enough on the subject to make any conclusions. I know, in my own case, the reason my mother hid my hearing issue involved her own identity insecurities, but I cannot make the same assumptions in Mark’s case.

In Karen’s case, she had an easier time keeping the charade going because she wore hearing aids and had good speech. Most of her stories were about hiding her aids or avoiding situations that would make people think there was something wrong with her. She stated that she never went to movies because it was too difficult, she never went to neighborhood swim parties because she would have to go without her hearing aids, and she never let anyone touch her hair.

As with Mark, I asked Karen about incidents when her family did or did not share the secret of her hearing loss, and she shared a story about an incident at her cousin’s house that made her believe that her parents were not telling all the neighbors; however, she was unable to give a clear answer to the question. She said, “The neighbors never acted like they knew anything about my hearing issue.” I pushed a little further and asked if she ever spoke to her siblings about them telling her secret, and she replied, “No, I have never talked to them about it.”

I find it intriguing that with a certain number of people knowing their secret, they both believed that their secret was somehow not a subject of general discussion in

the community, and they were, therefore, able to pass in the community while growing up. Even though both Mark and Karen gave examples of their family members telling their secrets they fully believed no one really knew. I am not sure what caused them to be in denial over this outside of the drive to belong to the greater society. Tajfel and Turner (1979) conclude the drive to be a part of the larger group can lead individuals to drastic measures including denial.

The idea that each one of the participants felt the need to navigate the mainstream and pass speaks to this driving desire to belong to the larger group. This desire can be attributed to social identity, which, in this case, is the ability of a social group to rate itself higher than other groups in a society. The members of both factions face the consequences of belonging to their group, and the faction that is successful in promoting the belief that they are superior will record higher self-esteem rates among its members. The basic characteristics of both groups may be similar, but if the perception of one faction is that it is more acceptable, then its members will automatically feel more confident because of their association with the faction and will experience higher levels of self-esteem (Hewstone, Islam, & Judd, 1993). One of the basic reasons for people to join popular groups or make an effort to make their group more popular is to attain a constructive social standing. Research shows that most individuals in a popular group feel that social acceptance helps their confidence and self-esteem levels (Klaczynski, 2004). For various reasons, all four participants were compelled to do whatever it took to succeed. For Rachel, her success came at the expense of others.

The Community: LGBT and Hard-of-Hearing

Communities are formed in many ways, and they can be based on where we live, the cultures in which we are raised, and the people we choose to associate with. Throughout this chapter, I have given examples of the first two kinds of community, those that are based on where we live and those that are based on the cultures in which we were raised. This last section is based on the communities that can or cannot be chosen by the participants based on their orientation or hearing impairment. What is interesting about these particular communities, gay and Deaf, is the fact that they are not tied to one location. These communities are found in most places or on the internet.

Upon speaking to each of my participants, I discovered that only one has made an effort to belong to one of these kinds of communities. Karen is currently involved with the local Deaf community in her area, but she says she struggles due to her lack of knowledge about Deaf culture. Our conversation led us to signing, and she showed her ability to communicate, but she lacked the subtlety of someone who has grown up around the Deaf community.

Karen said that her biggest struggle in fitting in with the Deaf community has come with her ability to speak so proficiently. She told me that when she first started to get involved, the other deaf people were more patient with her speaking. Now, she says they “pressure me to sign only.” She confessed that she is insecure about signing exclusively and fears she will “lose” herself if she gives up speech. Due to a previous conversation we had, I asked her about the term “losing herself.” Karen said that even though she no longer belongs to the hearing world, she still has memories of it and cannot let go of them. She claims it was easier to function in the hearing world because

it was comfortable, even though it had its challenges. I found this interesting and puzzling since she was so young when she lost her hearing.

Hodges and Siegel (1985) highlight that social stressors or incidents/behaviors that cause stressful situations can also lead to depressive inclinations in adolescents. Numerous studies have shown an inter-linked association between social stressors, depression and the significant happenings in an adolescents' life such as moving to a new home or school, health crises, the demise of a loved one or friend, and a marital split or dissatisfaction, etc. Some of these incidents leave such a deep mark on the identity of the individual that he or she feels the need to hold on to the event as a reflection of who he or she is (Goodyear, 1992; Luther, 1991).

Karen and I talked about the possibility of a cochlear implant, and she said she was a candidate but could not get it due to cost. Karen did express an interest but pointed out to me the controversy surrounding cochlear implants and the Deaf community. Surprisingly, even though she was aware of the controversy, she said it would not affect her decision. When I asked her if she would get the implant if she could ever afford it, she could not answer.

Mark, who has moderate to severe hearing loss, said he really had no desire to belong to the Deaf community because none of his friends or family members would be included in that aspect of his life. I asked if he has ever interacted with the Deaf community, and he informed me that he has not and was not planning on it. The more he talked about the Deaf community, the more condescending he became. Mark took on an aggressive countenance and said he was not like them. I am not sure if his lack of desire to interact with the Deaf community has to do with his own acceptance or

something else. He would never open up about the Deaf community or the culture. However, it was clear in his answers and behavior he harbored some anger over the issue.

I approached the subject of a cochlear implant with Mark, and he said he was not a candidate. I continued the conversation asking if he knew the controversy surrounding it and if he had any opinions. He let me know that if he could do it, he would; he said furthermore, “Anyone who does not do it is stupid.” His anger regarding this topic was equal to the anger he displayed when talking about the Deaf community. I found his anger on the subject to be a challenge for me during our conversations, because it is such a relevant topic for me and one I have struggled with along with a large portion of the hard of hearing members of the Deaf community.

Finally, I asked Mark if he felt he belonged to the hearing community despite his challenges. Initially, he claimed he did belong, but upon going home and reflecting about it in his journal, he returned to tell me that he did not feel as though he was as much a member of the hearing community as his family. He said, “I work in it, but I don’t really belong in it.” Even after reflecting upon this, he still refused to accept his possible participation in the Deaf community.

I struggled with this for several days, thinking he did not have a desire to belong to any community, but when I looked at his stories, it became clear that it was very important for him to belong and, not only belong, but to be “cool.” A possible factor that might trigger this need to belong to a larger group is low-self-esteem and perceived social incompetence, i.e. negative self-evaluation of personal capabilities and identity

(Beck, 1967, 1976; Carlson and Kashani, 1988; Rutter, 1986). Mark emphasized in the stories of his early school years the verbal humiliation of being called retarded, which he perceived as incompetence in the social setting of his class.

In the cases of my LGBT participants, they each showed an interest in belonging to the gay community but admitted they made little to no effort to make that happen. Both Mary and Rachel said they did not know many gay people, and neither of them work in a place that has a large out gay population. Both participants are in relationships, so they have no reason to go out looking at the gay clubs.

Because she is not yet out to everyone, Mary says she worries about being seen by certain people, which could jeopardize her job. She works in a profession where it is not completely acceptable to be gay. There are plenty of gay people in her profession, but being out is very controversial, and the potential controversy keeps Mary in the closet. I believe Mary's choice to remain closeted again goes back to the deep-seated issue of image. Regardless, she says she is happy just being around her friends and family who know and are accepting. Her maintain of this straight image around co-workers and certain family members shows her concern for protecting herself and her partner.

Rachel, who is now out, says she just does not have time to participate in the community. Her partner has a child, and between working and doing the "family thing," she just cannot go out. In contrast with Mary, Rachel has shed her need to appear normal. She now has short hair and wears, by her own admission, men's clothing. I asked if this was a rebellious act against her family, and she told me "No, I

simply feel more comfortable that way.” She is out at work but works in an industry dominated by men, so instead of participating in the gay community, she participates in life as “one of the guys.”

The three participants who do not actively participate in their respective communities, gay and Deaf, still claim to feel that they struggle to belong to the greater community of mainstream society. As for Karen, she is uncertain at this time whether she will fully embrace the Deaf community or attempt to navigate back and forth. Regardless, it is my belief based on the stories that all four participants struggle to belong and desire the acceptance of that comes with belonging. All of the participants continue to navigate and negotiate out their identities even though they have all left home and school. This continuing negotiation is a sign of fear and lack of confidence in those around them to live their true story. Despite my being out I even still find a need to negotiate situations with family and friends to maintain comfort levels of those around me.

This simultaneous desire to belong and difficulty with belonging is not uncommon amongst LGBT, as interlinked and self-evaluative concerns or fixations have been studied extensively by researchers. These studies have, to an extent, also shown a link between adolescent misbehavior or truancy and interlinked and self-evaluative concerns (Blatt et al., 1993; Blatt & Zuroff, 1992; Frank, Van Egeren, Paul, Poorman, Sanford, Williams, & Field, 1997). Interlinked fixations usually involve potential anxiety about the desertion or loss of a healthy and caring friendship. These fixations tend cause different reactions (constructively, unconstructively or neutrally) including personalized or familial difficulties as well as peripheral problems (Blatt &

Zuroff, 1992; Frank, Van Egeren, Paul, Poorman, Sanford, Williams, & Field, 1997; Leadbeater et al., 1995).

Self-evaluative concerns are mainly driven by the challenge to sustain a healthy and effective image or ideal of one's own personality as well as the apprehension of a potential failure and consequent loss of self-value and independence (Blatt & Zuroff, 1992). The idea of maintaining a mainstream kind of image was of great importance to all of my participants regardless of the potential long term affects. It is assumed that when an individual aims to gratify social perceptions, it is difficult to express what one really feels, which leads to a loss of oneself, bringing on frustration and depression (Fichman et al., 1994; Frank, Van Egeren, Fortier, & Chase, 2000).

Depression is, to an extent, also caused by the relation between self-evaluation and changing environmental factors. The basic attitudes of adolescents who are extremely self-analytical are isolation, irritation towards peers and family members, and aggressive, unfriendly, unsympathetic and unreceptive behaviors (Blatt et al., 1993; Frank, Van Egeren, Paul, Poorman, Sanford, Williams, & Field, 1997; Hokanson & Butler, 1992). A great deal of self evaluating went into the participants' identity process. As each assessed who they were in relation to their surroundings they turned inward with their shame followed by depression. For some the depression led to isolation and attempted suicide, for one it turned to substance abuse and for some an unfriendly persona, snob, was created to protect them from the environment around them.

The adolescents' psychological responses can be connected to their behavioral and social outbursts (Frank, Jackson-Walker, Marks, Van Egeren, Loop, & Olson,

1998). Mary's substance abuse, Mark's "cool" persona, Rachel's participation in gay-bashing, and Karen's undertaking of being a snob are all examples of this connection. I feel that the characteristics and behavior of the participants came out of or in reaction to the situation they were in at home, school and in their community. The constant threat of exposure or instances of bullying scared my participants and myself to the point of not believing in the possibilities. An individual can only take so much from my experience before succumbing to the pressures behind hiding a secret. The constant battle I faced as a young person led me to doubt my own abilities to achieve anything in life.

The normal reactions of adolescents to such situations has been antagonism and irresponsibility, which have, of course, other repercussions such as behavior and management difficulties, delinquency, social isolation, pride boost and substance abuse (Frank et al., 1998). All of my participants experienced one or more of these behaviors. The toll taking by the participants for their experiences have left them with broken identities and confusion on who they are as a member of society. Throughout the process of telling and re-telling their stories the uncertainty of belonging created the outlet for the excuses they made for their actions as young people.

Conclusion

When dealing with the issue of identity, there are always stories of struggle and despair. This is true for all four the participants; as the stories of their youth were laid out and analyzed, the common themes discussed emerged as the most powerful pieces of their experiences. Each individual felt a powerful sense of shame that drove them to act as they did. Even though the driving force behind the shame proved be different for

the LGBT and the hard of hearing participants, the desire to hide and protect prevailed. From my own experience shame can be one of the most powerful emotions felt. Shame drove them to pretend to be straight and create a fictitious story about themselves to acquire a sense of belonging, even when they knew deep down they did not belong. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986) it is in our nature to want to belong and the lasting effect of not critically hinders our identity development. The struggles faced by all involved in this study proved the significance behind this desire to belong and the shame we face when it is not possible.

For the participants in this study, they were filled with feelings of shame and guilt because they could not find people with similar experiences. If they had joined a community with people who shared their sexual preferences or hearing ability then it would have been much easier for them to come to grips with who they are as individuals. Furthermore, as shown above most experienced and used “passing” as a coping strategy to deal with their families, peers and community members.

This narrative inquiry into the lives of closeted LGBT and hard of hearing individuals during their educational years has shown that social identity is more important for minorities than it is for the majority. Because minorities have less visibility such as in the case of LGBT and HH the desire to belong to the larger group increases. This is the role model we see as minorities. When you look at television, movies our communities minorities especially like these in this study have few to none to reference their experiences to. In the case of LGBT visibility often in mainstream media this visibility comes in the form of stereotypes depicting them as overly masculine or overly feminine. Due to this lack of positive role models, minorities like

the ones in this study attempt to connect to the majority often with little success leaving them wanting. These groups often as in the case of this study develop low self-esteem as a byproduct of this lack of visibility.

This study has shown that social identity is important for minorities. For instance, Verkuyten (2001) found that in Netherlands, adolescents from minority sexual groups possessed lower self-esteem if they did not have strong links with their group and higher self-esteem if they did have a strong sense of belonging. These links were also found in my hard of hearing participants, as they were the minority in their social environment. Again this goes back to a sense of belonging to the majority and the effects felt by those who force themselves into a group they do not truly fit in. I was able to see a direct link between my participants' sense of self-worth and their ability to belong. Sadly, the affects were not positive and all had low self-esteem.

In the same way, Verkuyten (2001) found that Turkish adolescents in Netherlands developed higher self-esteem when they experienced a strong sense of belonging with their group. Porter and Washington (1993) found these same trends to be globally present amongst all minorities. Adolescents formed higher self-esteem if their sense of belonging was stronger with their social group. In this study, it is clear that all my participants lack a high self-esteem, which could be linked to their lack of involvement with their group. Karen found the Deaf community later in life, but her lack of early participation leaves her hesitant and less confident.

Similarly, Phinney, Cant and Kurtz (1997) found that social identity was a strong indicator of higher self-esteem amongst African Americans, Latinos, and Whites. Other research studies conducted along the same lines have found similar

results (Branscombe et al., 1999; Martinez and Dukes, 1997; Rowley et al., 1998).

Rachel's lack of identification with her cultural group could be an example of the connection between similar groups and self-esteem. She was my only participant who sat in two groups one of ethnicity and one of sexual orientation. However her orientation hindered her from finding a place in her culture further driving her into isolation and depression. I believe that the struggle increases as the levels of participation in multiple groups occur. I like Rachel had a very difficult time due to the fact I was juggling two distinct identities and was unable to find connection with any of the mainstream communities.

Research shows that self-respect and pride are highly likely to be influenced by significant or popular traditional standards and principles. When looking at this on an individual level, higher self-esteem leads to constructive associations between groups and improved psychological growth. As presented in Social Identity theory the lack of connection between self and the larger society in which the standards are set leaves less room for growth in individuals like my participants and I (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). The fact that there are negative connotations associated with the LGBT community and the Deaf community, more specifically Special Ed., the opportunity to feel pride declines based on the inability to see oneself in a positive light (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

Triandis, Leung, Villareal, and Clack (1985) asserted that the people who formed major social groups in the United States did not experience isolation and rejection. Verkuyten and Kwa (1994) concluded that the majority of the adolescents in their study were able to form constructive associations between being in a group and

their standard of living. All of these studies help us come to the conclusion that the more an individual was able to blend in and find support in his or her social group, the more he or she would be able to develop constructive self-evaluations and self-esteem.

The various cultural or traditional inclinations for the formation of social groups have various elements that can form their basis. For instance, some groups could be formed on the basis of:

- similar aims and objectives,
- apprehension about the status of the group,
- inter-reliance,
- cordiality, as well as
- family integrity.

Most of the societies that promote the formation of groups also promote the interdependent characteristic of the self, family concord and reliance group unity, group allocation, consistent and prearranged associations and networks, and group task allotment, all of which lead to higher levels of self-respect and pride (Triandis, 1994; Triandis et al., 1990). In the case of my participants and myself the inability to have similarities with the groups we interacted with left us feeling inadequate and incapable of participating successfully.

To conclude, we have looked at the idea of shame and the impact on self-esteem, at passing as a coping mechanism, and at community as an integral part of building a stronger sense of self. We have also looked at the toll these experiences have taken on the participants and their identity development. It is through these stories that we see the need to help intervene in the process of degradation that individuals such as the participants have undergone. It is time to stand up and help.

Chapter 6: Enough is Enough

To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.

- Bell Hooks

Introduction

Faggot, Dike, Boy, Retard, Stupid: these were just a few of the names I heard growing up. I was even followed into the girl's locker room and told I had to leave because boys were not allowed. Some of my participants experienced these same name-calling incidents. As recently as September, 2010, a thirteen year-old boy in a local school district committed suicide due to bullying that included homophobic behavior or the college student whose privacy was invaded when he was videotaped by his roommate with another man. So I simply ask, when is enough, enough? When are we going to stop the hatred that exists in places of learning?

I have spent my life dealing with the kind of bullying that is associated with the identities I hid. Three of my participants faced bullying, and in some instances violence towards them, due to the secret they hid. We can no longer be silent hoping that silence will protect us. As educators, we can no longer let the remarks continue thinking that our noninvolvement will make the situation better. Even in silence, the identities of these children are in jeopardy. As educators, we cannot always see all the different identities of the students who sit in front of us on a daily basis. However, we can look at the faces of those students and see that they are individuals who deserve respect and love.

The stories shared by me and by the participants in this study are examples of how we are failing to protect individuality, not only in school but in society at large,

and we are failing to provide enough space for those who are different to exist. When I started this research, I did not expect to have as many stories about the stress at home regarding the identities of LGBT and hard of hearing youth, but I believe the answer lies in educating future generations to be more accepting and respectful of others. Unfortunately, I was not surprised by the stories of the participants' educational experiences. All of the participants except Mary specifically talked about bullying and name calling in school. As I listened to their stories, I could see the pain in their eyes as they recalled the incidents they related.

During the process of analyzing the stories both included in and excluded from this paper, this idea of bullying in grade school and the continued threat of bullying and its relational connection to self-esteem or worth led me to look at the previous research on the issue. I believe that it is imperative to understand why we must change the system; thus I have included some of the findings of my search. I understand that this is a small look into a large body of research. My intention is to help set up my argument for a much-needed change. Growing up I always heard the idiom, sticks and stone may break your bones but words will never hurt you. Though I was always told this in order to teach me to ignore the mean things other children say I never learned, it always hurt.

Bullying

I was saddened on many occasions by the repeated stories of bullying in my data analysis. Due to the horrific affects this had especially for Rachel the conversation about bullying must occur in order to understand enough is truly enough. Educators can no longer stand by and allow students to be made inadequate by the comments and actions of other students and faculty. I speak of Rachel because of the extreme

experiences she underwent in regards to bullying; but I believe that the cover stories created by both Mark and Karen are closely related to the bullying experienced during their elementary and middle school years. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that my own struggle with identity comes from my own experiences with bullying throughout my educational career.

Bullying in schools, as experienced by me and my participants in this research, can be defined as “a student being exposed to negative actions on the part of one or more other students’ with the intention to hurt” (Woods & Wolke, 2004, p. 135). Bullying in the most subtle of ways still over time can have permanent affects as in the case of Rachel. The researchers Woods and Wolke, who gave that definition, further explain that “bullying must be a repeated action and occur regularly over time and it usually involves an imbalance in strength, either real or perceived” (Woods & Wolke, 2004, p. 135). This is one definition or explanation of bullying; however, bullying is extended to forms of harassment as well, again with repetition. For my participants, the imbalance in strength was perceived, for each one felt as though his or her hidden identity made him or her more vulnerable and inferior. As I analyzed the data for Rachel in particular this repeated action of bullying took over her idea of what was acceptable for her and created in her mind that she was not equal or worthy like the children in her class. Throughout my analysis I was forced to ask myself the question how many more have to die to make change happen?

While looking at the research on bullying I recalled the story told earlier in this study regarding an incident in elementarily school when I was pulled off the monkey bars biting straight through my tongue, this aggressive form of bullying which the

teacher condoned filled me with a sense of fear. This kind of bullying was the focus of early research; dealing with aggression which creates a fear of physical damage. By the nineties research studies performed by Dr. Dan Olweus, with the Research Center for Health promotion (HEMIL) at the University of Bergen in Norway, began to look at the indirect aggression and the impact it played on peer relationships (Craig, 1998). As I again turned to the re-telling of my participants stories I consistently saw this form of indirect aggression which equally impacted my participants. The threat of social relationship was the most prevailing reason behind both Mark and Karen's persona development. Craig (1998) discusses the forms of indirect aggression, many of which Karen experienced, such as rejection, exclusion, and neglect. Thread throughout the stories of the participants were feelings of anxiety associated with the more covert forms of bullying in which they recounted with as much fear and shame as the more overt forms.

Research shows that bullying has an association with depression among the victims. No one likes to be made fun of or kicked, tripped, spit on, and verbally assaulted, this is something we all know inside of us the way we feel when this happens. So why do we need research to tell us that it hurts young people's spirit when this occurs. Why do studies such as Slee's (1995); which found a direct connection between bullied victims and low self-esteem, unhappiness at school, and isolation from peers, need to occur for educators to learn? Why do individuals such as my LGBT participant Rachel and my HH participant's Mark and Karen have to take on the burden of feeling not worthy before educators take a stand and learn how to address bullying? Slee (1995) study also found that those who had high depressive inclinations

experienced lowered levels of self esteem and confidence and were bullied quite easily. Mark, of all my participants, spoke most about the frequency of bullying in elementary school, which led to his desire to be someone else. As I looked at the progression of Mark's experiences I was moved to wonder why there was such a frequency in bullying.

Keeping the above mentioned research in mind, it is interesting to note that each emerging theme and sub-category within the theme showed an overlap in how these participants were driven by their shame at home, in their school and in their communities to hide and pretend to be someone they were not. This shame, in turn, was what led them to act either positively or negatively in an aggressive or bullying situation. Furthermore, the need for these participants to have a sense of belonging in their schools or societies also played a part in their approach towards bullying or other forms of aggression. Mary, Rachel, Mark and Karen all communicated their desire to belong to the larger society as though their individual self worth depended on it.

Self-esteem/Self worth

If you ask me who I am today I can tell you with some certainty that I am Deaf, that I am a lesbian, that I am creative, that I am capable, and that I am me. I have almost forty years of lived stories to help me find myself, though the journey was not without struggles. If you asked me twenty years ago even ten I would have had no answer to give you. The damage from years of bullying, hiding, and pretending left me clueless to who I was as an individual as a member of society. My self-worth was gone a long time ago. From the conversations with three of my four participants it was clear

that they also found it difficult to define who they were, especially for Karen who is just starting her story in the Deaf community.

Harter (1990) explained that self worth is the basic instinct of an individual to approve, like, dislike or value his own qualities as a person. After hearing the experiences of my participants it is no wonder they find fault with who they really are. Mark who showed deep dislike for the Deaf community can only be reflecting his own self-loathing onto the image he sees in the mirror. Rachel's struggle with her self-esteem and worth led her to bash other gays.

In his study Harter (1990), presented two diverse philosophies on the concept of self worth which were strongly supported by other researchers in their own studies particularly Rosenberg (1989). The first philosophy of self worth brought forth by Harter was from William James. James defined self worth to be a direct relation of the success an individual has within a sphere and the priority that the individual attaches to the success achieved in that sphere (James, 1890). Mark displayed this most appropriately when he talked about his status as the cool kid in church and emphasized his top dog title. Karen took on her cover story of snob because she knew that it would place her in the inner circle of those girls who were popular, despite her lack of truly getting close to any of them to protect her story.

The other philosophy of self worth brought forth by Harter is from C. Horton Cooley. Cooley defined self worth as the significance that an individual laid on the social view, especially of significant others such as family and friends, for the acceptance of his/her personality (Cooley, 1902). This view of self worth could be found throughout the stories provided by Mary. She repeatedly spoke about image and

the importance of maintaining that image. Her cover story was perfection; however, she was the one participant who turned to substance abuse.

The connection between Self-esteem and substance abuse has been thoroughly studied amongst aggressive or bullied teenagers. Though Mary stated she was not a victim of bullying she did have self-esteem issues which led to substance abuse. The vast extents of researches that have been done on the concept of self-esteem have included numerous factors over a period of time. Some of these factors are heightened levels of apprehension, dejection, discontent, anger, isolation and petulance (Rosenburg, 1985). I cannot recall a single story of my own or my participants in which at least one of these factors were not included.

Blyth & Traeger (1988), in their study, also found a direct influence of high or low self-esteem with the strength of association or closeness with the parents (O'Malley & Bachman, 1979). In Mark's case, even in isolation, he considered himself cool due to the perceived support of his parents. This was the aspect of the research I was not anticipating but discovered while analyzing the participants stories. Blinded by my own relationship with my parents I did not connect the positive and negative experiences as a part of developing my self-worth. I say blinded because I could definitely remember how my mother made me feel when she called me horrible names but I did not realize that those words would last forever as a reminder of how insignificant I was. It was not until I saw the direct connection of my participants that I returned to those painful memories and made the connection.

It is important to note here that the process of self-analysis begins at a very young age, in early childhood (Bowlby, 1982, cited in Harter, 2006) and then follows

through consistently into the adolescent and teenage years, i.e. early school life (Block & Robins, 1993; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; O'Malley & Bachman, 1983) regardless of our own awareness to this process. As Karen repeatedly distinguished the change in her family based upon her hearing loss she displayed this process of self-analysis and the impact her loss had not only on her own development but those in her family as well. Whatever priorities and decisions are made regarding what is important and what is not important to determine one's self worth are all dependent upon the numerous differing views and philosophies of self-esteem. Again for Karen everything was defined and determined based on this event, losing her hearing, which was the most important thing to ever happen to her. For William James (1890), who is a founder of the self psychology, has defined self-esteem to be a structure based on the opinion an individual has on his/her own capabilities (Higgins, 1991, cited in Gecas & Shwalbe, 1983). Both Karen and Mark saw their hearing impairment as an inhibitor in their life preventing them from fully participating. Though they believed that they were incapable of doing things such as attending swimming parties or sleepover, I believe that it was more about protecting the truth about who they were and the cover stories they created because they achieved success in pretending. In Rachel's case, I believe that her own lack of self-esteem kept her from going on to college or art school. She did not believe in herself at all after high school.

Taking in account the above mentioned definition and participants stories, the decisive factor of one's self-esteem is the association of one's perceived capability and the level of success in its application. As stated previously, this is most prevalent in my hard of hearing participants, because what drove them to be successful in school and

successful in creating personas was an internal belief in what they were capable of accomplishing. This factor of belief in capability is what causes the inconsistencies and differences between the objectives, ideals, aims, principles, morals and feats of individuals. The ideals of an individual mainly represent the perception of what he or she believes he or she should be or should aim to be or wants to be. Most of these ideals of an individual are influenced by the expectations and targets of his or her parents during early childhood years and his or her teachers and fellow students in later years (Higgins, 1991; see also Harter, 1999). Much of Karen's struggles today in terms of completely joining the Deaf community still tie back to what she believes her parents want for her. For Mary though some of her family is aware the idea of image is so ingrained in her that it is impossible for her to be completely out. Rachel who rejected her family, cut her hair and moved away from the community to be who she wanted to be has cost her the connection she once had to the people in her life. I believe she rejected the image her family and community wanted out of survival. The deep seeded hate she had over being who she believed her family wanted her to be drove her to the edge and the only way she could fight back was to walk away. Regardless of the philosophies surrounding self-esteem my participants lacked a positive sense of self.

Self-esteem, when defined as a weighing scale to measure the self-merit of an individual (e.g., Harter, 1998; Rosenberg, 1979) or as a self-analyzing process (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967; DuBois, Felner, Brand, Phillips, & Lease, 1996) has been related to numerous modification and welfare factors. Some of these factors are

- Academic feats or accomplishments (Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1992),
- Despair/melancholy/dejection (Hammond & Romney, 1995),
- Probability or likelihood of suicidal characteristics or desperation (Wichstrom, 2000),

- Consumption syndromes (Wilcox & Sattler, 1996),
- Behavior syndromes (Watson, 1998),
- Drug or alcohol use (Scheier, Botvin, Griffin, & Diaz, 2000).

All of these fears were experienced by one or more of my participants at some point in their lives during and even after their academic years. The important thing to note here is that educators in today's world seem to be ill-prepared to deal, not only with bullying, specifically the homophobic kind, but also with the aforementioned factors that are normally associated with bullied students in schools. This situation desperately needs to change in order to avoid any more violent outbreaks amongst students who have a different lifestyle choice or a disability or any other aspect that causes them to have low self worth due to the negating approach of their peers and society in general.

The more I listened to the voices of the participants, the more I came to believe it is time to educate the educators. It is time to stop worrying about upsetting society and protect those who are unseen. Some may think that one life is not important enough to justify changes to the education system, but for me, one life lost is one too many. One voice unheard is a tragedy, and every life is worthy of being heard. The question becomes, how can we accomplish this feat? Now that the stories have been told, how can we ensure that justice is served to those who are hiding in plain sight?

Influences on Identity

As I discovered in this research identity is influenced by multiple institutions, from schools, media and home. Some of these institution can be changed now if we make change and some over time. Whichever, it is up to us as educators to start the process in hope to make the necessary changes to prevent those like my participants

and I from being bullied, from being isolated and from not believing in our own capabilities.

Schools

Schools are more than the buildings we all go into at multiple points in time; they are, many assume, the places that provide the knowledge of life. However, if one really thinks about it, schools are the individuals – “classmates, teachers, coaches, nurses, principals, everyone who makes up the communities in which we spend half our waking hours, three-quarters of the year, for over a decade of our lives” (Woog, 1995, p. 21). Therefore, the time students spend in the classroom can and does shape the persons they become. This is self evident in the stories shared by my participants and I.

The problem with this influence is that the type of education system we currently have in place is not conducive to a positive development in identity for those who do not fit the societal mold. Not a single participant in this study conveyed a story that positively influenced their budding identities. Freire (2006), argues that despite the fact that American school systems were supposedly built upon the ideology of democracy, they are, in actuality, a totalitarian system that leads its participants to behave in a subservient manner now and in the future. This system prevents students from having the ability to safely express themselves in tolerant and accepting environments. The simple fact that bullying occurs to the extent shown in this research proves we have a long way to go to achieve democracy.

The experience of both my participant’s and myself was what Freire (2006) describes as the “banking system” (p. 72) in which education becomes an act of depositing. Students attend school for the required knowledge as set forth by the

majority of society. Freire states, “The scope of the action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposit” (Freire, 2006, p. 72). Ironically I worked well as did my HH participants in this kind of system because following a teacher standing at the front is much easier than following one moving around. However, the system that Freire (2006) describes removes creativity, transformation, and true access to knowledge. It removes the human aspect, which is critical to the development of identity. When a teacher can stand in the front of his/her classroom and fail to see the multiple identities in front of him/her there is no hope for those children looking back seeking to find themselves in the world around them.

As my research shows each of my participants were forced to adapt their identities, true selves, to the world around them by either creating a cover story or doing what was necessary to be accepted by those around them. This is what Freire is speaking to when he says students must “adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them” (p.73). The problem is this perpetuates the stereotypes of a hetero-normative society and pushes those who are different further out into the fringes. This fragmented view of the world prevents a healthy sense of self worth among the LGBT and HH youth, especially those who hide that part of themselves.

The question becomes how do we change the system our society has adopted to protect those who are different or perceived different? How do we change a system that protects bullies who pick on LGBT youth because society at large looks down on them? Freire’s (2006) solution is to promote a “problem-posing” education system where communication is the key to learning (p.79) because it will only be through

conversation that those who sit on the outer edges will find the strength to face the world. In communication individuals like my participants and I can find dignity and self-worth because it is in communication that we see everyone is different.

To create this system of education, Freire discusses the need for a dialogic process. He describes this dialogical relationship as talks between the teacher and student and suggests that it is the foundation for the achievement of knowledge as well as free thinking. If just once a teacher had this conversation students like me would know that it is ok. If just once the teacher has a conversation about bullying those who suffer at its hands will know someone cares. If just once a teacher takes an interest and starts the conversation with his or her students maybe a student like me will be saved.

Consider a place where a struggling LGBT youth could find safety, could find strength, and could find hope. With an act as small as a conversation the door to a world of freedom and respect can appear aiding those like Rachel and myself who struggle to find freedom within. Every day I look at the dominant culture making decisions for me. But if we participate in the dialogic process, Freire (2006) discusses then education becomes a practice of freedom instead of a practice of domination. If we can find freedom in our conversations with our students we can help student's develop a mindset of in the classroom and the school. From there the communication can help students and faculty learn how to express themselves in positive ways. Freedom education creates a space that allows those students on the outside to feel as though they can be a part of the classroom and, more importantly, a part of society.

I can only imagine for myself and my participants what this kind of education could do for our self-esteem and our identity development. Maybe as Freire (2006),

suggest we could have experienced a deepening of the consciousness, and a sense of a transformable reality in which they we could have actively engaged in. Through seeing the reality of life, those like us who struggle can come to consider their lives in a more positive manner. But it is not the conversation alone we need to have but as educators as students we must move ourselves forward by examining the world and understanding it. The sad reality is as nice as all this sounds if the conversation is not examined in a positive and critical way it fails. Mary who did not face bullying, who did not even hear homophobic thoughts still did not feel safe enough in school to fully engage with meaning and purpose. She participated in school, even played sports but I would argue she never really engaged.

Freire tells the reader that “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking” (Freire, 2006, p. 92). If one teacher sat me down and told me to really think about my situation well, one did and that is why I sit here writing this. It was that one teacher who spoke with Karen that made her critically examine her world and attempt to engage in the Deaf community. I would argue, it is through this critical thinking that acceptance and respect grows allowing students the ability to express themselves safely and effectively with little fear of retaliation. Maybe we could cure bullying one teacher at a time, would not that be nice?

John Dewey insists that growth cannot occur unless dialogue across differences takes place (Briden, 2005). Where better to start the conversation than in the place we spend so much of our youth, school. In a state, in a city that is filled with so much diversity, why is it we refuse to have these conversations with our students. I realize there are those out there who fight the good fight everyday but equally there are those

who allow bullying to continue without caring about the consequence in the short term, like the young man in Cypress Fairbanks who committed suicide, or the long term, like the participants of this research who have forever been negatively impacted by their school experiences.

As I continue the conversation of school as an influence on identity I am reminded of the words of hooks when she asserts, “education is about healing and wholeness” (hooks, 2003, p. 179). As educators who are interested in the well-being of all students, including those who are marginalized for reasons that are not visible, we must all heal and we must all look to the good of the whole. I will ask again, when is enough, enough? How many more students like the young man in Cy-Fair have to die before we look at the students in front of us as whole beings needing love, compassion and respect? The idea that we can see our students as participants in the conversation of knowledge allows empowerment, liberation, and a renewal of the vitality of life, which comes in many forms (hooks, 2003).

I continue to think about my participants and myself wondering if this had occurred in our classrooms where would we be today. Would Rachel be in art school? Would Mark see the deaf community as something positive? Would Karen be struggling so much to participate in either community? Would I have gone to college straight out of high school? It is hard to contemplate the, what ifs’ when we still have young people dying. If “openness” can occur than students would be allowed to inquire into the unknown and explore different perspectives (hooks, 2003). If the youth of future societies could be given the opportunity now to be open then maybe children will no longer have to suffer the pain of being an outsider. As I examine the past both good

and bad I am drawn to the words “love will always challenge and change us” (hooks, 2003, p. 137). I started with a story of love, that one story laid my foundation for every future one. I believe it will only be through this change of love, compassion, respect and hope that students will have true freedom to express themselves completely in school and life.

Media

Unfortunately, dialogue in the classroom is influenced by those outside of education as well. Teachers and students listen, watch, and participate in many forms of media that have power over what is said in the school environment. In some instance like the ThinkB4YouSpeak campaign on the internet is set up to be a positive influence on stopping sayings such as “that’s so gay” (ThinkB4YouSpeak.com, 2010). However, as the site reports that in one day the same saying is used over fifteen hundred times on twitter. The question becomes which message is getting through? Recently I was doing a Google search online regarding the word lesbian, as I got to the letter b the search engine went blank, no references, no pop-up possibilities. It is not until you type the whole word that websites appear. So, another question to ponder is what message is being sent by one of the largest and most widely used search engine to young people struggling with a LGBT? Then there is the television, where the gay characters are stereotypical, *Modern Family*, *Gray’s Anatomy*, *GLEE*, even the recently discontinued series *The L Word* depicted a false reality of what gay life is; leaving LGBT students with no role models and teachers, parents, and community members an unrealistic example.

In *Teaching Community*, bell hooks (2003) states that “conservative manipulation of mass media has successfully encouraged parents and students to fear alternative ways of thinking” (hooks, 2003, p. 6). There is no better example of this than the campaign circling the Prop 8 law in California. First the law makers wrote it in a misleading way, and then religious organization paid for multiple TV commercials aimed at putting fear into the voters in order to secure the passing of the proposition. The conservative church spent millions excluding gays from participating in mainstream America. These kinds of acts, influence teachers’, parents’ and learners’, in the ways they look at others and their expression of whom they are inside and out (hooks, 2003). For me this particular situation fell close to my heart because I have family in California. I recall my sister-in-law telling me about an argument with a co-worker about Prop 8 as she told the comments being made I could see the anger in her eyes because she knew what this law could do for me. The mass media promotes and, society has bought into what hooks considers to be an imperialistic and capitalistic view that only seeks to keep the masses down and follow the lead of the dominant group, which dictates the only acceptable expression of identity. Again, I ask what message is being sent.

To further this conversation, today’s television programming promotes this ideology and continues to oppress the masses. Though hooks applies this argument to people of color, I believe that this oppression is not isolated to the observable marginalized groups, such as the people of color but that the oppression is also aimed toward those groups who are not as visible, such as gay and lesbian populations or groups with special needs. This is where the input of the social system as a whole plays

an integral part. If one takes a moment to think of all the ways he/she has encountered LGBT or Deaf individuals in the media, one would have to question were they positive or negative? None of my participants could speak to the positive influences of the media on the identity they hid. This is not to say they were unaware of LGBT or Deaf actors just not aware of positive references. Rachel's only comment was in regards to the L Word; she simply said with a smile "they are hot." For her there was no real model to gain insight from.

Home

I do not have the answers to give about ones' home. I myself struggled, going back and forth between good and bad parental input. I believe that in the end the good won and I was able to overcome the challenges I faced. My participants expressed the impact home played in developing their identities. I showed throughout the participants stories the importance parents and families play in helping young people develop a strong and confident identity as well as the impact negative experiences in the home create. What I cannot answer is how to get parents to change. I can suggest that as educators we practice and teach respect but I nor anyone else can demand these things from parents. My only suggestion would be that through a change in educational practice over time we can change the ideals of society and future parents. This is not immediate and does not help those struggling right now but maybe we can save the future and enough will be enough.

Conclusion

I started this paper with my story, my struggle with making sense of who I am. As that story unfolded, I used the words of other critical thinkers to examine the impact my experiences have had on the development of my identity. I continued this journey with my participants' stories, laying them next to each other, searching for that piece that makes them unique yet common. I had no set question to answer, only a desire to share and have the reader generate his or her own questions. I still have no answers. I have hope in those educators who chose a liberating praxis.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1989) the social system is basically a personality or character structure. Within this system, an individual's self-esteem is influenced by biological, personal, as well as social elements such as the family, contemporaries, and social institutions such as schools or the mass media. All these elements can influence self-esteem and identity development directly. All of the participants employed different social systems, factoring in the identities that they formed, whether real or persona identities.

Ultimately, all four participants and I experienced the same effects in developing our identities regardless of what was being hidden. This unique and explicit similarity among LGBT youth and Hard-of-Hearing youth shows that even though we are different we are also the same and can benefit from one another.

All I ask of the reader is what I hoped for at the start of this journey, for the reader to create new eyes to see the children in front of them not as a sea of kids but as individuals seeking multiple landscapes through their own experiences.

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APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Survey for LGBT Participants

Please answer the following questions with as much detail as you wish to divulge. These are open-ended questions that will aid in the process of gaining background information as well as some important perception information about your educational experience. If you are uncomfortable answering any question please feel free to let me know.

1. Please describe briefly your family dynamic (e.g. Parents, siblings, extended family involved in your life growing up)
2. Please describe the community dynamic in which you grew up in (e.g. Small town, urban city, etc)
3. Please describe the dynamics of the school(s) you attended (e.g. Size, urban/rural, etc Names are not necessary)
4. What was your perception of your teachers' behavior towards you? Explain or give examples.
5. Did you experience bullying or harassment during your education experience? Explain or give examples.
6. When did you realize your difference in the school setting? (Possibly an encounter that first pointed out your difference)
7. How did your difference impact your learning experience? Explain or give examples.
8. Did you have an educator whom you were able to confide in? if so, please explain what drew you to them and if not, please discuss your thoughts as to why this type of educator/student relationship was not available to you.
9. When did you come out or have you come out? How did you go about doing this? (If you are not comfortable answering this question please fill free to leave blank)
10. What is or was your fear about coming out or being "outed" by someone else? (If you are not comfortable answering this question please feel free to leave it blank)

Survey for HH Participants

Please answer the following questions with as much detail as you wish to divulge. These are open-ended questions that will aid in the process of gaining background information as well as some important perception information about your educational experience. If you are uncomfortable answering any question please feel free to let me know.

1. Please describe briefly your family dynamic (e.g. Parents, siblings, extended family involved in your life growing up)
2. Please describe the community dynamic in which you grew up in (e.g. Small town, urban city, etc)
3. Please describe the dynamics of the school(s) you attended (e.g. Size, urban/rural, etc Names are not necessary)
4. What was your perception of your teachers' behavior towards you? Explain or give examples.
5. Did you experience bullying or harassment during your educational experience? Explain or give examples.
6. When did you realize your difference in the school setting? (Possibly an encounter that first pointed out your difference)
7. How did your difference impact your learning experience? Explain or give examples.
8. Did you have an educator whom you were able to confide in? if so please explain what drew you to them and if not, please discuss your thoughts as to why this type of educator/student relationship was not available to you.
9. Do you sign? If yes, for how long, where did you learn, and why did you learn? If no, why did you choose not to learn sign language?
10. Please describe your feelings toward the Deaf community, Explain or give examples.