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Exploring the Advancement and Authority Experiences of Lesbian and Gay Corporate Leaders

Michael Eric Baker
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Michael Eric Baker

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Exploring the Advancement and Authority Experiences of Lesbian and Gay Corporate
Leaders

by

Michael Eric Baker

MS, Walden University, 2017

BS, Walden University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Psychology

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

Research has shown lesbian and gay (LG) corporate leaders are likely to experience issues in advancement and authority in the workplace. However, little is known about how LG leaders experience these issues, and how their experiences influence their careers and organizations. This qualitative multiple-case study explored the advancement and authority experiences of 12 gay male corporate leaders using a constructivist paradigm. The theoretical foundation used Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory and Fassinger, Shullman, and Stevenson's affirmative lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender leadership model. The conceptual framework included stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, corporate culture, and sociopolitical culture. Research questions included how LG corporate leaders experienced advancement and authority and how their experiences influenced their careers. A qualitative research design and a holistic multiple-case study approach were employed. Data analysis included descriptive, in vivo, and concept coding. Codes were grouped into categories and categories into overarching themes. Findings indicated gay corporate leaders experienced challenges, although they can be overcome through ability, dedication, and informed decisions. Additional research should be conducted in lesbian, bisexual, and transgender populations and in younger populations. Creating a positive corporate culture where everyone has a voice, acceptance is communicated, and different viewpoints are appreciated is critical for LG employee achievement, and both LG individuals and organizations are likely to benefit through improved employee commitment and corporate productivity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In an effort to be inclusive, the homosexual community encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual, and others, which is written LGBTQIA+. Historically, those identifying as lesbian and gay have received the most attention in scientific research. Those identifying as bisexual and transgender are often overlooked even within research using the acronym LGBT, while newer terms such as queer, intersexual, and asexual have yet to receive scientific attention (McFadden, 2015). Some have also distinguished between lesbian, gay, and bisexual as issues of sexual orientation and transgender as an issue of gender orientation, again ignoring the transgender community (Curry, 2017; Tannehill, 2016). While I refer to existing LGB and LGBT research, for homogeneity, in this study I focus solely on LG participants.

Within the corporate environment, the experiences of LG leaders are likely to involve their sexual identity and minority status. Although they have advanced to leadership positions, their careers were likely to have been influenced by leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure decisions, and corporate culture (Eckes, 2017; Gedro, Mizzi, Rocco, & van Loo, 2013; Liberman & Golom, 2015; McFadden, 2015; Morton, 2017; Pheko, Monteiro, & Segopolo, 2017; Schneider, 2016). Their lives and careers are also likely to be influenced by the current sociopolitical culture.

As many as 66% of LGBT individuals experience workplace discrimination and earn between 10% and 32% less than their heterosexual peers (Gates & Mitchell, 2013;

King & Cortina, 2010; Prati & Pietrantonio, 2014). Discrimination and stereotypes can have a negative influence on hiring decisions, salaries, advancement opportunities, and authority (Tilcsik, 2011) and can lead to a decrease in job satisfaction, productivity, and commitment (Cook & Glass, 2016; Colgan, Wright, Creegan, & McKearney, 2009). Further, being members of a minority group has been associated with mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, high-risk behavior, suicidal ideation, and suicide (Chung, Chang, & Rose, 2015; Meyer, 1995).

LG status is considered a concealable stigma (Fassinger, Shullman, & Stevenson, 2010; Prati & Pietrantonio, 2014), which requires a decision to conceal or disclose sexual identity. This is neither a dichotomous nor a singular decision: LG individuals may disclose their sexual identity to all, some, or none of their coworkers, and the decision must repeatedly be made with every new introduction (Buddel, 2011; King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones, & Kendra, 2017). Those who choose to conceal their sexual identity may deal with the fear of disclosure, which can create challenges in networking, mentoring, and building relationships with coworkers (Morton, 2017). King and Cortina (2010) stated, “If LGBT workers speak, they are condemned; if they stay silent, they are damned” (p. 71).

The experiences of LG leaders may also involve corporate culture, which is often influenced by the type of industry in which they work, other leaders, and the current sociopolitical culture (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Lang, 2016). While many organizations and some states have taken steps to enact antidiscrimination policies and legislation, there is currently no federal legislation protecting LG employees’ rights in the workplace, and

in 29 states employers have the right to fire an employee based on sexual orientation (Becker, 2014; Gates, 2015; Rhodes & Stewart, 2016). Organizations with antidiscrimination policies may find them difficult to enforce for several reasons: LG employees may not report discrimination due to the need to disclose their sexual identity; acts of discrimination may be difficult to recognize and prove; and some still consider discrimination based on sexual orientation to be socially acceptable (Arwood, 2005; Pichler, Ruggs, & Trau, 2017; Schneider, 2016; Tilcsik, 2011). In spite of this, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC, 2017) stated antidiscrimination policies are critical for organizations to be productive and competitive in the current global business market.

For LG leaders and other individuals, advancement in the workplace usually entails additional authority and responsibility, a salary increase, and additional recognition within the organization, while authority usually entails making decisions, defining roles, assigning tasks, and developing an organizational direction (Aksoy, Carpenter, Frank, & Huffman, 2018). Previous researchers have explored isolated issues that many LG employees may face in the workplace, such as leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture (Eckes, 2017; Liberman & Golom, 2015; McFadden, 2015; Morton, 2017; Pheko et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016). However, few researchers have explored how LG leaders experience these issues or how they experience advancement and authority among colleagues and coworkers. Further, there is little research on the steps LG leaders have taken to overcome the challenges they may face in the corporate environment or how recent changes in the sociopolitical culture influence LG leaders and the organizations

where they are employed. This research study is significant and may lead to positive social change by exploring these experiences and giving a voice to LG corporate leaders as well as offering insights and suggestions for LG and other leaders, human resource management (HRM), and other stakeholders on ways to mitigate challenges that LG leaders may face in the workplace, thus improving employee commitment and corporate productivity.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the current literature related to advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders, explore the gap in the literature, and present the problem statement and purpose of the study. The research questions, conceptual and theoretical framework, and the nature of the study are also presented, including the decision to use a multiple-case study approach. Finally, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the research study are presented.

Background

Advancement in the workplace usually entails additional authority and responsibility, a salary increase, and additional recognition within the organization, while authority usually entails making decisions, defining roles, assigning tasks, and developing an organizational direction (Aksoy et al., 2018). Although LG leaders have advanced to leadership positions, their advancement and authority may have been influenced by some of the issues explored by previous researchers, including leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture.

Stereotypes are implicit or explicit beliefs about the characteristics of individual members of social groups (Tikcsik, 2011). Implicit stereotypes or unconsciously held beliefs are especially challenging to identify and change. Stereotypes may include beliefs about leadership, gender, and sexual identity. Leadership stereotypes may suggest that effective leaders are male, masculine, and domineering, and assert that there is a better fit between these characteristics and heterosexual men and women than gay men and lesbians (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Liberman & Golom, 2015). Gender stereotypes may suggest men should be domineering, aggressive, and in control of their emotions while women should be compassionate, nurturing, and sensitive (Wellman & McCoy, 2014). Stereotypes based on sexual identity may suggest gay men will exhibit characteristics similar to heterosexual women and will not fit the typical leadership stereotypes of male, masculine, and dominant.

Workplace discrimination directed toward LGB employees is common, from small companies to Fortune 500 companies (Everly & Schwarz, 2015; Kite & Bryant-Lees, 2016). Discrimination can be overt, such as being denied employment or being fired from a job, verbal or physical harassment, wage discrepancies, or violence (Nadler, Lowery, Grebinoski, & Jones, 2014; Sangganjanavanich & Cavazos, 2010; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012). Discrimination can also be subtle, such as being denied a raise or promotion, being denied a vacation, being ignored or isolated, or being the target of office gossip (Nadler et al., 2014; Sangganjanavanich & Cavazos, 2010; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012). Researchers have indicated that discrimination can negatively influence LG employees and leaders in recruiting and hiring (Burns, 2012), in salaries (Nadler et

al., 2014), in relationships with coworkers and mentoring opportunities (Fassinger, 2008; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012), and in advancement opportunities (McFadden, 2015; Rhodes & Stewart, 2016). Further, as many as 66% of LGB individuals have experienced some form of workplace discrimination and earn between 10% and 32% less than their heterosexual peers (Gates & Mitchell, 2013; King & Cortina, 2010; Prati & Pietrantonio, 2014).

The decision to disclose or conceal sexual identity is often difficult and is neither a dichotomous nor a singular decision (King et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016). LG leaders may choose to tell some or all of their colleagues and coworkers or to completely conceal their sexual identity. This process is never fully realized, as the LGB individual must choose to disclose or conceal their sexual identity with every introduction and unique situation (Buddel, 2011). Some LG leaders may disclose their sexual identity to forge authentic relationships and leadership enactment, and disclosing sexual identity can lead to greater organizational commitment and career satisfaction (Buddel, 2011) as well as a reduction in psychological stress. Other LG leaders may conceal their sexual identity due to concerns over stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and the potential loss of advancement opportunities (Buddel, 2011; Collins & Callahan, 2012; Schneider, 2016).

Another issue for LG leaders is corporate culture, which has been defined as a set of shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms influenced by an organization's history, leaders, and customs (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Pichler, Varma, & Bruce, 2010). A positive corporate culture that includes antidiscrimination policies can create a safe and affirmative environment for LG leaders. However, corporate culture can also create a

hostile environment where discrimination is indulged with little recourse for the LG leader. Currently, there is no federal antidiscrimination legislation prohibiting discrimination explicitly based on sexual identity, and in 29 states organizations have the right to fire an employee based on his or her sexual orientation (Becker, 2014; Gates, 2015; Rhodes & Stewart, 2016).

After advances in recent years, many fear a backlash in the gay rights movement (Elliott, 2015; Lang, 2016). Some regard the Trump administration as a “mandate to hate” (Lang, 2016, para 3), and reports indicate hate crimes (crimes against minority group members) rose 18% between 2016 and 2017 (Farivar, 2018). More than 400 hate crimes were reported directly following Donald Trump’s nomination (Lang, 2016). President Trump has reversed much of the progress made during the previous administration through refusing to recognize or attend gay pride celebrations (Rosenberg, 2018), rescinding antidiscrimination regulations that provided protections to LGB individuals, attempting to ban transgender individuals from serving in the military, promoting religious freedom as a means of discriminating against LGB individuals, undermining the Affordable Care Act, which provided healthcare to many LGB individuals, and appointing a vice president, supreme court judge, and other officials who have been historically anti-LGB (Cahill, Geffen, & Wang, 2017).

While previous researchers have explored isolated issues such as leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture (Eckes, 2017; Liberman & Golom, 2015; McFadden, 2015; Morton, 2017; Pheko et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016), few have considered how these issues have interacted, how

they have influenced the careers of LG corporate leaders, or how they have influenced the organizations where LG leaders were employed. Dissertation authors have been more likely to examine LG experiences holistically, including leadership experiences. Recent authors have explored LG leadership experiences including leadership effectiveness among educational administrators (Christo, 2015), the narratives of openly gay men in the workplace (Herrin, 2017) and openly gay leaders (Wallace, 2016), the interactions of gender and sexual orientation on leadership evaluations (Macoukji, 2013), and the effects of sexual orientation and leadership style on the perception of leadership effectiveness (Mann, 2016). One researcher explored barriers and support among openly gay male corporate leaders in California (Valdovinos, 2018). In this study, barriers included the lack of networking opportunities, discrimination, stereotypes, and internalized homophobia, and support included workplace programs, self-confidence, and LG allies (Valdovinos, 2018). Valdovinos (2018) called for additional studies on this topic within different industries and geographic locations.

Researchers have agreed on the limited research on LG issues and have called for further research on several issues relating to this understudied population (Christo, 2015; Graybill et al., 2015; Liberman & Golom, 2015; McClelland & Holland, 2016; Pichler et al., 2017; Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014; Spengler & Ægisdóttir, 2015; Wallace, 2016). Specific calls for further research have included contextual information describing LG leaders' behaviors (Morton, 2017), antecedents and outcomes of workplace discrimination (Pheko et al., 2017), how sexual identity disclosures influence LG leadership (Schneider, 2016), how antidiscrimination policies influence LG

leadership (Gedro et al., 2013), and barriers and support among LG leaders in parts of the United States other than California (Valdovinos, 2018). Another important aspect of LG leadership that has not been studied is the influence of the current sociopolitical culture.

The goal of this research study was to explore the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders and how these experiences have influenced their careers and the organizations where they are employed. This research is significant and may lead to positive social change by exploring these experiences and giving a voice to LG corporate leaders as well as offering insights and suggestions for LG and other leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders on ways to mitigate challenges LG leaders may face in the workplace and improve employee commitment and corporate productivity.

In the preceding section, I briefly described the background of advancement and authority issues among LG corporate leaders and outlined the gap in the existing research. In the following sections, I describe the problem and purpose the study, list the research questions, and describe the theoretical foundation, conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. I also define key terms and discuss the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of qualitative research, as well as the significance of the study.

Problem Statement

For LG leaders and other individuals, advancement in the workplace usually entails additional authority and responsibility, a salary increase, and additional recognition within the organization, while authority usually entails making decisions, defining roles, assigning tasks, and developing an organizational direction (Aksoy et al.,

2018). Previous researchers have explored isolated issues that LG individuals may face in the workplace, such as leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture (Eckes, 2017; Liberman & Golom, 2015; McFadden, 2015; Morton, 2017; Pheko et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016). These researchers have often focused on issues LG individuals were likely to face in the hiring process and in advancement and have often explored issues from a heterosexual lens. For example, both Tilcsik (2011) and later Bailey, Wallace, and Wright (2013) explored how resumes were evaluated among a heterosexual sample, Pichler et al. (2010) explored heterosexism in employment decisions among a predominately heterosexual sample (91% of college students and 98% of HR professionals), and Lewis and Pitts (2017) explored the perception of fair treatment among federal employees in a sample where only 2.4% indicated an LGB orientation. Further, few researchers have considered how leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture influence the authority LG leaders have in the workplace. Thus, there is a gap in the literature with regard to how LG leaders experience advancement and authority and how their experiences have informed their careers and the organizations where they are employed.

The aim of this research study was to explore how LG leaders experience advancement and authority within a holistic framework. Critically, I also explored the influence of the current sociopolitical culture among LG corporate leaders and shed light on both the advancement (additional authority, responsibility, salary increase, and recognition) and authority (decision-making, assigning tasks, and how direction is

followed) experiences of LG corporate leaders. It may provide a positive social impact by offering a better understanding of the challenges LG leaders may face in the workplace and improve employee commitment and corporate productivity. The findings can be useful to LG and other corporate leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders through a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm explores how reality is understood and interpreted by individuals involved in real-life activities (Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015). This paradigm is consistent with qualitative research using interviews and observations (Patton, 2002). Gaining a better understanding of these experiences and adding to the general knowledge of this subject may help LG and other leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders understand and address challenges to diversity and inclusion, and how these challenges affect organizational efficiency and productivity within the framework of the current global business market.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do LG corporate leaders experience advancement, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

RQ2: How do LG corporate leaders experience authority, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

The primary focus of this research study was to explore the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders. Using a conceptual framework to explore these experiences and develop interview questions, I considered key issues, including leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, corporate culture, antidiscrimination policies, and the current sociopolitical culture. These issues were drawn from existing research.

Theoretical underpinnings of the research study came from Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory (SIT) and Fassinger et al.'s (2010) affirmative LGBT leadership model. SIT suggests that people form their sense of self-identity and belonging partially through their social and organizational group memberships (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner identified categorization as a natural cognitive process through which people group objects and people, and this categorization leads to stereotyping: depersonalizing individuals and assigning them group characteristics. To increase self-image, individuals may enhance their in-group and disparage members of out-groups, or groups to which they do not belong. Fassinger et al.'s affirmative LGBT leadership model suggests that LGBT leaders operate within a framework of stigma and marginalization, and their sexual identities interact with their gender and group composition in a complex and mutable process that influences leadership enactment and effectiveness.

In this study, SIT was used to explore the process of stereotyping and categorization and denigrating out-group members. The affirmative LGBT leadership

model was used to explore how sexual identity and identity disclosure interacted with context and corporate culture, and how these subsequently influenced leadership enactment. These theories are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I used a constructivist paradigm and multiple-case study approach to explore the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders. The constructivist paradigm suggests that there is no single reality. Rather, reality is created and interpreted by the individual (Gergen et al., 2015). According to Yin (2003), the case study approach is appropriate for real-life situations and contemporary phenomena that are bounded by time and place. The experiences that were explored were bounded by the current sociopolitical culture and by the corporate environment. This paradigm and approach offered rich descriptions and in-depth understanding of how LG corporate leaders understood and interpreted their realities and the experiences that influenced their careers.

The method of data collection for this study was semistructured interviews and observations, and documentary data from corporate antidiscrimination policies. Research participants were recruited through snowball and homogeneous sampling, from LGB executive groups such as gay and lesbian chambers of commerce. Interviews were audio-recorded, and the data were transcribed and analyzed. Individual cases offered insights into advancement and authority experiences, and multiple cases offered replication and cross-case analysis.

Definitions

Advancement: Advancement or promotion to a higher status position usually entails additional authority and responsibility, a salary increase, and enhanced recognition within an organization (Aksoy et al., 2018).

Antidiscrimination policy: Official policies included in an organization's or legislative body's governing documents that prohibit discrimination based on age, sex, race, sexual orientation, and similar criteria.

Authority: In addition to influencing the opinions and behaviors of others (Authority, n.d.), authority in the workplace may involve making decisions and defining roles, assigning tasks, and developing an organizational direction (Aksoy et al., 2018).

Corporate culture: Shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms influenced by an organization's history, leaders, and customs (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Pichler et al., 2010).

Discrimination: Treating people differently based on their race, age, sex, or any characteristic that may separate them from the majority population. LGB discrimination in the workplace can take the form of being denied employment, being denied a raise or promotion, being ignored or isolated, being harassed or fired, or physical assault (Nadler et al., 2014; Sangganjanavanich & Cavazos, 2010; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012).

Diversity and inclusion: Corporate diversity often refers to differences in race, gender, or sexual orientation. Jordan (2011), global director of diversity and talent strategies at Pitney Bowes, explained,

Diversity means all the ways we differ...Inclusion involves bringing together and harnessing these diverse forces and resources, in a way that is beneficial.

Inclusion puts the concept and practice of diversity into action by creating an environment of involvement, respect, and connection. (para. 2)

Gender stereotype: Stereotypes that relate to gender, such as suggesting men should be domineering, aggressive, and in control of their emotions, while women should be compassionate, nurturing, and sensitive (Wellman & McCoy, 2014).

Homonegativity: Discrimination or prejudice toward homosexuals. Einarsdóttir, Hoel, and Lewis (2015) suggested that homonegativity stems from traditional gender and sexuality norms.

Leadership stereotype: Stereotypes are implicit or explicit beliefs about the characteristics of individual members of social groups (Tikcsik, 2011). Leadership stereotypes may include characteristics typically assigned to an effective leader such as male, masculine, and dominant (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

Outed: When an individual's sexual identity is involuntarily disclosed by a third party.

Sexual identity disclosure: Disclosing sexual orientation. Individuals with concealable stigma such as LGB status may choose to either disclose or conceal their minority status.

Sexual stereotype: Stereotypes that relate to sexual orientation, such as suggesting gay men should exhibit characteristics similar to heterosexual women and lesbians should exhibit characteristics similar to heterosexual men (Kite & Bryant-Lees, 2016).

Sociopolitical culture: Cultural issues that involve both social and political factors.

Assumptions

Assumptions in research include issues that are believed to be true but cannot be proven. Assumptions in this research study were that the participants selected accurately represented LG leaders, that they would be willing to discuss their advancement and authority experiences, and that they would answer completely and truthfully. An additional assumption was that the multiple-case study approach would yield the data necessary for me to answer the research questions. These assumptions were inherent and necessary for the research to be conducted.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the research study included the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders, 40 to 60 years old, from small to mid-sized business located in the Southeast United States. Although participants were recruited from LGB organizations, they may not have disclosed their sexual identity in the workplace, or they may have disclosed their sexual identity to some or all of their coworkers and colleagues: The degree of disclosure was not a determining factor among the participants. The United States government considers small to mid-sized business to have fewer than 500 employees and assets of less than \$10 million dollars (Investopedia, n.d.; Merritt, 2018). To gain an in-depth understanding of these experiences within a homogeneous sample, I excluded bisexual corporate leaders and LGB employees who were not in leadership positions. To reach leaders who had similar backgrounds in education and experience, I

also excluded leaders younger than 40 and older than 60 as well as individuals from small and large companies. The results are specific to the individuals and contexts being studied. While the results may transfer to other leaders within similar age brackets and organizational cultures, there may also be significant differences in LG corporate leaders from different age brackets, cultures, and geographic locations.

Limitations

Limitations to the research study may include participants who were not truthful or complete in their responses, the multiple-case study method failing to gather appropriate data, the participant selection method, and researcher bias in data collection and analysis (see Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The case study approach has inherent limitations in generalizability and in the inability to make causal inferences (Creswell, 2013). Limitations and potential biases were addressed through reflexivity, member-checking, journaling, and the use of a systematic coding methodology.

Significance

This research study contributes to existing literature by offering additional knowledge and insights on the experiences that influence advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders and the steps they have taken to overcome these issues. This study is timely as many are concerned over a potential backlash in the gay equality movement after recent advances (Elliott, 2015; Lang, 2016; Rosenberg, 2018). By adding to the existing knowledge of the experiences that influence advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders in the workplace, this research study may help to mitigate challenges due to stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and

organizational culture, and advance the call for state and federal legislation banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. This research study may provide a positive social impact by gaining a better understanding of these experiences and their potentially negative influence on employee commitment and corporate productivity.

Summary

Although LG corporate leaders have advanced to leadership positions, their careers were likely to have been influenced by leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure decisions, and corporate culture. These experiences may negatively influence advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders and the organizations where they are employed. In this chapter, I presented a brief introduction and summary of the current literature related to advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders as well as a rationale for conducting the study. The problem statement, purpose, research questions, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study were also reviewed. In the following chapter, I provide an in-depth review of the conceptual and theoretical framework and the existing literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

For LG leaders and other individuals, advancement in the workplace usually entails additional authority and responsibility, a salary increase, and additional recognition within the organization, while authority usually entails making decisions, defining roles, assigning tasks, and developing an organizational direction (Aksoy et al., 2018). Previous researchers have explored isolated issues that LG individuals may face in the workplace, such as leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture (Eckes, 2017; Liberman & Golom, 2015; McFadden, 2015; Morton, 2017; Pheko et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016). These researchers have focused on issues LG individuals were likely to face in the hiring process and in advancement, and often explored issues from a heterosexual lens. For example, both Tilcsik (2011) and later Bailey et al. (2013) explored how resumes were evaluated among a heterosexual sample, Pichler et al. (2010) explored heterosexism in employment decisions among a predominately heterosexual sample (91% of college students and 98% of HR professionals), and Lewis and Pitts (2017) explored the perception of fair treatment among federal employees in a sample where only 2.4% indicated an LGB orientation. Further, few researchers have considered how leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture influence the authority LG leaders have in the workplace. Thus, there is a gap in the literature with regard to how LG leaders experience advancement and authority and how their experiences have informed their careers and the companies where they are employed.

My aim in this research study was to explore how LG leaders experience advancement and authority within a holistic framework. Critically, I also explored the influence of the current sociopolitical culture among LG corporate leaders and shed light on both the advancement (additional authority, responsibility, salary increase, and recognition) and authority (decision-making, assigning tasks, and how direction is followed) experiences of LG corporate leaders. The study may provide a positive social impact by offering a better understanding of the challenges LG leaders may face in the workplace and improve employee commitment and corporate productivity. The findings can be useful to LG and other corporate leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders through a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm explores how reality is understood and interpreted by individuals involved in real-life activities (Gergen et al., 2015). This paradigm is consistent with qualitative research using interviews and observations (Patton, 2002). Gaining a better understanding of these experiences and adding to the general knowledge of this subject may help LG and other leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders understand and address challenges to diversity and inclusion and how these challenges affect organizational efficiency and productivity within the framework of the current global business market.

In this chapter, I outline the conceptual and theoretical framework for the research study and review recent literature on issues unique to many LGB individuals, including the strengths and weaknesses of the literature. The conceptual framework includes key

issues derived from existing literature and how they relate to the current study. The theoretical framework includes theories believed to influence the understanding and an interpretation of advancement and authority experiences.

Literature Search Strategy

This literature search was conducted using Walden Library databases, including Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SocINDEX, and LGB Life with Full Text. Other search areas included Google Scholar, organizations such as the HRC, Pew Research Center, and Fenway Institute, and biographies and books relevant to the issues being studied.

Search terms and combinations of terms including *LGB* or *GLBT* or *gay* or *lesbian* or *bisexual* or *transgender* and *leadership*; *LGB* or *GLBT* or *gay* or *lesbian* or *bisexual* or *transgender* and *corporate leadership*; *LGB* or *GLBT* or *gay* or *lesbian* or *bisexual* or *transgender* and *authority*; *LGB* and *corporate* and *leadership* not *student*; and combinations of the terms *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, *bisexual*, *leadership* *stereotype*, *gender stereotype*, *sexual stereotype*, *discrimination*, *sexual identity* *disclosure*, *corporate culture*, *culture*, *antidiscrimination*, *antidiscrimination policies*, *government policies*, *government legislation*, *leadership*, *advancement*, and *authority*.

In addition to searching through academic databases and the Internet, several biographies and books yielded relevant information. These included *Out & Equal at Work: From Closet to Corner Office* (Berry, 2012), *The Glass Closet: Why Coming Out Is Good Business* (Browne, 2014), and *The G Quotient: Why Gay Executives are Excelling as Leaders* (Snyder, 2006).

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

The goal of this research study was to explore how LG corporate leaders understood and interpreted advancement and authority experiences and how these experiences influenced their careers. An exhaustive literature review led to issues critical to advancement and authority, including leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, corporate culture, antidiscrimination policies, and the influence of the current sociopolitical culture. Theoretical underpinnings of the study come from Tajfel and Turner's (1979) SIT and Fassinger et al.'s (2010) affirmative LGBT leadership model.

Social Identity Theory

SIT suggests that people form their self-identity partially through group memberships, including work groups (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1973). According to Tajfel and Turner (1973), social identity involves a natural cognitive process of grouping similar objects. This process is extended into grouping individuals into similar and different groups: in-groups and out-groups. This process occurs in three steps: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. In social categorization, individuals arrange people into groups that are similar or different as a way to organize and understand their social environment. Individuals are depersonalized and ascribed general characteristics prototypical of their group membership. In social identification, individuals adopt the identity of their in-group. They may change their thinking and behavior to more closely match the group to which they identify. The more closely they identify with their in-group, the more likely they are to adopt group

characteristics. Finally, in social comparison, individuals compare their in-group with other groups. In-group members are likely to promote their own group members while disparaging and denigrating out-group members as a means to maintain and advance their own positive social identity. Social categorization often leads to stereotyping and prejudice by exaggerating similarities between in-group members and differences between in-groups and out-groups. The SIT of leadership is an extension of the SIT, suggesting the more strongly individuals identify with a group, the more salient the group prototypical norms become and the more critical it becomes that the leader match this prototype (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Leaders who do not fit the typical prototype may be considered undesirable or ineffective (Rast, 2015)

Affirmative LGBT Leadership Model

Currently, business leaders are facing new situations and technologies as well as high levels of uncertainty that are unique to today's business demands (Fassinger et al., 2010). These demands require flexibility and agility to quickly assess problems and develop innovative solutions. In contrast to the traditional *great man* style of leadership where designated leaders were followed without question, Fassinger et al. (2010) suggested that a learning style of leadership might be more effective when dealing with modern business demands.

The learning style of leadership originated from the need for new and more effective ways to lead and coincided with an increased awareness of diversity, inclusion, and collaboration within the workplace. Fassinger et al. (2010) proposed that LGBT and other minority leaders might be ideally suited to engage in the learning leadership style

due to factors stemming from their minority status. These factors include the ability to quickly assess people and situations, an ability likely developed to navigate the corporate environment and assess those who would be comfortable or uncomfortable with their LGBT status. Further, due to many challenges they have likely faced including their dual identities, LGBT leaders may be uniquely capable of finding new ways to resolve difficult situations, put aside traditional gender norms and expectations, and engage people in new collaborative ways.

The affirmative LGBT leadership model asserted that LGBT leadership enactment involves three primary factors: sexual identity, including disclosure; gender; and situation, including group composition (Fassinger et al., 2010). These factors interact in a complex and mutable process that influences leadership enactment and effectiveness. This process often takes place within a framework of stigma and marginalization (Fassinger et al., 2010). The authors stated that LGBT stigma and marginalization are well documented, especially in the workplace, and referenced existing research detailing heterosexist norms, which are “deeply and nonconsciously embedded in societal institutions such as law, religion, health, and the workplace” (Fassinger et al., 2010, p. 205). These norms tend to denigrate, disempower, and ignore sexual minorities and perpetuate the idea that heterosexuality is normal and superior. However, LGBT leaders may be uniquely capable of overcoming these challenges and leading in innovative and effective ways.

In the preceding section, I introduced issues that are key to the conceptual framework, including stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, corporate

culture, and sociopolitical culture. I also outlined the theoretical framework: SIT and the LGBT affirmative leadership model. In the following sections, I discuss the conceptual issues in depth.

Literature Review

An extensive review of the current literature suggested the main issues in advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders involve stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture. Although research is limited, the current sociopolitical culture is also likely to create unique issues for LG corporate leaders. In the following sections, I introduce advancement and authority within the framework of LG corporate leaders and describe the central issues: stereotypes, including leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes; discrimination, including discrimination in the recruiting process, salaries, relationships with coworkers, mentoring opportunities, and performance evaluations; sexual identity disclosure; corporate culture, including antidiscrimination policies; and sociopolitical culture.

Leadership is typically considered a social endeavor through which an individual influences and leads others toward a collective goal (Hogg, 2001; Rast, 2015). Many factors are important when considering leadership, including culture, gender, competence, trust, legitimacy, and group identity (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Rast, 2015; Yi-chong, 2017). Effective leaders may use inspiration and motivation to share their vision and influence their direct reports and employees, and this is often more effective than using force, rewards, or threats of punishment (Cummins & O'Boyle, 2014). Effective leaders are adept at identifying the context and demands of their roles,

developing relationships with their colleagues and coworkers, developing organizational plans and direction, and identifying ways to work efficiently (Chang & Bowring, 2017). Chang and Bowring (2017) explored the experiences of LG leaders in authority and developing relationships and found the most important aspects that LG leaders identified were sexual identity disclosure and connecting with colleagues and coworkers. While some LG leaders thought they were defined by their sexual identity once it was disclosed, others thought that being open about their sexual identity offered a way to connect with their direct reports and led to authentic leadership experiences (Chang & Bowring, 2017). Snyder (2006) echoed these sentiments, suggesting that LG leaders may bring unique skills to leadership due to their minority status. These skills include creating an inclusive workplace, communicating and connecting with colleagues and direct reports, adaptability, and innovative problem solving. It is important to note that while most leaders reported positive experiences with sexual identity disclosure, some disclosures led to strained relationships and safety concerns (Chang & Bowring, 2017).

LG corporate leaders are likely to face several unique issues in the workplace, especially in advancement and authority. Advancement in the workplace usually entails additional authority and responsibility, including authority over additional employees (Aksoy et al., 2018). Advancement may also entail salary increases and additional recognition within the organization (Aksoy et al., 2018). Advancement opportunities may come after performance evaluations, which may be negatively influenced by stereotypes, discrimination, and sexual identity disclosure (Lieberman & Golom, 2015; Lindsey, King, McCausland, Jones, & Dunleavy, 2013). While some have argued leaders who disclose

their sexual identity are more fulfilled, more committed to their work, and enjoy better relationships with colleagues and coworkers (Hewlett & Sumberg, 2011), others have contended disclosure can lead to workplace hostility and limit advancement opportunities (Johnson, Rosenstein, Buhrke, & Haldeman, 2013). Advancement opportunities may also be influenced by corporate culture and mentoring. Mentoring is often critical to advancement and also subject to the negative influence of discrimination (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001).

Authority in the workplace usually entails making decisions and defining roles, tasks, and organizational direction (Aksoy et al., 2018). Although LG corporate leaders have advanced to leadership positions, their authority can be either positively or negatively influenced by stereotypes and discrimination. A British study found that gay men typically have higher levels of education and attain more low-level management positions than their heterosexual peers, yet they are statistically less likely to hold high-level management positions (Aksoy et al., 2018). These findings are likely due to discrimination rather than age, experience, or education (Aksoy et al., 2018).

Stereotypes

Until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental disorder (Herek, 2000; Meyer, 2003). While no longer in effect, this classification may still influence the negative perceptions and stereotypes about LG individuals that persist today (Buddell, 2011; Lindsey et al., 2013; Nadal, 2013; Nadler et al., 2014). Tilcsik (2011) defined stereotypes as implicit or explicit beliefs about the characteristics of individual members of social groups. Stereotypes influence how people view minority

group members including LG individuals, and their expected characteristics and behaviors. People may hold dual attitudes toward the same attitude object (Nadler et al., 2014). An attitude may be developed through early socialization, while another attitude is learned later. The early attitude is not replaced and leads to unconscious or implicit stereotypes, while the later attitude is consciously endorsed and leads to explicit stereotypes.

People may hold stereotypes in a variety of areas including leadership, expecting successful leaders to be agentic, domineering, and aggressive (Goodnight, Cook, Parrott, & Peterson, 2013; Tilcsik, 2011; Wellman & McCoy, 2014). There may be a lack of fit between LG individuals and leadership characteristics, as people may expect gay men to be less domineering and more emotional, and less likely to fit the typical leadership stereotype (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Individuals may also hold gender stereotypes regarding expected characteristics and behaviors of men and women, and sexual stereotypes regarding expected characteristics of LG individuals. Sexual stereotypes may suggest gay men will exhibit characteristics similar to heterosexual women, and lesbians will exhibit characteristics similar to heterosexual men (Kite & Bryant-Lees, 2016; Morton, 2017). Negative gender and sexual stereotypes may influence how LG leaders are regarded, and are common in the United States (Goodnight et al., 2013; Liberman & Golom, 2015; Wellman & McCoy, 2014) where some still consider discrimination based on sexual orientation to be socially acceptable (Schneider, 2016). The following discussion on leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes will illustrate some of the ways

stereotypes can negatively influence LG corporate leaders, their followers, and organizations.

Leadership stereotypes. Leadership can be defined as a process through which a leader influences, guides, or provides direction to others working to fulfill a group goal (Rast, 2015). Leadership can be seen in a positive manner, such as transformational, authentic, or democratic leadership where leaders inspire and motivate change, and do so in a way that is self-aware, transparent, authentic, and impartial (Fine, 2017). Leadership stereotypes suggest successful leaders are domineering, assertive, and aggressive, and that there is a better fit between these characteristics and heterosexual men and women than gay men and lesbians (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Liberman & Golom, 2015). Leadership stereotypes can negatively influence advancement opportunities for LG leaders, as well as their authority in the workplace (Fine, 2017; Wellman & McCoy, 2014). Leadership stereotypes can also negatively influence organizations when individuals are not advanced due to their LG status, when they are not fully engaged and productive, and when their authority is undermined (Burns, 2012).

Gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes suggest men should be domineering, aggressive, and in control of their emotions, while women should be compassionate, nurturing, and sensitive (Wellman & McCoy, 2014). When heterosexuality is assumed, the term is imbued with characteristics of what is considered socially acceptable, and becomes a benchmark for judging behavior (Zook, 2017). Gender conformity results from adhering to gender norms, and behaviors that are counter to those norms or stereotypes can create tension and lead to sexism or heterosexism: “negative attitudes,

beliefs, and behaviors that devalue, denigrate, stigmatize, or restrict females or female-related characteristics and lesbian, gay, and bisexual...persons or nonheterosexual forms of behavior” (Szymanski & Moffitt, 2011, p. 361). Wellman and McCoy (2014) suggested gender conformity is particularly robust in the United States, where rigidly conforming to gender expectations results in fragility that is unique and easily threatened among men, who then become especially sensitive to gender expectations and likely to endorse discriminatory behavior.

Sexual stereotypes. In addition to gender stereotypes and the *think manager*, *think male* paradigm, stereotypes based on sexual orientation are likely to create additional challenges for LG leaders (Lieberman & Golom, 2015; Rast, 2015). Gay men are often seen as violating traditional male gender norms, which include being masculine, agentic, aggressive, and natural leaders (Morton, 2017). Stereotypes based on sexual orientation may suggest gay men will exhibit characteristics more like heterosexual women, including being passive, sensitive, and adopting a communal leadership style (Morton, 2017). Therefore, there is a lack of fit between gay men and typical leadership stereotypes (Morton, 2017).

Lesbians are also vulnerable to sexual stereotypes. Because stereotypes may lead people to believe gay men and lesbians are likely to exhibit behaviors typical of their opposite genders, gay men are expected to exhibiting feminine characteristics while lesbians are expected to exhibiting masculine characteristics. They may be viewed as more masculine and aggressive, and lacking in traditional feminine traits such as warmth and nurturing abilities (Lieberman & Golom, 2015). Those who violate gender norms and

sexual stereotypes are evaluated more negatively compared to those who adhere to traditional norms (Morton, 2017).

Critically, few researchers have explored how stereotypes influence advancement and authority from the LG leader's perspective within the context of the current sociopolitical culture. The research identified here explored stereotypes, but not how LG leaders understood and interpreted the influence of stereotypes, how stereotypes influenced their advancement and authority and their commitment, or how stereotypes influenced organizational productivity and profitability. Further, few aside from Fassinger et al. (2010) have considered the possible positive association between LG identity and leadership.

In this section, I discussed stereotypes including leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, and how they can negative influence LG leaders, their followers, and the organizations where they are employed. In the next section, I will discuss discrimination including discrimination in the recruiting and hiring process, in salaries, in relationships with coworkers and mentoring opportunities, and in performance evaluations and advancement opportunities.

Discrimination

Workplace discrimination directed toward LGB employees is common, from small companies to Fortune 500 companies (Everly & Schwarz, 2015; Kite & Bryant-Lees, 2016). As many as 66% of LGB employees experience workplace discrimination, and earn between 10% and 32% less than their heterosexual peers (Gates & Mitchell, 2013; King & Cortina, 2010; Prati & Pietrantonio, 2014). Further, as many as 53% of LGB

employees conceal their sexual identity in the workplace due to the fear of discrimination (Kite & Bryant-Lees, 2016).

Discrimination can be overt, such as being denied employment or being fired from a job, verbal or physical harassment, wage discrepancies, or violence (Nadler et al., 2014; Sangganjanavanich & Cavazos, 2010; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012). Discrimination can also be subtle, such as being denied a raise or promotion, being denied a vacation, being ignored or isolated, or being the target of office gossip (Nadler et al., 2014; Sangganjanavanich & Cavazos, 2010; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012). While overt forms of discrimination in the workplace are no longer considered acceptable, subtle forms of discrimination are still common. This form of discrimination may cause self-doubt, and is often difficult to identify and confront (Chung et al., 2015). Some even believe discrimination toward LGB individuals is still acceptable (Pichler et al., 2010; Schneider, 2016).

Workplace discrimination can negatively influence LGB employees and the organizations where they are employed. For the employee, discrimination can lead to physical and mental health issues including high blood pressure and hypertension, anxiety and depression, substance abuse, high-risk behavior, suicide, and suicidal ideation (Bauermeister et al., 2014; Tilcsik, 2011). For the organization, discrimination can lead to reduced productivity, distraction, and fatigue in LGB employees, absences from work, costs in replacing and retraining employees, and potential litigation (Burns, 2012; Lindsey et al., 2013). Cianciotto (2017) reported annual costs for organizations could be as high as \$400 billion globally.

Recruiting and salaries. LGB individuals can be negatively affected by discrimination throughout the recruiting process (Burns, 2012). This includes reviewing resumes (Tilcsik, 2011), conducting interviews (Nadler et al., 2014), hiring decisions, and salaries (Lindsey et al., 2013). Tilcsik (2011) believed LGB discrimination began in the recruiting process. He went beyond existing research on wage discrepancies that utilized self-reports and small experimental studies and offered a large-scale, objective look at discrimination in recruiting. In an experiment using two different resumes where sexual orientation was experimentally manipulated, Tilcsik found evidence supporting his hypothesis, suggesting stereotypically held beliefs about gay men were inconsistent with job postings that called for decisive, assertive, or aggressive employees. Tilcsik found similar discrimination directed toward lesbians who were not invited for interviews based upon resumes that indicated sexual orientation. While a similar study found little evidence of discrimination in the recruiting process (Bailey, Wallace, & Wright, 2013), the study was conducted among large organizations that were likely to have antidiscrimination policies and were located in major metropolitan cities (Philadelphia, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco) that also have antidiscrimination legislation.

Discrimination in the form of stereotypes, prejudice, and bias is also likely to negatively affect the interview and hiring process (Nadler et al., 2014). Discrimination is particularly likely in ambiguous situations such as job interviews where there are no clearly defined right or wrong outcomes, and where individuals are easily able to justify their behavior by something other than the stereotypes they may hold (Nadler et al., 2014). Research has also found gay men earn between 10% and 32% less than their

heterosexual peers (Bailey et al., 2013; King & Cortina, 2010). Wage discrepancies for lesbians are less clearly defined, but research pointed to an approximate 30% difference between heterosexual women and lesbians (Bailey et al., 2013)

For the organization, discrimination may limit the pool of qualified employees required to remain productive and competitive (Burns, 2012). Organizations are also likely to incur costs in reduced productivity, absences, replacing and retaining employees, lost sales, and potential litigation. Surveys suggest the cost to replace an hourly employee is between \$5,00 and \$10,000, while the cost to replace an executive is between \$75,000 and \$211,000 (Burns, 2012). Further, businesses that condone or promote anti-LGB discrimination are likely to face negative reactions from their customers including lost sales, while ten discrimination lawsuits filed in 2010 cost organizations \$346 million (Burns, 2012).

According to the HRC (2017), equality for LGB employees helps to make businesses stronger in the current global business market. To enjoy the largest pool of available employees, maintain employee commitment and productivity, and promote the best people, organizations should endeavor to reduce discrimination within their organizations, and offer antidiscrimination policies and protections for their LGB employees both here and abroad (Cook & Glass, 2016).

Relationships with coworkers and mentoring. Discrimination can influence relationships with coworkers and mentoring opportunities, which can negatively affect authority and advancement opportunities (Fassinger, 2008; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012; Theodorakopoulos & Budhwar, 2015). Most people want to be honest and authentic with

themselves and their coworkers and colleagues, and the desire for honesty may lead people to disclose their sexual identity, which can lead to positive and authentic relationships (Gibson, Harari, & Marr, 2018). However, disclosure can also negatively influence authority in the workplace (Gibson et al., 2018), and there are additional potential costs for LGB employees. Chung et al. (2015) stated,

Possible benefits of disclosure may include relief and the freedom to be oneself; increased self-esteem and affirmation; closer interpersonal relationships; opportunities for resources, support, and mentoring; and being part of organizational and social change. On the other hand, the costs could be loss of employment, discrimination, harassment, social isolation and physical assault. (p. 214)

Having a mentor can mitigate many negative issues for LGB employees (Gibson et al., 2018; Hebl, Tonidandel, & Ruggs, 2012; Mandel, 2014; McFadden, 2015).

Mentoring has been positively associated with advancement opportunities and salary increases, as well as job satisfaction, involvement, and commitment (Hebl et al., 2012; McFadden, 2015). LGB mentoring programs have been positively associated with D&I in the workplace (Gibson et al., 2018), and matching LGB mentors and mentees has been positively associated with greater job satisfaction and involvement, specifically among LGB employees (Hebl et al., 2012). LGB mentors can help guide their LGB mentees through sexual identity disclosure decisions (Mandel, 2014), and help mentees manage workplace discrimination (Mandel, 2014; McFadden, 2015). LGB mentors provide role models for LGB and other employees, which may lead to higher ratings of positive and

inclusive workplace culture. In turn, this may allow LGB employees to focus less on concealing or managing their sexual identity and more on their productivity and job commitment (Hebl et al., 2012).

Performance evaluations and advancement opportunities. Discrimination may negatively effect performance evaluations and advancement opportunities (McFadden, 2015; Rhodes & Stewart, 2016). Kite and Bryant-Lees (2016) reported 43% of LGB employees experienced discrimination in performance evaluations. Researchers (Buddel, 2011; deLeon & Brunner, 2013; Gedro, 2010) have referred to the *lavender ceiling*: Similar to the *glass ceiling* women may experience in the workplace which is perceived to limit their advancement opportunities, the lavender ceiling is perceived to limit advancement opportunities for LGB individuals in the workplace. It has been suggested the lavender ceiling may be even more difficult to surmount than the glass ceiling (deLeon & Brunner, 2013).

Critically, there is a lack of current research on the influence of discrimination on advancement and authority among LG leaders. Tilcsik's (2011) research on discrimination in the hiring process was seminal. However, this research was conducted several years ago, and conducted among a heterosexual population. We do not know how discrimination is currently understood and interpreted by LG leaders, if attitudes have changed, or if the current sociopolitical culture influences discrimination.

In this section, I discussed discrimination including discrimination in the recruiting and hiring process, in salaries, in relationships with coworkers and mentoring

opportunities, and in performance evaluations and advancement opportunities. In the next section, I will discuss sexual identity disclosure.

Sexual Identity Disclosure

The decision to disclose or conceal sexual identity is often difficult, and is neither a dichotomous nor a singular decision (King et al., 2017). LG leaders may choose to tell some or all of their colleagues and coworkers, or to completely conceal their sexual identity. Further, it is never fully complete, as the LGB individual must choose to disclose or conceal their sexual identity with every introduction and unique situation (Buddel, 2011). Some LG leaders may disclose their sexual identity to forge authentic relationships and leadership enactment, and disclosing sexual identity can lead to a reduction in psychological stress as well as organizational commitment and career satisfaction (Buddel, 2011). Other LG leaders may conceal their sexual identity due to concerns over stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and the potential loss of advancement opportunities (Buddel, 2011; Collins & Callahan, 2012; Schneider, 2016). Sexual identity disclosure decisions are likely to be based on expected outcomes, including reactions from coworkers, safety concerns, and how the disclosure is likely to affect both advancement opportunities and the authority and influence LG leaders have in the workplace (Schneider, 2016). Research has shown sexual identity disclosure to lower status coworkers often undermines an LG leader's authority (Gibson et al., 2018). This disclosure may be seen as a vulnerability, which violates leader expectations and stereotypes (Gibson et al., 2018).

As LG status is considered a concealable stigma, LG leaders who choose to conceal their sexual identity are likely to employ identity management strategies, which may include adapting their dress and mannerism to more closely match heterosexual norms, changing pronouns or inventing heterosexual partners, or avoiding situations where personal disclosures are necessary (King et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016). They may separate their personal and work lives, leading to stress and disengagement (Buddel, 2011). Identity management strategies are likely to vary depending on the interaction partner and the situation (King et al., 2017). While Gibson et al. (2018) reported disclosure negatively effects authority among lower-status employees, it did not have a negative effect among colleagues and peers.

There are many reasons LG leaders choose to disclose their sexual identity, including the effort required to manage dual identities and the desire to maintain a singular identity, mentoring and paving the way for future LG leaders, and the desire to make sexual identity a nonissue where LG leaders can acknowledge their differences while simultaneously acknowledging their similarities with colleagues and coworkers (Schneider, 2016). LG leaders may also disclose their sexual identity to maintain their personal integrity, advocate for the LGB community and other LGB employees, and take advantage of domestic partnership benefits (King et al., 2017). In spite of these reasons, many young LG leaders choose to conceal their sexual identity due to fear of potential negative consequences including sexual stereotypes, discrimination, and diminished advancement opportunities (Buddel, 2011; Collins & Callahan, 2012).

Collins and Callahan (2012) explored the case of John Browne, former CEO of British Petroleum, whose sexual identity was disclosed by the media. Browne resigned from BP due to the disclosure and the lie he felt compelled to tell in an attempt to conceal his sexual identity. Schneider (2016) stated there is a personal cost to disclosing sexual identity in the workplace, and this cost can be much higher when the disclosure decision is taken out of the hands of the LG leader.

In spite of this research, there is still a lack of understanding how sexual identity disclosure influences advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders. While some evidence suggests younger LG individuals are more open about their sexual identity (King et al., 2017), there is conflicting evidence that suggests they conceal their identity due to concerns over diminished opportunities (Collins, & Callahan, 2012). There is also little research on the influence of the current sociopolitical culture on sexual identity disclosure decisions.

In this section, I discussed sexual identity disclosure, including reasons many individuals choose to either disclose or conceal their sexual identity. In the next section, I will discuss corporate culture including antidiscrimination policies.

Corporate Culture

Corporate culture can be defined as a set of shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms influenced by an organization's history, leaders, and customs (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Pichler et al., 2010). Corporate culture can be influenced by the type of industry, geographic region, and leaders, and by the visible and invisible features of its members (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Visible features include factors such as gender, sex, race, and

age, while invisible features include factors such as personal values, religion, and sexual identity. As employees learn the organizational culture, they are likely to endorse common beliefs and norms, and emulate them as a means of assimilating into the majority culture (Hogg, 2001; Nourafshan, 2017), and the tension between organizational and personal cultures, managing a concealable stigma, and balancing multiple identities can create challenges for LG leaders.

Heterosexuality is often assumed, and is considered the norm against which people are often judged (Zook, 2017). This assumption may influence how corporate culture is structured, including social interactions such as company events, as well as benefits such as domestic partnership benefits and paid leave. Most Fortune 500 companies include antidiscrimination policies and domestic partnership benefits (HRC, 2017; Pichler et al., 2017). However, some large companies do not offer these benefits (Chatel, 2016). Further, while research exists on LGB policies and benefits in large U.S. and international organizations, there is little research on small and mid-sized organizations. In addition, while many organizations have adopted LGB affirmative policies, this inclusion has done little to change the heterosexual norms upon which most organizational culture is based (Ward, 2008).

A positive corporate culture that includes antidiscrimination policies can help to create a safe and affirmative environment for LG leaders. However, corporate culture can also create an environment that is hostile to LG leaders: an environment where discrimination is indulged with little recourse for the LG leader. Pichler et al. (2010) attributed workplace bullying and discrimination to corporate culture, suggesting bullying

often results from an organization's work culture including problems in leadership and the victim's social exposure.

Antidiscrimination policies. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was established in 1964 to prohibit employment discrimination based race, religion, national origin, and sex, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established in 1965 to enforce these Title VII protections (Gandara, Jackson, & Discont, 2017). However, the issue of *sex* remains contentious. Arguments have been made that sex includes sexual identity. President Obama issued several executive orders to clarify this issue, including order 13,087 prohibiting discrimination among federal employees on the basis of sexual identity, and order 13,672 extending this protection to employees of federal contractors and subcontractors (Gandara et al., 2017). However, these orders are in jeopardy under the Trump administration. During the 2016 Presidential campaign, Donald Trump stated he planned to rescind many of Obama's executive orders if elected (McMahon, 2016).

There is a link between corporate antidiscrimination policies and LGB employee commitment and productivity (Chung et al., 2015), yet little research has been conducted on how antidiscrimination policies are enacted, enforced, and the potential benefits to both the employer and employee (Everly, & Schwarz, 2015; Theriault, 2017). In the absence of state or federal regulations, many Fortune 500 companies have established antidiscrimination policies covering sexual orientation, and some have policies covering gender identity (HRC, 2017; Pichler et al., 2017). However, many smaller companies have not followed this example (HRC, 2017; Pichler, Blazovich, Cook, Huston, & Strawser, 2016; Pichler et al., 2017). There is also a question of how these policies are

enforced (Muñoz & Thomas, 2006; Theriault, 2017). Subtle discrimination is often difficult to identify, and enforcing antidiscrimination policies often becomes a challenge (Muñoz, & Thomas, 2006).

Currently, there is no federal antidiscrimination legislation prohibiting discrimination explicitly based on sexual orientation. While some states have enacted their own legislation, in 29 states employers have the right to fire an employee based on sexual orientation (Becker, 2014; Gates, 2015; Rhodes & Stewart, 2016). The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would prohibit workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, has been introduced in almost every session of Congress since 1994 but has failed to pass (Gates & Mitchell, 2013). The lack of federal antidiscrimination policies and legislation can leave employees unprotected in the workplace, with little recourse against discrimination.

Some research has been conducted on the influence of corporate culture on LG leaders and leadership enactment. However, there is a need for more research on this issue including how antidiscrimination policies are enacted and enforced. There is also a need for additional research exploring why small and mid-sized organizations are slow to embrace antidiscrimination policies and domestic partnership benefits, and how these factors influence LG leaders' careers and the organizations where they are employed.

In this section, I discussed the positive and negative influence of corporate culture and antidiscrimination policies and the influence of heterosexual norms. In the final section, I will discuss social and political culture.

Sociopolitical Culture

After major advances in recent years, many LGB leaders fear a backlash in the equality movement (Elliott, 2015; Lang, 2016). Some regard the Trump administration as a “mandate to hate” (Lang, 2016, para 3), and reports show hate crimes rose 18% between 2016 and 2017 (Farivar, 2018), with more than 400 hate crimes reported directly following Donald Trump’s nomination (Lang, 2016). The anti-LGB sentiment the Trump administration has engendered influences both the social and political culture of this country. Socially, some individuals feel they no longer need to espouse a politically correct view of minority individuals whom they regard as different. Politically, the current administration has taken steps to limit LGB equality and reverse many steps taken by previous administrations.

Social culture. While some reports indicate increasingly favorable views of LGB individuals (Brown, 2017), other reports state for the first time since 2014 many Americans are “less comfortable with their LGB neighbors” (Rosenberg, 2018, para. 1). In the workplace, the Pew Research Center reports anti-LGB sentiment in the United States may be higher than previously believed (Morin, 2013). Comparing data from both acknowledged and anonymous surveys, there was increase from 16% to 27% respectively among those who disapprove of having an openly gay manager, and an increase from 14% to 25% respectively among those who believe it should be legal to discriminate against LGB individuals during the hiring process.

Political culture. The Obama administration made significant progress toward LGB equality, including recognizing the LGB community during annual pride

celebrations, and advocating for marriage equality and the repeal of the military's *Don't Ask Don't Tell* policy (Duarte, 2017; Rosenberg, 2018). However, the Trump administration took steps to reverse those advances and create a more negative culture (Duarte, 2017). Those steps included refusing to recognize or attend pride celebrations (Rosenberg, 2018), rescinding antidiscrimination regulations that provided protections to LGB individuals, attempting to ban transgender individuals from serving in the military, promoting religious freedom as a means of discriminating against LGB individuals, undermining the Affordable Care Act which provided healthcare to many LGB individuals, and appointing a vice president, supreme court judge, and other officials who have been historically anti-LGB (Cahill et al., 2017).

In the preceding sections, I described the main issues in advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders: stereotypes including leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes; discrimination including discrimination in the recruiting process, salaries, relationships with coworkers, mentoring opportunities, performance evaluations, and advancement opportunities; sexual identity disclosure; corporate culture including antidiscrimination policies; and sociopolitical culture.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented the conceptual and theoretical framework for the current study, and reviewed recent research findings on issues unique to many LG leaders including leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, corporate culture, and sociopolitical culture. The conceptual framework included key issues derived from existing literature and how they relate to the current

study. The theoretical framework included theories believed to influence the understanding and interpretation of advancement and authority experiences.

In the following chapter, I will outline the research design and rationale, methodology, data collection instruments, pilot study, and plan for data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness and ethics will also be reviewed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders through a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm explores how reality is understood and interpreted by individuals involved in real-life activities (Gergen et al., 2015). This paradigm is consistent with qualitative research using interviews and observations (Patton, 2002). Gaining a better understanding of these experiences and adding to the general knowledge of this subject may help LG and other leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders understand and address challenges to diversity and inclusion and how these challenges affect organizational efficiency and productivity within the framework of the current global business market.

In this chapter, I outline the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the methodology, including the researcher-developed instrument, the pilot study, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness including reliability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and ethical issues are also reviewed.

Research Design and Rationale

In this research study, I used a qualitative research design and a holistic multiple-case study approach to explore how LG corporate leaders understood and interpreted advancement and authority experiences. Based on existing literature, these experiences are likely to include leadership, gender, and sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual

identity disclosure, corporate culture, antidiscrimination policies, and the influence of the current sociopolitical culture.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do LG corporate leaders experience advancement, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

RQ2: How do LG corporate leaders experience authority, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

Qualitative Research

While quantitative research attempts to find explanation and causation, qualitative research attempts to explore and understand complex phenomena in a naturalistic setting (Stake, 1995). While quantitative research attempts to remove context and find generalizations, qualitative research focuses holistically on the context and uniqueness of each case and situation. Qualitative research often uses several sources of data, including observations, interviews, and documents. Qualitative research is inductive, building increasing abstract patterns of information from the research data, and may be a collaborative and interactive process of working with the research participants to refine data and establish patterns and themes (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is also an emergent approach, with the possibility of changes in interview questions or data collection methods, and an interpretive approach, with the researcher interpreting the data based on his or her history, experience, and understanding, and the reader interpreting the final report (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research positions the researcher within the research. The researcher is the primary instrument in the study; his or her experience and

history often leads to interest in a particular area of study and aids understanding and interpreting the data during field work, observations, and interviews (Patton, 2002).

Previous researchers have explored isolated issues (Eckes, 2017; Liberman & Golom, 2015; McFadden, 2015; Morton, 2017; Pheko et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016) but have not considered the issues holistically. Other researchers have used quantitative methods to measure specific issues without considering the personal aspect of how the issues are understood or how they influence both people and organizations (Bailey et al., 2013; Lewis & Pitts, 2017; Pichler et al., 2010; Tilcsik, 2011). Further, there is little scientific research on how the current sociopolitical culture is influencing advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders. A qualitative approach was chosen for this research study to allow for an in-depth exploration of the complex experiences of advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders, and a constructionist paradigm was chosen to specifically explore how LG leaders understood and interpreted the issues based on their own experiences. A qualitative approach allowed for a holistic and extensive exploration of these understudied experiences, how they are understood and interpreted, how they are influenced by the context and culture in which occur, and how they influence the lives and careers of the people involved.

Multiple-Case Study

According to Yin (2003), case studies can be explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive and should include five components: the research question, propositions, the unit or units of analysis, an explanation of how the data are linked to the propositions, and an interpretation of the findings. Case studies are typically used in conjunction with

how or *why* questions to study contemporary phenomena, bounded by time and place, within real-life contexts. Case studies can be instrumental or intrinsic (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The instrumental case study focuses on a single issue or case, while the intrinsic case study focuses in the case itself, often a program or extreme case. The case can be almost anything, from a single individual, to a school, agency, organization, or program. Single case studies explore one case, while multiple-case studies explore multiple cases using replication logic, either a literal replication where multiple similar cases are selected, or a theoretical replication where multiple contrasting cases are selected (Yin, 2003). Both single-case and multiple-case studies can be holistic or embedded. Holistic studies explore one case in each context, while embedded studies explore multiple cases in each context. Multiple-case studies are generally preferred, as they offer the potential for robust analyses and increased external validity (Yin, 2003).

A holistic multiple-case study approach was chosen for this research study. Contexts varied depending on organizational setting, and each context included one case. The unit of analysis was the individual case: the corporate leader. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and gathered data from several sources, including observations, interviews, and documents. Multiple cases allowed patterns to emerge across cases and added credibility to the study.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher positions him or herself within the research and fills various roles, including teacher, observer, interviewer, advocate, biographer, and interpreter (Stake, 1995). The researcher is a teacher, studying, observing, interviewing,

and learning from others, and passing on that information. The researcher is also an advocate, disseminating knowledge and indicating how the knowledge might be used (Stake, 1995). The researcher is a biographer, recognizing and acknowledging the lives and contexts of those being observed, and interpreting those lives, making connections, and presenting the data for others to use (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research also calls upon the researcher to be a participant in the research, using personal knowledge and experience to understand and interpret data while setting aside personal bias.

In this research study, my role was to study the issues, observe and conduct interviews, and interpret and present the data in such a way that will be beneficial for others. As a gay man and corporate leader, potential bias came from personal experience with the issues, including gender and leadership stereotypes, sexual identity disclosure, and discrimination. Throughout this study, I acknowledged my experience with the research topic. To help ensure there was no bias and to keep my experience from influencing the research design, data collection, and interpretation, I used journaling to document how I understood and analyzed the data. I also explored rival explanations and used cross-checking and cross-validating (see Patton, 2002).

Methodology

According to Yin (2003), interviews are often the best choice for a case study approach, and case studies may include other data sources, such as observations and field notes, contextual data, documentary data, and interviews with the participant's colleagues. Comprehensive in-depth interviews with thick descriptions, observations, and documentary data, including organizational and antidiscrimination policies, were

gathered from each leader. I transcribed each interview, and data from each case were analyzed and coded. Then patterns within and across cases were explored. The results include a description of each individual case, a description of patterns across cases, and themes that emerged from the data.

Participant Sampling Logic

Research participants were selected through a purposive, homogeneous sampling strategy used to reach LG leaders who have similar backgrounds in education and experience. The sample included LG corporate leaders such as chief executive officers, chief operating officers, and chief financial officers, 40 to 60 years old, from small to mid-sized business located in the Southeast United States. Patton (2002) stated that homogeneous sampling is used for in-depth exploration of particular subgroups within a larger population. In this case, the subgroup was LG corporate leaders with similar ages, backgrounds, experience, and geographic location, within the larger group of all LGB individuals who are employed. Research participants were recruited through snowball and homogeneous sampling. I recruited initial participants from LGB executive groups such as gay and lesbian chambers of commerce.

Sample Size

Qualitative research generally requires depth of information over breadth and does not attempt to generalize to a broad population (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). While few researchers have suggested a definitive number of participants, most called for enough participants to reach the point of saturation, a point where additional interviews no longer yield new information. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggested 12

interviews are generally sufficient to reach the point of saturation. In their research, 94% of their codes were developed from the first six interview participants, and 97% from the first 12 participants. Yin (2003) also stated that an excessive number of interviews tends to dilute the data. To reach saturation, I conducted 12 interviews.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was developed by me and was created to gather detailed information and rich descriptions. The semistructured interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to answer the research questions by gathering data on the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders. The interview questions were formulated based on SIT and the affirmative LGBT leadership model, as well as current literature on issues, including stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, corporate culture, and sociopolitical culture. The semistructured nature of the data collection allowed for follow-up questions necessary to clarify any issues.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study with two research participants who met the inclusion criteria. This study was used to measure the time required to conduct the interview, to determine if the interview protocol and questions provided sufficient data to answer the research questions, to ensure there were no leading questions, and to ensure the participants were able to understand the terminology of the questions. The pilot study was also used to assess the instrument's internal validity. Participants for the pilot study who matched the inclusion criteria were recruited from the researcher's acquaintances.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Research participants were recruited through snowball and homogeneous sampling. I approached LGB executive groups such as gay and lesbian chambers of commerce. These executive groups had an online membership directory, and I sent several members an invitation to participate in my research study. I also posted an invitation on their Facebook pages, and on the Facebook pages of several other LGB executive groups. While participants were drawn from LGB executive groups, it was likely that many were employed at non-LGBT focused companies. Thus, participants may not have disclosed their sexual identity in the workplace, or they may have disclosed their sexual identity to some or all of their coworkers and colleagues. Those who meet the inclusion criteria were sent the consent form, and I scheduled an interview. I also asked each participant to suggest colleagues or acquaintances who may meet the inclusion criteria and be willing to participate in the study. I sent those potential participants an invitation as well. Interview times and locations were scheduled at the participant's convenience with regard to their comfort and privacy. I planned to conduct interviews either face-to-face when location and availability permitted, or via telephone or an Internet service such as Skype or GoToMeeting.

Research (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) suggested the time required for a qualitative interview depends on the availability of the participants, the research question(s), and the depth of information the researcher intends to gather. Research also suggested executives will not be available for more than 1 hour (Patton, 2002). In this research study, semi-structured interviews consisting of 10 questions lasted

approximately 1 hour. Participants were also asked if they would be available for a brief (no more than 30 minutes) follow-up session for additional questions or clarification. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The interview protocol included an introduction consisting of a brief overview of the study, confidentiality, the option to withdraw from the study, and closing remarks (Appendix A). The interview protocol also provided each participant with my contact information, as well as contact information for Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), an opportunity to ask questions and add final remarks, and discuss potential follow-up and member-checking. The interview questions include the following (Appendix A):

1. Tell me about your experience with advancement in the workplace.
2. Tell me about your experience with authority in the workplace.
3. What influenced your decision to disclose or conceal your sexual identity?
4. If your sexual identity has influenced your leadership experience, can you describe how?
5. If stereotypes have influenced your advancement and authority, can you describe how?
6. If discrimination has influenced your advancement and authority, can you describe how?
7. If your corporate culture has influenced your career, can you describe how?
8. If the current social and political culture has influenced your authority in the workplace, can you describe how?
9. What advice would you offer future LG leaders?

10. Moving forward, what advice would you offer organizations?

The original data will be kept on my password-protected computer. The data will also be backed-up onto a password protected thumb drive and kept in a secure, off-site location. Audio recording will be destroyed at the end of the study, and the transcribed data will be kept for 5 years in accordance with Walden University's guidelines. Walden University's IRB approval number for this study is 11-26-18-0256972.

Data Analysis Plan

In data analysis, Yin (2003) focused on finding patterns within the data and drawing comparisons between cases. The author identified several techniques for analyzing case study data, including pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Yin believed analysis rested on linking data to prepositions, the expected findings that are developed from existing literature prior to data collection. In contrast, Stake (1995) focused on more traditional coding methods and context-specific data.

In this research study, analysis was an iterative process involving several cycles of coding and recoding, categorizing, and synthesizing (Saldaña, 2016). Coding included a constructivist perspective exploring how the participants understood their experiences within the context of corporate and sociopolitical culture. Interview data was coded, as were observations such as the interview setting, the participant's overall mood, and how the participants reacted to the interview questions. When possible, corporate handbooks and antidiscrimination policies were reviewed and coded as well. The coding noted if there are antidiscrimination policies, and the amount of detail included in the policies.

Initial coding identified and code concepts within the data. Secondary coding refined the initial codes and identified concepts and patterns across cases. Finally, tables were used to group and analyze patterns and develop themes both within and across cases. Data that both supported and contradicted the findings were explored and reported, as well as potential explanations for discrepant data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to how reliable or believable the data appears, and how it relates to reality. Transferability refers to how well the data will generalize to other populations and contexts. Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the data collection process. Confirmability provides evidence that the study results are based on the participants' words and experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations. In this section, I will discuss how I attempted to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

To help ensure credibility, Patton (2002) suggested connecting the results directly to the participants' personal experiences. In addition, triangulation and member checking were used to help ensure credibility. Triangulation entailed using multiple sources of information such as interviews, observations, documentary data, and theory to generate thick descriptive information for each case. When possible, I also shared interview transcripts, interpretations, and conclusions with the participants, providing an

opportunity to validate the information they shared, and offer clarification and additional information when necessary.

Transferability

While transferability refers to how well the data will generalize to other populations and contexts, generalizations can change with time and a researcher's first priority should be to offer insights into particular cases and contexts before attempting to generalize to broader populations (Patton, 2002). With that caveat, Patton (2002) suggested researchers may generalize more confidently when findings remain consistent across participants and when the researcher can demonstrate that the constructs being studied (rather than other constructs) are responsible for the outcome. Thick descriptions and direct connections to culture and context that allow the reader to better understand the data and draw their own conclusions can also help to demonstrate transferability.

Dependability

Dependability refers to consistency and reliability. An audit trail documenting each step of the research process, including how the data was collected and interpreted, was used to help ensure dependability. This documentation also helped to ensure the rigor of the study, and will help future researchers understand and duplicate the research strategy.

Confirmability

An audit trail helped in both dependability and confirmability by documenting how the data was collected, how codes were developed, how interpretations were drawn,

and how a rationale was developed for themes found in the research. I also kept a journal to reflexively discuss my thoughts, and the steps I took to keep bias out of the research.

Ethical Procedures

The participant's ethical rights were paramount throughout the study. Each participant was provided with an informed consent document that explained their voluntary participation, their right to anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time with no negative repercussions. The informed consent document briefly described the purpose of the study, and the study's benefits and risks. In the final study, participants' names were substituted with descriptors (Participant A, Participant B, and so on), and information that could potentially identify the participants such as employer's names and locations was avoided. As some participants were concealing their sexual identity, caution was taken during all contact and data collection. If the interview elicited any negative emotional response, a list of local counselors whose services are available for free or at a reduced cost was provided (Appendix B). Participants were offered an opportunity to review their interview transcripts and modify the data in any way they deemed necessary to respect their rights and confidentiality.

Research data will be kept for 5 years in accordance with the University's guidelines, and will be maintained on my private password-protected computer, as well as a password protected thumb drive, which will be kept in a secure, off-site location.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, an outline of qualitative research and the multiple-case study approach, the

participant selection logic including recruitment plan, instrumentation, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

In the following chapter, I will provide information on the pilot study and the research findings including the setting, demographics, data collection, analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness, along with the results of the proposed study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore issues surrounding advancement and authority among LG corporate leaders through a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm explores how reality is understood and interpreted by individuals involved in real-life activities (Gergen et al., 2015). This paradigm is consistent with qualitative research using interviews and observations (Patton, 2002). Gaining a better understanding of these issues and adding to the general knowledge of this subject may help LG and other leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders understand and address issues of diversity and inclusion and how these issues affect organizational efficiency and productivity within the framework of the current global business market.

In this chapter, I describe the pilot study as well as the interview settings and demographics of the research participants. The data collection and method of analysis and the data analysis by interview question and by research question are also discussed.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do LG corporate leaders experience advancement, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

RQ2: How do LG corporate leaders experience authority, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study with two participants who met the inclusion criteria to determine if the interview protocol and questions provided sufficient data to answer the research questions, to ensure there were no leading questions, and to ensure the participants were able to understand the terminology of the questions. Participants were recruited from my acquaintances. Interviews were conducted and transcribed, and transcripts were coded to develop provisional codes.

The pilot study was also used to test the instrument's internal validity. The ability of participants to understand and answer the interview questions and no evidence that outside issues influenced the study findings offered evidence of internal validity. The results of the pilot study did not indicate any concern with the interview protocol or questions, sufficient data to answer the research questions was gathered, and the original protocol was used for the remainder of the research.

Setting

There were no conditions that appeared to negatively influence the 12 research participants. However, there were conditions in which some participants varied from the norm of steady employment in a corporate leadership role. Participants who varied include Participant C, who recently left his corporate job to pursue a career in a different field. He explained that he was tired of the politics, including the discrimination he had faced in the corporate world. Another participant with a unique setting was Participant D, who had dual careers: One career was outside of the corporate environment and was very accepting, while the second was in a corporate setting that was less accepting. He

informed me that while his corporate career flourished after he disclosed his sexual identity, he had faced challenges in the workplace that were likely due to discrimination. Two other participants with unique settings were Participant F, who was working in a corporate environment while simultaneously studying for a Juris Doctorate, and Participant J, who was recently laid off but was actively pursuing employment. He said mentoring in his previous job helped him prepare for a career in a different industry. While these conditions varied from the norm of most of the participants, they did not adversely influence the participants, who were mostly eager to share their stories and experiences. In the next section, I discuss the participant demographics.

Demographics

All of the 12 research participants were White homosexual males between the ages of 44 and 60. Six participants had bachelor's degrees, one had a Master of Arts degree and four had MBAs, and one was studying for a Juris Doctorate. All participants lived and worked in the Southeast in a variety of industries, including health and beauty, healthcare, sales, finance, banking, tourism, telecommunications, manufacturing, and cyber security. In the next sections, I discuss the data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

The interview protocol was administered to 12 self-identified corporate leaders between the ages of 44 and 60 who identified as gay men and who had experience with advancement and authority. Interviews took place via telephone at a time convenient to both the participant and me. Interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes, with an average time of 42 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded using a Sony digital

recorder. The recordings were immediately transferred to a desktop computer, and the recordings were deleted from the digital recorder.

The data collection procedures outlined in Chapter 3 included lesbian and gay corporate leaders, with the option of interviews conducted either face-to-face when location and availability permitted or via telephone or an Internet service. Although I approached several lesbian members of the chambers of commerce and other organizations, these groups were comprised mainly of gay men, and only gay men responded to my interview requests. Further, participants unanimously chose telephone interviews. The reason for this may have been convenience as well as privacy.

Participants were mostly poised, articulate, and eager to share their experiences and offer their insights on the topic of advancement and authority. However, two of 12 participants had not revealed their sexual identity in the workplace and seemed somewhat reluctant to share their experiences.

Data Analysis

Once the individual participants' interviews were transcribed, they were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet where responses to each interview question were analyzed using descriptive and in vivo coding. According to Saldaña's (2016) coding method, descriptive and in vivo coding methods are first cycle methods and part of the elemental coding process. Descriptive coding identifies a word or short phrase that is used to summarize the topic of a passage, while in vivo coding uses language taken directly from the transcript to both honor the participant's voice and ground the analysis. These first cycle codes were then used as the foundation for the second cycle of coding

where more abstract concepts were identified. These concepts were then grouped into categories.

I transcribed and coded the interviews. Coding was an iterative process of reading and rereading the interview transcripts, refining the codes, and exploring the interview transcripts both individually and as a whole. The following analysis by interview question includes tables (Tables 1–10), which are each labeled with a single the interview question and present the concepts that were developed during the second cycle of coding and how the concepts were grouped into categories. Each table is then followed by a discussion of each category, with quotes taken directly from participants. These quotes help to explain the data and offer validity to the coding process. This section is followed by evidence of trustworthiness and the results, which includes a table (Table 11) identifying how the research questions aligned with the interview questions, and an analysis of the overarching themes that were developed.

Analysis by Interview Question

Table 1

Q1. Tell me about your experience with advancement in the workplace.

Categories	Concepts
Advancement can be based solely on ability.	<p>Advanced due to experience, ability, and supportive leadership.</p> <p>Owner wanted someone who worked hard and loved the company.</p> <p>Advancement is self-driven.</p> <p>Openly gay and advanced because of his abilities.</p> <p>Does not believe his sexual identity impacted his advancement.</p> <p>Does not feel like his sexual identity impacted his advancement.</p>
Advancement can be positively influenced by the industry and corporate culture.	<p>Being out can help in some industries</p> <p>Came out when he saw others who were out in the company.</p> <p>Support from leadership.</p> <p>OK to be out because there were many others in the industry.</p> <p>Once he accepted being gay was OK, career flourished.</p> <p>Energy that was spent hiding could be re-directed into career.</p>
Advancement can be negatively influenced by sexual identity and corporate culture.	<p>Advancement is often political.</p> <p>Experienced the good old boy network.</p> <p>Also had negative experiences with boys club.</p> <p>Felt like there was discrimination.</p> <p>Less obvious minority status may have held him back.</p> <p>Future employer asked staff if they would be OK with a gay coworker.</p> <p>Came out during a job interview and the interviewer had to get the owner's approval.</p> <p>Denied an interview because he was gay.</p> <p>Denied advancement because he was gay.</p> <p>Denied a position because supervisor was not gay friendly.</p> <p>Obstacles exist even in big cities.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 1 include the following: Advancement can be based solely on ability; advancement can be positively influenced by the industry and corporate culture; and advancement can be negatively influenced by sexual identity and corporate culture. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Advancement can be based solely on ability. Several of the research participants expressed the belief that their advancement was based solely on their abilities. For example, Participant F worked in an industry that is not typically LGB friendly, yet he was open about his sexual identity and believed he advanced due to his abilities and supportive leadership. When he was outed by a coworker, the owner of the company took him aside for a candid conversation about his sexual identity, fired the individual responsible for the outing, and promoted Participant F to a management position. In another situation, Participant J stated that his industry is relaxed, and he has also been open about his sexual identity throughout his career. By mentioning involvement in several LGB organizations, he identified himself as a gay man on his resume as a means of qualifying potential employers. He experienced regular advancement as well as mentoring opportunities that helped his career flourish. In contrast, Participant G stated that his industry is LGB friendly, but he did not discuss his sexual identity at work and believed his advancement was solely due to his experience and abilities. In general, the people who stated their advancement was based solely on their abilities also worked in industries that were either relaxed or LGB friendly and had supportive leadership.

Advancement can be positively influenced by the industry and corporate culture. Some participants stated their sexual identity actually helped them advance. Participant B worked in the pharmaceutical industry, and believed his sexual identity helped him in working with his organization to develop initiatives targeting the LGB community. Participant D had a remarkable journey of self-acceptance and also found acceptance in his career. After he disclosed his sexual identity he said his career flourished. He stated “living out in that area of my life just created this remarkable liberty and freedom to place my energy in so many places other than hiding.” He also noted “the struggle was really more with myself than with other people.” Participant E worked in a LGB friendly industry. He made the decision to disclose his sexual identity early in his career when he realized several of his coworkers were gay, and he felt comfortable with the disclosure, in part, due to the acceptance of the industry. Participant H worked in the health and beauty industry and believed his sexual identity helped him connect with his staff and clients. He stated “the [businesses] that I would run, or my teams, would be predominantly women, and I need their buy in quickly that I’m someone they can trust.”

Advancement can be negatively influenced by sexual identity and corporate culture. Several participants experienced different stages of advancement throughout their careers based on their industry and corporate culture, while others stated their advancement was negatively influenced by their sexual identity. For example, Participant A stated his advancement was based on his abilities early in his career, but his advancement became more political as he moved into a different segment of his industry. He believed his advancement was negatively influenced by his sexual identity. He

explained “the people that were chosen to receive the jobs were far less qualified than me, but each of them was a White heterosexual male who had worked with the hiring manager at a former company.” Participant K also believed his advancement was influenced by his sexual identity. He disclosed his sexual identity during a job interview. Before he was offered the position he was told “we were totally okay with it, we just wanted to run it by the partner and, you know, get his buy in.” Participant C had a similar experience. After he had been hired, a coworker informed him before an offer was made “there was a discussion about me being gay, and was that going to bother anybody.” When he questioned why he had not received a promotion in another organization, he stated the human resource director “basically came right out and said it’s because you’re gay.”

Table 2

Q2. Tell me about your experience with authority in the workplace.

Categories	Concepts
Some minority leaders experienced no problems with authority.	<p>Authority grew with success. Never experienced any direct confrontations. Believed he was respected and liked as an authority figure. Never believed he had problems with authority. Felt he always had authority. Respects people who do well in business, and those he can learn from. Supportive of others who want to come out. Treat everyone as individuals and focus on what they bring to the workplace.</p>
Disclosing sexual identity may increase authority.	<p>Concealing sexual identity can lead to gossip, which can undermine authority. Openly gay and proud throughout his career and felt this helped his authority. Believes being gay helped his authority. Seen as an authority on LGBT issues. You will excel when you're honest and know yourself. Everybody can sense when you're hiding something. Found acceptance when he came out.</p>
Some negative experiences with authority.	<p>Struggled over authority with another minority. Management knows he successfully leads a double life. Easier to be out in some professions. Noticed authority and discrimination issues among peers. Struggled over authority with a straight White manager. Experienced problems with some long-time employees. Experienced problems with employees taking orders from a gay man. Often closeted because of customers.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 2 include: Some minority leaders experienced no problems with authority; disclosing sexual identity may increase authority; and some negative experiences with authority. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Some minority leaders experienced no problems with authority. Several participants stated they were admired and respected as authority figures, and their sexual identity did not positively or negatively influence their authority in the workplace.

Disclosing sexual identity may increase authority. Participant B thought he was hired in part because of his sexual identity, so he believed it helped with his authority in the workplace. Participant I spoke in terms of self-acceptance as well as acceptance in the workplace. He stated “the more that you accept yourself and you let people see that you know who you are, you will excel.” Several participants also discussed the process of disclosing sexual identity, and how being honest and authentic can enhance both working relationship and authority. For example, Participant J stated, “I actually think that if anything [coming out] has lent me more authority because people are more comfortable with who I am and the position I’m coming from.” Participant J also discussed the process of disclosing sexual identity. He said, “The more uncomfortable you are with being out, the more uncomfortable with people around you tend to be about you being out.” He also stated how gossip can negatively influence authority: “I think [secrets] can, can undercut your authority because people are going to either second guess you because of that they think they know about you, or what have you.”

Some negative experiences with authority. Other participants discussed negative experiences with authority. Participant A revealed he had several occasions when he thought his authority was challenged because of his sexual identity. These included an occasion when a coworker bullied and gossiped about him in a negative manner in an attempt to discredit his character and abilities. Participant D had advanced throughout his career, yet stated he felt compelled to conceal his sexual identity to a segment of his client base. His corporate leaders were aware that he led a double life. He stated “with my higher ups and with climbing the ladder, I think they have realized that I’m able to, uh, to live this double life very well, which is sad to say, but it’s true that upward mobility has not been an issue.” Meanwhile, as a younger leader, Participant F stated he encountered resistance with some of his older employees due to his age as well as his sexual identity.

Table 3

Q3. What influenced your decision to disclose or conceal your sexual identity?

Categories	Concepts
Minority leaders may disclose their sexual identity to be authentic.	<p>Wanted to be authentic. Easier to come out than try to hide. Not interested in hiding a part of himself. Did not want to hide. Had to be true to himself. Felt worthy. Saw people dying from AIDS and wanted to be authentic. Important to be authentic. Had a benchmark for coming out. Organically discloses his sexual identity to disarm and create a bond with his (mostly female) employees and clients. Came out organically. Out on resume to disclose and qualify opportunities. Believed there had to be alignment between home and work.</p>
Minority leaders may disclose their sexual identity because of a supportive environment or role model.	<p>Role model and supportive work environment made coming out easier. Supportive work environment made coming out easier. Supportive and encouraging work environment. Was told not to shy away from who he is. Supported by the company owner. Came out to a good friend who was very supportive.</p>
Some minority leaders have not disclosed or completely disclosed sexual identity.	<p>Not open about his sexual identity. Never actively discloses sexual identity because of political environment. It's no one's business." Answers when asked directly, but never volunteers information. Answers direct questions.</p>
Some minority leaders are outed by a friend or coworker.	<p>Outed at a work party. Outed by a family member. Outed by a coworker.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 3 include: Minority leaders may disclose their sexual identity to be authentic; minority leaders may disclose their sexual identity because of a supportive environment or role model; some minority leaders have not disclosed or completely disclosed sexual identity; and some minority leaders are outed by a friend or coworker. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Minority leaders may disclose their sexual identity to be authentic. Internal reasons several participants chose to disclose their sexual identity included the desire to be authentic. Comments included Participant E who said having friends and coworkers early in his career who were dealing with AIDS prompted him to disclose his sexual identity and live his life authentically; Participant I who said once he accepted his own sexual identity he felt worthy and wanted to be authentic and true to himself; Participant J who said he did not want to partition his life and said “for me, being out was actually the path of least resistance;” and Participant K who spoke of the importance of alignment between his home life and work life.

Minority leaders may disclose their sexual identity because of a supportive environment or role model. External reasons several participants chose to disclose their sexual identity included the presence of a positive role model, supportive coworkers, and a supportive corporate culture including leadership. Participant B had a lesbian sister, and said having this role model made the decision to disclose his sexual identity easier. Other participants said having a supportive work environment and supportive leadership made

the decision to reveal their sexual identity easier. Participant J stated, “knowing that the company...had my back in that case was very empowering.”

Some minority leaders have not disclosed or completely disclosed sexual identity. Some participants stated they answer direct questions, but rarely volunteer information. Others said they have either not disclosed their sexual identity due to the political nature of their corporate culture, or feel their sexual identity is a private matter and do not discuss it at work. Although he revealed his sexual identity later in his career, in the early part of his career Participant L concealed his sexual identity, going so far as to create a fake girlfriend to deceive his coworkers. When this deception was revealed, rather than expressing concern over his need to conceal his identity, he reported his coworkers “found it hilarious how good I was at it,” and said “you don’t even miss a step with the pronouns, she and her. I said, oh yeah, I’ve had a lot of practice.”

Some minority leaders are outed by a friend or coworker. For a few participants, the decision to disclose or conceal their sexual identity was taken out of their hands. Participant A was outed by a coworker at a party. Although he was deeply embarrassed, the participant explained it was an innocent remark, as the coworker believed everyone knew the participant was gay. He stated another coworker revealed that “it hurt her feelings for me to see that I had been so wounded by what was a funny comment, and she wanted me to know that I had her respect and her love and her acceptance and to never shy away from who I was.” Early in his career Participant D worked with his family and was outed by a family member after a family conflict. Participant F was intentionally outed by a coworker who, according to the participant, felt

threatened by his career success. Initially, the participant believed he would be fired by the company's conservative owner. However, the owner was supportive, and stated, "the only thing that I will ever fire you for is if you're ashamed of yourself."

Table 4

Q4. If your sexual identity has influenced your leadership experience, can you describe how?

Categories	Concepts
Sexual identity led to being more caring, adaptable, and confident.	<p>Be more compassionate. More compassionate. Being confident. Being adaptable. A more inclusive leader. Competent and true to himself. Being an overachiever led him to promote a work/life balance. More aware of issues outside of work. High level of empathy and compassion for others on the outside. Invested in personal and profession lives of employees. More accepting and generous with others. Increased confidence, vulnerability, and authenticity in revealing sexual identity. More open-minded, not judgmental.</p>
Sexual identity may enhance relationships with others.	<p>Being gay led him to foster and appreciate diversity. See and treat everyone equally. Straight men and women see his as less threatening. Gay men are often more observant. Look at people individually rather than stereotypically. Being gay helps him relate to others and lead in a less threatening manner. Strong in dealing with adverse situations. Strong leadership sets the tone. Wants to give everyone the tools they need to be successful. Tried to live by example. Tried to set an appropriate tone in how to communicate with others. Encouraged other leaders to be more inclusive and diverse. Helped be more of a person than just an employee.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 4 include: Sexual identity led to being more caring, adaptable, and confident; and sexual identity may enhance relationships with others. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Sexual identity led to being more caring, adaptable, and confident. Regarding how sexual identity may have influenced leadership, once again there seemed to be both internal and external components. Internally, several participants discussed being more caring and compassionate, more adaptable and inclusive, and more confident and capable. Participant A discussed how his struggle to overcome the stigma of being gay led him to become a workaholic and overachiever, and how he eventually found a work/life balance. He said this struggle made him more compassionate toward others, including those dealing with issues outside of work, and helping others find a work/life balance. Participant J spoke of his early outsider status, which made him more aware and compassionate towards others who may also be on the outside. Both Participants D and H discussed how their sexual identity allowed them to be adaptable and relate equally well to both men and women. Participant E stated his journey and sexual identity allowed him to feel competent and secure in his identity and leadership abilities, while Participant H stated, “if I know who I am as an individual, I’ll know who I am as a leader. And there’s a confidence that comes with that, being able to stand in front of the group of people and just say, hey, authentically, here I am.”

Sexual identity may enhance relationships with others. Sexual identity also influenced leadership externally, influencing relationships with others including wanting

to help others grow and reach their full potential. Participant B explained he felt it was important to lead by example and set the tone for the workplace, including how he communicated with his employees and how they communicated with each other. Participant B also encouraged other leaders within his organization to be more open to diversity and inclusion. Participant C stated “it was very important that I made sure [my employees] had every tool they could have to be successful.” Several participants discussed how their own minority status led them to set aside stereotypes and preconceived ideas and see their employees and fellow leaders as individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses. Participant H said his leadership involved more than his sexual identity. In a defining moment early in this career, he explained a mentor told him “you want to be known as a [leader] who does a great job and is amazing and just happens to be gay, versus being known as gay leader.”

Table 5

Q5. If stereotypes have influenced your advancement and authority, can you describe how?

Categories	Concepts
Minority leaders may not fit existing stereotypes.	Doesn't fit existing stereotypes. Personality may work to change stereotypes. Stereotypes cease to be a factor once people get to know you.
Stereotypes may be an advantage.	Stereotype of gay network worked in his favor. Knew how to use the network without taking advantage of relationships.
Stereotypes may be a disadvantage.	Believed there were negative stereotypes and doubts about how well people would accept a gay leader in the South. Because of potential stereotypes company leaders did not push him to pursue management positions. Traits that match existing stereotypes are more noticeable and tend to be discussed among coworkers. Notices stereotypes of gay people being flamboyant with feminine attributes. Stereotypes exist. Older generation is more cognizant of stereotypes than younger generation.

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 5 include: Minority leaders may not fit existing stereotypes; stereotypes may be an advantage; and stereotypes may be a disadvantage. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Minority leaders may not fit existing stereotypes. Some corporate leaders believed they did not fit existing stereotypes regarding gay men. Participant K stated “This is going to come across as a bit of a brag and I don’t mean it that way, but...people

don't identify me as gay." This participant also expressed the belief that when he discloses his sexual identity, his behavior, which appears counter to typical stereotypical behavior, may help to change those stereotypes. Participant J thought that while stereotypes do exist, his work spoke for itself, and as coworkers interacted with him their stereotypical thinking diminished.

Stereotypes may be an advantage. Some leaders worked in LGB friendly industries or were employed in positions where they believed stereotypes worked in their favor. Participant B stated "as you know probably, there is a stereotype, and it isn't true, that we all know how to look one another up, that there is kind of a network." Other participants discussed their relaxed and non-threatening relationships with female staff, coworkers, and clients, and how their minority status made some aspects of their jobs easier.

Stereotypes may be a disadvantage. Even with positive examples, many participants discussed negative experiences with stereotypes. Participant C stated traits and characteristics that closely match existing stereotypes are more often noticed and discussed among coworkers, resulting in gossip. Participant D believed his leadership career was more adversely affected by stereotypes in the South than it had been when working in the North. He stated, "I do feel for me to manage heterosexual men in [the South] that they would have had a very hard time with that, and so I think that the upper management realized that and never pushed me to, to go to management classes." Participant H discussed stereotypes of gay individuals being flamboyant and exhibiting

feminine characteristics, and believed older individuals may access stereotypes more frequently and easily than younger individuals.

Table 6

Q6. If discrimination has influenced your advancement and authority, can you describe how?

Categories	Concepts
Some minority leaders experience little or no discrimination.	<p>May have experienced discrimination, but it was the exception.</p> <p>Believes being open and promoting LGBT issues worked in his favor.</p> <p>Doesn't feel he was negatively impacted by discrimination.</p>
Some minority leaders experience discrimination.	<p>Believed he was fired for being gay.</p> <p>Believed he experienced some discrimination.</p> <p>Discrimination against women and gay men exists at the corporate level.</p> <p>Strong prejudice favoring White men.</p> <p>Missed out on advancement opportunities due to discrimination.</p> <p>Experienced discrimination due to a different minority status.</p> <p>Felt isolated and that he didn't fit the appropriate image.</p> <p>Believed he didn't advance as quickly as others because he was gay.</p> <p>Noticed some anti-gay sentiment with a client.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 6 include: Some minority leaders experience little or no discrimination; and some minority leaders experience discrimination. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Some minority leaders experience little or no discrimination. Some participants stated that they experienced little or no discrimination. Participant J stated if he experienced discrimination it was the exception. He also believed that being open about his sexual identity and leading several LGB initiatives worked to offset any

potential negative effects of discrimination. Participant F stated that he felt no discrimination in the workplace, and credited this to the strong antidiscrimination position of the company owner.

Some minority leaders experience discrimination. In contrast, several participants discussed their negative experiences with discrimination, and stated they believed discrimination negatively impacted their advancement. Participant C discussed discrimination toward women and other minorities, stating “if you weren’t a White man, and [the manager] probably felt that way about gays too although he never said it to me, but he saw you as being less than.” Participant C said there were occasions when his sexual identity kept him from advancing. Participant H began his leadership career in retail, and believed he did not fit a certain corporate image. He also believed his sexual identity kept him from advancing as quickly as his peers. Participant L experienced discrimination during his career including being fired from a job when his sexual identity was revealed.

Table 7

Q7. If your corporate culture has influenced your career, can you describe how?

Categories	Concepts
Company owners are critical in establishing corporate culture.	<p>Owners are important in setting the tone.</p> <p>Culturally diverse company background may make the company culture more accepting.</p> <p>Zero tolerance policy on discrimination.</p> <p>Culture puts employees first, customers second.</p> <p>Had mentoring opportunities that helped his career.</p>
Industry and location make a difference in corporate culture.	<p>Geographic location makes culture more accepting.</p> <p>Be aware of environment/location when deciding to reveal sexual orientation.</p> <p>The culture of some industries is more supportive than others.</p> <p>Corporate culture is relaxed.</p> <p>Different industries have different cultures.</p> <p>Southern states/locations can be less accepting.</p> <p>Sexual identity doesn't matter, what matters is that you show up and lead your team.</p> <p>Better experience if people get to know you first, before they find out about sexual identity.</p>
Sexual minorities may feel excluded due to corporate culture.	<p>Good old boy network.</p> <p>Feels at a disadvantage because he's not part of the club.</p> <p>Corporate leaders will judge you based on the bottom line.</p> <p>You can tell when a coworker is uncomfortable being around an openly gay person.</p> <p>Tailor your personality to match your environment.</p> <p>Tailor your mindset to taking care of your customers.</p> <p>Be creative when dealing with different types of people.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 7 include: Company owners are critical in establishing corporate culture; industry and location make a difference in corporate culture; and sexual minorities may feel excluded due to corporate culture. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Company owners are critical in establishing corporate culture. When discussing how the corporate culture influenced their leadership experience, several participants discussed the importance of the company owners and the tone they set among the other leaders and employees. Participants F and H both indicated their company owners had a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination in the workplace. Participant E said a culturally diverse corporate history helped to make his company accepting of diversity. Participant K also spoke of a family-centered corporate culture that accepted diversity in the workplace.

Industry and location make a difference in corporate culture. Several participants, including those who worked in industries such as mental health, health and beauty, and technology, mentioned their corporate cultures were relaxed and accepting of diversity. Meanwhile, participants who worked in industries such as finance, banking, and manufacturing said their cultures were more structured, and they tended to experience more challenges due to corporate culture. Several participants also indicated geographic location made a difference in corporate culture. For example, Participant F discussed challenges due to location. He explained his office is located in a larger Southern city and has an open and accepting culture. However, company locations in

smaller cities are less accepting of diversity. Participant K said the corporate culture of his technology-based organization was relaxed and accepting of diversity, although the Southern location may have created challenges. Meanwhile, Participant C stated “I certainly did not lead with my gay card living in [a Southern state] I’m just going to go ahead and tell you that. There were counties, one county over from where my [office] was, no Black people would be seen in that county after dark.”

Sexual minorities may feel excluded due to corporate culture. Several participants reported feeling a mismatch between their sexual identity and their corporate culture. Some participants felt excluded due to a *good old boy* network, which is composed of heterosexual men and works to ignore and exclude minorities from leadership roles (Arwood, 2005; McFadden, 2015). As Participant D explained, “if you can hang out late, drink with the guys, hang in conversation, then they’re going to be fine with you. And that’s just not, that’s not who I am.” Other participants felt they had to tailor their behavior, including their sexual identity disclosure decisions, to meet the requirements of the corporate culture. Participant C shared an experience with another leader who had issues with an employee because he was gay, yet had no issues with Participant C because they had an opportunity to work together before his sexual identity was disclosed. Participant L stated, “there is a difference between a manufacturing environment and a corporate environment and it’s just a matter of tailoring your personality and how you react more than anything. I think you just have to be smart about that.”

Table 8

Q8. If the current social and political culture has influenced your authority in the workplace, can you describe how?

Categories	Concepts
The current administration is encouraging division and intolerance.	<p>The current administration is saying it's OK to be divisive, hateful, and non-inclusive, and people hearing that message believe it's OK.</p> <p>The current administration is divisive but people are trying not to make it a workplace issue.</p> <p>President who criticizes and calls people names gives others the authority to do the same.</p> <p>Current administration sets the stage for people to be less accepting.</p> <p>Leadership sets the tone.</p> <p>People are learning division and taking that to work.</p> <p>People are learning by example that it's OK to be outspoken.</p> <p>Hatred and discrimination are becoming the norm.</p> <p>How you deliver a message is as important as the message.</p> <p>People have become very aggressive on both sides.</p> <p>More hostility in conversations.</p> <p>Current political climate is frightening.</p> <p>Anyone who is not a strong male is an open target.</p> <p>Concerned for the next generation.</p>
The political culture may be influenced by location and situation.	<p>Urban environments may be more open to political diversity.</p> <p>Location influences political climate.</p> <p>Doesn't talk about politics or religion with clients.</p> <p>Changes behavior to fit the environment.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 8 include: The current administration is encouraging division and intolerance; and the

political culture may be influenced by location and situation. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

The current administration is encouraging division and intolerance. No participants indicated that the current social or political culture directly influenced their authority in the workplace. However, several said the current administration is influencing the social and political culture in general. They indicated the current administration is divisive and creating an atmosphere where this divisiveness is becoming the norm. Several participants suggested the current administration is setting the tone for the rest of the country, explaining a tone of intolerance and exclusion allows others to believe those behaviors are acceptable. Participant C explained “I think we are in a time now where it’s okay to be more in the face of people that you disagree with, and you don’t have to hold your tongue any more.” Participant D stated, “I think the fact that we have a President who calls people names and criticizes in that way...has given others the authority to do the same.” Meanwhile, Participant H voiced his concerns for the future “What I’m concerned about is as people are feeling comfortable sharing views of hatred and discrimination, what that’s going to do to the next generation.”

The political culture may be influenced by location and situation. Some participants indicated their industry or location influenced how politics related to corporate culture. Some said urban locations were typically more diverse and accepting of minority sexual identity than were rural locations, while others said they avoid any political discussion between employees and between employees and clients.

Table 9

Q9. What advice would you offer future LG leaders?

Categories	Concepts
Be true to yourself.	<p>Leaders who are open and authentic are often admired and successful.</p> <p>Being upfront and matter-of-fact often leads to a good outcome.</p> <p>Focus on the whole picture rather than only the gay perspective.</p> <p>You may have to fight harder to succeed, so know you deserve to be there.</p> <p>Know that you are more than your sexual identity.</p> <p>Don't let the struggle make you bitter.</p> <p>Know yourself.</p> <p>Be a role model.</p> <p>Listen to your instincts.</p>
Understand your corporate culture.	<p>Understand the work environment.</p> <p>Be smart and work within the system.</p> <p>Be sensitive to others.</p> <p>Find the right environment where you can succeed.</p> <p>Be aware of the comfort level of others.</p> <p>Choose your battles and know there may be repercussions.</p> <p>Establish common goals and work as a team.</p>
Be considerate of when you reveal your sexual identity.	<p>Prove yourself before you let people know you're gay.</p> <p>Be a leader first and gay second.</p> <p>Gay individuals need to be better than others just to be treated equally.</p> <p>It may be more difficult to prove yourself after you reveal your sexual identity.</p> <p>Reveal personal information in supportive environments.</p> <p>Be open as a means of normalizing homosexuality.</p> <p>Be honest and go the extra mile to show people you're worthy.</p> <p>Disclosing sexual identity may infringe on success.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 9 include: Be true to yourself; understand your corporate culture; and be considerate of when you reveal your sexual identity. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Be true to yourself. The overwhelming advice participants offered future LG leaders was be authentic and be true to yourself. Participants also said LG leaders may have to work harder than their peers, so they should acknowledge their challenges and celebrate their achievements. As Participant C stated “You have to fight harder for what you want. You have to be better than others to get there. So once you get there, just know...you deserve to be there.” Participant H observed “If you’re proud of who you are, [others] will be proud of you as well because they know you’re authentic.” Participant J expressed this idea, “the more successful and more admired of those leaders that I’ve worked with have been the leaders that have been out. I find that in general that works for someone more than it works against them as long as the person who is gay or lesbian really owns it and doesn’t shy away from it.”

Understand your corporate culture. Several participants advised understanding the corporate culture and disclosing or concealing sexual identity with awareness of potential repercussions. Participant D said it is important to be sensitive to the comfort level of coworkers when making disclosure decisions. Participant L said “if you’re willingly putting yourself into a position of leadership, if that be professionally or personally, you have to understand and make the decision that what you’re bringing with

that is everything about you. You need to be prepared for criticism, you need to be prepared for acceptance.” Meanwhile, Participant F stated,

You have to be able to make that personal decision: Is it more important for you to be 100% well rounded, 100% disclosed who you are, and just work really hard, or is it more important to isolate the two into, you know, I’m here to make this unit, this team successful and what goes on outside of here really doesn’t make any difference whether we’re going to be successful or not. Because if you make that determination, you also have to be willing to pay the price that it could infringe on you being successful because your team may have an adverse reaction to it. And unfortunately that’s just the world we live in.

Be considerate of when you reveal your sexual identity. Several participants voiced that idea that it is important to be a leader first before disclosing sexual identity. Participant A summed this up by saying “being the most formidable, compassionate collaborator you possibly can so you become a trusted and necessary advisor to your client, to peers, to colleagues, to managers, will help overcome prejudice and stigma.” Participant D stated, “we will be held to a higher standard. We need to be head and shoulders above the rest to be considered the same because we were seen as bringing this baggage.” Importantly, Participant B said it may be more difficult to prove leadership ability after sexual identity is disclosed. He stated, “first be a good leader. Because if you’re first open, then try to be a good leader, I think it’s much harder than if you’re a good leader and then you’re open.”

Table 10

Q10. Moving forward, what advice would you offer organizations?

Categories	Concepts
Be aware of the unique talents LGBT employees bring to the table.	<p>Some gay individuals have more education and have bettered themselves in order to be treated equally.</p> <p>Organizations will excel when everyone feels respected and feels they have a voice. Everyone can contribute.</p> <p>When employees feel supported they are going to work harder to support the company.</p> <p>A diverse workforce may relate better to a diverse audience.</p> <p>Different viewpoints LGBT employees offer can be important.</p> <p>Gay individuals may interact with people on a different or deeper level than their heterosexual counterparts.</p>
Have measurable goals for organizational inclusion.	<p>Use HRC/CEI as a yardstick.</p> <p>It is important for growth and retention to have well defined path for advancement.</p> <p>Focus on what brings people together rather than what makes them different.</p> <p>Do what's best for the organization.</p> <p>Don't ignore gay individuals due to lack of understanding or experience.</p> <p>Affinity groups can reduce employee friction.</p>
Be open to diversity and promote LGBT inclusion.	<p>Be open-minded.</p> <p>Promote LGBT awareness.</p> <p>Create an atmosphere where employees can be authentic.</p> <p>Organizations should let employees know differences can be celebrated.</p> <p>Politics of the workplace can create obstacles.</p> <p>Hire based on talent rather than race or sexual identity.</p> <p>When employees are happy and feel invested the organization does well.</p>

The categories developed from the concepts identified in Interview Question 10 include: Be aware of the unique talents LGBT employees bring to the table; have measurable goals for organizational inclusion; and be open to diversity and promote LGBT inclusion. The following is a discussion of each category with quotations from participants.

Be aware of the unique talents LGBT employees bring to the table.

Participants discussed a variety of strengths LGB employees can bring to the workplace, including advanced degrees and specialized training, a diverse perspective, and a unique connection to clients and customers. For example, Participant D said “we are typically the ones who got more education, we have furthered ourselves in other ways because we had to do more to be treated the same in the past,” and Participant I said “When everybody has a goal and feels respected, and they can contribute freely, your performance, and your team’s performance, will excel.” Several participants also suggested when LGB employees feel heard and respected in the workplace they are extremely loyal to the organization. Participant H explained “when you feel safe, you feel supported, you’re going to want to do more for that company because of what they’re doing for you as an individual.”

Have measurable goals for organizational inclusion. Several participants said there was no clear path of advancement for the LGB employee, and some did not know if their organizations had antidiscrimination policies or if those policies would be enforced. Participants suggested organizations use the HRC’s Corporate Equality Index (CEI) as a way to measure and improve organizational D&I. Another participant suggested leaders

should not ignore LGB employees due to lack of experience or exposure. Participant D said “don’t cut off your nose despite your face by neglecting gays and lesbians because you don’t know how to interact with them...get to know people, and recognize that we’re not so different.” Organizations should consider offering D&I training, enhancing their corporate antidiscrimination policies, and having a procedure for enforcing those policies.

Be open to diversity and promote LGBT inclusion. Finally, several participants simply suggested organizations should be open to diversity and promote LGB inclusion. Participant E advised “hire based on the person’s skills and talents, and don’t judge based on race or sexuality,” and Participant H said “look at the individual and celebrate them for who they are. Every person can bring something positive to the workforce.”

Most of the participants shared similar stories, discussing their experiences with advancement and authority, the factors that influenced their disclosure decisions, and how their sexual identity influenced their leadership experience. However, there were two participants who seemed somewhat belligerent, one saying he *never* made a disclosure decision, and both saying their sexual identity did not impact their leadership in any way. However, both still offered insights on the overall research. It was also interesting to note that those were the shortest interviews.

In the preceding analysis I reviewed the concepts that were developed during the second cycle of coding, how the concepts were grouped into categories, and each individual category with quotes taken directly from participants. In the next sections, I will discuss the evidence of trustworthiness and the results, which include an analysis of the overarching themes that were developed.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to how reliable or believable the data appears, and how it relates to reality. Transferability refers to how well the data will generalize to other populations and contexts. Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the data collection process. Confirmability provides evidence that the study results are based on the participants' words and experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations. In this section, I will discuss how I attempted to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to how reliable or believable the data appears, and how it relates to reality. To offer evidence of credibility, I pilot tested the interview protocol to ensure the interview questions could be understood, would not lead research participants, and would allow me to answer the research questions. I explored the participants' lived experiences, and used their own words to offer thick descriptions. I also attempted to ensure triangulation through multiple interviews, field notes, and observations, and connecting the data to existing research and theory.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how well the data will generalize to other populations and contexts. Patton (2002) suggested researchers are able generalize to a broader population when research findings remain consistent across participants and when the researcher can demonstrate that the constructs being studied are responsible for the outcome. In this

research study, a theoretical sampling strategy was used to attempt to ensure participants would represent the population being studied. The findings remained consistent within and across cases, and I presented connections to the participant's context and culture to offer further evidence of trustworthiness.

Dependability

Dependability refers to consistency and reliability. An audit trail was used to document the research process, including how the participants were selected, how the data was collected and interpreted, how the codes were developed, and how the codes were grouped into categories and overarching themes. Further, the interview protocol and data collection remained consistent throughout the study. The audit trail and consistency in data collection should allow the study to be replicated. The coding also followed Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) findings: Most of the codes were developed in the first six interviews, with the following six interviews confirming the earlier data.

Confirmability

Confirmability provides evidence that the study results are based on the participants' words and experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations. For this research, I reflexively documented my own experience with stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, corporate culture, and sociopolitical culture. I documented where my own experiences mirrored those of the participants, and made every attempt to limit potential bias. I used an audit trail to document how the data was collected, how codes were developed, and a rationale for the categories and overarching themes that

were developed. I also used the participants' own words to honor their voices and ground the study.

Results

Table 11

Alignment Between Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research question	Interview question
RQ1: How do LG corporate leaders understand and interpret issues related to advancement, and how have these issues influenced their careers?	Question 1
	Question 3
	Question 5
	Question 6
	Question 7
	Question 9
RQ2: How do LG corporate leaders understand and interpret issues related to authority, and how have these issues influenced their careers?	Question 10
	Question 2
	Question 3
	Question 4
	Question 5
	Question 6
	Question 7
	Question 8
	Question 9
	Question 10

Research data revealed two overarching themes involving challenges and resolutions for each research question. These themes revealed the challenges gay leaders often face in the workplace, and how they resolved or overcame these challenges. Tables 12 and 13 show how the categories were grouped into themes for RQ1 and RQ2 respectively.

RQ1: How do LG corporate leaders experience advancement, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

The research data revealed the first theme relating to advancement: There can be challenges to advancement due to stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture. Several gay leaders who were interviewed discussed their challenges with discrimination, including how discrimination limited their advancement opportunities. Some discussed how stereotypes negatively effected their advancement, and their challenges with sexual identity disclosure. Many gay leaders discussed negative aspects of the corporate culture, including how discrimination is allowed to persist, how the good old boy network limited their advancement opportunities, and how corporate culture can exacerbate personal concerns. For example, several leaders spoke of their challenges in maintaining dual identities, including Participant L spoke of the measures he took to maintain a heterosexual façade.

The second theme for RQ1 involves how challenges to advancement can be resolved: Challenges to advancement can be resolved through ability, dedication, and informed decisions. Many leaders believed they advanced solely due to their abilities and hard work. Others stated they advanced to leadership positions, yet experienced challenges throughout their careers due to discrimination, stereotypes, and corporate culture. Participant L said he believed he was fired from a job when his sexual identity was revealed, and Participant F believed he was going to be fired when his sexual identity was disclosed by a coworker. He also discussed the challenge of working in an *at will* state, where employment can be terminated with no explanation. Participant F's career actually flourished because the owner of the organization appreciated and rewarded his hard work and dedication to the organization.

Leaders explained they made informed decisions that influenced their advancement. Some said if their advancement was challenged in one organization they left and found employment in a more accepting organization. Participant C attributed his advancement to his own talent, hard work, and the ability to recognize and move on from situation where he believed he would be unable to advance. He stated, “I have to be honest, I worked with people who started out [in entry level positions] who never got promoted into any kind of higher position. You know what I mean. They’ve been [at entry level] for 25 years...who’ve never gotten the opportunities that I’ve had.”

Other leaders believed minority individuals should to be aware of their corporate culture, and let that awareness direct their actions and disclosure decisions. Participant A suggested LGB employees should work smart, and work within the system. Participant L stated, “it’s just a matter of tailoring your personality and how you react more than anything. I think you just have to be smart about that.” Participant J said this, “how someone reacts to what you say has a lot to do with how you deliver the information.”

Several leaders discussed the idea of awareness of the comfort level of coworkers and the need to gauge potential reactions when making disclosure decisions. Participant A stated before LGB employees disclose their sexual identity they should “be cognizant of the prejudice of others and earn their respect, earn their trust.” Participant D added this, “be very honest with people, as honest as you possibly can, and then be okay going the extra mile to show that we are worthy. Because I think that changes things for our community.” Existing research (Fassinger et al., 2010; Schneider, 2016) also suggested

LGB individuals need to be aware of the corporate environment when making disclosure decisions, including awareness of those who may or may not be accepting of diversity.

Table 12

How Categories Were Grouped Into Themes for RQ1

Themes	Categories
There can be challenges to advancement due to stereotypes, discrimination, corporate culture, and personal issues	<p>Success was political.</p> <p>Experienced the good old boy network.</p> <p>Felt like there was discrimination.</p> <p>“The higher I got up in the healthcare industry, the more I got exposed to how bigoted people really were”</p> <p>Denied an interview because he was gay.</p> <p>Denied advancement because he was gay.</p> <p>Denied another position because CEO was not gay friendly.</p> <p>Future employer asked staff if they would be OK with a gay coworker.</p> <p>No clear path to success.</p> <p>Obstacles exist even in big cities.</p> <p>Believed being gay was wrong and needed to be healed.</p> <p>Felt like his minority status was less evident than others’.</p> <p>Kept people at arm’s length.</p> <p>Closted until 25.</p>
Advancement can come through ability, dedication, and informed decisions.	<p>Early success was measured by achievement and it didn’t matter if you were gay.</p> <p>Advanced due to experience and supportive leadership.</p> <p>Advanced through hard work.</p> <p>Owner wanted someone who worked hard and loved the company.</p> <p>Once he accepted being gay was OK, career flourished.</p> <p>Energy that was spent hiding could be re-directed into career.</p> <p>Struggle was more internal than external.</p> <p>Support from leadership.</p> <p>Being out can help in some professions.</p> <p>Came out when he saw others who were out in the company.</p> <p>OK to be out because there were many others in the industry.</p>

RQ2: How do LG corporate leaders experience authority, and how have their experiences influenced their careers?

The research data revealed the first theme relating to authority: Minority sexual identity can create challenges to authority. Several leaders spoke of the challenges they faced with authority, including Participant A who struggled with authority among several peers and coworkers including other minority managers, Participant F who struggled with authority among long-time employees whom he believed did not want to take direction from a young gay man, and Participant H who said he had some challenges with authority, and said it was important to be able to explain and defend his actions.

The second theme for RQ2 involves how challenges to authority can be resolved: Sexual minority corporate leaders who disclosed their sexual identity experienced increased and improved authority among peers and employees. Leaders who were open about their sexual identity often said their authority increased: they gained authority in new areas of their organizations and they were seen as honest and trustworthy, often earning equal honesty and trust among their employees. Several leaders discussed how disclosing their sexual identity led their employees to be equally honest about their own lives, while other leaders discussed the idea of being a role model for both LGB and heterosexual employees. Participant H explained, “When you take on a job, you are that role model and you are that example. So live that, but also understand that part of being that example is being yourself.” Participant J discussed his experience:

I actually think that if anything [coming out] has lent me more authority because people are more comfortable with who I am and the position I’m coming from.

And in particular, I've been a leader at several of the companies I've worked for in trying to either organize or develop an LGBT employee group, and because of that leadership and that initiative to do that work I think people saw me as an authority on those issues.

Leaders who were open about their sexual identity also said their authority improved: their relationships with peers and employees were more honest and authentic, they were more compassionate, and they felt more competent in their leadership abilities. Participant E said, "I think [being open has improved my leadership ability] in a sense of being competent and being true to who I am." While Participant H stated, "if I know who I am as an individual, I'll know who I am as a leader. And there's a confidence that comes with that." Disclosing their sexual identity, bringing their whole selves to work, being authentic, and having alignment between their home life and work life led to more authentic and fully engaged leadership and authority. Participant J explained,

They use the expression a lot with bringing your whole self to work, and companies should create environments where employees feel comfortable bringing their whole selves to work. I don't know how true that is for all aspects of ourselves, but certainly for me, for LGBT identity, I think that it's only a positive to create that environment for their employees.

Table 13

How Categories Were Grouped Into Themes for RQ2

Themes	Categories
There can be challenges to authority among peers and subordinates.	Struggled over authority with another minority whom he believed didn't like him because he was gay. Struggled over authority with another gay man whom he believed felt threatened. Struggled over authority with a straight White manager whom he believed didn't like him because he was gay. Issues with long-time employees. Issues with employees taking orders from a gay man.
Disclosure can increase and improve authority among peers and employees	Authority grew with success. Never experienced any direct confrontations. Encouraged to apply for leadership positions. Easier to be out in some professions. Supportive of others who want to come out. Decided to look at employees as individuals and focus on what they bring to the company.

Summary

In summary, the results of this research study indicated minority sexual identity does create challenges to advancement for many leaders, but those challenges can be overcome through ability, dedication, and informed decisions. Some talented and capable individuals who rose to leadership positions experienced discrimination in hiring and advancement, and many struggled with sexual identity disclosure decisions. Some leaders benefitted from a supportive corporate culture, while others were disadvantaged by corporate culture, which allowed stereotypes and discrimination to persist.

Gay leaders who were able to disclose their sexual identity often flourished. Some said their authority in the workplace increased when colleagues and employees felt comfortable with their honesty, and when they initiated and led LGBT employee groups. Other gay leaders said their authority improved when their honesty and authenticity led their employees to be equally honest and authentic. Many gay leaders believed disclosing their sexual identity led them to be more confident and capable leaders.

In this chapter, I reviewed the data collection process including the setting, demographics, analysis, and results. The following chapter will offer an interpretation of the research findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. I will also discuss a direction for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the advancement and authority experiences of LG corporate leaders using a constructivist paradigm and multiple-case study approach. The constructivist paradigm suggests that there is no single reality. Instead, reality is created and interpreted by the individual (Gergen et al., 2015). The case study approach is appropriate for real-life situations and contemporary phenomena that are bounded by time and place (Yin, 2003). The experiences that were explored were bounded by the current sociopolitical culture and by the corporate environment. This paradigm and approach offered rich descriptions and in-depth understanding of how LG corporate leaders understood and interpreted their realities and the experiences that influenced their careers. The method of data collection for the study was semistructured interviews and observations. Research participants were recruited through snowball and homogeneous sampling, from LGB executive groups such as gay and lesbian chambers of commerce. Individual cases offered insights into advancement and authority experiences, and multiple cases offered replication and cross-case analysis. Gaining a better understanding of these experiences and adding to the general knowledge of this subject may help LG and other leaders, HRM, and other stakeholders understand and address challenges to diversity and inclusion and how these challenges affect organizational efficiency and productivity within the framework of the current global business market.

Key Findings

In this study, results revealed that gay corporate leaders experienced challenges due to stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture. Table 12 provides an overview of each participant's negative experience with these core issues. These challenges can be overcome, however, through ability, dedication, and informed decisions. Most gay leaders agreed that their ability, hard work, and dedication played a large part in their advancement. Others spoke of managing challenges due to stereotypes and discrimination and the importance of having a supportive corporate culture, including coworkers and company owners. Importantly, several leaders spoke of making informed decisions. These included being aware of the corporate culture, moving on if the culture was not accepting, and letting the corporate culture guide and direct their behavior and identity disclosure decisions. Further, corporate leaders who disclosed their sexual identity stated that they often experienced increased and improved authority among peers and employees. Several leaders explained that their authority increased when their authenticity and honesty led to equal honesty among their colleagues and employees. Additionally, many stated that their authority improved. Acknowledging and being open about their sexual identity led them to feel more confident and capable in the workplace, and they believed this improved their leadership abilities.

Table 14

Participants Who Discussed Negative Experiences With Core Issues

	PA	PB	PC	PD	PE	PF	PG	PH	PI	PJ	PK	PL
Stereotypes				✓		✓		✓			✓	
Discrimination	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Sexual identity disclosure	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Corporate culture	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓
Sociopolitical culture			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	

Interpretation of the Findings

Similar to the previous research presented in Chapter 2, I found that gay leaders often experience challenges to advancement and authority due to stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture. Research data revealed two overarching themes involving challenges and resolutions for each research question. Regarding advancement, the data revealed two themes: (a) There can be challenges to advancement due to stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture, and (b) challenges to advancement can be resolved through ability, dedication, and informed decisions. Regarding authority, the data also revealed two themes: (a) Minority sexual identity can create challenges to authority, and (b) sexual minority corporate leaders who disclosed their sexual identity experienced increased and improved authority among peers and employees. While many leaders reflected on the negative influence of the current political culture within the corporate environment, they stated

that this did not impact their advancement or authority. The following is an interpretation of each of the concepts presenting in Chapter 2 as they relate to the current research.

Study Results Compared to Previous Research

Stereotypes. Stereotypes can be implicit or explicit (Tilcsik, 2011) and are common in the United States where some still consider discrimination based on sexual orientation to be socially acceptable (Schneider, 2016). Every gay leader interviewed for this research study discussed stereotypes, indicating that they are both well known and prevalent. Some gay leaders said they did not fit the typical stereotypes of gay individuals and believed this helped their careers. Others stated those who more closely match existing stereotypes of gay men by exhibiting feminine characteristics often incur office gossip. Participant D said stereotypes were especially prevalent in the South, and these stereotypes led to him not being suggested for leadership positions.

Gender stereotypes suggest men should be domineering, aggressive, and in control of their emotions, while women should be compassionate, nurturing, and sensitive (Wellman & McCoy, 2014). Sexual stereotypes also suggest men should be domineering, aggressive, and agentic, and gay men may violate these traditional gender norms (Morton, 2017). The gay leaders who said they did not fit typical stereotypes suggested that by not fitting these stereotypes, they were assumed to be heterosexual, and this assumption helped their advancement and authority. Participant K said,

This is going to come across as a bit of a brag, and I don't mean it that way, but I don't come across, people don't identify me as gay. Now with 28 years of being in the closet and keeping it repressed [I have] paid a price. I think that it, I was

able to be in the corporate world and people wouldn't necessarily know that I was gay. So that I didn't deal with that stereotype, and that kind of gave me a little bit of a blank slate to present to my colleagues, or my manager, or the people that worked underneath me.

While Participant E offered this example:

Many of the people have said I would pass for straight... but I definitely see more influence in hiring. I remember specifically in an instance where one of my clients, I was in the office and they were interviewing receptionists, and one of the receptionists was a male candidate, and I remember hearing a business executive that said we're not going to hire some fag to sit up the front desk. And I was, I was very happy I was an outside party and didn't work for that company.

Discrimination. Discrimination against LGB employees is common, and many conceal their sexual identity due to concerns over potential discrimination (Everly & Schwarz, 2015; Kite & Bryant-Lees, 2016). Discrimination can negatively impact the LGB employee in physical and mental health issues, anxiety and depression, and other factors (Bauermeister et al., 2014; Tilcsik, 2011), as well as the organizations where they are employed, where discrimination can lead to reduced productivity, distraction and fatigue, absences from work, costs in replacing and retraining employees, and potential litigation (Burns, 2012; Lindsey et al., 2013). These issues affected several of the gay leaders interviewed for this research study. Participant C said that he was fired when his sexual identity was revealed, which negatively impacted him and his employer. Further, there was a potential lawsuit, as he was informed directly that he did not receive a

promotion because of his sexual identity. Participant L was also fired when his sexual identity was revealed and also believed he could have files a lawsuit against his former employer.

Sexual identity disclosure. Sexual identity disclosure decisions are likely to be based on expected outcomes, including reactions from coworkers and how the disclosure is likely to affect both advancement opportunities and authority (Schneider, 2016). Minority sexual identity is considered a concealable stigma, and LG individuals who choose to conceal their sexual identity are likely to use identity management strategies, which may include adapting their dress and behavior to more closely match their heterosexual peers or changing pronouns or inventing heterosexual partners (King et al., 2017; Schneider, 2016). According to Buddel (2011), some LG leaders disclose their sexual identity to be authentic and improve their leadership enactment. LG leaders may also disclose their sexual identity to reduce the effort required to manage dual identities, to mentor and pave the way for future LG leaders, or to make sexual identity a nonissue where LG leaders can acknowledge both their similarities and differences with colleagues and coworkers (Schneider, 2016).

The gay leaders interviewed for this research study mentioned many of these issues. For example, Participant L said he had a benchmark for disclosing his sexual identity, and prior to meeting this benchmark, he used identity management strategies, including changing pronouns and creating a fake girlfriend. Several leaders said they disclosed their sexual identity to be authentic and to be role models for other LG employees. For example, Participant J wanted to manage his dual identities, stating, “I

just wasn't interested in trying to partition my life and be out in some situations but not in others. So for me, being out was actually the path of least resistance." Similarly, Participant K disclosed his sexual identity to be authentic and to have alignment between his personal and professional lives. He stated, "And so that process started to happen, it just felt like it had to be, it had to be in alignment. I had to be the same person I was at home that I was at work." Further, Participant D explained, "I think talking about [being gay] in a way that shows that we're not ashamed of that normalizes it for others."

Corporate culture. Corporate culture can be defined as a set of shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms influenced by an organization's history, leaders, and customs (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Pichler et al., 2010). Similar to the research presented in Chapter 2, gay leaders interviewed for this research study had either positive or negative experiences with corporate culture. Some leaders said company owners had zero tolerance policies toward discrimination: They supported all of their employees and fired those who discriminated against their LGB coworkers. Other gay leaders had negative experiences with corporate culture, including cultures that allowed discrimination. Several gay leaders discussed their negative experience with the good old boy network, which works to ignore and exclude minorities from leadership roles (Arwood, 2005; McFadden, 2015). Several leaders also stated that industry and geographic location influenced corporate culture, either positively or negatively.

Antidiscrimination policies are also important in creating a positive corporate culture. Participant K explained that early in his career, the organizations where he was employed did not have these policies. However, organizations did begin adding

antidiscrimination policies in the late 90s. Antidiscrimination policies did help several gay leaders feel more comfortable in their corporate environments. However, Participant G stated that he did not know if his organization had an antidiscrimination policy, while Participant I said his organization did have a policy, but it was not regularly enforced.

Social Identity Theory

Initially, it was believed Tajfel and Turner's (1973) SIT might help to explain how and why heterosexual employees stereotyped their LGB leaders. While few leaders discussed occurrences of stereotyping, the SIT, particularly the social identification stage during which individuals may adapt their behavior to more closely match the group to which they identify did help to explain why several leaders spoke of tailoring their behaviors and actions to more closely match their corporate cultures. Further, Fassinger et al.'s (2010) affirmative LGBT leadership model was used to explore the interaction of sexual identity, gender, and group composition.

Affirmative LGBT Leadership Model

Fassinger et al.'s (2010) affirmative LGBT leadership model referenced abilities likely to be present among LG leaders, including the ability to quickly assess people and situations and find new and innovative ways of bringing people together and working in collaborative ways. Several leaders spoke of abilities they believed were unique to their LG status, including Participant J who stated, "I feel like I'm a more observant person. Some of that was sort of a paranoia of the closet, but just in general, I find that I'm a better observer of people and I find that to be true of many gay people that I know, they just to have a tendency to be a little bit more observant." Other leaders spoke of working

as a team towards a collective goal, including Participant B who said “certainly all of the teams that I’ve managed, I’ve tried to live by example and set a good example, but also foster in them acceptance of diversity through not only setting goals in our work to do that, but also in setting a tone in our communications with one another,” Participant G who stated “as an employee you’ve got to be more creative, you might step out of your comfort zone, where before you probably haven’t had to,” and Participant I who explained “When everybody has a goal and feels respected, and they can contribute freely, your performance, and your team’s performance will excel.”

Caution must be taken in interpreting data and generalizing to a broader population. Yet generalizations can be made more confidently when findings remain consistent across participants and when the researcher is able to demonstrate the constructs being studied were responsible for the outcome (Patton, 2002). In this research, the data did appear to be consistent across the participants. Further, contextual information, quotes taken directly from the participants, and an audit trail offered evidence that the constructs being studied rather than other constructs were responsible for the outcome.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of this research that may have effected the interpretations. The sample size and participants may be limitations. The sample size was relatively low. Twelve participants agreed to be interviewed, and most of the interviews lasted less than one hour. The corporate leaders who were interviewed may have presented their stories in a way that was personally flattering, or they may have

remembered or reported information inaccurately. Further, they may not have accurately represented LG corporate leaders in the Southeast.

Limitation of this research may also come from the gender and ethnicity of the participants, and the nature of the study. While both lesbian and gay corporate leaders were invited to participate, only gay men responded to the invitation. Further, although the invitation to participate did not reference ethnicity, eleven of the participants were Caucasian and one was Latin. This research targeted LG corporate leaders in the Southeast, making the geographic location a potential limitation. Finally, the nature of the study may be a potential limitation. The case study method has inherent limitations, including the ability to generalize to broader populations, and to make causal inferences.

Recommendations for Further Research

While existing researchers explored isolated issues LG individuals may face in the workplace, including stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture, this study explored how these issues were related, how LG leaders experienced advancement and authority, and how their experiences influenced their careers and the organizations where they were employed. As illustrated by the limitations, further research should be conducted in a larger population and in a geographic location other than the Southeast. Further research should also be conducted among lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender corporate leaders.

Regarding different perspectives of younger versus older LGB individuals in the workplace, further research should be conducted among younger leaders to explore how they experience advancement and authority, and how they experience stereotypes,

discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture. Additionally, research should be conducted on how their experiences contrast with older LGB leaders.

I believe challenges resulting from stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture need to be resolved at both the corporate and governmental level. Yet LGB individuals continue to face challenges in the workplace and the government. Given this study's findings on prevalence of these challenges, additional research should be conducted to explore how heterosexual individuals view these issues, what steps could be taken to mitigate these issues, and the impact these issues have on organizations.

Implications

The results of this study indicated LG corporate leaders do experience challenges due to stereotypes, discrimination, and corporate culture, but these challenges can be overcome through ability, dedication, and informed decisions. Results also indicated that LG leaders who disclose their sexual identity in the workplace often have better experiences, and increased and improved authority. Taking steps to improve corporate culture through diversity and inclusion education and training, including antidiscrimination policies as well as procedures on how to enforce those policies, and creating an environment where LG leaders feel safe when disclosing their sexual identity may lead to improved experiences for the LG leaders and for the organizations where they are employed. LG leaders who feel comfortable disclosing their sexual identity report being better and more authentic leaders, and more invested in their work and their organizations' success.

Social Change

For LGB employees and leaders, one implication for social change would be awareness that sexual identity disclosure can be positive. LGB employees may be concerned that disclosure may lead to workplace hostility or limit advancement opportunities. Yet, the leaders interviewed for this research had positive experiences after disclosing their sexual identity. They often disclosed to be more authentic and more engaged with their coworkers, employees, and organizations. Further, disclosure often led them to feel more capable and more confident in their leadership roles.

Another implication for social change for organizations would be awareness of the benefits of a positive corporate culture. Corporations benefit from authentic and engaged workers (Chung et al., 2015; HRC, 2017). Engaged workers are likely to work harder, and to remain at organizations where they feel appreciated and respected (Burns, 2012; HRC, 2017). Several of the gay leaders interviewed here echoed those sentiments, discussing the importance of creating a corporate culture where everyone has a voice, where acceptance is communicated to all of the employees, and where different viewpoints are appreciated. Participant H explained “when you feel safe, you feel supported, you’re going to want to do more for that company because of what they’re doing for you as an individual,” while Participant I added “When everybody has a goal and feels respected, and they can contribute freely, your performance, and your team’s performance will excel.”

Conclusion

This research study provided evidence that stereotypes and discrimination still exist in the corporate environment, and discrimination negatively affects both LGB employees and the organizations where they are employed. Several gay leaders spoke of discrimination limiting their advancement opportunities and their authority within their organizations, and several spoke of organizations that were negatively affected through limiting potential job candidates, failing to hire or promote qualified people, the cost of replacing gay employees who leave organizations due to discrimination and the cost of retaining new employees, and potential legal action. Gay leaders also spoke of their personal challenges, including those who decided to conceal their sexual identity and the impact of that decision, those who believed they were less than their heterosexual peers and had to work harder to prove their worth, and those who feared disclosure or were outed by coworkers.

While many gay leaders experienced challenges due to stereotypes, discrimination, sexual identity disclosure, and corporate culture, advancement did occur through ability, hard work, and dedication. A supportive corporate culture including coworkers and company owners also helped to overcome challenges and encourage advancement. Critical to advancement were managing challenges and making informed decisions. Gay leaders should be aware of their corporate culture, and let that awareness guide and direct their behavior including moving on if the culture is not accepting.

Gay leaders who disclosed their sexual identity often experienced increased and improved authority among their peers and employees. Several leaders explained their

authority increased when their authenticity and honesty led to equal honesty among their colleagues and employees, and many stated their authority improved. Acknowledging and being open about their sexual identity led them to feel more confident and capable in the workplace, which they believed improved their leadership enactment.

Further research should continue to study the challenges LGB individuals face in the workplace, how they can overcome these challenges, and how corporations can make the workplace both more inclusive for LGB employees and ultimately more successful.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide and Questions

Introductory Statement

[Name], I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me, and remind you this conversation is being recorded. We can stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. I would like to talk with you about your experience with advancement and authority in the workplace. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with advancement in the workplace.
 - a. Gender
 - b. Sexual identity
 - c. Evaluations
2. Tell me about your experience with authority in the workplace.
3. What influenced your decision to disclose or conceal your sexual identity?
4. If your sexual identity has influenced your leadership experience, can you describe how?
5. If stereotypes have influenced your advancement and authority, can you describe how?
6. If discrimination has influenced your advancement and authority, can you describe how?
7. If your corporate culture has influenced your career, can you describe how?
 - a. Coworkers
 - b. Mentoring

c. Antidiscrimination policies

8. If the current social and political culture has influenced your authority in the workplace, can you describe how?
9. What advice would you offer future LG leaders?
10. Moving forward, what advice would you offer organizations?

Closing Statement

Thank you for participating in my study. I appreciate your time and your honest discussion about this important topic. I have your contact information and will be in touch if I have any additional questions. You also have my information, so please feel free to contact me if you would like to add anything to this conversation. Do you have any questions before we close the interview?

Appendix B: List of Counselors

Link Counseling Center / www.thelink.org

Therapists / www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists

Theravive / www.theravive.com/cities/ga/