

**“I can hear it in the way they look at me...”: Gay and Lesbian University Students’ Lived Experiences with Blatant and Subtle Interpersonal Discrimination**

A Dissertation Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Psychology  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

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395, rue Wellington  
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Your file Votre référence  
ISBN: 978-0-494-92260-6

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## ABSTRACT

In certain contexts (e.g., university campuses), it seems that subtle, rather than blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours are more likely to be perpetrated by heterosexuals (Jewell & Morrison, 2010). However, the nature of subtle discrimination, including gay and lesbian persons' experiences with these behaviours, is not well understood. As such, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to investigate 10 gay and 10 lesbian Canadian university students' lived experiences with blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours. Participants were recruited through an electronic university bulletin board and participated in open-ended interviews. Nineteen participants also kept a diary for 10 days, in which they submitted nightly entries describing any encounters with discrimination experienced that day. All data were analyzed using van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach and four lived existentials (i.e., lived other, space, body, and time) were used to guide the analysis. Findings indicated that participants were often more confident that discrimination had occurred when they were the target of blatant homonegative behaviour, while their experiences with subtle homonegativity were characterized by ambiguity and doubt as to whether they had been discriminated against. Consequently, participants spent more time ruminating about subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, doubting their own interpretations of an event, and questioning how they should respond to these occurrences. Perhaps the most striking aspect of what it meant to be the target of homonegativity was the feeling of not belonging or being "other." Participants' experiences with homonegativity also suggested to them that their comfort, opinions, experiences, and identities were not as important or valid as those belonging to heterosexuals and they were not free to be themselves. Subtle homonegative behaviour was experienced as being especially invalidating, demeaning, and dehumanizing. Participants' experiences in relation to each lived existential are discussed in detail, and a framework for categorizing various types of homonegative behaviour that may be perpetrated is provided.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who I wish to thank for their invaluable support and contributions over the last several years. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Melanie Morrison, for her guidance and mentorship. I am forever grateful for your belief in my ability and the many opportunities you provided that allowed me to become a successful researcher. The confidence that I feel about my ability as a researcher is largely a result of your support and the time you so graciously spent mentoring me.

Second, I would like to thank my committee: Todd Morrison, Don Cochrane, and Wendy Duggleby. Each of you approached this research with great enthusiasm and a willingness to engage with me throughout this process. I have been inspired by each of you, and am sincerely thankful for the time and effort you spent on this project. I do not think it would have been possible to have had a better committee.

Third, my ability to focus on my academic work would not have been possible without the scholarships and funding I received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute of Gender and Health, Sexual and Gender Identity: Vulnerabilities and Resilience research team; and the University of Saskatchewan. I am thankful for the many wonderful opportunities that these institutions made possible.

Next, I would like to thank Andy Livingston, Rebecca Ritchie, and Mabel Shwaga for so generously offering to assist me with transcribing my interviews. You saved me many precious hours. There also are several people with whom I share many happy memories of my time here and whose support helped me get through those days when the end seemed to loom far in the distance. Thank you especially to Kate, Nicola, Michelle, and Rebecca.

And, finally, to my cherished loved ones—Aaron, my mom and dad, and Bryan—however can I express my indebtedness for the endless, unwavering support that each of you offered me throughout this journey? A simple thank you does not adequately express the amount of gratitude I feel.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Daniel and Louise Jewell. You have provided me with the greatest gift possible: you allowed me to follow my dreams. This is as much yours as it is my accomplishment.

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## CHAPTER ONE–GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades, gay men and lesbian women have struggled to achieve equality in Canadian society and have repeatedly contended with prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours from others. Research (Morrison & Morrison, 2002) suggests that, at least on university campuses, the types of negative attitudes directed toward gay men and lesbian women have changed over time and contemporary forms of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes are becoming more subtle in nature. Considerably less attention has been paid to understanding whether a parallel trend has occurred with respect to the types of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that are perpetrated by heterosexuals.

In carrying out research on homonegativity, it has become increasingly apparent to me that subtle discrimination is more pronounced than blatant discrimination in certain contexts. For instance, in a recent study, I found that university students were more likely to report that they had directed subtle, rather than blatant, discriminatory behaviours toward gay and lesbian individuals (Jewell & Morrison, 2010). These findings suggest that, as with attitudes, modern manifestations of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours may also be more subtle in nature. Further, through interviews with gay men and lesbian women recruited from a community setting, I have come to learn that subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, despite being less obvious or noticeable, can have a profound impact on the wellbeing of gay men and lesbian women (Jewell & Morrison, 2010; Jewell, McCutcheon, Harriman, & Morrison, in press). Unfortunately, with the exception of a handful of studies carried out by myself and others (e.g., Burn, 2000; Peel, 2001; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Morrison & Morrison, in press; Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008), few researchers have focused explicitly on exploring the nature and impact of subtle discrimination as it is directly experienced by gay men and lesbian women. As such, our knowledge about the types of subtle homonegative behaviours that are directed toward gay and lesbian persons is limited, as is our understanding of the lived experience and lived meaning of being the target of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour in these individuals' everyday lives.

To my knowledge, based on an extensive review of the literature (using keywords such as homonegativity, homophobia, discrimination, prejudice, anti-gay behaviour, anti-lesbian behaviour, gay, lesbian, qualitative, and phenomenology), no previous studies have explored gay and lesbian university students' experiences with blatant or subtle homonegative behaviours with the intention of understanding how they experience their lifeworlds during the moments in which

they are being treated discriminatorily (i.e., their lived experience) or how gay and lesbian persons derive meaning from being targeted. Thus, as researchers working in this area, we lack an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, the essence of what it means to be the target of subtle homonegativity, and how this experience compares to the experience of being a target of blatant homonegativity. This critical omission in the literature can be rectified, however, by employing a phenomenological approach to illuminate the aspects of gay and lesbian persons' experiences with subtle discrimination that are not readily apparent or obvious (van Manen, 1990). Thus, the primary purpose of this research was to explore gay and lesbian university students' lived experiences with subtle discrimination by conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry to enhance our understanding of the contemporary nature of anti-gay/lesbian discrimination on university campuses. Moreover, I have specifically decided to focus on *university* students' experiences because we have previously identified university campuses as a setting in which subtle homonegative behaviours are likely to occur (Jewell & Morrison, 2010; Morrison & Morrison, 2002).

### ***1.1 Literature Review***

Our understanding of the modern nature of homonegativity can be broadly informed by considering how homonegativity is perceived and experienced by both heterosexual and sexual minority persons. Consequently, I approached the extant literature with the goal of reviewing empirical research attesting to heterosexual university students' endorsement of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes and participation in discriminatory behaviour, gay and lesbian university students' perceptions of and experiences with blatant and subtle homonegativity, and theoretical accounts pertaining to the processes through which homonegativity is perpetuated. However, before delving into the literature review, I would like to clarify the meaning of the term homonegativity, my reasons for using this term, and the parameters of this research.

### ***1.2 Definition of Homonegativity and Parameters of Research***

In this study, the term homonegativity will be used to refer to any negative cognitions, affective responses, or behaviours directed toward individuals, correctly or incorrectly, perceived to be gay or lesbian (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). Other terms have been used in the literature to refer to negative attitudes and behaviours directed toward gay men and lesbian women, such as homophobia (Weinberg, 1972) and heterosexism (Herek, 1990); however, these terms do not adequately describe the nature of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes and behaviours, as they are

conceptualized in the current program of research. Specifically, the term homophobia is inadequate for three reasons. First, its characterization of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes as a “phobia” implies that attention should only be paid to individuals’ negative affective responses, even though cognitive and behavioural responses also reflect components of the negativity that is directed toward gay men and lesbian women (Herek, 2004; Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). Second, “homophobia” implies that anti-gay/lesbian responses reflect an irrational fear or intolerance of people who are homosexual (Weinberg, 1972). Multiple studies, however, have demonstrated that individuals often experience other emotions either in addition to, or in lieu of, an irrational fear of gay men or lesbian women, such as anger or disgust (Herek, 2004; Jewell & Morrison, in press; Logan, 1996; MacDonald, 1976). In addition, individuals who are “homophobic” rarely have the same physiological and affective reactions when they encounter homosexuality that people with other phobias exhibit (e.g., accelerated heart rates, excessive and unreasonable feelings of anxiety, or an intense desire to avoid the offending object; Herek, 2004; Logan, 1996; Shields & Harriman, 1984). Finally, the term homophobia implies that psychopathology on the part of the individual is responsible for the negativity that is directed toward gay men and lesbian women, even though cultural ideologies and intergroup relations contribute to individuals’ negative attitudes and behaviours (Adam, 1998; MacDonald, 1976; Niesen, 1990). In other words, the term homophobia individualizes the problem of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes, when negativity toward gay men and lesbian women is actually a social problem perpetuated through societal structures and institutions, shared cultural values, and social interactions (Adam, 1998; Dermer, Smith, & Barto, 2010; Herek, 2004; Niesen, 1990).

In contrast to the term homophobia, the term heterosexism refers to an “ideological assumption that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community” (Herek, 1990, p. 316). Thus, heterosexism takes into account the notion that cultural ideologies (i.e., shared values and beliefs about sexuality and gender) may contribute to the negativity that is directed toward gay men and lesbian women. Yet, the term’s explicit focus on ideological assumptions implies that it is more appropriately used in relation to research exploring institutional discrimination toward gay and lesbian individuals (i.e., research that focuses on investigating the structural biases against sexual minorities that are entrenched in society’s policies and institutions; Dermer et al., 2010; Pincus, 1996). For instance, research examining discriminatory practices and policies directed toward

gay men and lesbian women in the legal, health-care, and educational systems, as well as in religious institutions, mass media, and the discursive practices of a given society, would fall under the rubric of heterosexism (Adam, 1998; Herek, 1990; 2004). Since the current program of research focuses on interpersonal negativity directed toward individuals who are gay or lesbian, homonegativity is the most suitable term to use in this research context.

In addition to defining homonegativity, it is important to specify the particular social groups that will be included in this research. Much research conducted under the domain of homonegativity has treated gay men, lesbian women, bisexual men and women, and transgender individuals as if they share the same experiences and belong to the same social group, but this practice is not recommended (Herek, 1988; Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Moreover, individuals from different sexual and gender minority groups are often treated as a single social group because the sample would otherwise be too small to analyze each group separately (Balsam & Mohr, 2007). The practice of collapsing these social groups obscures their separate experiences and realities. For instance, Herek (1988) suggests that gay men and lesbian women represent two distinct social groups toward whom individuals may have different reasons for, and ways of, directing their homonegativity. Further, the extant literature suggests that the experiences of bisexual men and women may be quite different from the experiences of gay men or lesbian women, as they may be the victims of a distinctive form of negativity (i.e., bi-negativity), related specifically to the legitimacy and stability of bisexuality as a sexual orientation (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999). In addition, bisexual individuals are often the victims of discrimination directed toward them from both heterosexuals and gay and lesbian individuals (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Ochs, 1996). Comparably, the limited research which has explored the experiences of transgender persons (i.e., individuals whose gender identity or expression does not conform with traditional gender norms) suggests they encounter negative attitudes and behaviours that are unique from those directed toward gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals (Bauer, et al., 2009; Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001; Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, & Budd, 2005). In fact, Grossman and D'Augelli (2006) commented that transgender individuals' non-conforming gender identities and behaviours may put them at even greater risk for stigmatization than sexual minorities.

Given the problems inherent with treating gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals as members of a single social group, this study focused only on the experiences of self-identifying gay and lesbian persons. Throughout the study's conceptualization and during analysis, gay men and lesbian women were treated as distinct social groups to ensure that any differences in their experiences and realities were given recognition. However, references are still made to bisexual and transgender persons in the ensuing literature review whenever members of these social groups were included in research samples. Similarly, some individuals who are non-heterosexual prefer to identify themselves as queer (Jewell et al., in press). "Queer" is a term that often has been associated with homonegative discourse, but has been re-appropriated by some sexual minority persons in recent years as their preferred identity (Lichterman, 1999). Individuals who identify as queer tend to be critical of the concepts that distinct sexual (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) and/or gender identities (e.g., man or woman) exist and actively involved in socio-political movements pertaining to these issues (Lichterman, 1999). However, other gay and lesbian individuals still find the label of queer to be offensive or derisive. As such, the term queer was used only when study participants described their identity using this label.

### ***1.3 Prevalence of Anti-Gay/Lesbian Attitudes and Behaviours on University Campuses***

The extent to which heterosexual students, faculty, and university staff hold negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women, have engaged in anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, and perceive the campus environment to be tolerant and accepting of gay or lesbian students are all indicators of the presence of homonegativity at universities. Similarly, gay and lesbian individuals' experiences with discrimination on the university campus; their perceptions about the existence of homonegative attitudes among other students, faculty, and university staff; and their general feelings of safety and acceptance on campus also indicate the extent to which university communities are tolerant of sexual minorities (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Evans & Rankin, 1998; Waldo, 1998). The following section will review the literature which has addressed various aspects of, and perspectives on, the prevalence of homonegativity on university campuses.

#### ***1.3.1 Prevalence of Negative Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Persons***

Contemporary research suggests that university students' attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women have become more positive in recent years, at least when scales designed to

assess homonegativity in terms of adherence to religious teachings and social norms, perceptions of morality, and endorsement of myths about gay men and lesbian women are employed (Morrison, Morrison, & Franklin, 2009). Looking specifically at studies conducted within Canada, Altemeyer (2001) reported that when undergraduate university students ( $N=557$ ) from Manitoba completed the Attitudes toward Homosexuals Scale (ATH; Altemeyer, 1988) in 1984 their mean scores ( $M=59.3$ ) fell around the mid-point of the scale (66; total scale scores could range from 12-120). In contrast, students ( $N=350$ ) who completed the scale in 1998 had substantially lower mean scores ( $M=37.2$ ) and, hence, more positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. More recently, Morrison and associates (2009) documented that Canadian undergraduate male and female university students ( $N=374$ ) in Ontario scored below the midpoint of both the Attitudes Toward Gay Men scale (ATG; Herek, 1988) and Attitudes Toward Lesbians scale (ATL; Herek, 1988), indicating relatively positive attitudes toward these social groups, at least when attitudes are measured using the ATLG. The results from these studies, as well as from other Canadian and American studies, suggest that university students are tolerant of gay and lesbian individuals (Kilianski, 2003; Mohipp & Morry, 2004; Schellenberg, Hirt, & Sears, 1999).

Despite these recent findings, the apparent positivity toward sexual minorities reported in the literature may be somewhat misleading. For example, studies such as Altemeyer's (2001) have relied on mean scale scores to reflect students' attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women; however, this practice obscures the variability that exists with regards to students' endorsement of homonegativity. In a recent study, I found that roughly 20% of the undergraduate university students we sampled ( $N=286$ ) scored above the midpoint of the ATG (scores could range from 10 to 50), even though the overall mean score ( $M=21.83$ ) for the scale was well below the mid-point of 30 (Jewell & Morrison, 2010). The endorsement of specific items on the ATG further illustrates the blatant nature of the homonegative beliefs held by some students. For instance, 19% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed that homosexuality is a perversion (28% were undecided), 22% thought that homosexuals were disgusting (10% were undecided), and 23% indicated that homosexual behaviour between two men was just plain wrong (14% were undecided). Consequently, these results suggest that a substantial portion of students continue to hold relatively negative attitudes toward gay men.



In addition, studies documenting the endorsement of modern homonegativity (i.e., a subtle form of homonegativity based on abstract political concerns about gay men and lesbian women) indicate that many students have ambivalent attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women when it comes to concerns related to the equality of these sexual minorities (Morrison & Morrison, 2002). Data collected from the same participants in my previous study (Jewell & Morrison, 2010) revealed that approximately one-quarter to one-third of the students were undecided as to whether they agreed with the items on the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2002). For instance, 33% were undecided as to whether gay men still need to protest for equal rights (39% indicated it was not necessary for gay men to do so), 25% were undecided as to whether gay men use their sexual orientation to obtain special privileges (20% agreed they did), and 34% were undecided as to whether gay men should stop shoving their lifestyles down other people's throats (29% agreed they should stop; Morrison & Jewell, 2007). Further, both Morrison et al. (2009) and Morrison and Morrison (2002) indicated that university students' modern homonegativity scores hovered around the midpoint of the scale, suggesting that, at best, most students held neutral attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. Thus, it appears that a sizable proportion of Canadian students may endorse scales that measure both blatant and subtle homonegativity.

### ***1.3.2 Heterosexuals' Participation in Anti-Gay and Lesbian Violence on University Campuses***

Of particular interest in this program of research is the extent to which anti-gay and anti-lesbian behaviours occur on college and university campuses. To date, two approaches have been taken to assess the prevalence of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours on university campuses: 1) self-report measures administered to heterosexual perpetrators of these behaviours; and 2) self-report measures and interviews conducted with gay and lesbian students. Those studies which have measured heterosexual male and female students' participation in blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours will be presented in this section.

Notably, Franklin (2000) documented that approximately 10% of a sample ( $N=489$ ) of American community college students from Northern California had physically assaulted or threatened people they believed to be gay or lesbian, 24% ( $n=114$ ) had called gay or lesbian individuals insulting names, and an additional 17% ( $n=83$ ) of the sample, who had not engaged in discriminatory acts, reported witnessing the verbal or physical harassment of gay or lesbian persons. Roderick, McCammon, Long, and Allred (1998) found that more than 10% of the male

and female students from a state university in their southeastern American sample ( $N=266$ ) had frequently or occasionally spread gossip about or yelled insulting comments to gay or lesbian individuals, told anti-gay/lesbian jokes, or purposefully distanced themselves from a gay man or lesbian woman. In addition, Patel, Long, McCammon, and Wuensch (1995) reported that 8% of a southeastern American college student sample ( $N=102$ ) comprised of students attending classes at either a university or military base had physically hit a gay man, 52% had yelled insulting comments, 38% had made verbal threats, and 25% had purposefully been rude to someone perceived to be gay. Finally, a study conducted by Rey and Gibson (1997) with American university students ( $N=226$ ) from the mid-Atlantic region revealed that 91% of students had laughed at or agreed with anti-gay/lesbian jokes and derogatory statements, 81% had used terms such as “fag,” 19% had purposefully ignored someone who was gay or lesbian, 17% had used derogatory terms, 12% had made anti-gay/lesbian jokes in front of someone known to be gay or lesbian, and 12% chose not to befriend a man because he was gay while 7% chose not to befriend a woman because she was lesbian. In general, heterosexuals’ self-reported perpetration of homonegative behaviour has received minimal attention, and the handful of studies described here, which were conducted between 10 to 15 years ago, constitute the most recent evidence regarding the frequency of American heterosexuals’ participation in anti-gay/lesbian behaviour.

Unfortunately, there also is a paucity of research exploring heterosexuals’ participation in anti-gay/lesbian behaviours on Canadian university campuses. The one notable exception is a study that I conducted. Specifically, using a measure that assessed university students’ perpetration of homonegative behaviour toward gay men, I found that 43% of the sample of Canadian undergraduate students ( $N=286$ ) had yelled insulting comments at gay men, 43% had told an anti-gay joke, 32% had spread gossip about gay men, 14% had played a joke on a gay man, 9% had distanced themselves from a gay man, 4% had made verbal threats, and 2% had physically hit or pushed a gay man (Jewell & Morrison, 2010). Despite the limited research in this area, the few American and Canadian studies that have assessed heterosexuals’ participation in behavioural homonegativity indicate that heterosexual university students direct a variety of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours toward sexual minority students. It also is important to note that reliance on self-report measures when assessing behavioural homonegativity from the perspective of the perpetrator has likely led to the underestimation of the prevalence of homonegative behaviour, since survey respondents are sometimes unable to remember or

identify, or are unwilling to report, when they have engaged in discrimination (Burn, 2000; Jewell & Morrison, 2010).

Before concluding this section, some information regarding the characterological profile of individuals who engage in anti-gay/lesbian behaviours on university campuses will be presented to contextualize the perpetration of behavioural homonegativity. Consistently, past research has reported that male heterosexual university students are more likely than female students to direct negative behaviours toward gay men and lesbian women (Franklin, 2000; Roderick et al., 1998; Jewell & Morrison, 2010). In addition, Franklin (2000) asked 163 participants from a sample of undergraduate students ( $N=489$ ) who self-reported participating in anti-gay/lesbian behaviour to describe the circumstances surrounding the most serious or vivid behaviour they perpetrated. Results indicated that perpetrators had a median age of 18 years at the time of the incident, and 16% of the students had reported drinking alcohol prior to or during the incident, while 7% had used drugs. In addition, roughly 50% of the heterosexual students had been in groups of three or more when directing discriminatory behaviours toward gay men or lesbian women, whereas 20% had been with one other person. Approximately 67% of the anti-gay/lesbian behaviours were directed toward lone gay or lesbian individuals, 63% of the attacked homosexual persons were unknown to the perpetrators, and behaviours were most frequently perpetrated in school or work settings. Franklin's study does not provide insight into the reasons why particular individuals were identified as gay or lesbian and subsequently targeted; however, her findings do provide insight into the self-perceived motivations underlying the perpetrators' homonegativity. A desire to act in line with one's anti-gay/lesbian ideology, gain acceptance and approval from friends, engage in thrill-seeking behaviours, and defend oneself motivated the participants' behaviours. Finally, I found that individuals who participated in anti-gay behaviours were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward gay men, be politically conservative, and attend religious services regularly (Jewell & Morrison, 2010). Interviews with eight male and female heterosexual university students who self-reported engaging in anti-gay behaviours also revealed that motivations such as a desire to reinforce traditional male gender roles, alleviate feelings of discomfort, and convey one's heterosexual identity motivated their behaviours. A limitation of my study, however, is that participation in anti-lesbian behaviour was not assessed and, as a result, it is not possible to extend our understanding to the characteristics and motivations of individuals who are likely to direct negative behaviours toward lesbian women.

### ***1.3.3 Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students' Experiences of Discrimination on University Campuses***

Numerous studies have explored the victimization experiences of gay and lesbian university students. Perhaps the most widely cited study is the Yale Sexual Orientation Survey conducted by Herek (1993) in which 166 American gay and lesbian students participated. Of these individuals, approximately 65% of the respondents indicated they had been verbally insulted, 25% had been threatened with physical violence or chased, 12% had been sexually harassed, and 10% had their property destroyed on account of their status as sexual minorities. The results from many of the other studies exploring gay and lesbian students' experiences with discrimination have been in line with Herek's and have used derivations of his survey (e.g., Balanko, 1997; D'Augelli, 1992; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). One such study was conducted by Balanko (1997) at a western Canadian university in which slightly lower rates of victimization were reported. In this sample ( $N=28$ ), 36% of gay and lesbian students indicated they had been verbally insulted, 22% were chased or followed, 14% had been threatened with physical violence, 4% had property damaged or destroyed, and 4% had been sexually harassed or assaulted. The difference observed in the prevalence of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours between Herek's and Balanko's studies may be due to the small sample size employed by Balanko or may suggest that Canadian sexual minority students experience less discrimination. Despite the lower prevalence of victimization, Balanko also found that 50% of the sample sometimes feared for their safety on campus, 68% thought it likely that a gay or lesbian person would be victimized at the university, and 64% of the students knew one or more individuals who had been harassed on campus on the basis of their sexual orientation. These statistics suggest that, even if there is less discrimination directed toward Canadian students, the campus environment may still be perceived as unsafe by sexual minority students.

A number of noteworthy findings regarding the victimization experiences of gay and lesbian students also emerged from a study conducted by D'Augelli (1992). Here, approximately two-thirds of the 121 gay, lesbian, or bisexual undergraduate student sampled who were attending a rural state university in Pennsylvania concealed their sexual orientation from other students to avoid harassment, while half of the students concealed their sexual orientation from university staff, faculty, and job supervisors. In addition, only 12% of the students reported any incident of harassment or violence they had experienced; however, it was not defined as to whom

incidents were reported. Most chose not to report victimization incidents due to fear of further harassment from authorities (who also were not specified), their belief that authorities would not offer them help, fear of having to disclose their sexual orientation, and their own minimization of the incidents they had experienced (e.g., one man reported that verbal insults do not bother him, because they are common and expected). Finally, 65% of the gay students and 40% of the lesbian students indicated they had purposefully avoided certain locations where harassment and violence were likely, distanced themselves from well-known gay or lesbian individuals, or concealed their sexual orientation to protect their personal safety.

Gay and lesbian individuals' disclosure of their sexual orientation is an important variable that warrants further consideration when discussing sexual minority students' victimization experiences. Gortmaker and Brown (2006) found that gay and lesbian university students attending a midwestern state university who were out (i.e., open about their sexual orientation) perceived greater amounts of discrimination from campus administrators and tended to perceive the school environment to be more negative than did closeted students (i.e., students who kept their sexual orientation private). Even so, both out and closeted students reported that similar amounts of anti-gay/lesbian violence had been directed toward them. However, willingness to participate in the study may suggest a certain degree of outness (i.e., the extent to which a person is open about and discloses his/her sexual orientation to others) among the closeted students. There is likely a contingent of students who are unwilling to outwardly identify as gay or lesbian under any circumstance (including on an anonymous survey). These individuals may be privy to a number of homonegative behaviours (both as observers and targets) but, due to their unwillingness to disclose their sexual orientation, the implications of homonegativity on these individuals' wellbeing are virtually unknown.

In addition, a qualitative study (Evans, 2001) that used confidential interviews to explore the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students ( $N=20$ ) living in residence halls located in a small, conservative eastern American town indicated that these students encountered a range of negative and positive events after disclosing their sexual orientation to other students. The students were recruited from lesbian and gay organizations, support groups, and email listservs, and their openness about their sexual orientation ranged from minimally to extensively. Some of the students who disclosed their sexual orientation to others for the first time while living in the residence halls commented that they lived in a state of perpetual fear because of other students'

awareness of their sexual orientation. Further, students who were just beginning to identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual indicated that they expected negative interactions with other students on the basis of their sexual orientation. Several of the incidents that caused study participants to fear for their safety or be wary of interactions with heterosexual peers included the receipt of death threats, placement of anti-gay signs and graffiti throughout the residence hall, playing of religious programs that condemn homosexuality, pranks targeting sexual minority students, use of terminology that is derogatory of sexual minorities, and minimization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns. Although many reports were negative, students who were out (i.e., living openly as gay or lesbian) and living in residence halls did report a greater number of positive experiences with their fellow peers than students who were closeted (i.e., students who self-identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual to the researchers, but who kept their sexual orientation private from nearly all people in their lives). Some of these positive experiences included acceptance from other students, non-gay/lesbian peers' participation in gay pride rallies or organizations, peers intervening when others made anti-gay/lesbian remarks, and being able to educate others about lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues. Thus, it appears that gay and lesbian students' level of outness may influence their perceptions of campus climate insofar as the amount of discrimination perceived to occur on campus and expectations about having negative interactions with heterosexual peers. Interestingly, gay and lesbian students who are out may be more prominent targets for anti-gay/lesbian violence; however, being out also may increase the number of positive experiences gay and lesbian students have with their peers. As such, all gay, lesbian, and bisexual students did not necessarily experience the residence halls similarly.

Unfortunately, Evans did not specify the specific qualitative approach that was employed, which makes it difficult to assess the rigour of this study. However, Evans and Broido (2002) employed the same sample and indicated that a constructivist approach was used as the methodological framework. Further, the emphasis placed on exploring the students' experiences in a specific environment (i.e., residence halls), including the influence of the environment on their behaviours and beliefs and the meaning they derived from their experiences, suggests that, more specifically, ethnography may have informed the methodology (Creswell, 2007).

In conclusion, it is important to note that several of the studies (Balanko, 1997; and D'Augelli, 1992; Herek, 1993) described in this section were conducted over 15 years ago and may not reflect the present reality of gay and lesbian students. In general, research on

homonegativity has tended to focus on the attitudinal correlates of heterosexuals' homonegativity, rather than on gay and lesbian individuals' experiences with discrimination, which perhaps explains the limited and dated information available on sexual minority university students' encounters with anti-gay/lesbian behaviours (Jewell & Morrison, 2010). Only Gortmaker and Brown (2006) and Evans (2001) assessed gay and lesbian university students' experiences with behavioural homonegativity within the past ten years. Given that both studies found that anti-gay/lesbian behaviours are still encountered by gay and lesbian students, their research indicates a need to continue the practice of documenting students' experiences with homonegativity. Without this type of research, it is impossible to know the extent to which gay and lesbian students are victimized on university campuses and whether the nature of discrimination has changed.

#### ***1.3.4 Global Perceptions of Homonegativity on University Campuses***

The final set of studies relevant to this research area pertain to a more global approach for assessing the extent to which homonegativity is directed toward sexual minority students. In general, these studies asked various members of the university community about their perceptions of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes and behaviours on campus, as well as their beliefs about the safety of gay and lesbian students. In one such study, Malaney, Williams, and Geller (1997) conducted a telephone survey with 545 randomly selected northeastern American university students and found that approximately 25% of students surveyed thought that members of their university community held anti-gay/lesbian/ bisexual attitudes, 60% indicated they knew individuals who made anti-gay/lesbian/bisexual remarks, and 10% reported often seeing anti-gay/lesbian/bisexual graffiti on campus. Moreover, only 35% of the male and 39% of the female respondents stated they would intervene directly if they were to witness another student verbally harassing a gay, lesbian or bisexual student because of his/her sexual orientation. In Balanko's (1997) study of 308 Canadian heterosexual students, results indicated that 17% of students "frequently" or "always" heard members of their university community make belittling comments about gay or lesbian students, 15% frequently observed anti-gay/lesbian graffiti, 10% knew an individual who had been a victim of an anti-gay/lesbian act, and 52% thought it "likely" that the average gay, lesbian, or bisexual person would be the target of anti-gay/lesbian discrimination, harassment, or violence at their particular university. Consequently, the results from these studies indicate that anti-gay/lesbian attitudes and behaviours are frequently observed

by heterosexual students and university campuses are perceived, in some cases by a majority of participants sampled, to be a relatively unsafe place for sexual minority students.

Finally, a handful of studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2004; Waldo, 1998) have compared gay and lesbian students, heterosexual students, and staff members' perceptions of the existence of homonegativity on university campuses. Brown and colleagues (2004) surveyed the perceptions of state heterosexual students ( $n=253$ ), sexual minority students ( $n=80$ ), faculty members ( $n=126$ ), student affairs staff ( $n=41$ ), and residence advisors ( $n=15$ ) from a midwestern university and found that gay and lesbian students perceived the campus environment to be significantly more negative than the other groups. In general, female students perceived anti-gay/lesbian attitudes to be more prevalent than did male students, and freshman students, in comparison to juniors, thought anti-gay/lesbian attitudes were less prevalent on the university campus. Possible explanations for these findings are that female students may have had greater awareness of the presence of homonegativity on campus due to their own status as a minority group, while senior students may have been more sensitive because they spent more time at university and, thus, have had more opportunities to observe anti-gay/lesbian attitudes and behaviours.

Comparable to Brown and colleagues' findings, Waldo (1998) reported that gay and lesbian undergraduate ( $n=59$ ) and graduate ( $n=62$ ) students attending a large midwestern university perceived their campus environment to be significantly less accepting of sexual minorities than did heterosexual undergraduate ( $n=1166$ ) and graduate ( $n=761$ ) students. Intriguingly, heterosexual undergraduate students who were involved in fraternities or sororities were less likely to perceive the campus to be accepting of gay and lesbian students, while students who identified as Christian were more likely to rate the campus environment to be positive toward sexual minorities. Given that fraternities and sororities are, by nature, exclusive or elite organizations, individuals who belong to these societies may be more aware of the social standing of various social groups and individuals on campus, including the extent to which gay and lesbian students are accepted by the university community. In addition, undergraduate students, particularly male students, who tended to perceive the university as being tolerant of gay and lesbian students also tended to be resistant of policies designed to increase interpersonal contact with and provide support for gay and lesbian students (e.g., provisions for gay and lesbian student organizations and the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in program curricula). It



may be that because these students already perceived the campus to be tolerant of sexual minorities, they deemed it unnecessary to devote additional resources to activities intended to further facilitate the inclusion of gay and lesbian students. Measures that assess modern homonegativity, such as the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2002), would best capture the type of homonegative beliefs underlying the male students' resistance to policies affording greater support to sexual minorities. Regardless, this study suggests that the students who hold the most negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women (i.e., males, self-identified Christians) may also be the students who perceive the campus environment to be the most accepting of sexual minorities.

The various studies which have assessed the prevalence of homonegativity, whether from an attitudinal or behavioural perspective or from the point-of-view of the perpetrator or target, have all consistently demonstrated that it is a significant concern on university campuses across Canada and the United States. Many heterosexual students have reported that they either hold negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women or have engaged in anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, while a sizable proportion of students who have not directed negative behaviours toward sexual minority students have witnessed other students do so. Given the "chilly" campus environment for gay and lesbian students documented in this literature review, it is apparent that continued effort needs to be devoted to reducing homonegativity on university campuses.

#### ***1.4 Impact of Homonegativity on the Wellbeing of Gay and Lesbian Individuals***

##### ***1.4.1 Impact of Discrimination on Health Outcomes***

A discussion about the prevalence of homonegative attitudes and anti-gay/lesbian behaviours is incomplete without reviewing the impact of these phenomena on the wellbeing of gay men and lesbian women. Although the following discussion is not specific to gay and lesbian university students, it will illuminate the damaging consequences that are associated with homonegativity. Specifically, discrimination directed toward gay men and lesbian women, as well as societal intolerance of homosexuality, have been found to negatively affect the physical and psychosocial health of sexual minorities. Victimization experiences influence individuals' perceptions of the world and cause them to question their: 1) belief that they are safe, secure, and invulnerable from harm; 2) belief that the world is an orderly and meaningful place; and 3) sense of self-worth (Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990). Indeed, gay men and lesbian women who have been the victims of anti-gay/lesbian violence are more likely to experience psychological distress

(Szymanski, 2009; Morrison, 2010), including depression (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Herek, Gillis, Cogan & Glunt, 1997; Morrison, 2010; Otis & Skinner, 1996), anxiety (Herek et al., 1999; Herek et al., 1997), symptoms of traumatic stress (Herek et al., 1999; Herek et al., 1997), anger (Herek et al., 1999), and loneliness (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001). Individuals who have been the victims of hate crimes (e.g., physical violence and verbal harassment) based on sexual orientation also tend to fear further victimization, feel more vulnerable, have lower levels of self-esteem and self-mastery, report less optimism about life, and be more likely to consider the world and others to be malevolent (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; Herek et al., 1999; Herek et al., 1997; Morrison, 2010; Otis & Skinner, 1996). In fact, it is the decreased self-esteem associated with being victimized that is thought to mediate the occurrence of psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety; Otis & Skinner, 1996; Waldo, Hesson-McInnis, & D'Augelli, 1998). That is, victimization experiences are thought to negatively change individuals' perceptions of themselves, which then leads to symptoms of psychological distress. Some research also suggests that gay men and lesbian women are at elevated risk for using tobacco (Greenwood & Gruskin, 2007; Lampinen, McGhee, & Martin, 2006) and alcohol or other drugs (Greenwood & Gruskin, 2007); however, not all studies have supported these findings (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001).

In the United States, linkages have been documented between the presence of institutional discrimination and adverse mental health outcomes among gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, and Hasin (2010) used a prospective longitudinal design to assess changes in the mental health status of sexual minority individuals ( $N=577$ ) after amendments banning same-sex marriage were implemented in 16 states between 2004 and 2005; these changes in mental health status also were compared to changes among gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons living in states that did not introduce such legislation. Increased rates of psychiatric disorders (e.g., mood disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, and alcohol use disorders) were only found in states where constitutional amendments had been implemented (with the exception of substance-use disorders which also exhibited a significant increase in states that had not introduced legislation). The amendments likely signified to the sexual minority persons residing in those states that they belonged to devalued and marginalized social groups. In another study, Hatzenbuehler, Keyes, and Hasin (2009) demonstrated that negative mental health outcomes among sexual minorities are more common in states that do not have

legislation that bans employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or includes sexual orientation as a protected hate crime category. Higher rates of generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and dysthymia were found among gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals living in the 19 states that did not offer any type of legislated protection for sexual minorities. Notably, the psychiatric disorders documented in both studies tend to be associated with feelings of hopelessness, chronic worry, and hypervigilance, all of which have been identified as common responses to discrimination (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Jewell et al., in press).

#### ***1.4.2 Impact of Internalized Homonegativity on Health Outcomes***

Internalized homonegativity is another aspect of some gay and lesbian individuals' experiences that may influence their health and wellbeing. Internalized homonegativity refers to feelings of shame about one's sexual orientation that result from being exposed to, and accepting of, the homonegative messages present in society (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). As such, it is not necessary for gay and lesbian persons to be the direct target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviour to experience detriments in wellbeing; the ubiquitous presence of homonegativity is sufficient to affect the health of gay and lesbian individuals (Jewell et al., in press).

Individuals who have internalized negative feelings about their own homosexuality are more likely to have been victimized in the past (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001), have lower self-esteem (Szymanski, 2009), experience psychological distress, including depression and anxiety (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; Igartua et al., 2003; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009), and perceive their relationships to be of a lower quality than those who have not internalized homonegativity (Frost & Meyer, 2009). As with victimization experiences, self-esteem has been found to mediate the relationship between internalized homonegativity and depression (Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). Moreover, Igartua et al. (2003) found that disapproval of one's homosexuality was more likely to be related to symptoms of psychological distress than either a person's attitude toward other gay or lesbian individuals or comfort with disclosing his/her sexual orientation to others.

Sexual minorities who are victimized or who have internalized the negative messages about homosexuality that are pervasive in society also are at greater risk for attempting and completing suicide (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001). Bagley and Tremblay (1997) sampled gay and bisexual men from Calgary, Alberta and reported that gay and bisexual men are 13.9 times

more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual men, with gay men accounting for 62.5% of all suicide attempts within the stratified, random community sample ( $N=750$ ). In addition, Igartua, Gill, and Montoro (2003) indicated that their Canadian community sample of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals ( $N=197$ ) were six times more likely to engage in suicidal ideation and four times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexuals.

#### ***1.4.2 Relationship between Being Out, Internalized Homonegativity, and Wellbeing***

The extent to which gay men and lesbian women are open about their sexual orientation has often been associated with their mental health. Outness is considered to be a proxy for the degree to which an individual is comfortable with and accepting of his/her sexual orientation. It has been documented that lesbian and bisexual women who do not disclose their sexual orientation are more likely to be depressed (Ayala & Coleman, 2000) and to engage in suicidal ideation (Koh & Ross, 2006). Moreover, internalized homonegativity is thought to play a role in the coming-out process and overcoming one's internalized homonegativity is considered to be an important aspect of developing a positive sexual identity and becoming comfortable with disclosing one's sexual orientation (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). However, some researchers (e.g., Frost & Meyer, 2009; Balsam & Mohr, 2007) have recently cautioned against using outness as a proxy for internalized homonegativity, suggesting that these concepts reflect two distinct constructs, and that one's level of being out is more dependent on relational and social contexts (and the degree to which these contexts are affirming of lesbian and gay persons) than on internalized homonegativity. In line with this theorizing, Frost and Meyer (2009) found that the extent to which gay and lesbian persons were out was not related to health outcomes; however, higher levels of internalized homonegativity were associated with negative indicators of wellbeing, such as lowered relationship quality.

Interestingly, the relationship between being out and sexual minority individuals' emotional wellbeing may be a Western phenomenon. Laurent (2005) states that gay men and lesbian women in many Asian cultures do not struggle with disclosing their sexual orientation to make it a visible component of their identity, but are instead concerned with ensuring that their sexual orientation does not disrupt their relationships with family, neighbours, and co-workers. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that specific cultural influences which have a significant impact on gay and lesbian individuals' wellbeing in one country may be less important in another country.

Several protective factors also have been found to mediate the negative psychological outcomes that are associated with the victimization of gay men and lesbian women. Individuals who are out; rejecting of negative stereotypes about sexual minorities; involved with other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people; accepted by their families; and who think positively of their gay, lesbian or bisexual identity are more likely to experience higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, and lower levels of depression (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; D'Augelli, 2003; Luhtanen, 2003). Support from one's partner (Otis & Skinner, 1996) and the gay and lesbian community (Waldo et al., 1998) also have been found to contribute to reduced levels of psychological distress following victimization. Finally, acceptance from heterosexual friends and co-workers has been associated with higher levels of self-esteem among gay/bisexual men, but not among lesbian/bisexual women (Luhtanen, 2003).

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that most of the research that has been cited in this section (with the exception of Bagley & Tremblay, 1997; D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; Igartua et al., 2003; and Lampinen et al., 2006) has been conducted primarily in the United States. Even among the studies that included Canadian samples, limitations exist. For instance, D'Augelli and Grossman's (2001) sample included an unspecified number of older adults from Canada and did not examine the mental health outcomes of Canadian sexual minorities separately from their American counterparts. In addition, there is not a wealth of information about the health consequences of discrimination across various age groups: Lampinen et al. (2006) focused on youth; Bagley and Tremblay's (1997) sample included young adult men; Igartua et al. (2003) and Morrison (2010) surveyed adults; and D'Augelli and Grossman's (2001) sample consisted of seniors. Therefore, no age groups are adequately reflected by these studies and information from university-aged students is notably lacking. In general, there is a dearth of Canadian research related to the health consequences of victimization and internalized homonegativity for gay men and lesbian women and more information is needed about the health outcomes of gay and lesbian individuals across the life span.

## **CHAPTER TWO—UNDERSTANDING GAY AND LESBIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF SUBTLE ANTI-GAY/LESBIAN BEHAVIOURS**

Nearly all of the studies outlined in this literature review have assessed the extent to which blatantly anti-gay/lesbian behaviours have been directed toward gay and lesbian students. However, as I alluded to earlier, recent research suggests that the frequency in which heterosexual male and female students engage in these blatantly homonegative behaviours is decreasing, at least on university campuses. For instance, past research (Franklin, 2000; Patel et al., 1995; Roderick et al., 1998) found that approximately 8 to 10% of students reported directing physical violence toward gay men and approximately 25 to 38% reported verbally harassing them. In contrast, I found in a recent study of Canadian undergraduates ( $N=286$ ) that only 2% of our sample had physically hit and 4% had verbally threatened a gay man (Jewell & Morrison, 2010). Instead, participants in our sample were most likely to indicate engaging in more subtle behaviours that served to indirectly disparage (e.g., through anti-gay joke telling and gossip), covertly express their disapproval of (e.g., by staring disapprovingly or being rude), or distance themselves from gay men (e.g., by switching seats, changing normal behaviour in a restroom, or walking away). Follow-up interviews in this mixed methods study which employed an interpretative phenomenological analytic framework with eight highly homonegative individuals (4 male; 4 female) revealed a concern amongst participants of being perceived as prejudiced by others. This concern seemed to contribute to participants’ unwillingness to engage in blatantly anti-gay behaviours or to consider the negative behaviours in which they had engaged to be “anti-gay.” For instance, participants indicated that, although they had told jokes about gay men and used derogatory slang words, they did not consider these behaviours to be discriminatory or harmful toward gay men. Thus, on the basis of our research and others (e.g., Burn, 2000; Burn, Kadlec, & Rexer, 2005), it appears that heterosexual university students are engaging in more subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours because blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours are no longer tolerated.

### ***2.1 Theory of Modern Homonegativity***

The theoretical framework of modern homonegativity is useful for understanding the decreasing prevalence of blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours among college and university students and the emergence of subtle discriminatory behaviours toward gay men and lesbian women. Morrison and Morrison (2002) suggest that in environments where the social mores dictate that it is no longer acceptable to hold blatantly negative attitudes toward gay men and

lesbian women, such as on university campuses, a newer, more covert form of homonegativity has emerged (i.e., modern homonegativity). Old-fashioned manifestations of homonegativity are rooted in moral and religious objections to homosexuality and are characterized by overtly negative attitudes and behaviours directed toward gay men and lesbian women (Brochu, Gawronski, & Esses, 2008; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Morrison et al., 2009). In contrast, modern manifestations of homonegativity are based on objections to abstract concerns related to the equality of, and provision of rights to, gay and lesbian individuals. Individuals who endorse modern homonegativity reject the idea that discrimination is still a concern for gay men and lesbian women, believe that gay and lesbian individuals are making illegitimate demands for special rights, and purport that gay men and lesbian women exaggerate the importance of their sexual orientation, which prevents them from assimilating into mainstream culture (Morrison & Morrison, 2002). Essentially, individuals who endorse modern homonegativity believe that gay and lesbian individuals have all the rights they need. Past research suggests that modern homonegativity is conceptually distinct from old-fashioned homonegativity (Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Morrison, Kenny, & Harrington, 2005; Morrison et al., 2009).

The theory of modern homonegativity is based on similar conceptual frameworks that have been developed in the areas of racism (McConahay, 1983; 1986) and sexism (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995), which also have teased apart old-fashioned and modern forms of these phenomena. Researchers (Davies, 2004; Ficarotto, 1990, Kilianski, 2003; Parrott, Adams, & Zeichner, 2002) have repeatedly demonstrated that racism, sexism, and homonegativity are interrelated. As a result, it is thought that similar processes underlie all forms of prejudice.

The notions of egalitarianism and equality are important to consider when discussing modern prejudice. Research has found that individuals who endorse measures of modern prejudice also often consider themselves to be egalitarian (i.e., they believe that all people are equal and should be treated identically; Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000; Whitley & Kite, 2006). However, their belief in equality is usually based on the idea of equality of *opportunity*, which is anchored in the assumption that everyone should have an equal, fair chance at success, rather than on the concept of equality of *outcome*, which assumes that everyone, regardless of their personal resources or characteristics, should have an equal share of society's resources (Sears et al., 2000; Whitley & Kite, 2006). In practice, individuals who favour equality of opportunity over equality of outcome tend to be opposed to policies that appear to give particular

social groups greater (and seemingly unfair) access to certain sectors of society, such as affirmative action policies (Brochu et al., 2008; McConahay, 1986). For instance, the belief that gay men and lesbian women are not disadvantaged in terms of accessing the same opportunities as heterosexuals allows individuals who endorse modern homonegativity to rationalize their negative evaluations of gay and lesbian persons as being valid and deserving, while maintaining their self-image of being non-prejudicial (Brochu et al., 2008; Harton & Nail, 2008). Moreover, because these individuals do perceive themselves to be egalitarian, they tend to couch their claims of unfairness in terms of liberalism, which can make their prejudicial assertions difficult to recognize (Peel, 2001). People who endorse modern prejudice also tend to support individualistic values (e.g., personal freedom, self-reliance, individual responsibility, devotion to work, and achievement) that are often reflected by politically conservative stances and the Protestant worth ethic (Harton & Nail, 2008; McConahay, 1986; Swim et al., 1995).

To date, most research on modern homonegativity has explored heterosexuals' endorsement of modern homonegative attitudes (Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Morrison & Morrison, in press; Morrison et al., 2005; Morrison et al., 2009), with a handful of studies exploring the types of behaviours that are associated with modern homonegativity (Aberson, Swan, & Emerson, 1999; Morrison & Morrison, 2002). Modern prejudice theory posits that individuals will only act in a discriminatory fashion in situations where their actions can be attributed to something other than bias against gay men and lesbian women (Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Swim & Cohen, 1997). In fact, McConahay (1983) outlines five situations where individuals who endorse modern prejudicial beliefs will act in a discriminatory matter, including situations characterized by: 1) ideological ambiguity (i.e., non-prejudicial values or political beliefs can be drawn upon to explain a behaviour); 2) situational ambiguity (i.e., it is possible to make a non-biased attribution about a behaviour); 3) a minority group member acting negatively toward or harming another individual; 4) unstructured or normless conditions in which there are no clear guidelines for appropriate behaviour; and 5) a lack of saliency with respect to minority group status. Individuals high in modern prejudice are expected to act positively toward minority group members in any situation that would otherwise bring about a self- or other-generated attribution of prejudice, as they are motivated to maintain a self-image of being egalitarian and non-prejudiced (Brochu et al., 2008).



In line with the conjecture that anti-gay/lesbian bias will be acted upon in situations of attributional ambiguity, Morrison and Morrison (2002) found through a randomized experiment that participants ( $N=49$ ) who were high in modern homonegativity were more likely to engage in subtle acts of discrimination than those low in this form of prejudice. Specifically, participants were asked to choose whether they would like to view a film in Theatre A or B after a gay or lesbian confederate had already selected a theatre. Participants were subjected to either an overt condition where the same movie was playing in both theatres (and it could be perceived as discriminatory if the participant chose to sit in the unoccupied theatre) or a covert condition where two different movies were playing in the theatres (and the participant could legitimately claim he/she wanted to view the other movie). Results indicated that participants high in modern homonegativity were more likely than participants low in modern homonegativity to choose a different theatre than the gay or lesbian confederate in the covert condition, a situation characterized by ambiguity. In the overt condition, individuals were equally as likely to choose the same theatre as the gay or lesbian confederate. A limitation of this study, however, was the small sample size employed, which may limit the extent to which these results are generalizable.

Masser and Moffat (2006) simulated how subtle discrimination may be manifested toward gay men in workplace settings where norms for appropriate behaviour are unclear. Here, participants ( $N=153$ ) were asked to provide help to either a heterosexual or homosexual worker (sexual orientation was self-disclosed), while a heterosexual confederate acted as the worker's supervisor. The situational norms were then manipulated by having the request for help come from either the worker (where the norms for appropriate behaviour could be perceived as ambiguous) or the supervisor (where the correct course of action was unambiguous). Results indicated that participants who scored higher on the Index of Homophobia (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) offered help that was of a lower quality (which was operationalized as the usefulness of the assistance provided and conceptualized as a subtle indicator of prejudice) to the homosexual worker in the ambiguous condition, while, in the overt condition, they offered help of higher quality. Interestingly, with respect to more blatant indicators of discrimination, such as the amount of help offered, participants high in homonegativity did not treat the gay worker differently than the heterosexual worker. It may be that participants were conscious of being perceived as prejudiced and wanted to be seen as behaving fairly and appropriately. Consequently, they may only have been willing to behave differentially toward the gay target

when their discriminatory behaviour could not be easily detected. The Index of Homophobia is an old-fashioned measure of homonegativity and, thus, the results do not provide direct support for the theory of modern homonegativity. However, the study does empirically demonstrate how seemingly “normless situations” may lead to subtle discriminatory behaviour toward sexual minorities, as would be expected within the modern prejudice framework.

In another randomized experiment of subtle discrimination, Aberson et al. (1999) asked heterosexual participants ( $N=260$ ) to watch one of four videos depicting the interview of a male job candidate and then rate this person’s suitability for a position. A two by two design was employed wherein a job candidate: 1) was depicted as either heterosexual or gay; and 2) did or did not make a negative comment during the interview (allowing participants to justifiably rate candidates lower in the conditions where an inappropriate comment was spoken). Results indicated that in the unjustified condition (i.e., the job candidate did not make a negative comment), participants tended to rate the gay man favourably, but elevated their evaluations of the heterosexual man to be even higher. Thus, in this situation, where there were no clear guidelines with respect to how to rate the candidates, the heterosexual candidate was inadvertently afforded a subtle advantage. Like Masser and Moffat (2006), Aberson and associates did not employ a measure of modern homonegativity to assess heterosexuals’ endorsement of negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women (perhaps because one did not exist at the time the study was carried out) and instead used the Homophobia Scale (Bouton et al., 1987), which is considered to be a measure of old-fashioned homonegativity. However, the theorizing that was used to conceptualize the study was congruent with the principles of modern prejudice, and the results reflect what one would expect from heterosexuals who endorse modern homonegative beliefs.

Finally, Swim, Ferguson, and Hyers (1999) found that heterosexual women ( $N=79$ ) tended to socially distance themselves from lesbian women. In this experiment, heterosexual female participants were asked to share their opinion about a topic following either a lesbian or heterosexual confederate who dissented from the beliefs stated by the other heterosexual confederates who were present. Results indicated that the heterosexual women expressed opinions that diverged from those articulated by the lesbian confederate to avoid being associated with a stigmatized social group. The nature of this situation allowed for the existence of ideological ambiguity, as participants who vocalized opinions that differed from the lesbian

woman could explain their dissention by claiming different ideological beliefs. Again, Swim et al. employed a measure of old-fashioned homonegativity (i.e., Attitudes toward Homosexuals Scale; Kite & Deaux, 1986); however, they did include a measure of modern sexism which suggests that a modern prejudice framework was employed in this study. Further, as with the previous studies, the explanation that was used to interpret the observed results was consistent with modern theorizing about prejudice.

Thus, the few existing studies exploring behavioural manifestations of what can be conceptualized as modern homonegativity suggest that individuals who hold negative attitudes toward gay men or lesbian women are prone to act in line with their prejudicial attitudes when certain situational conditions exist. Even so, Masser and Moffat (2006) question whether their findings were reflective of what happens in everyday life (i.e., whether heterosexuals high in homonegativity do tend to engage in subtle rather than blatant discriminatory behaviours) or an artefact of social desirability bias whereby participants knew their behaviours were being assessed by researchers and were, consequently, motivated to tailor their discriminatory behaviours to be more subtle. This possible limitation can be extended to the other experimental studies that have been discussed in this section. Research examining manifestations of modern homonegativity in field settings or investigating gay and lesbian individuals' experiences with heterosexuals in situations of ambiguity would be valuable for assessing the generalizability of the findings presented in this section.

### ***2.2 Defining Subtle Anti-Gay/Lesbian Behaviours***

The subtle nature of the discriminatory behaviours associated with modern homonegativity is quite different than the blatant behaviours typically linked with old-fashioned homonegativity. Relatively little research has systematically explored the types of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours in which heterosexual men and women may engage. However, before reviewing the literature that does exist with respect to subtle homonegative behaviours, it is important to clearly define what is meant by the terms blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. At the time this study was designed, few formal attempts had been made to explicitly distinguish blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. Thus, it was necessary to develop a set of working definitions that could be used to conceptualize and delineate the various types of discriminatory behaviour that were of interest in this study. The definitions that are proposed in

this section are preliminary; indeed, one of the consequent goals of this study was to empirically investigate the accuracy and suitability of these definitions.

Theorizing that has occurred within the sexism literature regarding different types of blatant and subtle sexist behaviours that may be perpetrated served as a basis for developing the preliminary definitions of blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. With respect to sexist behaviours, Benokraitis and Feagin (1995) and Benokraitis (1997) suggest there are three types of discriminatory behaviours that can be directed toward women: blatant, covert, and subtle. Benokraitis uses the term *blatant* sex discrimination to refer to the unequal and harmful treatment of women that is intentional, visible, and relatively easy to document (e.g., physical violence, sexual harassment, and sexist language and jokes). *Covert* sex discrimination is used to describe “the unequal and harmful treatment of women that is hidden, purposeful, and often maliciously motivated” (Benokraitis, 1997, p. 12). Examples of covert behaviours include manipulation (e.g., giving women undesirable jobs under the guise of equal treatment) and sabotage (e.g., behaviours that undermine a woman’s position). In contrast, *subtle* sex discrimination refers to the unequal and harmful treatment of women that is less visible, less obvious, more difficult to document, and generally unintentional. These behaviours often go unnoticed because they have been internalized as “normal” or “acceptable” and are often not perceived as harmful by the perpetrator. Benokraitis and Feagin (1995) suggest that behaviours such as “friendly” harassment, paternalistic behaviour, humour at the expense of women, objectification of women, and collegial exclusion constitute subtle sex discrimination. Thus, both covert and subtle behaviours reflect “hidden” forms of discrimination; however, covert behaviours, like blatant behaviours, are deliberate, while subtle sexist behaviours are unintentional.

A definition similar to the one Benokraitis and Feagin (1995) and Benokraitis (1997) proposed to define blatant sex discrimination was initially used to conceptualize blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. Specifically, I tentatively used the term *blatant anti-gay/lesbian* to refer to behaviours that are explicitly directed toward gay men and lesbian women and are purposefully intended to harm or derogate members of these social groups on the basis of their sexual orientation. Examples of blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviour include physical assaults, verbal threats and harassment, chasing or following, vandalizing property, and telling anti-gay

jokes (when the target is present). These actions are what one might expect from individuals who endorse old-fashioned homonegativity.

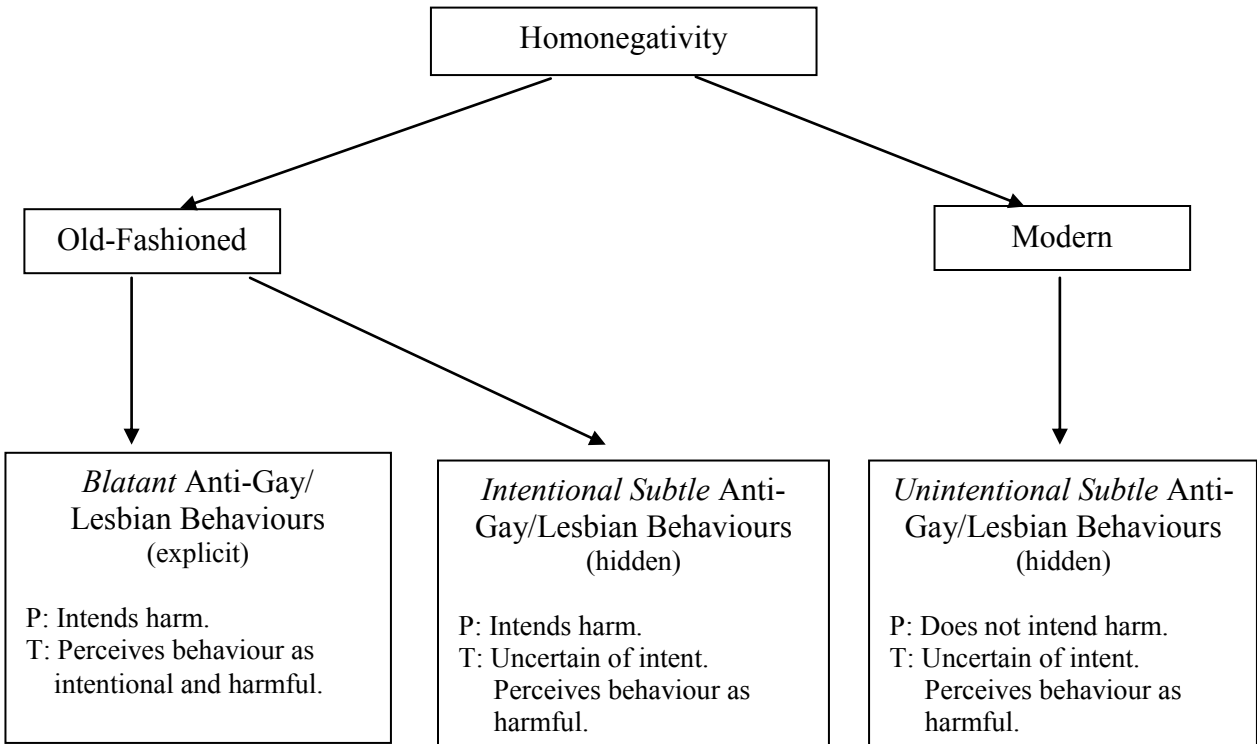
In contrast to Benokraitis and Feagin (1995) and Benokraitis (1997), I used the term *subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours* to generally refer to behaviours that derogate gay men and lesbian women, but are difficult to definitively identify as being a result of anti-gay/lesbian bias. I then initially partitioned subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours into two categories: intentional subtle behaviours and unintentional subtle behaviours. The term *intentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour* refers to behaviours that are intentionally directed toward gay men and lesbian women with the purpose of degrading or sabotaging these individuals, but are purposefully hidden to make it difficult to identify these actions as discriminatory. This conceptualization of intentional anti-gay/lesbian behaviour is comparable to Benokraitis' (1997) definition of "covert" sexist behaviours; however, I opted to use the phrase "intentional subtle" to make it clear that I am referring to a specific type of subtle behaviour that is purposefully directed toward sexual minorities. Behaviours such as spreading gossip, distancing oneself from a gay or lesbian individual, acting in an unfriendly manner, and convincing others not to befriend a gay or lesbian individual may be examples of intentionally subtle behaviours. I considered the key features of behaviours that fall into this category to be that the target was not aware the perpetrator was engaging in this behaviour (e.g., in the case of spreading gossip) or was uncertain about whether the perpetrator intended the action to be malicious (even though the perpetrator did intend harm through the behaviour). For example, a target may be unsure as to whether someone was cold and unfriendly toward him/her because that person was in a bad mood or was homonegative. Given that individuals who engage in intentionally subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours are knowingly acting in ways to discriminate against gay men and lesbian women, it is likely these individuals still endorse blatant forms of homonegativity. However, they may be motivated to control or hide their prejudicial attitudes due to pervasive social norms calling for tolerance of sexual minorities, and, as a result, turn to covert methods as a means of expressing their negativity (Jewell & Morrison, 2010).

Finally, the term *unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour* refers to behaviours that serve to derogate gay men and lesbian women, but which are not deliberate, are often perceived to be normative, and generally go unrecognized by heterosexuals. Again, this definition is similar to the definition Benokraitis and Feagin (1995) and Benokraitis (1997) proposed for "subtle"

sexist behaviours; however, I wanted to clearly distinguish this type of subtle behaviour as being unintentional and, therefore, opted for slightly different terminology. Examples of unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour may include using subtle prejudicial language (e.g., using the word “gay” instead of the word “stupid”), telling anti-gay/lesbian jokes (when the perpetrator does not recognize these jokes as harmful), and engaging in homopositive behaviours (i.e., behaviours intended to be positive, but are often perceived to be indicators of prejudice). Non-verbal behaviours such as those described in relation to intentional subtle homonegativity (e.g., avoiding eye contact or acting unfriendly) and social distancing also may fall under the realm of unintentional subtle discrimination if perpetrators were not aware that they were engaging in these actions. The key characteristic which I considered to distinguish unintentional subtle homonegative behaviours from intentional behaviours was the absence of a conscious motivation to harm a gay or lesbian individual on the basis of his or her sexual orientation. However, given that with both types of subtle behaviours targets are left to infer the intentionality of an action, they may experience intentional and unintentional anti-gay/lesbian behaviours similarly. Due to the inherent difficulties associated with determining whether behaviour was consciously motivated, researchers may find it difficult to distinguish between intentional and unintentional subtle behaviours, since some knowledge about a perpetrator’s intention is required to make this distinction. As a result, the generic term *subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours* will be used when it is not possible to infer or obtain information needed to determine whether behaviour was intentional.

Participation in unintentional subtle discriminatory behaviours has been found to be associated with the endorsement of modern forms of prejudice (Swim & Cohen, 1997). For instance, Swim, Mallet, and Stangor (2004) found that individuals who endorsed modern sexism were more likely to use subtle sexist language, less likely to use non-sexist language, and were less likely to detect the usage of sexist language than those who did not endorse modern sexist beliefs. Swim and Cohen (1997) suggest that individuals who endorse modern prejudice and engage in subtle discriminatory behaviours are likely not trying to hide their prejudice, but may simply be unaware of, and insensitive to, what constitutes discrimination. Individuals high in these forms of prejudice may not perceive certain behaviours (such as those characterized by unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours) to be discriminatory and, as such, do not experience compunction when carrying out these behaviours. Heterosexuals who engage in

unintentional subtle discriminatory behaviours may not endorse either modern or old-fashioned forms of homonegativity and may be engaging in what they perceive to be socially acceptable behaviour. Consequently, they may be unaware that they are engaging in behaviour that may be experienced as discriminatory. See Figure 1 for an overview of how old-fashioned and modern homonegativity are related to blatant, intentional subtle, and unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour.



P: perpetrator; T: target.

*Figure 1.* Relationship of old-fashioned and modern homonegativity to blatant, intentional subtle, and unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour

### **2.2.1 Role of Intentionality and Perceived Harm in Identifying Discrimination**

The importance of intentionality and perceived harm in determining whether an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour is seen to occur warrants further consideration. In order for behaviour to be *intentional*, a perpetrator must believe and desire a particular action to be discriminatory and must have an awareness of fulfilling that intention when engaging in the behaviour (Malle, 1999). For behaviour to be considered harmful and discriminatory, it also must have negative consequences for particular gay or lesbian individuals or for gay men and lesbian women as social groups and the target must attribute the behaviour as an attack against his/her minority

group status (Swim, Scott, Sechrist, Campbell, & Stangor, 2003). That is, even if behaviour is not perceived to be harmful at an individual level, it may still constitute subtle discriminatory behaviour if it is perceived to be harmful at a collective level. For instance, a gay or lesbian person may not personally be offended by an anti-gay remark, such as “that’s so gay,” but may perceive that these comments have deleterious effects for gay men and lesbian women as social groups (e.g., their continued marginalization).

The interplay between intent and perceived harm is a complex process given that the target can never know the precise intent behind a behaviour and the perpetrator can never completely know the harm incurred by a behaviour, since both experiences reflect an internal state of another individual (Malle & Knobe, 1997). Therefore, in determining whether behaviour was meant to be discriminatory, targets must make an inference about the perpetrator’s intentions and often rely on the amount of harm experienced when determining whether an action was bias-related (Swim et al., 2003). As a result, behaviours that were unintentionally negative or seemingly benevolent may be considered discriminatory if they cause a target to experience harm (Benokraitis, 1997; Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Swim & Campbell, 2001).

Swim et al. (2003) found that observers of negative behaviours tended to rely on expressed intentions (when available) to determine whether a behaviour was discriminatory, rather than on targets’ claims of harm. Specifically, Swim et al. reported that, when assessing whether a perpetrator was prejudiced or his/her behaviour discriminatory, female and male observers of sexist behaviours tended to disregard the amount of harm experienced by a target when information about the perpetrator’s intent was available. In contrast, for female targets of sexist behaviours, greater harm was associated with greater judgements of discrimination and prejudice, regardless of the perpetrator’s spoken intent. Interestingly, when perpetrators expressed they did not intend a behaviour to be discriminatory, targets’ doubts about the truthfulness of the perpetrators’ claims increased as the harm associated with the behaviour increased. Although this study did not explicitly explore the attributional processes in which perpetrators engage to determine whether they have behaved discriminatorily, the observers in Swim et al.’s study may be viewed as a proxy for this group. As such, it may be that perpetrators and targets tend to use the variable that is most salient to them when determining whether behaviour is discriminatory, and their reliance on different features of a situation (i.e., expressed intent or perceived harm) can lead to discrepancies in assessments of behaviours.



It also should be noted that targets may judge a behaviour to be discriminatory, but may not necessarily assume the perpetrator of that behaviour to be prejudiced. Swim et al. (2003) found that, as the degree of uncertainty associated with the intent behind a sexist behaviour increased, targets were less likely to judge a perpetrator to be prejudiced, even though they often judged the behaviour to be discriminatory. In contrast, when there was a high level of certainty about the perpetrator's intent, targets were more likely to judge both the person as prejudiced and his/her behaviour as discriminatory. Thus, targets may be more cautious in judging a person to be prejudiced than his/her behaviour as discriminatory, and their perceptions of intent may affect their evaluations of the perpetrator. Finally, Swim et al.'s study suggested that researchers may be able to reduce the complexity associated with determining whether a discriminatory behaviour occurred by restricting focus to perpetrators' expressed intentions and targets' perceptions of harm, since both of these variables can be measured. It is then possible to avoid the issues associated with measuring perpetrators' interpretations of the harm experienced by the target and targets' interpretations of the perpetrator's intentions.

### ***2.2.2 Role of Apologies and Excuses in Perceiving Discrimination***

Additional research in the areas of racism and sexism also suggests that the use of excuses or justifications may either exacerbate or ameliorate the perceived seriousness of discriminatory behaviours. McClelland and Hunter (1992) reported that, when perpetrators offered an apology for engaging in a behaviour perceived to be a form of racial harassment by accepting responsibility for their "bad" behaviour, observers of the behaviour perceived the situation to be less serious. However, when perpetrators offered excuses (i.e., denied responsibility for their "bad" behaviour) or justifications (i.e., denied that their behaviour was "bad"), observers' original assessments of the seriousness of the action remained the same or slightly increased. Hunter and McClelland (1991) found similar results with respect to observers' perceptions of the seriousness of sexual harassment behaviours. Taken together, the results from these studies suggest that one also has to take perpetrators' apologies, excuses and justifications into account when understanding targets' perceptions of the severity of a discriminatory behaviour.

While there has not been any research exploring the relationship between apologies, excuses, justifications, and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, these variables may be particularly relevant in targets' assessments of harm associated with homonegative behaviours,

since their ability to ameliorate or exacerbate the perceived severity of the situation may affect targets' judgements about a perpetrator and his/her behaviour. By directly exploring gay and lesbian individuals' encounters with behavioural homonegativity, it would be possible to gain insight into how they know they have been the target of homonegative behaviour and the factors they consider in identifying such behaviour. Indeed, the use of a phenomenological approach to understand the essence of gay and lesbian students' experiences with homonegative behaviours, including the types of behaviours (blatant and subtle) they consider to be discriminatory and the processes they engage in to identify discriminatory behaviours, seems warranted given the infancy of research in relation to subtle discrimination with gay and lesbian persons and the complexity involved in identifying anti-gay/lesbian behaviours.

### ***2.3 Subtle Behavioural Manifestations of Homonegativity***

As mentioned previously, a lack of attention has been paid to documenting the types of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that are perpetrated by heterosexuals, the frequency in which these behaviours are perpetrated, and gay men's and lesbian women's experiences with these behaviours. One notable exception is Burn (2000); here, approximately 66% of the American university students sampled ( $N=257$ ) self-reported on a questionnaire that they had regularly made anti-gay jokes and used anti-gay slang epithets such as "faggot" and "queer." Approximately half of the individuals who had engaged in these anti-gay behaviours did not endorse attitudinal items measuring prejudice toward gay men; thus, as suggested earlier, maintaining homonegative attitudes does not necessarily seem to be a requisite for engaging in these types of behaviours. Further, participants who engaged in these behaviours generally did not believe these actions were offensive to sexual minorities. However, a follow-up study conducted by Burn and colleagues (2005) exploring sexual minorities' perspectives on the use of anti-gay slang words found that American and Canadian gay and lesbian students ( $N=175$ ) were offended when heterosexuals used words such as "faggot" and "queer." In fact, when asked to judge the offensiveness of 13 scenarios depicting the inappropriate use of these words, participants' mean rating of offensiveness was 5.8 out of 7. Moreover, gay and lesbian students who were offended by these types of behaviour indicated that they would be less likely to disclose their sexual orientation. Therefore, it seems that, even though heterosexuals may not intentionally use anti-gay/lesbian epithets to harm gay men and lesbian women, their use of these words may have a detrimental impact on sexual minorities. In addition, the findings from Burn

(2000) and Burn and colleagues (2005) suggest there is an incongruity between heterosexuals' and gay and lesbian individuals' perceptions of what constitutes anti-gay/lesbian behaviour.

A study conducted by Rey and Gibson (1997) also briefly explored the severity of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. As a means of developing a questionnaire to assess heterosexuals' participation in anti-gay/lesbian behaviours (i.e., the Discriminatory Behaviour Scale; DBS), Rey and Gibson (1997) held a focus group with American gay and lesbian university students to determine how harmful they considered various behaviours to be. To accomplish this goal, participants were asked to rate the severity of each item on the DBS. Students in this study reported that derogatory terms, statements, and jokes directed toward sexual minorities were minimally harmful, as were heterosexuals' failures to befriend a gay or lesbian individual and their participation in making sexually explicit comments. They considered it to be moderately harmful to make derogatory anti-gay/lesbian statements and jokes in front of a gay or lesbian individual, as well as to purposefully ignore, exclude, or verbally harass a member of the sexual minority. It is important to note that participants found it more harmful to "overhear" homonegative comments (a behaviour which would be defined as a subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour if there was no intent to harm) than to have a homonegative comment explicitly directed toward them (which would constitute an act of blatant discrimination). Finally, behaviours such as ending a friendship, convincing others not to befriend someone, threatening violence, chasing or following, and vandalizing the property of gay men and lesbian women were determined to be very harmful, while physically or sexually assaulting a gay or lesbian individual were considered to be severely harmful. Many of the behaviours allocated the most severe ratings of harm were blatant in nature; however, some potentially subtle behaviours (e.g., the dissolution of a friendship and social exclusion) were perceived to be quite harmful.

Unfortunately, Rey and Gibson (1997) provided minimal information with regards to how the gay and lesbian students categorized the level of harm associated with these behaviours, leaving us with little insight into how harm was defined in this study and why some behaviours were considered more harmful than others. In addition, the methodology adopted by the researchers was unspecified. Thus, additional research that is methodologically rigorous is required to further explore the severity and consequences of various subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours.

To estimate the frequency in which gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals encounter homonegative behaviours, Swim, Pearson, and Johnston (2007) conducted a diary study where

sexual minority participants ( $N=69$ ; most were university students) were asked to record the number of heterosexist (i.e., homonegative) and non-heterosexist “everyday hassles” they encountered during a one-week period. On average, the participants experienced two heterosexist hassles and eight non-heterosexist hassles over the seven day period. The majority of hassles experienced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals were verbal comments (58% of the documented behaviours), including the use of language that draws upon existing stereotypes or makes assumptions about their sexual orientation, anti-gay/lesbian jokes, and hostile comments. Approximately 54% of these comments were explicitly directed toward the participants, while 37% of the comments were overheard. Minimal detail was provided about the specific nature of the heterosexist (or non-heterosexist) hassles reported; however, it is possible that many of the comments overheard reflected unintentional acts of discrimination. In addition, the gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals also encountered a number of other homonegative behaviours (22% of the hassles reported), such as being excluded, receiving poor service, and being the recipients of aggressive or hostile behaviours (e.g., pointing, mocking, rude gestures, hostile looks). Some of these behaviours (e.g., exclusion and poor service) also may reflect intentional or unintentional subtle discrimination. Finally, 13% of the hassles reported by the participants were related to being fearful that their sexual orientation may be revealed. Interestingly, participants who were out and those who had not widely disclosed their sexual orientation experienced an equal number of heterosexist hassles.

A number of limitations are associated with Swim and associate’s (2007) study. Since they did not tease apart blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours, the frequency with which sexual minorities encounter subtle (versus blatant) discrimination remains uncertain. In addition, the daily diary approach employed did not allow targets to describe salient incidents occurring outside of that particular week, leaving open the possibility that a range of experiences not captured by this “snapshot” approach may exist. Finally, it is possible that by being required to document their hassles on a daily basis, participants became more sensitive to negative behaviours directed toward them and considered more behaviours to be hassles than they otherwise would have prior to their participation in the study. Even so, the results suggest that gay men and lesbian women regularly encounter a variety of blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours over the course of their everyday lives, regardless of the extent to which their sexual orientation is known to others.

Other subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that have been documented in the literature include homonegative individuals' tendencies to avoid eye contact with sexual minorities (Conley, Devine, Rabow, & Evett, 2002; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002); acting coldly, unfriendly, and hostilely toward gay men and lesbian women (Conley et al., 2002; Dasgupta & Rivera, 2006; Walters & Curran, 1996); using subtle prejudicial language (e.g., "those people"; Conley, Calhoun, Evett, & Devine, 2001; Hylton, 2006); and trying to keep conversations with gay and lesbian individuals as brief as possible (Hebl et al., 2002; Walters & Curran, 1996). In addition, recent research has suggested that some seemingly "homopositive" attitudes and behaviours may actually be perceived by gay men and lesbian women as subtle indicators of prejudice (Conley et al., 2001; Morrison & Bearden, 2007; Walls, 2008). For instance, Conley et al. (2001) reported there are several common "mistakes" that heterosexuals may unintentionally make when interacting with gay men and lesbian women to demonstrate they are not prejudiced. Some of these mistakes include expecting a gay person to know another gay acquaintance and/or to want to date that person because they are both gay or lesbian, explicitly stating that they are not prejudiced or do not care about a person's sexual orientation, personally acting in line with stereotypical assumptions about gay and lesbian individuals, ignoring gay and lesbian issues, being overly friendly, or not avowing one's discomfort with gay men and lesbian women. Heterosexual men and women who commit these mistakes likely have good intentions, but their actions do not have the intended consequence of making gay and lesbian persons feel comfortable in interactions with heterosexuals or of making themselves appear non-prejudiced. Unfortunately, Conley et al. only explored gay men's and lesbian women's perceptions of the mistakes that heterosexuals may make in interactions with members of these sexual minority groups and little is known about heterosexuals' perceptions of these mistakes.

### ***2.3.1 Heteronormative Behaviours***

Acting in line with heteronormative assumptions also has been identified as a form of subtle discrimination by researchers (Hylton, 2005; Jewell et al., in press; Kitzinger, 2005; Røndahl, Innala, & Carlsson, 2006). Heteronormativity is centred around the ideas that there are only two sexes, heterosexuality and displays of affection between males and females are normal or natural (while affection displayed by sexual minorities is not), and same sex couples are (potentially deviant) variations of opposite sex couples (Kitzinger, 2005). Moreover, Kitzinger (2005) argues that heteronormative behaviours are enacted "without oppressive intent or

conscious design” (p. 478) and are not reflective of heterosexuals’ beliefs, values, or ideologies. Heteronormative behaviours are thought to occur as a result of living in a society that denies non-heterosexual orientations and leads to everyday, unintentional forms of discrimination that exclude or deny the realities of gay men and lesbian women.

Heteronormativity has most often been examined in relation to gay and lesbian persons’ interactions with healthcare providers (including physicians, nurses, and social workers). For instance, Hylton (2005) conducted interviews with 19 lesbian and bisexual graduate social work students and, using a grounded theory approach, found that heteronormative assumptions were pervasive across their experiences as students. It was made clear to the participants that their heterosexual peers generally did not take sexual orientation into consideration and, when faculty and students did speak of lesbian or gay issues, they appeared uncomfortable. Such actions prevented sexual orientation-related issues from being openly and thoroughly discussed in class. In addition, students noted that, overall, lesbian and gay issues were invisible in the curriculum—there was little course content pertaining to lesbian and gay issues, lesbian and gay issues were not incorporated in class examples, and sexual orientation was not included in definitions of diversity.

Comparably, Røndahl et al. (2006) interviewed 27 gay and lesbian persons who had experienced hospital care in Sweden and found that there was no recognition of homosexuality in the materials displayed in waiting rooms, patient documents, or patient interviews. In addition, nursing staff assumed the patients and their significant others to be heterosexual. Further, when required to discuss non-heterosexual sexual orientations, the gay and lesbian informants observed the nurses as being uncomfortable when communicating with them; they perceived the nurses’ to be concerned about behaving incorrectly and insecure in their interactions with the sexual minority patients. As a result, the sexual minority informants felt excluded and believed that their status as a gay or lesbian patient or partner was not given as much credence as that afforded to heterosexual patients or partners (e.g., gay or lesbian partners were not accepted as “true” relatives). A formal methodological approach was not employed in this study.

Interviews with 19 Canadian gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer adults conducted that I conducted also revealed that participants felt that healthcare providers did not recognize the possibility that they may be in same-sex relationships and tended to lack knowledge about health concerns unique to lesbian and gay persons (Jewell et al., in press). The lack of recognition

afforded to gay men and lesbian women caused some participants to feel uncomfortable with disclosing their sexual orientation and led them to seek other healthcare providers. Here, a new methodology designed by Narvaez, Meyer, and Kertzer (2009) to investigate the relationship between identity and experiences with discrimination was employed and data analysis was informed by grounded theory. It should be noted, however, that both Røndahl and associates (2006) and the study I conducted employed convenience samples, whereby participants were recruited via local gay and lesbian email listservs and word-of-mouth. Thus, these findings may not be representative of all gay and lesbian persons' experiences in healthcare settings, and the participants' experiences with discrimination may have prompted them to volunteer for the studies.

### ***2.3.2 Heterosexist Discourse***

Finally, heterosexism also has been used to characterize some forms of subtle discrimination. As with heteronormativity, heterosexism can be manifested in many forms and often has been studied in relation to how it is enacted through talk. Using a discursive approach, Peel (2001) examined the language used by heterosexual human service workers (e.g., social workers, psychologists, and university wardens) during lesbian and gay awareness training sessions over a two-year period. Through her analysis, Peel (2001) identified three forms of mundane heterosexism, which she defines as “unnoticed and (normatively) unnoticeable incidents of heterosexism” (p. 541): 1) the belief that heterosexuals are subject to reverse discrimination; 2) the idea that non-heterosexuality is a deficit, whereby it is implied that to be a “complete, fully functioning and ‘normal’” (p. 547) person, one has to be heterosexual; and 3) the tendency to refuse diversity, which refers to the participants' tendency to deny the fact that gay men and lesbian women are different from heterosexuals.

Korobov (2004) also carried out a discursive analysis of adolescent boys' ( $N=54$ ) discourse in relation to heterosexism and found that they often used heterosexist language as a means of enacting their own masculinity and demonstrating their own heterosexuality. Moreover, the boys tended to express their opinions about homosexuality in a manner that would allow them to appear non-prejudiced (or even liberal and egalitarian) to the persons with whom they were interacting, by using strategies such as employing politically correct language, withholding their opinions, and presenting themselves as indifferent about homosexuality. In addition, a discursive analysis of a variety of analytic material (e.g., interviews, focus groups,

informal discussions, documentaries, and newspaper and magazine articles) conducted by Speer and Potter (2000) pointed to additional strategies that may be used to enact heterosexist beliefs, while appearing tolerant of homosexuality, including discounting heterosexism, displaying a lack of understanding of heterosexism, portraying other people as prejudiced, and showing concessions to the struggles encountered by gay and lesbian persons. Other examples of how subtle rhetorical arguments and acts of speech can be used to perpetuate heterosexism can be found in the literature (e.g., Gough, 2002; Land & Kitzinger, 2005), and also tend to focus on heterosexuals' discourse. Given the lack of attention devoted to understanding how gay men and lesbian women approach heterosexist discourse, a discursive analysis focusing on how sexual minority persons respond to prejudicial language would be informative.

As is apparent in the studies discussed above, both heteronormativity and heterosexism tend to focus on institutional structures and practices that lead to the expression of negativity toward lesbian and gay individuals and the privileging of heterosexuality over non-heterosexual orientations. Moreover, research (Kitzinger, 2005; Land & Kitzinger, 2005; Peel, 2001; Speer & Potter, 2000) within these frameworks tends to focus on the practice of discrimination (i.e., *how* discrimination is manifested between individuals) and does not take psychological dimensions of discrimination into account (e.g., perceptions of intention or harm and other reasons underlying *why* a certain act is considered to be discriminatory). Thus, greater attention to the *experience* of being the target of subtle discrimination and understanding how one comes to know that one has been discriminated against is necessary.

#### ***2.4 Impact of Subtle Anti-Gay/Lesbian Behaviours on Gay Men and Lesbian Women***

In addition to understanding the types of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that may occur on university campuses, it is important to understand the ways in which gay men and lesbian women are affected by these behaviours. The available information exploring the impact of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours on sexual minorities is limited, since this is an area that has only recently begun to garner attention from researchers. However, some existing research suggests that subtle discriminatory behaviours may be just as harmful as more blatant behaviours (Dovidio, 2001; Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990).

A handful of quantitative studies have indirectly explored the association between subtle discrimination and psychological wellbeing, primarily among university students. For instance, in their examination of the psychological sequelae of American LGB individuals' ( $N=69$ ; mostly



university students) experiences with everyday heterosexist (or homonegative) hassles documented via daily diaries (see Swim et al., 2007), Swim and colleagues (2009) found that experiences with everyday hassles were associated with increased feelings of anxiety and anger, but not depressed mood. Heterosexist hassles also changed participants' meta-perceptions of lesbian women and gay men. That is, heterosexist hassles were associated with decreased collective self-esteem (i.e., feelings towards LGB individuals as a social group), but did not affect personal self-esteem. As discussed earlier in relation to Swim et al.'s (2007) study, many of the everyday heterosexist hassles participants reported can be characterized as subtle in nature.

Two studies also have compared the psychological consequences of experiencing discrimination directly and indirectly among lesbian and gay individuals. Silverschanz and colleagues (2008) explored the psychological and academic outcomes of American sexual minority university students who had experienced blatant homonegative comments directed toward them personally (e.g., being called a "faggot") and subtle comments directed toward LGB persons in general (e.g., anti-gay/lesbian jokes told in their presence). Homonegativity experienced directly and indirectly (i.e., more subtly) were both associated with a number of psychological (e.g., anxiety and depression) and academic (e.g., school avoidance, and social acceptance) variables; however, incidents of blatant discrimination exhibited slightly stronger correlations with these outcomes. Waldo (1999) also investigated the impact of direct (i.e., blatant) and indirect (i.e., subtle) homonegativity on American LGB employees' job satisfaction, health conditions, and psychological distress. Results from this study indicated that both indirect and direct experiences of homonegativity led to decreased job satisfaction and greater psychological distress (e.g., increased depression and anxiety, and lowered self-esteem and life satisfaction); however, only direct homonegativity was associated with the presence of additional health conditions (e.g., severe headaches, ulcers, and feeling exhausted). In these studies, experiences of indirect discrimination may approximate experiences with subtle discrimination. Even so, our ability to draw conclusions about the psychological consequences of blatant versus subtle discrimination is limited by a lack of conceptual clarity regarding the correspondence of direct and indirect homonegative behaviour to blatant and subtle behaviour.

The few qualitative studies that have directly explored gay men's and lesbian women's experiences with subtle discrimination offer more concrete information about the impact of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours on wellbeing. For instance, Garnets and colleagues (1990)

reported that the psychological consequences that occur as a result of verbal victimization (including the use of anti-gay/lesbian epithets) can be more damaging than the consequences of physical violence because it is more difficult to identify the “psychic scars” (p. 373) of verbal remarks than wounds that result from physical violence. A lesbian participant in a study that used a constructivist approach to explore the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women ( $N=20$ ) living in an American university residence hall echoed this statement when she commented, “I think for the most part women are less physically violent than men would be. Women tend to talk behind people’s backs. They’re more emotionally violent...I think in a lot of ways, emotional violence is probably worse” (Evans & Broido, 2002, p. 34). In addition to alluding to the dangers associated with more emotionally violent actions, this quotation suggests that subtle homonegative behaviours might be more prominent among women than men, which is an issue worthy of further investigation. Moreover, Evans and Broido noted that the lesbian and bisexual women’s responses to more subtle homonegative behaviours, including feeling afraid, hiding their sexual orientation, and distancing themselves from others, were similar to their responses to blatant homonegative behaviours.

In another study employing an interpretive phenomenological analytic approach, Goyer (2006) reported that several Canadian gay and lesbian individuals who participated in a focus group designed to explore their experiences with old-fashioned and modern homonegativity perceived modern forms to be the most damaging. Participants considered modern homonegativity to be more dangerous because they could not predict the form in which it might present itself and were uncertain as to how to cope with more subtle homonegative behaviours. For instance, a male discussant commented, “I almost think that the old-fashioned or the overt, is almost easier to take... at least you know it’s out there and you kind of know how to deal with it” (p. 24). In addition, participants found themselves spending more time ruminating about subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours and becoming increasingly wary when interacting with strangers after encountering modern homonegativity. In support of this finding, a female participant stated, “you’re always questioning...it isn’t socially acceptable to be openly homophobic, and people learn to code their homophobia...I’ve had a difficult time really trusting how people are treating me, if I’m really getting an authentic, real answer from them” (p. 30).

Other researchers also have documented that gay and lesbian students may alter their behaviours on the basis of subtle indicators of prejudice. For instance, I found that, in workplaces

where homonegative comments were often made, participants ( $N=19$ ; lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer individuals) were less comfortable with being open about their sexual orientation to co-workers and often chose to keep their sexuality private in an effort to pre-emptively avoid discrimination (Jewell et al., in press). In these situations, they found themselves monitoring and “editing” their daily lives for others, and one participant indicated that such actions led to the compartmentalization of her identities (i.e., she was a closeted teacher at work and openly queer at home). Additional consequences of subtle homonegativity were mentioned by the participants. For instance, subtle discrimination encountered from family members who tended to ignore or dismiss the participants’ sexual orientations was associated with feelings of isolation and resentment. Many of the participants also commented on the ubiquitous nature of homonegativity and found that it was a constant presence in their lives that contributed to feelings of invisibility and being marginalized, as well as to living in a state of hypervigilance to detect indicators of prejudice.

Comparably, Hylton (2006) reported that, when lesbian and bisexual American social work students interacted with individuals who used subtle prejudicial language, they tended to engage in various strategies, such as providing evasive answers to personal questions, masking their sexual orientation, and limiting their contact with these individuals, to avoid disclosing their sexual orientation and being discriminated against by others. Moreover, the degree to which individuals feel compelled to manage or conceal their sexuality in public spheres may influence the extent to which they experience their identities as harmonious (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Further, the constant vigilance that sexual minorities must engage in to identify possible threats to their wellbeing and to manage the stigma that is associated with their sexual identity is thought to place additional stress (i.e., minority stress) on gay men and lesbian women (DiPlacido, 1998).

In general, the qualitative studies (Evans & Broido, 2002; Goyer, 2006; Hylton, 2006; Jewell et al., in press) described above serve as rich sources of information with respect to the nuanced way in which subtle discrimination is experienced by and affects sexual minority individuals. While these studies have been helpful in advancing our understanding about the impact of subtle homonegative behaviours on sexual minorities, the implications of subtle forms of discrimination for LGB individuals are still not well understood. In particular, researchers need to more carefully tease apart blatant and subtle discrimination and systematically explore the impact of these various types of behaviours on physical and psychological wellbeing.

## ***2.5 Statement of the Problem***

The lack of attention that has been paid to the study of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours may partially be due to the fact that research on behavioural homonegativity has typically lagged behind research investigating negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. The majority of research conducted on homonegativity over the last three decades has generally focused on measuring homonegative attitudes and determining various correlates of these attitudes, while relatively little emphasis has been placed on understanding behavioural manifestations of homonegativity or the impact of these behaviours (Jewell & Morrison, 2010).

Another factor which has likely contributed to the omission of research on subtle homonegative behaviours is that many existing measures simply do not take this construct into account. For instance, scale items related to heterosexuals' demeanour when interacting with gay men and lesbian women, use of anti-gay/lesbian epithets and slang words, or refusal to befriend gay or lesbian individuals are notably absent from the Self-Report Behaviour Scale-Revised (SBS-R; Roderick et al., 1998), a scale used by numerous researchers to document university students' participation in anti-gay/lesbian behaviours (Jewell & Morrison, 2010; Patel et al., 1995; Roderick et al., 1998). In fact, of the four self-report behavioural measures developed to assess heterosexuals' participation in homonegative behaviours (i.e., SBS, Patel et al., 1995; SBS-R, Roderick et al., 1998; DBS, Rey & Gibson, 1997; and a questionnaire employed by Franklin, 2000), only the DBS included subtle behaviours. However, information regarding the specific items included on the DBS is not available and, as a result, it is not possible to employ this scale in future research (P. R. Gibson, personal communication, August 21, 2008<sup>1</sup>).

In addition, many of the existing behavioural homonegativity measures were developed during the 1990s at a time when the cultural atmosphere toward gay and lesbian individuals was much more negative. The greater intolerance toward gay and lesbian individuals witnessed during the 1990s is thought to be one of the repercussions of the AIDS epidemic, a disease that was purported by the media to be a "gay plague" (Franklin & Herek, 1999, p. 144; Messinger, 2006). In fact, Ruel and Campbell (2006) determined that an increase in negative attitudes toward homosexuality among the American general public coincided with the diffusing period of the AIDS pandemic (circa 1986 to 1991), a period during which information about the disease

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<sup>1</sup> The only information that is available about the procedures employed in this study and the DBS is what was reported in the original article.

appeared frequently in the media. Ruel and Campbell documented that the AIDS epidemic was related to more intolerant attitudes about gay and lesbian civil rights among American citizens from 1986 to 1998. In addition, several reports from the 1990s indicated that some heterosexuals reacted to their fear of AIDS by attacking gay and lesbian individuals (Franklin & Herek, 1999). Thus, the existing behavioural scales were likely developed to capture the blatant manifestations of homonegativity that were prevalent during that period, since no behavioural scales existed prior to that time. The danger associated with continuing to use measures of behavioural homonegativity that only capture a subset of the range of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that may be perpetrated in contemporary society is that it distorts perceptions of the extent to which discrimination is occurring and may potentially lead researchers to erroneously conclude that university campuses (and our broader society) are more tolerant and accepting of gay and lesbian students than they actually are.

Finally, most research exploring the various types of discriminatory behaviours encountered by lesbian and gay persons and the impact of subtle discrimination on sexual minority persons have employed either American (e.g., Rey & Gibson, 1997; Swim et al., 2007, 2009; Waldo, 1999) or British samples (Kitzinger, 2005; Land & Kitzinger, 2005; Peel, 2001; Speer & Potter, 2000). Little information about the nature of subtle (or blatant) homonegativity in Canada is available; however, in comparison to lesbian and gay persons living in the United States and the United Kingdom, sexual minorities in Canada have greater legal recognition and, conceivably, may be more likely to encounter subtle discrimination (Lanutti, 2005; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2010; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006). Despite the reduced institutional discrimination against sexual minorities in Canada, the extent to which these policies expel all forms of discrimination or inadvertently promote subtle forms of discrimination is unknown. Thus, research investigating how discrimination may be manifested in a more politically tolerant country is needed.

Moving beyond these general observations of the literature in relation to the study of subtle discrimination, there are three key gaps that need to be addressed with respect to homonegativity directed toward gay and lesbian university students. First, there is a paucity of research exploring the occurrence of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours on Canadian university campuses and gay and lesbian students' experiences with these behaviours. Given that subtle discriminatory behaviour appears to be a contemporary means through which heterosexual

university students express their homonegativity, and university campuses appear to be an environment particularly conducive to these displays of homonegativity, the exclusion of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour from past studies is problematic. Additional research is needed to explore the types of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that are experienced by gay and lesbian students and the processes in which the students engage to identify that they have been the target of subtle discrimination.

Second, little is known about the consequences that subtle discriminatory behaviours have for the lives of gay men and lesbian women. Given evidence suggesting that subtle discriminatory behaviours may be just as, if not more, pernicious than blatant behaviours (Dovidio, 2001), it is critical that we understand how subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours affect gay and lesbian students. In particular, in-depth information offering insight into the *lived experience* of being the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours would be valuable in understanding how these behaviours are manifested and affect gay and lesbian university students.

Finally, little attention has been paid to developing definitions of blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. It is necessary to have clear, concise definitions of these phenomena to ensure that researchers are using these terms to consistently refer to the same types of discrimination.

## ***2.6 Purpose and Specific Aims***

The current study served to address existing gaps in the literature by using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of self-identified gay and lesbian university students who have either been the direct targets of homonegativity or been affected by the presence of homonegativity in their lifeworlds. Given the questions currently unanswered in the literature (namely, what are subtle homonegative behaviours and what is the experience of being the target of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour), a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which lends itself to an in-depth understanding of the essence of an experience, seemed fitting. Two questions guided this research: What is the *lived experience* of being the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, especially behaviours that are subtle? And what is the *lived meaning* of being the target of an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour? Special attention was paid to: 1) describing the lived experiences of gay and lesbian university students who have encountered or been affected by anti-gay/lesbian behaviours; 2) exploring how gay and lesbian university students find meaning in their experiences of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours; and 3) identifying the

essential aspects of blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, including the features that distinguish these behaviours from each other.

### **CHAPTER THREE—HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY AS A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

At its core, phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). It is grounded in a rich philosophical history and is informed largely by the writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer (Dowling, 2007). Over time, several traditions of phenomenology have emerged, with the two most common approaches being descriptive (or empirical) phenomenology and hermeneutic (or interpretive) phenomenology (Hein & Austin, 2001; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Descriptive phenomenology most closely follows the writings of Husserl, while hermeneutic phenomenology is more closely aligned to the philosophies of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer (Hein & Austin, 2001; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

Briefly, the underlying goal of descriptive phenomenological practice, as outlined by Husserl, is to identify and describe the structures of reality as they appear through human consciousness (Laverty, 2003; Mackey, 2009). In particular, descriptive phenomenology is based on the premise that it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the essences of a phenomenon (i.e., commonalities across a phenomenon's potentially diverse appearances) that is free from bias or interpretation (Hein & Austin, 2001; Lopez & Willis, 2004). To grasp the essential aspects of a phenomenon, Husserl believed it was possible to engage in a process of bracketing or phenomenological reduction in which one's preconceived notions and assumptions are set aside to see the phenomenon in an uninhibited manner (Hein & Austin, 2001; Husserl, 1964; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). The goal, as suggested by Husserl, is to go "back to the things themselves" (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 47) to describe them as accurately and faithfully as possible, free of possible distortions of meaning (Mackey, 2009).

In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with understanding the experience of being-in-the-world (Hein & Austin, 2001). Contrary to Husserl, Heidegger (1962) postulated that it is impossible to examine experience apart from the world in which a person exists and to grasp the essence of a phenomenon in a manner that is free of bias. In fact, hermeneutic phenomenology presupposes that some apriori understanding is necessary in understanding a phenomenon (Hein & Austin, 2001; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Thus, Heidegger surmised that phenomenology should be concerned with understanding the nature of being human in the contexts in which life occurs and, by incorporating hermeneutics (i.e., the practice of interpreting



text<sup>2</sup> to unveil meaning that may not be apparent), it is possible to understand the underlying meaning of the human experience of a phenomenon (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology is not just concerned with the nature of human consciousness as is the case with descriptive phenomenology; it is concerned with the broader questions of human experience and existence (Heidegger, 1962; Hein & Austin, 2001). Consequently, an emphasis has been placed on the meaning of lived experience in the current study, due to a need in the literature to increase our understanding of what it means to be the target of subtle homonegative behaviour and the implications that being targeted has for the lived realities of gay and lesbian university students.

In particular, van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach was employed to guide the current study, as it allows for a phenomenon to be explored from the vantage of the persons who directly experience it, while attending to the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which they live. Further, van Manen's approach requires analysis to be performed at such a depth that aspects of the phenomenon that have been hidden or veiled can be revealed and a greater understanding about what it means to be human in a particular context can be achieved (Munhall, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Finally, while van Manen's approach is not prescriptive, there has been some scholarship explicating the research activities that should be considered when conducting inquiries of this nature, which enhances the ability of researchers to adeptly carry out this type of phenomenology (Hein & Austin, 2001; Munhall, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Given the similarities between the intended purpose of this study and van Manen's approach, it was deemed to be a suitable methodology to employ.

### ***3.1 Philosophical Basis of Hermeneutic Phenomenology***

In general, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with describing and understanding interpretations of the possible meaning of lived experience (van Manen, 1990; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Lived experience refers to the way in which the world is immediately experienced pre-reflectively before a person conceptualizes, categorizes, or reflects upon it (Dilthey, 1985; Husserl, 1964; Schutz & Luckman, 1973). Thus, a critical question asked by this approach is what does it mean to *be* in the world in a particular way? (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999; van Manen, 1990). To answer this question, hermeneutic phenomenology offers a means to systematically uncover and describe the essences (i.e., internal meaning structures or

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of this research, text may refer to interview transcripts, documents written by the participants or researcher, literature, and other written literary materials.

paradigms) of lived experience. Ultimately, by understanding the essence of a phenomenon, it is possible to determine the qualities of lived experience that make the phenomenon what it is and without which, it would no longer be (Husserl, 1982; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990).

There are several philosophical assumptions of hermeneutic phenomenology that need to be considered, including those pertaining to the emphasis placed on interpretation in this methodology, its ontological underpinnings, its epistemological basis in interpretivism (where concepts such as intentionality and intersubjectivity are integral), and the role of pre-existing notions and understandings in grasping the nature of a phenomenon. Specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology is based on the assumption that interpretation is a key component of the phenomenological approach that is necessary for fully understanding the lived experience, since the possible meaning of such experience may be hidden or veiled (Polkinghorne, 1983; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999; van Manen, 1990). The idea that interpretation is required to arrive at a deeper understanding of the possible meaning of human action and expression is derived from the tradition of hermeneutics (Polkinghorne, 1983). Ultimately, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to acquire, through interpretation, a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology is strongly based in existentialism and provides an interpretive understanding of existence in the world (Mackey, 2009; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999; van Manen, 1990).

Given the focus that hermeneutic phenomenology places on being-in-the-world and lived or existential meaning, questions asked within this tradition tend to be ontological in nature. That is, they tend to be concerned with the nature of reality (Schwandt, 2007) or, in other words, the nature of a phenomenon as it is meaningfully experienced (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009; van Manen, 1990). In comparison, questions asked within the descriptive phenomenological tradition tend to be epistemological in nature (Lavery, 2003) with a focus on determining the kinds of knowledge that are possible or, more colloquially, how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). Ontologically, hermeneutic phenomenology claims that the experience of *being* is subjective because humans must constantly engage in interpretation to find meaning or purpose in their lifeworlds (Armour et al., 2009; van Manen, 1990). Thus, reality is considered to be constructed, fluid, relative, historical, and social; and multiple interpretations of reality are thought to be possible (Armour et al., 2009; Lavery, 2003; van Manen, 1990). In contrast, descriptive phenomenological approaches tend to assume that reality is objective and exists independently of

history and culture, that only one correct interpretation of reality is possible, and the structures of a phenomenon are universal rather than contingent on the context in which they are situated (Hein & Austin, 2001; Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Epistemologically (i.e., with respect to the nature of knowledge and the criteria that are used to judge whether particular forms of knowledge are valid; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007), hermeneutic phenomenology falls within the paradigm of interpretivism. Interpretivism is based on the assumption that our view of social reality is the product of processes through which social actors negotiate meanings for various actions and situations (Crotty, 1998). There is no agreed upon definition of interpretivism; however, Schwandt (2000) states there are three assumptions common to most definitions: 1) human action is purposeful (i.e., action must be understood in terms of interpretations of striving toward a goal); 2) it is necessary to remain respectful and loyal to a person's conception of his or her lifeworld (i.e., interpretative science should describe participants' lived experiences in a manner that is authentic); and 3) it is possible to understand the subjective meaning of action in an objective manner. It is through the process of intentionality (which refers to the way in which individuals relate to their world) that it is possible to objectively understand subjective meaning (Schwandt, 2007).

Intentionality is based on the ideas that a person's thoughts are always *about* something and that things acquire meaning only when there is a consciousness of them (Crotty, 1998). In fact, consciousness is the only access humans have to the world (van Manen, 1990). Thus, the subject and object of any thought or interaction are always mutually interdependent, and the natural and social worlds do not exist independently, but are dependent on each other (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). In other words, people do not exist separately or independently from the world, and it is only possible to come to know the world through our participation in it (Hein & Austin, 2001). Moreover, it is not possible to understand an action without exploring the meaning that action has for the actor, and it is necessary to study the subjective processes of a person to access their personal meanings (Polkinghorne, 1983).

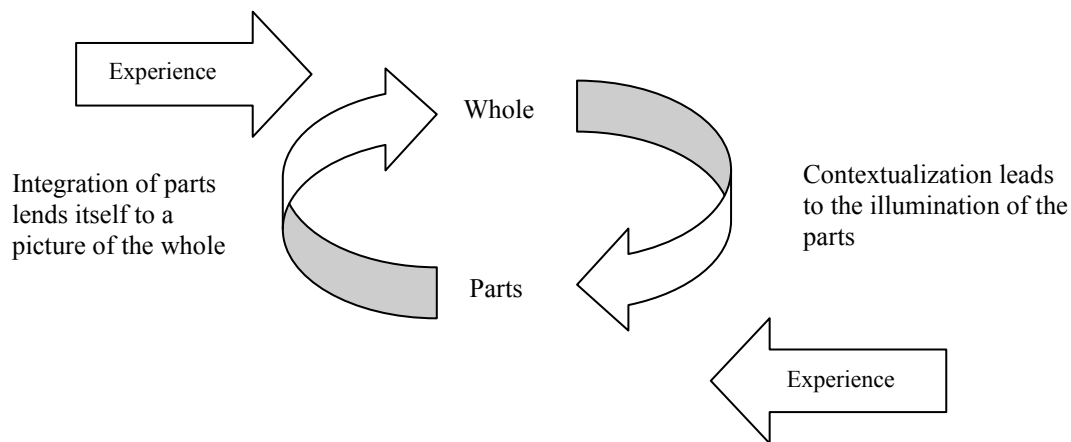
Hermeneutic phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer posit that consciousness can never be described directly and that the world cannot be described without referencing the experience of a given person (van Manen, 1990). That is, it is impossible to *know* directly another person's subjective experiences; however, it is possible to attain an understanding of others' experiences by making interpretations about their intentions (Schwandt,

2007). In particular, it is because thought is dependent on the interaction between the mind and the world that the “location” of where thought occurs is not within the human mind, but external to it (Schwandt, 2007). Thought exists in an intersubjective realm where members of a given cultural, historical, and linguistic community are able to share a vocabulary that allows them to construct meaning in similar and consistent ways by taking for granted that we experience the same reality (Hein & Austin, 2001; Holstein & Gubrium, 2005; Schutz & Luckman, 1973). Despite the ability to construct mutually agreed upon meanings, Heidegger and Gadamer (according to Polkinghorne, 1983) suggest that any form of understanding is interpretation and, as a result, humans are always engaged in interpretation. Within hermeneutic phenomenology, “knowledge or knowing is considered subjective, incomplete, and transactional” (Armour et al., 2009, p. 106).

Given that it is not possible to describe consciousness directly, the essences of a given phenomenon can only be grasped or intuited by studying particular instances of the phenomenon as it is encountered in a person’s everyday life while he/she is naturally engaged in his/her world (van Manen, 1990; Schwandt, 2007). Further, it is thought that our understanding of a phenomenon will be situated in our apriori understandings of human nature. As mentioned previously, descriptive phenomenological traditions encourage researchers to “bracket” their presuppositions to prevent them from influencing their perceptions of lived experience and to enhance their ability to arrive at the universal structures of human experience through a process of phenomenological reduction (Hein & Austin, 2001; Husserl, 1964; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). However, hermeneutic phenomenology posits that it is impossible for researchers to extricate themselves from the socio-historical tradition to which they belong when engaging in the act of interpretation (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1990). Therefore, attempts to remove one’s socio-historically situated biases or prejudices when engaging in interpretation to arrive at a “clearer” understanding are deemed impossible because meaning is not something that is external, objective, and ahistorical. Instead, van Manen (1990) encourages researchers engaging in hermeneutic phenomenology to make explicit their understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories to become aware of how their own experiences may influence the meaning which is drawn from an interpretation. Consequently, the assumption that a phenomenon can only be understood by taking into account the context in which it occurs suggests that, within a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, any essences that are identified

may only reflect the underlying meaning structures of that experience as it pertains to a particular group of individuals in a given setting at a certain point in time.

With respect to the process of interpretation, Gadamer (as cited in Polkinghorne, 1983) posits that interpretation is a “fusion of horizons” or a dialectical interaction between the expectations of the interpreter and the meanings in text (Polkinghorne, 1983). Essentially, Gadamer describes an ontological hermeneutic circle in which it is assumed that all efforts to interpret or understand takes place in a particular context or background (e.g., a historical tradition or web of beliefs) that cannot be transcended and will inevitably influence how the object is interpreted (see Figure 2 for a graphical depiction; Schwandt, 2007). Moreover, interpretation is perceived to be a circular and iterative process characterized by movement from the whole to the parts and from the parts to the whole (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1983).



*Figure 2.* The hermeneutic circle (adapted from Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007)

To summarize, hermeneutic phenomenology is both descriptive and interpretative. From this approach, one should arrive at a description of the essence of the lived experience of a given phenomenon (i.e., an immediate description of the lifeworld as lived). Further, an understanding of the meaning of lived experience should be achieved through interpretation (i.e., a mediated description of the lifeworld). Given that the ultimate aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to acquire a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences through in-depth accounts (Hein & Austin, 2001), the key questions asked through this research were: “What is it like to experience anti-gay/lesbian behaviours?” “What does it mean to experience an

anti-gay/lesbian behaviour?” and “What is the nature or essence of the experience of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours?” These questions are reflective of those typically asked within a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. By engaging in this research, I hoped to examine and reflect upon gay and lesbian university students’ everyday ways of being to achieve greater insight into the essential aspects or qualities of their experiences with blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours and to describe and understand what it means to be discriminated against in these ways.

### ***3.2 Methodology and Method***

There are no strict guidelines with respect to how to design and conduct a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. In fact, the openness and flexibility of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach reflects another way in which this tradition differs from descriptive phenomenology, since descriptive phenomenological approaches tend to be characterized by an explicit set of procedures related to the design, data analysis, and explication of these studies—hence, its alternate name of empirical phenomenology (Hein & Austin, 2001). Even so, van Manen (1990) does identify six research activities that should be considered when carrying out a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis: “1) turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world; 2) reflecting on experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; 3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; 5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon; and 6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.” (p. 30-31). In the following sections, I explain how I incorporated the research activities recommended by van Manen into the present inquiry.

#### ***3.2.1 Turning to the Phenomenon***

In undertaking a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, van Manen (1990) encourages researchers to seek out a phenomenon which deeply interests them and to examine their own personal experiences with it. The way in which we are oriented toward a phenomenon influences how we interpret its nature (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, it was critical that I explicitly identify and reflect upon my own biases, beliefs, preconceptions, theories, and assumptions to allow myself to then deliberately hold them at bay and view the data anew so as to see the gay and lesbian university students’ experiences with discrimination in the form it showed itself (Munhall, 2007; van Manen, 1990). My goal was to attempt to achieve a state of “unknowing”

where it was possible to view the phenomenon as it was experienced, rather than as I believed or expected it to be manifested (Munhall, 2007). In the following paragraphs, I reflect upon the reasons why I chose to explore the nature of subtle discrimination as it is experienced by gay and lesbian university students, as well as my own biases and understandings that may have influenced how I perceived the data.

First, I would like to share my own personal demographic information to highlight the similarities and differences between myself and the individuals who took part in the study. I am a 28 year old white, female university student, which places me as just a few years older than, and in the same ethnic group as most of the persons who participated in my study. However, unlike the participants, I am heterosexual. Consequently, I cannot possibly share their experiences of being gay or lesbian university students who have been targets of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. I can, nevertheless, achieve insight into the atmosphere in which some of the participants lived through my own personal experiences. I grew up in a small town in rural Alberta and have seen rampant homonegativity, not in the sense of gay-bashing, but in the sense of blatant prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory remarks, an overt lack of understanding and willingness to accept sexual minorities, and, of course, a litany of anti-gay/lesbian comments. Growing up in (and frequently returning to) such an atmosphere made it clear to me that certain sectors of our society are neither accepting nor tolerant of sexual minorities. Further, I have found myself, at certain moments, questioning how forthright I should be disclosing the topic of my dissertation research in contexts I know to be unwelcoming of gay and lesbian issues or interactions with persons I know to be homonegative. In those situations, I assume that my opinions will be ill-received and that I will potentially instigate a conversation rife with homonegative rhetoric over which I sometimes feel I have little hope in changing. Of course, this does not compare to deciding whether to be open about a core aspect of one's identity, but I can appreciate how certain environments or people can give one pause.

In terms of understanding why I chose to carry out a phenomenological investigation of gay and lesbian students' experiences of discrimination, I was drawn to this phenomenon because it seems unjust to me that a group of people may be marginalized simply because of who they love. Aside from racism directed toward Aboriginal people, gay men and lesbian women constitute the social groups that I most often observe being derogated by those around me. I am a proponent of equality and have always been critical of practices and behaviours that result in the

marginalization of minority groups. As such, it seemed fitting that I use my dissertation as a means for garnering knowledge that can ameliorate what appears to be one of the most pressing social problems in the communities in which I have lived.

At this juncture, it also is important to acknowledge that I am a social psychologist by training and have been a social psychologist at heart for as long as I can remember. By virtue of my training, a number of social psychological concepts, theories, and principles are embedded in the way in which I view the world, and I am particularly sensitive to issues related to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. My program of research has largely been centred on understanding subtle forms of discrimination that may be directed toward gay and lesbian persons, and I have consequently developed a number of beliefs about this phenomenon, many of which are articulated in Chapters One and Two of this study. Most notably, I assume that subtle homonegative behaviours are more prevalent than blatant behaviours, particularly in environments thought to be more liberal or open-minded, such as universities. Further, in addition to being more prevalent, I also assume that subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours can be more damaging over the long term for two reasons: 1) the ambiguity associated with such behaviours can make it difficult to determine whether discrimination actually occurred and, as a result, individuals may ruminate about the behaviour longer than they would about a blatant behaviour in which the attack was explicit and the intended purpose known; and 2) people likely dismiss or ignore subtle discriminatory behaviours on a regular basis but, at some level, I suspect that these ostensibly minor occurrences add up to have some sort of psychological (or even physical) effect on the individual.

When analyzing the data, I was particularly vigilant about the ways in which these beliefs may have influenced how I interpreted the participants' experiences and attempted to hold these assumptions at bay in order to hear the participants' words as faithfully as possible. In addition, I did not revisit the literature that I had initially reviewed until I had completed my analysis to further minimize the influence of my pre-understandings when interpreting the data. I also discussed the data with my supervisor in a further attempt to identify my biases when interpreting the data, and maintained a journal throughout the study to reflect upon my thoughts and feelings about the data, my reactions to the participants' experiences, and the ways in which my own responses may have influenced my understanding of their narratives. Munhall (2007) suggests that, by keeping a personal journal while carrying out a phenomenological



investigation, it is possible to enhance one’s ability to *see* the phenomenon as it presents itself rather than how we might assume it to exist. Through journaling, it also was possible for me to observe how my understanding of the phenomenon changed throughout the course of the study, including how I influenced and was influenced by the participants.

### 3.2.2 Investigating Experience As It Is Lived

Researchers engaging in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiries are charged with the task of investigating the experience of the phenomenon as it is lived and not as it may be conceptualized (van Manen, 1990). As such, data should be systematically collected using methods which allow participants to share their experiences with a particular phenomenon and permit an in-depth investigation into these accounts. In the current study, open-ended face-to-face interviews and daily diaries were used to explore the gay and lesbian students’ experiences with discrimination. Both methods have been recognized as permitting researchers to interact with, and learn about, individuals’ experiences at the level of detail required for a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (Fontana & Frey, 2005; van Manen, 1990). However, as each method is characterized by its own set of limitations (which will be outlined below), I chose to use both in an effort to offset these restrictions. The use of two methods to explore the gay and lesbian students’ experiences allowed for triangulation to occur wherein it was possible to gain greater insight into the nature of these experiences by integrating the data obtained from both techniques (Atkinson, & Delamont, 2005; Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). Data collected from the interviews and daily diaries was integrated during the analysis. Figure 3 depicts the sequence of interview and daily diary data collection and analysis.

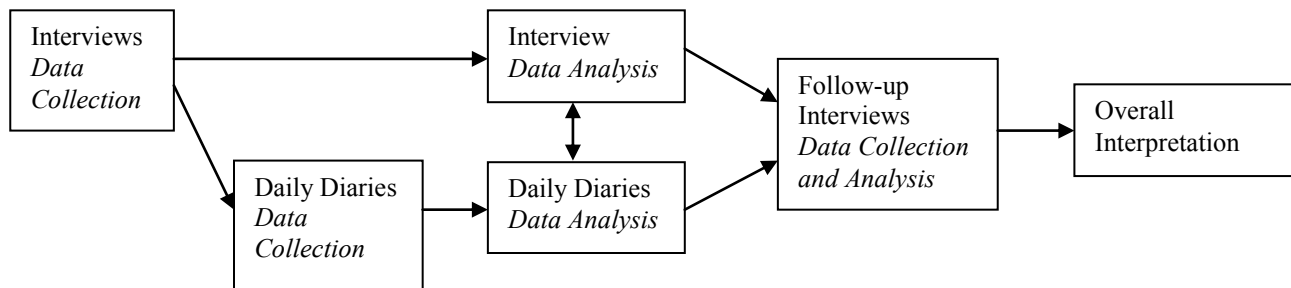


Figure 3. Overview of the sequence of data collection and analysis

The advantage of employing interviews in this study was the flexibility it afforded to thoroughly explore elements of the gay and lesbian students’ experiences, such as their thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and social interactions, in relation to a given event. I used an

interview guide which outlined a number of areas that I wished to ask the participants about; however, the interviews were not bound by the interview guide and the participants' narratives of events were allowed to unfold in a way that was natural to the conversation. I also was able to use follow-up interviews with a handful of participants to have a conversation about the extent to which my findings resonated with their personal experiences. Interviews are considered to be a means through which the researcher and participants mutually accomplish a story about their experiences. It is increasingly being recognized that the content of an interview is largely dependent on the nature of the interaction that occurs between the researcher and the respondent and that both parties play a key role in what unfolds (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that interviews are not a neutral method of data collection, but one in which both the researcher and interviewee are active participants (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Despite the flexibility associated with interviews, reflection on lived experience, as it occurs during interviews, is necessarily recollective (van Manen, 1990). Research has found that when recalling past events, individuals tend to employ a variety of involuntary and unconscious heuristics that bias their ability to recall the nature of an event exactly as it occurs (Smyth & Stone, 2003). For instance, individuals tend to recall events in accordance with their beliefs or worldview, the outcome of an event tends to affect how someone remembers a given experience, and recollections of experiences tend to differ according to the environment in which the person is recalling the event (Smyth & Stone, 2003; Shiffman, Stone, & Hufford, 2008; Thomsen & Brinkman, 2009). Therefore, participants' access to their lived experiences when recalled in the interviews may be biased by the heuristics employed by the human mind and, as a result, the thoughts, emotions, and meanings associated with a given memory may change over time (Thomsen & Brinkman, 2009). It was hoped that by collecting data via diary entries completed soon after anti-gay/lesbian behaviours occurred, participants' descriptions of their lived experiences would be less affected by the potential limitations of retrospective accounts, since there would be less time for participants to reflect upon, conceptualize, and categorize the experience (van Manen, 1990; Shiffman et al., 2008). Thus, the main impetus for including daily dairies was to gain more immediate insight into the participants' lived experiences.

Moreover, it may be possible to identify through daily diary entries experiences with subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that may be minimized over time or forgotten (and consequently not mentioned in interviews; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Thomsen

and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that the specific memories individuals are able to readily recall may be less representative of their lifeworlds because they tend to be remembered due to their unusualness, importance, and emotional intensity, or because they have been previously shared. Thus, less salient and more mundane experiences of homonegativity that may otherwise be pushed aside as a function of everyday living and survival may be captured (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003; Shiffman et al., 2008). Unfortunately, the daily diaries did not provide me with the opportunity to further probe elements of the participants' experiences that were unclear; however, keeping a diary did help the participants reflect upon and describe significant aspects of their experience (van Manen, 1990).

When collecting diary data, it is possible to employ event-based sampling (i.e., a diary entry is made immediately after a predefined event occurs), time-based sampling (i.e., a diary entry is made according to a time schedule), or a combination of the two approaches (Shiffman et al., 2008). In the current study, a time-based sampling approach was used wherein participants were asked to complete their diary entries prior to going to bed each evening because the technology to facilitate an event-based submission process was not available. However, participants were asked to send me a text message via their cellular phones with a brief description of their experience with a homonegative behaviour immediately after an event occurred in an effort to capture their lived experience before they had any time to reflect upon the incident. Further, participants were specifically asked to submit their entries electronically to allow the time that participants completed their entries to be tracked and to reduce the likelihood of hoarding. Shiffman et al. (2003) reported that one of the most significant problems plaguing paper-and-pencil diary entries was that upwards of 85 to 90% of participants tend to complete their entries immediately before meeting the researcher. However, the longer participants wait to complete their entries, the greater the likelihood that their perceptions of lived experience will be affected by the limitations associated with retrospective recall. Thus, electronic submission was incorporated as a means of increasing participants' accountability in terms of when they completed their entries. Figure 4 depicts the sequence of data collection.

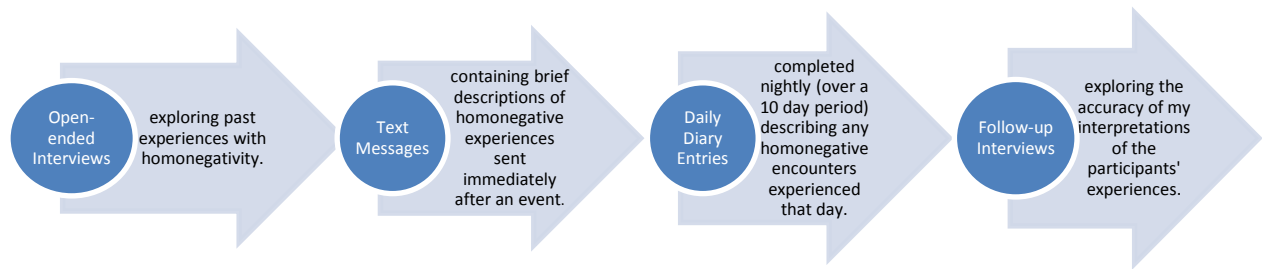


Figure 4. Overview of the methods employed and sequence of data collection.

**Procedures specific to open-ended interviews.** Following ethical approval, a purposeful sample consisting of 20 gay and lesbian university students (10 gay men, 10 lesbian women) were recruited to participate in open-ended interviews. To be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to meet the following inclusion criteria: self-identify as a gay, lesbian, or queer person; attend the University of Saskatchewan as either an undergraduate or graduate student; and be fluent in English. In addition, the students had to feel that they had either been the direct target of homonegativity or, if they had not experienced homonegativity directly, could comment on how they had been affected by the existence of homonegativity. Phenomenological studies often employ sample sizes of approximately 10 participants (Munhall, 2007); thus, the current study included more participants than is typical for studies of this nature.

To recruit participants, a maximum variation-type sampling approach (Patton, 2002) was employed through which I hoped to recruit a diverse range of gay and lesbian students, including those who were not out, did not belong to local gay and lesbian organizations, came from a variety of disciplines, and were in various phases of their educational journey. As such, I placed an advertisement on a university-wide electronic bulletin board, and individuals who were eligible and interested in participating in the study were encouraged to contact me directly (see Appendix A for a copy of the advertisement). In addition, some individuals were recruited through word-of-mouth and learned about the study from their friends who had already participated in an interview. Before scheduling the interview at a time and location that was convenient, I briefly confirmed with the participants (generally through an email conversation) that they were indeed eligible to participate. It should also be noted that a gay man who was not involved in the study reviewed the interview guide before any interviews were conducted to ensure that the language used in the guide was appropriate.

During the first (and primary) phase of interview data collection, I conducted 20 face-to-face interviews with 10 gay and 10 lesbian participants; all participants chose to meet in a meeting room I had available at the university. Prior to beginning the interviews, I explained the purpose of the study to the participants and informed them of their rights as participants in the study. I then obtained written informed consent from them and asked for their permission to record the interview (see Appendix B for the Consent Form). All interviews were digitally recorded. The interviews began by allowing the participants to share with me their experiences as a gay or lesbian student at the university and to comment on the extent to which they felt safe or welcome at the university. I then asked them additional questions from the interview guide (see Appendix C), including whether they had any experiences with blatant homonegativity, intentional or unintentional subtle discrimination, or homopositive behaviours. They also were asked to describe any common mistakes they perceived heterosexuals to make when interacting with them. Given the emphasis on understanding the participants' lived experiences, they were probed to provide descriptions of concrete occurrences which they had experienced (Thomsen & Brinkmann, 2009). In relation to any experiences with discrimination that were mentioned, participants were asked to describe their thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations at the time the behaviour occurred, as well as the impact they perceived the behaviour to have on them or the interaction in which they had been involved when the event occurred. The interviews concluded by asking the participants to define blatant and subtle homonegative behaviour (including how it feels to be the target of a blatant versus a subtle homonegative behaviour and the key features that distinguish these types of behaviours) and reflect upon how they find meaning in the homonegativity that was directed toward them.

The interview questions were developed in keeping with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and were informed by past research exploring homonegativity directed toward gay and lesbian students (as documented in Chapters One and Two of this study). Sample interview questions included: What has been your experience with negative behaviours being directed toward you on the basis of your sexual orientation [*as gay or lesbian*]? What impact did the experience have on you? How has the experience affected you? Could you describe in detail an experience in which you weren't one hundred percent sure whether someone meant to treat you negatively on the basis of your sexual orientation? How do you find meaning in or make sense of homonegative behaviours?

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked to complete a few demographic questions to allow me to contextualize the sample. Specifically, they were asked about their age, sex, academic major, whether they were an undergraduate or graduate student, year of university, ethnic background, marital status, and sexual orientation. To assess the extent to which participants have contact with and are involved in the gay and lesbian community, they also were asked to answer the seven items that comprise the Involvement in the Gay Community Scale (IGCS) developed by Tiggemann, Martins, and Kirkbride (2007). Each item was rated using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Finally, to obtain a sense of how open the participants were about their sexual orientation, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they were out to various people in their lives and how accepting these people were of their sexual orientation. See Appendix D for the demographics questionnaire.

After completing the demographics questionnaire, the gay and lesbian students were debriefed and provided with a list of resources which they were free to contact if they felt distressed about anything that was discussed during the interview (see Appendix E). Participants also were asked whether they wished to review a copy of the transcript from the interview (see Appendix F). Seven participants opted to review their transcript and later released the transcript to me for inclusion in the study via a transcript release form (see Appendix G). Before leaving, the participants also were asked if I could contact them again in the future in case I had any additional questions for them or wanted to meet with them to discuss my interpretations of the results. In addition, they were asked if they would be interested in learning about the daily diary component of the study.

The interviews ranged in length from 50 to 100 minutes. I took field notes during the interviews, wrote memos documenting the thoughts I had in relation to the theoretical and methodological aspects of the study, and kept a journal about my own personal responses to the interviews (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). I conducted all the interviews, as I was the person who was the most knowledgeable about the information that needed to be obtained from each interview and wanted to ensure that the depth of the data collected was adequate. Towards the end of the interview data collection period with both the lesbian and gay participants, relatively little new information about the participants' experiences with homonegative behaviour emerged, which suggested that the phenomenon had been thoroughly explored and saturation

had been achieved (at least for many content areas of the interviews; Patton, 2002). Finally, the participants received a \$20.00 gift certificate for agreeing to participate in the interview immediately after it concluded; however I informed the participants before the interview began that they could stop the interview at any point, and I would give them the gift certificate at that time.

*Procedures specific to daily diaries.* The *same* participants who took part in individual interviews were invited to submit daily diary entries for a ten-day period following their initial interview. All, but one participant, agreed to participate in the daily diaries. At the conclusion of the interview, I explained the nature and purpose of the diary study to the participants and informed them of their rights as participants in this phase of the study. Those who were interested in participating were then asked to provide written informed consent (see Appendix H for the Consent Form).

On the first day of the daily diary data collection period (which was based on the preferred start date of the participant), I emailed a set of instructions to the participant describing the procedures of the daily diaries in detail (see Appendix I—namely, each night before going to bed, the participants were asked to complete an online diary entry through a website describing any experiences they had that day with blatant or subtle homonegativity, homopositive behaviours, or situations in which they felt uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation). A series of six questions comprised the diary entry (see Appendix J for complete versions of the questions): Did you experience any anti-gay/lesbian behaviours today? How many anti-gay/lesbian behaviours did you experience today? Please describe in detail your experience with this anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. What impact did this experience have on you? What meaning do you find in this experience or how do you make sense of this experience? What other thoughts, comments, or observations do you have about this incident? Even if participants did not have any experiences with homonegativity that day, they were asked to submit a diary entry stating so. I sent a personalized email to the participants each night at approximately 7:00 p.m. reminding them to complete their nightly diary entry to increase compliance.

In general, the majority of participants submitted a diary entry each night. Four participants forgot to submit an entry one night during the data collection period, while three participants forgot to submit an entry two nights throughout the 10-day period. In each case, the participants informed me the next day that they had not experienced any homonegativity the

previous day. Two participants did not submit a diary entry on several nights during the data collection period; however, they did submit an entry on the days they encountered an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour and confirmed with me (approximately every three days) that they had not experienced any homonegativity on the days they had not submitted an entry.

In order to briefly capture the participants' thoughts and feelings immediately after experiencing an event they deemed to be homonegative, they were asked to text me a few words describing the behaviour and how it made them feel. The purpose of these text messages were to help capture their initial thoughts and feelings directly following an encounter with discrimination, and any keywords they had texted to me earlier were included in the nightly reminder email. It was hoped that by reminding participants about their immediate reactions following the homonegative event, they would be better able to describe their lived experiences in the diary entries. Only three participants opted to text after experiencing a homonegative event, but all participants completed their diary entries on the days they encountered homonegativity. Since I treated the participants' decision not to text me as the equivalent of choosing not to answer a particular question (as they were informed was their right at the outset of data collection), I did not ask them to explain their decision for not texting.

The participants were offered the opportunity to meet with me after their data collection period ended to debrief and approximately four participants chose to check in with me to discuss their experiences with the diary study. Of those I spoke to, many commented that they became more observant of homonegativity in their daily lifeworlds by virtue of keeping the daily diaries. The number of homonegative behaviours encountered by each participant during the 10-day daily diary data collection period ranged from 0 to 6. Two participants did not encounter any homonegative behaviours during the diary collection period, three participants encountered one behaviour, six participants encountered two behaviours, three participants encountered three behaviours, four participants encountered four behaviours, and one participant encountered six behaviours. Participants received a \$30.00 gift certificate of their choice for participating in the daily diaries at the conclusion of their 10-day data collection period. They were provided with the option of meeting me in person at the university to receive their gift certificate or having it mailed to them.

***Procedures specific to follow-up interviews.*** Approximately six months after I conducted the initial interviews with participants and had completed analyzing the interview and daily diary



data, four participants were asked to participate in a follow-up interview. The purpose of this interview was to verify the accuracy of my interpretations of their interview and daily diary data. For these second interviews, I invited participants who indicated in the first interview they would be interested in meeting with me again and were articulate in sharing their experiences. In addition, I purposefully selected a range of participants in terms of the degree to which they were open about sexual orientation (with some being quite closed and others being quite open about their sexuality) and the types of homonegative behaviour they had experienced (some had experienced only subtle behaviours, while others had experienced both blatant and subtle behaviours). All participants who were invited to participate in a second interview agreed to meet with me.

As with the first interviews, the second interviews were held in a meeting room that I had available at the university during a time that was convenient for the participant. Before the interviews began, I offered to treat the participants to a coffee and snack. I then shared with them, orally and in written form, the themes that had emerged from the interview and daily diary data, as well as the four narratives that I wrote to exemplify each of the lived existentials. Since most of our discussion was centred on my writings, I took detailed notes so as to ensure I accurately captured their thoughts about specific themes and passages. For each theme that I presented, the participants were asked to reflect on the extent to which it fit with their experience or the experience of other gay and lesbian persons they know. These second interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

### ***3.2.3 Reflecting on the Essential Themes***

In this section, I will describe the approach to data analysis that I employed to arrive at the essence of what it means to be the target of an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. Before analyzing any data, each interview was transcribed verbatim and each transcript was checked against the audio-recording to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Any important pieces of information that were documented in the memos and field notes were then incorporated into the transcripts to ensure that these nuances were taken into consideration when interpreting the data.

Unfortunately, I was not able to formally analyze the data concurrently with data collection, because all 20 participants responded to my initial advertisement and wished to participate in the study prior to the end of term and before they left the university for the summer (leaving me with a 5-week time span for the open-ended interview and daily diary data collection). However, I did

reflect on each interview after it was complete, and adjusted my interview guide accordingly in an effort to obtain information about facets of the students' experiences that I lacked understanding or required information of a greater depth.

Upon beginning data analysis, I fully emerged myself in the data by reading each transcript carefully and began the process of identifying and reflecting upon themes apparent within and across interviews. Initially, I examined the interview transcripts belonging to the lesbian participants separately from the gay participants, and followed the same procedures for analyzing the daily diary entries. However, after analyzing the data from the gay and lesbian participants separately, it became clear that, in general, their experiences with being the targets of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours were similar and these experiences were similarly expressed through the interview and daily diary entry data. Thus, I merged the data from the gay and lesbian participants, as well as from the interview and daily diaries, to consider together the themes that emerged from these separate sources; however, throughout my presentation of the results, I make note of instances in which a subset of themes seemed to be more reflective of the gay or lesbian participants' experiences. In addition, I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software (Version 8; QSR International, 2008) to organize the data.

To understand the essence of a phenomenon, it is necessary to reflect upon the essential themes that emerge from data analysis. Obtaining insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively clarifying and making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience, and can be accomplished by analyzing the thematic aspects of an experience. van Manen (1990) suggests that three approaches can be taken to uncover themes—namely, a) 1) holistic approach (i.e., attempting to capture the fundamental meaning or significance of the text as a whole); 2) selective approach (i.e., attempting to capture the statements or phrases that seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described); or 3) line-by-line approach (i.e., attempting to capture the meaning that each sentence or sentence cluster has for the phenomenon or experience being described). In the current study, a combination of all three approaches was employed. During some moments, I examined the overall meaning of each participant's transcripts and daily diary entries, while at other times I only analyzed sections of their transcripts and daily diary entries or engaged in a close reading of each line. An overview of the process I followed is provided in Figure 5.

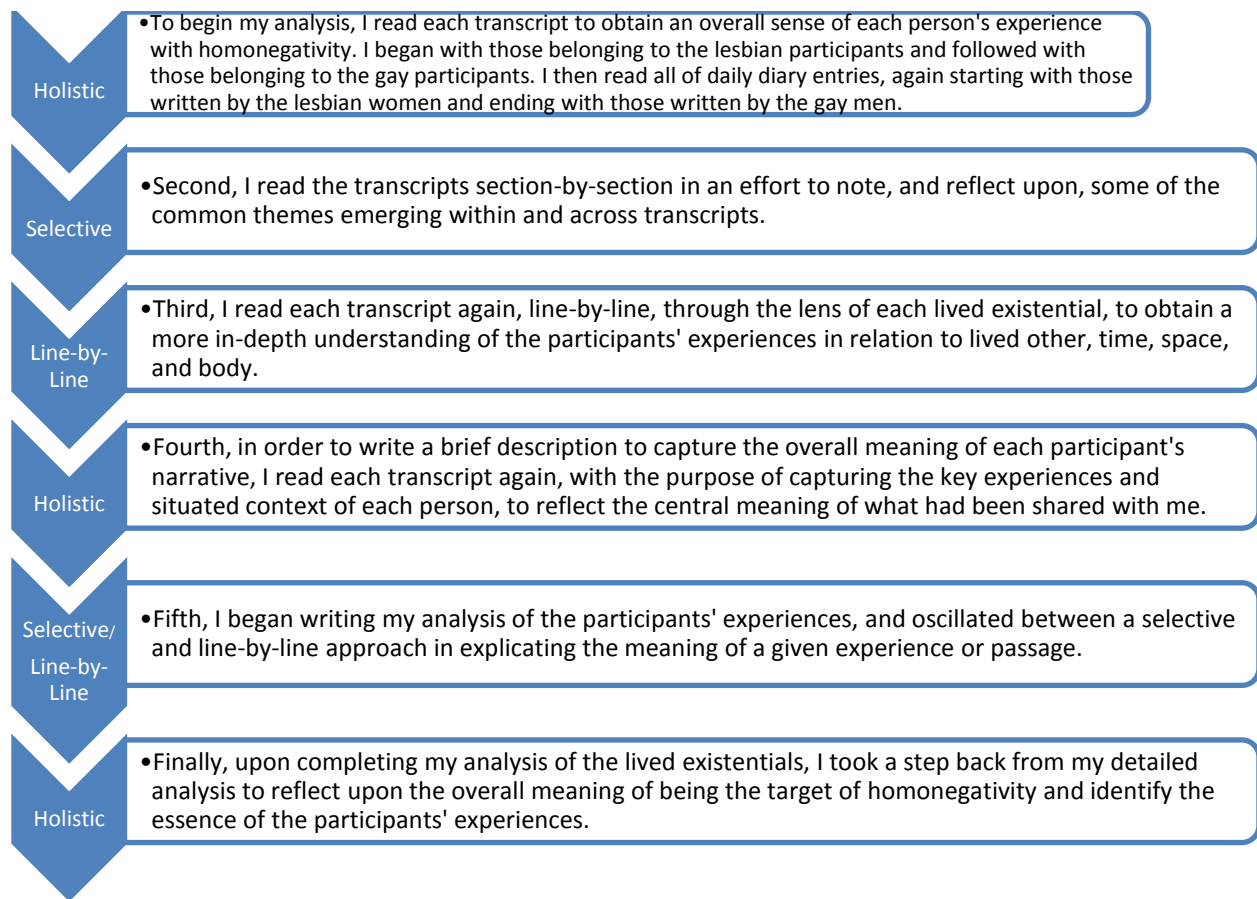


Figure 5. Approach to data analysis.

van Manen (1990) also suggests that it is possible to use four lifeworld existentials, which are thought to be characteristic of all experiences of being-in-the-world regardless of their historical, cultural, or social situatedness, to guide the process of generating themes and reflecting on the phenomenon. The four existentials are: 1) lived space (i.e., spatiality) which refers to the environment in which we live (van Manen, 1990); 2) lived body (i.e., corporeality) which refers to the way in which our body is engaged in the world (e.g., through tasting, touching, smelling, feeling, and so forth; Streubert & Carpenter, 1990); 3) lived time (i.e., temporality) which is based on the premise that we experience time subjectively and focuses on our perception of the past, present, and future (Mackey, 1999); and 4) lived human relation (i.e., relationality or communicability), which refers to our relationships with others (van Manen, 1990). In line with van Manen's recommendations, I used these four existentials to guide data analysis and tended to read the transcripts using only one of these lenses at a time to identify themes. While the themes at which I arrived were intended to capture the essence and meaning of the

participants' lived experiences, it is important to keep in mind that themes are only tools that allow us to make sense of, and give shape to, a phenomenon by pointing to its content (van Manen, 1990). They are necessarily simplifications and do not, on their own, express complete meaning of a given notion. As such, I also gained additional insight into the participants' experiences of homonegativity by tracing the etymological origins of key words that seemed integral to their experience (e.g., space, look, and exposed) and examining idiomatic phrases that were often borne out of lived experience (e.g., "you have to choose your battles"). In addition, to enhance my reflexivity with the data, I continued to engage in a process of memoing to document my thoughts and responses to the data throughout analysis and explication (Morrow, 2005). I also frequently returned to the memos I had written and incorporated these observations into my writings.

Finally, as the data were analysed, clusters of themes began to recur across the lived existentials that reflected commonalities across the various descriptions of lived experience that were collected. My task was to then identify the essential and incidental themes that pertain to the essence of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1964). As such, I identified the essential themes of being the target of blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours by engaging in a process of imaginative variation where I added or removed various aspects of the phenomenon from the descriptions of lived experience to determine whether the phenomenon remained the phenomenon in the presence or absence of those characteristics (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

### ***3.2.4 Describing the Phenomenon***

After engaging in the process of developing and identifying themes, van Manen (1990) indicates that it is necessary to engage in a reflective process of writing to arrive at a deep understanding of the phenomenon. Through writing, the researcher is intended to develop a phenomenological description that conveys the lived experience in a deeper manner than was available before and which addresses both our cognitive and non-cognitive ways of experiencing the world (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenological understanding is meant to be emotive, embodied, vivid, and situational. It also is intended to demonstrate what is shared and what is unique in relation to a given experience in an expressive, evocative manner (van Manen, 1997). The ensuing chapters reflect the culmination of my efforts to acquire insight into the nature of blatant and subtle discrimination as it is experienced by gay and lesbian university students through the art of writing and re-writing. I often began writing by identifying extracts

from transcripts that were particularly insightful and exemplified the participants' lived experiences in relation to a certain aspect of being the target of homonegativity. I would then write around these extracts to ensure that my interpretation was grounded in experience. While writing, I also found myself continually asking questions such as what is the meaning behind this lived experience or what does this experience reveal about the "whatness" of being the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviour and often strove to answer these questions in my writing. In addition to presenting my thematic interpretations of the participants' lived experiences, I have included a number of short stories or linguistic transformations at the conclusion of the findings to further enhance our understanding of what it means to be targeted on the basis of one's sexual orientation. These narratives were intended to be reflective of the different voices represented in the study and to be evocative of the feelings experienced by the gay and lesbian students during the moments in which they were discriminated against (van Manen, 1997; Munhall, 2007). That is, they were intended to demonstrate experientially rather than rationally what it means to be the target of subtle homonegative behaviour (van Manen, 1997).

A good phenomenological description can be identified by the phenomenological nod, wherein persons who experience the phenomenon can recognize their own experiences in the description (van Manen, 1990). That is, good phenomenological description is "collected by lived experience and recollects lived experienced" (van Manen, 1990, p. 27). To ensure that my interpretations of the data were indeed reflective of the gay and lesbian students' experiences, four participants were asked to participate in a second interview. In this interview, I shared my findings with the participants by providing them with a written and verbal summary of the themes that I had derived from my analysis. I also provided them with the linguistic transformation narratives I crafted on the basis of the themes that had emerged. For each theme I presented to them, a critical question was asked: is this what the experience is really like? The ultimate goal was for the participants to provide a "phenomenological nod" in relation to my interpretation and description of their experiences and to recognize either their own experiences or an experience they could have had in the description. The participants who took part in a second interview did, in fact, recognize either their own experiences or the experiences of others known to them in the findings I presented.

### ***3.2.5 Maintaining a Strong Orientation to the Phenomenon***

It is necessary for researchers to maintain a rigorous approach to the phenomenon throughout the research process. Thus, research carried out using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach should meet several evaluative criteria. For instance, according to van Manen (1990), phenomenological descriptions should be oriented (i.e., connected to lived experience); strong (i.e., provide a strong interpretation of the phenomenon); rich (i.e., provide concrete examples of lived experience); and deep (i.e., offer an interpretation of the meaning of the phenomenon). Throughout my analysis and explication of the data, I have been careful to provide an oriented, strong, rich, and deep description and interpretation of the gay and lesbian students' experiences with homonegative behaviours. While a final and complete interpretation of the participants' experiences is not the goal of a phenomenological investigation, readers may evaluate for themselves whether the text I created imbues the above qualities to ascertain the legitimacy of the present study (van Manen, 1990).

Other evaluative criteria also have been posed to assess the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Tobin & Begley, 2004). For instance, it is important to ensure that the data are interpreted and presented in a manner that is authentic and credible (Creswell, 2007). My decision to return to the participants to determine whether they could identify their own experiences in my descriptions served to enhance the confirmability of the data and my interpretations of it. In addition, to ensure the authenticity of the data, I strived to use the participants' own words where possible to describe their experiences and tried to illustrate that multiple realities and experiences exist (Tobin & Begley, 2004). I also periodically consulted the raw data to remain connected to the participants' voices and verify the credibility of my interpretations (Morrow, 2005). Further, the use of two data collection methods (i.e., interviews and daily diaries) to generate data to support the essential themes that were identified and to overcome the limitations associated with each method also enhanced the credibility of the study (Morrow, 2005).

In addition, I was careful to create an audit trail that others can examine to review the credibility of the research process and ensure the dependability of the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). My audit trail consisted of the memos and drafts I made throughout the study documenting my thoughts and decisions about the theories underlying the study, data collection methods, data analysis, and my interpretations and conclusions. Finally, I have included detailed

descriptions of the context in which this study took place to enhance the transferability of the data and allow others to know when it is appropriate to transfer the findings to another setting (Creswell, 2007).

### ***3.2.6 Balancing the Research Context***

In the final research activity outlined by van Manen (1990), it is necessary for the researcher to oscillate between the parts and the whole (van Manen, 1990). Essentially, what van Manen refers to here is the necessity for the research process to be flexible and for the need, at times, to choose directions and explore techniques that were not anticipated at the beginning of the study. Despite the linear manner in which I have described my approach to this study, in practice, it was an iterative process in which I did choose directions and explore techniques that I had not anticipated at the outset of the study. For instance, I did not anticipate the need to analyze the data by employing all three approaches to data analysis (i.e., holistic, selective, and line-by-line) on multiple occasions. I also found myself analyzing and re-analyzing data and writing and re-writing my interpretations as I took additional elements of the participants' experiences into consideration, oscillating, as van Manen describes, between the parts and the whole.

### ***3.2.7 Ethical Considerations***

Finally, I would like to explicitly address the way in which I handled the ethical concerns that were present in this study. As is common, I obtained ethical approval for the procedures outlined in this study prior to commencing data collection and ensured that the gay and lesbian interviewees were aware of their rights as participants in this study. For instance, I explained verbally that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, they could stop participating in the interview at any time without penalty, and they could refrain from answering any questions they were asked. I also obtained written, informed consent from the participants before beginning either the interviews or the daily diary data collection. In addition, I was concerned that participants might become upset during the interviews or daily diaries as a result of recalling an experience in which they had been the target of homonegative behaviour. Thus, at the end of the interviews, I provided the participants with a debriefing and resources sheet outlining a number of agencies they were encouraged to contact in the event that they felt upset after the interview or daily diaries (see Appendix E).

Throughout the study, it was of utmost concern to me that the gay and lesbian students

felt comfortable participating and could be assured that their true identities would not be revealed (an issue that was of particular concern to those who were not yet out) in any presentations of the data. As such, I informed the participants that their responses would be confidential, pseudonyms would be used in place of their names to protect their identities, and their transcripts and daily diaries would be stripped of any personally identifying information. In addition, the participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts, in part, to alleviate any concerns they may have about whether they could be identified on the basis of the information included in the transcripts. The participants also were made aware that their data would be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

After the interviews and daily diaries, I found myself receiving queries from the participants expressing interest in becoming involved in similar research, typically as student researchers. In all cases, I assisted the participants with becoming involved in gay and lesbian research to the best of my ability. I considered their initiation of contact with me to reflect that I had succeeded in establishing rapport with the students and facilitating an environment in which they felt comfortable and excited about participating in the study. I also was pleased to have the opportunity to reciprocate my own appreciation of their willingness to participate in my study.



## CHAPTER FOUR—SITUATING THE INQUIRY

This chapter provides a basis for understanding the way in which the gay and lesbian students were oriented to their lifeworlds at the time the study was carried out. To achieve this goal, I have included brief descriptions highlighting the salient characteristics of the participants' lives and personal histories that seemed particularly influential in the way they viewed and experienced the world around them (Munhall, 2007). It is hoped that this information will be helpful in understanding the situated context in which participants experienced blatant and subtle homonegativity in the subsequent chapters and providing details about their lives that are otherwise unavailable through the analysis (yet intricately tied to the meaning derived from it). I also have included information about the general nature of the environment in which the participants were located (i.e., at a mid-sized university on the Canadian prairies) and the overarching issues with which the students were contending at this developmental point in their lives to further situate the inquiry.

### *4.1 Participants*

Twenty (10 male; 10 female) students from the University of Saskatchewan who identified as gay, lesbian, or queer participated in the present study. Three participants were graduate students and one participant was in a professional degree program, while the remaining participants were undergraduate students. The students ranged in age from 19 to 34 years, with most being in their early twenties. All but three were Caucasian (one participant was Aboriginal, one was Métis, and one was Chinese). The demographic information presented about the participants is based on the details provided during the first interview.

#### *4.1.1 Participant Descriptions*

**Marcie.** Marcie is a 22-year-old ethnic minority woman who is pursuing a Master's degree in the sciences. She is originally from a town outside of Saskatoon and has been at the university for five years (four years were spent obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree). She identifies as primarily homosexual, but is uncomfortable with using specific labels (e.g., lesbian) to describe her sexual orientation. "I don't like putting a title to it. I just feel pinned down." Through her workplace and school, Marcie has made a few gay and bisexual friends, but the number of non-heterosexual friends that she has is limited. At various times, she has attempted to meet more gay and lesbian people and to become involved in the gay and lesbian community,

but has struggled with this endeavour. Currently, Marcie is not actively involved in, or integrated with, the gay and lesbian community.

Marcie has not formally disclosed her sexual orientation to her parents; however, her cousin and aunt insinuated to her mother that she is lesbian. This caused some friction within her immediate family, and she has since had indirect conversations about her sexual orientation with both her mother and father. On the basis of these conversations, she perceives her mother to be somewhat accepting and her father to be rejecting of her sexual orientation. Marcie is concerned about disappointing her parents. Her brothers also are aware of her sexual orientation, and she finds that her relationship with them has remained unchanged. She comments, “Never are they like my friends where they make little comments every now and then.” For the most part, her sexual orientation is not mentioned by her family members.

At school, Marcie has told a few friends about her sexual orientation, but otherwise is not open about her sexuality. Although her friends claim to be accepting of sexual minorities, she frequently encounters instances of homonegativity from them that cause her to feel isolated. At work, Marcie disclosed her sexual orientation to two people “and then somehow most of the store found out.” Marcie’s lack of control over who knows about her sexual orientation is a theme that is present throughout her narrative. “People are so gossipy. [It’s] hard to trust somebody.” Marcie also frequently encounters blatantly negative comments or innuendos in relation to her sexual orientation in her workplace. For instance, her supervisor frequently comments that she must be a “crackslapper” and “like poonana” in front of other staff.

As a result of having many negative or ambiguous experiences in relation to disclosing her sexual orientation, Marcie is reluctant to tell more people about being lesbian. However, she feels frustrated that she cannot be open about her sexual orientation.

I see other people who are gay, and they seem more out about it, and people are okay with it. And I’m like, why couldn’t I have that? (What do you think is the difference?) I don’t know. Probably, like, now me, because I’m more hesitant.

**Alyssa.** Alyssa is a 24-year-old Caucasian female in her fourth year of an undergraduate degree. In addition to being a student, she devotes time to volunteering with various community-based organizations within Saskatoon. She is originally from Saskatoon, identifies as lesbian (primarily homosexual), and is recently married. Most of Alyssa’s friends are lesbian or gay, and she perceives herself to be strongly integrated into the gay and lesbian community. Alyssa is out

to her family and believes her mother to be somewhat accepting of her sexual orientation and her father and sister to be fully accepting.

In relation to being lesbian at the university, Alyssa perceives that people on campus are: “Typically open and accepting and, if they’re not, I find that people know it’s their problem...If they may be taken aback, I know it’s up to them to deal with, not me.” Any negative experiences Alyssa has had on campus have occurred indirectly (e.g., overhearing anti-gay/lesbian jokes). Alyssa also primarily has had positive experiences in the workplace. She has often had gay or lesbian colleagues and, when she has encountered co-workers who were not accepting of homosexuality, they have been tolerant and treated her with respect.

Over the course of the daily diaries, Alyssa mindfully placed herself in situations where homonegativity may have arisen. However, even in environments and interactions where she was uncertain of how welcome lesbian and gay persons would be, she did not encounter negativity; an occurrence which she attributes to her confidence in her identity as lesbian.

The past 10 days, my partner and I put extra effort into going out and acting more like a couple. I even let conversations at work stray to my home life and had to come out to the extra couple people at work who hadn't been formally told. In those, and all other situations, I didn't experience anything homophobic. And I was really looking for it...Older, mature and out people who display confidence are rarely challenged about their sexuality—if someone is uncomfortable, they will hide it.

Although Alyssa rarely encounters homonegativity, she does regularly contend with the assumption that she is straight and the corresponding requirement to come out as lesbian.

Everybody always assumes you're straight. And I just always say, it gets tiring coming out every day. You do it the first time, and it's the hardest thing in your life. You do it the fifth time, and you're excited and happy to be able do it. You do it for the hundredth time, and it's like, I'm still doing this? It's not really ever going to change. It's always going to be assumed, and I'm always going to have to correct somebody.

Despite her frustrations with being required to come out on a daily basis and encountering heteronormative assumptions, Alyssa considers it important to “be a good ambassador for the community.” By being her authentic self, Alyssa hopes to increase heterosexuals’ awareness and understanding of gay and lesbian people. “Being out there and just being normal, that's what's going to help change minds—not hiding it so much.”

**Tara.** Tara is a 21-year-old Caucasian female who is in the fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. She identifies as lesbian or queer. Although she is originally from Saskatoon, she lived in rural Saskatchewan throughout elementary and junior high school. She had “a really,

absurdly supportive family atmosphere growing up” with respect to being lesbian and her parents are both accepting of her sexual orientation. However, she was chastised by her peers at school for being affectionate toward other girls.

Too much affection with other women was really frowned upon...In elementary school, I had girls throw me off them and be like, “Don’t touch me. I think you’re a lesbian.”...It really messes up your personal space boundaries.

In contrast to her early educational experiences, Tara has “found university to be a really supportive environment.” She came out in her first year and was initially nervous about telling others about her sexual orientation. Now, in her fourth year, she is comfortable discussing her sexual orientation with both students and professors and has found being lesbian to “be an absolute non-issue.” Further, she tends to assume tolerance among others and expects them to be accepting of her (and other sexual minority individuals): “I usually err on the side of extremely forgiving and presume people to be extremely tolerant. But I also don’t give people a lot of option [laughs].” While at university, Tara also has found it exciting to become involved in activism and to meet “lots of people who were already out at a really young age.” Most of her friends are gay or lesbian, and she is strongly integrated into the gay and lesbian community in that she is actively involved in the community and identifies with gay and lesbian culture.

Despite having a largely positive experience at university, Tara has encountered some homonegativity. Notably, Tara had a negative interaction with a professor in a Catholic college affiliated with the university who “kind of picked [her] out as...the dyke feminist.” Off campus, she has also had derogatory comments yelled at her in public places, such as restaurants. In addition, Tara occasionally encounters more subtle homonegative behaviours. Most notably, she identifies as “femme” and finds that some people do not believe she is lesbian because she does not fit the stereotypical image of a “butch” lesbian. Overall, however, Tara is satisfied with herself as a lesbian woman.

So far, at this point in my life, being gay has been, it’s something that I really enjoy. I feel really good about it...This is right for me, and it makes me feel good about myself that I figured it out, have support, and can enact it in space that’s safe, most of the time.

**Kelly.** Kelly is a 25-year-old Caucasian undergraduate student who is in her first year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. She is originally from Saskatoon, identifies as queer (both in relation to her sexual orientation and her gender), and prefers not to disclose her gender identity (however, for the purposes of this paper, feminine pronouns will be used to refer to Kelly). For Kelly, it is

being “gender-queer” that plays the most prominent role in her life, and she purposefully chooses the word queer to describe her sexual orientation and gender identity.

I hate using words like lesbian and even, like, gay. Like, I’m just not interested. Even GLBT sometimes makes me cringe. I just like queer. It’s a general umbrella that can encompass a whole bunch of people in it, so I identify as being queer.

Kelly came out to her family in elementary school and perceives her parents to be somewhat rejecting of her sexual orientation, her brothers to be somewhat accepting, and her sisters to be accepting. When she was younger, her parents would subtly try to steer her away from “anything that had any queer content in it.” Further, she “was always allowed to have boys sleep over at the house, but never girls.” There also was a period of time where she did not talk to her mother. However, after living out of province, Kelly moved back to Saskatoon with her girlfriend and, at that time, she “really pushed [her] family’s buttons to be okay with it.”

Kelly does not feel integrated into the university community, but does have a large queer community outside of the university. “I just come here and go to my classes, and that’s pretty much my university life here.” She considers the university to be an academic environment, but it “isn’t exactly a comfortable environment”. One of the reasons Kelly does not feel a part of the university community is that she is the target of looks from others that suggest to her that she is different.

Despite feeling uncomfortable on campus, Kelly generally considers the university to be supportive. She has had positive experiences, albeit “maybe not as many in numbers,” and has never felt compelled to “hide [her] identity from anybody” on campus. She also remarks that she does not encounter homonegativity on a daily basis.

I don’t feel walking into my classrooms that people are ostracizing me the second I walk in, or something. I don’t feel like that at all...For sure I get different occurrences that happen, but it’s not on a daily basis either.

Prior to attending university, Kelly attended a technical school, where she found the environment to be more relaxed. “Nobody cares...I’ve never had to explain myself to anybody. Nobody’s ever asked me about anything there, and I never once was treated differently.” The difference in environments sometimes causes her to question whether she is “cut out for university life.”

**Becky.** Becky is a 27-year-old Caucasian female who is in her second year of a Master of Science program (her seventh year at the university). She is from Saskatoon, identifies as lesbian

(exclusively homosexual), and has many gay or lesbian friends. Becky is comfortable with her sexuality and wears a rainbow bracelet to signify that she is lesbian.

Becky first came out as lesbian at the age of 23 and previously identified herself as straight. In fact, she dated, and lived with, one man from the age of 18 to 23. It was being in university that provided her with the space to explore her sexuality.

It wasn't until I sort of came to university and was open to new experiences that I actually sort of realized, wow, maybe I'm not so strange as I thought I was [laughs]...And right away, when I started dating women, I started to identify myself as a lesbian.

Because Becky "lived as a straight person for so many years," some people in her life struggled to accept her as lesbian. For instance, Becky's mother initially believed that she was "in a phase," but is now starting to fully accept Becky's sexual orientation as lesbian. In contrast, her brother was immediately accepting of her sexual orientation. In addition, some of Becky's friends began to ignore and exclude her after learning about her sexual orientation. "That was kind of hurtful because they were a lot closer to me, so I expected them to react differently because they knew me and nothing had changed." It bothers Becky when she feels that people view her only in terms of her sexuality, and she does not like the idea of being "judged upon a label." According to Becky, "Being a lesbian is not who I am, it's one little factor." She finds that it is a "disappointment when someone is judging you about something so little, so insignificant."

In general, Becky's experience as a lesbian student at the university has been positive. "I've never really had anyone who's approached me in an entirely negative manner or experienced any verbal, sort of, abuse really, or anything." However, she finds that, at times, she does not know how her academic colleagues and peers, who "tend to be conservative," view her. "I feel sometimes I don't know where I stand exactly, so I kind of just hang back and let other people figure me out." She is somewhat worried about revealing her sexual orientation in professional settings because she is concerned that: "I could be judged based on who I sleep with and not who I am...and that I might be overlooked because of my sexual orientation."

**Hope.** Hope is a 34-year-old female Caucasian student in her third and final year of a professional degree program. She has lived in various provinces and countries throughout her life, but decided to complete her education in Saskatoon to be close to her mother who was struggling with an illness. Hope identifies as lesbian (primarily homosexual) and came out in her 20s. She currently lives with her common-law partner of six years.

During her formative years, Hope had a religious upbringing where it was “just assumed that you’re not gay or, if you are, you’ll take care of that right away.” As a result, she has struggled with internalized homonegativity and finds that she is not as open about her sexuality as other women. Hope’s experience with her family has been both positive and negative. Her parents initially struggled with her sexual orientation, but, overall have been accepting of her.

Ideologically or religiously, my father would disagree with it, but his doctrinal belief is that grace is more important...His background is more like God loves you and God is grace, and so that carried the day thankfully.

In contrast, Hope’s sister had greater difficulty with accepting her as lesbian. Hope perceived her sister’s evangelical background, combined with her disappointment that Hope would not be fulfilling the plans she had constructed for her, posed the greatest barriers to her acceptance.

When I came out, it was...“What do you mean you’re leaving the church? And you’re never getting married? And you’re never having kids? And you’re never going to own a home?” And I was, like, “Whoa, wait a minute [laughs]. You can have all of those things...just not with a man.” But she just had that package deal prepared for me in her mind.

For several years, Hope’s sister did not discuss Hope’s partner or sexual orientation, but after their mother was diagnosed with an illness, they were able to reconcile their differences.

Throughout her time at the university, Hope has felt isolated from other gay and lesbian persons, as well as from other students. “Being 34, and in a long-term relationship, and my partner’s not white, and just all of that kind of intersected. And I was the only lesbian in my year, so I felt kind of isolated at times.” She also struggled with a constant sense of ambiguity about why she felt distance between herself and the other students. “I couldn’t tell: is it just I see myself different or is it they do too?...Is it them or is it me who’s doing the distancing?”

At university, Hope has experienced little direct negativity about her sexual orientation; however, she did have two disappointing interactions with faculty members, one of whom used prejudicial language in her class and the other who discounted her opinion because she is lesbian. In addition, she witnessed some “more vocally bigoted people” in other years of her program making derogatory comments about gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals. At times, Hope felt concerned about identifying as lesbian for fear that her opinions would lack legitimacy.

Outside of school, Hope also felt isolated from other gay and lesbian persons and was disappointed by the lack of community in Saskatoon.

I just had this kind of idealized notion that Canada's really progressive, and everyone's very open there, and there'll be lots of openly gay people. And then, when we settled here for the three years, we just...didn't see any other lesbians.

Hope and her partner have decided to move to another city in the fall because they want to live in a location where they know a community of lesbian women exists.

**Christie.** Christie is a 23-year-old Caucasian female and is originally from outside of Saskatoon. She is in her second year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. Prior to attending university, she worked as a welder for several years. She identifies as gay (primarily homosexual; "I tend to identify a lot more with a gay-man culture just because it tends to be a little bit more light-hearted"), many of her friends are gay or lesbian, and she feels strongly integrated into the gay and lesbian community (i.e., she is actively involved in the community and often spends her time in gay- and lesbian-friendly venues). Christie is not out to her parents, step-parents, and sister because she perceives them to be somewhat rejecting of homosexuality; however, she is out to her brother and perceives him to be accepting.

Christie volunteers for the sexual minority and women's centres on campus and has organized some events with the expressed purpose of bridging the queer and ally communities. She believes it is important "to make a stronger community and a more visible community." In general, she perceives the university to be fairly tolerant of sexual minorities. In fact, the more tolerant environment it offers is one of the reasons why she decided to stop working in the trades, an environment in which she felt she had to conceal her sexual orientation. Although Christie generally perceives people at the university to be tolerant of sexual minorities, she does find herself trying to determine how accepting others are of homosexuality to decide how open she should be in a particular situation. "You have to kind of judge the people you meet on a personal basis. There is kind of like a scale, based on how conservative they appear to be, or how much into the whole jock man culture they appear to be." She also tries to ensure that her sexuality is not highly visible to avoid any possible homonegativity. "I do put a little bit of effort into...not being very, very out when I'm out and about." Christie has not explicitly come out to other students or professors in her classes, but has been able to incorporate lesbian and gay issues in a couple of assignments she has written. Both were received favourably by faculty.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth is a 19-year-old Caucasian female who is in her second year of a Bachelor of Science degree and identifies as lesbian (exclusively homosexual). She perceives her parents, especially her father, to be intolerant of homosexuality. Elizabeth is not originally from



Saskatchewan, but decided to move to Saskatoon to gain some space from her family. “I wanted to...get away from the environment, I guess...A new start is what I was hoping for.” She is concerned that if her sexual orientation is disclosed to her parents that she will be openly rejected by them. “My dad has made it very clear that ‘that’ is not allowed in his household.”

On campus, Elizabeth generally perceives other students to be open and tolerant. No homonegative behaviours have been directed toward her personally; however, she has heard people use derogatory language toward gay and lesbian persons on several occasions. She also believes that: “Sometimes people treat me differently because I don’t look like the typical girl.”

Elizabeth has disclosed her sexual orientation to few people, largely because she is still becoming comfortable with the idea of being lesbian. “I really only accepted it, like, in grade 12. So, like, two, three years ago...and I'm still getting used to it.” Although Elizabeth is uncomfortable with directly disclosing her sexual orientation, she would like people to recognize her as lesbian. As such, she has cut her hair in a way that others may associate with being lesbian (“The whole intention behind cutting my hair short was to make it look like I was a lesbian without having to tell people”) and wears a rainbow bracelet (“I don't really want to be closeted to everyone, but I don't know how to bring it up...So I hoped that it would help with that so that people just know from meeting me—it's out in the open already”).

Of the few people she has told about her sexual orientation, Elizabeth has not directly experienced any negative reactions. However, she does wonder if the reason her friend no longer talks to her is because she is lesbian. Consequently, she is concerned that others in her life will act differently toward her once they find out about her sexuality. Even though Elizabeth does not readily disclose her sexual orientation, she does identify with gay and lesbian subculture and finds herself spending time in gay and lesbian friendly environments. She also spends a significant amount of time reading about lesbian and gay rights and issues. When asked to reflect on herself right now, Elizabeth comments:

I think I’ve progressed a lot in terms of finding out who I am, but I still hide too much from everyone...so they don't really know who I am really, because it's kind of a big aspect of me that they don't know. I think the rest of my life is pretty normal. It doesn't really affect much else. It's just relationships with people could be different probably.

***Sheena.*** Sheena is a 20-year-old Caucasian female who is originally from Saskatoon. She is enrolled in her second year of a general Arts and Sciences undergraduate degree; however, she will not be returning to university for her third year. Instead, she is going to pursue a trade.

Sheena identifies as lesbian (primarily homosexual); has gay, lesbian, and heterosexual friends; and identifies strongly with lesbian subculture.

Sheena came out as lesbian immediately after she graduated from high school and has disclosed her sexual orientation to most people in her life. Her mother was somewhat rejecting of her sexual orientation and acted negatively toward Sheena when she first learned she was lesbian. However, her father and brother were accepting.

It was pretty ridiculous at the house. A lot of the things that she had said to me—it was pretty horrible for a mom to say to the daughter...But I think it's getting better now...Like we still don't talk about it. I still don't bring girls home...but I think it is getting better.

In general, Sheena does not feel connected to the university community. Further, being lesbian is not something that is at the forefront of her attention while she is at school.

I pretty much just come to class, you know, and I'll hang out in the library or something, but it's hard to, it's not like I meet people and introduce myself like that or anything. You know, it doesn't really get brought up that much.

Sheena has not experienced much homonegativity on the university campus, but has encountered looks from those around her. She also has had some negative experiences off campus, such as frequently hearing friends, supervisors, or co-workers use derogatory language in relation to being lesbian or gay. Further, the position of captain was withheld from her on a sports team for which she played because of her sexual orientation.

I was basically the captain throughout the whole year. And then, once we got to nationals, another girl was made captain...They had said that since I was gay, some people may feel uncomfortable coming to me. So, being in the captain role, they may feel that they can't come and open up to me, sort of thing. So I lost that position, I guess because of that, which is pretty shitty because it was my senior year and I was expecting it all year...I was pretty pissed off...but, what can you do?

Thus, her sexual orientation has been an issue in several situations since coming out.

**Jamie.** Jamie is a 24-year-old Caucasian undergraduate student in her third year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. Jamie's sex is female, but her gender identity is fluid. She identifies as queer, both in relation to her sexual orientation and her gender. Jamie is not originally from Saskatchewan and initially moved to Saskatoon to live with her then girlfriend. Most of her friends are gay or lesbian, and she is involved in the gay and lesbian community, particularly the queer music scene. Jamie spends time working with elders and people with cognitive and physical disabilities and volunteers at the sexual minority and women's centres on campus. She has identified herself as a feminist since she was "12, basically before anybody else ever would

have.” Her parents, step-parents, and sister were all accepting of her sexual orientation: “It was never an issue.”

For the most part, Jamie’s experiences on campus have been positive, especially with respect to her interactions with feminist professors to whom she is open about her sexual orientation. However, she has encountered homonegativity on more than one occasion. For instance, she was marked unfairly on an assignment she completed on same-sex marriage; a fact that was ascertained when she brought the case forward to the department chair who agreed that her mark had not been based on legitimate criteria. She also feels unwelcome in certain spaces on (and off) campus, such as bathrooms and gyms.

In terms of her interactions with others, Jamie struggles most with being gender-queer. She feels that others judge her on the way that she enacts gender, and she has experienced strained interactions with her co-workers as a result of being gender-queer. “When it came to certain things, they wouldn’t talk to me about it...They just assumed that because, I don’t know, I didn’t look like them, that I wouldn’t understand that.” As a means of avoiding any discomfort that she may experience as a result of not fitting into traditional gender roles and being queer, Jamie is upfront about being queer.

I get through my life easily, because it’s like, if I just wear it on the outside, it’s already up front. That’s my only tactic—it’s that I’m just going to be completely frank. I’m not going to make any apologies for it, and I’m not going to retract it. And that is my only strategy.

**Patrick.** Patrick is a 23-year-old Caucasian male in his third year of a Bachelor of Science degree. He is originally from another city in Saskatchewan and moved to Saskatoon to pursue his degree. He identifies as gay (exclusively homosexual), most of his friends are straight, and he tries to dissociate himself from certain elements of the gay and lesbian community (such as Pride).

To me, [Pride] always sort of misses the mark...It’s this huge, big spectacle of stereotypes and, to me, it’s like, no, that’s not what pride should be about. Pride should be about celebrating the progress that’s been made from, you know, the beginning of time to now...I don’t find myself getting involved with, like, a lot of the gay community...So, that’s just sort of a disconnect between me and, like, the rest of gay culture.

Patrick has known that he is gay since the seventh-grade and came out to his parents on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. At first, his parents were somewhat rejecting of his sexual orientation, which Patrick found surprising because they maintained a close relationship with his gay uncle. “I never expected it to be as big an issue as it was, and the only thing I can really attribute it to...

[is] they were never expecting that it would happen to their son.” Consequently, Patrick’s relationship with his parents became strained.

For years,...I barely talked to them, I barely acknowledged them. It's sort of, like, “No, you had your shot. You basically said, no, we don't like you.” That's not how it is at all, but it's just the way I've since interpreted it.

Recently, his relationship with his parents has improved as he has begun to perceive them to be more accepting. As a result of the negative reaction he received from his parents, Patrick waited three years to come out to his sister. However, his sister had suspected he was gay and was immediately accepting.

Patrick feels that he is not particularly visible as a gay man and, as a result, has had minimal experiences with homonegativity on and off campus. “I don't feel I necessarily stand out as being a gay person...and so my experience has been sort of neutral.” With respect to disclosing his sexual orientation, Patrick finds that most people are accepting of him. “As soon as you come out, you know, it's never as bad as you think it's going to be.” It has been his experience that people in their twenties are especially accepting of gay and lesbian people. “Coming out to my friends was a whole separate situation than my parents...It was 99% well received.” In general, Patrick’s sexual orientation is “not really important” in his interactions with others.

**Fred.** Fred is a 23-year-old Caucasian male who identifies as gay (primarily homosexual). He is originally from Saskatoon and is currently in his first year of a Bachelor of Science degree. Most of his friends are heterosexual, and he is not overly involved in the gay and lesbian community. However, he has volunteered with an online forum to help youth struggling with being gay or lesbian. In fact, his volunteer experience helped him become more comfortable with being gay.

I think I was only about sixteen when I started. And, I wasn't really out to anyone, like two friends, maybe. And, I just felt that it was a way of connecting with the community without being outwardly obvious and having to really deal with that. And, I think it helped me express things and get more comfortable with myself in that way.

Fred is not out to either his mother or father. Based on their reactions to his sister who came out as lesbian, he perceives they would be somewhat rejecting and accepting of his sexual orientation, respectively. He is reluctant to come out to his family because he believes that he will be dismissed. “Now I feel like if I come out to my parents, they'll say, ‘oh...you're just copying your sister,’ which I think is silly, but that is the way I feel.” All of his siblings have been supportive of his sister and he believes they would be supportive of him, too.

In general, Fred perceives other students at university “don’t really care one way or another, but I think there’s definitely, you’re going to run into people who are really against that and negative toward that.” Consequently, he has only told select friends about being gay and tends to avoid talking about his sexual orientation by omitting details about his life to ensure that his sexual orientation remains private. “I’ve gotten very good at dancing around facts without being obvious.” Fred also feels like he cannot talk about his sexual orientation at his place of employment where he is a manager because he fears that people will not listen to him if they knew about his sexual orientation. He finds it difficult to balance being out to only a few people in his life. “It kind of makes things a little awkward, and...it feels like lying because I’m not being honest with everyone.”

Since Fred is not open about his sexual orientation, he has not had a lot of negativity directed toward him personally; however, he has frequently heard derogatory comments about gay and lesbian persons spoken around him. For the friends to whom he has come out, Fred feels that he is a good role model with respect to what it means to be gay because he does not act in a stereotypical way. “I’m really just kind of average...I think I’m a good role example in that way, that we’re normal people, too. We’re not the stereotype.”

**Rory.** Rory is a 24-year-old Caucasian male who is in his third year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. He identifies as gay (primarily homosexual), is originally from Saskatoon, and also considers himself to be a musician. Many of his friends are gay or lesbian and he is actively involved in the gay or lesbian community. He disclosed his sexual orientation to his family (i.e., mother, father, and two sisters) when he was 13, and all of them were accepting of, and positive about, his sexual orientation.

For the most part, Rory’s experience as a gay student has been positive. He is forthcoming about this sexual orientation with his professors and has found that they have been receptive to him. “I don’t really hesitate to write if something comes up about a partner or just homosexuality in general.” Although Rory’s experiences have generally been positive, he has been involved in two blatantly homonegative incidents. A few weeks prior to the interview, he and his friends were verbally harassed at a restaurant. “They started calling us dykes and fags and stuff...It was scary, because it seemed kind of just uncalled for. And it was. I hadn’t ever really experienced anything well, much like that.” He also had a knife pulled on him while he was sitting under a bridge late one night.

He was really lethargic, and it wasn't like, 'Oh, I'm going to mug you,' like really aggressive, but he just said something like, 'Oh, you know what I think about faggots?' And he took out a knife and...was pointing it at us. My friend luckily just talked to him and said, 'Oh, you know, that's not necessary, whatever.' And he ended up trying to joke with us and stuff like that by the end.

Incidents of this nature are contrary to Rory's typical experience of being gay in Saskatoon, as he generally feels comfortable living openly as a gay man. The aspect of being gay that he struggles with the most is the small size of the lesbian and gay community in Saskatoon and the difficulties this presents in finding a partner and making gay friends.

**Daniel.** Daniel is a 20-year-old ethnic minority male. He is currently in his third year of a Bachelor of Science degree and hopes to pursue a Master's degree. Daniel is originally from Saskatoon and identifies as gay (exclusively homosexual). He does not have many gay and lesbian friends, but his closest friends do belong to a sexual minority. Further, although he is not actively involved in the gay and lesbian community, he identifies strongly with gay and lesbian subculture. One of the reasons Daniel is not affiliated with the gay and lesbian community and has few gay friends is that he finds it difficult to meet other gay people. "I just don't know any here. It's such a small city, I met a couple but...it's just I haven't had the right luck...or I'm just afraid of asking the question sometimes."

In general, Daniel is open about his sexual orientation. However, he has not disclosed his sexual orientation to his family because he considers them to be "quite traditional" and does not perceive them to be accepting of homosexuality.

With my parents, I think they realize that I'm different and that I'm interested in men, but I think they're denying it right now because they don't want to accept the truth...I think it's quite obvious that I'm a homosexual, but right now, they would make hints wanting me to go the traditional path and marry a woman.

He worries that if his parents were to find out about his sexual orientation that he will be disowned and asked to leave his home.

The other context in which Daniel is not open about his sexual orientation is in professional settings where he is concerned he will be treated differentially for being gay.

I'm just afraid that even though I know it's accepted here, or it's under law that gay people and lesbians can marry now,...that it might change my academic career here. It's probably subconscious. I just don't feel comfortable revealing it to some of my professors or TAs.

Overall, Daniel has found that most people are tolerant of his sexuality; however, he has occasionally encountered people who were not comfortable with him and finds that if these people do treat him differently, their behaviours tend to be indirect or subtle in nature.

The majority of people usually don't mind my sexuality, but there's always the few that are either quite blatant and tell you in front of you, or the other people that just don't talk to you, kind of thing. But I've rarely encountered those people.

**Von.** Von is a 28-year-old Caucasian male in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. He took time off between his third and fourth years of university and has had the opportunity to live throughout Canada during that time. He is originally from rural Saskatchewan, identifies as gay (primarily homosexual), has many gay and lesbian friends, and is actively involved in the gay and lesbian community.

Von struggled with being gay for many years. "I'm 28 and have only been out for two years—it's only in the last few months that I've really begun to accept my sexuality." Von found that the small town in which he was raised did not offer a safe environment to be gay and was one of the reasons why he denied his sexuality for so long. During the time that he did not accept his sexual orientation, he relied on alcohol to avoid thoughts of being gay and currently considers himself to be a recovering alcoholic. Even after he recognized that he was gay, Von struggled to truly accept himself.

It took me ages to be okay with it. Even after I came out, it was quite the ordeal. It wasn't, like, come out of the closet, go back to university. It was more like come out of the closet, get really depressed, attempt suicide twice, get help for your addictions issues, and stuff like that. And I think those were all related to my sexuality and trying to cover it...I'm an alcoholic, I go to AA, and I think one of the main reasons why I drank so much was to avoid that little voice in the back of my mind that I was talking about, the one that would say "you're gay." The best way to suppress that one was to be unconscious, right?

Eventually "something just clicked" and Von was able to become comfortable with himself as a gay man. He told his family (i.e., his mother, father, and brother) that he was gay and they are all accepting of his sexual orientation. In fact, they had previously suspected that he was gay. Now, Von is "a lot more open [and] just trying to be a lot more honest about all aspects" of himself.

**Quinton.** Quinton is a 21-year-old Caucasian male who is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Science degree. He plans to begin a Master's degree in the fall. Quinton identifies as gay (exclusively homosexual) and lives with his common-law partner (Greg). He is originally from another city in Saskatchewan and has many close gay and lesbian friends, but is not actively involved in the gay and lesbian community. He disclosed his sexual orientation to his family

when he was in the twelfth grade, and perceives his mother and oldest brother to be somewhat accepting, his father to be somewhat rejecting, his youngest brother and sister to be accepting, and his second brother to be rejecting of his sexual orientation.

At university, being gay is not at the forefront of Quinton's experience. "When I'm at school, I don't really think about being a gay person...I just kind of come here as a student." In fact, in most contexts, Quinton makes a point to not be overly visible as a gay man. "I think people put too much emphasis on that, as if it's like a huge different lifestyle, when it's really not that different at all." In part, Quinton does not want to make others uncomfortable ("I know that there's some people, even if they're not homophobic, that it just might still make them uncomfortable") and, in part, he does not want to lose some of the same privileges afforded to heterosexuals.

I was applying to grad studies and, I mean, not a single professor there is under 45, I'm sure. And, I just, I was definitely worried, and, it did cross my mind that if I was too gay or something, or some of them knew, that it could affect my chances. And they wouldn't say that, of course, but, you know, that they might find some kind of reason like, "Oh, there's no funding, or I already have a student, or I'm not looking."

Quinton also frequently is concerned that his friends or acquaintances will disclose that he is gay and experiences anxiety in situations where his sexual orientation may be revealed; although, he wishes he was less concerned about making others uncomfortable. "I think I need to learn to just not care if I am indirectly making someone uncomfortable by talking about being gay...It would be nice to not feel any anxiety about it." For the most part, however, he perceives that his sexual orientation is not a contentious issue: "I think generally most people don't care."

**Nathan.** Nathan is a 20-year-old Caucasian male who is originally from Saskatoon and identifies as queer. He is in his third year of a Bachelor of Arts degree and hopes to obtain a Master's degree in the future. He does not have any gay or lesbian friends; all of his friends are heterosexual and he perceives them to be intolerant of homosexuality. In fact, Nathan perceives that most people do not accept sexual minorities, even those who may indicate they are tolerant.

There's not a lot of support for that, at least among where I grew up and all the people I know...The funny thing is some of them will say, you know, it's fine, it's accepted. But if you tell them, "Well, that's what I am," then, you kind of get this "Oh" [frowns].

Nathan has disclosed his sexual orientation to few people, and those he has told have generally reacted negatively. "The first person who I kind of told wouldn't believe me for like three days...That was the first time I realized people are kind of scared when they find out." As



such, Nathan purposefully conceals his sexual orientation to avoid encountering homonegativity. Nathan also chooses to conceal his sexual orientation because he is concerned that people will view him as deviant. However, not being able to freely discuss his sexuality does cause him to experience feelings of isolation.

It's kind of like you are on an island by yourself, because there's the people that openly admit it, and then that's such a small minority that if you kind of join that, then people kind of start lumping you in with that—you know, like...the gay pride parades and...the cross-dressing. And...then some people just start to see you as this freak, and it's unfortunate...I don't know what you can do about that, because it's such a stigma.

Nathan had worries that, if he were to live openly as a queer male, he will be “in for a never-ending battle.” He further explains that: “No one wants to be that nail sticking up that's going to get hammered by everyone else.”

Nathan first realized he was queer when he was in grade eight. At the time, he was attending a Catholic school, where it was made clear to him that one should not act on homosexual impulses. His experiences in high school and with not being open about his sexual orientation have caused him to experience feelings of hatred toward himself and others.

It's kind of like an inner struggle...It's a hate of yourself, and it's a hate of them. And it's a no-win situation, really. You can't do anything about it. I mean, you're going to get thrown out, and you're going to get treated differently if you do it. If you don't say anything, then they're going to still do it, so either way you're going to lose. It's just kind of this anger.

Nathan perceives the university environment to be more accepting than high school; however, he still finds that intolerance is prevalent among students. “It's not as bad and some of the professors are more open to that, but I think the students aren't so much.”

While completing the diary entries, Nathan noted that he is slowly becoming more comfortable with the idea of disclosing his sexual orientation and even with addressing the homonegative comments he frequently overhears from his friends and acquaintances. “Through the course of this diary, I'm becoming a little more brazen in my behaviour...One day, I guess I'll have to break down and come out...Until then, I'll just keep on fighting in my own little way.”

**Brad.** Brad is a 25-year-old ethnic minority male who identifies as gay (exclusively homosexual). He is originally from another city in Saskatchewan and still resides in that city as an off-campus student. Brad is in his fourth year of university, but in his third year of a Bachelor of Education degree. In addition to being a student, he works with adults that live with intellectual or physical disabilities and acts as an advocate for children. Most of his friends are

gay or lesbian, he strongly identifies with gay and lesbian subculture, and is actively involved in the gay and lesbian community. However, he does tend to travel to other cities to be among other sexual minorities, which he deems to be “important for your self-esteem and your wellbeing.”

Brad is out to nearly all people in his life and finds those close to him (e.g., mother, father, sister, step-parents, and friends) to be accepting of his sexual orientation. However, one of the few places Brad does not feel comfortable disclosing that he is gay is at his place of employment where he works with children and parents. He describes his experience of hiding his sexual orientation as: “Totally horrible because, in my own mind,...it does define me. And it's just like, ‘Ugh, why would I deny this?’ ...You have to kind of redefine yourself a little bit.”

Brad’s experience as a gay university student has varied over the years he has been a student. Brad initially came out in high school, but for him, being out in high school was separate from being out in university. During his first year on campus, he found university to be isolating and kept his sexual orientation concealed.

I think the campus tries really hard to make gay people visible, but I think,...if you're not in certain areas of the campus, it's not that visible. So I kind of felt isolated... You're not sure if there's other gay people, and you're not sure of the parameters.

It was not until his third year at university that he felt comfortable enough to be openly gay. The threat of violence is the primary factor that led Brad to conceal his sexual orientation. “Once I realized that people had either a confused reaction or a positive reaction, but not an aggressive reaction, like you would expect, then I became more comfortable with myself.”

In addition, the absence of gay and lesbian issues in the curriculum contributed to Brad’s sense of isolation, but also mobilized him to raise issues pertinent to gay men and lesbian women in his classes. Faculty and students have been receptive of his attempts to raise awareness about gay and lesbian issues, and he has received an award acknowledging his efforts. Brad considers himself to be a role model for heterosexuals. “Social interaction is one mode in which you can create social change...I do want to be an agent of change.”

**Liam.** Liam is a 23-year-old Caucasian male who is in his second year of a Bachelor of Science degree. He identifies as gay (primarily homosexual) and is originally from Saskatoon. Between his first and second year at university, he took three years off to travel. Liam has many friends who are gay or lesbian and is actively involved in the gay and lesbian community. He came out to his family (i.e., mother, father, brother, and sister) in grade nine and perceives them

all to be accepting of his sexual orientation. At this point in his life, Liam feels comfortable with himself and his sexual orientation.

I'm probably more open than ever and more comfortable with myself than ever, because I'm not worried about things inside my head...When you first come out, it's...almost a selfish process, because you're concerned with yourself and everyone you tell is a risk. But I feel like it's no longer a risk for me to tell someone, because I have such a well-established group of friends and a pretty strong sense of security.

For Liam, the main issue with which he contends is heterosexism or heteronormativity (i.e., the assumption of heterosexuality). He can recall several instances in which he has encountered heteronormativity throughout his high school and university education. Since Liam considers himself a “shit-disturber,” he likes to bring gay and lesbian issues (particularly those related to heteronormativity) to the forefront whenever possible and tends to use humour to “advance [his] agenda.”

One phrase I hear a lot is, “Oh, I never thought about that.” And kind of the epitome of heterosexism is, “Oh, nothing ever made me think about things from a different perspective, so I never did.” So maybe what I try and do now, like in combating that, is, in ways that don't require me to put myself on the line or lose anything, make people think about it a different way. And then beyond that, it's beyond my control.

Another issue that Liam struggles with is finding romantic partners, due to the invisibility of gay people. “Where I think invisibility becomes an issue for me is, you know, my ultimate goal is to find someone, and you can't identify other gay people unless you know them.”

Even though Liam is generally comfortable disclosing his sexual orientation to those around them, he is more hesitant about discussing his sexuality with his professors. The fear of being treated unfairly or given less respect contributes to his hesitancy. “When you admire and respect someone, then you don't want to do anything that could make you look [bad]...and it's attached to marks.” Despite his concerns about revealing his sexual orientation in this context, Liam generally tries to be himself at all times. “I think the best way to be a good representative for the gay community is to be myself and be gay.”

**Greg.** Greg is a 23-year-old Caucasian male. He is a graduate student in his first year of a Master of Science program; he also obtained his undergraduate degree from this university. He is originally from rural Saskatchewan, but moved to Saskatoon to attend school. He identifies as gay (primarily homosexual) and currently lives with his common-law partner (Quinton). Most of his friends are heterosexual and he neither identifies strongly with gay and lesbian subculture nor is actively involved in the gay and lesbian community.

Greg came out when he was in grade 12. He perceives his mother, father, and sister to be somewhat accepting, somewhat rejecting, and accepting, respectively, of his sexual orientation. Even though some of his family members are not overly accepting of his sexuality, they reacted better than he expected when they found out he was gay.

I was really expecting my dad to be really angry about it, but he's never said anything. And I think he never will say anything. It'll just be something that's known, but never talked about...And my mom...said, you know, what happens in your own bedroom stays in your bedroom.

In general, Greg's experience at university has been positive, especially in comparison to high school where he had several negative experiences in relation to his sexual orientation. For instance, two close friends ended their friendships with him when he told them he was gay, and he was the target of many "horrible names". Such experiences left Greg feeling "like there was something wrong with [him]." Living in a small town where most people were intolerant of homosexuality further intensified his feelings that being gay was wrong. "When you grow up in a small town with a lot of churches, you get a really narrow-minded opinion about what's right and what's wrong...And growing up with that really sticks with you."

Currently, Greg does not readily disclose his sexual orientation to others, especially in professional settings. He generally chooses to wait until he has developed a strong personal relationship with someone before revealing that he is gay. "I really, really don't like mixing work and personal life."

#### ***4.1.2 Similarities and Differences Among Participants***

As the brief descriptions of the gay and lesbian students who participated in the study indicate, there is much diversity represented among the participants. Several of the participants (i.e., Marcie, Hope, Christie, Elizabeth, Fred, Daniel, and Nathan) struggled with being open about their sexual orientation, while other participants (e.g., Alyssa, Becky, Tara, Kelly, Sheena, Jamie, Patrick, Rory, Brad, Liam, Quinton, Greg, and Von) were generally comfortable with identifying themselves as gay, lesbian, or queer regardless of the context in which they found themselves. Many of the same participants who tended to be less open about being gay or lesbian (i.e., Marcie, Hope, Patrick, Fred, Daniel, and Nathan) also tended to be the same people who felt isolated from the gay and lesbian community, while those who were the most open about their sexual orientation (i.e., Alyssa, Tara, Becky, Christie, Jamie, Sheena, Rory, Liam, and Brad) tended to feel the most integrated into it. Moreover, the students who seemed to have the

most frequent encounters with homonegativity (i.e., Sheena, Fred, Nathan, Elizabeth, and Marcie) also tended to be the students who were the most reluctant to identify themselves as gay or lesbian to others. In contrast, those who seemed to have the fewest encounters with anti-gay/lesbian behaviours (i.e., Alyssa, Tara, Becky, and Patrick) appeared to be the most open.

In terms of their personal backgrounds, several of the students were raised in religious (i.e., Hope, Nathan, Patrick, and Greg) and/or rural (i.e., Marcie, Von, Quinton, Tara, Christie, Brad, and Greg) settings that made it difficult for them to come out and live openly as gay or lesbian persons in those environments. Further, only a few participants (i.e., Alyssa, Jamie, Rory, Tara, Von, and Quinton) experienced their families to be entirely supportive of their sexual orientations. The families of the other participants either tended to be unsupportive of the participants' sexual orientation (which was enacted most frequently by ignoring or dismissing their sexual orientation) or, more typically, mixed with respect to their support (i.e., some family members were accepting of their sexual orientation, while others were not). The students also differed in the extent to which they felt comfortable at university. Tara, Alyssa, Christie, Rory, Becky, Nathan, Brad, Liam, and Greg felt welcome on campus, while the other participants did not necessarily find university to be a supportive atmosphere.

Finally, in terms of their personal characteristics, many of the participants (i.e., Alyssa, Tara, Christie, Jamie, Fred, Brad, and Liam) specifically spoke of the importance that being an activist played in their lives. Others found that the intersection between their gender and sexual identities was an important aspect of their experience. For instance, Kelly, Jamie, and Elizabeth spoke of the difficulties that being “gender-queer” (i.e., being more masculine in their presentation of self) posed in their interactions with heterosexuals, while others (e.g., Tara, Hope, Quinton, Greg, and Patrick) discussed how the way in which they enacted their gender allowed them to blend in or “pass” among heterosexuals.

## ***4.2 Setting***

### ***4.2.1 Geographic Setting***

This study took place at the University of Saskatchewan, a mid-size university containing approximately 18,000 students. The University is located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, a mid-sized city located on the Canadian Prairies. In terms of the specific locations where data collection occurred, the interviews were held in a meeting room located on campus, while the daily diary entries were completed at the participants' homes. For the interviews, the participants

were given the option of choosing a location other than the meeting room on campus, but all opted to meet in the room I had available.

Looking at the broader geographic context in which this study occurred, Canada is known for being a country that is progressive with respect to the provision of rights to sexual minorities, particularly in comparison to either the United States or the United Kingdom, which constitute the other two countries from which research has been cited in this paper. For instance, same sex marriage has been federally granted in Canada since 2005 (Lannutti, 2005), and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited by the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in the realms of employment, accommodation, and service provision (Hurley, 2007). In contrast, same-sex marriage is not federally recognized in either the United States or the United Kingdom (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2010; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006). Employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited in the United Kingdom (Office of Public Sector Information, 2010); however, in the United States, only 20 states and the District of Columbia have legislation that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2010). Moreover, Canadian citizens tend to have more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities in relation to both old-fashioned and modern forms of homonegativity than their American counterparts (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Morrison et al., 2009).

Despite Canadians' tendencies to be more tolerant of sexual minorities, the region of the Prairies in which this study took place has been identified as a more socially conservative area of Canada that is characterized by the endorsement of traditional Christian beliefs (McDonald, 2010). Further, in terms of choosing representatives for the federal government, individuals residing in Saskatchewan tend to be politically conservative and have endorsed the Conservative Party in the last several elections (Heard, 2011). Past research (Agnew, Thompson, Smith, Gramzow, & Currey, 1993; Harton & Nail, 2008; Herek, 1988; Jewell & Morrison, 2010) has associated Christian orthodoxy and political conservatism with negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. Thus, it is possible that homonegativity may be more likely in the area in which the study was conducted than in other parts of Canada.

On the other hand, Saskatchewan also is known for its socialist and co-operative roots, and is recognized as being the home of universal medical care (de Vlieger, 2006). Provincially, until the SaskParty (i.e., a politically right-wing party) recently won the majority of seats in 2007

(de Vlieger, 2006; SaskParty, 2011), a New Democrat government (i.e., a politically left-wing party) had been in power for 17 years (1991 until 2007). As such, the province has traditionally been sympathetic to social justice issues and marginalized sectors of the population, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged (Saskatchewan New Democrats, 2010). Thus, Saskatchewan is a province of conflicting ideologies and political leanings.

Another characteristic of Saskatchewan that also should be acknowledged is its relatively small population. Just over one million people reside in the province, with the largest municipality, Saskatoon, consisting of approximately 240,000 people (Government of Saskatchewan, 2011). It is estimated that 65% of the population resides in urban areas (i.e., cities composed of at least 6,000 people), while the remaining 35% of the population dwell in rural settings; the majority of the population lives in small cities or towns (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010). In addition, aside from the 15% of the population who identify as Aboriginal and the 3.6% who consider themselves to be visible minorities, Saskatchewan is composed primarily of Caucasian persons (Government of Saskatchewan, 2011).

Information about the geographical setting in which the participants live has been provided to contextualize the unique socio-political environment in which they reside. Accordingly, the experiences of the gay and lesbian university students discussed in the present study are specific to those attending the University of Saskatchewan. Gay and lesbian students who attend other Canadian and American universities may have different experiences than those reported here due to the unique socio-political setting in which they live.

#### ***4.2.2 Developmental Setting***

In addition to discussing the geographic locale in which the study took place, it is worth mentioning the developmental setting of the participants' lives. Many of the participants were young adults and at a point in their lives where they were actively learning about themselves. Several students commented that, while at university, they had been growing and exploring themselves as persons, including their identities as gay men and lesbian women. In fact, for many of the participants, the process of coming out was linked with the broader processes of learning about, and generally becoming more comfortable with, themselves. In the following extract, Liam explains how coming out is intrinsically linked with the process of growing up.

I think there's part of the coming out experience that you can talk about in terms of coming out, but it is strongly connected to just general growing up...Everyone grows up,

but not everyone has to come out, but sometimes the fact is that the two can be linked. You can come out as you grow up, and explore your sexuality as you grow up.

Thus, some of the concerns that are expressed by participants in the subsequent analysis, particularly in relation to being open about their sexual orientation, may in part be related to the stage of development in which the participants were located at the time the study was conducted.

Some of the participants also mentioned that the university environment was particularly conducive to self-exploration. For instance, Alyssa comments that, "University is such an open and diverse environment, I find that it's one of the best places to grow up and come of age...because it's been so open, and you can explore so much." In contrast, others struggled to be visible on the university campus. Due to the level of anonymity associated with a large university population, some of the students felt there was limited space to be seen as an individual. With respect to being visibly gay on campus, Brad comments, "It's really hard for people to be visible in the first place," while Elizabeth states, "It's a huge school, so being seen and known is a little hard in general." Consequently, the participants' general orientation to the university likely influenced how they experienced themselves and those around them.

Finally, it is important to note that the happenstance circumstances (or throw-ness; Heidegger, 1962) of the participants' lives also influenced how they experienced themselves as gay or lesbian. Situations in which the gay and lesbian students found themselves, including who their family and friends are and the frequency and types of homonegative events they encountered, affected the extent to which their sexual orientation represented a positive or negative facet of their identities. A diary entry by Brad describes the complexity and diversity of the gay and lesbian experience.

An experience [I had] reminded me how complex the barriers that gay people experience are. While I know how hard it is to come out to your family, I have no idea what it is like to come out to an intolerant family. There were a couple times this year in which I was asked by gay people why I felt so strongly about gay issues. One even suggested that gay people are not a marginalized group. This is how complex the gay experience is. On one hand, the community still has gay people who have extremely difficult times coming out, while there is another fragment of the community who found coming out so easy they cannot fathom the barriers others encounter.

As Brad suggests, it is by matter of circumstance that some gay and lesbian persons may have largely positive experiences, while others may experience much negativity in relation to their sexual orientation. Thus, one's personal history may dictate the extent to which he/she feels targeted or marginalized as a gay or lesbian person (as an individual or social group).



## CHAPTER 5—CONTEXTUALIZING HOMONEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR

Before embarking on the analysis to understand what it *means* to be the target of homonegative behaviour, it is necessary to understand what types of actions constituted homonegative behaviour. Each of the gay and lesbian students spent time in the interviews discussing the types of behaviours they considered to be anti-gay/lesbian, as well as the distinctions they made between blatant and subtle homonegative behaviour. Further, during the moments in which they encountered homonegativity, it appeared that much of the participants' experience was consumed by their efforts of interpreting whether they had been targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation and deciding how they should respond to such behaviour. Thus, in this section, the characteristics participants associated with blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour are presented to clarify the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, as well as the factors the participants considered when determining whether they had been the target of homonegativity or if they should respond to a given behaviour.

### *5.1 Defining Homonegativity*

By engaging in this phenomenological inquiry and examining the gay and lesbian students' interpretations of various behaviours and the meanings they attach to those behaviours, it was possible to arrive at an enhanced understanding of what *are* subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. As will become apparent in the following pages, the gay and lesbian students' perception of whether behaviour was intentionally discriminatory was closely related to whether they considered it to be blatant or subtle. Thus, their experiences with knowing they have experienced homonegative behaviour are discussed together with whether they considered an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour to be blatant or subtle.

Perhaps the most striking similarity across participants was their attempts to interpret the intentions of those with whom they were interacting to determine whether a homonegative behaviour occurred. The participants tended to distinguish between behaviours that were purposeful from those that were not and, as a result, intention played a primary role in how the participants' perceived and experienced heterosexuals' behaviours. Patrick noted that his perception of a heterosexual person using prejudicial language was dependent on the "context and the intention—are they saying it to tease a friend, or are they saying it to hurt someone's feelings. Or,...do they know there's necessarily a gay person who could be hearing this?" Similarly, when Hope was asked to distinguish between behaviours that were blatant or overt

from those that were subtle, she indicated that she would “focus on the person’s intentions.” She found it difficult to describe the process of how she judges someone’s intentions, because she is “trying to gauge their subjective state of mind.” However, she does “try to read into” a behaviour to determine “whether it was intended or not.”

### **5.1.1 Defining Blatant Behaviours**

The participants consistently categorized negative behaviours that were intentionally directed toward them and meant to be harmful as being blatant or overt. The overt nature of blatant homonegative acts made it clear to the participants that they had been purposefully targeted by a heterosexual person on the basis of their sexual orientation. In these situations, the gay and lesbian students were confident in their perceptions of the situation and the other person’s intentions. In the following extract, Nathan describes what overt homonegative behaviours mean to him.

Overt is that intent...You are intending to insult that person...You’re outright overtly discriminating against that person. You have an intent to because you recognize that there’s a difference and that difference is something that you’ll never be able to overcome, to look past, so therefore that person needs to go away, that person needs to be tallest, needs to realize that you know what [you’re] doing right now or the way [you’re] living, [you’re] like wrong, because it’s intent...They want to put that fear into [us], so they don’t have to deal with it [i.e., homosexuality] more. Out of sight, out of mind.

As Nathan’s words suggest, when the participants were targets of blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, they knew where they stood in that person’s eyes and the implications of his/her behaviour were unmistakable.

### **5.1.2 Defining Subtle Behaviours**

In contrast to their description of blatant homonegative behaviours, the participants’ characterization of subtle behaviours was more varied. Behaviours were considered to be subtle if: 1) they were perceived to be unintentional, yet were experienced as negative or derogatory; or 2) if they *seemed* intentional, but were hidden, disguised, or ambiguously negative in some other manner. That is, subtle behaviours tended to be characterized as either being unintentionally negative or ambiguously negative. Throughout the remainder of this section, the gay and lesbian students’ experiences with, and reflections upon, subtle homonegativity will be discussed in an effort to describe in greater detail the various types of behaviours they encountered and the factors they perceived to be associated with the perpetration of this behaviour.

A closer examination of the way in which the participants spoke of, or wrote about, subtle homonegativity revealed that these behaviours were manifested in three ways. First, the gay and lesbian students perceived some subtle homonegative behaviour to reflect mindless or unintentional actions that stem from societal norms pertaining to the acceptability of using language that inadvertently derogates gay and lesbian persons. The participants believed that some heterosexuals who used anti-gay/lesbian remarks and expressions were not necessarily aware of the meaning underlying such words and phrases. For instance, with respect to the use of anti-gay/lesbian epithets, Elizabeth finds that: “People say things without really meaning offense. It's just a term, a catch phrase.” Similarly, Becky suggests that behaviour of this nature may occur because it is socially accepted.

Discrimination where something that's just said in passing, just in a joking manner, in a relaxed sort of way, would be more subtle to me. You know, it would just arise out of, you know, sort of how people socially interact, not a direct assumption or judgment of you—that would be more overt, you know?

Like Becky, many of the other participants perceived that the use of this language was not necessarily indicative of any underlying homonegativity and may, as Tara suggests, “Come out more of naivety and ignorance than out of, like, a ‘I’m going to be oppressive’ kind of mentality.”

Insightfully, in trying to find meaning in heterosexuals’ use of this language, Brad concludes that: “Subtlety is marked by apathy.” Several participants perceived that because heterosexuals were only vaguely aware of the connotations of the words they used, they were not sufficiently motivated to change the language they used in their everyday lives. A diary entry written by Fred after he heard a co-worker jokingly refer to another worker as a “fag” conveys his sentiments that the use of anti-gay epithets may reflect a type of automaticity in heterosexuals’ behaviour.

To them, it was probably an acceptable word to use. In any case, I ended up asking them to watch their language and to keep busy. I think that some people don't understand how some slang is inappropriate and offensive, even if they don't mean it to be. Maybe their peers use it, and they follow suit out of habit. On the other hand, maybe they do it on purpose because they don't care and don't really respect the differences in other people in the world.

During this incident, Fred considered the possibility that because prejudicial language is so common, heterosexuals who use this language may not even recognize that such language may be perceived as offensive by gay or lesbian persons. However, as Fred reflects on this incident,

he also considers that the perpetrators of such language simply may not care that they are using language that may be perceived as offensive by sexual minorities. Liam suggests that some heterosexuals are unwilling to alter their language to be more tolerant of sexual minorities because they are hesitant to experience the feelings of awkwardness and discomfort that occur when one disrupts the status quo and learns a new way of being and behaving.

It makes a lot of people uncomfortable...and they feel like they don't want to challenge it, because they feel like they're going to have to learn this whole new p.c. vocabulary that they're not going to be good at. And, they're just going to feel inadequate, without realizing that the system, as it is, is making some people continually feel...awkward.

As such, Liam perceives that heterosexuals would rather continue their mindless behaviour that is disrespectful of sexual minorities because they value their own comfort over the comfort of gay and lesbian persons. However, many participants indicated they sometimes chose not to address heterosexuals' prejudicial language to avoid making others feel uncomfortable (a topic that will be discussed in detail in a subsequent section), which suggests that another factor potentially contributing to heterosexuals' persistence in engaging in these behaviours is that they may not be aware of how uncomfortable sexual minority persons feel when they hear anti-gay/lesbian remarks.

The gay and lesbian students also perceived that a lack of social sanctioning in relation to using language that derogates gay men and lesbian women contributed to heterosexuals' usage of this language. This lack of social sanctioning was made especially clear to participants when they compared the language that was spoken in relation to their social groups to the acceptability of using comparable language to speak about racial minorities. In fact, several of the participants determined that a comment was homonegative by examining whether the same comment would be perceived as pejorative if the target were a racial minority. Using such a comparison, Liam explains in a diary response how he perceives heterosexuals' tendency to apologize for their use of prejudicial language rather than removing such language from their vocabulary as evidence of their apathy to meaningfully modify their vocabulary and behaviour to construct a society that is more accepting of sexual minorities.

I regularly hear this one from people that do know I am gay, and they are quick to qualify it with, "Oh, well you know what I mean" or "I don't mean like you." I understand what they mean, but their thought hasn't come full circle on their behaviour. They would cringe if you said n\*gg\*r period, or even the word negro, but gay, or fag, etc. is not 'fully' deemed socially inappropriate in a derogatory sense.

Essentially, the participants concluded that if it was inappropriate to make similar comments in front of a racial minority group member, it was inappropriate to make these types of comments about sexual minorities in front of them.

The participants did experience, however, that heterosexuals were motivated to modify their behaviours during situations where it would be considered socially impolite to speak derogatorily of gay and lesbian persons (i.e., when they were in the presence of sexual minorities) to avoid awkward or tense social interactions. In a diary entry, Elizabeth, who has disclosed that she is lesbian to few people, perceives that prejudicial language is frequently used around her because others are not aware of her sexual orientation. However, she believes this behaviour would not occur if the perpetrators of the comments were aware she is lesbian.

It just seems like a double standard, and it's probably my own fault for allowing it to exist in my personal life. This is a big generalization, but it's commonplace for straight people to poke fun at gay behaviours when they believe no one will be offended. And I assume that if we were out to them, gay jokes would not occur in the same way in my presence, but it's probably safe to say that it wouldn't really change when I'm not around. Sure it won't be like that with everyone, or people may learn that gay jokes aren't okay, but generally, the double standard sucks.

Again, Elizabeth alludes to a perceived apathy among heterosexuals to *really* change their behaviour and language usage to be more respectful and inclusive of sexual orientation. Instead, she believes that heterosexuals only curb their prejudicial language use when they may be caught or held accountable by other heterosexuals for their behaviour. Similarly, Fred perceived that some heterosexuals use prejudicial language because they assume sexual minorities are not present which, to him, reinforces the thoughtless nature of these acts. "If nobody comes out around them, they just feel like...gay people are hidden...They're not here...And, I don't think they see that it might offend someone...It's just not thinking." As individuals who are lesbian and gay, but not open about their sexual orientations, Elizabeth's and Fred's experiences offer a unique perspective about how, and in what circumstances, this type of subtle homonegative behaviour may be manifested. Further, being in situations where homonegative discourse is freely used in their presence reinforced to the participants who were less open about their sexualities that there is only limited acceptance for being gay or lesbian among those in their lifeworlds and contributed to their reluctance to be open about their sexual orientations.

Other participants found that heterosexuals tended to apologize for their use of anti-gay/lesbian remarks or expressions in front of the participants rather than actually altering their

behaviour to avoid engaging in this behaviour. Tara has encountered this apologetic behaviour after correcting heterosexuals' prejudicial language usage.

People just assume that they're in a space with everyone who is straight and then, but the moment at which you're like actually, you know, not me, people...really back peddle and are like, "Oh, I'm sorry, I hope I didn't offend you. Like, I wasn't counting on someone being gay." Which is a problem, but it's, I don't know—it strikes me as a very Canadian kind of thing. It's like, "We can be, you know, discriminatory as long as we don't talk about it. And then the moment at which we find out we've been being so, we apologize a lot. It will make it okay."

Tara's experience alludes to a future discussion of how public spaces are regulated by an unspoken rule to be respectful and polite toward others when in a shared space. Tara concludes that heterosexuals' unwillingness to behave discriminatorily or use prejudicial language in front of sexual minorities is largely a Canadian phenomenon, since Canadians are known for their tendency to be polite. Thus, the cultural precedent in Canada to be tolerant of diversity may actually lend itself to subtle and indirect forms of homonegativity.

Moreover, the participants tended to interpret these after-the-fact apologies as insincere—they did not believe that these apologies reflected an intent to be more inclusive in the future, but rather spoke to heterosexuals' regret at being caught for espousing homonegative rhetoric and disrupting the social environment. In a diary entry, Liam describes how he perceives apologies to reflect excuses used by heterosexuals to deny responsibility for their discriminatory behaviour.

Straight people know their language discourse is wrong—evidenced by their qualification of their statement—yet they are too lazy to correct it. They are quick to brush this laziness off when you call them on it—"Oh, everyone can't be thinking all the time." They must not know what it's like living inside a closet. Watching every word, every phrase. Even more scary, doing the hokey pokey with the closet—one parent in, one parent out, the whole family in, shake it all about. Constantly watching what you say is just a side-effect of being gay in our society—we learn to be mindful with our words because we are always mindful of our words when dealing with our sexuality. Our sexuality is important to so many institutions in our society, and so much of our vocabulary is engendered with gender (husband/wife, he/she, etc.). I've danced around my words (partner, spouse, boyfriend? which is wisest? flat-out lie, girlfriend?), and now get to consciously choose the words that most accurately reflect the inside me—sorry to burden you heterosexuals with a little linguistic awareness and ask you to get a little more creative with your adjectives than 'that's so gay.'

The juxtaposition of some heterosexuals' careless and some gay and lesbian persons' careful use of language highlights the powerful role language can play in the lives of sexual minorities and the degree of consciousness that occurs among gay and lesbian persons when selecting words to describe their lives and identities to others; a consciousness that Liam does not perceive

heterosexuals to exhibit when selecting words to speak to or about sexual minorities. Heterosexuals' lack of motivation to modify behaviour that may be experienced as harmful also speaks to the privileged position and power they hold in society. Due to this lack of effort on heterosexuals' behalf, Liam is not particularly forgiving of their usage of prejudicial language and holds them accountable for their language, regardless of their attempts to excuse their behaviour. Liam's words also exemplify the importance language plays in expressing himself as a gay man. Of the participants, Liam was among the most secure and open about his sexual orientation across spaces; however, he, too has struggled with how much to reveal about himself and to whom simply because the space to be gay cannot be taken for granted in Canada.

Some participants found that attempts to reprimand their heterosexual peers for using anti-gay/lesbian discourse were futile. For instance, when Sheena asked some of her acquaintances to stop making fun of gay men, she found that it "doesn't really read with some of them," meaning that even when she does point out that their behaviour is inappropriate and they apologize for their behaviour, they do not truly understand what is wrong with their behaviour. Others were simply unwilling to consider the possibility that their language was inappropriate. Kelly has found when she has reprimanded some heterosexuals about their homonegative language, they became defensive and denied that their behaviour was hurtful.

There's still a lot of people that you would say that to and would take it as an attack... And they would be like,..."I don't see what's wrong with me saying that, blah, blah, blah, whatever," instead of just accepting that you know what? You're hurting somebody.

The perception that heterosexuals were unwilling to, or unconcerned about, altering their language to be more respectful of sexual minorities suggested to the participants that, as gay men and lesbian women, they occupy a lower status position in the social hierarchy. When Jamie hears prejudicial language, it reinforces to her that, "As a queer person...you're way down at the bottom... you just kind of know where you rank."

The participants did not deem all unintentional homonegative behaviours to be seemingly thoughtless mistakes. At times, they perceived that some unintentional behaviours were expressions of an underlying homonegativity that accidentally belied a person's prejudice toward gay men and lesbian women. Kelly used her felt sense to distinguish between intentional and unintentional comments and perceived that some unintentional comments were inadvertently indicative of negativity toward sexual minorities.

A lot of honesties come out with people unintentionally...When it's intentional, I can feel more hostility behind it. When it's unintentional, I just think that it's, like, somebody speaking their truths...It comes out when there's not a lot of thought behind it, and, it might be a slip of the tongue, or it might be this or that...not something that was thought about and...deliberated over before it actually gets out.

In a diary entry, Kelly describes a specific instance of her experience with this type of behaviour. She encountered a situation where, in her presence, an acquaintance commented to a mutual lesbian friend that she was “too pretty to be gay.” Kelly did not perceive the comment to be intentional, but she did believe it to be reflective of the woman's inner beliefs about lesbian women. As a result, Kelly indicated that, “I immediately wrote her off after hearing a statement like that.” Thus, in Kelly's experience, subtle homonegative behaviours tended to be devoid of the overt or aggressive hostility that tended to accompany blatant behaviours, yet still suggested to her that the person has homonegative tendencies. Similarly, Greg has observed that: “Some people... exhibit subtle behaviours without knowing that they're even doing it.” For instance, Greg encountered an unintentional behaviour he perceived to be suggestive of an underlying prejudice toward sexual minorities when his female co-workers (to whom he is open about his sexuality and who have vocalized their acceptance of him as a gay man) spoke negatively of a lesbian woman who asked one of the co-workers on a date. To Greg, it seemed that because these comments were spoken in relation to a lesbian woman, his co-workers did not think he would find them offensive; however, he interpreted the comments to reflect an underlying prejudice that he suspects the women may not acknowledge they possess.

All those women...say they're fine with me being gay...They're really nice people and I don't think any of them has a problem, until all a sudden they react so negatively towards somebody who is a lesbian. And it makes me wonder what their real thoughts are...I think it shows kind of what they're really thinking deep down. Even though they might say that they're comfortable with homosexuality on a daily basis, they might truly even believe that they're comfortable with it, but then something like that comes and they kind of react on instinct. And you kind of see what somebody's really thinking deep down without having to mask it.

For Greg, moments in which homonegative comments are spontaneously made can provide access into another person's mind and provide glimpses into what he perceives to be their “true” opinions and beliefs.

Further, unintentional behaviours that seem suggestive of an underlying homonegativity do not necessarily have to be verbal. Nathan perceived subtle distancing behaviours to reflect unconscious manifestations of a person's discomfort with gay or lesbian persons.



Subtle behaviours, I would probably define as they're not conscious actions, you can tell like the person is not doing it with intent...If you're a gay man and you're talking to a man, it's seems to be this, is he going to try to hit on me, is he going to try to kiss me? It's this fear of that...and it becomes kind of unconscious. So, you start, you know, inching away, or you won't talk to that person as much. Like I've had it happen to me, and it's not really overt. It's not like they're trying to hurt you or do something, but they are doing it, but it's not done with intent.

Nathan recognizes that these subtle behaviours are not carried out with intent, yet he still experiences them to mean that the person with whom he is interacting is uncomfortable with gay and lesbian persons. Thus, behaviours need not be intentionally negative to be experienced as discriminatory and for the participants to draw conclusions about heterosexuals' comfort with, and acceptance of, sexual minorities.

Finally, the gay and lesbian students considered some homonegative behaviours to be subtle when it was difficult to unequivocally ascertain that a person intentionally meant to harm the participant or demonstrate negativity toward gay or lesbian persons. These behaviours included those that were purposefully hidden from the participants to avoid the detection of one's homonegativity. According to Greg:

The more subtle ones are acting in ways that could be perceived as something else...Like I'm not going to say that I don't like you because you're gay, but I'm not going to treat you the same way that I treat everybody else.

Thus, although these behaviours may be hidden, the participants found that they tended to be accompanied by slight behaviours or clues that suggested the person was purposefully trying to treat them negatively (but not to the degree that it is possible to be certain about his/her intentions). Participants also relied on their felt sense of a person to judge whether his/her behaviour was meant to be discriminatory. Elizabeth describes that she sometimes *knows* when a person is homonegative even though their behaviour does not directly express any negativity. "There is that hate, but they don't tell you directly about it. You know it's there, you know there's people that are not going to accept you, but they don't tell you. You just know it's there." In general, she perceives that: "People have become very good at hiding or not vocalizing what they are thinking about you."

Daniel attributes some heterosexuals' tendency to indirectly express their homonegativity to the societal pressure that exists to be tolerant of sexual minorities.

Subtle is going around the bush kind of thing, where you're not directly, you're indirectly telling them that you don't like it...People nowadays tend to be more subtle about what they say, because they know that the majority of society accepts homosexuality. It's been

passed in law on marriage, and so they understand that they cannot discriminate against us in a way, so they do it in a more passive tone than an aggressive tone.

Due to the legal protection afforded gay men and lesbian women in Canada, heterosexuals can no longer openly discriminate against gay and lesbian persons without being reprimanded. Consequently, Daniel perceives that heterosexuals who wish to express their homonegativity are now required to do so using passive and indirect means. Thus, the emergence of this form of subtle homonegativity seems to have arisen because more overt forms of homonegativity are no longer condoned by society.

## ***5.2 Being Targeted***

An understanding of the processes in which the gay and lesbian students engaged to identify, interpret, and respond to homonegative behaviour is critical for grasping the situated context in which their lived experiences unfolded, as well as what it means to be the target of an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. The gay and lesbian students considered a number of factors to determine whether they had experienced homonegative behaviour, including the perceived intention behind the action (as already mentioned), the context in which the behaviour occurred, and their own personal responses to the behaviour.

### ***5.2.1 Deciding When a Behaviour is Negative***

Returning to the process through which the gay and lesbian students interpreted the intentions of others, they found that, because it was impossible to *know* another person's state of mind, they used whatever information was available about a person to judge his/her intention. For instance, in a situation in which a professor made a heteronormative assumption in class, Hope found herself to be forgiving of this error because she perceived her professor to be a "good person."

I'm almost certain she didn't mean anything, because I know her to be very compassionate and... she cares about people, you know? And she cares about justice, and she cares about these things, so I think she just wasn't careful with what she said. She probably didn't even mean it anyway.

Any sense of positivity or compassion that the gay and lesbian students felt in relation to a given person was used to mediate their perceptions of his/her intent to cause harm. Rory also described how he was forgiving of mistakes people may make when speaking to him as long as he sensed some positivity from them. "I feel like people's intentions are really important because, even if you get a bit of that sense the person is trying to be positive, I still kind of appreciate that and don't see it as being overt." Similar to Rory, Becky also judged a person's intent on the basis of

how she intuitively felt while interacting with him/her. “I guess there [are] always some subtle or different feelings about people. You can kind of tell maybe they’re not so okay with it, but they’re not outwardly negative towards you.” The participants’ felt sense of a given person played an integral role in their judgement of his/her intentions.

The participants also identified elements of their interactions with heterosexuals, such as their body language or tone of voice, which suggested that their behaviour may be intentionally negative or reflective of an underlying prejudice. Von comments, “I think if you're speaking to someone...it's the way they interact with you that gives it away more than anything else, in like their inflection, how they're saying it,” while Tara states that, “subtle I find has a lot to do with facial expression...looks are really telling.” In addition, several participants noted that it was the way in which two or more heterosexuals interacted with each other in relation to the participant that led them to experience a behaviour as discriminatory. According to Jamie, and Alyssa, respectively, “sometimes people talking to each other” and “whispers in the hall” suggested to them that people were discussing their sexuality in a negative context.

The involvement of a third individual in an interaction occurring between the participant and a heterosexual person could also lead a given behaviour to be experienced as discriminatory. Kelly described how she perceived a behaviour to be negative after a private (and potentially ambiguous) moment between her and another person suddenly became a public (and, from Kelly’s perspective, unequivocally negative) moment when another person was invited to be critical of her.

I can decide when it’s negative when somebody looks at me and then they talk to somebody else. That gives you the negative feeling, because then it’s like, okay, so now, all of a sudden, this isn’t just a moment between me and this other person, right?...It’s hard when you know that, all of a sudden, then there’s two people who give you disapproving looks. And then, all of a sudden, there’s three people who give you disapproving looks, you know? And then it sort of, like, moves down the line from there.

As Kelly’s experience demonstrates, the act of including multiple others in displaying disapproval of someone creates a felt sense of negativity. It seemed that moments which occurred between the participant and one other person could be dismissed as potentially meaningless but, when a third person was involved, the meaning behind an act became crystallized.

### ***5.2.2 Being Sure That Behaviour is Inappropriate***

Another significant aspect of the participants' experiences with being the target of blatant and subtle homonegative behaviour was how they responded to these behaviours. Since homonegative behaviours are acts that occur between two or more people, the participants' decisions to respond were often situated within their social lifeworlds and relationships with others. The decision to address homonegative behaviour was complicated and dependent upon a host of factors. Patrick comments that the decision to address homonegative behaviours "isn't black-and-white" and varies depending on "people and relationships and contexts."

In general, the gay and lesbian students perceived behaviours that were intentionally meant to harm them as the easiest to classify as inappropriate, as well as the easiest to respond to, because the person's intent to harm the gay and lesbian person was considered to be obvious, and the behaviour itself was often socially agreed upon to be unacceptable. Patrick explains that when language is "used, as in like...let's beat up this gay person, or this faggot, that's obviously... not acceptable." Similarly, Hope found that when people were blatantly rude toward her or other gay and lesbian persons, there was a general understanding among others who may be present that behaviour of that nature was inappropriate. For instance, she found there was a consensus among her classmates that the behaviour of a fellow student who frequently vocalized his homonegative beliefs was wrong. In the following extract, Hope reflects on her personal response to overhearing such blatantly anti-gay/lesbian comments.

Sometimes the overt one is more shocking because I'm shocked that people are that brazen. But it also kind of normalizes it in the sense that it makes it feel like lots of people think that person's being brazen or obnoxious. And, so, it just seems more understood that their behaviour's inappropriate because it's more out in the open.

As a result of the certainty associated with blatant homonegative acts, the gay and lesbian students were confident about their own responses toward individuals who perpetrated these behaviours. Typically, participants ended their communication with the person who acted negatively toward them and dismissed the person as someone who is hopelessly prejudiced. For instance, Alyssa describes her general approach to people who are blatantly rude or derogatory towards her.

If it's overt, you know, you can just be, like, "enjoy the rest of your night." I don't need to sit here and talk it through with you. We can just leave your comfort where it is. You're not going to be the person I'm going to talk to at this dinner party, or at this student conference, kind of thing.

### ***5.2.3 Being Unsure: Is It Because I'm Gay?***

In contrast, the participants found subtle homonegative behaviour to be more difficult to identify and address because of an element of ambiguity associated with the person's behaviour and/or intentions. As a result, the act of interpretation was exponentially more prominent in their experiences with subtle homonegativity. Alyssa explains that: "Subtle behaviour leaves you more to question, and you don't know how to go." Participants found that they tended to live in a state of ambiguity in their social relationships. Indeed, the word "ambiguous" resonated with Hope, who felt that this word thoroughly captured her experience with her classmates whom she generally felt to be distant for reasons that were unclear to her.

Ambiguity is a really good word to hone in on, because I didn't know that was my experience, but that's my experience...I always I kind of felt like I didn't always have a clique... I could never tell if that's because I'm the lone lesbian and I feel awkward about that,... or is it just because they're twenty three, and I'm thirty four...I couldn't tell is it just, like, I see myself different or is it they do too? But I did, for sure, feel that sometimes, actually, like pervasively, on a...low grade chronic level—is it them or is it me who's doing the distancing?

The fact that Hope chronically questioned the factors contributing to the perceived distance in her relationships suggests that this sense of ambiguity can play a substantial role in the participants' experiences with others.

Since the gay and lesbian students struggled to know with any degree of certainty that a given behaviour was meant to harm them, they often found themselves ruminating about whether they may be misinterpreting the other person's actions. In the following extract, Hope explains the thoughts that tend to run through her head when she encounters a subtle behaviour for which she is unsure of the person's intentions.

If it's more subtle, then it's easier for me to then do that mental gymnastics and wonder, like, "Is it me? Am I misinterpreting it? How do I understand this?" And then it kind of feels worse, because it's subtle, and then you're left to wonder and try to make sense of it. And do other people think that or did I misunderstand?

As Hope's words illustrate, when the participants encountered subtle behaviours they tended to expend energy and time trying to decipher the other person's actions and even began to doubt their own intuitive feelings about the situation. Hope's doubt about whether others present found the behaviour to be offensive also suggests there is less social consensus regarding the degree to which subtle behaviours are considered to be inappropriate. This doubt seemed to add to the uncertainty she experienced upon encountering subtle behaviours.

Similar to Hope, after a classmate failed to introduce Kelly to an acquaintance, she also pondered what could have been underlying that person's motives not to acknowledge her.

Are you scared that this person is going to think I'm with you? Or, like, what is this?... Is this just how you treat everybody? So, who knows if it's like a generalized thing or if it is a specific thing?...Is it worth saying something about it? You know what, like maybe this person is struggling too, because they're uncomfortable with the situation. So, maybe, I should just like let them be uncomfortable and know that I'm fine with myself, and, whatever, right?

Kelly's experience suggests that it may be even more difficult to understand the questionable actions of acquaintances because minimal information regarding what constitutes "typical" behaviour for that person is available. Consequently, the uncertainty the gay and lesbian students experienced in their relationships with heterosexuals may be amplified in their interactions with persons with whom they have had limited contact. Further, when in a situation where she did not (and could not) know the other person's intentions, Kelly found that, in addition to questioning his/her motives, she began to question her own actions in relation to that person. In contrast to the confidence that Hope experienced in her responses to overt homonegativity, she also was reluctant to address subtle homonegative behaviours because she felt as though she lacked evidence to accuse someone of behaving negatively toward her in these situations.

The subtle stuff you don't have the validity to confront sometimes because they can point to it being something else. Like, um, "Why didn't you invite me to your wedding? Is it because I'm gay?" "No,...I just didn't know if you'd want to..." Or, you know, it could be a thousand other things...And if it's a really overt one, you feel, like, I feel like I would have the validity to address it, because I know and you know why you did that. But if it's really subtle, then maybe I wouldn't have a foot to stand on if I confronted it because, even if I'm pretty sure that's the reason, it could just be chalked up to so many other things.

Thus, not only does the ambiguity that can overshadow gay and lesbian persons' relationships and interactions with heterosexuals make it difficult to definitively identify whether one has been the target of discrimination, it also can cause a person to doubt the appropriateness of his/her own actions.

#### ***5.2.4 Feeling Vulnerable***

In addition to feeling that they lack evidence to address subtle homonegative behaviour, the extent to which the gay and lesbian students felt vulnerable in a given situation also affected their willingness to respond to these behaviours. For Alyssa, concerns that she will be singled out or unable to exit the situation if a confrontation escalates were at the forefront of her mind when

deciding whether to reprimand someone for using prejudicial language among a group of people with whom she was only minimally familiar.

I guess [it depends on] what my alternatives would be. If the only option to do is stand here and talk to them,...I'd be less likely to say something...I might not even be, like, "Don't say stuff like that." Because then I don't want to be the odd one out all day, if I'm stuck with people and the one who's going to bring up that sort of issue, you know? Or, if there's a different group of people to go talk to, you might just walk away, or you might say, "Gay jokes are so gay," you know, and just walk away. It depends what you have to go to, how you're going to handle the situation.

As Alyssa's words suggests, the participants were wary to create situations in which they may be ostracized or feel uncomfortable over extended periods of time.

The participants' moods and their self-confidence on a given day or in a given situation also affected their feelings of vulnerability and whether they were willing to address subtle homonegative behaviours. Kelly comments, "If I'm feeling good about myself, I'm feeling confident about myself...and then I can stick up to it and it's fine. But there are times when you're feeling a little bit more vulnerable." In fact, one's mood may even dictate how an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour is perceived and interpreted. Von explains how his interpretation of unintentional homonegative comments made in his presence depends, in part, upon how he is feeling about himself on a given day.

You will overhear it in different ways sometimes, and I guess it just depends on my mood too. Some days I'll say something about it, and other days I'm just like, "Yeah, whatever." If it's one of those days where I am willing to say something, it touches a nerve. I don't know how to describe it—it just touches a nerve sometimes. And I just want to like, [points at himself] you know, "Hi!" But then other days, like I said, it's just not a big deal...Some days it really hits a nerve, and other days it doesn't.

Depending on his mood, Von sometimes experienced a strong desire to reveal himself as a gay man when he is around people who are using prejudicial language (and who are unaware of his sexual orientation) to defend himself among those who are inadvertently offending him.

However, on days when he is not feeling vulnerable, derogatory slang words and phrases do not bother him. Experiences such as Kelly's and Von's suggest that there is no singular response to being the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours and that how a behaviour is interpreted may depend upon a complex interplay between social and personal factors related to how secure one feels in relation to those around him/her.

### ***5.2.5 Choosing Your Battles***

Due to the challenges associated with identifying and confronting subtle homonegative behaviour, the gay and lesbian students sometimes experienced a sense of futility in relation to addressing these behaviours. In situations when it did not seem worthwhile to address these behaviours, they attempted to “brush off” the behaviours or ignore their existence. Daniel explains, “I am used to it and I just turn a blind eye to it, because I understand there’s always going to be people who don’t understand and ask us questions about that stuff. So I don’t really care about that stuff anymore.” Several participants drew upon the metaphor of war to describe when and how they chose to address subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. According to Hope:

At the time you just have to brush it off...School is demanding, and you just have so many battles to fight. Like, it’s enough of a battle to keep your notes straight, you know... Something like that happens, and you think it’s the last thing I’m going to confront today...I just kind of pushed aside some of those things and just focused...I would forget it...I think that my natural reaction is just to kind of dissociate a bit and to just not feel as participatory, even though I’m still there.

Hope’s description of the battle she experiences in deciding whether to confront or disregard homonegative behaviour reveal that the decision to confront such behaviour is often made in relation to the other stressors present in one’s life. At certain moments (such as when Von felt compelled to reveal himself in his aforementioned experience), the participants’ battle with homonegativity was of utmost importance to them, and they deemed it necessary to address these behaviours. However, there were moments when other aspects of their lives took priority, and they found themselves disengaging from the event or behaviour perceived to be homonegative to allow them to continue moving forward in their lives. Sheena comments, “You just gotta kind of learn to brush it off. There’s gonna be people worse than that.”

### ***5.2.6 Sacrificing Yourself***

Adding to the complexity of how the gay and lesbian students experience and respond to subtle homonegative behaviours, several participants noted that sometimes they chose not to address these behaviours because they did not want to be responsible for precipitating situations in which others felt uncomfortable. After a friend stopped speaking with him after he invited him to a bar, Fred even went so far as to take it upon himself to learn how to prevent situations where homonegativity may be perpetrated. Fred describes how he struggled to make sense of a new friendship and wanted to learn how to avoid similar occurrences in the future.



“Did I do something wrong? Did I offend him in some way?...Does he think all of my friends are gay?...Did he think that I thought he was gay? Maybe I offended him that way?”...Sometimes when you say something, and someone reacts badly, and you don’t know why, it makes you feel like okay, well, I have to learn what I did wrong and next time not say that.

The situation to which Fred refers is another example of an interaction fraught with ambiguity. Perhaps, the most revealing aspect of this incident was Fred’s assumption that it is his responsibility to be more careful about what he says and to learn how he is being interpreted to avoid alienating heterosexual persons in the future. Despite being made to feel as an outsider in their social relationships with heterosexuals, several of the gay and lesbian students (particularly those who were less open about their sexual orientation) felt compelled to manage their social relationships by shaping or modifying their behaviours to decrease the likelihood they will make others feel uncomfortable in the future. The experience of feeling like they were different was not one that the participants relished, and if they could avoid situations similar to the one Fred experienced at the expense of sacrificing their own comfort, they were often willing to do so. Jamie suggests that sometimes it is easier to silently experience discomfort than to address it and, consequently, bring discomfort onto everyone involved in the social situation.

Sometimes you can cloak your own feelings...because it's easier not to say, “Okay, well, this is how I identify, blah blah blah”....I mean, I'm totally frank, I'll talk to anyone who wants to listen about my gender identity and my sexuality, but sometimes, it's just like, okay...They sort of set up the rules, and this is how it's going to be, and if it's not particularly bothersome, then I'll just go along with it...If anything, the only person to be at any loss was myself, and that’s always the first person you’re willing to sacrifice, right?

Similarly, Sheena felt that it was inappropriate to displace any discomfort she felt in her relationships as a result of her sexual minority status onto the heterosexuals who may be contributing to her feelings of discomfort (such as in situations where prejudicial language is being used in her presence). Sheena comments, “I can’t expect people to just be comfortable with it, you know, if...they’re not comfortable with it, then they’re not. I shouldn’t make them uncomfortable just so I can be comfortable.”

Why might the gay and lesbian students feel the need to sacrifice their own comfort in social interactions? In part, it seemed that, because the participants repeatedly found themselves in situations where they were made to feel as though they did not belong, they came to accept that, as the outsider, they were responsible for making others uncomfortable. As such, they experienced a strong desire to foster positive interactions with heterosexuals, even if

heterosexuals' comments and behaviours caused them to experience feelings of hurt or discomfort. In addition, living in a society that values polite and courteous conversations also played a role in the participants' unwillingness to contribute to discordant social relations, especially with unknown others. Quinton comments in a diary entry that, in general, he does not "like drawing attention to 'controversial' things," including his sexual orientation. Similarly, Tara echoes, "Maybe it's a Canadian thing, maybe it's a Saskatchewan thing, but you don't talk about stuff that's controversial."

Finally, the gay and lesbian students expressed concern that even greater discomfort may be brought upon themselves and others if the subtle homonegative behaviours they encountered were explicitly addressed. Brad describes that his reluctance to displace his discomfort onto someone else stemmed from his perception that: "You're going to make them feel anxiety, and you're going to feed off that anxiety." Others were concerned that by drawing attention to homonegative behaviours they assumed to be unintentional, they become overt. It seems that for behaviour to remain subtle, the intention behind, and impact of, that behaviour must remain unknown, unspoken, and unanalyzed. Tara describes how a social situation can become more uncomfortable after addressing homonegative phrases (such as "that's so gay") stated in her presence.

The trouble with confronting that is that I always feel like, when I do call someone and be like, "Hey, when you say that, how about you say stupid instead because whatever you're talking about doesn't have a sexual preference." Like, you know, "Don't be a moron," pretty much. And I feel like, by bringing that to someone's attention, I'm making it overt, which usually makes them more uncomfortable. It's like when someone says retarded and you call them out on it, and they're like, "That's not what I meant" and get really defensive and stuff, so. There are some things that I feel like people try and put back on you for making it overt. But it's like, well, you can't just let things like that slide, so I guess that's more of the subtle stuff.

Tara struggled with how to best manage the myriad emotions she experienced in response to subtle homonegative behaviour and several questions emerged in relation to such interactions. Whose right for comfort in the social situations is greater—the perpetrators of such comments or the gay or lesbian person who overheard it? Who is at fault for disrupting the social interaction? In Tara's mind, the perpetrator should take responsibility for his/her comment; however, in her past interactions, she has found that these individuals tend to blame her for creating an issue out of what they perceived to be a misunderstanding. It is challenging for the participants to navigate these situations because they are negatively affected by prejudicial language, yet the lack of

purposeful intent to be hurtful makes it difficult for them to feel confident and justified in explicitly addressing this behaviour. Moreover, the unintentional nature of these behaviours is disturbed by accusing someone of being homonegative and additional social friction is created where, from the vantage of the perpetrator, there previously was none.

### **5.2.7 *Knowing What is Not Yours***

Before moving on, I want to reinforce the point that participants did not sacrifice their own comfort in all social interactions and that, in spite of the difficulties associated with addressing subtle homonegative behaviours, there were many occasions in which the participants sought recourse. For instance, in a diary entry Liam wrote about how he viewed opportunities in which people seemed uncomfortable with gay and lesbian persons as opportunities for him to question them about their discomfort.

You see visible discomfort...and I used to see that as a discomfort that says, "Shut up let's not talk about this. There's the line, I don't care if people are gay just as long as they don't act like it in front of me..." Now, how I read it is as more, "I've never been in this situation before, so that's actually an opportunity for me to force them...to question those things, because deep down I don't think anyone's really, like, biologically homophobic. I think,...socially, people are raised to be homophobic or taught to be homophobic, so... the only pragmatic thing I can do is expose you to me, and take it however you like...I'm pretty confident in myself, so it's not really going to affect me if you reject me, with students at least.

Several of the participants also shared Tara's belief that, when possible, the onus of discomfort should be placed on the person who is prejudiced or behaving negatively toward gay and lesbian persons. She explains, "I have no control over them. I can only control how I react to the situation." Similarly, Jamie is an advocate of detaching from people who are homonegative as a means of maintaining control over one's own life and emotions.

Some people curl up with their phobias, and then it's like their life, and you have to detach from it...Otherwise, you're going to take responsibility and carry everything in the world with you...You have to detach. You have to know what's not yours.

Sometimes distancing themselves from the homonegativity that exists in society was the most active strategy the participants could employ to ensure that they did not take responsibility for the negative behaviours that other persons felt justified in directing towards them.

### **5.3 *Being Hurt by Others***

The last aspect of the participants' experiences with homonegative behaviours that needs to be discussed in the context of knowing that they have been targeted is how their relationship with the perpetrators of homonegative behaviour influenced the impact these behaviours had on

them. Even though there tended to be greater ambiguity in the participants' interactions with acquaintances, the subtle rejection by a person the gay and lesbian participants held in esteem was often perceived to be more damaging than rejection from someone with whom they had a limited relationship. In a diary entry, Sheena describes how she found it especially hurtful when a close friend refused to stop making homonegative comments (i.e., "saying something was 'so gay'") around her.

She couldn't understand why [I was offended] and I explained calmly that it is offensive when people say it, and they should at least try to not say it....She started to tell me that it shouldn't be offensive because she didn't mean it. I was starting to get upset because she was refusing to think that it could offend me...I was really shocked that this was her view. I know she is not homophobic or anything, but it was very offensive what she was saying. I usually don't get that emotional about it, but I felt like crying...It still hurts because I know if I bring it up again, she will just argue with me and I don't feel like getting into that. I don't really know how to make sense of it right now...I never expected one of my good friends to say stuff like that to me. It is hard because it's like she doesn't care enough about me to try to not say it...If you use offensive terms, that is your call (I don't agree with it but to each their own), but you don't say it in front of people it will offend. You do this for strangers, why not for a friend?

The most troublesome element of Sheena's experience was that her friend was willing to change her language usage for a stranger, but was not willing to accord the same respect for Sheena, a person for whom she was supposed to respect and care. After the incident, Sheena was left grappling with feelings of hurt, powerlessness, and confusion. Her friend's action was senseless to Sheena, and she was left questioning whether her friendship with that person was as valuable and meaningful as she once thought.

Marcie also felt that subtle homonegative behaviours perpetrated by her family and friends undermined the quality of her relationship with those individuals.

I actually feel more hurt when people make the subtle ones, because I find that subtle ones are more from, like, friends... that know. And, the fact that they're doing that, kind of tells me they aren't really supportive...Or, well, their actions and their comments are contradicting the fact that they say they're supportive.

The homonegative behaviours she encountered from friends suggested to her that they were not accepting of her sexual orientation, despite what they may claim verbally, and caused her to doubt how honest her friends were with her. Not surprisingly, Marcie indicated that she felt more uncomfortable in her relationships with these individuals and less sure about how much of herself she should reveal. Notably, Marcie also commented that being openly called derogatory names by her co-workers was less painful than the subtle behaviours she encountered from

friends because she had “no connection to those guys.” In fact, it may be by virtue of being in a close relationship with a gay or lesbian person that friends and family are provided with the opportunity, and are perhaps required, to enact their homonegativity in a subtle manner.

According to Jamie:

Overt things are usually going to be from someone you don't know, so you don't feel as bad. But if it's subtle, it's usually because it's someone you know, who is in an environment with you and in a position to be subtle.

For some participants, however, the ambiguity of subtle homonegative behaviours was preferable to blatant behaviours being directed toward them. Greg found comfort in the fact that, with subtle behaviours, he does not have to assume that someone dislikes him based on his sexual orientation.

And I'd rather somebody be more subtle about it than just come out and say something like that... You can justify it in your own mind by saying, “Oh, well maybe it's just because they don't like me.” So you don't have to think about it, you know. You just get to be a normal person...[You don't have to make that jump to, “Oh, it's because I'm gay”?] Right...you don't have to go there. You can just say, “Okay, well, you know, people don't get along with me and that's fine...” You don't have to be sure, and that's easier with subtle.

Finally, the gay and lesbian students tended to experience homonegative behaviours as less damaging when other sexual minority persons were present when the behaviour was perpetrated. Kelly indicated that she feels less of an outsider when she is the target of homonegative behaviour when among her queer friends.

It's better when you're with queers in numbers because then, it's like, you know, you don't feel so alienated and isolated...When people are looking at me differently when I'm with somebody else, it's like it doesn't bother me at all. But sometimes, when I'm like on my own, sometimes it's like, uh, “Just leave me alone, already,” you know.

Similarly, Christie perceives that: “If you're not surrounded by friends, and you're not surrounded by people who support you, it gets a lot more difficult.” Thus, the presence of similar others reduces the feelings of difference and alienation experienced by the gay and lesbian individuals, as well as the impact that homonegative behaviours potentially have on them. Being able to rely on social support from other sexual minorities in the face of homonegativity was one of the key ways in which participants dealt with these behaviours.

#### ***5.4 Summary***

In conclusion, the gay and lesbian students' experiences with, and reflections about, blatant and subtle homonegative behaviour revealed that they experienced these behaviours

differently. Blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours were characterized as actions that openly targeted their sexual orientation and, as a result of their overt nature, were easier to identify, respond to, and dismiss. In contrast, when the gay and lesbian students experienced what they considered to be subtle homonegative behaviour, they tended to engage in an endless cycle of interpreting and re-interpreting the heterosexual person's behaviour, their own perceptions of the situations, and their own responses. That is, being the target of subtle homonegative behaviour meant the participants' experience was infiltrated by thoughts regarding the intentionality behind a given action, their own possible misinterpretations of the behaviour, the appropriateness of a given course of action to take in response to the behaviour, and questions about their own identities. Thus, the experience of being targeted by subtle homonegative behaviour meant living in a state of uncertainty, anxiety, and insecurity.

## CHAPTER SIX–FINDINGS FROM THE LIVED EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS

The participants' experiences with being the targets of homonegativity were all unique, yet there also were similarities underlying their lived experiences and the meaning they derived from those experiences. In the following pages, I discuss the aspects of their experiences that were common, yet all discussion is situated in the experience of an individual. Further, even though the experiences that are described in this analysis reflect those that were expressed by gay and lesbian persons, many of their descriptions reflect events and interactions that are fundamentally *human* in nature. That is, non-sexual minority persons also may have experienced similar situations in their lives, not necessarily in relation to their sexual orientation, but potentially with respect to other contexts or aspects of their identities.

In the following analysis, I begin by sharing my interpretations of the participants' experiences of "lived other". This section primarily focuses on the way in which homonegative behaviours influenced the way in which they related to the other people with whom they share their lifeworlds. Next, I present findings pertaining to the participants' experience of space, devoting equal attention to the way in which they related to the physical spaces in which they found themselves and the implications that homonegativity had for their own sense of personal space. Third, I share the participants' experiences with relating to the world through their corporeal bodies. The way in which the gay and lesbian students were bodily engaged in the world reflected an aspect of experience that was poignant for a few participants (e.g., Kelly, Jamie, Elizabeth, Rory, Tara, and Quinton) and less important for others. Fourth, I discuss how the participants' sense of time was affected by homonegativity by focusing on how homonegative behaviour can change a person's subjective perception of time in the moments when such acts are occurring and influence one's orientation toward, and expectations of, the future. Finally, I conclude by discussing the aspects of lived experience that were similar across lived other, body, space, and time to identify the essential aspects of what it means to be the target of homonegative behaviour. Although I focus on the gay and lesbian students' experiences in relation to the four existentials separately, they often experienced the existentials simultaneously.

## *6.1 Lived Other*

### *6.1.1 Being Different*

The relationships we maintain with others in the interpersonal space we share with them constitute a fundamental component of our experience as humans (van Manen, 1990). People tend to be happiest when they are investing in social relationships and experiencing a sense of connectedness is integral to our experience of relationality (Gilbert, 2006; van Manen, 1990). In the case of the gay and lesbian students, a state of disconnectedness more accurately described their experiences as targets of homonegativity. Given that interpersonal discrimination is, by definition, an act that is perpetrated by one person against another, much of the experience of being the target of discrimination occurs through one's relations with others and serves to disrupt the feelings of connectedness and joy one may receive from interacting with others. Quite literally, the participants indicated that when interacting with heterosexuals, they were sometimes made to feel as though they were "other." That is, through heterosexuals' words and actions, the gay and lesbian participants came to feel they were different from those around them.

The gay and lesbian students encountered a plethora of behaviours from heterosexuals that suggested to them that they were considered to be "other." These behaviours ranged from actions that served to distance heterosexuals from gay and lesbian persons to those that questioned or dismissed the participants' identities and personhood. Many of the behaviours the participants described which made them feel as though they were outsiders were not explicitly negative in nature, yet the nuanced way in which heterosexuals interacted with the gay and lesbian students left them feeling as though they were considered to be fundamentally different from heterosexuals. For instance, Nathan described several subtle behaviours that served to make him feel that, as a queer male, he was perceived to have nothing in common with the heterosexuals with whom he was interacting.

Sometimes it's even little things like they won't sit beside you, they won't look you in the eye. I notice that quite a bit, because it seems like they don't want to—they just kind of...look around. The conversations are kind of boring. It really seems like they think that you kind of live a different life and that you won't relate to anything.

The behaviours described by Nathan were typical of the participants' experiences and reflect how seemingly innocuous behaviours can lead to the construction of a lived social reality in which the gay and lesbian students felt as though they were outsiders.



Other behaviours also led the participants to feel as though they were perceived to be “other” by the heterosexuals with whom they are interacting. Actions intended to be positive, such as being overly nice in what was perceived to be an inauthentic manner, suggested to the gay and lesbian students that they were considered to be “abnormal.” Patrick explains, “I kind of interpret someone kind of going out of their way and maybe being over-the-top nice... as, yeah, you don't have to do this, I'm just a normal person.” In addition, conversations in which sexuality would become of the focus of conversation, particularly in situations where this information seemed ancillary, signified to the participants that they were not viewed as persons, but as sexual beings. Quinton found that in his interactions with some heterosexual men, they were often compelled to demarcate the social boundaries of their relationship by explicitly reminding him of their heterosexuality. Quinton comments, “I can tell when someone's really uncomfortable...if they want to start talking about their girlfriend and how much sex they have with girls and stuff like that.” After asserting their heterosexuality and insinuating their lack of interest in having a homosexual relationship with Quinton, he found that his conversations with these individuals could then move to topics other than sexuality.

In addition, when Marcie's sexual orientation was needlessly mentioned in conversation, she often felt singled out for belonging to a sexual minority.

Even in my lab, when the girl in my lab found out about me,...my other friend was there and he's gay as well...I went back to work, he was reading and then, all of a sudden, she was like, “Now I feel like the minority here.” And I was just like, “That's unnecessary,” and...felt kind of annoyed. I feel annoyed when people make comments like that because it's unnecessary. And it's like, “Okay, you already know, do you have to keep bringing it up?”...It's like one of the other reasons why I'm not really out is because people will say they're okay with it, but I don't really think they are. And their behaviour will definitely change.

By having attention drawn to her sexual minority status, Marcie felt that, despite verbal claims to the contrary, those around her were not fully accepting of her sexual orientation. Such reminders caused her to feel unsafe in her relationship with that person, as these seemingly harmless comments suggested to her that her friend may treat her discriminatorily in the future. Further, to protect herself from any future homonegativity she may encounter, Marcie withdrew from those around her and was reluctant to openly share aspects of herself, particularly in relation to her sexual orientation. Thus, flippant comments can have a substantial impact on the relationships the gay and lesbian students have with heterosexual acquaintances and friends and may limit the extent to which meaningful connections can be established.

### **6.1.2 Lacking Legitimacy**

Through their interactions with others, some of the participants also felt that because they were gay or lesbian their opinions and beliefs were discredited or dismissed by heterosexuals. The lack of respect afforded to them by heterosexuals suggested to these participants that they were considered to be of less importance than heterosexuals. In the following extract, Hope describes how she experiences her identity as lesbian as a potential threat to her status among her peers.

When I was vocal in class, I always wondered if I lacked some legitimacy because I'm a lesbian...I really got the impression. Sometimes when I would make a comment in class,...I could just feel people's eyes roll or, like, whispers sometimes, because it was like that raging lesbian feminist...So, well, sometimes I didn't want to be identified as a lesbian, because I felt that undermined my legitimacy in other people's minds.

The perception that others accorded less weight to her opinion because she was lesbian threatened Hope's sense of self-worth and, not surprisingly, made her reluctant to identify as lesbian. Her experience also reflects how facets of a person's identity can be validated (or invalidated) by those with whom the social lifeworld is shared.

At times, the gay and lesbian students felt that their entire identity as gay or lesbian was dismissed or minimized by heterosexuals. Despite the fact that the participants tended to experience their sexual orientation as something innate to their being (as Becky states, "I'm choosing to be out and tell people I'm a lesbian, but it wasn't a decision for me really to be a lesbian"), they often encountered discourse from heterosexuals which suggested they chose to be gay or lesbian and served to undermine the legitimacy of their identities. Hope found that: "A lot of people seem to not believe lesbians are real, but that they just haven't grown up and met the right guy." Comparably, a man suggested to Daniel that he is gay because he was "confused and just have never dated another girl before." Interactions of this nature caused the gay and lesbian students to feel uncomfortable and misunderstood. In addition, the denial of legitimacy in relation to being gay or lesbian prevented the participants' sexual orientation from occupying a taken-for-granted status and being gay or lesbian became an element of their identity that had to be "proven" to others. Tara describes how it was not until she had a romantic partner that those in her life began to believe she was lesbian.

I was single...and my mom in particular was like, "I don't believe you. Date someone and then come back and tell me you're gay." I was like, "Well, no, I just know." And that was really hard...Having a partner was a little bit easier almost, because you didn't have to say, "I'm gay" you could say, "I'm Tara, this is my girlfriend" and people would get it.

The reluctance of some heterosexuals to accept the gay and lesbian students' sexual orientation as a legitimate identity placed an unfair burden on the participants to explain and defend a critical aspect of their identity—an act in which most heterosexuals are not required to engage.

### ***6.1.3 Lacking Intimacy***

Interactions devoid of meaningful contact also fostered feelings of isolation and disillusionment among the participants. Moreover, these interactions did not need to be explicitly negative to arouse feelings of hurt among the gay and lesbian participants. Becky found that her mother's neutrality toward her lesbianism was more hurtful than any incidents of overt negativity she encountered.

She was never negative towards me at all. She was always, you know, fairly positive or neutral about it, but I think what hurt me the most is when she was neutral. Because it kind of made me feel like she didn't have any feelings towards it, and I was kind of confused by it? I thought either you're supportive or you're not supportive. But, no, there's a gray area, and my mom was kind of in that, you know?...It was kind of hurtful for me to go from "she's interested" into "mom's not really so interested anymore." Not the whole negative thing, but just sort of, yeah, "I don't really care"... I felt sort of like, you know, my main one support network wasn't really there for me.

Although Becky's mother was not openly rejecting of her sexual orientation and there was nothing about her behaviour that could be construed as rude or derogatory, her ambivalence was perceived to be hurtful. The subtle, yet emotionally tangible, withdrawal of her mother's support contributed to Becky's perception that there is a "gray area" in relation to one's acceptance of sexual minorities. It is this ambivalence that characterized the participants' experiences with some subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, as they could not fault the other person for his or her behaviour, yet they did experience a reduced emotional connection that resulted in feeling hurt. In addition, it was through experiencing subtle changes in their relationships after disclosing their sexual orientation that the participants came to feel they had been treated negatively (or at least differentially) on the basis of their sexuality.

Further, the gay and lesbian students found it difficult to establish or maintain substantive relationships with others when they felt that, through another's eyes, they were perceived to be fundamentally different from heterosexuals. Nathan describes how, after disclosing his sexual orientation to his friends, he struggled with being seen simply as a queer man rather than as himself, a multi-dimensional person.

It's kind of interesting what you notice when you just kind of watch someone. You kind of observe this, and you start wondering, "Why is this person doing this?" And it's hard

to make sense of it when you're the one being shied away from, when you relate more to that person because, in my mind, it's no big deal...I don't know why they're doing it...If they hang out for long enough, then sometimes that does get pushed down and you start to see the person, but it's like as soon as you find out, there's kind of like this wall that goes up, and that's the first thing you see. And you can tell when you see them that's the first thing that pops into their heads, and then everything else kind of gets lost...It feels like they can't really relate to you, because they're not that way. So it's kind of more of just the pleasantries and daily stuff, and there's nothing more, because they kind of feel maybe that, by being that way, that you're different and they just can't relate to you...It just feels more like it's impersonal, like there's nothing personal there...There's really no meaning behind it.

Nathan felt that his entire person was rejected by those who distanced themselves from him after finding out about his sexual orientation. Nathan struggled to make sense of the subtle changes that ensued in his relationships, because he perceived himself to be no different prior to disclosing he was queer. However, he felt that, in the other person's eyes, he became unidimensionally queer with all other aspects of his personhood falling to the wayside. Consequently, Nathan was left questioning, why? Why should being queer change how he is perceived? Why was the other person shying away from him? Participants spent much time questioning why someone may be distancing him/herself from them and often became frustrated with others who caused them to doubt their friendships. When asked to reflect upon a friendship of her own that broke down after she disclosed she was lesbian, Elizabeth concluded that it was not worthwhile to maintain a semblance of a friendship with her former friend. "You shouldn't have to work for it, and you shouldn't have to question whether someone is okay with who you are." Many participants struggled with what Nathan considered to be a "reduction in connection" in their relationships with close others after disclosing their sexual orientation, and were bothered when previously meaningful relationships eroded into relationships based on superficial pleasantries.

#### ***6.1.4 Being On the Outside***

The inability of some heterosexuals to treat gay and lesbian persons as they would treat other heterosexuals and their tendency to distance themselves from sexual minorities was described as an alienating experience by several of the participants. Literally, Jamie perceived that she was viewed as an alien when a mother pulled her child away from her in a washroom. "Her mom...kind of like tugged her away, and I was just like, 'Oh God, come on, what am I?' So that was one time where...the mom saw me as like an alien." As a result of this interaction, Jamie began to question her very being and concluded that "people are really scared and they hate what

they're scared of.” Jamie’s use of the word alien to describe how she felt is particularly revealing, as to be “alien” is to be foreign, unfamiliar, strange, or from another world (Collins, 1998). Experiences such as these in which the participants felt they were, as Fred commented, “a little bit on the outside” contributed to a loss of their humanness.

In trying to find meaning in situations where their sexual orientations or identities were dismissed, some participants tended to assume that these comments were indicative of the other person’s discomfort with homosexuality. Fred explains, “It just makes me feel like they’re trying to isolate themselves from [homosexuality] and create this world where that doesn’t exist. I think they’re just trying to be kind of ignorant from all that.” Others took a more empathic approach and strove to be understanding of their heterosexual family members and friends who they perceived to be struggling with the idea of homosexuality and accepting people who are different. According to Liam:

Just as coming out is a process for me...learning to accept other people is a process, too. And so, the other side of the coin, is like I can get to the point where I'm totally okay with being gay, everyone else though has to go through this process where they get to a point with being okay with me being gay or with gay people being around. I guess it's probably more difficult in some ways, because they don't have this inherent sense inside them that's telling them you are this way that you are. It's not in them, it's in someone else. They almost have to have more of a faith or, for some people,...they need to meet a lot of gay people before they're like, “Okay, you guys aren't choosing this just to be a pain in our ass. This is who you really are.” So they’re entitled to that process too.

Thus, the participants interpreted and responded differently to heterosexuals’ apparent attempts to distance themselves from sexual minority persons.

## ***6.2 Lived Space***

The space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel and factors prominently into how we experience the world around us (van Manen, 1990). Throughout the participants’ narratives, it was clear that their experience of a given space played a meaningful role in their lives. Often, the gay and lesbian students relied on their sense of felt space to identify environments and situations where they felt unwelcome or may be at risk for discrimination. As such, their sense of a particular space contributed to the extent to which they felt safe, secure, and free to be themselves. It is difficult to discuss the participants’ experiences with the spaces they inhabit without considering their relationships to others who may be present in those environments. Thus, in the following sections, I will explore how their experience of felt space affected how they experienced themselves and others in certain settings.

### 6.2.1 *Knowing When You Are Not in a Safe Space*

The gay and lesbian students' experience of space varied depending on whether they were in public or private spaces, indicators of homonegativity were present, or spaces were primarily assumed to belong to heterosexuals. However, regardless of the space they were in, the participants tended to engage in an act of interpretation to ascertain how welcoming or accepting the space was of sexual minorities and, consequently, how much of themselves they should keep hidden or felt comfortable revealing in that space. Christie explains, "I don't want to get into a situation where I will meet someone who is homophobic, or is going to give me a hard time about it. I'm kind of cautious about it." The possibility of encountering negativity, no matter how remote, was constantly at the back of the gay and lesbian students' minds. As Jamie states:

It's like you never know if you're going to get on the bus and those people are going to be there. Hate is always lurking...It's definitely there. You're conscious of it...I mean my life's not ruled by fear, I'm not constantly scared... I'm not going to let any people dictate how and why and the ways that I choose to live. But, at the same time, you can't act like you're ever above, you know? You have to not go into that alley.

Jamie does not try to let the hate toward gay and lesbian persons that exists within society control her life but, at the same time, it does shape her behaviours, and she is always somewhat prepared for the moment when that hate might reveal itself.

The gay and lesbian students relied on their felt sense of a space to determine whether they were in an unwelcoming environment and indicated that they implicitly *knew* when they did not belong in a given space. Jamie notes, "You know where you don't go...You know when you're not in a safe space, that's for sure." The participants struggled to describe the feeling they experienced upon walking into environments they deemed unsafe. Daniel simply describes the feeling as intuition. "It's just an intuition thing...I think it's just built in every person, some people's intuition is a little weaker and mine is a little stronger. I just get this feeling in my stomach." In contrast, Von does not try to name the feeling he interprets to mean he should not discuss his sexual orientation in a certain space. Instead, he explains, "I just know that there's something that I'm not supposed to talk about."

The presence and absence of certain characteristics demarcated spaces experienced as welcoming or unwelcoming, and the participants' intuitive feelings tended to be tied to the presence of those qualities. For instance, many (but not all) participants mentioned that they felt more comfortable or at ease in public spaces where large crowds were present. Christie comments, "If I'm in a public place like the mall or something, I kind of let down the guard a

little,” while Alyssa speaks of her comfort in high traffic areas when on the university campus, “I’m more comfortable in certain buildings...where everybody passes through.” Further, Hope, who is typically cautious about displaying affection toward her same-sex partner, feels more relaxed about being affectionate in large crowds (as noted in the following diary entry).

Last night, my partner and I went for a walk at the river valley. I am always cognizant of who is around us and am worried that if we hold hands we might be harassed. So, we sometimes curtail our public displays of affection, especially if there is a risk teenagers might be around...We don’t hold hands often at the mall, in the park, etc., unless there are a lot of people around (to me it feels safer if there are larger crowds).

The participants’ words reflect their tendency to be vigilant to indicators of prejudice in their surroundings, and to relax this vigilance when in the presence of many others. It has been suggested that thoroughfares and public locations are not places where people feel at rest, because they are not places where people stay or have the space to express themselves (i.e., they are no place to *be*; van Manen, 1990); however, for the gay and lesbian students, the anonymity afforded by large crowds contributed to an enhanced sense of security that they will not be derogated or singled out for being gay or lesbian. It seems that public spaces, where a diverse array of people are present, provide a cloak of anonymity that allows greater freedom to express one’s individuality.

The expectation that one be respectful and polite when in large crowds to ensure peaceful and harmonious relations also acted as a form of social control that discouraged homonegativity in these settings. Social decorum holds people accountable to those around them in public settings and, consequently, blatant negativity is generally held at bay in these spaces. Nathan experienced a sense of safety in public spaces because he perceived them to be “policed.” In the following extract, he compares his experiences with hearing homonegative phrases and jokes in more private spaces (e.g., barbecues and parties) to those in more public spaces.

Generally, parties are pretty bad, not so much public places...For the most part, it's at parties, at barbecues...It's kind of like there's no repercussions for what [they] say, they can joke around and whatever...When it can be enforced, they keep quiet, but once you leave that policed area, then it kind of kicks up. And it's never to the point where you can prove it, but it's kind of like, even if it happens once really, it kind of damages you. And then it sticks in your mind, because it's one of those things that then you start to wonder if everyone else is thinking that way... Like, if everyone who's straight is really thinking this, but they're too nice to admit this.

Nathan’s words suggest that he is more likely to encounter homonegative comments in private spaces because people feel free to express their prejudicial beliefs in their own homes or the

homes of friends without repercussion. Nathan's experience also demonstrates how tenuous feelings of comfort in a given space may be and that a single homonegative slur or phrase may shatter the illusion of safety that one previously experienced. An anti-gay remark spoken by one individual was sufficient to lead Nathan to question whether others present might also be prejudiced toward gay men and lesbian women, but are refraining themselves from verbalizing their negativity out of a sense of propriety. Upon hearing a homonegative comment about a lesbian woman at his workplace, Greg also questioned whether the other people present endorsed similar beliefs, but were too polite to speak them out loud: "You wonder if it's just that person who's negative or if other people are thinking it, but they're not saying anything." Once the thought that one might be among homonegative others creeps into a person's mind, it seems that it is difficult to dismiss the implications and recover the sense of security that was previously experienced. Such thoughts serve to undermine how comfortable a person is with being gay or lesbian in a given environment and may lead to a heightened state of watchfulness for additional indicators of prejudice.

In both situations to which Nathan and Greg refer, the homonegative comments that caused them to question the beliefs of others present were not explicitly directed toward them. However, sometimes the homonegative behaviours that occurred in public spaces were targeted directly at the gay and lesbian students. In these situations, the space in which the participants were located immediately became perceived as threatening. Hope's experience with being discredited by a professor in one of her classes with the swift, yet damaging proclamation, "But you're a lesbian" after she asserted her opinion on a topic unrelated to her sexuality (i.e., whether there are acts in this world that are universally wrong, such as the rape of a child) reflects the fragility of one's sense of safety. "I felt like it was a safe place to talk about it and then, suddenly, I realized it was not...I felt [she] really invalidated my being, not just my beliefs." Not only did this comment make Hope realize she was not in a safe environment, she became acutely aware that, because she was lesbian, she was not valued as a person in this space.

An experience of Tara's also exemplifies how a public space can quickly become dangerous after a man verbally lashed out at her and her partner in a restaurant.

We were weaving our way through the line of people to get into the restaurant and this guy on the patio starting yelling at us and he was like, "Lesbians, oh my God!" And I turned around, and he was sticking his tongue out at me. And I flipped him off, and I yelled at him, and I was like, "Fuck you!" And then...I just kind of stopped and I was



like, I just did that in front of an entire restaurant full of people and all these people waiting on the street. And we took off then, went into a store and regrouped...I was really upset and then, afterwards, I got a little scared. And I was like, "Okay, we should probably go home." Like, I don't want to be out on the street anymore, and there were lots of people. It's the kind of area where, like, a lot of the same people circulate...and I was like, you know, "What if we run into this guy again?"

In this case, the presence of large crowds did not offer a sense of protection or safety; conversely, they contributed to an enhanced sense of vulnerability. It seems that when attention is drawn to a gay or lesbian person's sexual orientation, the sense of anonymity offered by public spaces is destroyed and, in an instant, a space initially thought to be safe becomes unsafe. No longer did Tara perceive the crowd to be protecting her identity; instead, the crowd seemed to be protecting her attacker who could appear again at a moment's notice.

Another notable aspect of Tara's experience was the desire to return "home" after the attack. The concept of home is one that is important to most people: it is a place of privacy, security, and freedom (Distasio, Sylvestre, & Mulligan, 2010). Thus, home is the place that Tara retreats to seek protection and comfort. However, home was not a place of safety and security for all participants in the study. One of the unique experiences of being gay or lesbian is that, under some circumstances, one's home may be another location where one is subjected to discrimination. This was the case for Daniel, who, when asked if there were any locations where he cannot openly be himself, he responded, "Well, at home, obviously, but other than that I don't hide myself...I'm usually myself everywhere." Daniel lives with his parents who he perceives to be both traditional and intolerant of homosexuality. Thus, home, the place where most people can be themselves without any restriction, is the primary location where Daniel is required to present a carefully monitored version of himself.

Von also feels that he cannot return home, not due to his parents (who are accepting of his sexual orientation), but because he deems the town in which his home is situated to be unsafe.

Driving toward my hometown there, the town right next to it, the sign that says 1 km away is riddled with bullet holes. The sign has actually been shot and then spray painted underneath it is "gay..." right there for you to look at when you drive into town. So, I don't go home anymore.

For Von, the sign riddled with bullet holes conveys to him that he is neither welcome nor safe in that space. In fact, these blatant displays of homonegativity filled him with a sense of hopelessness and terror while he did live in his hometown.

I felt like I'd never ever leave it, and I was surrounded by people that thought differently than I thought... and just kind of trapped...I remember being scared that I would basically be lynched...I don't know how much of that was just me overreacting , or how much of that was a reality,... but I was scared shitless.

Such blatant displays of homonegativity serve to restrict the spaces gay and lesbian persons are willing to enter and can strongly influence their felt sense of that space. Further, Von's question regarding whether the perceived consequences of revealing himself to be gay were real or imagined is important to acknowledge as it suggests that it is the perceived risk of violence that shaped how the gay and lesbian students felt and behaved in certain environments. Since the gay and lesbian students cannot know others' thoughts or intentions, it is the perceived or, perhaps more appropriately, *felt* risk of being discriminated against in a given space that constitutes their lived reality. With respect to feeling that he must hide himself, Von concludes, "It's all context. It's all where you are...just because, I guess, you can sort of imagine what sort of people are going to be around you based on where you are."

In terms of other indicators in the environment that influenced the gay and lesbian students' felt sense of space, many found that signs of religious worship made them uneasy due to the strained history between sexual minorities and Christian religions. The mere presence of a large number of churches in Saskatoon caused Patrick to perceive Saskatoon to be less tolerant of gay and lesbian persons than his home city of Regina. "Regina is surprisingly more liberal. Although the gay population [in Saskatoon] is larger, it's also a much more religious city...There are churches literally everywhere in the city." Similarly, when working in a rural area of the United States where the religious beliefs of the community were publicly stated, Becky felt it would be best to hide her sexual orientation.

It's definitely a place where, if you are a lesbian or gay, you will have a hard time. You will be singled out and stuff like that. It's kind of a scary place—beautiful and nice, and great people, but at the same time very old-fashioned in their beliefs. Like, you drive down one road, and there's the ten commandments on huge billboards down this one country road. So,...we knew that when we went there,...we just don't discuss this, just to make it easier. We don't need the lynch mobs chasing after us, you know? [laughs]

Often when the gay and lesbian students found themselves in spaces where they perceived hate to be present, their response was to hide their sexuality to avoid hateful behaviours that may be directed toward them.

Cues that were more subtle in nature also signalled to participants that a space may not be welcoming. Quick glances or the shifting of bodies served as warnings that those around them

may not be tolerant of homosexuality. For instance, when asked how she knows that she is in a space that is potentially unsafe, Jamie explains that she relies on the body language.

It can be as simple as someone shifting uncomfortably, like, the way someone looks at you, you know. It can be physical things like that. Sometimes other people talking to each other, you kind of cue into other people's mannerisms...The size you up and down look, the disapproving looks, you know, the: "That's not appropriate. You're not appropriate."

Brad uses the term "risk management" to describe the process of monitoring these types of subtle behaviours to determine how open he can be about being gay in a particular space. He explains, "There's a very quick risk management where you're, like, reading facial expressions very quickly... and then,...you have your two choices where it's like,...'Do I want to be part of this situation or not?'" Thus, through slight gestures signalling discomfort with gay and lesbian persons, the participants perceived heterosexuals to construct spaces exclusive of sexual minorities. In general, the gay and lesbian students were highly attuned to how others may perceive them.

Visible displays of homonegativity were not necessary to create an unwelcoming space; the lack of any details acknowledging the existence of gay and lesbian individuals also was sufficient to make the gay and lesbian participants not want to be in certain locations. Upon walking into a new space, one of the strategies the participants used to determine whether a space was welcoming was to scan the environment for signs of lesbian and gay persons. Jamie describes that: "You kind of survey the room, it's like you can almost tell by anything that's in the room too, like reading material, anything that you can tell that wasn't designed for you, and does not include you." A lack of acknowledgement of lesbian women and gay men quickly signified to Jamie that she does not belong in that space. Similarly, Brad felt uncomfortable in spaces on campus that did not identifiably belong to anyone (including gay men and lesbian women).

There's these small pockets of visibility that kind of makes you feel like there's small spaces on campus that are very positive toward gay people. But, in general, it's just dead space...It's not identified to any group, which I guess is understandable.

Brad's use of the phrase "dead space" to describe spaces devoid of gay and lesbian life is interesting, as it suggests he perceived these spaces to be stagnant places that lacked life and vibrancy or even dangerous places where one was at risk of being harmed. Perhaps a combination of these interpretations contributed to the anxiety Brad experienced in these "dead spaces" and prompted his avoidance of these areas on the university campus. "I was just in very

gay bubble pockets and nowhere in between. Like just on-off, on-off.” For him, it was these unclaimed spaces, thoroughfares or not, that constituted spaces that were no place to be.

### ***6.2.2 Belonging to an Invisible People***

At times, the gay and lesbian students felt that sexual minorities were generally unacknowledged by society. The presence of societal norms that assume and expect heterosexuality suggested to the gay or lesbian students that there was limited space afforded to being gay or lesbian in Canadian society. Christie comments, “I find that just most people assume that you’re a straight person...[Homosexuality] will come up as a subject and people, it won't even occur to them that someone they’re around might be a gay person.” Similarly, Rory has observed that it is: “A general thing for people to...just kind of assume that the default is straight and...that's the most likely thing.” The lack of awareness the participants perceived to exist fostered a feeling of invisibility among the gay and lesbian students. For instance, the lack of attention devoted to lesbian and gay rights in the curriculum in his university classes led Brad to perceive that sexual minorities “are invisible people, a second-class kind of group of people.” For Nathan, the minimal attention paid to sexual minorities by society suggested to him that being homosexual is not, and never will be, acceptable to those around him. “If school and your teachers aren't teaching you about it, then clearly it's not something that’s acceptable. It's not something that should be happening because, if it was, then you'd be learning about it.”

### ***6.2.3 Dreading Spaces***

Three locations—namely dance clubs, gyms or locker rooms, and bathrooms—were specifically identified by participants as spaces where they did not feel comfortable because they perceived them to be primarily “heterosexual spaces.” The lack of a sexual minority presence combined with a strong emphasis on heterosexual culture led many of the gay and lesbian students to feel as though they did not belong in these establishments. For some participants, being a sexual minority in a predominately heterosexual environment led to negative self-directed feelings. For instance, when Kelly was in both bars and gyms, she would view herself through the gaze of heterosexual others and come to see herself as unattractive and an outsider. The following extract describes her experiences at a heterosexual bar (which were strikingly similar to her experiences at the university gym).

It’s like you feel ugly. You feel gross. You feel like, you know, you don’t look like anybody else in there, right? You look like, I don’t know, you definitely look like you don’t belong...When you’re surrounded with all those feelings and you walk into there,

it's like hmm.... you know, red flags going off, get out of here. Like, this is not good for me... And, yes, I have gone there a few times with a couple of friends for birthday parties...And, every time I go into there, the same feelings, same awkwardness, same like, you know, I'll sit at a table and I'll wait and then I'll leave.

Kelly's lived experience of space was directly tied with her experience of her body, and she became acutely aware of her body and sexuality in relation to those around her while in this perceived heterosexual space. Being in an environment that had the power to make her feel "ugly" and "gross" made her certain that she neither belonged nor was safe in that space. Not surprisingly, Kelly's instinct when in a space where she did not feel like herself was to flee; however, this was not always a possibility. Instead, when she could not exit a space, it was as if she entered a state of paralysis where she simply sat, waited, and bade her time until it was possible to leave. Thus, one's sense of felt space can have at least a momentary effect on the extent to which a person feels comfortable with his/her body, confident about his/her identity as lesbian or gay, and welcomed in a space perceived to primarily be occupied by heterosexuals. In addition, being in environments perceived to be "straight" seemed to intensify the differences participants saw between themselves and heterosexuals.

Just as Kelly was self-conscious while in a heterosexual bar, Rory experienced a self-consciousness combined with a concern about creating a potentially negative or awkward situation when at the gym or, more specifically, in the men's locker room. In particular, he worried that, as a gay man, his presence in the locker room (and reasons for being there) may be misconstrued as sexual by the heterosexual men who may be present.

It might just be my concern, and it might just be my own perception of other people, or it might just be sexuality in general and being in a change room—I just sort of, I don't know, sometimes get the sense, like feel weird...like that guy's changing, I'm going to make sure I go around him...I really find myself just not looking anywhere but what my zone is, because I'm like, okay,...I don't want someone to think that I'm intruding on their zone of personal comfort or anything.

As a result of his concern that other men may perceive him to be making sexual advances toward them, Rory made a concerted effort to maintain the boundaries between himself and other men while in the locker room. It is likely that Rory's concern about intruding on someone's comfort is related to a fear that he may be viewed or treated negatively in a space where heterosexual men may find him threatening. Further, Rory also questions whether his concern about being perceived negatively by other men present in the locker room is an accurate reflection of the reality of the situation. It appears that it is difficult for the participants to navigate and feel at

ease in spaces that cause their identity as gay or lesbian to become salient (at least to them) and are shared with heterosexual persons.

For the lesbian participants who either identified as gender-queer or perceived themselves to be more masculine-looking than other women (i.e., Kelly, Jamie, and Elizabeth), women's bathrooms constituted an anxiety-invoking space. It frustrated Kelly that she had to define her gender identity each time she wanted to use the washroom and that there were few gender neutral washrooms available in public locations (such as on campus). "I just wish I wouldn't have to choose... because that's definitely stressful... Sometimes I would rather, like, hold myself and just wait until I get home five hours later, than actually walk to the bathroom here and go." In fact, bathrooms made her so uncomfortable that, if possible, she would rather experience slight discomfort than enter a gender-specified washroom.

One of the reasons the gender-queer lesbian women were uncomfortable in women's washrooms was that, in these spaces, they were often the targets of stares or comments questioning their gender. These subtle behaviours served to tell the women that they were variant and did not belong in that space, regardless of the fact that they, too, were biologically female. In a diary entry, Elizabeth describes how she felt after a woman briefly mistook her as a man while she was in a washroom.

I don't want to make anyone else feel uncomfortable by my presence. I feel guilty when I create an awkward situation. It just makes me feel like I don't really belong in the women's washroom, and I obviously don't belong in the men's washroom, so where am I supposed to fit in? I would describe the feeling as alienating. It emphasizes the knowledge that I'm different and that I don't belong in the predominantly heterosexual world or fit the image a girl is supposed to display.

Elizabeth's words reflect the complexity of her emotional response in this situation—in addition to feeling dislocated because her appearance does not fall in line with societal expectations of heterosexuality or femininity, she also felt guilty about making someone else feel uncomfortable. Elizabeth's guilt may be related to the role she perceives herself to play in disrupting other women's sense of security in an environment that is typically considered to be a safe space for women. As Jamie notes, "A lot of women consider bathrooms their safe spaces, like heterosexual, cis-gender women [i.e., women whose gender identity matches their biological sex] are like this is where I can just be with...women identified women."

Further, Elizabeth's experience of guilt suggests that the lesbian women's experience of discomfort in washrooms is situated not only in their own minds and bodies, but also in the

intersubjective space they share with others who are uncomfortable with their more masculine appearances. It is the interaction between others' perceptions and the participant's interpretations of those perceptions that results in the construction of washrooms as an unwelcoming space. For Jamie, it is the seemingly unavoidable interaction with other women in public washrooms that makes this space uncomfortable.

I don't identify with this space. I hate, I dread going to the bathroom. If anything else, I find the single washrooms, because it's like I don't need to wash my hands, and everyone else is looking at themselves in the mirror, and I'm just avoiding them, so I don't have to look at them. Yeah, bathrooms sometimes are tricky.

It is a constant struggle and source of frustration for the gender-queer identified lesbian participants to determine which gendered spaces they can travel in and those they cannot. The looks Jamie encountered from other women remind her that she cannot effortlessly visit what she describes as "women-only spaces" because she is not seen to "qualify there." Thus, spaces such as washrooms which are often perceived to be safe havens for heterosexual women may be spaces rife with feelings of vulnerability and alienation for gender-queer participants. In summary, the commonality underlying the gay and lesbian participants' experiences in all of these perceived "heterosexual spaces" was the feeling of being outside the norm and a heightened sensitivity to the differences that exist between themselves and heterosexuals, both of which led to the experience of these spaces as uncomfortable and threatening.

#### ***6.2.4 Being Allowed to Be Yourself***

In addition to referring to the physical location which one inhabits, space can also refer to an aspect of experience that is more psychological in nature: personal space. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2008), personal space consists of having "the opportunity to assert or experience one's identity or needs freely." As has been suggested thus far throughout the exploration of this lived existential, the extent to which gay or lesbian persons perceived they could openly express their identities was, perhaps, the most significant issue with which the gay and lesbian students struggled in the spaces they were situated. Their attempts to interpret whether a space was safe or unsafe, welcoming or unwelcoming, accepting or non-accepting all served the goal of trying to ascertain whether they could be openly gay or lesbian. Given the strong connection between the participants' sense of personal space with their experience of physical space, it is only appropriate that I explore in greater depth what it means to *not* be free to *be* oneself.

Another unique element of being a sexual minority is that it can be possible to hide one's sexual orientation. Sexuality is not a facet of a person's identity that is necessarily readily apparent and, as a result, gay and lesbian persons can sometimes control the extent to which others are aware of this aspect of themselves. As Patrick describes, "It's like being a non-visible minority... because you are a minority but, at the same time, I don't think you would ever be recognized as such... You're as non-visible as you want to be." Regardless of how open the participants generally were about their sexualities, they all found themselves in situations where they questioned how vocal and overt they should be about being gay or lesbian.

In particular, when the gay and lesbian students entered spaces where blatant or subtle homonegativity was present, not only did they find themselves asking questions about their safety in these spaces, they also asked themselves existential questions about their right to *be*. Often, the gay and lesbian participants had to balance their questions of safety with their desire to assert their identities. For instance, Von describes the questions that plagued him during an incident in which he overheard two men at the gym use homonegative slurs in his presence.

What can you do? I mean, part of me wants to say like, "Do you realize you're being ignorant insensitive pricks?" And then another part of me goes, "Well, yeah, but if I do that, am I going to get followed out, and then...?" It creates this disaster kind of situation. I guess it's like—when are you allowed to be yourself and when aren't you? That's kind of the question that comes to mind, I guess.

The feelings of powerlessness that characterized Von's experience resulted from his perceived need to suppress his identity as a gay man to preserve his overall personal safety at the expense of being able to freely defend himself and address a socially unjust behaviour. The severity of having to regularly choose between one's safety or freedom of expression is apparent in Von's characterization of this choice as a "disaster kind of situation," suggesting that neither alternative (i.e., revealing himself or hiding his sexual orientation) was desirable. The question that Von asks about his identity during this incident (i.e., when can he *be* himself, a gay male?) is not asked lightly.

The gay and lesbian students also encountered the expectation that a person *should* hide his/her sexual orientation, which they similarly perceived to infringe upon their personal space. In a diary response to a friend's proclamation that she is accepting of Nathan's sexual orientation, as long as she does not have to hear about his homosexuality, he was left pondering several questions about his existence and what it would mean if he did not share this aspect of himself with his friend.



Is it such a bad thing if she doesn't care as long as she doesn't know? If everyone felt this way, would this whole problem be non-existent? However, on the other side of the coin, does that not deprive me of a certain facet of my life that should be recognized?

Essentially, by requesting that Nathan not speak of being queer in her presence, his friend placed a restriction on Nathan's ability to express himself freely. Indeed, a gay or lesbian person's sexual orientation can be hidden. Further, hiding one's homosexuality may render gay and lesbian persons invisible and reduce the tension that exists between sexual minorities and heterosexuals; but, the question that remains is—at what cost? For Nathan, the cost would be the deprivation of a significant facet of his life—a cost which, at times, was too high for the gay and lesbian students. In response to his own existential explorations in the face of such rhetoric, Brad concluded, “I am a gay person...and I want to be visible.” A need to show oneself and to be seen for who one is was vital to the participants' contentment.

### **6.2.5 *Feeling Restricted, Acting Straight***

Moving beyond an understanding of the questions about *being* that were raised in the participants' minds when they felt their personal space was restricted, it is necessary to grasp what the experience of feeling restricted was like for the participants to appreciate what it means to be gay or lesbian in spaces where homonegativity was present. Several participants described the feeling of being in spaces where they could not be openly gay or lesbian as being closeted or feeling suffocated. In the following extract, Christie describes her experience of feeling closeted in a workplace where she felt she could not reveal her sexual orientation due to the explicit homonegative comments that were frequently made by her co-workers.

It was a very, very closeted environment. I felt like I had to jump on any chance to give the illusion that I was straight, and like I had to be very, very careful about what I said...It was a horrible feeling. After a while, you feel restricted, you feel so closed in.

Similarly, Liam states, “I feel if I hold back, then I feel like I'm sort of suffocating my personality a little bit.” The use of words such as restricted, closed in, and suffocated suggests when the gay and lesbian students felt as though they could not freely express their identities, they found themselves in a stagnant state where they could not experience their lives fully. In fact, the definition of “closet” is “to shut up or confine in a small private room” (Collins, 1998, p. 305). As such, it seemed that when the participants were in situations where they felt vulnerable, they locked certain aspects of their identities and personalities into the rooms of their inner lifeworlds that were not accessible to others. It was not until they exited spaces that restricted their personal space that they became living, dynamic beings. Reflective of this notion, Christie

described coming to the university, an environment where she felt she could be more open about her sexuality, as “a breath of fresh air.”

Returning to the previous extract from Christie, it is important to note that not only did she indicate that it was necessary to hide aspects of herself, she also acted in ways “to give the illusion [she] was straight.” Thus, not only may participants feel they must keep their sexual orientation hidden, they also may feel compelled to actively display themselves in ways that are inauthentic. Some of the participants noted that they (unwillingly) put on different personas when in spaces where they felt that, as a sexual minority, they did not belong. When working for the College of Medicine, Jamie found that she would enact a “smarmy attitude.”

My shoulders will drop. I don't hold myself the way that I normally would. I'm a lot more feminine when I'm around them, just because that's how they need me to be...So you'll take on this whole different persona around them, you'll kind of go into like...hardcore inner child, and you're like, “I'm just 12, and I just want you to approve of me.” It's so sad...You can occupy so many different personas in your life. Yeah, so that's one of the particularly heinous personas that I try and avoid, and that's why I avoid people and places and spaces like that. I don't want to have to sit in a way that doesn't make me comfortable. I don't want to have to, you know?

It is interesting to note that Jamie changed aspects of herself, not for her own comfort, but because she perceives this to be what others need from her. Again, we see the emergence of the tendency for participants to feel responsible for making others comfortable by not imposing their sexual orientation (and consequently their selves) onto others. The desire for harmonious social relationships was, at times, so strong that the gay and lesbian students were willing to sacrifice aspects of themselves (by modifying the expression of their own personalities) to avoid conflict and awkward situations.

Similar to Jamie, Quinton also found that he put on a different persona and uses what he refers to as his “straight voice” when interacting with heterosexual men.

I was walking with a friend, a female friend, and we walked into a male friend of mine who's in one of my classes. And we were talking and whatever, and when we were finished, me and my friend walked away, and she said, wow, you sound really different when you are talking with him. And, I didn't realise it, but, I put on a deeper voice and sort of more macho, you know. So, I guess depending on who I'm with, I act differently.

The decision to act in a way that is not necessarily authentic to oneself may not be conscious. Just as Quinton did not realize he had changed how he was presenting himself, when Von was asked to explain how he knows when he must monitor how he is presenting himself, he remarks, “It seems obvious...there's not like a logical thing going on there, it just happens.” Further, while

Jamie experienced pressure to act more feminine, Quinton behaved in such a way that emphasized his masculinity. The tendency of both Jamie and Quinton to act more in line with their respective gender suggests that the unspoken expectation that women be feminine and men masculine exerted a strong influence over how the participants expressed themselves in certain spaces. Moreover, it was in situations where neither Jamie nor Quinton were overly familiar with the other person(s) present where they felt compelled to take on different personas because they were likely unsure of how comfortable these people would be with their true selves. Thus, the gay and lesbian students' sense of personal space was closely tied to their relationship to those with whom they are interacting and/or sharing a space.

### ***6.2.6 Feeling Boxed In***

In exploring the gay and lesbian students' experiences with personal space, the discussion thus far has focused on the participants' perceived or felt need to restrict the expression of their selves in certain spaces. However, the gay and lesbian students also experienced that their sense of self was, at times, restricted by assumptions explicitly imposed upon them by heterosexual men and women. The participants found that some heterosexuals had preconceived notions about the characteristics associated with being gay or lesbian and would view the participants through this stereotypical lens, preventing the gay and lesbian students from asserting their individuality. This tendency to assume that all gay men and lesbian women shared similar characteristics led the participants to feel that they were not seen as individuals, but as members of a group. Becky comments,

I just think it's kind of disappointing that they get, you know, all lesbians, get lumped into one sort of group, right? We're all boyish, with short hair and, you know, bigger women who wear guy clothes...That's not the whole spectrum of lesbians, right? We're people, you know?

At times, the lack of space afforded participants' own individuality placed them in positions where they had to defend their sexual orientations. In particular, the participants who did not present themselves in line with existing stereotypes about gay men and lesbian women found that others tended to dismiss their sexual orientation. For instance, both Hope and Tara encountered comments from heterosexuals that suggested there was not space to be both lesbian and feminine. These restrictions on who is, and can be, lesbian made it difficult for the participants to openly be lesbian (when they did want to be) and to have their sexual orientation

accepted by others. Tara explains the difficulties she has as a self-identified “femme” lesbian woman.

I’ve never really had a gender crisis. Like my sexual orientation is pretty separate from my gender. Like I’m not a butch girl, but I did really have a hard time at first, when I, when I was first coming out, because there were a lot of people making comments, being like, “Oh, I had no idea you were gay, you just look like everyone else.” Or “You’re too pretty to be gay.” And you’re so girly. Why are you a lesbian?” And I’d be like, “Well, I just am.”

Due to the lack of space to be something other than a stereotype, Tara’s identity as a lesbian woman was constantly questioned and denied by those around her. Such behaviours prevented her sexual orientation from becoming a taken-for-granted aspect of her identity for some time. Albeit less frequently, similar experiences also were noted by the gay participants whose expression of self deviated from stereotypical depictions of gay men. For instance, Quinton found that others were willing to believe he was gay but, because he did not dress in a manner stereotypically associated with being gay (e.g., wearing clothing that draws attention), they would doubt his comfort with his sexual orientation. When reflecting upon an interaction with a friend who would not accept that Quinton could be openly gay and dress in a subdued manner, he comments, “He doesn’t really understand, and I’ve tried to explain it to him,...there’s different types of gay people.” Thus, existing stereotypes limit not only the extent to which others deem a gay or lesbian person’s sexual orientation to be legitimate, but also can influence how accepting sexual minorities are perceived to be of their own sexual orientations.

In addition to having their sexual orientations dismissed, the gay and lesbian students found that heterosexual family members, friends, and acquaintances would restrict the opportunities they had to express themselves. Specifically, their family members and friends would make assumptions about their interests and inadvertently exclude them from certain activities and conversations on the basis that, as gay or lesbian persons, they would not be interested. According to Jamie, “They kind of decide for me...it’s a little bit sad, but it’s just the nature of the whole problem...People kind of think that they know me better than I do.” Similarly, in trying to find meaning in situations such as these, Sheena concludes, “Some people just kind of have it in their head that this is what I like and this is what I do...So they’ll just exclude me, I guess, based on those principles. Not necessarily to be mean or anything like that.” Although the participants recognized that such acts of exclusion were unintentional (and even possibly made in good will), they nevertheless were perceived to infringe upon their autonomy.

### **6.2.7 Respecting Boundaries**

Finally, the participants sometimes experienced that their sense of personal space was violated by heterosexuals who did not respect their personal boundaries. When the gay and lesbian students' sexuality was not relegated to the hidden corners of their being, it became the subject of curious and prying questions. The participants were often asked intimate questions about their sexual orientation and lives as gay men and lesbian women that they perceived would not be asked of heterosexuals. According to Alyssa: "My bedroom door is always open...Such simple conversations always end up talking about your sexuality, a.k.a. your sex life, and other people don't need to talk about theirs, so why do I always have to?" Alyssa experienced the frequent need to explain herself and her sexual orientation as a daily hassle with which heterosexuals did not need to contend.

Being asked intimate questions about their lives invaded the participants' sense of privacy and, at times, made them feel uncomfortable. Brad notes, "I think some people have this perception that if they're, that it's okay to always ask without knowing your own comfort level and what you are dealing with. And I think that was also isolating." For Brad, being asked questions without any regard for his comfort caused him to feel alienated from those around him. In addition, some participants felt that it minimized their experiences when heterosexuals with whom they were only minimally acquainted asked about personal aspects of their identities or experiences as gay or lesbian persons. Becky explains:

It's like...they all want to hear the coming out story and..."Oh, have you ever had this experience?" and that kind of thing. And, to an extent, some people are really interested. And, you know, just from their perspective, "How do you, you know, deal with things or how does society accept you?" that kind of thing. But some of them are just taking it for entertainment value...and it feels like they take away from your experience then.

Thus, questions that were too personal in nature for the type of relationship the person had with the participant tended to make the gay and lesbian students feel as though their experiences and challenges were merely sources of amusement and served to trivialize their identities.

In general, being viewed solely in terms of their sexual orientation and the stereotypical characteristics thought to accompany being gay or lesbian, combined with heterosexuals disregard for their personal boundaries, suggested to the participants that they were not afforded the same respect as heterosexuals. The lack of recognition given to their personal space and personal boundaries caused some of the participants to resent the prominence their sexual orientation played in how others saw them. As Nathan states, "I shouldn't be gay, I shouldn't be

bi, shouldn't be queer, shouldn't be straight. Don't judge me on my sexual preference. My name isn't gay kid, and that's what I think needs to be seen.” The participants’ sexuality reflected significant aspects of their identities, but not the only aspect. Von comments, “You can't define me based on my sexuality, like it's a big part of me, but it's not all of me.” As such, the gay and lesbian students wished that others would view them not as gay men or lesbian women, but as individuals.

### ***6.3 Lived Body***

Our bodies are the vehicles through which we experience the world. We often take our bodies for granted and engage in acts such as breathing or experiencing the position of our limbs with limited self-consciousness (Mackey, 2009). Further, due to the many elements of our being competing for our awareness, we tend to have a directedness toward the things in our lifeworlds and are only aware of a limited number of aspects of our existence at any given time (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Consequently, some elements of our experience inevitably fall into the background, while others emerge in the foreground. It is only when something disrupts our bodily experience that we tend to take notice of, and direct our attention toward, our bodies. In these moments, as we become conscious of our bodies, they lose their taken for granted status (Mackey, 2009).

#### ***6.3.1 Failing at Your Gender***

One of the instances in which we become acutely aware of our body is when it falls under the scrutinizing gaze of another. According to Finlay (2006, citing Sartre, 1945/1969), “the body comes into being when the person becomes aware of the regard of another” (p. 21). In these instances, the body can begin to feel unnatural wherein it loses its fluidity and is experienced as an object separate from the self (van Manen, 1990; Finlay, 2006). Indeed, several of the gay and lesbian participants spoke of a bodily self-consciousness in which their bodies became sources of discomfort when they perceived themselves to be critically examined by others. For instance, Kelly became uncomfortable when she perceived her body to be the target of judgemental looks from her heterosexual peers, which suggested to her that her appearance falls outside the norm of how women are expected to look.

You can tell when there's a lot of people looking at you. Like, even in my classes, sometimes I catch people looking at me...When I wear shorts, it's like, “Oh my God, she's got hair on her legs...” Sometimes you get people looking, and then they'll look away. And, then they'll look again and then they'll look away, and...once in awhile, I'll

just catch their eyes looking at certain parts on your body. [How do you feel about that when people are sort of looking?] Makes me feel uncomfortable. Definitely it does...It's hard being gender-queer, too, right...You don't want people to alienate you even further for being gender-queer. And, when you get disapproving looks sometimes, or when you get even people looking at you for being outside of what their normal is, that makes me feel uncomfortable too...because it feels like I'm being judged on a constant basis, all the time.

It is the pattern of fleeting looks and lingering gazes on certain parts of Kelly's body that signify to her that she is being judged and leads to her feelings of discomfort—feelings which she seems to experience on a regular basis. Further, Kelly perceived that it was her gender non-conformity that was primarily judged and examined by others. Jamie echoes Kelly's perceptions that being gender-queer was the most prominent aspect of her identity that was questioned by others. "The gender stuff is...always what complicates it, always gender stuff." In fact, all of the sexual minority women (i.e., Jamie, Kelly, and Elizabeth) in the sample who tended to present themselves as more masculine agreed that it was their non-feminine bodies (and not their sexual orientation) that seemed to attract the most critical attention from others.

In addition to feeling uncomfortable in one's body when scrutinized by others, a host of other negative feelings about one's body and self also may be experienced. For instance, through the gaze of another, the body may come to represent failure. While at a function for medical professionals, Jamie experienced the disapproving looks she encountered to signify that she has failed to enact the expectations that women be feminine.

Because I wasn't wearing makeup and everyone else was really dolled up, they all had really fancy hair, and mine was like, I cut my own hair, I don't wear makeup...The best thing I could muster up...[for] my professional wardrobe is polyester men's pants, maybe a plain cardigan, right? And so you know instantly that you didn't spend the 600 bucks on a dress, so it's like, okay. So you've got that mark that's like, okay, gender fail, right? She's not wearing makeup, she's not—gender fail....It's like you know you're failing at your gender.

Finlay (2006, citing Merleau-Ponty, 1962) suggest that "while the lived body is that which is most intimately "mine/me, it is also an object for others" (p. 20). Jamie's decision to present herself as more masculine reflects an expression of her inner self, her most intimate "me." However, in the moments when Jamie experiences her body as a failure, it becomes an object of scorn that belongs to those gazing at her. Further, for Jamie, this act of being judged is unmistakable, regardless of the fact that this judgement is rarely spoken aloud.

It's not a paranoia, you're aware of it, you're really in tune with the fact that people are like, "Okay, there's that little boyish type girl in the corner."...It's very rare that someone

actually, like, directly says something to you... but you can hear it, you know. You can hear it in the way that they look at you, so it's there, it's unspoken.

Comparably, Rory experienced his body as failing him by not allowing him to blend in with heterosexual men. In a diary entry, he described an incident in which he became critical of his appearance when near a group of men using anti-gay expressions and epithets; an experience he describes as an “everyday sort of thing.”

I was out at a restaurant with two friends. There was a group of guys sitting at the booth next to us. I could hear them using language such as "...so gay" and "...what a fag". We went out for a smoke and, when we came back, they were staring at me on the way in. I couldn't help but feel a bit intimidated and that they might have something against me. I didn't feel like I was having as much fun as I normally would have. I was constantly feeling self-conscious that they might have been talking about the people at our table in a negative way...I wonder if I should start working out to look bigger or more masculine or something, so that I can blend in with the straight people. The incident wasn't that bad. It could have been entirely my own perception. They may not have actually had anything against me at all. But I just couldn't help but feel that way.

When in the presence of the heterosexual men, Rory experienced a heightened self-consciousness over which he had no control and experienced this self-consciousness to such an extent that he briefly considered altering his physical appearance to satisfy the demand he perceived to appear more “straight.” Further, Rory’s uncertainty regarding whether the heterosexual men were thinking negatively of him or whether it was his own interpretation of the situation exemplifies the experience of the gay and lesbian students in situations such as these. When homonegativity was not explicitly directed toward the gay and lesbian students, they were left to assume that because their bodies felt so unnatural to them, it must also be perceived as unnatural by those looking at them. Thus, feeling uncomfortable in one’s body and interactions with others can lead to a state of anxiety and insecurity.

Like Rory, Kelly also experienced feelings of anxiety which she assumed to be tied to an uncertainty about whether others were judging her for looking different than most heterosexuals.

I have anxiety problems too, sometimes, and I’m sure that my anxiety does stem from being queer.... You don’t know if it’s your anxieties that are playing with you. So then I got to stop myself before being too critical about it, too, and say, “Okay, you know what, maybe it’s not even me that they’re looking at. Maybe this is something to focus on for a second. And, that’s all that it is, right?” And, so, sometimes it’s hard to differentiate when somebody is thinking like that or when they aren’t; or whether I’m just saying that they’re doing that, so that I don’t think that they’re looking at me because I’m different than them.



The complexity of Kelly's thought processes in relation to trying to ascertain whether someone was criticizing her on the basis of her appearance are apparent in this extract. In part, her anxiety and fear that her sexuality and gender identity are evident for all to see lead her to initially believe that, when others look at her, they do so with judgement. However, she also recognizes that others may look at her by happenstance and that glances directed toward her may be meaningless. A state of self-doubt results from these conflicting thoughts because she can never be certain of others' intentions. Moreover, she is critical of her own intentions to see these behaviours as coincidental because she is aware that she experiences looks of this nature to be threatening to her sense of self. Thus, there is no comfort for Kelly in these situations: she is always left to doubt either her own or others' intentions and, as she explains, "You're constantly thinking about it." Finally, the question of whether others intended negativity begs the question—does it matter? It seems the gay and lesbian students' corporeality can be disrupted simply from the perception of negativity; a perception they would not experience if there were not so many subtle reminders in society that homosexuality and gender non-conformity are not accepted.

### **6.3.2 *Being Exposed: Everyone Must Know I'm Gay***

In general, it was common for the gay and lesbian students to perceive that their sexual orientation was readily apparent to those they encountered. In the following extract, Rory further describes his feelings of self-consciousness in relation to being assumed to be gay.

It's almost like a self-consciousness...sometimes I think, "Oh, everyone must just know I'm gay...there must be something about me that most people just automatically think that, you know, I'm gay." But then other times, I've come out to people, and they've said, "Oh...I had no idea..." So it's kind of a boundary between what I assume people think and then what they actually think.

van Manen (1990) suggests in our bodily presence, we tend to both reveal and conceal aspects of ourselves neither "consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves" (p. 103). The lack of control some participants experienced over their ability to hide or reveal their sexual orientation was apparent in Rory's discourse, and the knowledge that the gay and lesbian students' bodies could betray their innermost secrets often left them feeling anxious and exposed in their interactions with others. Sheena comments, "I always think people are looking and judging...a lot of the times I think people are acting that way when really they're not...I just always have that feeling around public and people." Similarly, after a near encounter with a Mormon group, Tara describes in a diary entry, "I can't help but feel like they can 'tell' just by

looking at me, even though as a femme queer girl I'm often presumed to be straight. I'm sure they probably didn't even look twice at me, but I certainly noticed them.” A sense of powerless over feeling that others can *know* about their sexual orientations simply by looking at them was associated with an experience of feeling exposed. Further, the possible betrayal of their bodies often served as a source of frustration. Quinton explains that “I don’t want anyone to pick me out for that one little thing, for being gay.” Thus, the question of whether heterosexuals can actually detect the participants’ sexual orientation simply by looking at them seems tangential to the participants’ lived experiences. It is the feeling of being exposed as different that is central to their personal experiences of their bodies in their interactions with others.

### **6.3.3 Being Objectified**

Under the critical gaze of another, the body also can begin to feel as though it is an object of scorn, particularly when overt looks of disapproval are encountered. Tara describes how she felt objectified after a group of women glared at her when she hugged her partner while at a bar.

These girls walked past us to go to the washroom and the look they gave us was like, “Ugh, the evil eye.” It was just like this really snarky, “Oh my God, look at those gay girls, what are they doing?” like, bleh, kind of look...And it affects you, even though it isn’t anything that’s spoken. [How does it affect you?] It made me feel really, really slimy...like, “Ew, stop looking at me like that. Like, what’s your problem?” kind of a thing. And there’s a voyeuristic element to it too...that makes me uncomfortable—where it’s like, “Okay, you can stop looking. Like take a picture—it will last longer” kind of thing.

As a result of the way the women looked at her, Tara experienced her body as something that was scandalous or sordid. The judgement the women held in their eyes led Tara to feel that she was an oddity on display and served to disrupt her sense of being in the world. Moreover, the fact that she experienced the looks as voyeuristic suggests that she felt violated and that her sense of privacy had been invaded. Suddenly her sexuality and the intimate moments she shared with her partner no longer belonged to her; instead, they (unwillingly) became aspects of herself that could be seen and scrutinized by others.

Tara also has felt objectified in her experiences with heterosexual men. Frequently, after coming out to heterosexual men, she (and the other more feminine lesbian participants) encountered comments which suggested that lesbianism was eroticized in their minds.

There was one guy, who when my partner at the time and I came out to him, he was like, “Oh sweet, can I watch?” And I was like, “Fuck you. Who says that?”...And that’s a little more uncomfortable because then I feel like I’m being creeped on. Like it’s, usually I feel like when I’m coming out to someone, I’m the person who has the reins on the

conversation most of the time. And it's when people say things like that, I'm like, "Whoa, now I feel like this has gotten really inappropriate, and I feel really objectified." And I'm like, "Now you're, like, thinking about me having sex with someone and that makes me really uncomfortable. Like, that's not yours, that's mine, like leave me alone." I guess it's the whole like male gaze thing.

After hearing comments of this nature, Tara tended to experience her body and her sexuality as being exploited by heterosexual men to fulfill their own sexual fantasies. This experience of being objectified stripped Tara of her sense of control over how she is perceived by others, as well as her right to privacy in relation to her sexuality, leaving her feeling exposed. It was as if the boundaries between herself and others became blurred and her body was appropriated for someone else's pleasure.

#### **6.3.4 *Feeling Diseased***

Several of the participants also described that, by virtue of being gay or lesbian, they had at various times perceived their bodies and, by extension, themselves as being diseased. Slight movements and gestures suggested to the gay and lesbian students that there was something inherently wrong with their bodies and sexual orientation and, for Daniel, the act of someone shying away from him was sufficient to induce feelings of being diseased.

We were at a club dancing, and...we were starting to meet these two people. And you know how it's loud music, right? And then I tried to talk to one person and I couldn't hear him right, so I tried to get closer and he kind of got uncomfortable and kind of moved away from me. [And how did you feel when he started moving away from you?] I felt angry...It's not like I'm maybe sexually touching him or something like that, which wasn't my intent...It felt like I was diseased or something, like he thought that I would come on to him. I was just trying to get close to him to listen to him, and he took it the wrong way. And I thought it was very disrespectful.

Sexuality never seemed to be far from the surface with respect to how the participants were perceived by others. Despite Daniel's intention to only have a conversation with the man, he was made to feel as though he had been making a sexual advance as a result of the man's movement away from him. The experience of being made to feel that gay men and lesbian women are first and foremost sexual beings was echoed by many of the participants. In fact, when interacting with heterosexual acquaintances, many of the participants encountered the assumption that they were hypersexual and would automatically be attracted to the heterosexuals with whom they were interacting. In describing her experience with assumptions of this nature, Becky extended the disease metaphor to suggest that in addition to gay and lesbian bodies being considered to be diseased, homosexuality also may be viewed as contagious. "It's that sort of awkwardness, you

know, ‘Well, are you attracted to me, and are people going to think I’m a lesbian if I’m a friend?’ ... It’s uh, ‘No, no it’s not catching, you know, I’m not contagious.’”

As a result of some heterosexuals’ assumptions of gay and lesbian persons’ hypersexuality, many of the participants were cautious in their interactions with heterosexual acquaintances whom they feared would see them only as sexual beings. Hope explains how thoughts that others will view her as a pervert plague her mind when she is among her university peers.

I’m always scared, and that’s just my own shame or whatever, but I’m always scared that they’re going to be scared of me. Like, “Oh my God, is Hope hitting on me? Oh my God, is Hope looking at me?” Or, like, only look at eye level, you know?...If I join the group are they going to think...I like them? Or are they going think: “Is Hope scoping me out?” I’m so terrified that they would think that I was a pervert...even though I don’t think I’m a pervert.

Thus, the way in which Hope feared her body (and identity) would be viewed by others led her to restrict her expression of self by carefully monitoring her actions (e.g., “only look at eye level”) and contributed to a loss of her natural way of being in the world. Hope’s words also alluded to the possibility that, when a person sees his or her body as diseased or deviant, even if it is through the eyes of another, these thoughts may be internalized. That is, sexual minority individuals may come to believe that their bodies *are* diseased because they are gay or lesbian. Hope assumes that it is her own shame that causes her to perceive herself as a pervert through others’ eyes. Thus, even though she consciously does not think of herself as deviant, it seems that some part of her does believe it is possible. In a diary entry, Von shared a piece of his own poetry that further exemplifies what it means to implicitly accept the idea that one’s body may be “diseased” by being gay.

Fuck You and everything I'll never be  
I never wanted you inside me  
You're a disease, a cancer in Plain sight  
And I hide from all that might Be my life  
They say money doesn't matter  
But it's the definer of everything  
Lets us run from ourselves  
And wallow in greatness  
I'm worth more than I cannot be  
And although you're stuck inside me  
A disease, a cancer in plain sight  
I will not hide from all that might be my life

Here, Von struggled with feeling that his body had been overtaken by his sexual orientation. For many years, Von was reluctant to be open about his sexual orientation and hid his sexuality from both himself and the outside world. The serious consequences of viewing one's body as diseased are apparent in Von's poem and demonstrates the powerful impact that it had on him personally.

Further, behaviours need not be directly targeted at gay and lesbian individuals for them to come to see their bodies as diseased. Greg found that being in an environment where being gay was explicitly stated to be undesirable led him to believe that being gay was wrong. "It makes you think that there's something wrong with you...You hear being gay is wrong, being gay is wrong, over and over again, and you start to believe it yourself." Moreover, witnessing the derogation of other sexual minority persons on the basis of their sexual orientation also can have a profound impact on how a person sees him or herself. Quinton frequently witnessed the derision of his more flamboyantly gay friend and found that it made him wary about his own sexual orientation being disclosed to others. Specifically, he worries about "being exposed as something dirty."

### ***6.3.5 Being Less of a Person***

Even worse than feeling diseased or dirty, the participants spoke about how, on occasion, they felt dehumanized by the way that others subtly looked at, and silently judged, them. Jamie describes how subtle homonegative behaviours have the power to strip her of her sense of self.

Overt is quick, like a Band-Aid...the subtle stuff is demeaning, and it can be really dehumanizing. And it will eat at you, it will strip you of your confidence. You will walk into a room, and because you don't belong there, you'll sit differently, and you feel differently, and you'll look like shit just because you feel like shit, you know what I mean? You just feel like everything is wrong and off about you, so that's different. The overt stuff is just like, alright I'm a gender warrior today then, screw you. And not that any act of violence is ever justified, but there are subtle acts of violence, everyday acts of violence that are just worse, I would argue in a lot of ways, different. [Can you tell me a little bit about feeling dehumanized?] Well, when someone strips you of anything that you have cultivated for yourself, a way of living, a way of speaking, your vocal intonations, anything that's going to have to change because they've made you feel lesser than them, or second-class...underclasses. Yeah it's demeaning, definitely.

In trying to explain the impact that subtle homonegative behaviours have on her, Jamie compared her experiences with these behaviours to those with more blatant behaviours. The juxtaposition of overt and subtle homonegative behaviours revealed that it is subtle behaviours that are the most demeaning and have the greatest cost to individuals in relation to how they feel about themselves. When confronted with overt negativity, Jamie was motivated (and able) to

take action against these behaviours and, consequently, viewed herself as a warrior: someone who is strong and powerful. However, when confronted with subtle homonegativity, she became powerless, found her bodily self disappearing, and lost all sense of her being. All aspects of her individuality were erased or inhibited, leaving her feeling negatively about herself and her body. Not surprisingly, Jamie has questioned her own self-worth during these moments.

Of course you question your own worth, even if only momentarily. You're like, "Oh God, what if they are right? What if I'm not a worthy human being?" You kind of go there, and if you're lucky you come back from it. But, yeah, you don't feel like a human being, very dehumanized, right? Awful, that's definitely the worst thing.

Thus, the subtle actions of others led the gay and lesbian students to feel that they were lesser beings and caused them, at times, to lose their embodied way of being in the world.

Finally, sometimes it was the absence of any behaviour that contributed to a feeling of disembodiment among the participants. Some gay and lesbian students also spoke of how, at times, they felt invisible among heterosexuals. Kelly describes how the lack of any acknowledgment of her presence led her to feel invisible.

It's not even disapproving looks anymore. It's like completely not acknowledging that this person exists. And...you do feel that too, where you...might be in a room with people and everybody else says something to each other, and then, you sort of get left out. Nobody looks at you, right? So, it's like, okay, kind of awkward, right? You know, maybe it's me or maybe, I don't know what this is.

The experience of not being *seen* fostered a strong sense of not belonging within Kelly, and the lack of recognition that she even exists was the most dehumanizing experience about which she spoke. If one's existence is oppressed, what more can be taken away from that person? Of course, the experience of feeling dehumanized occurred on a continuum, and not all participants experienced subtle homonegative behaviours as intensely as Jamie and Kelly. For instance, Becky agrees that being under the critical gaze of others can make her feel "like less of a person;" however, she qualifies her statement to explain that it is "not to that extreme." Regardless, the gay and lesbian students' experiences suggest that when individuals look at themselves through the eyes of others, it can affect how they see their own bodies and feel about themselves. Looks, distancing behaviours, and derogative words all have the potential to affect how gay and lesbian individuals perceive their body and whether their bodies are considered to be sources of pride or sites of disgrace.

## ***6.4 Lived Time***

Often when we speak of time, we refer to specific units of time that pass at regular intervals. However, when we experience time, we tend to experience it subjectively, with some moments passing quickly and others slowly (van Manen, 1990). We also tend to experience time continuously (i.e., as coherent or consistent patterns over time) or, as Heidegger (1962) describes it, “flowing streams of now” (p. 474). However, certain events can disrupt our experience of time as continuous and, consequently, upset the overall continuity of our experience (Mackey, 2009). For the gay and lesbian students in the study, being the direct or indirect targets of homonegative behaviours were events that served to disrupt the continuity of their experiences. Essentially, being the target of homonegative behaviour interrupted the participants’ ability to be in the now.

### ***6.4.1 Being Preoccupied***

Specifically, many of the gay and lesbian students expressed the view that, when they were in situations where someone had intentionally or unintentionally made a derogatory comment about gay or lesbian persons in their presence, they lost the ability to remain fully engaged in the interaction at hand. Instead, they retreated into their own minds and became preoccupied with the homonegative behaviour. In a diary entry, Brad describes how he found it difficult to remain present in a conversation he was having after he overheard his gay friend arguing with a family member about his sexual orientation outside.

I remembered being preoccupied by the events outside, but [trying] not to listen in on their conversation too much. It bothered me quite a bit, and sometimes I found it difficult to focus in on the conversation in the room, as if my senses were bringing me to the conversation outside.

The preoccupation that Brad experienced suggests that when one overhears comments that may be directly or indirectly threatening to one’s sense of self, a person cannot help but focus on that potentially threatening information. As a result, Brad was no longer able to fully engage in the interaction with which he was involved (suggesting that his experience had been disrupted) and found himself returning again and again to the conversation outside.

Depending on the nature of the situation, the experience of being preoccupied may be short in duration. Brad indicated that he essentially forgot about this situation after leaving the house. “It definitely dominated my thoughts while I was there, but to be completely honest, once we were out of the situation I returned to normal.” Alternatively, the preoccupation experienced by gay and lesbian persons after encountering a homonegative behaviour may be of a longer

duration. After Tara felt that her lesbianism had been targeted on an exam (i.e., her professor included a question regarding whether human rights should be extended to gay men and lesbian women after Tara had several negative discussions about gay and lesbian rights with him throughout the term), she felt consumed by the incident for several days following the exam.

I found it to be really, kind of, all consuming...I was really just consumed by it all the time, trying to think about, what do I do? Is there something else I should be doing? And I was like phoning a bunch of people and talking about it and making sure the word got out about the prof and stuff...I didn't get super involved in it, and I never followed up with a letter or anything, but it was just emotionally really involving.

In the days following the exam, Tara was plagued by thoughts of what she should do in terms of seeking recourse for her professor's actions and found that the amount of attention she devoted to this incident took her away from her other daily activities, such as her school work. That is, Tara entered a time-full state in which her thoughts and life were consumed by the homonegative incident. It seemed that in situations where homonegativity was present, the gay and lesbian students' futures could no longer be taken for granted and became unclear. As such, they could no longer continue along the course that their lives had been taking and were not able to *be* in the present as they constructed a "new" future.

Alyssa also describes how her subjective experience of time changes when she is in situations where individuals use prejudicial language in her presence.

With the subtle one, you don't know if you should just pretend like everything's normal and keep talking...Should I be the person who say stands up and is like, "Don't say things like that, you never know who's standing there," you know? Do you say that? Because it does make you feel uncomfortable, being in a group of people, just chatting, and have them make a gay joke... Sometimes I'll stand there and tune out of the whole conversation and think about it, you know. Should I be the ambassador for the group and tell people to be more sensitive? Should I not do it? And then, sometimes, your time runs out. Sometimes I'll think about it, you know, for a few minutes, and have lost the opportunity, because you're shy, or you think if you just wait for an appropriate time, it will come, and then it doesn't come, and you've just, you've missed it.

Similar to Tara, Alyssa also experienced a state of preoccupation and discomfort that was centered largely around thoughts of how she should respond to the homonegative behaviour; however, she perceived the time period she had to make (and act upon) this decision to be time-limited. Alyssa's words suggest that after losing herself to her thoughts immediately after hearing an anti-lesbian joke, she felt pressured to return to the interaction because there was a limited window in which it would be socially acceptable to draw attention to the joke. Thus, as Alyssa retreated into her own personal lifeworld, her experience of time became repeated as she



questioned again and again what to do. In contrast, she experienced time as fleeting in her social lifeworld because she had to act quickly (before the moment was gone) or not at all. Thus, Alyssa's experience illustrates how individuals' subjective sense of time may simultaneously be experienced differently in their personal and social lifeworlds.

#### **6.4.2 *Feeling Overburdened with Responsibility***

Alyssa's experience also alludes to another aspect of some gay and lesbian persons' experiences that may contribute to the disruption of their experience of time: the desire to be a good ambassador or role model for the gay and lesbian community. Mackey (2009) suggests that expectations play an integral role in the ability to experience time continuously, and it certainly seemed that participants' expectations of themselves affected their ability to remain in the now. When homonegative events occurred, the gay and lesbian students often found that questions surrounding their responsibilities as members of society also came to the forefront of their attention. Similar to Alyssa, Tara found that when she was targeted by her professor, the incident was, in part, time-consuming because she struggled with an obligation to protect others who also may have been affected.

I felt really kind of overburdened with responsibility too, because...I was kind of like: What if I'm not doing enough? What if I didn't talk to someone else in the class and now they feel like shit? Like, what if there's someone I didn't get a hold of or there's something I'm missing, or I'm not doing enough follow-up and things like that. It was really time consuming, really exhausting.

Many participants valued being able to teach heterosexuals about what it means to be gay or lesbian, as well taking action to reduce the occurrence of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. Thus, when homonegative behaviours are encountered, the gay and lesbian students' experience of time may be arrested by existential questions about their identities.

#### **6.4.3 *Feeling Time Pass, Feeling Time Stop***

In contrast to time being experienced as "full" or "fleeting" after encountering homonegative behaviours, time also could be experienced as empty and slow. The experience of time passing slowly was most notable when the participants began to notice subtle changes in their relationships with close others, generally after disclosing their sexual orientation. During these often protracted periods, participants tended to experience greater emotional distance from the other person and found themselves waiting for the relationship to be rekindled. In the following extract, Nathan describes his experience of time after he notices a reduction in

connection and communication with a friend to whom he had recently disclosed his sexual orientation.

We talked on MSN and would have conversations daily and then, all of a sudden, for like a month, there's nothing. And you're kind of like, "Is it really that big of a deal?" You try and talk to them, and it's like, "Hey," and that's it. They don't respond to you... It's kind, you know, you were like best friends, they find out and then all of a sudden and then it's just nothing, and the time just passes. I think you try and justify it first, like, oh maybe they're busy. And then time starts to drag on, and then you're like, well maybe they just forgot, or maybe they just got so busy. And you try and talk to them and you get this kind of one word and that's it... And then more time goes by and then you're kind of like, especially when you talk to other people that know them and they talk to them every day, and you're kind of like, I get it now.

In the days following the disclosure of his sexual orientation, Nathan's time was filled with alternating periods of questioning his friend's behaviour and waiting for the relationship to return to its previous level of closeness. He experienced time during this period to be empty, devoid of meaning, and passing slowly. Eventually, however, as time continued to pass, the emptiness of time that Nathan experienced became meaningful—he had been rejected on the basis of being queer. Thus, one's experience of time may influence the meaning one finds in a given behaviour.

Related to the experience of time passing slowly, the gay and lesbian students also spoke of moments in which time felt suspended. Time tended to be experienced as suspended when the participants' sexual orientation was made known following a homonegative behaviour or in situations where someone who was aware of the participants' sexual orientation inadvertently made a derogatory comment about gay men or lesbian women in their presence. In a diary entry, Fred describes such an experience when, at a dinner outing, a friend unintentionally made a derogatory comment in front of him.

I was at a charity fundraiser dinner, and I was sitting with some old friends of mine whom I hadn't seen in a while. We were discussing what we've been up to and things of that nature. I can't remember exactly what I said about school, but one of my friends casually commented, "Oh, that's gay," as in to say, "That's bad." Everyone at the table knows I'm gay, so there was kind of a moment of awkward silence. I could tell he didn't mean to offend me, but it was kind of unsettling.

Fred's characterization of the time immediately following the comment as "a moment of awkward silence" suggests that time seemingly stopped for all persons involved in the conversation. All were aware that their friend had committed a social blunder, unintentional or not; however, no one knew what to expect in the seconds and minutes following the comment. How may Fred react? How should Fred react? How should the person who uttered the comment

act? How should the others present act? There was much at risk for all parties and their shared uncertainty about the future contributed to the disruption of their collective experience. Ultimately, it was Fred's decision to let the comment pass that set the tone in the subsequent moments and allowed time to "begin" again.

#### ***6.4.4 Expecting Negativity***

Our experience of time also is related to how we approach the past, present, and future. The experiences we have in the past leave traces on our being that influence how we experience the present and look toward the future, including how we carry ourselves, the gestures and habits we adopt, and the words we speak (van Manen, 1990). Not surprisingly, the participants' past experiences with homonegative behaviours affected their orientation toward the future. After being the target of discriminatory behaviours, the gay and lesbian students tended to look toward the future with trepidation and fear that had not previously been experienced. This trepidation was particularly pronounced among participants who had experienced intentional physical or verbal violence, such as Rory and Brad.

Specifically, in addition to disrupting the continuity of the participants' experience at the time they encountered homonegative behaviours, blatant homonegative behaviours were able to alter the way in which they perceived their lifeworlds. Rory describes how his sense of security was shaken after he and his friends were verbally assaulted at a restaurant.

It bothered me for a little while after. [How were you bothered by it?] Just thinking about it and how it just made me, at the time, feel really, really frustrated. It just took me a long time to forget about it and calm down from it and... just be, like, not thinking about it at all, you know?...I just think it was bothersome thinking, because, for the most part, I feel like most people are decent and...aren't out to get you or anything. I feel pretty comfortable being out in the city and stuff and just thinking...It's just kind of disappointing that there's people around like that.

It seemed that the aspect of this experience which most bothered Rory was that it challenged the way in which he typically viewed his lifeworld and those who share it with him. In general, he perceived that people are tolerant of gay men and he can be openly gay in the city in which he lives; however, this incident brought to his attention that some people are not accepting of sexual minorities and are even willing to act on their prejudice. As a result of this unexpected behaviour, he was forced to confront his understanding of the world and, potentially, alter his perceptions of those around him. Mackey (2009) suggests that we rely on patterns of experience

to navigate our worlds continuously. Here, the pattern of Rory's experience was upset and he consequently had to accommodate this experience into a new way of being in the world.

Similar to Rory, the way in which Brad viewed his lifeworld also was altered after he was hit by another man because he was gay.

You know, when you do something that's really, really off kilter, and it's something that bothers you for like days and days and days—that's what it's kind of like. It's always on your mind, for at least two weeks...It's always kind of there, and there's always like a slight anxiety about it. But you just got to get over that and you've got to overcome it. And so, other than, like, the first week and a half or two weeks where you're, like, always constantly thinking about it and thinking how much it sucks, you get over it.

As was typical with the other experiences that have been described, Brad became preoccupied with the incident immediately following the event, but found that his preoccupation eventually lessened to the point where he rarely thought about the incident anymore. However, Brad found that, in some ways, the experience of the event permanently stayed with him, leading him to always feel a slight anxiety among heterosexuals. He did try to control the extent to which his anxiety influenced his future experiences, but he found that traces of his experience returned to affect him at certain moments. For instance, he was reluctant to disclose his sexual orientation during his first two years of university because “there was always that constant of violence” in the back of his mind. Moreover, Brad found the anxiety he experienced in relation to his expectation that heterosexuals will react negatively (and violently) toward him manifested itself bodily in a state of “physical chaos.”

I was embarrassed. I would get really like tense. I would feel my heart kind of go rapid, you just kind of, like, try to suppress it, you know?...Because I just didn't know those parameters yet and you always expect a negative, well, I don't anymore, but I used to expect a really negative reaction all the time.

Thus, Brad's past experiences seemed to not only affect his expectations about future interactions with heterosexuals, it also left a physical trace on his body that emerges during moments he perceives himself to be at risk. As such, there appears to be a strong connection between the participants' past experiences, expectations about the future, and lived bodily reactions in the present.

The connection between the lived experience of body and time also is apparent in a diary entry written by Quinton. Several of the participants were wary of discussing their sexual orientation when unknown others were present, because they perceived the possibility of being threatened or harmed to be more likely in these situations. In an interaction that is quite typical

for him, Quinton describes his lived experience of time, body, and other during a moment when he fears that his sexual orientation will be revealed.

[My friend] and I were sitting in class waiting for it to start, and she started talking about a joke I made earlier and was saying, "You're so funny, I don't know what you're going to say next. I think it's because you're—from [city]". She said that sentence continuously, but it felt like in that brief instance between the words "you're" and "from [city]" I thought she was going to say "because you're gay"... My heart started racing, I could feel my face get red, and I was super jittery. For some reason, that is the first thing that seems to come to mind. I always assume the worst case scenario is going to happen and someone is just going to start talking about my sexuality openly in front of other people... The experience made me flustered and distracted and embarrassed for a few moments. In response, I just laughed what she said off and tried texting on my phone in order to "end" the conversation, just so that "the worst" doesn't happen (i.e. she suddenly starts talking about my gayness haha!)...I think from just being younger and growing up having people make fun of you for being gay (and watching people make fun of [my gay friend] so severely), I just sort of always have these little scenarios at the back of my head that, every time someone starts talking to me about something, they may just start talking about me being gay.

When examining Quinton's experience, we see that many of the elements of lived time that we have discussed thus far converge in a single episode. Due to Quinton's past experiences with homonegativity, he has developed the expectation that people will draw attention to his sexual orientation whenever possible and put him at risk for being disparaged by others. Consequently, when he was in a situation where he feared his friend would reveal his sexual orientation, time became suspended for him as he awaited the "worst case scenario" (i.e., the mentioning of his sexual orientation). Comparable to Brad's experience, Quinton's body entered a chaotic state while he waited for his friend's response (i.e., his heart raced, his cheeks flushed, and he became anxious), and he found himself unable to effortlessly continue the conversation. Although Quinton's reaction seemed to primarily stem from his expectations about heterosexuals' actions, it is necessary to consider the way that he experienced time in relation to his body and the particular space in which the interaction occurred to achieve a holistic understanding of his lived experience during this situation.

Less blatant homonegative behaviours also may exert a powerful influence on a person's orientation toward the future and others in his/her life. Discriminatory comments and behaviours that occurred in relation to the participants' disclosure of their sexual orientation were particularly influential in shaping their future expectations. For instance, after Marcie admitted to her cousin that she had a crush on another woman, her cousin insinuated that being lesbian was

unnatural. Following this incident, Marcie became leery about disclosing her sexual orientation to other family members in the future.

After this happened, I had no idea who I should trust. I haven't talked to my family about anything that would reveal my orientation since then. I think she was trying to get me to feel guilty about my orientation. It almost felt like she thought she was better than me, like she had more worth as a person—especially since she was implying that...what I was thinking was wrong.

This experience occurred more than three years ago, and Marcie had largely forgotten about it until another diary entry she wrote brought it into awareness again; however, the incident continues to have a powerful effect on her, as she still actively avoids discussing anything that may reveal her sexual orientation to her family.

Like Marcie, Becky also found that, due to a negative reaction from one person, she tends to become withdrawn in situations where she feels at risk for being treated negatively again.

I tend to stereotype those people who would react badly...I would sort of be more standoffish to fully say I'm a lesbian, just in case they have a bad reaction...It's mostly... just my sort of own insecurities...It's not always them being iffy, but the situation is kind of sketchy for me because I'm not sure where I stand in terms of their views...It's just those sort of situations maybe because I've had such a, a bad reaction from some people, from one person in particular, that you want to avoid that, right? And so that's kind of where it stems from.

Consequently, when Becky enters situations reminiscent of one in which she has previously encountered homonegativity, she tends to become more guarded and attempts to hide her identity. The gay and lesbian students seemed to use their past and future expectations to establish some form of perceived control over their lives, even if the only control they had was to restrict their expression of self. Thus, Marcie's and Becky's experiences demonstrate how singular negative past events can have a substantial influence on how gay and lesbian participants approach the future, particularly when, in the past, one's trust was breached. A comment from Tara further exemplifies the impact that a handful of homonegative behaviours can have on a person's orientation to the world.

That's the thing that I really find with all of them, like, I think back on from the time I came out to now, my general impression of my life and my knowledge of it is super positive. I'm so lucky and then, when I talk about some of these things like this, I'm like, oh yeah, you know, that one bad thing did happen, and it was a really influential one bad thing [that] informs the rest of it.

Even when participants had not been the target of blatant homonegativity, the possibility of encountering this form of negativity in the future affected their way of being in the world.

Comments from participants who had not personally experienced blatantly homonegative behaviours suggested they considered it to be a matter of chance that they had not yet been targeted. In response to a question asking whether any overt negativity had ever been directed toward her, Christie responds, “I haven't, because I've been lucky,” while Kelly answers “I'm lucky enough that I haven't had to experience it, but, you know, I easily could...It just depends on where you are and what kind of people are around you.” These comments suggest the participants believe that, other than happenstance, there is nothing preventing them from being the targets of blatant homonegativity in the future. As a result, the participants tended to experience a moment of suspense in relation to disclosing their sexual orientation, even in situations where they wanted to reveal that they were gay or lesbian. Liam comments that, regardless of how positive his experience has been in sharing his sexual orientation with others, there is always an element of risk present when he discloses his sexual orientation to a new person. “For the most, part my experience has been positive, but...it's like you're always the one in limbo. You always have the uncertainty of: ‘Okay, how are they going to react?’” It seems that the negative experiences of others serve as warning to gay and lesbian persons who have not been blatantly targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation and also influences their expectations about the future.

Finally, with respect to the relationship between subtle homonegativity and the traces it leaves on a person, participants found that the subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours they encountered tended to bother them longer than those that were overt. Brad suggests that blatant behaviours are easier to heal from because they are easier to dismiss.

I've had an easier time getting over, like, physical aggression...[With] physical aggression, there's a little bit of emotional hurt there, but... it doesn't take much time to get over that, especially with how easy it is to justify...But if it's...just like, in general, a negative person, then I think it's harder to. You know, you heal from it and you learn from it and you get direction from it, but it affects you a lot longer...well, it affects me a lot longer.

In addition, Jamie indicates that it is the frequency in which she experiences subtle homonegative behaviours and the accumulation of these traumas over time that contributes to her perception that these behaviours are worse than blatant behaviours.

Well, the subtleties are usually worse because they accumulate. You will kind of add them up and you're like, “Oh God, wow.” It's like a cancer those things...If someone's going to drive-by and yell dyke at me, it's kind of better than someone who's going to make these little snide remarks at work for three months. Sometimes the difference is the

time, the accumulation, how many times it's happened. Like the amount and the quantity...if it's a standalone thing versus you know, it's continuous and almost monotonous.

Thus, the duration over which homonegativity is encountered also may affect the extent to which participants are affected by these behaviours.

### ***6.5 Summary of the Lived Existential Analysis***

The purpose of exploring the lived existentials was to arrive not only at an understanding of what it is like to experience homonegative behaviours, but also what it means to be the target of these behaviours at the time they occur, as well as in moments subsequent to these behaviours. After looking at the participants' experiences vis-à-vis the lived existentials, it is apparent that elements of their experience were common across their subjective realities of time, space, other, and body. These overarching aspects of experience will be described to provide a more holistic understanding of the gay and lesbian students' experiences with blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of what it meant to be the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviour were the feelings of being an outsider or "other" that were manifested among the participants as a result of heterosexuals' actions. Through their felt sense of spatiality, temporality, corporeality, and relationality with respect to their experiences of homonegativity (including homonegative behaviours that were actively perpetrated against them, those that occurred within their vicinity, and those they feared may be imminent), the participants came to know that they were somehow different than heterosexuals (or at least perceived to be different by heterosexuals) and felt that they did not belong (be it in a given space, relationship, or their own bodies). It was through their experience of homonegative behaviours that the gay and lesbian students came to understand that because they are sexual minorities, they are not valued or respected as much as heterosexuals and that, at least through heterosexuals' eyes, they are considered to be somehow lesser. For instance, the lack of recognition afforded gay and lesbian persons by heterosexuals and the broader society via heteronormativity indicated to the participants that they belonged to an invisible people. Further, the gay and lesbian students' experience of time, relationships with others, their bodies, and space in the face of homonegativity suggested to them that their comfort, opinions, experiences, and identities were not considered to be as important and valid as those belonging to heterosexuals. As a result of such feelings and perceptions that served to minimize their existence, some participants viewed



themselves in an unfavourable light and considered their identities as gay or lesbian persons to be sources of shame, often in spite of themselves. In other cases, participants attempted to “brush off” the personal implications of homonegative behaviours by placing the blame on heterosexuals for engaging in anti-gay/lesbian. Regardless, all of the participants were affected by homonegative behaviours, ranging from minor discomfort in certain spaces, interactions, and moments to more serious consequences, such as questioning their self-worth.

The experience of being the target of homonegative behaviour also signified to the gay and lesbian participants that they were not free to be themselves in the spaces they inhabited, their relationships with others and, at times, even in their own bodies. The possibility of encountering homonegativity or being singled out for being gay or lesbian was a nagging threat ever-present at the back of the participants’ minds and prevented them from freely expressing their individuality. Consequently, the gay and lesbian students found they lived in a heightened state of vulnerability in which they were vigilant about any signs that the spaces and interactions in which they found themselves were unsafe or unwelcoming of them as sexual minority persons. Essentially, being the target of homonegativity meant that the participants could not simply *be* in their lifeworlds, but instead had to be careful to protect themselves from present or future threats to their personhood.

The restriction of self experienced by the gay and lesbian students also was associated with the knowledge that they were not often *seen* and *understood* by others. The participants found that they walked the world not as persons, but as gay or lesbian persons (who were often considered to be primarily sexual beings) and, consequently, were often required to defend, hide, prove, or discuss their identities as sexual minorities. Anti-gay/lesbian behaviours called their sexual orientation into question and prevented this integral aspect of their identities from being taken-for-granted. As such, the participants came to associate homonegative behaviour with feelings of self-consciousness and discomfort through which they became acutely aware of themselves as gay or lesbian persons in certain spaces, interactions, and moments of time, as well as in relation to their bodies and appearances. Overall, being the target of homonegative behaviour meant that the continuity of the gay and lesbian students’ experience was disrupted and they were at risk for losing aspects of their personhood, including their ability to express their individuality, thoughts, and feelings; to feel at ease with themselves and among others in a given space; and to find fulfillment in their relationships and in their lives.

Another notable aspect of what it meant to be the target (or potential target) of anti-gay/lesbian behaviour was the constant need to be engaged in an act of interpretation. Participants judged whether they were in safe, dangerous, or “dead” spaces; they evaluated others’ behaviour to establish whether they had intentionally or unintentionally behaved negatively toward them; they listened to their own bodies to understand whether they were in an unsafe space or interacting with a prejudiced person; and they used their subjective sense of time to know whether they had been discriminated against. Taken together, the participants used all aspects of their being-in-the-world to decide whether they had been the target of an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, as well as to determine their own safety, security, and freedom to be gay or lesbian.

### ***6.6 The Essence of Being the Target of Anti-Gay/Lesbian Behaviours***

The ultimate goal of a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis is to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon by identifying the essential nature of that experience (i.e., that without which the experience would not occur; van Manen, 1990). By explicating the essence of a phenomenon, it is possible to arrive at new insight about its inner meaning. After spending much time analyzing and dwelling on the gay and lesbian university students’ experiences, there appears to be two essences which permeate their experience of being the target of homonegative behaviour: *being-out* and *being-in*.

#### ***6.6.1 Being-out***

The phrases “being out” and “coming out” are commonly used by gay and lesbian persons to describe the extent to which they are open about their sexual orientation, including the person(s) with whom they have shared their sexual orientation. However, the idea of *being-out* can be thought of on several levels. It can mean the extent to which one is willing to share his/her sexual orientation, but it also can refer to being on the *outside*, including *being-outside* of a group or *being-out* of step with oneself. It is when *being-out* is considered in this more complex manner that it can be seen to be at the core of the participants’ experiences of homonegativity.

Considering *being-out* at its most basic level as the ability to openly and freely be oneself, it is clear that this facet featured prominently in the participants’ encounters with homonegativity. All of the gay and lesbian students spoke of the struggle of knowing when to reveal themselves, when to keep themselves (not just their sexual orientation, but their *inner selves*, their *being*) hidden, and the emotional toll that hiding themselves had on their wellbeing.

The felt presence of homonegativity restricted the gay and lesbian students' ability to openly and freely be themselves and existential questions about their ability to *be-out* were at the core of their experience.

Several examples from the analysis support this conceptualization of *being-out* as a tension between being open about one's sexual orientation (and inner self) or remaining within oneself (i.e., *being-in*) to avoid possible punishment or homonegativity for being openly gay or lesbian. For instance, the participants' vigilance in public and private spaces for signs of homonegativity, which was described as risk management, is centered around an inner drive to hide oneself in order to avoid being targeted or hurt. The gay and lesbian students operated with the understanding that hate was always lurking and were always prepared for the possibility that they might be targeted in the future. It was as if they were foreigners travelling in a dangerous land. Thus, despite a desire to live in a state where they could *be-out* and be seen for who they are (i.e., persons who are gay or lesbian), the presence or possibility of homonegativity infringed upon their ability to openly live their lives and, in so doing, caused crisis, tension, and turmoil in the gay and lesbian students' lives.

At a deeper level, *being-out* also can be taken to mean being on the *outside*. Much of the participants' experience of being the target of homonegativity consisted of feelings of being different. For instance, the participants spoke of being "other," being alien, experiencing spaces as exclusive of sexual minority persons, and experiencing interactions filled with judgement, distance, or meaningless contact. At the core of these experiences was the feeling of being on the *outside* of the heterosexual majority, as it was through anti-gay/lesbian behaviour perpetrated by heterosexuals that participants came to know they neither belonged nor were welcome in certain spaces or relationships. The gay and lesbian students then internalized these messages and experienced themselves as *outsiders*, somehow separate or different from the heterosexuals with whom they interacted. Feelings of being gross, ugly, invisible, and less than human when in perceived heterosexual spaces, as well as the experience of one's body as failing, diseased, or dirty, are reflective of this internalization of *being-out*. In addition, the lack of recognition generally afforded to gay and lesbian persons in society and the consequent feelings of invisibility that resulted among the participants is another dimension of *being-out*. Without any recognition that a person might be something other than heterosexual, the participants found there was no space to be gay or lesbian and that they were required to experience these aspects of

their identities internally and independently. Thus, in this context, *being-out* signifies the feelings of disconnection and “otherness” experienced as a result of being the target of homonegativity.

Finally, *being-out* also can be considered in terms of *being-out* of sync with one’s self. Homonegativity introduced elements of doubt in the gay and lesbian students’ experience of self that led them to become suspended in time. Participants became lost in their thoughts after a homonegative event, constantly analyzing and replaying the event, questioning the perpetrator’s intentions, questioning whether others accept them for who they are, and questioning their own interpretations and responses. In these moments, gay and lesbian persons were disconnected from their lives. Essentially, *being-outside* of oneself refers to the disruption homonegativity presents to the lives of gay and lesbian persons, including the tendency to be critical of their own and others’ actions and the inability to *be* in the moment.

### **6.6.2 *Being-in***

*Being-in* can be thought of as the contrast to *being-out* and refers to the idea of operating, or being contained, within a set of boundaries. As with *being-out*, *being-in* can be considered on several levels. In situations where homonegativity was thought to be present and it was not possible to openly express one’s sexual orientation, the gay and lesbian students experienced a sense of being confined to themselves. The participants described this experience of hiding their inner thoughts and feelings as *being-in* a closet or being restricted, as their sexuality was relegated to the inner recesses of their being and was kept there until it was once again safe to reveal themselves. The perceived threat of homonegativity led the gay and lesbian students to turn their attention inward so as to avoid the negativity that may be awaiting them outwardly. As a result, their dynamic way of being in the world was stifled.

Sometimes the experience of *being-in* was imposed externally rather than internally. The gay and lesbian students also spoke of how their sense of self was restricted by the lens through which others viewed them. Heterosexuals often had preconceptions about the characteristics they associated with being gay and lesbian and assumed that the participants embodied these characteristics. Thus, the gay and lesbian students were trapped within the confines of these preconceptions when interacting with these individuals. In addition, judgemental looks, crass comments, and trivializing questions led the participants to feel as though they were not provided with the space to be their own person, that they were expected to live in the world in a certain manner, and that the idiosyncratic nature of their personalities and lives were not respected.

Thus, gay and lesbian persons' abilities to express themselves and be individuals may be restricted both from without and within.

On a broader level, the experience of *being-in* also can be considered as a desire to fit in. Ultimately, the gay and lesbian students struggled with homonegativity because they wanted to fit in, be accepted, and belong to society, just as heterosexuals do. Actions such as acting straight, blending in, and putting on various personas to avoid homonegativity may be thought of as attempts at self-preservation, but they also suggest a desire to belong so as to pass or go unnoticed and untargeted. The desire to *be-in* is also reflected by participants' willingness to sacrifice their own comfort for the sake of maintaining the comfort of heterosexuals. The desire for harmonious interactions may be more powerful at certain moments than the desire to *be-out* (i.e., to be vocal about one's sexual orientation) because, by *being-in*, participants are able to avoid the undesirable position of *being-outsiders*. The responsibility that some participants experienced to teach heterosexuals about gay and lesbian persons and providing heterosexuals with the space to understand their own feelings about homosexuality also can be viewed as attempts to create a society that is accepting of heterosexual and sexual minority persons alike (i.e., where it would be possible to *be-in*). This desire of *being-in* or fitting-in reflects what is lost by being-out (i.e., by being open about one's sexual orientation and being on the outside).

Finally, the essence of *being-in* is also about *being-in* sync with oneself. By coming out, gay and lesbian persons may be made to feel as outsiders; however, they also are able to come in to themselves. They are able to openly express themselves as gay and lesbian persons and, in so doing, experience contentment by acting within the confines of their own sense of self. This act of openly being who they are was considered by many participants as the ultimate requirement for a content existence. Further, by overtly living as gay and lesbian persons, the participants also open themselves to the possibility of *being-insiders* in a group composed of other sexual minority persons. While the participants did not speak much of their relations with other gay and lesbian persons, we are reminded of the importance they associated with belonging to a group of similar others when they spoke of the comfort they received from other gay and lesbian persons when they were targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation in their presence. As such, *being-in* is about living life authentically and truthfully. It is about *being-in* line with who you are.

In many ways, the essences of *being-out* and *being-in* are complementary to each other and perhaps, more accurately, it is the struggle between *being-out* and *being-in* that captures the

essential structure of the gay and lesbian students' experiences with homonegativity. This duality suggests that being the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviour may ultimately be about being placed in position where a person is required to choose one way of *being* in the world at the expense of another. Gay and lesbian persons may fear *being-out* about their sexual orientation due to the inherent dangers it poses, yet they also are compelled to live their lives authentically and to allow their expressions of self to *be-in* line with their inner thoughts and feelings. *Being-outsiders* as a result of being gay or lesbian places the participants on the fringes of society, yet *being-in* often requires some amount of compromise or holding back. Finally, *being-outside* of oneself can be associated with feeling disconnected from one's sense of self or life, while *being-inside* oneself can be connected with feeling trapped, restricted, and bound. Homonegativity places gay and lesbian persons in an existential dilemma where they must prioritize one way of being in the world over another vitally important aspect of being.

### ***6.7 Linguistic Transformations***

In closing my analysis of the participants' lived experiences with being the targets of homonegative behaviour, I have prepared a series of linguistic transformations or stories that serve as experiential reflections on the participants' experiences with homonegativity. The stories were intended to be a composite depiction of all the participants' experiences with discrimination, and were created to evoke the lived meaning of being the target of blatant and subtle homonegative behaviour in the context of lived other, space, body, and time. I have prepared five stories, one for each existential, with two of the stories narrated from the perspective of a lesbian woman and two from the point of view of a gay man; a final story narrated from the perspective of a gay man takes into account all of the existentials.

#### ***6.7.1 Being "Other"***

Bethany is on her way to meet with her group to work on a project that is due next week. She's been dreading this meeting all day. There are three other girls in her group and sometimes they make her feel like she's the odd one out. Bethany doesn't think they mean to, but it just seems like she doesn't have a lot in common with them, especially when they start talking about their boyfriends. They don't really include her in those conversations, and there doesn't really seem to be any space for Bethany to talk about her girlfriend. Two of the girls (Sarah and Jessie) seem fine with the fact that Bethany is lesbian, but she's not so sure about the third one (Jane). She's made little comments and has given Bethany the odd look that tells her she's not really

okay with it. If it wasn't for the group project, Bethany would just stop hanging out with Jane, but she's stuck with her until their assignment is done.

When Bethany arrives at the library, she sees that the rest of the girls are already there. She sits down just in time to hear Jane talk about what her and her boyfriend did on the weekend. Bethany knows it's natural for people to talk about their boyfriends and what they did on the weekend, but does Jane have to say "my boyfriend" every second sentence? Surely, he has a name. "Maybe I'm just being overly sensitive," Bethany thinks, "but it feels like every time she says boyfriend she gives me a look as if to say, 'I'm straight, don't even think about coming on to me.' It's like all she can think of me when she looks at me is that I'm lesbian and that I'm some kind of sexual predator." It's on the tip of Bethany's tongue to say, "Don't worry, Jane, you're not my type. I don't like straight girls, especially ones who are full of themselves." But instead, she looks awkwardly from Jane to Sarah to Jessie, and tunes out of the conversation, until Jane decides to start talking to her.

"So Bethany, what did you do this weekend?" "Not too much, did some homework, went to a movie, nothing too exciting," Bethany replied. She doesn't know why, but she just doesn't want to give Jane any information about her life. She doesn't feel comfortable around her, and it feels like she would use any information she has about Bethany against her. "Oh yeah. Do you remember that guy who stopped by the table the last time week?" "Yeah, I think so." "Well, he totally thought you were hot and said that you're too pretty to be lesbian. Are you sure you aren't into men? I can totally hook you two up." "Ouch, that stings a little. So I can't be pretty and lesbian?" Bethany thinks sarcastically. "Does she not think that's offensive?" Out loud Bethany replies, "Uh, I'm pretty sure I'm not interested, Jane, and I don't think my girlfriend would be very happy about me going out on dates with other people." She refrains from tagging on, "Are you sure you're not interested in women? Maybe you shouldn't knock it until you try it." "Oh yeah, I forgot you had a girlfriend. You really are lesbian," Jane giggles. "So you didn't believe me before when I told you I wasn't interested in men?" Bethany thinks to herself.

After a couple more minutes pass, Bethany is tired of feeling like an outsider, so she begins to talking about their assignment—their group is supposed to give a 15 minute presentation and then facilitate a class discussion. The group is supposed to encourage discussion about a significant legal reform or policy change in Canada related to human rights, and the legalization of same-sex marriage immediately came to Bethany's mind. "I was wondering what

you all thought about focusing on the passage of the same-sex marriage act?” she proposes to the group. Before either Sarah or Jessie could respond, Jane lets out a sigh, “I should have known that’s what you would want to do. I think we should pick something that is a little more relevant to everyone, like maybe something related to the environment or global warming.” Bethany feels like Jane’s words have struck her at her core. She’s just been berated for suggesting that they work on a topic of interest to her. Obviously her opinion and interests don’t count here and sexual minority rights are unimportant to heterosexuals. “Who is this girl?” Bethany wonders. “Is she oblivious to the implications of what she is saying? I really can’t tell if she’s just ignorant and isn’t aware that her comments are offensive or if she’s just really good at being snarky.”

Bethany can feel the anger rising in her chest and she clenches her fists under the table. She has always gotten the sense that her ideas don’t count as much to Jane—that *she* doesn’t matter because she’s lesbian. As she looks from Jessie to Sarah, she can feel the tension in the air. She can tell that they’re uncomfortable, too. Jessie quickly jumps in and tries to diffuse the situation, “Well, why don’t we each talk about what our ideas are. I was actually thinking about the same-sex marriage act as well, because it has been so well publicized.” Bethany breathes a sigh of relief, thankful that it’s not just all in her head and that the other girls thought her comment was rude as well. She’s also thankful that she doesn’t have to say something and risk becoming the troublemaker of the group. Sometimes she wishes that she had never told them about her sexual orientation, so that maybe she would just be treated normally.

### ***6.7.2 Being in an Unsafe Space***

Brandon and his partner, Adam, have a busy weekend ahead: tonight they are headed to a festival, while tomorrow they have been invited to a new friend’s birthday party. It’s a beautiful evening, so they decide to walk to the festival. Others in the neighbourhood seem to have the same idea as Brandon and Adam; there are quite a few people out and about. Consequently, Brandon and Adam opt to walk side by side with a safe distance between them so as not to reveal that they are a gay couple. They generally feel comfortable living in their neighbourhood as gay men, but they never know when they might stumble across a homophobic person. Sometimes it’s easier to just not put it out there that they are a couple.

Brandon and Adam arrive at the festival and are amazed by how many people are present. Brandon quickly looks around for any signs that hate may be lurking (a habit that is second nature to him now) and is pleasantly surprised to see a booth selling books targeted toward



lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons. Perfect. He could feel his body relax, as he didn't feel a lot of pressure to conceal or protect his identity and felt free to just be himself. Adam must have felt the same way since, throughout the night, they freely talked about being gay when it arose in their conversation and weren't particularly careful about what they said and how loud they said it. They even briefly touched each other affectionately throughout the night, which is something they don't normally do in public. Brandon always feels somehow safer and freer when he's in a large crowd. It seems less likely that he and Adam will be singled out or noticed, because there are so many activities and people present that everyone seems to focus on doing their own thing.

The next evening, Brandon and Adam head off to the birthday party. Brandon has just started to become friends with Mark this year, as they ended up in a few of the same classes and have worked on a few assignments together. They share a lot of the same interests, so Brandon was looking forward to the party and meeting a few of Mark's friends. As soon as Brandon and Adam walked into the party, however, all of their hopes of having a good time and meeting some new people are quickly dashed. Within thirty seconds of being there, they hear one of Mark's friend call another guy a "faggot," and a couple of minutes after that they hear someone describe something as "that's so gay" as in "that's so stupid." Brandon is immediately on edge—he feels tense and anxious and has a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. He glances at Adam, who also looks uncomfortable. Through an unspoken look, they decide that they will not be open about their relationship tonight. Brandon would love to hold Adam's hand and experience some form of support in this unwelcoming place, but he can't do that. He can't draw attention to them. Brandon is shocked to hear Mark's friends use such language and a flurry of thoughts come to his mind. "Why are these guys still saying these types of things, don't they know better than this? Haven't they grown out of that yet? Do they even know what they're saying? Are they homophobic?" He didn't know the answers to any of these questions, and he wasn't in a hurry to find out. His initial reaction, of course, is to tell them to watch their language, but he feels that doing so would be an admission of his own sexuality. Telling a group of presumably straight guys that he's gay has always been an intimidating situation for him, and he often chooses to avoid discussing his sexual orientation with them because he always expects a negative reaction. Brandon already doesn't have a good feeling about these guys, so he really doesn't want to risk it. "What if they start to harass me or something?" he worries. He knows it's probably unlikely, but he can't help thinking it might happen. Sometimes it's easier (and safer) to just hide himself.

Brandon doesn't like doing it. He feels like he's not being honest with himself or those around him and that his very being is being suffocated. "It's really unfair that I have to hide myself," he laments, "but at least it gives me a little bit of control over the situation at hand." They stay at the party for another half hour before coming up with an excuse to leave. As they start driving away and it is just the two of them again, Brandon lets out a sigh of relief. He can start breathing again. He can start being "himself" again.

### ***6.7.3 Being Self-Conscious***

Like every weekday morning, Robin woke up this morning to her ringing alarm clock. Without wasting a moment, Robin jumps in the shower, neglecting to shave her legs, just as she does every other morning. Back in her bedroom, she is faced with deciding what to wear for the day. Feeling rather boy-ish, she decides on a pair of cargo shorts, a collared shirt, and a v-neck sweater to pull over top in case she gets cold. She tousles her short hair with gel before leaving her room and is ready to head for school.

Robin arrives at her class with a couple of minutes to spare and sits in her regular seat. She doesn't see any of her friends, so she pulls out her laptop and spends the next couple of minutes surfing the net. As she becomes absorbed in her Internet world, she feels something pulling her out of it. Robin looks to her left and briefly catches the gaze of a girl sitting a few seats away from her. "Okay, whatever," she thinks to herself and returns to her computer. A couple more minutes pass, and she can't help but feel that the girl is still looking at her. Sure enough, Robin turns her head and sees the girl avert her gaze again, this time from what she assumes to be her legs (or, perhaps more accurately, her hairy legs?). Actually, she can't really tell what she is looking at—it could be the two guys in front of Robin who are rehashing their weekend fairly loudly. Or maybe she's trying to figure out whether Robin is lesbian. Who knows? All Robin knows is that it really feels like she's being judged. A stream of thoughts rush through her head. "Maybe if I move my bag to the other side of my legs, she'll stop looking at me. I should have just worn jeans this morning so that I could blend in better and I wouldn't have to worry about any of this. Or maybe I should start shaving my legs, even though I don't want to. It's such a silly social practice. I don't know why others have to make such a big deal about how I look—I don't care how other people dress or what they do with their body hair." Robin hopes class starts soon. She's ready for it to be over, so she can get out of here. She hates when it feels like people are judging her—why can't that girl just mind her own business? She catches the

girl's eye again, except Robin continues to look back at her this time. The girl looks down at her papers. "Good, leave me alone," she thinks. At that moment, the professor starts to speak and Robin is relieved that she has something else to focus on now.

At the end of class, Robin still feels unsettled by the way the girl had been looking at her. She can't shake the feeling that she doesn't belong here. She just doesn't look like the other girls. She's not wearing yoga pants, she doesn't have long hair, and she doesn't like wearing fitted tops. It almost makes her feel like there's something wrong with her or her body, or even with the fact that she's attracted to girls. She knows there's not. She knows she has the right to feel and present herself in any way she wants, but knowing and feeling that are sometimes two separate things. It's hard to dismiss the feeling that she's somehow diseased or weird when someone looks at her critically like that girl did, and she hates what feeling that way does to her. Robin noticed herself trying to disappear throughout the class. She was slouching instead of sitting straight and decided not to participate in the class discussion (even though she had something to contribute) because she didn't feel like drawing even more attention to herself. "I don't know why someone I don't even know has the power to affect how I feel about myself," she thinks to herself. "I don't know why I let these kinds of things bother me." But she knows she can't help feeling that way. Robin decides that she has had her fill of campus for the day and decides to head home. She hopes that once she gets there the gross, uncomfortable, anxious feeling that's sitting in the pit of her stomach will go away.

#### ***6.7.4 Being Suspended in Time***

Class has just ended and Justin is chatting with a couple of his classmates, Scott and Brian, outside the classroom. There are only three guys in their program, so the three of them had bonded fairly quickly at the beginning of the year. Up to now, Justin has never felt any real need to tell them that he's gay; however, now that they seem to be more than acquaintances, he has started to consider telling them. The perfect moment just hasn't arisen yet.

While they are standing there, Scott decides to tell a joke that he heard from his brother. "What's a gay guy's favourite pick up line at a gay bar?" Justin cringes as soon as the words come out of Scott's mouth. As he waits for the punch line, his heart starts to race, his cheeks begin to blush, his hands grow clammy, and his breath gets caught in his lungs. In what seems to be in the distance, he hears Brian call out, "What?" and Scott answer, "May I push your stool in?" The two of them start laughing as if this is the funniest joke they have ever heard before,

while Justin stands there stunned. He's come to expect this type of behaviour from most heterosexual guys, but not from these guys. He's never heard them say things like "that's so gay" before, so to hear Scott tell a gay joke (a pretty tasteless joke at that) and for Brian to find it funny seems so out of character for them. While they stand there laughing, all Justin could do was ask himself over and over again what should he do? Should he tell them the joke is offensive? Should he tell them that he's gay and that he doesn't appreciate that kind of humour? Should he just let it pass, given that it seems to be out of character for them? What if other gay people overheard the joke and now they're feeling uncomfortable—should he say something for their sake? These, and other thoughts, churn in his head, all the while knowing that if he's going to say something, he has to do it soon. The guys are just about to stop laughing and once they move on to something else, it will be too awkward for him to bring it up.

Justin decides that this is his moment. He's feeling bold today and, in general, he's tired of gay men being the brunt of jokes and people thinking that it's acceptable. He takes a deep breath and speaks up, "I don't think that joke is very funny. I don't know if you guys know this, but I'm actually gay." The next few seconds seem to stretch out forever as he waits for them to respond. He can see shocked expressions unfold on Scott and Brian's faces. Scott is the first to speak and stammers, "Oh, sorry man. I didn't realize you were gay. The joke didn't mean anything. I just thought it was funny. It's just like any other joke. I really didn't mean anything by it." Justin can't quite read the expression on Brian's face, it seems sheepish more than anything, and Justin assumes that Brian is embarrassed for his part in getting caught for telling a gay joke in front of a gay man. "It's okay. I know you guys are good guys. These kind of jokes really get under my skin and I've been meaning to tell you for awhile that I'm gay, so this just seemed like as good a time as any." Not long after this, their conversation ends and everyone heads off in their own direction.

When Justin meets the guys in class on Monday, everything seems to be normal between them. "That's a relief," he thinks. Periodically over the weekend he had worried about the rashness of his decision to call them on the joke and felt anxious about meeting up with Scott and Brian again. He had hoped that it hadn't wrecked their friendships, especially because they were going to be in the same classes for the next two years. However, Justin's initial relief was short-lived. Normally on Monday, Justin and Brian each lunch together because they have an hour break between their morning and afternoon classes and Scott has a meeting for one of the clubs

to which he belongs. As they walk out of class, Justin asks Brian where he wants to go for lunch. “Sorry Justin, I actually can’t do lunch today. My printer ran out of ink, so I have to head to the computer lab to print off the assignment that’s due at 1:00 p.m.,” Brian answers. “Okay, no problem,” Justin replies, not thinking much of it.

However, over the rest of the week, Justin starts to grow suspicious of Brian’s behaviour. He notices that Brian doesn’t talk to him as much as he normally does and that he tends to rush off after classes instead of hanging around to chat. At first, Justin passes it off as Brian having a really busy week, but then he heard him telling Scott that he had been out for drinks a couple of times this week, so it couldn’t be that after all. As the week went on, a nagging thought kept popping up at the back of Justin’s mind: “Brian’s acting weird around me because he thinks I’m gay.” Justin doesn’t know why it should matter. It’s not like he changed between last week and this week; he’s still the same person. Brian just knows a little bit more about him now. He tries not to think too much about Brian’s behaviour, but it is growing increasingly harder to keep these thoughts at bay. Each day, he finds himself waiting for things to change, but they don’t. He’s just left waiting. After a few more weeks of avoidance and idle conversation with Brian, Justin realizes the truth of the situation. Their fledgling friendship is over, all because Justin is attracted to men. “I guess it’s best that I found this out now,” he consoles himself.

### ***6.7.5 Navigating Being-in and Being-out***

Lee had fairly typical day ahead of him. First, he had class, then he was going to hit the gym and, later on in the afternoon, he had a lab meeting to attend. He arrived at his last of the day class with a couple of minutes to spare and sat down in his usual seat. His friend, Jen, was already there and they started chatting. “How was your weekend?” Jen asks. “Not too bad,” Lee replies, “I had to work Friday night and managed to go out with a few friends on Saturday.” “What, no hot dates?” Jen follows up, “I thought you gay guys always have a different man lined up each weekend?” “You know, I’m not that kind guy, Jen,” Lee mildly rebukes; he doesn’t feel like playing into her joke today. “Yeah, I know,” she grins, looking a little sheepish. Lee knows Jen was just joking. They’ve been friends for ages and they always joke around together, but sometimes, depending on his mood, comments like this one bug him a little bit. He hates being compared to the stereotype. It makes him feel as though he’s being boxed in, and he would rather just be seen as himself than be compared to this imaginary idea of what a gay man is like. So many people make assumptions about him, and he doesn’t need Jen to be one of them. He

doesn't always have a chance to say something when people do make assumptions, so he experiences a brief sense of satisfaction when he sees Jen's sheepish smile, knowing that he made his point and she heard it.

After class, Lee heads to the university gym, despite the fact that it's not his favourite place to be. He always feels self-conscious at the gym; there's something about being in that testosterone-filled space that makes him cautious about identifying as a gay man. He does his best to not be "gay" at the gym, but he still feels like everyone can tell that he's not one of them just by looking at him. Surely, it's as clear to them as it is to him. At the back of his mind, he always assumes that straight guys will think that he's checking them out. He makes a conscious effort to avoid looking at any of the guys while he's in the locker room and remains focused on himself. "I don't need anyone mistaking me for someone who's coming on to them," he thinks. He gets out of the locker room as fast possible. "In some ways," he thinks, "I feel more tired after being at the gym than I do before I go, because of all the effort it takes to act straight." He wishes that he could be like other guys and not worry about being so cautious about everything he does while he's at the gym. After he has finished his workout, he feels that familiar sense of relief wash over him as he walks out the door of the gym. He no longer has any pressure to be anything but himself.

Lee hurries over to his lab meeting. Most of the lab is already there and he walks in at the tail end of a conversation that concludes with his lab mate, Carl, saying, "It was so gay," as in, "It was so stupid." He feels his heart skip a beat as he sits down at the table. No one in the lab knows about Lee's sexual orientation. He just started working in the lab a couple of weeks ago, and he hasn't felt the need to share this piece of information about himself with any of his lab mates yet. He hasn't had enough time to figure out what his peers views are on gay and lesbian persons and, really, the fact that he's gay should have no bearing on the work they do together—it is supposed to be a professional relationship after all. He knows that the comment he overheard is probably meaningless, but he can't help but feel a little off or on edge. Lee wonders if he should say something about not using that kind of terminology. "I don't know if I'm ready to expose myself like that to this group, and I don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable or cause any friction in the group," he decides, choosing to say nothing, "Maybe it's just a one-off comment." He then starts thinking about all of the other conversations he has had with Carl over the past few weeks, trying to recall if he's done anything else that would suggest he is

prejudiced. He can't think of anything, but maybe he should start paying more attention. "Lee? Lee?" he hears someone calling his name, bringing him back to reality, "Were you able to find that article we needed?" It's amazing how a single comment can make him feel somehow different from everyone else and pull him into his own thoughts. He shakes his head and tries to rejoin the group, "Yes, I have it right here," he responds and pulls it out of his bag.

## CHAPTER SEVEN—REFLECTING UPON THE INQUIRY

Before I reflect upon the implications of my study in terms of the literature that exists in relation to homonegativity, I would like to reflect upon my own learning and the insight that I have personally gained as a result of conducting this study. In addition to the participants of a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, the researcher also plays an integral role as the research instrument and influences the co-construction of the knowledge that occurs (Munhall, 2007). In other words, I am just as much a part of this study as my participants, and it would not have emerged in the form it did without me. Thus, a component of reflecting upon what was learned from this hermeneutic phenomenological investigation consists of considering the way in which I was changed by the process of conducting the study and the lessons I have learned as a result of immersing myself in the participants' experiences.

I have not carried out a study that required interpretation to occur at such depth before, and many of the lessons that I have learned are related to looking at a group of individuals' experiences in a way that I never would have previously. Several concepts common in phenomenological research are much clearer to me now. Specifically, I have a fuller appreciation of what it means to be a research instrument, including the role that I played in the data I collected and my interpretations of it. For instance, by explicating my own preconceptions and assumptions about the study, I was more aware of my own biases than I have been in other studies I have conducted and, as such, was more vigilant about identifying when they were creeping into the questions I asked of, or about, the participants. I also felt that when I was interviewing the participants and analyzing their experiences that the boundaries between myself and them faded; it was as if I let their narratives wash over me so as to become fully immersed in their experiences. One of my participants commented that he considered the events of which he spoke as being fundamentally *human* experiences. That is, although he spoke of experiences that were related to his sexual orientation, he suggested that everyone has likely encountered similar situations in other contexts of their lives. I took these words to heart and, despite the fact that I am heterosexual, used my own experiences as a starting point to better understand those of my participants by looking for that common, fundamental, *human* thread between us. I tried to approach the interviews and daily diary entries with an empathic understanding of what the gay and lesbian students had shared with me and drew upon my own experiences, understandings, and perceptions to see their experiences in a way that I had not seen before and ask questions that



I would not have thought to ask otherwise. As much as possible, I tried to vicariously experience the situations the gay and lesbian students told me about, and I believe my attempts to dwell in their experiences were rewarded by the amount of rich data I obtained and insight I was able to achieve.

The idea that the participants' experiences were fundamentally *human* experiences deserves greater discussion. Just as I could, at times, connect the participants' experiences to my own experiences, I have unexpectedly heard their words echoed in the voices of others who, for reasons other than sexual orientation, have coincidentally recalled moments where they were unsure of the reason they were treated differently and the difficulties that ensued as result of being in that state of uncertainty that results from not knowing. For instance, I can vividly recall a conversation I had with a First Nations woman who spoke of a negative encounter she had in a grocery store that she struggled to make sense of because she did not know if she imagined a problem to exist where there was none, if it was because she did not feel comfortable in that space, or if it was because of her race. For a moment, I had to pause and revel in the similarities between her words and those of my participants. It was through this happenstance conversation that I came to feel confident that I was on the right path in uncovering the essence of what it means to be the target of subtle discrimination. This conversation also helped me appreciate what it means to uncover the universal or essential meaning structure of an experience, as her experience in relation to her race was strikingly similar to the gay and lesbian students' experiences in relation to their sexual orientation.

In carrying out this study, I also have a greater appreciation of what it means to move from the parts-to-the-whole and from the whole-to-the-parts. I find this experience difficult to articulate, but when I was analyzing the participants' data, I was constantly engaged in the process depicted by the hermeneutic circle I described earlier. I examined each experience the participants shared on its own and then in the context of the overall meaning of their personal narrative, the other participants' experiences, the lived existential to which it was related, and the overall analysis, often shifting back and forth between these different ways of considering that person's experience. Associated with this need to shift from the parts-to-the-whole and vice versa, was the process of writing and re-writing, as I tried to capture as accurately as I could the meaning of a given experience in the context of the whole. I wanted to do justice to the participants' words and this endeavour took many attempts on my part. The amount of dwelling,

attention, and drafts needed to capture the participants' experiences in a way that was satisfactory surprised me.

Moreover, I was astounded by the depth at which it was possible to analyze the gay and lesbian students' experiences by using the lived existentials. There are several aspects of their experiences that I do not think I would have identified if I had not employed this approach. For instance, the power of the memories we store in our bodies, and the influence these memories have on our lives, was not as apparent to me before I started this study as it is now, especially in light of gay and lesbian students' tendencies to approach the future with trepidation as a result of the real or vicarious experience of trauma. I also had not previously given much thought to the notion that our bodies are essential to the way in which we experience the world, including their potential to share our secrets or be a personal source of betrayal. These possibilities were startling to me, especially with respect to the relationship that the participants who were gender-queer (e.g., Jamie and Kelly) had to their bodies and their perceptions of their bodies as failing them. Further, the tension between wanting to belong and not wanting to be an outsider or "other" that pervaded the participants' experiences was not what I had anticipated would be at the core of what it means to be the target of homonegativity. Having primarily studied homonegativity from the perspective of heterosexuals, I knew that perpetrators of homonegativity tended to engage in anti-gay/lesbian behaviour to punish gay and lesbian persons from deviating from the norm; however, I did not realize that these feelings of being "other" were internalized by the targets of these acts to the extent that they are.

Other elements of the gay and lesbian students' narratives brought to life other pieces of knowledge that I had known academically, but had not fully appreciated their implications at a personal level. Inevitably, when we discuss homonegativity, we speak about the negative messages about homosexuality and gay and lesbian persons that exist in our society. However, the personal nature of these "societal" messages became clear to me in carrying out this study. The lifeworld in which the participants found themselves, including their communities, homes, workplaces, schools, and family and peer networks, had a profound influence on their experiences and acceptance of their sexual orientation. Some participants (e.g., Von, Marcie, Nathan, and Elizabeth) received very negative messages about their sexual orientation at a young age, which set them on a different trajectory in terms of accepting their own sexual orientation than those who came from more loving and supportive environments (e.g., Tara, Jamie, and

Alyssa). Although this study was not focused on the participants' acceptance of their own sexual orientation or feelings of internalized homonegativity, I could not help but notice the differences in the way these different groups of participants shared their stories and approached their lives. In fact, at moments during the interviews, I wished that I could share some of these insights with the participants who seemed to be struggling, but I recognized that was neither my place nor my purpose in the interviews. Moreover, it became clear to me that the deep-rooted shame that some of the participants dealt with, and the concerns about safety or acceptance that all struggled with at one point or another, did not come from negative messages out there somewhere in society; they came from the persons (including their family members and friends) whom they interacted with on a daily basis. Thus, when we speak of negative societal messages that lead to phenomena such as internalized homonegativity, we mean those messages that society generally agrees upon, but which are passed to a person through the mouths of kin, peers, mentors, and acquaintances.

Another aspect of this research process that I would like to discuss is the participants' perceptions that it was the subtle homonegative behaviours that were more damaging than the blatant homonegative behaviours. As I spent time analyzing the gay and lesbian university students' experiences with subtle discrimination, I was surprised to learn the extent to which these behaviours were able to disrupt their experiences, strip them of aspects of their personhood, and cause them to experience feelings of alienation, invisibility, and dehumanization. However, at the same time that I was carrying out this research study, I also was carrying out a study on hidden homelessness (i.e., a type of homelessness in which individuals stay with family members or friends to avoid being absolutely homeless; Jewell, 2010) in which it struck me that the gay and lesbian students may have been in a position of privilege that allowed them to acknowledge and consider the impact that subtle discrimination had on their lives. Specifically, Maslow's hierarchy of needs came to my mind and I could not help but recognize the homeless individuals with whom I was interacting were struggling to meet the needs located at the lowest levels of the hierarchy (i.e., housing, food, shelter, and safety), while many of the gay and lesbian students in my study were concerned with needs reflecting higher levels of the hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). Specifically, they were struggling with needs related to love, belonging, and esteem. This led me to wonder if it was because they tended to live in environments of relative safety and security that afforded them the space to consider the consequences of subtle discrimination for their lives. In bringing up this topic, I simply want to acknowledge the

possibility that gay and lesbian persons struggling with needs related to their safety and security may be more severely affected by blatant homonegativity. For instance, blatant homonegative behaviours that cause gay and lesbian persons to lose their children (Brown, Smallin, Groza, & Ryan, 2009) or partners (Herek et al., 1997) due to anti-gay/lesbian motivated behaviour seem as though they would be more damaging than subtle discrimination. However, I want to be clear that I do not doubt the very real impact that subtle discrimination had on the gay and lesbian university students' lives or that they indeed experienced these behaviours to be more damaging than the blatant homonegative behaviours they encountered. I simply raise these points as fodder to consider when thinking about the context in which this study took place and the phenomenon of homonegativity more broadly.

I would like to conclude my self-reflection of my experiences in carrying out this study by discussing the occurrences that I found to be most unexpected and interesting: my relationship with the participants. First, I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm the gay and lesbian students had for the study and their participation in it. I did not expect for so many of them to be visibly excited about the study. For some, the study seemed to be a venue to talk about an aspect of their identity or life that they often do not have a chance to discuss in a safe environment while, for others, their participation seemed to be an expression of their activist values and another way that they could contribute to the advancement of gay and lesbian persons. I also did not expect to be sought out afterwards by the students who participated in my study to see if I could help facilitate their involvement in similar research; however, I was pleased to have the opportunity to assist them with their endeavours just as they assisted me with mine.

Second, I had not known it was possible to have a strong relationship with a person's words. The more I read some participants' words, the more connected I felt to them and my feelings of endearment toward them increased. Elizabeth comes to mind as an example in which this happened. I initially found my interview with Elizabeth challenging—she was shy and struggled with talking openly about her sexual orientation. However, the more I read her words, the more privileged I felt to have been allowed to hear her story, and the more I realized the extent to which she had shared her experiences with me. Interestingly, there also were participants to whom, after reading their transcripts and daily diary entries several times, I felt disconnected. These participants often had shared their experiences in a more superficial or negative manner and, ultimately, I think my sense of detachment from them emerged from

having a different worldview. After noticing that I tended to gravitate toward some participants more than others, I recognized that it was important for me to explicitly acknowledge the differences in the relationships I had with the participants and their words, despite the fact that I felt uncomfortable writing in my journal that there were participants to whom I did not feel an affinity (the question I struggled with was—who am I to prefer some participants’ stories over others?). However, this act was necessary to allow me to be conscientious about not discounting their opinions and experiences or to dismiss their words as being less important than others. I was grateful that they had participated in my study, and I wanted to ensure that their voices were represented just as much as anyone else’s.

Finally, I was surprised at how each and every participant was able to touch me with their stories. Regardless of whether I felt connected to a participant, each person enabled me to see the world in a new way and garner greater insight into what it means to be the target of homonegativity. I learned something valuable from each person and feel privileged that the participants trusted me enough to share their experiences with me. I know that I have been changed by conducting this study, both in terms of my skill as a researcher and as a citizen in this world.

## CHAPTER EIGHT—DISCUSSION

The findings from this hermeneutic-phenomenological investigation offer insight into the nature of Canadian gay and lesbian university students' lived experiences with being the target of blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour on and off a university campus. Collectively, the four lived existentials of other, body, space, and time revealed how the experience of being discriminated against can disrupt the continuity of one's being, lead a person to question his/her relationships with others, feel vulnerable in a given space, and contribute to a sense of discomfort in one's own body. Anti-gay/lesbian behaviours (both blatant and subtle) considerably interrupted the way in which the participants could simply *be* in their lifeworlds. Most noticeably, being the target of homonegativity affected how participants felt about themselves in relation to those around them, as well as their perceptions of those thought responsible for homonegative acts. The participants' experiences of space, both the physical location in which they found themselves and the extent to which they perceived it possible to fully express their own personal identities, also factored prominently in their experiences of homonegative behaviour. The gay and lesbian students' lived experiences of body and time were less integral to their experiences of homonegativity, yet anti-gay/lesbian behaviours did profoundly affect the way they perceived their bodies and anticipated the future. Ultimately, at the core of the participants' experiences was a struggle between *being-out* (i.e., being open about their sexual orientation, being an outsider, and being out of sync with oneself) and *being-in* (i.e., being restricted by oneself or other's preconceptions, being part of or fitting into society, and living in line with one's inner self).

The purpose of a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is not to reduce the nature of the phenomenon to such an extent that it becomes decontextualized and no longer adequately reflects the lived meaning of that phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). As such, I am cautious in presenting a general summary of the study findings in any great detail. However, there are several notable or unanticipated findings that I would like to discuss and, in so doing, summarize the primary themes that emerged in the analysis. Given the infancy of research on subtle forms of discrimination as experienced by gay and lesbian persons, this discussion is intended to advance our understanding of what it means to be the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours and highlight the most significant implications of this study for future research.

## ***8.1 Clarifying the Phenomena of Blatant and Subtle Homonegativity***

### ***8.1.1 Defining Blatant and Subtle Homonegative Behaviour***

Underlying the current inquiry was a need to understand how the gay and lesbian university students' lived experiences with blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours differed from each other to clarify the nature of these forms of discrimination. In turn, I hoped to use these findings to refine the definitions which I had initially proposed when designing this study to describe the various homonegative behaviours that may be encountered. During the conceptualization of this study, I developed a set of definitions delineating the different categories of blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour that may be encountered as a means of offering clarity to the terminology that was used in the current research and to identify the types of behaviour that were relevant to this investigation. It is unusual to define the nature of a phenomenon at the beginning of a hermeneutic phenomenological study, as the goal of such studies are to explore the phenomenon from a state of unknowing rather than to confirm a set of pre-conceived notions (Munhall, 2007). However, given that terminology describing the phenomenon of interest (i.e., behavioural manifestations of homonegativity) had not been clearly explicated in the literature, it was necessary to use a set of "working definitions" to ensure that others (i.e., my colleagues and participants) understood the types of discrimination I was interested in exploring. In carrying out data collection and analysis, I was aware that I already had a set of notions about the inherent nature of blatant and subtle discrimination, and consciously chose to set aside these definitions to allow myself to understand how the gay and lesbian students categorized the various homonegative behaviours they encountered. At this point, I would like to revisit the definitions that were originally used to frame this study and compare them to the types of homonegative behaviour that were referred to by the participants. The purpose of this comparison is to provide a set of more accurate definitions of blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour that better reflect the participants' experiences and the essential features of these behaviours.

The definitions of blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour initially proposed to guide the development of the present study were based on past theorizing in the sexism literature (e.g., Benokraitis, 1997; Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995) and assumed that several elements, such as perceived harm, intention, and the extent to which behaviours were explicit or direct, were crucial for establishing whether blatant or subtle discrimination occurred. On the basis of the gay

and lesbian students' experiences, and in line with prior theorizing, it was apparent that the students did take these factors, as well as others, into consideration when establishing whether they had been the target of discrimination and if it was blatant or subtle. A critical aspect of feeling discriminated against was the feeling of being harmed by another or treated unjustly on the basis of being gay or lesbian. The participants largely relied upon their own subjective feelings related to their personal security and wellbeing (including the extent to which they were hurt or offended by a behaviour, felt inhibited in their expression of self, became wary of another person, and felt unsafe in a given space or interaction) to determine whether discrimination had occurred. In other words, the participants relied upon the host of experiences associated with *being-out* and *being-in* to determine whether they had been the target of homonegativity. They then went on to use various criteria, including the degree to which a behaviour appeared to be intentionally negative, reflective of underlying prejudice, direct or explicit, and socially agreed upon to be wrong to determine whether it constituted a form of blatant or subtle homonegativity.

Similar to the original definitions proposed, the gay and lesbian students identified *blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours* as actions which were explicitly directed toward, and purposefully intended to derogate or harm, them on the basis of their membership in a sexual minority. Physical violence and verbal harassment were the most common overt behaviours to which the participants referred. Further, the gay and lesbian students also categorized subtle homonegative behaviour as actions that were experienced as harmful or offensive, but were characterized by ambiguity and could potentially be interpreted as non-discriminatory. However, with respect to the specific categories of subtle discrimination that were previously suggested, the gay and lesbian students distinguished three, rather than two, types of subtle homonegative behaviour. *Intentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours* were indeed identified as one form of subtle discrimination. Participants described this form of discrimination as behaviour that was intentionally directed toward the gay and lesbian students with the purpose of degrading or sabotaging them on the basis of their sexual orientation, but was purposefully hidden (from others or the target) to make it difficult to identify these actions as discriminatory. Instances of behaviour which the participants considered reflective of this category included judgemental looks or glances, tone of voice, or an unfriendly demeanour (all in contrast to how a person interacted with others).



The participants also identified two forms of *unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour* (as opposed to the one category that was initially suggested). Actions that were perceived to derogate gay and lesbian persons, but regarded as *thoughtless or mindless behaviours* that were not necessarily reflective of any underlying prejudice toward gay or lesbian individuals were considered to be one type of unintentional subtle homonegativity (e.g., anti-gay/lesbian jokes, slang words, and phrases). In addition, homonegative behaviours in which perpetrators did not seem to be aware they were engaging, but were perceived to be *indicative of an underlying prejudice*, were considered to be another form of unintentional subtle discrimination (e.g., facial expressions or slight movements away from the participant; reduction of connection in a close relationship). Thus, participants made a distinction between unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that seemed fuelled by prejudice and those that seemed driven by ignorance.

### ***8.1.2 Being Targeted: Understanding that Homonegativity Has Occurred***

To garner a complete appreciation of the complexity of the process through which the gay and lesbian students determined they had been the target of homonegativity, a detailed discussion of the specific factors that the participants relied upon to find meaning in heterosexuals' actions is warranted. As was mentioned previously, participants' own felt sense of a transgression, heterosexuals' perceived intentions when engaging in a behaviour, and the extent to which an action was overt or hidden were used to determine whether discrimination occurred. However, participants' also relied upon other factors to judge the nature of a behaviour, including their perceptions of whether the perpetrator is prejudiced, their own mood, the accompaniment of apologies or excuses when a behaviour is performed, the degree to which others agree that a behaviour is discriminatory, and their own willingness to recognize that discrimination has occurred. Some of the factors can be considered essential aspects of determining that one has been the target of blatant or subtle homonegative behaviour (i.e., perceptions of harm, intention, underlying prejudice, and the extent to which behaviour was direct or hidden), while others seemed tangential or supplementary to the participants' experiences of homonegativity (e.g., mood, social consensus about whether discrimination occurred, and the accompaniment of apologies or excuses). Even so, in some capacity, the gay and lesbian students relied on these facets of their experience to understand that they had been targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation.

It was unexpected that the participants' perceptions of a heterosexual perpetrator's level of prejudice toward gay men or lesbian women was considered in addition to the perceived intentionality of an act in making judgements about a discriminatory behaviour. However, upon analysis, it appeared that the gay and lesbian students considered heterosexuals' level of prejudice separately from the degree to which they had intentionally behaved in a discriminatory manner when determining the type of homonegative behaviour that had occurred. In the cases of blatant discrimination and intentional subtle homonegative behaviours, assessments of intentionality and prejudice corresponded closely with each other, as these behaviours were both perceived to be intentional and motivated by prejudice. Conversely, with respect to subtle unintentional anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, there was no correspondence between intention and perceived prejudice—some unintentional behaviours were thought to be driven by prejudice, while others were not. In fact, it was this tendency for participants to use their perceptions of prejudice to distinguish between the various types of unintentional homonegative behaviours that may be perpetrated, which suggested that perceived prejudice is an essential factor that needs to be considered when identifying and classifying homonegative behaviour.

The gay and lesbian students also tended to use any sense of positivity or compassion felt in relation to a person, including any prior knowledge about his/her acceptance of gay and lesbian persons, to mediate their perceptions of that person as prejudiced and the person's behaviour as discriminatory or intentional. The desire to *be-in* and to not experience themselves as being on the outside can be used to understand this tendency. With respect to subtle homonegative behaviours, sometimes the gay and lesbian students would give the perpetrator of a questionable behaviour who was thought to be accepting of sexual minorities (particularly family members or close friends) the benefit of the doubt and not interpret the action in as negative a manner. It likely was much less threatening to their sense of self and relationship to that person to consider a behaviour to be well-intentioned but poorly enacted than wilfully negative and intentionally perpetrated. At other times, a behaviour would be considered discriminatory, and the perpetrator would be perceived as acting out of poor judgement or ignorance, rather than prejudice, given what was known about the person's attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. It seemed that, despite the perpetrators' actions, a positive perception of their inner disposition toward gay and lesbian persons allowed the gay and lesbian students to reasonably assume they were accepted by that person, which likely was more desirable than

acknowledging that they were perceived to be outsiders or “other.” In other circumstances, the students would identify a behaviour as discriminatory and perceive the perpetrator to be prejudiced, but also be forgiving of that person if he/she was actively trying to be accepting of the participant’s sexual orientation. By focusing on the positive aspects of the situation and being lenient with seemingly well-meaning heterosexuals, the participants could continue to perceive themselves as being part of a society that had space for both heterosexual and sexual minority persons. Liam, Alyssa, and Rory’s comments regarding their appreciation of heterosexuals’ attempts at inclusivity, even if it requires that they be forgiving of any inadvertent homonegative behaviours to support their attempts, reinforce this contention.

Related to these findings, Sechrist and Delmar (2009) reported a tendency for targets to assume that perpetrators’ intentions are benign when they cannot be definitively determined. However, Farrow and Tarrant (2009) have found the opposite result: when minority group members believe that ingroup members hold negative attitudes toward the outgroup (i.e., are prejudiced), members of the outgroup tend to appraise discrimination in a threatening manner. Moreover, the tendency of the participants to differentiate between behaviours that are discriminatory, persons who are prejudiced, and behaviours that are intentional to determine the seriousness of a transgression is congruent with findings from the study conducted by Swim et al. (2003). Swim and associates reported that targets of sexist discriminatory behaviour distinguished between people who are prejudiced and behaviours that are discriminatory, did not necessarily assume that someone is prejudiced because they engaged in a discriminatory behaviour, and used the perceived intentionality behind an act to judge its seriousness.

At this juncture, I will turn to the tangential elements of the gay and lesbian students’ experiences with being the target of discrimination that also influenced how they interpreted homonegative behaviours. In addition to any sense of positivity emanating from the person responsible for homonegative behaviour, the lesbian and gay students also indicated that their own moods influenced whether they considered a behaviour to be discriminatory. For instance, Von indicated that, depending on this mood, he may not deem the same behaviour as offensive from one day to the next. It seemed that the extent to which the participants were able to live authentically (i.e., were able to act in a way that was congruent with their inner selves) and were confident about their ability to *be-out* affected the way in which they experienced anti-gay/lesbian behaviours.

Schwarz (1990) posits that mood serves as a form of information that individuals take into account when making judgments about other persons, the quality of their own lives, or even their own opinions. To date, limited empirical research has explored the connection between mood and perceptions of discrimination. However, a study conducted by Sechrist, Swim, and Mark (2003) investigating the circumstances under which women made an attribution of sexist behaviour directed toward either themselves or other women found that women tended to use their mood as information, with those who were in positive moods being less likely to acknowledge that discrimination had occurred. These women also were less conscious of the stigma associated with belonging to a marginalized social group when they had positive moods. Comparable to Sechrist et al.'s findings, several gay and lesbian students commented that they were more likely to interpret a subtle homonegative behaviour to be discriminatory when they felt more vulnerable (such as when they felt the need to conceal their sexuality) and, conceivably, were in less positive moods. This suggests that mood or, perhaps as indicated by the current analysis, a strong sense of self, is an important source of information that the gay and lesbian students relied on when judging behaviour to be discriminatory. Their mood or feelings of vulnerability also affected the way in which they were willing to respond to homonegative behaviour, which is a topic that will be addressed in detail in the next section.

The current inquiry also revealed that the provision of apologies or excuses influenced the gay and lesbian students' interpretations of homonegative behaviour. Several participants observed that it was common practice for heterosexuals, particularly in the presence of gay or lesbian persons, to excuse any anti-gay/lesbian remarks they have been reprimanded for making by denying that they were malicious. Such apologies (e.g., I didn't mean anything by it) were often interpreted by the participants (e.g., Liam, Tara, Kelly, and Sheena) to be insincere, especially if heterosexuals were not able to adequately demonstrate regret for the behaviour or an understanding of why it was inappropriate. Perhaps it was because these seemingly meaningless apologies did not acknowledge or ease the feelings of being an outsider that were experienced by the gay and lesbian students as a result of the homonegative behaviour that made them reluctant to accept the apologies as acts of contrition. Consequently, apologies were assumed to reflect heterosexuals' regret over having been caught for engaging in a discriminatory behaviour rather than for having offended a gay or lesbian person (or causing them to question their place in

society), and were often interpreted as a refusal to take responsibility for inappropriate behaviour.

Other elements of the gay and lesbian students' experiences also need to be considered in understanding their interpretations of the apologies offered in response to homonegative behaviour. In some situations, apologies were considered to reflect a cultural artefact of Canadian society, in which the norms of being respectful of diversity and politeness are valued, sometimes over being remorseful for one's actions (Howard-Hassmann, 2001). The lack of sincere regret also seemed to increase the likelihood that the gay and lesbian students perceived the perpetrator to be prejudiced and his/her behaviour discriminatory. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the participants' annoyance at the lack of attention heterosexuals paid to ensuring that they used inclusive language was exacerbated by the pressure they felt to carefully choose the language they used to describe their daily lives (to *be-included* in society and to avoid *being-out*), as they were often concerned on some level about how much they should reveal about themselves and their sexual orientation. This tendency for sexual minorities to feel pressure to edit or monitor their daily lives has been well-reported in the literature (DiPlacido, 1998; Hylton, 2006; Jewell et al., 2010).

With the exception of the research (Hunter & McClelland, 1991; McClelland & Hunter, 1992) that was cited in Chapter Two regarding the relationship between apologies, excuses, and perceptions of the seriousness of discriminatory racial and sexist events, to my knowledge, no other research has explored the role that these aspects of forgiveness play in interpreting discriminatory behaviour. Given that the provision of apologies and excuses did constitute factors that the gay and lesbian students took into consideration when making judgements about heterosexuals' discriminatory behaviour, this is an important area of research to consider in the future.

Another unexpected aspect of the participants' experience in relation to determining whether discrimination occurred was the role that other people played in their interpretation of homonegative behaviour. When a discriminatory behaviour was performed, the extent to which others present recognized the behaviour as homonegative influenced the degree to which participants were confident in assuming that discrimination had occurred. Specifically, the gay and lesbian students found that when they encountered blatant homonegativity, particularly in public spaces, there was generally consensus among all people present that the behaviour was

unacceptable. This social consensus made it easier for the participants to identify and respond to these behaviours as discriminatory, since they could be confident of the perpetrator's intentions and dismiss him/her as prejudiced. As a result, the person posed no threat to their sense of self. In these situations, they also could be more confident about their own social position among those present, as the consensus that the other person was in the wrong likely suggested to the participants that they were perceived by those present as *being-in*. In line with the participants' experiences, Inman (2001) reported that there does tend to be greater victim-observer congruency about discrimination when discriminatory behaviour is more obvious. Both victims and observers also were more likely to perceive discrimination when norms of social responsibility were violated, as is arguably the case when blatant discrimination occurs. Further, Farrow and Tarrant (2009) found that when ingroup members are thought to hold positive attitudes toward the outgroup, and demonstrate this shared understanding through social consensus, the ingroup is likely to be perceived as a source of social support (and less likely to be associated with maladaptive cognitions). It is quite possible that a similar process occurred among the gay and lesbian participants whereby they interpreted heterosexuals' consensus that homonegativity had occurred as a form of social support that bolstered their confidence. At a deeper level, heterosexuals' agreement that affronts of this nature are unacceptable, may have enhanced the participants' sense of belonging to the same community as heterosexuals.

With respect to the perpetration of subtle homonegative behaviours, the gay and lesbian students noted there tended to be a lack of social consensus among others present that such actions were unacceptable. The lack of external recognition that subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours were discriminatory often led the participants to doubt their own interpretations of the behaviour as homonegative. It is likely that the struggle between *being-out* and *being-in* was driving this uncertainty. Since heterosexuals did not recognize these subtle homonegative behaviours as discriminatory, by labelling these behaviours as such, the students risked drawing attention to their sexual orientation and acknowledging that they were different from heterosexuals (i.e., they risked *being-out*). They also potentially exposed themselves to a situation where they would be responsible for positioning themselves as being on the outside, since their revelation that they consider these behaviours to be discriminatory would place them in opposition to heterosexuals who do not acknowledge them as homonegative.

Recent research (Clarkson, Tomala, DeSensi, & Wheeler, 2009; DeMarree, Petty, & Brinol, 2007; Petrocelli, Tormala, & Rucker, 2007) exploring the related concept of attitude certainty (defined as a subjective sense of conviction one has about the validity of his/her opinion or attitude) also can be used to understand the role that social consensus played in the gay and lesbian students' evaluations of subtle homonegative behaviour. For instance, Clarkson et al. (2007) and DeMarree et al. (2007) have found that attitude certainty is related to greater self-certainty and confidence in one's opinions and may be enhanced when there is social consensus supporting one's evaluations. In other words, confidence in one's self and judgements is influenced by the degree to which a person believes his/her beliefs are valid and the extent to which others also are assumed to deem his/her opinions as legitimate. Thus, if individuals are unable to obtain information (or obtain conflicting reports) that others agree with their judgements, they are more likely to experience uncertainty (DeMarree et al., 2007). Applying these findings to the gay and lesbian students, the lack of agreement that homonegativity occurred from others present in a given situation likely undermined the degree to which the students were certain of their own opinions about the situation by eroding the participants' perceptions that they were similar to those around them.

Further, Marti, Bobier, and Baron (2000) reported that the detection of prejudice is less likely to occur when the target group constitutes a hidden minority (such as gay men and lesbian women). These lower detection rates can, in part, be attributed to a lack of prototypicality in the form that discrimination may take, since individuals tend to be highly sensitive to discriminatory behaviours that correspond with prototypical forms and insensitive to discrimination that is more varied. Given that subtle discrimination reflects a newer form of a homonegativity that is characterized by diverse manifestations, it is likely that the lack of archetypal subtle homonegative behaviour contributes to heterosexuals' tendencies to not recognize contemporary forms of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours as being discriminatory. This lack of prototypicality, which results in lower social consensus that discrimination occurred, also likely weakens gay and lesbian persons' confidence in their own assessments of behaviour as homonegative.

Uncertainty that discrimination has occurred also has been associated with rumination (DeMarree et al., 2007). That is, when individuals are uncertain that they have been treated negatively, they tend to repeatedly assess the validity of their opinion and, in so doing, experience doubt and negative affect, which further undermines their confidence (especially if

they are not able to arrive at a clear judgement; DeMarree et al., 2007). The act of engaging in rumination is one that was characteristic of the gay and lesbian students' experiences with subtle discrimination, as several participants noted that they often found themselves in an endless cycle of questioning others' behaviours and their own interpretations of those behaviours. Subtle homonegative behaviour was responsible for a disruption in their experience of living in the now and being present in their relationships with others; it created a state in which the gay and lesbian students were disconnected from the world around them and themselves and trapped in a state of doubt about their own perceptions, feelings, and beliefs.

Overall, the findings regarding the relevance of attitude certainty, self-certainty, and rumination in determining the extent to which a person is confident that discrimination has occurred are highly congruent with the gay and lesbian students' experiences of subtle discrimination. These elements, while seemingly important to the experience of being the target of anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, have received little attention in the context of homonegativity, yet they offer great insight into the psychological processes that occur within gay and lesbian persons upon encountering subtle discrimination. Thus, researchers may be well advised to take these concepts into consideration. Moreover, the impact that other people have on individuals' interpretations of discrimination underscores the importance of acknowledging that discrimination occurs in an intersubjective realm shared by multiple people who all contribute to the occurrence and perpetuation of this phenomenon.

Finally, some of the gay and lesbian students (e.g., Kelly and Rory) indicated that they were sometimes reluctant to identify behaviours as discriminatory and considered that their hesitancy may be largely attributed to an unwillingness on their parts to acknowledge that they had been discriminated against. It can be threatening to accept that discrimination has occurred and to confront that one has been victimized (Sechrist & Delmar, 2009). At its core, an admission of being discriminated against is an admission of being "other." As a result, individuals who have been the target of homonegativity may be susceptible to various forms of self-deception wherein they may deny that discrimination has occurred, excuse the offender for the behaviour, minimize the incident, or interpret the situation in a non-biased manner (Crosby, 1984; Sue, 2010). Sue (2010) suggests that this denial is particularly likely to happen when the target shares a close interpersonal relationship with the perpetrator and may be reluctant to acknowledge what such behaviour means for their relationship. In addition, Stangor, Swim, Van

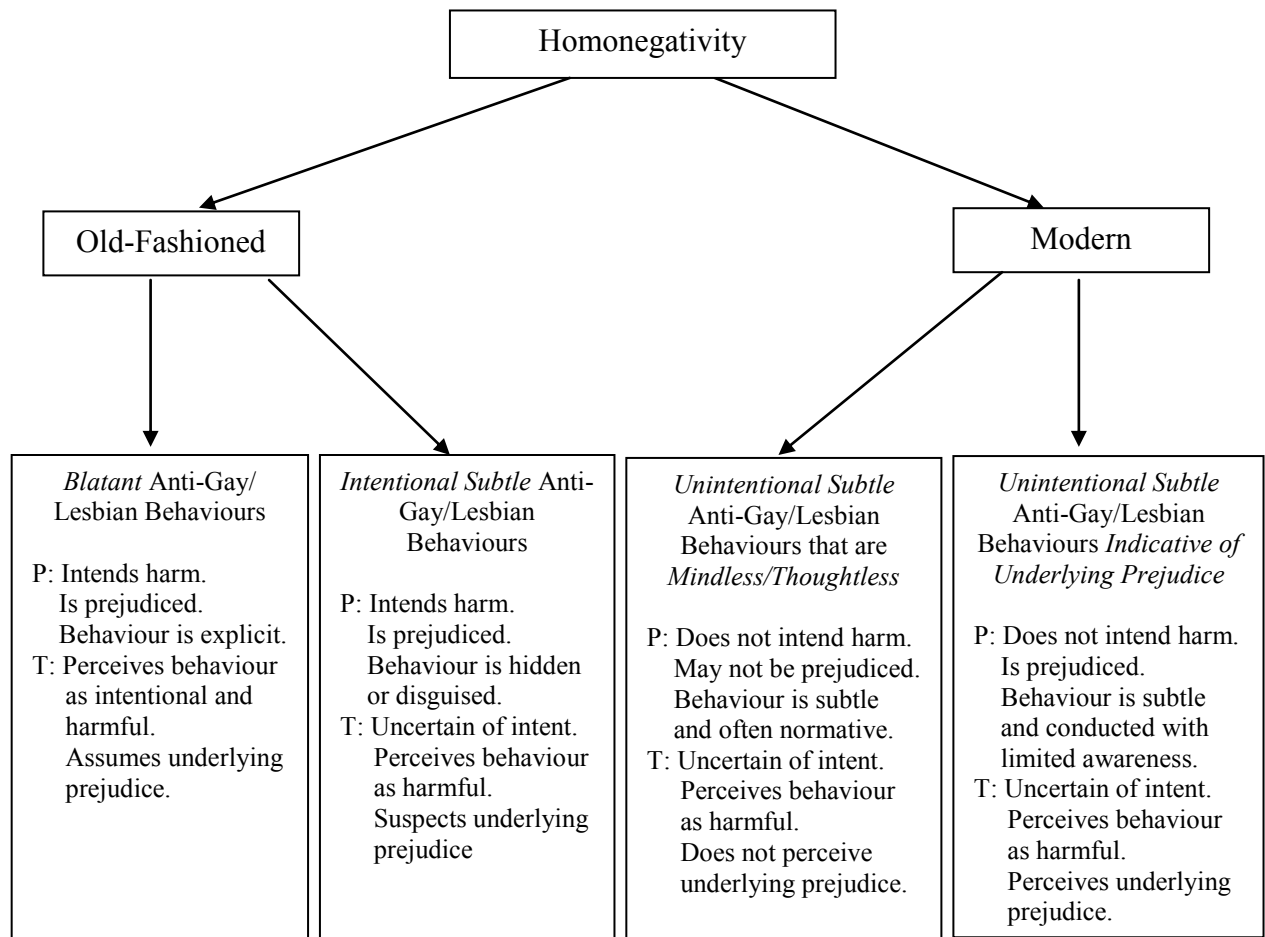


Allen, and Sechrist (2002) suggest that making attributions to discrimination also threatens one's belief in a just world and requires the target to acknowledge that others do not like or accept him/her on the basis of a characteristic he/she possesses. In other words, it requires individuals to grapple with being an outsider. The tendency for the gay and lesbian students to have indicated in the interviews that they rarely encountered prejudice, but to submit an average of three or four diary entries during the daily diary data collection period, suggests that they may generally be motivated to minimize or deny discrimination when it occurs. Similarly, some participants' (e.g., Greg, Quinton) preferences for experiencing subtle, rather than blatant, discrimination, precisely because they do not have to be certain that they were targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation, further supports the notion that it is threatening to think of oneself as having been discriminated against or as being an outsider. Figure 6 represents an updated version of Figure 1 that depicts the essential features of various anti-gay/lesbian behaviours and their relationships to old-fashioned and modern homonegativity, including targets' perceptions of whether the perpetrator is prejudiced.

### ***8.1.3 Linking Lived Experience to Theoretical Accounts of Homonegativity***

In understanding how the participants made sense of the homonegative behaviours they encountered, it appears that the gay and lesbian students took several of the elements outlined by the theories of old-fashioned and modern homonegativity into account to ascertain whether discrimination had occurred. The finding that participants' lived experiences of discrimination fell within the rubrics of these theoretical frameworks affirms the appropriateness of using them to situate the present study. Given that this inquiry was grounded in lived experience, it was not intended to prove or disprove a given theory (van Manen, 1990). However, it is possible to connect lived experience to existing theories to determine how well they correspond. This opportunity to link gay and lesbian persons' direct experiences with homonegativity to theories of old-fashioned and modern homonegativity reflects a significant contribution of the current study, given that most theories have focused on the factors underlying heterosexuals' prejudice (Jewell and Morrison, in press) and have not examined how well they take gay and lesbian persons' experiences into account.

Beginning with the theoretical framework of old-fashioned homonegativity, it appeared participants considered many of the constructs typically related to this form of prejudice when determining whether the interactions or spaces in which they were situated were homonegative.



P: perpetrator; T: target.

Figure 6. Relationship of old-fashioned and modern homonegativity to blatant, intentional subtle, and unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour revisited

For instance, variables traditionally associated with blatantly negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women, such as religiosity, moral objections to homosexuality, and endorsement of myths about gay men and lesbian women (Herek, 1988; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Morrison et al., 2009), were among the factors participants accounted for when determining whether they were the target of blatant discrimination or in an unsafe space and were associated with their struggle between *being-out* and *being-in*. Notably, participants considered signs of religious worship to be indicators of homonegativity and used the lack of recognition of lesbian and gay persons to identify when they were in a perceived heterosexual space. Further, these symbolic reminders that the gay and lesbian students were unwelcome in certain segments of society often

compelled them to conceal their sexual orientation in these spaces. In addition, they perceived heterosexuals' moral objections to homosexuality (as expressed through proclamations of being tolerant of homosexuality as long as it remains hidden); being viewed solely in terms of their sexual orientation (manifested as being perceived as unidimensionally gay or lesbian or a sexual being); and being regarded as embodying a defined set of stereotypical characteristics (rather than being seen for themselves) as infringing upon their personal space and freedom to express their individuality. It was the presence of these qualities in their interactions with others and the reciprocal impact it had on their expression of self that led the gay and lesbian students to understand that they had been discriminated against. In other words, these actions were associated with having to operate within a set of constrained parameters (i.e., with *being-in*), a state which the participants resented. Notably, the gay and lesbian students also tended to assume that perpetrators of these behaviours were prejudiced and that the endorsement of these negative attitudes directly contributed to the occurrence of these discriminatory interactions and spaces.

With respect to modern homonegativity, the significant role that ambiguity played in the participants' experiences of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour is congruent with what would be expected vis-à-vis this theory. Modern homonegativity posits that since heterosexuals who endorse this form of prejudice tend to think of themselves as egalitarian, they will only act in line with their negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women in situations where their actions will not be identified as discriminatory by either themselves or others (McConahay, 1983; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Morrison & Morrison, in press). Indeed, when the participants encountered subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, the primary reason they struggled to make sense of such behaviour was the presence of other, non-bias-related factors that could potentially explain a perpetrator's actions. For instance, Kelly frequently wondered whether the potentially judgemental looks she perceived from others were due to her gender presentation, sexual orientation, or a matter of happenstance. On other occasions, a lack of prior knowledge about a person, including his/her typical demeanour and attitudes toward sexual minorities, contributed to the participants' uncertainty about whether the behaviours they had experienced were discriminatory. In addition, distancing behaviours (e.g., reductions in emotional connection or comments that emphasize or direct attention to one's sexual orientation), from persons with whom they already had a relationship and who had proclaimed their acceptance of homosexuality, reflect additional examples of situations fraught with ambiguity in which

participants were uncertain of how to interpret a behaviour and the person perpetrating it. It is likely that the uncertainty associated with these behaviours disrupted the participants' experience of self (by causing them to *be-out* of sync), leaving them to question their relationships with the individuals responsible for those behaviours, feel awkward or exposed in their own bodies and the spaces they were situated, and become suspended in time as they considered the multitude of explanations for these behaviours. Thus, as indicated by empirical research (Aberson et al., 1999; Masser & Moffatt, 2002; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Swim et al., 1999) highlighting the conditions in which heterosexuals are likely to act on their modern homonegative beliefs, the gay and lesbian students' experiences with subtle discrimination (particularly unintentional anti-gay/lesbian behaviours that seem driven by an underlying prejudice) affirms that they, too, predominantly experienced subtle discrimination in situations characterized by attributional ambiguity.

In addition to situations of attributional ambiguity, it has been suggested that heterosexuals who are prejudiced toward gay and lesbian persons may engage in subtle discriminatory behaviours in situations where they are simply unaware of and insensitive to what constitutes discrimination (Jewell & Morrison, 2010; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Participants' experiences with thoughtless or mindless subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours, such as heterosexuals' usage of subtle prejudicial language under the guise that such language is meaningless, non-offensive, and socially acceptable, corresponds with the notion that some heterosexuals simply may not be knowledgeable about what comprises discrimination. The gay and lesbian students attributed the continued usage of remarks or expressions derogatory of gay men and lesbian women to a lack of social sanctioning that occurs in relation to using this language. As a result, the participants perceived that heterosexuals mistakenly believe that anti-gay/lesbian remarks are acceptable and not harmful or offensive to sexual minorities. Further, the lack of social sanctioning of subtle prejudicial language also likely contributed to the participants' feelings of *being-outsiders*. If the use of this language is not punished, the underlying message that accompanies its usage is that gay and lesbian persons are not accepted members of society who are worthy of protection.

The participants also suggested that, because heterosexuals lacked understanding about the negative consequences associated with using prejudicial language, they were apathetic toward changing their behaviour. Even so, some heterosexuals' reluctance to use derogatory

language directly in front of sexual minorities (as observed by Fred and Elizabeth) suggests that, on some level, they do acknowledge that anti-gay/lesbian remarks and phrases are not entirely appropriate. Sutton (2010) supports the participants' perceptions that a lack of social sanctioning for using language that is derogatory toward gay men and lesbian women (intentional or not) encourages the continued use of prejudicial language. He also suggests that the presence of such language may lead others to accept prejudice as normative and reinforces the outgroup position of the targeted social group. Regardless, the current study demonstrates that participants' lived experiences with being the targets of homonegativity corresponded with the factors thought to be associated with heterosexuals' perpetration of homonegativity.

### ***8.2 Dilemmas between Being-In and Being-Out: Responding to Homonegativity***

Deciding whether or how to respond to anti-gay/lesbian behaviour reflected a substantial aspect of the participants' experiences. The decision to respond to discriminatory behaviour was rife with challenges, regardless of whether the behaviour was blatant or subtle; however, subtle homonegative behaviour was particularly difficult to address. Moreover, gay men's and lesbian women's responses to discrimination constitutes another area that has been understudied. As such, the following section offers insight into the issues gay and lesbian students contended with when deciding how to proceed upon encountering homonegativity.

Closely related to the participants' confidence about whether they had been discriminated against was their experience of certainty (or uncertainty) in deciding whether to address homonegative behaviour. When confronted with blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, the gay and lesbian students felt confident in responding to such behaviour, as they were certain that it was wrong and intentional. For instance, Jamie's description of herself as a warrior in combating blatant homonegativity reflects the degree of certainty some participants experienced when responding to such behaviours. They could act confidently, secure in the knowledge that they were acting in line with their beliefs and that their actions will be approved of by others. In contrast, when the participants felt less certain discrimination had occurred, they were reluctant to take action to address the potentially homonegative behaviour. Specifically, they were hesitant to draw attention to the behaviour or to reprimand the heterosexual(s) who had perpetrated it, because they feared that they did not have the validity or evidence to suggest that a person had behaved discriminatorily. If heterosexuals did not accept their claims of discrimination, they could be chastised for creating conflict and pushed further into the margins. Consistent with the

gay and lesbian students' experiences, DeMarree et al. (2007) have found that as individuals' uncertainty about their opinions and attitudes increase, their likelihood of behaving in line with that attitude decreases.

One of the concerns participants shared about being reluctant to address discrimination was the fear of being viewed negatively in a given social situation. Several researchers (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Sechrist & Delmar, 2009; Sechrist, Swim, & Stangor, 2004; Stangor et al, 2002; Swim & Hyers, 1999) have documented that individuals who have been the target of discrimination are likely to minimize the transgressions they incur to avoid being labelled as a complainer or troublemaker and the public embarrassment and dislike associated with such labels. As the gay and lesbian students noted, the act of labelling someone as oversensitive is particularly relevant when contending with subtle discrimination. Since heterosexuals may not recognize subtle homonegative behaviour as discriminatory, the gay and lesbian students found that when they drew attention to these behaviours, they were often blamed for disrupting the social interaction and for creating problems where, from the perspective of the heterosexuals involved, there were none. Therefore, the participants were left with the choice of addressing the behaviour and risk being seen as an outsider by those present, or saying nothing and being left to struggle in private, wondering about the true meaning of the behaviour and whether they made the right decision in choosing their security over freely expressing themselves. Often when participants were uncertain about the meaning of a potentially homonegative behaviour or the outcome of addressing it, they chose the latter option and were left struggling with the existential implications of their decision. Questions, such as the following question asked by Von were common: "When are you allowed to be yourself and when aren't you?" It is important to note that, it is because participants can choose between *being-out* and *being-in* (i.e., sexual minorities constitute a non-visible minority), they found themselves in positions where they must actively choose to reveal their minority status and the way in which they would *be* in their lifeworlds. Thus, the use of tactics, such as identifying someone as a "troublemaker," seems to act as a form of social control that prevented the sexual minority students from speaking out against the majority group, revealing their differences, challenging heterosexuals' behaviours, and disturbing the status quo. In particular, these tactics play to gay and lesbian persons' desires fit in and belong to the greater society (i.e., *being-in*) and discomfort with *being-outsiders*.

Kaiser and Miller (2003) also suggest that target groups may be punished for claiming discrimination because dominant group members may feel threatened and anxious about issues of prejudice and deal with their insecurities by derogating the target (especially when they are motivated to perceive themselves as non-prejudiced). In line with this suggestion, Czopp and Monteith (2003) found that individuals who were high-prejudiced tended to exhibit other-directed affect and antagonism, including irritation and anger, toward targets of discrimination when confronted about their discriminatory behaviour, while low-prejudiced individuals were more likely to experience feelings of self-directed concern, such as shame and guilt. Further exacerbating their reactions to targets who reprimand them for their behaviour, high-prejudiced individuals have been found to be less likely to recognize subtle homonegative behaviours as severe or consider the confrontation of their behaviour to be justified, and tend to be unconcerned about offending or upsetting the confronter (Rogers, 2008). It is thought that high-prejudiced individuals base their standards of how to behave on their perceptions of how others expect them to act (and consequently lash out at others when a discrepancy is pointed out), while low-prejudiced individuals reprimand themselves when a discrepant behaviour occurs for not meeting their own standards of conduct (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991).

The literature on the confrontation of prejudice also highlights other variables that influence whether targets of discrimination will confront perpetrators. For instance, targets have been found to be less likely to confront perpetrators when they are fearful of being retaliated against or having their values dismissed, worried about being perceived as aggressive, or experience a desire to be polite (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Shelton & Stewart, 2004; Swim & Hyers, 1999). This research certainly resonated with the gay and lesbian students' experiences, as self-preservation and self-presentation concerns (i.e., the need to appear favourable to others) influenced the participants' willingness to respond to discriminatory behaviour. In fact, these concerns are reflective of the risk management process in which the participants engaged to determine how much of themselves, if any, they could safely reveal (i.e., *being-out*) or whether they had to carefully confine their sexuality or beliefs within themselves (i.e., *being-in*).

Despite a motivation to be viewed favourably by others, Sechrist et al. (2004) suggest that a need for control over one's personal outcomes may temper the tendency to minimize discrimination. By neither identifying nor addressing behaviour as discriminatory, the targets of such behaviour may feel that they cannot control their future outcomes (including being the

target of additional discrimination). Results from Sechrist et al.'s (2004) study, which investigated women's tendencies to address sexist behaviour, found that women who had a high need for control were more likely to publically label an event as discriminatory. Hyers (2007) also found that individuals who endorsed activist values were more likely to confront discrimination to feel agentic in the face of an undesirable situation, validate their own feelings of being wronged, educate the perpetrator about his/her wrongdoing, and manage the impression others have of them (i.e., to ensure they do not appear defenceless). Thus, in some situations, the personal costs associated with not asserting control over one's life may outweigh the social costs of reporting discrimination. The gay and lesbian students also spoke of similar factors that influenced their willingness to speak out against homonegative behaviour; however, the participants most often spoke of a need for control over their personal outcomes in terms of their ability to live openly as gay or lesbian (i.e., to *be-out*). This need to live authentically was always at stake when participants were required to choose between being open about their sexuality and speaking out against homonegativity or staying silent and letting the behaviour quietly pass without redress. In addition, many of the participants (e.g., Tara, Alyssa, Liam, and Ken) spoke of the role that their activist values played in their responses to homonegativity. They indicated that they often felt a sense of responsibility to address homonegative behaviour to protect those around them who may not *be-out* and who may have been unknowingly hurt and alienated by a certain action. It was this need to be seen by others in the way they see themselves and to protect other sexual minority persons who may be affected by homonegativity that seemed to make it more important to the participants to speak out against anti-gay/lesbian behaviour by addressing those who did not treat them with the respect they deserved than to avoid incurring social costs.

Even so, the decision to publicly address discriminatory behaviour tended to occur on a situational basis, as the participants only did so when they deemed it safe and worthwhile. Consequently, they tended to weigh several factors, including their self-confidence, whether threats to their personal safety were likely (e.g., physical violence), and if it was possible to exit the situation (if necessary), to determine if their safety (i.e., silence) or freedom of expression (i.e., vocality) were most important at a given moment. The participants also compared the stressor of experiencing a homonegative behaviour with the other stressors present in their lives to determine whether it was worth addressing. The need to "brush [discrimination] off" and "choose your battles" as a means of daily survival was common discourse among the gay and



lesbian students. In addition, the gay and lesbian students considered whether their efforts would be futile or if their admonishments would be effective in changing a perpetrator's behaviour before addressing an act of homonegativity. Hyers (2010) found that confrontation tends to result in greater attitude change among perpetrators of subtle rather than blatant homonegativity, which is congruent with the participants' perceptions that attempts to respond to discrimination can be more effective when directed toward some perpetrators compared to others. Other researchers (Gervais et al., 2010; Hyers, 2007; Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Sechrist, 2010) also have reported the extent to which one feels capable of dealing with harmful events, has effective strategies for confronting perpetrators of discrimination, and expects to have an impact on the perpetrator's behaviour influences whether targets address discriminatory behaviour. In addition, the tendency for persons to weigh the interpersonal costs of their potential behaviours prior to taking action against discrimination has been documented (Shelton & Stewart, 2004).

A final factor that the gay and lesbian students cited as influencing their willingness to address discriminatory behaviour was a reluctance to make others uncomfortable. Several participants seemed invested in maintaining harmonious social relationships and experienced guilt or discomfort when they felt responsible for making others uncomfortable. On several occasions, many participants sacrificed their own comfort by hiding aspects of themselves, adopting inauthentic personas when in certain settings or among certain groups of people, and letting discriminatory behaviours go unaddressed to avoid the tension that might occur in a social interaction if attention were drawn to the homonegativity present. In general, individuals often avoid confrontation because they are uncomfortable with creating conflict with others (Hyers, 2007). Congruent with this finding, the gay and lesbian students often acted in a way that would allow them to avoid conflict and facilitate the illusion of belonging rather than of being on the outside.

Greater insight into the responsibility that gay and lesbian students experienced to ensure others' comfort may be derived from a study conducted by Sechrist and Delmar (2009). Here, it was found that the targets of sexist behaviour also reported an unwillingness to be the source of another person's problems, and that this reluctance was rooted in an empathic response to that person—namely, they did not want the person to get in trouble for behaving discriminatorily and, as such, considered the cost to the perpetrator when deciding whether to address a sexist behaviour. Interestingly, the women often chose to minimize an act of discrimination when this

cost was high. It is possible that the gay and lesbian students also experienced an empathic response related to being the source of another person's problems that made them reluctant to draw attention to homonegative behaviour. In addition, some participants (e.g., Liam, Hope, Alyssa, and Rory) reported that they tended to be lenient of any missteps that heterosexuals made while interacting with them (including displaying discomfort with homosexuality), as long as those individuals generally made an effort to behave positively toward them, because they recognized that becoming tolerant and accepting of homosexuality is a process. As a result, they did not want to dissuade heterosexuals from coming to terms with their homonegativity by making them feel uncomfortable for engaging in anti-gay/lesbian behaviours (especially if their actions may have been involuntary reflections of their prejudice). Thus, many reasons may underlie the gay and lesbian students' hesitancy to make others feel uncomfortable by addressing homonegative behaviour.

Intriguingly, it may have been the participants' reluctance to confront perpetrators of subtle discriminatory behaviour that contributed to their tendency to dwell on these events after they occurred. Without having the means or opportunity to express themselves, they often found themselves suspended in time, neither able to move forward with their lives nor live in the *now*. Hyers (2007) found that targets of subtle discrimination who confronted the perpetrators of the behaviour tended to spend less time thinking about the incident after it occurred and contemplating various courses of actions they could take in the future (Hyers, 2007). In addition, targets who confront perpetrators are more likely to experience greater psychological wellbeing and increased feelings of empowerment and closure following a discriminatory event than those who do not (Gervais, Hillard, & Vescio, 2010; Hyers, 2007).

In summary, there was no consistent way in which the participants responded to discrimination. The gay and lesbian students' decisions to address homonegativity tended to be highly situational and depended on a variety of social and personal factors. However, at the core of this struggle was the dilemma between openly expressing themselves and asserting their personhood or hiding themselves and maintaining their safety and the appearance of belonging. This inquiry into gay men and lesbian women's responses to discrimination suggests this is a rich area that could benefit from additional research.

### ***8.3 The Lived Experience of Being Targeted***

#### ***8.3.1 Traces of Homonegativity on Being***

The final set of findings requiring attention pertain to the gay and lesbian students' perceptions of the impact homonegativity had on them. In general, the gay and lesbian students observed that their experiences with all forms of homonegativity had a lasting impact on their lives. Participants noted that even distant or singular instances of homonegativity (especially blatant behaviours) had the power to exert influence on their behaviours for several months or, in some cases, years after they occurred. Notably, past experiences with homonegativity increased their anxiety and trepidation when entering new spaces and interactions, particularly those similar to times when homonegativity was previously encountered. Participants described the tendency to carefully assess the degree to which they felt vulnerable in a given space or interaction as risk management. Further, the gay and lesbian students did not have to be the direct target of an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour to be affected by homonegativity: vicarious experiences of discrimination also were sufficient to shake their sense of security in the world. It was as if the gay and lesbian students were always waiting to be found out or targeted. As a result, the students tended to live in a state of vigilance where the threat of homonegativity was always at the back of their minds, which is an experience that also has been described by other researchers (DiPlacido, 1998; Hylton, 2006; Jewell et al., in press).

Such findings are instructive for current measurement practices in which victimization is often measured in the previous six or 12 months (Morrison, Morrison, Jewell, & MacDermott, 2009). Given the trace that homonegativity may leave on a person, measures of discrimination may be better served by asking gay and lesbian persons about incidents of discrimination across multiple timeframes (e.g., six months, 12 months, and over one's lifetime) and variables (e.g., intensity of the incident at the time it occurred, current salience of the event, and triggers that make past discriminatory experiences salient). In addition, it also would be valuable to assess any discriminatory acts that individuals may have witnessed. If the measurement period is restricted to a limited timeframe or excludes traumas experienced vicariously, it is possible that past experiences which are integral to individuals' orientation to their lifeworlds may be missed.

Oftentimes, encounters with homonegativity led the participants to experience a restricted sense of self in which they felt that they could not freely express their individuality (i.e., the experienced *being-in*). To varying degrees, the presence of homonegativity in their lives was

often equated with a perceived need to conceal aspects of their identities or modify facets of their personalities to avoid being identified as gay or lesbian. Some of the gay and lesbian students likened this felt need to restrict one's self to being closeted or suffocated; such feelings have been well-documented in the literature (Evans & Broido, 2002; Hylton, 2006; Jewell et al., in press). Being in situations where participants felt that their sense of self was restricted sometimes caused participants to ask existential questions about their right to *be* in the world. Namely, they questioned, when does an individual have a right to be themselves and when do they not? Thus, several of the gay and lesbian students experienced the presence of homonegativity as a form of social control through which heterosexuals were able to establish spaces and settings in which homosexuality and sexual minority persons were not allowed and were kept on the outside. Given that the opportunity to freely express oneself (and to truly be *seen* by others) was associated with a sense of control over and contentment with one's life, the struggle between one's personal safety and freedom of expression reflects the essence of the experience of being targeted on the basis of one's sexual orientation.

Less frequently discussed in the literature is the relationship between experiences of homonegativity and gay and lesbian persons' sense of corporeality. The current analysis demonstrated that for several of the participants, encounters with homonegativity had a substantial impact on how they experienced the world through their bodies, including how they perceived their bodily selves. For instance, the eroticization of some of the lesbian participants' (e.g., Tara and Hope) sexual orientation was experienced as a violation of the social boundaries between themselves and others. Such violations to their privacy were associated with experiencing their bodies as being objectified and representative of something that is scandalous or sordid. Further, judgemental looks (as well as perceived heterosexual spaces) had the power to make some participants (e.g., Kelly, Jamie, Elizabeth, and Rory) feel unattractive, unnatural, and uncomfortable in their own bodies. For others (e.g., Quinton, Daniel, and Von), homonegativity caused the gay and lesbian students to view their bodies, through the eyes of others, as sources of shame and disease. For many of the participants, it seemed that the body was the location where any insecurities they may have felt in relation to their sexuality were manifested. Given that we interact with those around us through our bodies, perhaps it is not surprising that the body was the site of being where the gay and lesbian students viscerally experienced others' judgement, admonitions, and disapproval. Their bodies constitute the most visible aspect of their being and

is the site where the tension between openly expressing or actively concealing their sexual orientation takes place. Moreover, the body is the locus or point of difference between heterosexuals and sexual minorities (i.e., it is how sexual minorities use their bodies and visibly express themselves that homonegative persons most often take contention), which may also explain why discrimination was experienced so profoundly in relation to one's corporeality.

Notably, the bodily experience of discrimination was a minimal aspect of some participants' experiences, but an especially vivid component of others (Jeremy, Jamie, Kelly, Elizabeth, and Quinton). For these participants, it was the pressure to conform to gender norms that were felt most severely through their bodies. In fact, Jamie and Jeremy went so far as to suggest that, on the basis of their appearance, they felt as though they failed at their gender and interpreted the judgemental looks and behaviours they encountered from heterosexuals as reprimanding them for that failure, more so than for being lesbian or gay. For these reasons, they felt that they could not comfortably enter gendered spaces (e.g., washrooms, gyms, and locker rooms), as they did not meet the requisite criteria (i.e., presenting themselves in line with normative gender roles) to belong in these spaces.

Other theorists (Kite & Deaux, 1986; Kitzinger, 2001; Konik & Cortina, 2008) also have interpreted homonegativity as a means of punishing individuals for violating normative gender expectations, separate from their non-heterosexuality, and ensuring adherence to gender role stereotypes. In other words, homonegativity has been considered to reflect a form of gender policing (Konik & Cortina, 2008). Supportive of this notion, Daley, Soloman, Newman, and Mishna (2007) indicated that lesbian youth who present as masculine or butch were more likely to be bullied than lesbian youth who presented as femme and do not step outside the gender norms. In addition, Konik and Cortina (2008) have found that sexual minorities may actually be subject to two related, but separate, forms of harassment: gender harassment and heterosexist harassment. As such, future researchers may be well advised to employ an intersectionality approach when examining homonegativity to further understand how related forms of discrimination may be experienced by sexual minorities, particularly in relation to their gender presentation and sexual orientation.

Intersectionality is based on the notion that it is necessary to consider the meaning and consequences of belonging to multiple social groups to fully understand a person's experiences with a phenomenon (Crenshaw, 1993). In other words, intersectionality posits that by attending

to the crossing of multiple forms of oppression, it is possible to understand the distinct perspectives and consequences (including unique non-additive stressors) that occur among individuals who identify with multiple marginalized groups (Stirratt, Meyer, Ouellette, & Gara, 2008). By using intersectionality, it may be possible to better capture the complexity of sexual minority persons' experiences with discrimination that are not visible when analyses are limited to a single identity category. For instance, Narvaez and associates (2008) developed a methodology wherein gay and lesbian persons were asked to list all identities they deemed essential to their sense of self (including those related to their gender, race, age, and sexual orientation), describe the relationships between these identities, and explore how the prominence and valence of various combinations of their identities influenced the meaning they derived from their encounters with discrimination. Their findings provided insight into how belonging to a sexual, racial, and/or gender minority presented unique challenges in terms of how participants interacted with different groups of people (e.g., family, friends, and co-workers) and presented themselves in various environments (e.g., home, church, or public settings) to avoid negativity (on the basis of their race, gender, or sexual orientation). Thus, the methodology developed by Narvaez et al. offers researchers a promising approach for employing intersectionality to understand the situated context of sexual minorities' experiences with discrimination.

### ***8.3.2 Struggling with the Unknown: Scars of Blatant versus Subtle Homonegativity***

One of the other ways through which the participants distinguished between blatant and subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours was in the way they were affected by these behaviours. Several of the gay and lesbian students commented that, overall, blatant discrimination had less of an impact on their person than subtle homonegative behaviours. In general, blatant homonegative behaviour left tangible physical and emotional scars that preoccupied the participants' attention for a period of time but, after those scars healed, the gay and lesbian students found that they forgot those scars and tended to move forward with their lives. In contrast, it seemed that participants were not as adept at overcoming the negative feelings that arose from subtle homonegative behaviours. Goyer (2006) suggests that sexual minorities may be more proficient at responding to old-fashioned forms of homonegativity because they have a plethora of practiced strategies they can draw upon; however, due to the contemporary and varied nature of modern homonegativity, gay and lesbian persons may not have developed

effective strategies for responding to these subtle behaviours and, as a result, find them to be more hurtful.

Subtle homonegative behaviours were perceived to be more detrimental in that they: 1) were encountered more frequently; 2) were more difficult to identify and greater time and energy was expended in trying to find meaning in them; and 3) stripped the participants of aspects of their humanity and personhood. A host of negative feelings about oneself, including alienation, isolation, being “other,” and dehumanization were associated with subtle discrimination, as these insidious behaviours ultimately reinforced to the participants that they were not accepted by those around them and were somehow different, deviant, or “less than human.” Subtle homonegative behaviour also was considered to be particularly hurtful when perpetrated by close friends and family, as it led the gay and lesbian students to question the value of their relationships with those persons. In fact, several participants (Jamie, Becky, and Marcy) noted it was by virtue of being in a close relationship with the participant that afforded family members, friends, and acquaintances the opportunity to behave in a subtle homonegative manner compared to unknown others (who were better positioned to behave in a blatantly discriminatory manner). Another consequence of subtle homonegativity described by the participants included feeling invisible. They also spoke of their identities as lesbian or gay being minimized, their entire personhood being dismissed and their experiences being trivialized. Sue et al. (2007) concur that the power of subtle discriminatory behaviours is that they send hidden, invalidating, demeaning, or insulting messages to those being targeted. Essentially, the participants felt ostracized or excluded from those around them, as well as the world in which they lived (i.e., they experienced a sense of *being-out*).

Williams and Carter-Sowell (2009) suggest that ostracism threatens four basic needs: belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence. All four of these concepts emerged repeatedly throughout my analysis of the participants’ experiences and are at the core of their struggle between *being-out* and *being-in*. Specifically, ostracism (which appears to be the ultimate felt consequence of discrimination) prevents persons from experiencing a sense of connectedness to others (i.e., it leads to a sense of *being-out*). Moreover, when reasons are not offered to explain why someone is being shunned, individuals tend to critically examine all aspects of themselves which may be viewed negatively, which serves to threaten their self-esteem (and may lead them to see themselves as “other” or *outsiders*). Further, if individuals are

not engaged in interactions with others (either positively or negatively), they have no means through which they can exert some type of control over their situation. Extending this idea, perhaps the participants found it easier to respond to blatantly homonegative behaviours because these behaviours explicitly acknowledged their existence as gay or lesbian (even if it was in a negative manner), and provided them with the opportunity to assert themselves in their lifeworlds (i.e., it gave them a sense of *being-in*). If a person's existence is not acknowledged, then his/her ability to live meaningfully in the world is compromised (and he/she must live his/her life on the margins). All of the consequences associated with ostracism were described by the gay and lesbian students in one fashion or another. Thus, the current study adds to the growing body of literature (Dovidio, 2001; Garnets et al., 1990; Sue, 2010) suggesting that subtle forms of discrimination may be more damaging than blatant discrimination due to its ability to undermine an individual's sense of self, way of being, and connection to others in the lifeworld.

#### ***8.6 Moving Forward: Broader Implications and Future Directions***

At this time, it would be useful to connect the findings from this study to the broader impetus driving research on homonegativity: the desire to reduce its prevalence in society. The gay and lesbian students' experiences with subtle discrimination identified a number of areas where efforts to reduce the prevalence of homonegativity may be effective, particularly the occurrence of unintentional subtle homonegative behaviours. Specifically, the participants' discourse surrounding their experience of these behaviours, coupled with their understanding of why these behaviours occur, suggests that it is necessary to sensitize heterosexuals to the powerful impact of unintentional subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, such as their use of prejudicial language. Due to the lack of recognition heterosexuals are perceived to display when engaging in these behaviours, their consequent "invisible nature prevents perpetrators from realizing and confronting their own complicity in creating psychological dilemmas for minorities" (Sue, 2010, p. 24). As such, there is great need to deconstruct the hidden nature of these behaviours to make them visible, and thereby allow them to be addressed. There also is a need to create a culture in which the perpetrators of these behaviours will be held accountable for their actions.

In the future, continued effort needs to be spent exploring the contemporary nature of homonegativity, including the types of subtle discrimination that go uncontested and unchallenged and the frequency in which they occur (Aguinaldo, 2008). By acquiring an



understanding of the social forces that allow subtle homonegative behaviour to go unnoticed, it will be possible to address the insidious nature of these behaviours and the root causes that allow them to be perpetuated. Even with the minimal research that has been carried out, researchers have already been able to identify strategies that can be used to address subtle forms of homonegativity. For instance, the lack of prototypicality of subtle homonegative behaviours has been identified as one of the factors contributing to their hidden nature (Marti et al., 2000). Thus, by increasing awareness of what constitutes discrimination and establishing the prototypicality of subtle homonegativity, it should then be possible to sanction these behaviours. Consequently, I have suggested elsewhere that educating heterosexuals about what constitutes homonegativity may be a vital component of reducing the occurrence of subtle discrimination toward gay men and lesbian women (Jewell, Morrison, & Gazzola, in press).

Further, on the basis of research suggesting that heterosexuals' use of language that is derogatory toward gay men and lesbian woman is not sufficiently punished or discouraged, Sutton (2010) cites that greater social sanctioning from authorities is required to reduce the use of prejudicial language. Specifically, by having authorities establish norms where the criticism of an outgroup is deemed unacceptable, heterosexuals would be more likely to evaluate their prejudicial comments prior to speaking and refrain from saying them aloud due to a concern that they may be personally negatively evaluated by others. In addition, encouraging heterosexuals to challenge other heterosexuals who perpetrate subtle homonegative behaviour may also help draw attention to the existence of these behaviours in society and reduce their occurrence. Czopp and Monteith (2003) found that, when confronting racism and sexism, members of the ingroup (e.g., Caucasians or men) were more effective in challenging perpetrators of blatant discrimination than members of the outgroup (e.g., African Americans or women) and garnering feelings of self-directed negative affect (e.g., guilt and disappointment) and being in the wrong. The authors suggest that confrontations initiated by targets (or members of the outgroup) were more likely to be discounted because their behaviour may confirm the expectations perpetrators already hold about the outgroup (e.g., they always complain about being treated badly). However, a study conducted by Rogers (2008) indicated that heterosexuals may not be as effective at modifying the behaviours of high-prejudiced individuals who perpetrate subtle homonegative behaviours. These individuals tended to consider subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours to be benign and did not accept that their behaviour was discriminatory when confronted by heterosexuals. However, they

were more likely to accept that their behaviour was discriminatory when confronted by a sexual minority person who, by belonging to the group that was targeted, added further legitimacy to the claim that discrimination had occurred. Thus, heterosexual, gay, and lesbian persons all likely have a role to play in reducing the occurrence of blatant and subtle homonegativity in society. Continued research in this area will likely lead to additional strategies that can be implemented to reduce the perpetration of subtle homonegativity and create environments that are more tolerant and accepting of sexual minorities.

The analysis of the gay and lesbian students' experiences with homonegativity in the present study also drew attention to a number of elements of their experience that warrant further investigation. For instance, the relationship that the participants' shared with their perpetrator seemed to affect how they interpreted a given behaviour and the extent to which a homonegative behaviour affected them. In some situations, discriminatory behaviours perpetrated by unknown others were more difficult to comprehend, while in other circumstances, the participants found those perpetrated by close others the most confusing. Similarly, some participants were forgiving of homonegative behaviours engaged in by those with whom they shared a close relationship and some were more hurt by these behaviours. Greater exploration into the relationship between the experience of homonegativity and discrimination source (i.e., stranger, acquaintance, friend, or family member) is necessary to further understand when gay and lesbian persons' identify behaviour as discriminatory, are forgiving of the transgressions directed toward them, and are most hurt by homonegative behaviour. Sechrist and Delmar (2009) concur that discrimination source is an important element of understanding attributions to prejudice but that, as a field, we have little information about the role it currently plays in making attributions to prejudice and determining the degree to which perpetrators are held accountable for engaging in homonegative behaviour. Further, Hammond, Banks, and Mattis (2006) suggest that the forgiveness of transgressions occurring between non-intimate acquaintances (as is often the case when the gay and lesbian students encountered behaviours from unknown others) is particularly understudied.

Other aspects of the participants' experiences that warrant additional research are the roles that mood, apologies and excuses, attitude certainty, self-certainty, self-presentational concerns, and social consensus played in determining whether subtle homonegative behaviour occurred and their consequent influence on whether one is willing to publicly respond to a discriminatory behaviour. In the presence of subtle homonegativity, all of these factors

undermined the participants' confidence that they had been discriminated against and were justified in labelling and drawing attention to a homonegative behaviour. To date, most research exploring the relationship between these variables and attributions to discrimination have either not been specific to sexual minorities (Clarkson et al., 2009; DeMarree et al., 2007; Petrocelli et al., 2007) or has explicitly focused on sexism (Sechrist, 2010; Sechrist & Delmar, 2009; Sechrist et al., 2004). Given that findings for one type of prejudice do not necessarily map directly onto another, it would be wise to specifically explore these variables in relation to gay and lesbian persons' experiences with discrimination. In addition, the gay and lesbian students' hesitancy to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by addressing homonegative behaviour (even when those same individuals were responsible for perpetrating a behaviour that compromised their comfort) was an intriguing theme that emerged from the analysis and warrants future attention.

Finally, more research is needed on the nature of blatant versus subtle homonegativity, particularly with respect to how it relates to gay men's and lesbian women's wellbeing. While the current study further supports research (Garnets et al., 1990; Sue, 2010) which suggests that subtle homonegative behaviours are more harmful than blatant behaviours, it was not possible to explicitly link experiences with discrimination to specific physical and mental health outcomes. Now that a framework has been proposed with respect to the types of homonegative behaviour that may be encountered (i.e., blatant, intentional subtle, and two types of unintentional subtle homonegative behaviours), it is necessary to systematically explore the relationship between wellbeing and all four forms of discrimination that may be experienced to acquire a better understanding of how each type of homonegativity may affect gay and lesbian persons.

### ***8.7 Limitations, Strengths, and Concluding Remarks***

In concluding this study, I draw attention to both its limitations and strengths. Inevitably, trade-offs are made throughout the course of designing and conducting research and limitations occur. As such, with respect to the present study, it is important to recognize the scope of this (and other) hermeneutic phenomenological studies. The purpose of this investigation was not to produce a theoretical account related to the perpetration and experience of homonegativity or to identify causal relationships between the gay and lesbian students' experiences with discrimination and wellbeing. Instead, the current study served to render visible new understandings of gay and lesbian university students' experiences with homonegativity by uncovering the hidden meaning of their everyday lives (van Manen, 1990). It is hoped that by

reading this study, it has been possible to more fully understand what it means to be the target of homonegativity.

The decision to use the lived existentials to guide my reflection on the participants' experiences with discrimination, while helpful in organizing and directing the analysis, also necessarily shaped the findings. By using this framework to guide the data, the extent to which it was possible to consider the data from a state of "unknowing" may have been compromised and the data limited. There may be other aspects of human experience that are integrally link to our lifeworlds that were not captured by the lived existentials and were consequently overlooked in this analysis.

Similarly, it is possible that the findings are an artefact of the participants' enforced reflection upon their past experiences. Although an effort was made to encourage the gay and lesbian students to recall their experiences as they were lived, the interviews were necessarily retrospective, and it is possible that their memories of the events they described had drifted from the lived reality of when they first occurred. As I mentioned earlier, individuals tend to remember events in a manner that is consistent with their worldview and the outcome of an event can influence how a person remembers that experience (Smyth & Stone, 2003; Shiffman, Stone, & Hufford, 2008; Thomsen & Brinkman, 2009). Therefore, any reconciliation the participants may have engaged in to come to terms with past negative experiences may have affected their present recollection of those events. For example, when looking back at some past encounters, several participants questioned whether they had overreacted to those events and had seen negativity where there had been none. Thus, by engaging in recollective recall, it seemed that, at times, the participants doubted the legitimacy of their experiences. Further, given my interest in exploring gay men's and lesbian women's experiences with discrimination, my desire to analyze the participants' experiences within a homonegativity framework may have influenced how they shared, reflected upon, and interpreted their past experiences, as well as how I interpreted their interview and daily diary data. However, I did endeavour to ask the participants general questions about their experiences (wherein I did not employ terms such as homonegativity and discrimination) to provide them with the space to describe their experiences as they were lived rather than with any words or concepts I may have inadvertently imposed upon them. In addition, I was vigilant when I came across extracts that reinforced my own biases and carefully reviewed the participants' words to ensure that I was not seeing them through the lens of my own

preconceptions. I also searched for and took note of any extracts that were contradictory to my own biases.

Another limitation associated with the current study is that it was not possible to gather information about frequency in which gay and lesbian persons' encounter blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours. It also was not possible to assess in a systematic manner how harmful various types of anti-gay/lesbian behaviours were considered to be, the amount of ambiguity associated with different subtle homonegative behaviours, how common or intense certain feelings (e.g., feeling isolated, hurt, or dehumanized) were in relation to a given behaviour, and the link between homonegative behaviour and physical and mental health outcomes. Such questions would be better answered using quantitative methods that offer information about the prevalence of a phenomenon rather than qualitative methods which tend to focus on attaining an in-depth understanding (van Manen, 1990).

Finally, it should be noted that the findings reflect a single interpretation of the data that were collected over the course of the study and are limited by my own ability to engage in hermeneutic phenomenological analysis and writing. Other interpretations of the findings are possible as hermeneutic phenomenological interpretations are never complete or final (Schwandt, 2007). That is, others who read the interview transcripts and daily diary entries may arrive at different understandings of the meaning underlying the participants' experiences, and even my own interpretations of the data may change as I acquire additional insight into gay and lesbian persons' experiences with discrimination. As with other qualitative studies, it also is important to keep in mind that the findings are limited to the 20 participants that were involved, since the relatively small sample size employed does not meet post-positivism's criteria for generalization (Korobov, 2004). However, it may be possible to transfer the results of this study to gay and lesbian persons situated in similar settings and circumstances, since great detail has been provided about the participants' backgrounds and experiences (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Despite the aforementioned limitations associated with the current study, it also was characterized by numerous strengths. Specifically, the use of both interviews and daily diaries to capture the gay and lesbian students' lived experiences resulted in a wealth of rich information; in fact, more than is common in most phenomenological studies (Munhall, 2007). Moreover, each data collection method offset the limitations of the other. The open-ended interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of events the participants could vividly recall and which

seemingly had a significant impact on them, while the daily diaries allowed the participants to capture their experiences with events they were more likely to dismiss and forget over time. Thus, these methods complemented each other with respect to the types of lived experience they were able to capture. The opportunity that I had to reconnect with several of the participants to discuss the appropriateness of my interpretations of their experiences further added to the trustworthiness of the results obtained

The diversity of the gay and lesbian students who participated in the study reflected another strength of the study. By using a broad recruitment strategy (i.e., an electronic bulletin board accessible to all university students), it was possible to recruit gay and lesbian students from different disciplines, stages of their academic career (i.e., undergraduate and graduate students), and ethnic backgrounds, as well as persons who were open about their sexual orientation and connected to the gay and lesbian services offered on campus to varying degrees. I believe that this diversity created the occasion to explore the phenomenon of homonegativity at a deeper level, as this diversity helped direct me to more clearly see what was at the essence of being the target of blatant and subtle discrimination and what was tangential. The resulting framework pertaining to the types of homonegative behaviours that may be encountered will prove to be useful in assisting future researchers with clarifying the types of discrimination they are studying.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the study, however, was the ability to explore the gay and lesbian students' experiences with discrimination in a holistic manner. By using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, it was possible to consider how all aspects of the participants' being (i.e., their lived sense of time, body, other, and space) contribute to their experiences. The current study offered insight into how gay and lesbian persons identify that they have been the target of homonegativity, respond to discriminatory behaviour, and experience the repercussions of these behaviours, within the rich context of lived experience and lived meaning. Rarely has research offered such a comprehensive overview of what it means to be the target of homonegativity; instead, often partialling experience into separate constructs typically divided into cognitive, behavioural, and affective domains. What is more, many of the elements that were relevant to the participants' experiences of homonegativity (i.e., perceived intent, perceptions of prejudice, self-certainty, attitude certainty, attributions of prejudice, discrimination source, mood, and social consensus) are often considered in separate bodies of literature that have few connections to each

other or to sexual minorities. However, as demonstrated by the current study, the ability to examine experience holistically creates possibilities to bridge gaps between these disconnected areas of research to arrive at a more complete understanding of the nature of homonegativity.

In conclusion, this hermeneutical phenomenological investigation significantly advances our understanding of contemporary forms of discrimination. As suggested by the voices of the gay and lesbian students represented in this study, emerging forms of homonegativity, which are characterized by doubt and ambiguity, are particularly challenging to deal with and tend to go undetected within society. By using the framework developed in the current study, which outlines the various types of blatant and subtle homonegative behaviours that may be perpetrated, it will be possible to explore the impact of homonegativity on gay and lesbian persons with greater specificity. Moreover, by further investigating the factors and social processes identified in this study that contribute to the perpetuation of subtle homonegativity, we will be able to continue rendering visible the invisible nature of this phenomenon.

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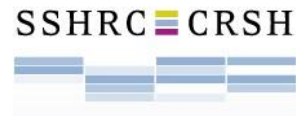
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APPENDIX A  
Recruitment Advertisement

**Are You a Gay, Lesbian, or Queer University Student?  
If YES, We'd Like to Talk with You!**



My name is Lisa Jewell, and I am a PhD student in Applied Social Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. For my dissertation, I am conducting a research study to better understand gay, lesbian, and queer university students' life experiences and self-perceptions.

I am looking for **gay, lesbian, and queer university students attending the University of Saskatchewan** who are willing to participate in a **one-on-one interview**. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences as a gay, lesbian, or queer university student.

Individuals who participate in an interview will receive a **\$20.00 gift certificate**. You also will be provided with the opportunity to participate in the second part of the study, which consists of completing a daily diary for 10 days. You are not required to participate in this second part but, if you choose to do so, you will receive an additional **\$30.00 gift certificate**.

Please note that your interview and daily diaries will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and, if you choose to participate, your identity will not be revealed to others.

**If you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please contact Lisa Jewell, by email: [lisa.jewell@usask.ca](mailto:lisa.jewell@usask.ca) or telephone: (306) 717-5342.**

**Your help with this study is much appreciated!**

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form: Interviews

**You are invited to participate in a study entitled “The Experiences of Gay and Lesbian University Students”. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions.**

**Student Researcher:** Lisa M. Jewell., Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Psychology, Arts Building, Arts 161, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 717-5342. My email address is: [lisa.jewell@usask.ca](mailto:lisa.jewell@usask.ca)

**Researcher:** Melanie A. Morrison, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Arts Building, Room 184, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-2564. My email address is: [melanie.morrison@usask.ca](mailto:melanie.morrison@usask.ca).

**Purpose and Procedures:** The purpose of this study is to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian university students at the University of Saskatchewan. In particular, this study focuses on gay and lesbian university students’ experiences with homonegativity (i.e., negative attitudes and behaviours that heterosexuals might direct toward gay men and lesbian women). We are interested in learning about any encounters sexual minority students have had with blatant and subtle (or indirect) forms of discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientations and the implications of these experiences for their own behaviours, perceptions of self, and well-being.

University of Saskatchewan students who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or queer will be eligible to participate in an interview. During the interview, you will be asked to describe your perceptions about the presence of homonegativity at the University of Saskatchewan, including the extent to which you perceive students, faculty, and staff to be tolerant and accepting of sexual minorities. You also will be asked to describe any experiences you have had with discrimination and to discuss how you were affected by these experiences. Your participation is voluntary and the interview should take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be digitally audio-recorded.

At the conclusion of the interview, you will be asked whether you would like to participate in the second part of the study: keeping a daily diary for 10 days. In the daily diaries, you will write about each experience you have with being the target of a homonegative or discriminatory behaviour during that time. Your participation in the daily diary component of the study is voluntary and you may choose to participate only in the interview. Additional information about the daily diaries will be provided to you in a separate consent form.

**Potential Risks:** It is important to point out that the questions asked in the interview are sensitive in nature and that the researchers clearly recognizes their sensitivity. In addition, it is important to mention that interviews are a common method used by social researchers to explore participants’ opinions in detail. The interview is not designed to make you uncomfortable and there are no physical or mental health risks associated with participating in this study. You are free to answer only those questions which you feel comfortable answering and you may turn off the recorder at any time. If you do experience any stress, or have concerns or questions at any

time throughout the interview and/or after you finish participating, you are encouraged to discuss them with Lisa Jewell or Dr. Melanie Morrison. Please contact the researchers using the information provided above. Alternatively, you may decide to contact one of the resource centers listed on the Debriefing and Resources Sheet you will receive after the interview. Finally, there is a remote possibility that someone will be able to identify you on the basis of what you have said because direct quotations from your interview will be used in publications and conference presentations. For example, if you told the researcher about a memorable incident and the researcher presented a quotation about this incident at a national conference, someone in the audience may recognize the incident and remember that you were involved. However, every attempt will be made to protect your identity by using a pseudonym for your name and removing all identifying information (e.g., date and place where an interaction took place) from any reports.

**Potential Benefits:** Your participation in this study will assist researchers in their effort to better understand the blatant and subtle forms of discrimination that might be directed toward gay and lesbian individuals. This research also will further our understanding of the ways in which discrimination affects gay and lesbian university students. Your opinions and feedback are highly valued.

**Storage of Data:** The data collected today will be kept in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Melanie Morrison's Social Psychology Lab for a minimum of five years, after which the data will be destroyed. Only the researchers will have access to the data. Please note that your consent forms will be stored separately from the interview transcripts. In addition, all identifying information will be removed from the transcripts.

**Confidentiality:** The data from this study will be published and presented at conferences; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although we will report direct quotations from the interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information (e.g., date and place where an interaction took place) will be removed from our report to ensure your anonymity. After your interview, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit, should you so desire.

**Right to Withdraw:** You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. Please note that you have the right to withdraw your responses from the study at any point during or after the study, and that if you have any second thoughts about your responses, you should contact the researcher who will remove them from the database.

You will also be asked at the end of this interview whether you would like to participate in a follow-up interview. The purpose of this second interview is to allow you to reflect back on the researchers' findings and interpretations of your interview data. Your decision to participate in this second interview is completely voluntary and you will again be asked for your consent prior to beginning the follow-up interview.

Similarly, at the conclusion of the interview you will be asked whether you would like to keep a daily diary over a ten day period. Again, you are not required to participate in this component of the study and will be asked for your consent prior to beginning the daily diaries.

**Use of data and dissemination of results:** The findings from this study will be presented at academic conferences (e.g., the Annual Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association) and submitted for publication to a peer-reviewed scientific journal. Whenever the findings are presented, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name and all identifying information (e.g., date and place where an interaction took place) will be removed.

**Debriefing:** A debriefing sheet will be handed out when the interview is complete, or in the event that a participant chooses not to participate. The debriefing sheet will provide some background to the study and identify the specific aims of the study. It will also contain a list of resources that you are free to access to further discuss any issues that arose during the interview.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to pose them; you are also free to contact the researcher at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on April 15, 2005. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. Information concerning the results of the study may be arranged (following the study's completion) via Lisa Jewell or Dr. Morrison at the contact address above.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

---

(Signature of Participant)

---

(Date)

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(Signature of Researcher)

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Guide

#### *Introductory Statement*

The purpose of this interview is to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian university students at the University of Saskatchewan. I am particularly interested in learning about your experiences with being treated negatively or differently by others due to your sexual orientation. In order to learn about some of the experiences you have had with homonegativity (i.e., negative attitudes and behaviours that heterosexuals might direct toward gay men and lesbian women), I will be asking you questions about how tolerant and accepting you perceive students, faculty, and staff to be of sexual minorities, including your perceptions of others' attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women and your experiences with discrimination. I am especially interested in learning about any of the subtle or indirect ways in which you have been treated badly or discriminated against because of your sexual orientation. For example, I would like to learn about any times where you thought someone was treating you negatively because of your sexual orientation, but you weren't 100% sure. I'm also interested in hearing about the implications of homonegativity or bias toward gay men/lesbian women for your own behaviours, perceptions of yourself, and well-being. Hopefully, this research will be used to inform future interventions that can be implemented to reduce prejudicial attitudes and discrimination that may be directed toward gay men and lesbian women on university campuses.

I know that we will be discussing some sensitive topics, so you may not feel comfortable answering the questions that I ask you. If you feel uncomfortable at any point or do not want to answer a question, please don't hesitate to let me know. You may also terminate the interview at any point or stop the audio-recorder, without any penalty. This means that you will still receive your gift certificate. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. Also, please be assured that I do not have an agenda—my only goal with this interview is to understand your opinions and experiences on campus as a [gay man/lesbian woman].

Before we get started, I also wanted to let you know that your responses will be strictly confidential and no one will be able to identify you by any quotations that I use in my PhD dissertation or other publications and presentations. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview. The interview data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will be stored separately from your consent form. Before we begin the interview, please read through the consent form and ask me any questions you may have. You may also ask me questions at any point during the study.

1. What has been your experience as a [gay man/lesbian woman] attending the University of Saskatchewan?
  - a. How tolerant or accepting do you feel other students are of gay men and lesbian women?
    - i. What is your general perception of heterosexual students' attitudes toward gay and lesbian students on this university campus?
    - ii. Have you disclosed your sexual orientation to other students?

- iii. How do you decide whether to come out or be open about your sexual orientation to other students?
    - b. How tolerant or accepting do you feel faculty or university staff are of gay men and lesbian women?
      - i. What is your general perception of faculty or university members' attitudes toward gay and lesbian students on this university campus?
      - ii. Have you disclosed your sexual orientation to faculty or university staff members?
      - iii. How do you decide whether to come out or be open about your sexual orientation to faculty or university staff members?
    - c. What positive experiences have you had with other students, faculty, or university staff regarding your sexual orientation?
2. As I mentioned earlier, I am interested in learning about any experiences you may have had with discrimination that are related to your sexual orientation.

What has been your experience with negative behaviours being directed toward you on the basis of your sexual orientation [*as gay or lesbian*]?

Could you describe in detail the most vivid experience you have had with anti-gay/lesbian behaviours? When describing the experience, try to do so by telling me about what the experience was like for you and sharing as much detail as possible about the experience by including how you felt, your mood during the incident, your bodily sensations, your thoughts while it was happening, and so forth

- a. Possible probes
    - i. How did you feel during (and/or after) the incident?
    - ii. What were you thinking during (and/or after) the incident?
    - iii. How did your body feel?
    - iv. Where were you?
    - v. Who were you with?
    - vi. What did you do in response to the behaviour?
  - b. What impact did the experience have on you? How has the experience affected you?
    - i. How did the experience influence your perceptions of yourself?
    - ii. How did the experience influence your interactions with others?
    - iii. How did the experience influence your actions or behaviours?
    - iv. How did the experience influence your own well-being?
    - v. How did the experience influence you socially (i.e., your interactions or relationships with others)?
3. I'm wondering if you have experienced any negative behaviours that were directed toward you on the basis of your sexual orientation. If yes, could you describe them in detail?

*Probe for blatant behaviours* [i.e., behaviours that are purposefully intended to harm someone because he or she is gay or lesbian. *Examples may include verbal harassment, physical assaults, being chased.*]

- a. Possible probes about the experience
    - i. How did you feel during (and/or after) the incident?
    - ii. What were you thinking during (and/or after) the incident?
    - iii. How did your body feel?
    - iv. Where were you?
    - v. Who were you with?
    - vi. What did you do in response to the behaviour?
  - b. What impact did the experience have on you? How has the experience affected you?
    - i. How did the experience influence your perceptions of yourself?
    - ii. How did the experience influence your interactions with others?
    - iii. How did the experience influence your actions or behaviours?
    - iv. How did the experience influence your own well-being?
    - v. How did the experience influence you socially (i.e., your interactions or relationships with others)?
4. As part of my research, I also am interested in learning about any experiences you may have had with “subtle” or “indirect” anti-gay/lesbian behaviours. These may be behaviours where you were unsure about the person’s intent (i.e., whether the person intentionally meant to act negatively towards you on the basis of your sexual orientation). They also might include negative behaviours you perceived to have been intentionally directed toward you but that were hidden or disguised in some way. Could you describe in detail an experience you have had with subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours?
- a. Possible probes about the experience
    - i. How did you feel during (and/or after) the incident?
    - ii. What were you thinking during (and/or after) the incident?
    - iii. How did your body feel?
    - iv. Where were you?
    - v. Who were you with?
    - vi. What did you do in response to the behaviour?
  - b. What impact did the experience have on you? How has the experience affected you?
    - i. How did the experience influence your perceptions of yourself?
    - ii. How did the experience influence your interactions with others?
    - iii. How did the experience influence your actions or behaviours?
    - iv. How did the experience influence your own well-being?
    - v. How did the experience influence you socially (i.e., your interactions or relationships with others)?

*Probe for additional subtle behaviours* [ask if they have experienced other kinds of subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. *Examples of this behaviour might include gossip, jokes, distancing, acting unfriendly, prejudicial language.*]



5. Have you had any experiences with behaviours that could be referred to as *homopositive* behaviours? These are behaviours that heterosexuals intend to be positive, but may actually suggest that they are prejudiced. Could you describe in detail an experience you have had with homopositive behaviours? [*Examples of this behaviour might include a person relying on positive stereotypes, stating they don't care about someone's sexual orientation, being overly friendly, ignoring one's sexual orientation.*]
  - a. Possible probes about the experience
    - i. How did you feel during (and/or after) the incident?
    - ii. What were you thinking during (and/or after) the incident?
    - iii. How did your body feel?
    - iv. Where were you?
    - v. Who were you with?
    - vi. What did you do in response to the behaviour?
  - b. What impact did the experience have on you? How has the experience affected you?
    - i. How did the experience influence your perceptions of yourself?
    - ii. How did the experience influence your interactions with others?
    - iii. How did the experience influence your actions or behaviours?
    - iv. How did the experience influence your own well-being?
    - v. How did the experience influence you socially (i.e., your interactions or relationships with others)?
  - c. What are some common "mistakes" that heterosexuals make when interacting with gay and lesbian individuals in an effort to appear non-prejudiced?
6. What do you think are the key features that define blatant and subtle anti-gay behaviours?
  - a. How would you define blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviours?
  - b. How would you define subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours?
  - c. How would you differentiate blatant anti-gay /lesbian behaviours from subtle anti-gay/lesbian behaviours?
  - d. How does it feel to be the target of a blatant anti-gay/lesbian behaviour versus a subtle anti-gay/lesbian behavior?
7. We are nearly at the end of the interview now. Just before we finish, I am wondering if you could reflect on how you make sense of homonegativity. In other words, how do you find meaning in or reconcile some individuals' intolerance of gay men and lesbian women?
  - a. How do you make sense of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes?
  - b. How do you make sense of discriminatory behaviours?
8. Before we conclude, is there anything else that you think I should know that we haven't already discussed during the interview?

## APPENDIX D

### Demographics Questionnaire

1. My age is: \_\_\_\_\_(yrs)
2. My sex is:     Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_
3. My academic major is: (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. I am a(n):  
    \_\_\_ Undergraduate student  
    \_\_\_ Graduate student
5. I am in my \_\_\_\_\_ year of university.
6. My ethnic background is: (*please select one*)  
    \_\_\_ Aboriginal  
    \_\_\_ African  
    \_\_\_ Asian  
    \_\_\_ Hispanic  
    \_\_\_ Caucasian  
    \_\_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
7. I am currently:  
    \_\_\_ Single/Dating  
    \_\_\_ Common-law  
    \_\_\_ Married  
    \_\_\_ Separated  
    \_\_\_ Divorced  
    \_\_\_ If other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
8. By my own definition, I would consider myself to be:  
    \_\_\_ Exclusively heterosexual  
    \_\_\_ Primarily heterosexual  
    \_\_\_ More heterosexual than homosexual  
    \_\_\_ Bisexual  
    \_\_\_ More homosexual than heterosexual  
    \_\_\_ Primarily homosexual  
    \_\_\_ Exclusively homosexual  
    \_\_\_ Queer  
    \_\_\_ If other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
9. I have many gay and lesbian friends.  
    \_\_\_ Strongly disagree  
    \_\_\_ Disagree  
    \_\_\_ Neither agree nor disagree  
    \_\_\_ Agree  
    \_\_\_ Strongly agree
10. I am actively involved in the Gay and Lesbian community.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

11. I generally spend time in venues that are Gay/Lesbian hangouts (e.g., gay bars, gay coffee houses, etc.).

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. I am a member of a Gay and/or Lesbian campus/community group or organization.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. My closest friends are straight.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. I strongly identify with the Gay and Lesbian subculture.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. I generally spend time in venues not specifically aimed at Gay and/or Lesbian individuals when I go out.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. Who was/were your primary care-giver(s) (e.g., mother, father, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_.

17. Please mark whether you have disclosed your sexual orientation to the following people.

	I would consider myself to be:			With regards to my sexual orientation, this person was:			
	OUT to this person	NOT OUT to this person	Not Applicable	Accepting	Somewhat Accepting	Somewhat Rejecting	Rejecting
<b>Mother</b>							
<b>Father</b>							
<b>Stepmother</b>							
<b>Stepfather</b>							
<b>Brother 1</b>							
<b>Brother 2</b>							
<b>Brother 3</b>							
<b>Sister 1</b>							
<b>Sister 2</b>							
<b>Sister 3</b>							
<b>Grandparents (on mother's side)</b>							
<b>Grandparents (on father's side)</b>							
<b>Closest male friend</b>							
<b>Closest Female friend</b>							
<b>Closest male co-worker</b>							
<b>Closest female co-worker</b>							
<b>Male boss/supervisor</b>							
<b>Female boss/supervisor</b>							

## APPENDIX E

### Debriefing and Resources Sheet

Little research has attempted to understand gay and lesbian persons' experiences with subtle (or indirect) forms of discrimination. The purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of what your experience with both blatant and subtle forms of discrimination has been, as well as how these experiences affect your behaviours, perceptions of yourself, and well-being. It is hoped that by learning about the experiences of individuals such as yourself, it will be possible to more accurately describe how discrimination is experienced by people who are treated negatively by others on the basis of one or more of their identities.

It can be stressful to think about past experiences which may be negative in nature, and it is possible that you found some of the memories that you recalled or some of the topics that you discussed during the interview to be upsetting. If you do experience any emotional and/or psychological concerns as a result of this study, you are encouraged to contact the agencies listed below to help you work through your concerns.

#### **Adult Community Mental Health Services**

715 Queen Street, Saskatoon, SK

Phone: 655-7950

Web site: [http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your\\_health/ps\\_mh\\_services.htm](http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/ps_mh_services.htm)

#### **Avenue Community Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity**

201-320 21<sup>st</sup> Street West, Saskatoon, SK

Phone: 655-1224

Web site: <http://www.avenuecommunitycentre.ca>

#### **Saskatoon Crisis Intervention/Suicide Line (24 hours)**

Phone: 933-6200

#### **Saskatoon Sexual Assault and Information Centre (24 hours)**

Phone: 244-2224

Web site: <http://www.saskatoonsexualassaultcentre.com/index.cfm>

#### **Saskatoon Victim Services**

Saskatoon Police Service

259B – 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave South, Saskatoon, SK

Phone: 975-8400

Web site: <http://www.police.saskatoon.sk.ca/victimservices.htm>

#### **USSU Pride Centre**

42 Lower Sask Hall, Saskatoon, SK

Phone: 966-6615

<http://www.ussu.ca/pridecentre/>

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!!!!**

**APPENDIX F**

**Consent to Transcribe and Review Interview Form**

*“The Experiences of Gay and Lesbian University Students”*

**1. The researcher would like to transcribe the personal interview that you have participated in today. Please indicate whether you consent to allowing the researcher to transcribe your interview.**

- YES, I consent to allowing the researcher to transcribe my interview.
- NO, I do not consent to allowing the researcher to transcribe my interview.

**2. If YES to Question 1, as a participant in this study, it also is your right to review your transcript once it has been transcribed. Please indicate whether you wish to review your transcript.**

- NO, I do NOT wish to review the complete transcript of my personal interview for this study.
- YES, I do wish to review the complete transcript of my personal interview for this study.

**If NO, I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize the release of my interview to Lisa Jewell to be used in the manner described in the consent form.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Researcher)

## APPENDIX G

### Transcript Release Form

*“The Experiences of Gay and Lesbian University Students”*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Lisa Jewell. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Lisa Jewell to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

## APPENDIX H

### Consent Form: Daily Diaries

**You are invited to participate in a study entitled “The Experiences of Gay and Lesbian University Students”. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions.**

**Student Researcher:** Lisa M. Jewell., Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Psychology, Arts Building, Arts 161, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 717-5342. My email address is: [lisa.jewell@usask.ca](mailto:lisa.jewell@usask.ca)

**Researcher:** Melanie A. Morrison, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Arts Building, Room 184, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-2564. My email address is: [melanie.morrison@usask.ca](mailto:melanie.morrison@usask.ca).

**Purpose and Procedures:** The purpose of this study is to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian university students at the University of Saskatchewan. In particular, this study focuses on gay and lesbian university students’ experiences with homonegativity (i.e., negative attitudes and behaviours that heterosexuals might direct toward gay men and lesbian women). We are interested in learning about any encounters sexual minority students have had with blatant and subtle (or indirect) forms of discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientations and the implications of these experiences for their own behaviours, perceptions of self, and well-being. University of Saskatchewan students who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or queer will be eligible to participate in this study.

In this component of the study, you will be asked to complete a daily diary over a 10 day time period. Each day you will be asked to describe each instance of homonegativity or discrimination you experienced that day. Immediately following each anti-gay/lesbian behaviour directed towards you, you will be asked to text or instant message the student researcher a few words describing the incident and your immediate thoughts and feelings during and after the event. Before going to bed each night, you will be asked to answer a series of questions related to your experience(s). An email or text will be sent to you each night around 7:00 p.m. to remind you to complete your diary entry. This email/text also will contain any words you may have texted earlier to help you remember how you felt immediately following the incident. Your diary entry will be submitted electronically. If you do not experience a homonegative or discriminatory behaviour on a given day, you will be asked to submit an entry indicating this to be the case. Your participation is voluntary. We anticipate that each time you experience a homonegative/discriminatory behaviour, it will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to answer the daily diary questions. On the days that you did not experience a homonegative/discriminatory behaviour, it will take approximately 5 minutes to answer the daily diary questions.

**Potential Risks:** It is important to point out that the questions asked in the daily diaries are sensitive in nature and that the researchers clearly recognizes their sensitivity. In addition, it is important to mention that daily diaries are a common method used by social researchers to explore participants’ opinions in detail. The daily diary is not designed to make you uncomfortable and there are no physical or mental health risks associated with participating in this study. You are free to answer only those questions which you feel comfortable answering. If



you do experience any stress, or have concerns or questions at any time throughout the interview and/or after you finish participating, you are encouraged to discuss them with Lisa Jewell or Dr. Melanie Morrison. Please contact the researchers using the information provided above. Alternatively, you may decide to contact one of the resource centers listed on the Debriefing and Resources Sheet you will receive after the interview. Finally, there is a remote possibility that someone will be able to identify you on the basis of what you have said because direct quotations from your interview will be used in publications and conference presentations. For example, if you told the researcher about a memorable incident and the researcher presented a quotation about this incident at a national conference, someone in the audience may recognize the incident and remember that you were involved. However, every attempt will be made to protect your identity by using a pseudonym for your name and removing all identifying information (e.g., date and place where an interaction took place) from any reports.

**Potential Benefits:** Your participation in this study will assist researchers in their effort to better understand the blatant and subtle forms of discrimination that might be directed toward gay and lesbian individuals. This research also will further our understanding of the ways in which discrimination affects gay and lesbian university students. Your opinions and feedback are highly valued.

**Storage of Data:** The data collected will be kept in a secure location in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Melanie Morrison's Social Psychology Lab for a minimum of five years, after which the data will be destroyed. Only the researchers will have access to the data. Please note that all text data will be forwarded to the student researcher's email address, printed out, and any identifying information (e.g., your phone number) will be censored. The email and text will then immediately be deleted from her email account and phone, respectively. If you send the researcher comments through instant messaging, this data will be printed, any identifying information will be censored, and the online conversations will be immediately deleted from the researcher's computer. Your consent forms will be stored separately from the daily diary data. In addition, all identifying information will be removed from the daily diary entries.

**Confidentiality:** The data from this study will be published and presented at conferences; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although we will report direct quotations from the daily diary entries, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information (e.g., date and place where an interaction took place) will be removed from our report to ensure your anonymity.

**Right to Withdraw:** You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. Please note that you have the right to withdraw your responses from the study at any point during or after the study, and that if you have any second thoughts about your responses, you should contact the researcher who will remove them from the database.

**Use of data and dissemination of results:** The findings from this study will be presented at academic conferences (e.g., the Annual Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association) and submitted for publication to a peer-reviewed scientific journal. Whenever the findings are

presented, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name and all identifying information (e.g., date and place where an interaction took place) will be removed.

**Debriefing:** A debriefing sheet will be handed out when the daily diary study is complete, or in the event that a participant chooses not to participate. The debriefing sheet will provide some background to the study and identify the specific aims of the study. It will also contain a list of resources that you are free to access to further discuss any issues that arose during the interview.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to pose them; you are also free to contact the researcher at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on April 15, 2005. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. Information concerning the results of the study may be arranged (following the study's completion) via Lisa Jewell or Dr. Morrison at the contact address above.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

---

(Signature of Participant)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Researcher)

## APPENDIX I

### Daily Diary Entry Instructions

#### **Contact Information**

Lisa Jewell

Cell: 717-5342

Email: [lisa.jewell@usask.ca](mailto:lisa.jewell@usask.ca)

1. Each time you encounter an anti-gay/lesbian behaviour, send Lisa a quick text message as soon as you are able to after the incident is over. In the text message, write down what the behaviour was and how it made you feel (e.g., anti-gay joke, uneasy, offended, worried)
  - a. If you do not have a cell phone, please send Lisa a quick email during the day (again, it doesn't have to be more than a few words).
2. At approximately 7:00 p.m. each night, you will receive an email reminding you to complete your daily diary entry. Any information that you texted/mailed to Lisa earlier in the day will be included in the email to help you remember how you felt while you experienced a particular anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. We are interested in learning about your *lived experience* (i.e., your thoughts, feelings, and reactions at the time that the behaviour was occurring).
3. **Please complete your diary entry prior to going to bed each day.** The diary entries are to be submitted through a website that will be forwarded to you via email. The date and time that you submit your entry will be recorded, so that we can determine when you submitted your diary.
4. If you will not be able to complete your diary entry on a given day, please let Lisa know. Similarly, if you have any questions at any point in time or can no longer continue participating, please contact Lisa.
5. Your **Participant ID** is the last four digits of your cell phone number. If you do not have a cell phone, please use the last four digits of your home phone number as your Participant ID.

## APPENDIX J

### Daily Diary Questions

Participant ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did you experience any anti-gay/lesbian behaviours today?  
 Yes (If YES, please go to question 2)  
 No (If NO, please submit entry)
  
2. How many anti-gay/lesbian behaviours did you experience today?  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Experience 1

3. Please describe in detail your experience with this anti-gay/lesbian behaviour. When writing, just try to relive the incident while it was happening and describe what it was like for you. Some aspects of the experience you might want to consider are your feelings, mood, thoughts, and bodily sensations while it was happening. Also please describe the context of the situation, including what happened, where you were, who you were with, and who perpetrated the behaviour.
  
4. What impact did this experience have on you? Please consider what you did in response to this negative behaviour and how it affected your feelings or mood, actions or behaviours, interactions with others, and perceptions of yourself.
  
5. What meaning do you find in this experience? How do you make sense of this experience?
  
6. What other thoughts, comments, or observations do you have about this incident?

Note: Questions will be repeated for each reported experience.