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On the Move: Storying the Authentic Leadership Development of Millennial Gay Men

A Dissertation by

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Orange, CA

Donna Ford Attallah College of Educational Studies

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

August 2019

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March 2019

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Foremost, I am forever grateful to the three participants who so graciously shared their time and personal experiences with me throughout the study. The willingness to engage, share, and present their authentic selves throughout the research process brought the narratives to life and demonstrated the power and efficacy rooted in storytelling. Because of each of you, I am a better researcher, teacher, and citizen now more capable of living and being more authentic in my practice and pursuit of improving our communities of place, practice, and interest.

To my committee, I say thank you for your guidance, mentorship, and patience. To Lori, I thank you for seeing potential in a struggling, academically floundering undergraduate student in need of encouragement and for helping me realign my passion with my abilities. I am grateful for our continued friendship and professional relationship we have maintained. To Whitney, my chair-leader extraordinaire, I say thank you for always encouraging me to try new things, helping me cope with culture shock from afar after moving abroad, and for pushing me to become a more effective writer. Last but not least, to Penny, I say thank you for sparking my interest in arts-based inquiry and the ability to combine my passion for building community and developing as an emerging scholar. I will forever value your encouragement to strive for progress, not perfection.

To my family, your unending support as I left home and chased opportunities to grow and see the world has been invaluable. It has been a privilege to travel, learn, and grow and to be able to share with you the many experiences along the way.

ABSTRACT

On the Move: Storying the Authentic Leadership Development of Millennial Gay Men

by Kyle Patrick Williams

This study used Arts-based research and Narrative Inquiry to explore the rural-urban transition experiences of three high-achieving millennial gay men. Using Clandinin's (2013) narrative commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place as frames for understanding each participant's individual story, the study utilized The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015) to illuminate participants' experiences related to identity development, sense of community, queer migration, and authentic leadership development. In addition to the individual narratives, story threads or themes present in one, two, or all three narrative portraits were analyzed and discussed. The data also included found poetry and original poems written in the style of George Ella Lyon's (1999) *I Am From* poem.

The study examined the authentic leadership development of the participants and advanced arts-based research through a discussion of the personal, practical, and social justifications of the methodology broadly, and this study in particular. The significance of this study is directly related to the social justifications of theoretical contributions and a social justice orientation. By engaging in the research, the participants told their stories in this way for the first time and gave voice to their past experiences and illuminated the implications of these experiences on their current roles as junior faculty members and administrators in higher education.

The narrative portraits and poetry serve as counter-narratives to those of white, straight men which are most often privileged in the academy and beyond. This study demonstrates the usefulness and rigor of using narrative methods to gather and share stories about: 1) transitioning between rural and urban places, 2) the experiences of a subset of the millennial cohort and life-course development, 3) and the development of authentic leadership. Each participant expressed a passion and purpose for more socially just classrooms, campus environments, and community spaces, and each participant incorporated this purpose in his teaching, research, and practice in his own way. As more millennial gay men assume leadership positions in universities, board rooms, and city halls, ABR creates the potential capacity for a new generation of public leaderships to usher in societal shifts reflecting a changing America.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

I am from the south fork of the Licking. Where floodwaters rise like the hopes of young people eager to move away. Where the community and lives are rebuilt after the waters recede.

I am from the 4-H club, where I learned to serve and to make the best better. Head, heart, hands, and health; citizenship, leadership, service.

I am from public school, where I inevitably stood out. Where I could never come out and often did not fit in. Where I could sing, perform, and entertain; where I could learn, serve, and lead.

I am from the red blazer. Where family, career, and community leaders are made. Where I learned to face the future with warm courage and high hope.

I am from a sophomore slump; where my first-generation dream was nearly shattered. I am from perseverance and humility; from the mentors who said ‘yes, you can.’

I am from Cabaret nights; Hong Kong junk boat days; and from Mardi Gras parades. Laissez le bon temps rouler.

I am from places and times past. Where I learned, I grew, I gained, I lost. Across time and space, I will continue to go, perhaps forever *on the move*.

As a self-identified gay man born in rural northern Kentucky in 1988, I am a member of the LGBT community; I am from a rural place, and I am a millennial. I am also white; cisgender; liberal-leaning; and high-achieving, having navigated educational systems and structures leading up to and including doctoral studies. Though these are just some of the many intersecting identities that make me who I am, each is particularly relevant to the research study described in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

The poem above, inspired by Kentucky Poet Laureate George Ella Lyon’s (2009) *Where I’m From*, captures the ways in which time, place, and social context have shaped my experiences as a learner, a doer, and a community member. From a humble upbringing on “the southern side” of northern Kentucky to travels around the United

States and countries on three other continents, I have expanded my worldview, learned to see things from others' perspectives, and began a journey of becoming a global citizen. Central to my poem and my experience has been a constant transition between places - rural, urban, and in between. At each stop along the way, I was undoubtedly changed by those places and believe I changed each in some way. My own *Where I'm From* poem, the participants' interpretations of the poem, and three narrative portraits presented in this dissertation are a collection of artifacts that describe the particular, individual experiences of millennial gay men *on the move* and story their authentic leadership development.

Researcher Positionality

I also provide here my own researcher positionality in an act of transparency and as a means of inviting you to join me in the research process. With both pride and pain, I have been acutely aware of what it means to be a young gay man from the rural south who has had invaluable opportunities to live, serve, study, and work in myriad contexts in rural and urban America as well as in international places, consistently situated in institutions of higher education and the communities where they are located. This led me to wonder how divides such as partisan, rural-urban, have-have not, and others can be addressed and potentially bridged as well as who may be ready, able, and willing to serve in such a bridging capacity. I turned inward and reflected on how I, and others like me, may be able to do just that. To design and engage in this study, I knew it would be necessary to not only understand myself in an autobiographical way but to be able to authentically share my personal interest and stake in the research. A wise professor once suggested that many Ph.D. students choose to research themselves and my own dissertation research would prove to be no exception.

I identify as a millennial gay man from rural northern Kentucky. My own early education and extracurricular activities included 4-H/Youth Development, community service, and school-based leadership opportunities. As a first-generation college student, I moved away from home and studied at the University of Kentucky, earning a bachelor's degree in Community and Leadership Development, but not before experiencing an epic sophomore slump and nearly flunking out. Since my time in my undergraduate studies, I have lived in six states and two countries; earned a master's degree in Leadership, Public Policy, and Social Issues; and conducted this research in partial fulfillment of a doctoral program. I also serve on the Board of Directors member of the Community Development Society, an international nonprofit, professional membership organization.

The day after the 2016 election was the day this research was realized. At the time, I already had a meeting scheduled with my advisor to talk about research ideas and we stared at each other for a while in silence. I think each of us was trying not to be the first one to cry. I was having a personal and professional crisis of identity. I have pursued the aforementioned education, volunteer, and work opportunities in service to others. I was so frustrated after the election worrying about, what does this mean for people that do the work as I do or for the people that I'm working on behalf of and alongside? What is my role in all of this? How do I prevent, at least, the backslide of progress that I think we all took for granted?

As the size and diversity of our population increases, so does social awareness and acceptance yet the divides are persistent. I arrived at this research with the purpose of understanding what is the role of people like me - millennial gay men - in creating safer, more vibrant, more productive, and braver spaces. Spaces where we can live, we can

work, we can engage with one another, we can create the future that we want to have. I wanted to understand what role specifically I could play in that and how does earning a Ph.D. help me do that? In order to understand this, I wanted to engage in a narrative process and to give voice to previously untold stories about our experiences as high achieving millennial gay men and to use those stories as counter-narratives that allow us to do our part in making our schools, our workplaces, our city halls, everywhere, the spaces we occupy, more ethical, and more just.

In many ways, I was afforded insider status with my participants as someone who had transitioned between rural and urban spaces, who has been openly gay since I moved to college, and as an emerging academic. I was certainly among good company and shared certain experiences and worldviews with each of the participants which allowed us to connect with one another during a series of semi-structured conversations.

The remainder of this first chapter serves as an introduction to the study and begins with the historical background and rationale for engaging in the inquiry. The rationale includes the statement of the problem, the purpose and research puzzle that guided the study, justifications for using narrative methods, and finally the significance of the study.

Historical Background

Of particular interest to this study are the experiences of millennials, one of the five living birth or generational cohorts; the growing number of self-identified LGBT U.S. adults and youth; the effects of school and leadership experiences; and changes at and across the rural-urban interface in America. Studied together, this narrative inquiry was designed to tell the stories about millennial gay men who have transitioned between

rural and urban places and the impact of education and leadership experiences on their identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement. The following sections define generational cohorts and provide information about millennials, specifically, followed by a distinction between rural and urban America and historical migration patterns of LGBT persons. I then provide an overview of generations of leadership theories with an emphasis on Authentic Leadership.

Generational Cohorts

As the population of the United States grows and diversifies, it is helpful to understand what trends are occurring as a result of these shifts and how this understanding leads to decisions that impact our daily lives. These impacts are felt in the communities in which we live, the schools in which we teach and learn, the workplaces where we earn a living, and a myriad of other informal and formal institutions and networks to which we belong. Of particular interest to this study are differences between birth or generational cohorts, particularly millennials; the growing number of self-identified U.S. adults and youth and the way they experience school, leadership, and politics; and changes at the rural-urban interface in America. Fortunately, several bureaus and organizations have assumed responsibility for collecting related data and making reports available for public consumption; some of these include the Pew Research Center, Gallup, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN).

Birth cohorts, or generations, are analytical constructs used to study changes over time and allow researchers to understand the interaction of formative experiences and the life-course (Dimock, 2019), the similarities and differences between age groups in the

U.S. and to manage policies and respond to the needs of the people therein. The Pew Research Center (2019), which uses generations to understand demographic and attitudinal habits of cohort members, classifies the living generations today as (1) The Silent Generation (born 1928-1945); (2) The Baby Boom (Boomers) Generation (born 1946-1964); (3) Generation X (born 1965-1980); (4) the Millennial Generation (born 1981-1996), and (5) Generation Z (born 1997-2012). Slightly varied birth years for the millennial generation included in the following discussion are 1980-1998 (Gates, 2017) and 1981-1997 (Fry, 2017). Authors William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991) published *Generations* and while the generation in focus was just beginning preschool; the group was designated as millennials because they would be coming of age in the new millennium. While generational cohorts are not monoliths, the use of generational cohorts are a useful frame of reference for understanding similarities and shared experiences of group members. These constructs, in addition to life course development models (discussed further in chapter two), provide an analytical framework for the population under study.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), the number of millennials in 2014 had reached approximately 83.1 million, eclipsing Baby Boomers at 75.4 million; this meant millennials represented about one-fourth of the U.S. population. Not only demonstrating strength in numbers, but the Census Bureau also highlighted that millennials are more diverse than previous generations with 44.2% a part of a minority race or ethnic group. In addition to racial and ethnic diversity, recent Gallup data also showed that some 10 million (4.1%) of all adults surveyed self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) in 2016 compared to 3.5% in 2012. When looking at

this data by birth cohort, 7.3% were millennials (defined in the report as born between 1980 and 1998), compared to 5.8% in 2012. The report also noted that higher rates of self-identification among millennials may be attributed to this sub-population being the first to grow up during a time when the LGBT community has seen a marked increase in social acceptance, less stigma, and less discrimination as experienced by older peers. The relationship between birth cohorts or generations and gay men will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Further, Richard Fry (2017) reported that in the 2016 election, for the first time Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) and other older voters were outnumbered by Gen Xers (born 1965-1981) and Millennials (born 1981-1997) who showed up to the polls.

According to the report, 69.6 million Millennial and Gen X votes were cast in the presidential election, representing a slight majority of the total 137.5 million total votes cast. While the number of millennial voters has yet to eclipse Gen X voters outright, Fry (2017) predicted they will do so by the 2020 presidential election, based on the total number of persons and the number of birth years spanned by the group. Fry (2017) noted the significance of this shift, particularly because a growing number of millennials take more liberal positions on social issues and because in 2016, 55% of all millennials identified as Democrats or Democratic-leaning independents. This is in contrast to 49% of Gen Xers, 46% of Boomers, and 43% of Silent Generation members who identified as or leaned toward Democratic.

The Rural-Urban Interface and Migration in the United States

Changes in rural and urban America are being felt not just in our nation's schools, but also in communities and the various institutions which sustain them. In short,

everyone is being impacted. Changing population trends, technology, and the consumers of Census data have all illuminated the need for updating the way urban and rural have been defined, measured, and studied. A report titled “Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau” (Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder & Field, 2016), described how cities and the suburbs around them have rapidly grown – both as measured by people and land area – while the population in rural places has declined. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, any location with 50,000 or more people is considered urban and everything else is considered rural; the definition and method of measurement have evolved to recognize other characteristics, such as population density, land use, and distance in developed areas. Because of the implications that Census data can have on our daily lives, such as congressional representative apportionment and qualification for federal funds, it is important to understand how these places are defined before attempting to understand characteristics of the people therein as well as the impact of ongoing changes in rural and urban populations.

Not only has the way we define rural and urban changed over the past century, but the demographic composition of rural and urban places has also changed over time. The American Community Survey (ACS) is administered nationwide to a sample size of about 3.5 million addresses in America on an annual basis and supplements the decennial Census (U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” n.d.). The data garnered from the ACS provide information related to demographics, the economy, housing, and other social interests for use from the local to the federal level. The ACS uses the urban and rural classifications as established by the Census and statistics from the ACS are the only sources of information for some rural populations and enable government officials,

planners, and business owners to make decisions that impact the local area (Fields, Holder & Burd (2016). As Fields et. al. (2016) discussed, the rural population of 54.4% reported in 1910 had fallen to 19.3% in 2010. The 2011-2015 ACS data showed some 60 million Americans living in rural America with the highest percentages living in Maine and Vermont (61%), the lowest in California (4.9%), and most of the rural population at-large (64.4%) residing east of the Mississippi River.

The changing size and makeup of the U.S. population present challenges and opportunities for everyone from the grassroots to schools, to local and state elected officials, as well as the federal government. The rural-urban interface and the significance of place to this study will also be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

U.S. migration. Rural and urban places, the people within them, and the migration of people between them have been studied for centuries. In the United States, an event now known as The Great Migration occurred between 1916 and 1970. During this time, six million southern African Americans relocated to cities in the north, Midwest, and west cities (History, “Great Migration,” 2019). Responding to the need in the north for industrial workers during the First World War, many of these migrants left behind poor economic opportunity and segregation laws. However, once in northern cities, Black migrants again faced harsh working conditions, competition for housing, and discrimination and prejudice (History, “Great Migration”, 2019). Though Black migration slumped during the great depression, it swelled again after World War II and through the 1970s. By then, less than half of African Americans in the U.S. lived in the south, and only a quarter lived in rural places (History, “Great Migration”, 2019).

The post-WWII period also gave way to the rise of suburbia and the pursuit of the American dream. Affluence rose (for some), cars rolled off assembly lines, the Interstate system connected more places than ever, and America saw a baby boom. Decaying cities, racial fears, and affordable housing were all factors that prompted suburban migration during this time (U.S. History, “Suburban Growth”, n.d.). The 1980 findings published by the Census Bureau showed for the first time that neither the Northeastern industrial region nor the Midwest agriculture region was the most populous; instead, most Americans were living west of the Mississippi River or south of the Mason-Dixon Line (FamilySearch, n.d.). In 1990, the percent of Americans living in metropolitan areas was 198.4 million people (79.8%) and increased to 226 million people (80.3%) in 2000 (Perry & Mackun, 2001). By the 2010 Census, the number of Americans living in metropolitan areas ticked up to 83.7% (Mackun & Wilson, 2011).

Queer migration. In addition to studying the general migration patterns of the United States at large, other researchers were concerned with the patterns of migration for sub-populations, specifically the LGBT community. The post-World War II era also gave way to the “great gay migration” (Weston, 1995) as major cities on the east and west coasts saw increasing numbers of gay men and lesbian women. The reasons for such migration and settlement included military disembarkation points for military personnel (i.e., San Francisco), the dishonorable discharge of gays and lesbians from the military, migration from the inhospitable and homophobic countryside, and the changing post-industrial jobs in which traditional expectations of masculinity were of lesser importance (Brown, 2008).

While previous studies have chronicled rural-to-urban migrations of Americans, it was observed that as the rural population shrank, there were fewer people to make such a unidirectional rural-to-urban migration and urban-urban migration was more prevalent. The unidirectionality and finality emphasized in studies on queer migration that overemphasized the escape from the rural were challenged and complemented by new research (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Gorman-Murray, 2007a) discussed further in chapter two.

Leadership Development

Definitions, theories, and research about leadership have been advanced for decades yet the notion of leadership remains difficult to describe because it means different things to different people in different contexts (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013). Influenced by culture, leadership varies from country to country leaving us to wonder what makes good leadership or what makes an effective leader; one study in the 1980s sought to define leadership and resulted in 110 different definitions from scholars across various disciplines (Rost, 1991). Some scholars choose to describe leadership using metaphors (Cohen & March, 1974; De Pree, 1992; Rost, 1991; Vaill, 1991; McFarland, Senn & Childress, 1993). As ideas about leaders and leadership have evolved over time, the attitudes, behaviors, purposes, and skills we expect leadership to reflect have also changed. Komives, Lucas, & McMahon (2013) trace the evolution of leadership theory theories from great man approaches, trait approaches, behavior approaches, situational contingency, influence, chaos theories, and reciprocal leadership approaches.

One theme underlying many post-industrial and reciprocal models of leadership that scholars have found is known as *authentic leadership*. This form of leadership encompasses positive psychology, transformational leadership, moral and ethical decision making, and is embodied by a leader who understands who they are, what they stand for, and align their actions with their beliefs (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans & May (2004). Bill George (2007) advanced authentic leadership by stating, “When you are aligned with who you are, you find coherence between your life story and your leadership” (xxiv). Using narrative methods to capture life stories, the experiences of the participants in this study shared illuminated the particular ways in which each had developed his authentic leadership.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for the study is presented below by describing the problem that led to the research, the purpose of the research and the research puzzle which informed the narrative design, justifications for using narrative methods for this particular inquiry, and the significance of the study as related to education, leadership development, and social justice.

Statement of the Problem

The U.S. population is growing more racially and culturally diverse, as we see minority population growth and increasing social awareness and acceptance of a plurality of gender, sex, and faith identities (Frey, 2018). There is also persistent and widening divide between those living in rural and urban America (Lichter & Ziliak, 2017), those who have and have not, and those who are wildly different from one another. These divides were exacerbated during 2016 election and a story in the New York Times

afterward noted the growing divide between cities and small towns and the people within them, as well as the sense that the fates of rural and urban America may be becoming disconnected (Badger, 2016).

Immediately following the 2016 election, I found myself experiencing a personal and professional existential crisis. I questioned whether the many years of education and associated debt would be worth the investment in a changed and ever-changing social and political landscape. I recognized that working with and on behalf of marginalized people and the communities where they live would likely become more difficult. I wondered what opportunities would exist to minimize the backslide of progress that had been achieved (and perhaps taken for granted) for those historically marginalized or more recently finding themselves in need. I questioned whether I – or others like me – could continue to be or become the change makers.

Though people of all ages have migrated throughout history, how (if at all) have migrations of millennials differed from those in other generational cohorts, particularly in recent years, as Fry (2019) explored in the post-Great Recession context? As Luibhéid (2008) and others explored, how do we examine queer migration outside of a heteronormative dominant narrative? To what extent has technology and globalization played a role in developing and sustaining communities, or are we in what Bradshaw (2008) would consider post-place community? How have the experiences of LGBT persons differed from non-LGBT persons, particularly when moving between and establishing new communities of place, practice, and interest? How much influence do education and leadership impact our identity development?

Purpose of the Study and the Research Puzzle

Mulling over these questions, I developed a curiosity about the role of millennial gay men in creating safer, more vibrant, and more desirable places to live, learn, work, and be in community. While each of the aforementioned studies informed aspects of my curiosity, I was unable to find other studies which comprehensively addressed the population or experiences of interest. Similarly, I did not find a suitable collection of studies which had used arts-based or narrative methods to understand the experiences of my intended population. As such, I wanted to understand how we can use the stories of our experiences to improve the communities in which we are a part, including schools, workplaces, and other contexts.

The resulting research study explored a research puzzle framed by the following two questions: (1) what are the rural-urban transition experiences of millennial gay men and (2) what is the influence of school and leadership experiences on their identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement? Using narrative methods, semi-structured interviews, and the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015) for data analysis, individual narrative portraits were developed for each participant and illuminated his particular, individual experiences of being on the move and the ways in which he developed authentic leadership.

Justifications for Narrative Methods

Researchers engaging in narrative studies are encouraged to consider the questions “so what” and “who cares” from the outset of the study (Clandinin, 2013). Attention is called to these questions and the justification for choosing narrative methods as narrative inquiries may be viewed as too simplistic, personal, or anecdotal. Justifying

the use of narrative methods prepares us to answer questions about our research puzzles, our relationship to and in our studies, and the methods employed, and field texts developed in the process. Clandinin (2013), following years of engaging in narrative inquiry, identified three ways in which we must justify our narrative inquiries: the personal, the practical, and the social. Personal justifications are concerned with the reasons why the narrative inquiry is important to us individually; practical justifications are concerned the impact the research has on practice; social or theoretical justifications are concerned with advancing theoretical understandings or to create more socially just situations.

We begin making personal justifications as we consider our own lived experiences, tensions, and relationship to the study. This requires us to understand ourselves as being and becoming within the inquiry, we understand the stories which we bring into the research relationship, and we prepare to attend to the experiences of the research participants. One practical justification of the study was to use storytelling and poetry as expressive forms in which participants could share their stories in new ways and for the first time. This telling and re-telling of participants' stories resulted in counter-narratives to those which dominate this cis, straight, white male-dominated higher education and leadership cultures in the United States. Sharing experiences in new forms also allowed the participants to break out of their traditional academic forms of writing.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is directly related to the social justifications of theoretical contributions and a social justice orientation. The study utilized arts-based

research and narrative methods to capture and re-tell previously untold stories about millennial gay men on the move between rural and urban places. As is discussed in chapter five, engaging in the research was the first time the participants told their stories in this way and gave voice to their experience. The narrative portraits and the participants' interpretations of George Ella Lyons' (1999) *Where I'm From* poem serve as counter-narratives to those of white, straight men which are most often privileged in the academy and beyond.

This study demonstrates the usefulness and rigor of using narrative methods to gather and share stories about transitioning between rural and urban places, the experiences of a subset of the millennial generational cohort, and the development of authentic leadership. Each participant's individual narrative and analysis of his authentic leadership development reflect a passion and purpose for more socially just classrooms, campus environments, and community spaces and each participant incorporated this purpose in his teaching, research, and practice in his own way. As more millennial gay men assume leadership positions in universities, board rooms, and city halls, we create the potential and build capacity for a new generation of leadership to usher in societal shifts reflecting a changing America.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with a description of the narrative commonplaces, which are specific dimensions central to the conceptual framework of a narrative inquiry and which encourage the researcher to think narratively about the experiences under study (Clandinin, 2013). With the narrative commonplaces as a framework for the remainder of the literature reviewed for this study, the discussion examines research on identity development than the relationship between place, sexuality, and migration. The review continues with a discussion of leadership development generally and among college students specifically as well as developing authentic leadership.

Narrative Commonplaces

By attending to the three commonplaces - temporality, sociality, and place - from the framing of the research puzzle and throughout the inquiry, researchers highlight the “shifting, changing, personal, and social nature of the phenomenon under study” and challenges dominant narratives as fixed and unchanging (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). Attending simultaneously to the three commonplaces makes narrative distinct from other methodologies. Our inquiries lead us to look forward and backward, inward and outward and draw connections to the place or series of places where our stories unfold. In the context of this study, the narrative commonplaces explored temporality by understanding the ongoing development of each participant from early childhood memories up to the time of the study; place was examined through rich descriptions of moving between rural and urban places; and sociality was examined by analyzing the dominant and counter-cultural, familial, institutional, linguistic, and social narratives.

Temporality. Clandinin & Huber (2010) called on narrative inquirers to be attuned to temporality and the past, present, and future of all events, people, places, and things that are being investigated. Based on an understanding that our stories are built upon our many experiences over time and influence the way our understanding of ourselves and the way we share this with others is in an ongoing state of revision. Using temporality as a lens to examine the experiences of the participants in this study illuminated the ways in which participants' stories have changed over time and provided context for how participants told their stories.

Sociality. Both personal and social conditions, according to Clandinin & Huber (2010), are at the fore of narrative research and are the foundations of the sociality commonplace. Personal conditions include the desires, feelings, and hopes of participants, including the researcher; social conditions are those in which experiences and events unfold. Narrative inquirers come to understand these social conditions by examining the cultural, institutional, linguistic, and social narratives that influence the research puzzle and the participants therein. The sociality dimension also emphasizes the interconnected and interdependent relationship between the lives of the inquirer and participants.

Place. Ralph Ellison's (1995) novel "Invisible Man" from 1952 included a scene in which the narrator reminded a forgetful character who had previously asked for directions that, "if you don't know where you are, you probably don't know who you are." Leslie Marmon Silko (1996) wrote that our identities are inseparable from the place or places in which we tell our stories as well as the places where the stories take place. Clandinin (2013) described place as the physical place or sequences of places where the

events that make up the stories we tell. If the stories we tell and the place or places where they take place are of utmost importance, and if our sense of who we are is also linked to the places we have been and currently find ourselves in, then it is also important to consider the role of these commonplaces in relation to identity development.

Identity Development

For this study, storying the rural-urban transition experiences of the participants and how these transitions influenced their identity development were central to my research puzzle. The following is a discussion of research that first examines identity development generally, then gay identity development specifically. Gay identity development draws distinctions between stage-based and life-course-based models of development as well as LGBT student development, which is particularly relevant to the temporality and sociality commonplaces, as we come to understand the ways in which social change and current climate affect identity development, and how this has changed over time.

Identity

McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich (2006) used narrative inquiry as a research method to understand identity and focused on three questions: whether storying constructions of identity illuminate a unity or multiplicity of self or both; how constructions of narrative identity are influenced by self and society; and how stories demonstrate stability, growth, or both, in their identities. As Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (2001) wrote, identity combines the personal world with “cultural forms and social relations” and identities should be understood as they are developed in social practice (p. 5). The authors were also attentive to the ways in which identities develop

over time and how identities allow for the creation of new activities, worlds, and ways of being. Etienne Wenger (1999) described identity as layers of events in which our experience and interpretations of that experience inform one another. These layers build upon one another as we experience the world and are relational with others. Beijard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) offered identity as a process by which one interprets himself or herself as a particular kind of person and being contextually recognized as such. Lawler (2014), while discussing the works of Goffman and Butler, noted that identity is done, that it is not innate but achieved, that it is not achieved in isolation, and that it is not achieved as a matter of choice. On Goffman and Butler, Lawler (2014) wrote “it is clear that both see the individual actions and responses as part of a wider social order that permits some actions and disallows others” (p. 119).

Understanding identity development broadly is important to this study, and even more relevant to this study is development of a gay identity. The following section discusses the ways in which gay identity development has been studied in the past as well as contemporary ways of understanding this development.

Gay Identity Development

Temporality, in conjunction with place, exposed how experiences in rural and urban places are similar and different, and the influence of place on identity development. As Plummer (1995) explained, identities are constructed in distinct times and places and within cultural and historical contexts. Tajfel & Turner’s (1979) contribution of social identity theory proposed that group memberships provide a person with a sense of who they are and provide a sense of self-esteem and pride. Among the many different social identities we each have, or groups we belong to, several were important to this study,

including gay, millennial, and rural and urban. the following section includes a discussion of and distinction between stage-based and lifespan or life course-based models of gay identity development.

As Cohler & Hammack (2006) wrote, identity is dependent upon the meaning made from life experiences and is historically relative; generation cohorts are then formed when particular cultural, historical, and social contexts contribute to the development of groups with a shared identity. Factors such as geography, gender, sexual orientation, and social status contribute to “intracohort variation” (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, p. 152). Individuals and groups such as gay men and lesbian women have developed counter-narratives of development that contest the dominant, heteronormative ones and social and historical changes continue to influence the ways in which counternarratives of gay identity are being rewritten. Gay identity, as defined by Cohler & Hammack (2006), is based upon a particular story in which same-sex desire becomes social practice and becomes a part of the life story. However, there have been different approaches to empirically identifying the ways in which gay identities are developed. The following sections contrast stage-based models of gay identity development against lifespan-based or life-course models, the latter used to demonstrate the relationship between time, place, and gay identity development of generational cohorts.

Stage-Based Models. Several models have been created as a result of studying gay identity development. Similar characteristics across these models include developing a sense of personal awareness, ability to disclose to others, and understanding that sexual orientation is an aspect of self-identity (Levine & Evans, 1991). Patton and Chang (2011) provided critiques of theories and models used for understanding LGBTQ identity

development with those developed by Cass (1979, 1984), D'Augelli (1994), Fox (1995), McCarn & Fassinger (1996), Robin & Hammer (2000), and Troiden (1988) attributed as instrumental to understanding these development processes but were not without limitations. Stage-based theories, for example, were overly linear and failed to "accurately predict significant developmental events and the order in which they occur, if at all" (Patton and Chang, 2011, p. 195). These theories often failed to account for the complexities of sexual identity development, falsely assumed that processes were the same for women and men, and often relied on White or male participants, had low participants in general, or lacked solid research foundations.

Vivienne Cass (1979), a clinical psychologist, proposed a model of homosexual identity development based on her work with gay clients and the stories they recalled of coming out. Based on the behaviors, emotions, and feelings expressed by the clients, Cass developed a model with 16 dimensions that could be used to explain gay identity development. Based upon a person's location within the proposed dimensions, six stages of gay male identity development were proposed. The stages included confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis.

Cass (1984) sought to empirically measure the efficacy of the six-stage model of identity development and whether the process was linear. In a quantitative study, 178 participants (109 males and 69 females) were asked to complete a "Homosexual Identity Formation Questionnaire" and a "Stage Allocation Measure" (p. 158). The questionnaire included 210 multiple choice questions and checklists and was meant to measure the 16 dimensions; a scoring tool was developed based on the way Cass anticipated a person in each of the six stages would respond. The Stage Allocation Measure was used to place

participants into one of the six proposed stages of development. From seven profiles of people provided to the participants, each was asked to select the one which they believed best represented them. Once data analysis was complete, the descriptions of each stage of the development model were supported though clear evidence for a particular sequence of stages was not found.

Troiden (1975), developed a model of gay identity development based on other models with the stages of sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption and commitment (Plummer, 1975; Ponce, 1978). Building on the work of Cass (1979, 1984), Troiden (1988) revised his own model to make a distinction between the processes of identity disclosure and identity development, to assign general age ranges for the stages in the model, and the ability of individuals to revisit stages in the development model. However, Troiden failed to empirically test his models and his ability to make behavior predictions was limited.

The models described above provide important insights into understanding the development of gay individuals at a time when the LGBT community was considerably more marginalized than the present. Shared strengths of these models include the acknowledgment that one's gay identity is only a part of their larger self-identity and that gay identity development includes challenges associated with confusion and disclosure to others. Patton and Chang (2011) noted the contributions of Fassinger & Miller (1996), McCarn & Fassinger (1996), and Tomlinson and Fassinger (2003) as important for understanding the way context and culture influence identity and how a more advanced identity was not necessarily dependent on public disclosure (i.e., the coming out process). D'Augelli's (1994) sexual orientation lifespan model moved beyond the linear models

previously established and acknowledged that lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities are fluid and shift over the course of people's lives. A critique, however, was D'Augelli's (1994) treatment of bisexuality as a process toward a gay or lesbian identity as opposed to an identity of its own. As described below, new approaches to understanding how gay identity develops have emerged with a focus on the life-course and the social, cultural, and historical contexts spanning from the late nineteenth century to the new millennium.

Lifespan-based or life-course models. Research on the lifespan and life course can be traced back to Erik Erikson, who proposed eight stages of psychosocial development spanning infancy to adulthood and emphasized the importance of culture and society in the development process (McLeod, 2013). More recently, life course-based research has focused on minority groups, including the LGBT community. Hammack, Frost, Meyer, & Pletta (2018) contended that a life course paradigm is not simply examining groups (gay men, in particular) at different points in their development of self and suggested focusing instead on the intersection of individual development with social and historical context. The researchers engaged in narrative research to understand the way same-sex attracted individuals of distinct generational cohorts made meaning of identity development.

Hammack, Frost, Meyer, & Pletta (2018) noted that the health and identity development of gay men of distinct birth cohorts could greatly diverge and also used a life course approach to identify five generations of gay men and the issues related to health and identity development for each. Recognizing social and historical change, Hammack et al (2018) acknowledged that context is important for generational studies and rationalized the narrowed study of gay men based on the emergence of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. The authors provided two key principles of a life course paradigm

to study gay men's health and identity development; the first is the principle of historical time and place and the second is the principle of timing in lives. These principles anchor gay men's self-understanding to the historical setting in which the development occurs and illuminates the significance of critical events as they are experienced during developmental moments.

To define the generational cohorts of gay men, Hammack et al (2018) identified key historical events in lesbian and gay history and their relation to identity development and health and considered further how these events were experienced in relation to two critical developmental periods of puberty and young adulthood. The authors identified five generation cohorts of gay men alive in 2017, including *Sickness*, *Liberation*, *AIDS-1*, *AIDS-2*, and *Equality*. The *Sickness* generation, approximately born during the 1930s and aged 70s-80s in 2017, developed under the context of pathologized homosexuality, many remained closeted throughout their lives, and tend to suffer more sexual psychological distress. The *Liberation* generation, those born during the 1940s, experienced puberty at a time the gay and lesbian movement began and early adulthood was marked by the formation of gay communities in urban areas. The *Liberty* generation was strongly impacted by the loss of friends and partners due to AIDS. The subsequent two generations were marked by the emergence of the AIDS epidemic. The *AIDS-1* generation, those born in the 1950s and 1960s, experienced AIDS during early adulthood and the trauma associated with substantial deaths in the community and saw major advances in treatment as well as gains in civil rights during midlife. The *AIDS-2* generation, those born during the 1970s and 1980s, experienced puberty during the AIDS apex, benefitted from the Internet during adolescence as well as advances in treatment

and increasing equality during early adulthood. Finally, the *Equality* generation includes those born in the 1990s, with puberty and emerging adulthood occurring alongside advances for HIV treatment, victories for civil rights, and increasing equality.

Table 1 Generational Cohorts of Gay Men

Generation	Approximate Birth Years	Age at CDE1 (Stonewall, 1969)	Age at CDE 2 (AIDS Discovery, 1981)	Age at CDE 3 (HAART introduced, 1996)	Age at CDE 4 (Lawrence v. Texas, 2003)	Age in 2017
Sickness	1930s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s-80s
Liberation	1940s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s-70s
AIDS-1	1950s-1960s	10s (puberty)	20s	30s	40s	50s-60s
AIDS-2	1970s-1980s	0	10s	10s	20s	30s-40s
Equality	1990s	0	0	<10	10s	20s

Millennials, born 1981-1996, span the AIDS-2 and Equality generations put forth by Hammack et al (2018). The oldest among millennials were born when many afflicted by AIDS were dying and medical advances were being made whereas the youngest among millennials were born during a time when views of LGBT persons were slowly becoming more accepting. To shift the perspective from birth to coming of age, the first-half of the millennial generation became college age (18-25) between 1999 and 2006 and the second half of millennials became college age between 2006 and 2013. Significant events that occurred during this time include the contested presidency of George W. Bush in 2000, the September 11 attacks and the debut of the iPod in 2001, the second Gulf war and completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter around 2006, the historic election of

Barack Obama in 2008, the recession in 2009, and passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. Significant LGBT rights advancements during this time included Vermont becoming the first state to recognize same-sex civil unions in 2000, the Supreme Court ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas* decriminalizing same-sex marriage in Massachusetts in 2004, California's Proposition 8 passes in November 2008 making same-sex marriage illegal and subsequently found unconstitutional by a federal judge in August 2010, the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in 2011, the Democratic Party becomes the first major party to publicly support same-sex marriage on a national platform in 2012, and section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act is struck down by the Supreme Court in *United States v. Windsor* in 2013, ruling that married same-sex couples are entitled to federal benefits.

As we continue to study and understand the process of gay identity development in the context of the narrative commonplaces, research has also looked at development of other non-monolithic groups, such as college students. The following discussion examines research related to the development of LGBT college students.

LGBT student development. Patton, Kortegast, and Javier (2011) discussed the growing presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) millennial students in college and the ways in which institutions and student affairs professionals could foster campus climates that are welcoming and inviting for these students. Patton et al (2011) noted the centrality and complexity of identity development and argued that psychosocial development models are insufficient for explaining the diversity among the developmental experiences of LGBTQ people and that alternative models have yet to be adopted within student affairs. The authors argued further that many models and theories also do not consider the intersection of LGBTQ, ethnic, and racial identities. Patton et al

(2011) cited the work of Savin-Williams (2005), which named the "differential development trajectory" of identity development (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 82) and its use for understanding identity development as a continuous process that honors the individual's development as a journey rather than just a destination. A key aspect of this process "involves naming one's own reality and to which community one belongs in a society that emphasizes and thrives on particular labels" (Patton, Kortegast, and Javier, 2011, p. 177).

Patton and Chang (2011) argued that traditional approaches to understanding college students relied on compartmentalizing identities as opposed to understanding how they intersect, how systems of oppression influence such intersections, and the impact of shifting social locations on individuals. Patton and Chang (2011) examined the diversity among millennial college students, with particular emphasis on those occupying multiple oppressive spaces as related to gender, sexual, and racial identities. The authors identified three areas for advancing the research on sexual identity: an understanding of what it means to be heterosexual; understanding the ways in which sexual identities intersect and collide with classed, gendered, and raced identities; and examining the social locations of individuals in order to challenge the use of traditional theories thereby understanding how societal structures make it possible or impossible to define "LGBTQ identities in personal and sociocultural contexts" (Patton and Chang, 2011, 196).

The Millennial Generation

Millennial gay men (those born between 1981 and 1996) who successfully transition between rural and urban places are at the center of this research. As discussed in chapter three, the population of this study spans the AIDS-2 and Equality generations

proposed by Hammack et al (2018) and Ghaziani's (2015) Post-Equality era. Though generational cohorts and geographic areas are far from homogenous, this research sought to explore the similarities and differences of the experiences of the participants. These life course models of health, identity development, and historic events added to the research puzzle examining participants' experiences and how they influenced their self-understanding, social participation, and sense of community.

A report (Frey, 2018) provided a rich analysis of the diverse composition of the millennial generation and the prediction the group - now 44 percent minority - will serve as bridgers to a more diverse future in which there is a white minority by the mid-2040s. As Frey pointed out, disparities in education, forming families, income, and housing exist along racial and ethnic lines, though he acknowledges that social and economic opportunities vary considerably in local contexts throughout the country. As such, Frey stressed the importance of elected officials, industry leaders, and community institutions understanding the role Millennials will play in shaping America's future. The diversity of the millennial generation is reflected in linguistic proficiency, immigration status, and interracial marriages. Millennials are marrying later than previous young adults and are more likely to live with their parents or in multifamily homes. Millennials also continue the upward trend of increased educational attainment, including higher rates of college enrollments and graduation rates among racial and ethnic minorities as well as decreased high school dropout rates for these groups. Frey (2018) emphasized the "cultural generation gap" (p. 31) and noted the role the millennial generation will play in bridging the divide between an older, whiter America and a vastly more diverse post-millennial

America, though the long-lasting social, economic, and political impacts resulting from such a millennial bridge are yet to be realized.

Millennials and education. Vacarro (2009) noted that generational communities are formed when people are bound together by experiencing historical events at particular life moments and yet accounted for the diversity of experiences between as well as within generations. The author studied three generations of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people at one university, which revealed intergenerational perceptions of difference where there existed similarities and actual differences in identity development related to coming out, family support, expressing sexual identity, and activism. Notably, participants from older generations expressed struggling with their sexual identities and managing feelings of difference whereas millennial youth described their identities as more complex and fluid with an increased awareness of how race, gender, sexual orientation shaped their identity.

Patton, Kortegast, & Javier (2011) discussed the growing presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) millennial students in college and the ways in which institutions and student affairs professionals could foster campus climates that are welcoming and inviting for these students. Patton et al (2011) noted the centrality and complexity of identity development and argued that psychosocial development models are insufficient for explaining the diversity among the developmental experiences of LGBTQ people and that alternative models have yet to be adopted within student affairs. The authors argued further that many models and theories also do not consider the intersection of LGBTQ, ethnic, and racial identities. Patton et al (2011) cited the work of Savin-Williams (2005), which named the "differential development trajectory" of identity development (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 82) and its use for understanding identity

development as a continuous process that honors the individual's development as a journey rather than just a destination. A key aspect of this process "involves naming one's own reality and to which community one belongs in a society that emphasizes and thrives on particular labels" (Patton, Kortegast, and Javier, 2011, p. 177).

Dungy (2011), noting similarities and differences within the millennial cohort, argued for exercising caution when labeling generations and to avoid applying broad generalizations. Participants identified generational defining moments including the attacks on 9/11, reality TV, mobile phones and social networks, mass shootings on college campuses, YouTube, the great recession, Wikipedia, and Barack Obama's election. Other similarities among the participants included reliance on technology, orientation toward social justice and environmental issues, and involvement in volunteer activities. There were, however, differences and associated effects within the cohort, including privilege related to economic class and immigration and competing views about campus climate issues of race and diversity.

LGBT Millennials. Dunlap (2014) examined the differences in coming-out experiences over time and argued that younger generations have experienced decreasing social stigma. Patton and Chang (2011) noted that traditional approaches to understanding college students relied on compartmentalizing identities as opposed to understanding how they intersect, how systems of oppression influence such intersections, and the impact of shifting social locations on individuals. Patton and Chang (2011) examined the diversity among millennial college students, with particular emphasis on those occupying multiple oppressive spaces as related to gender, sexual, and racial identities.

Theories and models used for understanding LGBTQ identity development were not without their critics, including Patton & Chang (2011). Those models developed by Cass (1979, 1984), D'Augelli (1994), Fox (1995), McCarn and Fassinger (1996), Robin and Hammer (2000), and Troiden (1988) were noted by Patton and Chang (2012) as instrumental to understanding these development processes but were not without limitations. Stage-based theories, for example, were overly linear and failed to "accurately predict significant developmental events and the order in which they occur, if at all" (Patton and Chang, 2011, p. 195). These theories often failed to account for the complexities of sexual identity development, falsely assumed that processes were the same for women and men, and often relied on White or male participants, had low participation in general, or lacked solid research foundations.

The contributions of Fassinger & Miller (1996), McCarn & Fassinger (1996), and Tomlinson & Fassinger (2003) were also recognized by Patton & Chang (2012) as important for understanding the way context and culture influence identity and how a more advanced identity was not necessarily dependent on public disclosure (i.e., the coming out process). D'Augelli's (1994) sexual orientation lifespan model moved beyond the linear models previously established and acknowledged that lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities are fluid and shift over the course of people's lives. A critique, however, was the treatment of bisexuality as a process toward a gay or lesbian identity as opposed to an identity of its own.

Three additional areas for advancing the research on sexual identity, as identified by Patton & Chang (2011) include developing an understanding of what it means to be heterosexual; understanding the ways in which sexual identities intersect and collide with

classed, gendered, and raced identities; and examining the social locations of individuals in order to challenge the use of traditional theories thereby understanding how societal structures make it possible or impossible to define "LGBTQ identities in personal and sociocultural contexts" (Patton and Chang, 2011, 196).

Each of the narrative commonplaces were simultaneously integrated into each phase of this inquiry. Of significant interest from the outset of this study was the role of place, and of migration between different places, and the influence this has on one's sense of community. The following section reviews literature related to the changing nature of communities, the relationship between geography and sexuality, and an overview of queer migration.

Place

If Ellison's (1995) connection between place and sense of self is to be assumed true, then it is important to understand how research has made explicit how we - and our identities - are shaped by the places where we are and where we have been. The experiences under study in my narrative inquiry involved moving between rural and urban places and each participant represented different directionality (e.g., rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural, rural-urban-rural). This section reviews literature on (sense of) community, Census definitions, and distinctions between urban and rural places, and the changing rural-urban interface in America. The discussion continues with a review of research chronicling the relationship between geography and sexuality and concludes with a review of studies examining queer migration in the United States.

Community

Durkheim (1964) recognized that society in a modern context developed community around interests and skills more so than it did around locality. Similarly, Gusfield (1975) made a distinction between two major uses of the word community, with one being the territorial or geographic rooted in place, such as the neighborhood or city, and the other being relational. In the latter, human relationships are emphasized without regard for location. McMillan & Chavis (1986) proposed a definition and theory of sense of community after considering other research and factors such as interaction, safety, pro-urbanism, neighboring preferences, localism, length of residency, community involvement commitment and satisfaction, neighborhood attachment, feeling of belonging, and more (Doolittle & MacDonald, 1978; Glynn, 1981; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; Riger, LeBailly & Gordon, 1981; Ahlbrant & Cunningham, 1979; Bachrach & Zautra, 1985). The authors identified recurring emphasis on neighboring, length of residence, home ownership, and community satisfaction (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). As a result of their study, McMillan & Chavis (1986) established four criteria to define a sense of community, including membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection. These criteria were developed to transcend and apply equally to territorial and relational communities.

In the intervening years since the aforementioned studies were completed, work on community and community development has continued to make distinctions between types of community. With the proliferation of the internet around the globe, scholars such as Stern & Dillman (2006) have continued to probe community participation and social ties in the digital age. The authors cited opposing views on the influence of the internet

on the local community such as those who believe the internet distracts from the local area and weakens community ties (Kraut et al, 1998) or those who view the usefulness of the internet as a tool for community organizing to achieve shared interests (Hampton & Wellman, 2003).

In response, scholars such as Bradshaw (2008) have continued problematizing the definition of community going so far as to redefine the very concept of community as “post-place” where the emphasis is placed on networks, solidarity, shared identity and norms that may not necessarily be tied to a particular place. A useful framework that distinguishes between types of community and the scholarly and practitioner work happening within them is used by the Community Innovation Lab (CIL), which is part of the Department of Community and Leadership Development at the University of Kentucky. The CIL (“Community Innovation Lab,” n.d.) focuses on three distinct but interconnected types of communities including community of place (geographic), community of practice (common norms, values, or foci), and community of interest (common areas of work or professions). Each of these three types of community was examined in this study, beginning with a particular emphasis on communities of place, as the experiences of millennial gay men transitioning between rural and urban areas were at the heart of the inquiry.

Census Definitions

Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields (2016) explained that the U.S. Census Bureau for any location with 50,000 or more people is considered urban and everything else is considered rural. Changing population trends, technology, and the users of Census data illuminate the need for updating the way urban and rural have been defined and

measured. The definition and method of measurement have also evolved to recognize other characteristics, such as population density, land use, and distance in developed areas. Because of the implications that Census data can have on our daily lives, such as congressional representative apportionment and qualification for federal funds, it is important to understand how these places are defined before attempting to understand characteristics of the people therein.

In the early iterations of the Census in the late nineteenth century, the Bureau (US Census Bureau, “Agency History FAQs,” n.d.) classified cities and towns as urban if they contained at least 2,500 people, while any places with fewer people were considered rural. The threshold of 50,000 persons for urban classification began with the 1950 Census and geographers used paper maps through 1980 to update geographic boundaries and began using a geographic information system (GIS) as of the 1990 Census. It is important to note, however, that before advanced computing technology was available, large urbanized areas were the only places where the density-based approach could be used. The 2,500-person threshold remained the standard for smaller clusters of developed areas until the 1990 Census. As of 2000, a two-type reclassification was issued for urban areas to include urbanized areas and urban clusters with the latter consisting of at least 2,500 but less than 50,000 people. As mentioned above, all populations, houses, and lands not included in an urban area or cluster are considered rural. Rural areas include a variety of developments including small towns, subdivisions skirting areas, and remote areas with sparse populations.

In an update to the U.S. Census Bureau blog, Holder, Fields, & Lofquist (2016) provided additional analysis for the 60 million Americans living in rural areas of the

United States and some characteristics about them, according to the classification system of completely rural (100% living in rural areas), mostly rural (50.0% to 99.9% living in rural areas), and mostly urban (less than 50% living in rural areas). Of the 3,142 counties in the United States, 704 qualify as completely rural, representing some 5.3 million Americans; this in contrast to 1,185 mostly rural counties (36.8 million people), 1,254 mostly urban counties (266.6 million people), and 29 counties with 0.0% rural population. The report went on to detail some characteristic differences among rural residents at the county level. For those aged 18 years and older – more than 47 million people – completely rural area adults were older than in the other two categories; only 62.5% of those in mostly urban counties also lived in their state of birth; and living alone was more likely as rurality increased while the percentage of those married decreased. Bachelor's degree holders among rural adults and the percentage of employed adults decreased with increased rurality while the percentage of those adults who were in poverty and uninsured increased with rurality. Rural areas are also home to 13 million children who are less than 18 years old. With increased rurality, the number of children who lived in homes with married couples decreased and increased in homes headed by grandparents. Poverty rates for children living in completely rural counties were also higher compared to mostly rural or mostly urban counties.

The New Rural-Urban Interface

Though definitions of rural and urban have varied and changed over time, and the distinction between the two has become increasingly blurred in recent years; understanding migration between and within rural and urban places is also a distinctive feature of my research. Quantitative researchers have examined the role of rapid

globalization, fluctuating economies, shifting geographic boundaries, and political changes domestically and internationally in places including the United States, Canada, Australia, and throughout Asia. While big data can quantify the number of people in given places and demonstrate these trends over time, raw figures dehumanize the lived experiences of the people being studied. Qualitative researchers have also attempted to chronicle the lived experiences of people in cities and in the countryside and some recent research questions whether we have reached a period of post-place and post-community (Bradshaw, 2008).

As Garner (2017) noted, the rural-urban binary has been the basis of research that has typified, perhaps falsely, the ideal representations of rural and urban life or has quantitatively measured residential changes without a complete understanding of the nuances of these changes. Garner (2017) called for a social-constructionist approach to understanding the blurring of rural-urban boundaries, noting that people come to define and understand their social milieu through interaction with others in the community with little or no regard for official rural or urban classification.

Lichter & Ziliak (2017) argued that while the rural-urban divide is ever pronounced, the rural and the urban are more integrated as well as socially and economically interdependent on one another than ever before. The authors noted that urban centers are where media, money, and politics shape culture, and where fresh ideas, jobs, and technology are born. Meanwhile, rural places are omitted from policy discussions and decision-making and rural Americans are left behind.

Acknowledging the new rural-urban interface, Lichter & Ziliak (2017) noted changing social and symbolic boundaries as reflective of and reinforcing of forces which

maintain economic, political, and social hierarchies as well as spatial inequality.

Distinguishing between symbolic and social boundaries, the authors defined symbolic as a method to categorize or classify people, objects, or geographic space. Social boundaries involve a qualitative assessment or value judgment of the worth of the people, objects, or space on each side of the boundary. The new interface, the authors asserted, blurs the aforementioned traditional boundaries and defies the binary of rural versus urban.

Lichter & Ziliak (2017) also attributed changing rural-urban boundaries to ongoing social processes, including boundary shifting, crossing, and blurring. Boundary shifting involves redefining the actual boundary; one example of such shifting involves reclassification by the U.S. government based on changes in the population. Boundary crossing involves the flow of ideas, money, and people between rural and urban areas; this demonstrates the permeability of boundaries which has the potential to reduce isolation and increase economic and political capital. Blurring involves the degree of ambiguity of social and symbolic boundaries; blurring makes these boundaries more difficult to observe, rendering the traditional binary less useful.

Geography and Sexuality

While making a distinction between rural and urban places is important for contextualizing the influence of place in this study, it is also important to understand the relationship between physical place and life for Americans who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Recent research, discussed below, has also explored whether the notion of post-place, as well as rural-urban and urban-urban migration, have contributed to the assimilation of the “gayborhood” into mainstream society to the detriment of the LGBT community.

Gorman-Murray, Pini, & Bryant (2013) examined the intersections of and connections between sexuality, rurality, and geography; their work explored emotional embodiment and desires, disciplinary social and political structures interpersonal relationships, physical and human geographies, and more. Of particular relevance to my research, the editors dedicated a section to rural gay, lesbian, and queer (GLQ) experiences. First, rural is viewed as space for sexual minorities to belong and to be alienated. Some media have presented the rural as an idyllic locale where eroticism, masculinity, nature, and innocence converge. The rural may also be viewed as a place where sexual minorities are "silenced, closeted, and hidden" (Gorman-Murray, Pini, and Bryant, 2013, p. 3). As such, research shows different motivations for LGBT persons on the move; some do indeed navigate to the city to escape the countryside, while others escape the city for a more peaceful return-to-the-land existence, and others still may continue moving between rural and urban spaces for any number of reasons not limited to the need for safety or escape (I'll have to work on a citation for this because 4-5 articles are coming to mind).

Gorman-Murray et al (2013) also acknowledged the dominant narrative of rural-to-urban migration, wherein the city is viewed as a locale in which sexual identity is enabled and tolerance is a virtue juxtaposed against the rural as a place of persecution and absence of sexual minorities. Notions of alienation and belonging represent lived experiences and the editors contended that these lived experiences "both reflect and inform spatial imaginaries of rural life" (Gorman-Murray, Pini, and Bryant, 2013, p. 4).

Gorman-Murray et al (2013) also made distinctions between rural GLQ groups, including those native to rural places and those who choose to move there. The natives,

or "country-born-and bred folk" must choose between moving out or staying put; with those moving out typically relocating to the city. Some who move out choose to stay in the city and others return to rural locales. Others, those city-born and move to the rural, may do so for personal or political reasons. Notable groups with such motivations include separatist groups such as "back-to-the-land" lesbians and gay male groups called radical faeries.

Sex and the city. Aldrich (2004) drew connections between the urban spaces and homosexuality dating back to ancient civilizations and credited the city as the place with a larger selection of partners, where crowds offer greater anonymity, and where much gay and lesbian culture was developed. Aldrich (2004) noted that homosexuality is embedded and observable in the city in several ways, including the "sexual topography" (gay venues and neighborhoods); "urban occasions" (balls, carnivals, parades, and other celebrations); and associations and membership organizations and the movements they sponsor (pp. 1731-1732). Similarly, Brown (2008) followed the research on gay men and gay city spaces as well as the changing social and cultural attitudes about sexuality and their impact on urban dwellers. Brown (2008) noted that while extant research provided guidance for the study of urban homosexualities, they were limited to a few major North American and European metro areas and thus limited the scope of gay identities and spatialities.

Hubbard, Gorman-Murray, & Nash (2015) provided an extensive overview of research on cities and sexuality and concluded that sexual diversity and experimentation, while generally attributed to cities, was more often associated with urban over suburban and to gay "villages" in particular. Second, both queer choice and constraint influence

boundaries between and spaces within heterosexual and heteronormative urban and suburban places. Further, shifting moral views and the commodification of queer sex have resulted in mixed neighborhoods that are increasingly queer-friendly. Hubbard et al (2015) rested on the notion that important questions remain regarding the intersection of class, race, and gender with sexuality and place. Further exploration of the relationship between the LGBT community, gay males in particular, and place in the context of rural and urban America over time became an important aspect of my research.

The rise and fall of the gayborhood. Ghaziani (2015) described the longtime, global connections between the city and sexuality and provided a queer sexual history of the United States spanning the late nineteenth century to the present. Noting the timelessness of sexual behavior, Ghaziani (2015) acknowledged that around 1870 the term and pathology of the homosexual emerged as medical professionals used sexuality as a diagnosis. This marked the beginning of what Ghaziani (2015) coined as the Closet Era, defined by 'scattered gay places.'

In the late 1900s, men and women began identifying as gay, to have a sense of community, and to politically organize based on that identity and community affiliation. However, this era was marked by the conflict between honoring the private experience of being gay and conforming to dominant societal expectations. This pre-war era, though represented by the proverbial closet, was marked by three myths: the myth of isolation (that the times compelled gays and lesbians to lead solitary lives); the myth of invisibility (if a queer world did exist, it could not be found); and the myth of internalization (societal norms of homosexuality as sickness were internalized). Contrarily, gays and lesbians constructed gay cities in public spaces in the midst of heteronormativity.

Next, Ghaziani (2015) identified the Coming Out Era, spanning from World War II through 1997, punctuated by the formation (the 1940s) and flourishing (the 1970s) of the gayborhood. Crediting World War II as a national coming out experience, Ghaziani (2015) noted how men and women dramatically increased the population of major military bases, often urban areas, including Chicago, Miami, New Orleans, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington DC. Men and women alike were increasingly discharged from their service due to their perceived or actual homosexuality; these urban concentrations of gays and lesbians changed the landscape as formal gay neighborhoods, or gayborhoods, were formed.

Distinctions about the changing relationship between the city and sexuality have emphasized that while the gayborhood may not have altogether disappeared, it has at least been in a constant fluid state, changing with culture and society and perhaps reaching a point of being post-gay (Burstin, 1994; Ghaziani, 2015; Brown 2014; Nash, 2012). Ghaziani (2015) defined the third era as the Post-Gay Era, spanning the end of the twentieth century (1998) to the present. Ghaziani (2015) provided several possible indicators of this: the closing of establishments such as queer bars and bookstores, an increase of heterosexuals moving in, and more frequent moving out of gays and lesbians. Demographers followed these trends by analyzing zip codes typically associated with gayborhoods and the changing numbers of same-sex households therein.

One characteristic of this is the gendered nature of casual discourse and formal research inquiry which has typically focused on gay men, which serves as erasure for lesbian experiences. Gendered economic inequality is also persistent between male and female same-sex households. Ghaziani (2015) stressed that while changes have occurred

in urban places, they have also occurred in rural places; the author, like others, also challenged both the rural-urban binary and a notion toward metronormativity. Such issues discussed here create the need for further explorations of the intersections of place, sexuality, and identities, including class, gender, and race.

Queering the countryside. Shifting focus away from the city, the following discussion focuses on the relationship between queer persons and rurality. Beginning in the 1980s, early studies of rural homosexuals exposed intense heterosexism, homophobia, and isolation among the negative effects on the psychological well-being of gays in the countryside (D'Augelli and Hart, 1987; Moses and Hawkins, 1980). Isolation and binaries between the rural and urban as well as the hetero and homo remained central to studying rural queerness, which also included examinations of masculinity (Annes & Redlin, 2008, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Bell and Valentine, 1995; Fellows, 1996; Kramer, 1995; Loffreda, 2000).

Bell and Valentine (1995) and Bell (2000) examined the representation of rural homosexuality and masculinity in film, novels, and poetry as well as lived experiences in order to understand the rural. Their work illuminated the rural as an imagined idyll for love and sex between same-sex persons as well as a space that could be constricting or intolerant for those struggling to form a queer identity. In addition to representations in the aforementioned media, other studies examined online representations of rural queer and questioning youth and raised questions about the politics of visibility (Brown, 2008; Gray, 2009). In contrast to studies emphasizing the rich social life of gays in the city and the isolation of the country queer, Kirkey & Forsyth (2001) illuminated the ways in which rural gay men were more integrated into the non-urban community. Gorman-

Murray, Waitt, & Gibson (2008) analyzed the qualities of belonging for gays and lesbians, which included understanding the power relationships in binaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality; experiences and emotions associated with individual and group identities and their attachment to place (safety and security); and finally, the politics of belonging and effects of marginalization.

On the Move: Queer Migration

Kazyak (2012) examined the relationships among place, gender, and sexuality as a way of understanding the gendered (masculine and feminine) acceptance of gays and lesbians in small towns, noting the relationship between femininity and gay sexuality, contrasted with the relationship between masculinity and both the rural and lesbian sexuality. Kazyak (2012) noted that both gay men and lesbian women gained community acceptance by practicing masculinity and suggested that as male femininity does not align with rurality, gay men may struggle to remain in rural areas. Ghaziani (2015) provided an array of arguments as to why so many gay men and lesbian women moved to a small number of cities during what became known as the great gay migration; these arguments were related to community, ecology, economics, history, politics, and sexuality. Garner (2017) suggested that to understand the importance of rurality and urbanity to people is to understand the processes by which they come to culturally understand identity, place, and space.

By extension, I propose, this will also illuminate their sense of community and their social participation. My research storied the rural-urban transition experiences of millennial gay men, attending specifically to the ways in which education and leadership experiences shaped their identity development, their sense of community, and their civic

engagement. The resulting narrative portraits serve as counter-narratives to the cultural, institutional, social, and linguistic ones that influence the lives of the participants.

Gorman-Murray (2007a) emphasized the usefulness of autobiographical accounts of sexual minorities for understanding the relationship between people and geographies. This geographic inquiry, particularly of marginalized populations “tap into collective identities, practices, and processes of community-formation while remaining sensitive to the diverse experiences described by different individuals through their personal narratives” (p. 8). Gorman-Murray (2007a) also acknowledged the role of queer storytelling as a means of liberation and disrupting the heteronormative master narrative. Further, the dominant western narrative of gay and lesbian stories is one based on coming out of the closet, notably a spatial metaphor and link between space and identity. This link became central to his continued interrogation of queer migration, which had previously been observed through the rural-urban binary and primarily as rural-to-urban displacement (Gorman-Murray, 2007b). Studies of queer migration through the mid-2000s were criticized for their narrow views of migration from homophobic rural places to accepting urban ones, and that such migrations were conflated with coming out and moving out linear paths with finality (Gorman-Murray, 2007b; Lewis 2012).

Gorman-Murray, Pini, & Bryant (2013) cited examples of rural community incorporation and acceptance of gays, lesbians, and queers (GLQ), inextricably linked to themes of anti-urban stances, class, community, consumption, rural gentrification, sexuality, and "mainstreaming of GLQ identities, relationships, and communities" (p. 6). The authors also suggested that the newest area of GLQ work is based upon rural sexual citizenship, with key questions pertaining to GLQ political visibility, ongoing tensions

between alienation and belonging, and the influence of social inclusion legislation, planning, and policy. The authors cited research that examines the relationship between individuals and society as well as understanding layers of structures that influence cultural, legal, political, and social norms. The narrative design of my research brings cultural, institutional, social, and linguistic narratives to the fore; the stories of my participants serve as counter-narratives to the hetero, white, male narratives which otherwise dominate in communities and the academy.

Annes & Redlin (2012a, 2012b, 2013) examined the rural-urban transition experiences of American and French gay men, particularly how movement between the rural and urban spaces influenced how participants developed a sense of self and understood discourses of masculinity. The authors, like other researchers introduced above, noted that previous migration studies focused on the suppressive nature of rural spaces and the appeal of the city as an accepting place of same-sex desire. This unidirectional focus, however, was challenged due to the limited understanding it provided for the movement of gay individuals, the false necessity of moving to the city in order to develop a gay identity, and the existence of a fully formed and fixed urban identity. For the participants, the city was not the final destination in their migration, though their urban experiences played an important role in shaping their identity. The authors found that the city served the function of transitional space and emphasized the back-and-forth movements between spaces as more meaningful in developing a gay identity, citing a need to better understand both the departure from and return to rural places.

The research by Annes & Redlin (2012a, 2012, 2013) and Gorman-Murray (2007b), as they focused on queer migrations, were concerned with identity quests, or journeys through space and time in search of an integrated, whole self in community with others. The temporal and spatial dynamics were as central to these studies as my own. The authors also acknowledged that just as there is a plurality of heterosexual experiences that can contradict one another, so too there is a plurality of experiences of LGBT people. As such, their research did not seek to create a universal and uniform rural experience. Similarly, as is discussed further in chapter three, the intent of my study was not to generalize or advance a universal experience of millennial gay men on the move. These studies provided a useful foundation upon which I could model my own study and I expanded the focus of the inquiry to not only hear and re-tell stories about rural-urban transition experiences for gay men and the impact on their gay identity but to also understand how these experiences shaped their views about and engagement in leadership development.

Leadership Development

Leadership theories have evolved over time beginning with trait-based approaches to leadership in times of crises to process-oriented, relational models in response to a rapidly changing world (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013). Foundational principles of these current leadership theories include the notion that leadership concerns us all; is valued differently in different cultures and disciplines; that conventional views about leadership have changed; leadership is demonstrated in different ways; that qualities and skills of leadership can be developed and learned; and that ethical action should inform leadership for change and social responsibility. (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2013).

Selected literature in this section examines student leadership development and the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model as well as a discussion about Authentic Leadership approaches.

Student Leadership Development

In the mid-2000s, Susan Komives and associates conducted a grounded theory study aimed at understanding the process behind developing leader capacity or leader identity in college students. The results of this data were subsequently used to create the stage-based Leadership Identity Development (LID) Model through which students deepen their self-awareness and come to see themselves as leaders. The LID model demonstrated the way relational leadership develops and signaled a shift away from skill-building and short-term training programs to better understand the complex process of a changing leader identity over time (Komives et al, 2005, p. 594).

The stages of leadership identity development in the LID model are Awareness, Exploration/Engagement, Leader Identified, Leadership Differentiated, Generativity, and Integration/Synthesis. In the Awareness stage, the student recognizes that leadership is happening around them and the student gains exposure to involvements. In the Exploration/Engagement stage, the student begins intentional involvement (clubs, organizations, sports, etc.); the student experiences group dynamics and begins assuming responsibilities. In the third stage, Leader Identified, the student assumes new roles and responsibilities, identifies needed skills, and begins to value individual accomplishments. The fourth stage is Leadership Differentiated, in which the student joins with others in shared tasks or goals, understands the need for developing group skills, and develops a new belief that leadership is non-positional and may come from anywhere in the group.

Generativity, the fifth stage, includes the student's active commitment to a personal passion as well as acceptance of responsibility for developing others and sustaining organizations. In the final stage, Integration/Synthesis, the student continues self-development and lifelong learning while striving for congruence and internal confidence (Komives, Longerbeam, Mainella, Osteen, & Owen, 2009). This is a useful framework for understanding the individual development of college students as relational leaders and is stage-based like the aforementioned models of identity development.

The attention to the ways in which leadership identity develops over time stuck out to me as I considered the research design for this study, as did the time at which the study took place because participants whose leadership was under study were college age in the early to mid-2000s and therefore represented the millennial generation. However, participants in the study were nominated by faculty and other leaders at the university because of their demonstrated ability or being perceived as leader-like. Because the participants in my study were not college age at the time of the study, nor was being a leader in the past or present a criterion for participation, the LID model proved limited in its applicability to my study. Komives and her co-researchers also acknowledge that additional research would be required to understand the post-college experiences of adults and the way those experience affect the last stage of the LID model. Just as Hammack et al (2018) called for additional research on gay generational cohorts and Komives et al (2005) called for additional research on the lifespan of leadership development and my research aimed to achieve both.

The LID has also been used to understand leadership in relationship to other social identities such as culture, disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and

social class; Komives recognized these intersecting identities shift and their relative salience for students will shift in different relationships and contexts. Renn & Bilodeau (2005) engaged this area of inquiry as they questioned whether identity-based leadership experiences contribute to the leadership development of students who belong to historically marginalized groups. In their study, Renn & Bilodeau (2005) sought to understand the student outcomes related to leadership development and LGBT involvement based on membership in an LGBT student organization. The authors utilized the LID, despite concerns about its linearity, but valued the model's emphasis on individual leadership in the context of group and acknowledged the centrality of cognitive growth to both leadership and LGBT identity development. Renn & Boileau (2005) also found that the Social Change Model and relational leadership models (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013; Komives & Wagner, 2017) with their social justice orientation were an appropriate fit with queer student leaders and activists who were the focus of their study.

While there is a rich history of student activism and involvement that has influenced student leadership development, there have also been historical trends in the ways in which members of different age groups become civically engaged. The following section examines millennial civic engagement.

Millennial Civic Engagement

The 2018 election shone a spotlight on the divides between individuals and communities with a range of identities, socioeconomic status, and social issues; the election also raised awareness of the decline of trust in American institutions (Bishop, 2017). In polls of American adults, Gallup reported declining confidence in the

presidency, the U.S. Supreme Court, and Congress (Gallup, “Confidence in Institutions,” n.d.). in confidence was also seen in community institutions such as the church, public schools, and the media as well as in economic institutions such as banks, organized labor, and big business (Gallup, “Confidence in Institutions,” n.d.). Along with the decline of confidence in American institutions, scholars such as Robert Putnam (2000) have noted the decline in social capital and civic participation, detailed in his book entitled *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

As Eyoel (2018) pointed out, America will no longer have a single racial or ethnic majority and we suffer from social distrust have yet to embrace the potential and power of diversity and inclusivity. Eyoel (2018) suggested the civic trust crisis and emerging millennial generation presents an opportunity to reignite civil society and building the capacity for millennial civic leadership. The Case Foundation (“Millennial engagement,” n.d.) recognizes millennials as everyday changemakers who see all assets as equal, believe in activism, are passionate about issues not institutions, and support the greater good.

Millennials, set to become the outright largest voting bloc in upcoming elections, demand more transparency and authenticity in institutions and elected officials (Gilman & Stokes, 2014). This call for authentic leadership is expected of others, and as millennials assume leadership positions in all facets of home, community, and work life, they, too, share responsibility for leading authentically. The following section defines authentic leadership and establishes a framework through which the participants in this study were examined for their own individual authentic leadership development.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership “recognizes the impact of hope, trust, and positive emotions and the need to understand the attitudes and behaviors of followers” (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2013, p. 87). Bill George (2007) recognized that you cannot be authentic by trying to be like someone else; that leaders are defined by their life stories and the ways in which those stories reflect their passions and purpose of their leadership. Only by understanding and being true to one’s life story can one undergo the conscious development for successful leadership. For emerging or practicing leaders considering whether to step up and lead authentically, George (2007) encourages them to ask “*If not me, then who? If not now, then when?*” (p. xxix).

By collecting stories about what makes leaders successful in their own view, Bill George came to understand and define the authentic leader as someone who “brings people together around a shared purpose and empowers them to step up and lead authentically in order to create value for all stakeholders” (xxxi). Another characteristic of authentic leaders is that rather than their own success or recognition, they are more concerned with serving others. Through his work, George (2007) developed five dimensions of an authentic leader: pursuing purpose with passion, practicing solid values, leading with heart, establishing enduring relationships, and demonstrating self-discipline. Once the participants in this study had shared their stories, their narratives were analyzed using the five dimensions of authentic leadership as a framework for understanding their individual leadership development. Each of the participants’ narratives incorporated deep reflection on his purpose, values, and relationships in relation to family, friends, educational attainment, and careers in higher education.

Discussion of Studies and Overall Learnings

The studies discussed in this review provide a foundation upon which I developed a narrative inquiry to understand the rural-urban transition experiences of millennial gay men and the way these experiences influenced their identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement. These studies provided theories, protocols, and insights gleaned from previous inquiries into identity development, the connection between geography and sexuality, queer migration, and leadership development. Several of these studies also demonstrated effective use of narrative methodologies to rigorously examine various phenomena and provided insights into the ways I should formulate my research puzzle, engage in the research process, and analyze the narratives I collected.

Conclusions and Contributions

My study contributes to the literature by expanding the research on migration of LGBT people as well as millennials. My study is temporally relevant in this regard as the 2009 recession impacted millennial economic security and mobility and as more LGBT people live openly about their sexuality. Each of these factors have implications for the makeup and vitality of our communities.

Sharing the narratives of the gay, millennial participants is also temporally relevant as millennials make up an increasing share of the management and leadership force and inch closer to be the outright largest voting bloc in the United States. Their narratives serve as counter-narratives that bridge the past, present, and future generations in our society. The participants in this study are all scholars or practitioners in higher education with an orientation toward social justice and are using their narratives to share their experience and transfer knowledge.

The study also contributes to the literature on leadership development by understanding the ways in which the participants – who were not selected because of their past formal leadership training or whether they were in a position of leadership at the time of the study. Instead, the narratives of their lived experiences were used to understand the way they developed authentic leadership over time as a result of their transitions between rural and urban places, their education experiences, and their engagement in the various communities in which they had been a part. The study did not seek to advance a new theory of leadership identity, or to demonstrate how the participants developed leadership in a new, novel way. Instead, the inquiry illuminated the ways in which the participants' individual, particular experiences contributed uniquely, rather than universally, to his leadership development.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to story the rural-urban transition experiences of millennial gay men as well as understand and share how these transitions and participants' educational and leadership experiences influenced their identity development, social participation and sense of community. Narrative inquiry, among the literary genres of arts-based research (ABR), was selected for this research because of its use of storytelling and its focus on lived experiences.

Through semi-structured interviews, I had individual conversations with three participants to learn more about where they were from, the places to which they had moved, and the meaning they made from the experiences they had. Our conversations covered a range of topics of interest such as teachers who made an impact on them, their coming out experiences, dynamics of familial and intimate relationships, and civic and political engagement. I spoke with each participant at length three separate times for a total of nine interviews, with additional personal communication occurring periodically via email with each participant. The following chapter details the methodology used to collect and analyze the narrative data for this study; the chapter includes (1) a description of arts-based research and the subgenre of narrative inquiry; (2) the data collection process; (3) use of the Listening Guide to analyze the data; (4) research ethics; (5) tensions in and evaluation criteria of ABR and narrative inquiry; and (6) limitations experienced during the study.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-Based Research (ABR) is relatively new among various research paradigms and methodologies and emerged as scholars sought to ask and answer research questions

in new ways. ABR, with its focus on illuminating particular rather than universal lived experiences have roots in John Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy. In the discussion that follows, I will describe ABR as a paradigm and umbrella for different genres therein. I will also describe the research methods used in narrative inquiry.

Similar to the emergence of the qualitative paradigm as an alternative to finding objective truth through quantitative inquiry, a new paradigm was needed. This new paradigm, neither truly quantitative nor qualitative in nature, became known as arts-based research (ABR). While more aligned with a qualitative stance, Leavy (2015) argued that what sets ABR apart from other methodologies is its ability to more effectively reach a broader base of audiences, both within and outside of the academy as well as the potential to "jar people into seeing and/or thinking differently, feeling more deeply, learning something new, or building empathetic understandings" (p. 21).

Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund (2008) traced the lineage of current art-based educational research (ABER) beginning with Dewey's focus on learning by doing to a blurring of genres that resulted in "arts-based inquiry," "schol-ARTistry," and "a/r/tography" (p. 6) and finally to a form of arts-based research today with two major strands. These strands include hybrid forms which embrace both science and art as well as art for scholarship's sake. The authors added that "Blurred genres of arts-based research contextualize the creation of art – story, poetry, printmaking, sculpture, autobiography, ethnodrama – within their experimental science..." (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 9). Blurred genres, the authors argued, included several goals, including the incorporation of tools from the arts and sciences to elicit new data and their meaning during and after the research; to broaden participation in the research process – a shift

away from focusing solely on the researcher; and to engage with new and different audiences inside and outside of the academy. Art for the sake of scholarship, on the other hand, was described by the authors as a way for scholarly artists, or scholARTists, to utilize their training to create artworks that represent their research findings in ways that draw forth an emotional response from consumers and interpreters of the art.

It is helpful to consider the questions posed by Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund (2008): in what way does art add to understanding research topics and problems as well as questions about how art is being used, who is using the art and for what purposes, and what outcomes of such use are possible. When considering the most appropriate methodology for research, Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund (2008) acknowledged that all methodologies are not created equal and that researchers must be attentive to the contributions and limitations of each method under consideration. Similarly, Patricia Leavy (2015) acknowledged that arts-based approaches to research are very different from others but no less vigorous or valid. Making the case for using arts-based research methods, Leavy (2015) noted that such approaches are used during all phases of the research, including data collection and analysis as well as interpretation and representation. Like Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008), Leavy (2015) included a variety of artistic mediums present in arts-based research – including dance, film, literary writing, performance, visual art, and others – with some representational forms being collages, drawings, paintings, sculptures, musical and theatrical performances, script writing, short stories, and poetry.

As McNiff (2007) wrote, “Perhaps a defining quality of art-based researchers is their willingness to start the work with questions and a willingness to design methods in

response to the particular situation” (p. 33). McNiff (2007) continued, stating that “Artistic inquiry, whether it is within the context of research or an individual person’s creative expression, typically starts with the realization that you cannot define the final outcome when you are planning to do the work” (p. 40). In defense of using arts-based methods, Leavy (2015) provided an array of strengths of such approaches. As with any methodology, the research should lead to new insights and learning, which is the first strength the author described. Leavy (2015) added ABR is particularly useful to describe, explore, and discover in problem-based or issue-based projects while also examining how our individual lives are connected to and influenced by larger contexts.

Due to the relational and emotional nature of arts-based research, another strength is developing critical consciousness, raising awareness, and empathy. As Leavy (2015) described, “ABR can expose people to new ideas, stories, or images and can do so in service of cultivating social consciousness. This is important in social-justice-oriented research that seeks to reveal power relations (often invisible to those in privileged groups), raise critical race or gender consciousness, build coalitions across groups, and challenge dominant ideologies. In this regard, Susan Finley (2008) posits ABR is a moral and political enterprise” (p. 24). Another strength of ABR is its ability to unsettle stereotypes, challenge dominant ideologies, and include marginalized voices and perspectives. To do so, ABR is often participatory and promotes dialogue; two additional strengths of the methodology.

In addition to the selected strengths described above, Leavy (2015) provided some of the skills possessed by arts-based researchers. Such skills include flexibility, openness, and intuition, honed through spontaneity and improvisation. Arts-based researchers also

develop ethical practice and a values system by authentically incorporating his or her sense of justice, motivations, and hopes for society. Leavy (2015), citing Finley (2008), described the public nature of ABR in which researchers, participants, and audience members have equal roles and stakes in the research, that the research focuses on issues such as diversity and inclusion, and that the role of the audience is considered when designing the research. Two additional skills attributed to ABR by Leavy (2015) include encouraging the researcher to think like an artist as well as a public intellectual. By thinking as an artist, the researcher must consider the artfulness and usefulness of his or her work. Thinking like a public intellectual requires the researcher to consider how the research will be both relevant and accessible to the public, including the language(s) and forms of representation used and the means of disseminating the research. Thinking like a public intellectual also means understanding the personal costs of producing public scholarship and the potential for critique.

ABR is my chosen methodology because I was interested in the particular, individual experiences of how each of my research participants, as opposed to generating a new universal theory of leadership identity development or crafting a single story about the way millennial gay men transition between rural and urban places. While the potential for similarities between my participants' stories existed, universal truth for my participants and others like them was not the aim of this study. Pinnegar & Daynes (2006) addressed the narrative turn from the general to the particular as narrative inquiry deviated from other human science research focused on developing grand narratives, or "theories that could be applied universally, regardless of particular circumstances" (p. 22).

Though similarities and differences emerged during data collection and analysis, the rationale for the methodology was to first and foremost develop the individual narrative portrait for each participant and honor his experiences, as opposed to developing a grand narrative or generalize the experiences of all millennial gay men who have transitioned between rural and urban places. ABR, with its emphasis on the researcher-participant relationship and orientation for scholarship accessible to those inside and outside the academy, is an ideal methodology to utilize for this research. There are, however, limitations of ABR, including tensions in which the arts-based researcher may find her or himself negotiating throughout the research process. These tensions are discussed in the following section followed by criteria for evaluating arts-based research.

Narrative Inquiry

Moving from the broad umbrella of arts-based research, we turn now to the narrative sub-genre of the methodology. According to Bruner (1986), using narrative is the way humans make sense of how everyday events and actions happening around them shape their experiences and that it is “a dialectic between what was expected and what came to pass” (Bruner, 2002, p. 31). Per Chase (2005), narrative research has roots dating back to the early 20th century and the Chicago School and emerging sociological practices there. Chase (2005) noted that in the 1940s and 1950s these practices were largely replaced by quantitative research methods and survey research, and that liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s may be attributed to the renewed popularity of personal narratives. Estrella & Forinash (2007) argued for the possibility of ABR and narrative to disrupt dominant discourses in research and theory and that researchers accomplish this by questioning the accepted ways we have come to understand the world.

Early narrative inquiry research by researchers D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly involved moving alongside teachers in the classroom and giving voice to the experiences of educators involved in curriculum making, achievement testing, and the interconnectedness of teacher and student lives. As they wrote, "Education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The authors explained that narrative inquiry could also be called 'inquiry into narrative'; that it is both phenomenon and method. "Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

It is through telling stories, Clandinin (2006) wrote, that people interpret their pasts and live from day to day and find personal meaning. The narrative inquiry process, Clandinin (2006) wrote, involves such elements as research puzzles, field texts, and research texts, and the inquiry may begin by asking participants to tell their stories or may require the researcher to move alongside the participants as they live out their stories. In the process, Clandinin (2006) wrote, "We negotiate relationships, research purposes, transitions, as well as how we are going to be useful in those relationships" (p. 47).

As Leavy (2015) wrote, "Storytelling and writing are fundamental parts of human life and our study of it" (p. 39). Through storying our lives and experiences, we are able to make meaning from them and relate to the lives of others. Leavy (2015) continued by stating that narrative research has grown in popularity across the disciplines since the

1960s and that researchers employ narrative methods for various reasons, but they share “a common desire to breathe humanity into their work, tell stories (their own and those of others) in more truthful, engaged, and resonant ways, and a desire to do work that has the potential to increase connectivity and reflection” (p. 41). Unlike some traditional research paradigms that are objective in nature, narrative inquiry attends to the particulars of human experience. Pinnegar & Daynes (2007), attributed the turn to narrative inquiry based on the convergence of the researcher-researched relationship, a shift in data from numbers to words, attending to the particular instead of the general, and development of new epistemologies or ways of knowing.

Another salient point that Leavy (2015) made is in regard to the usefulness and necessity of narrative to call to action and impact those involved. Leavy (2015) wrote, “When we represent and share our research, our goal is not simply to expose others to it but to affect those who read our work. The goals of particular projects may vary – educating, raising awareness, exposing falsehoods, building critical consciousness, disrupting dominant ideologies or stereotypes, putting a human face to an issue, and so on – but whatever our objective, we aim to affect our readers” (p. 49). The aim of the narrative method, Leavy (2015) wrote, is to story and re-story the life experiences of the participants in a collaborative way. In doing so, meanings emerge, and the complexity of our stories is illuminated.

Leavy (2015) also wrote about the importance of autoethnography in the narrative process, writing that it “exists on a continuum beginning with researchers sharing personal experiences with their participants, which then become part of the larger research narrative, to wholly autobiographical projects, to those that explicitly combine

autobiographical data and fiction” (p. 52). In engaging autoethnographically, Leavy (2015) wrote, the primary advantage is the possibility of raising self-consciousness and promoting reflexivity. This process requires vulnerability on the part of the researcher and attending to the emotions of the experience. As discussed later in this chapter, my own experiences as a millennial gay man who has transitioned between rural and urban spaces led me to explore this research puzzle. It was necessary for me to understand my experiences and their impact on my identity development, social participation, and sense of community, just as I sought to understand how these factors were experienced by the participants.

Jeong-Hee Kim (2017) discussed three key strengths of narrative methods. The first strength is that one’s story is at the center of the research; voices that may not have been heard before and voices that have been traditionally marginalized are brought to life. Secondly, narrative methods close the gap between research and practice; the participant’s voice is preserved, making the research more approachable and available to broader (non-academic) audiences. Finally, narrative methods allow for telling stories in multiple ways, including autobiographic and performance stories, creative nonfiction, digital stories, documentaries, oral histories, and visual stories.

Narrative Construction of Self

As Norton (2010) noted, “Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world and reorganizing that relationship across time and space” (p. 350). Similarly, Bruner (2004) wrote “We constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and

fears for the future” (p. 4). Sermijn, Devlieger, & Loots (2008) offered a postmodern view of narrative self-construction using the metaphor of a rhizome; a story which has multiple entryways, inherent multiplicity (many dimensions), and no clear hierarchy or structure, thereby allowing for any point in the rhizome to be connected to another.

Jones (2009) described self-authorship as an “integrated view of development” (p. 288) and occurs when individuals experience more complex understandings of her or his own intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive development. Jones (2009) also connected self-authorship to intersectionality as a means of understanding identity categories and their relationship to power, privilege, and inequality perpetuated by social systems. Such an approach emphasizes holistic development and orientation toward social justice. This notion of holistic development resounded across studies of identity development including through identity quests, seeking temporal continuity and coherence, and integration of the self (Annes & Redlin, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; McAdams, 1988; McLean, 2008, 2010). McAdams (1988) and McClean (2008) emphasized that forming an integrative life story allows us to interpret the past and present, to anticipate the future and that it is an ongoing process over the life course. These authors added that it is through sharing stories with others that our identities are constructed and maintained.

McClean (2008, 2010) also described the importance of culture and society in narrative identity work and for researchers to understand the master narratives, or story structures, which we accept as the truth for particular people at a particular time and place. By understanding the ways in which we construct our individual stories in relation to broader social narratives, we also become attuned with what society privileges and silences as we attempt to make our stories known. Stories of gay men serve as narratives

counter to those privileged in a heteronormative society; though the social climate for LGBT individuals has evolved rapidly over the past half-century, there is work left to do in pursuit of previously unheard voices.

Methods for the Study

For new and experienced narrative inquirers alike, Clandinin's (2013) framework of design considerations to work through was an invaluable resource when designing this study. The seven design considerations are research puzzles, entering in the midst, from the field to field texts, from field texts to interim research texts, from interim research texts to research texts. In this section, I will briefly describe the research participants in this study and work through each design consideration with regard to each of the participants and myself as the researcher.

Research Puzzles

Narrative inquirers should first identify "research puzzles" (p. 43) as opposed to research questions. Narrative inquiry is not considered to be a research destination; rather, as Clandinin (2013) makes clear, we begin and end in the midst of the experience. Taking into consideration Clandinin's (2013) "shattered mirror" (p. 42) metaphor, my approach to this research puzzle was to see how the many pieces of lived experiences of myself and others made up and were reflected through narratives at various points over time. Reiterated here are the two questions that frame my research puzzle: (1) what are the experiences of millennial gay men who transition between rural and urban places, and (2) how did these transitions and participants' educational and leadership experiences influenced their identity development, social participation and sense of community.

My research puzzle was to understand the rural-urban transition experiences of millennial gay men. I did not know what I would find out. They might have very similar experiences. They might have vastly different experiences. I wanted to know what it is like to move between a rural and urban space one or more times and the participants' migrations were multi-directional. In addition to moving between places, I wanted to understand the influence of school and leadership experiences on their identity development, their sense of community, and their civic engagement. Once the participants' stories had been told, it was then another matter of how share them and utilize them to change practice.

Research Participants and Recruitment

The population of interest for my study included millennial (born 1981-1996) men who self-identified as gay, who had transitioned between rural and urban places, and who were high achievers (those who were enrolled in or had recently completed a Ph.D. at the time of the study). As I have made strategic decisions about the characteristics of my participants, I considered the feasibility of finding participants who meet the criteria. Had I used another methodology other than narrative inquiry for this study, I would have been more concerned about the sample size and collecting enough data to generate themes or new knowledge that would be transferable to other contexts. However, because I chose to illuminate and honor the particular experiences of each participant, I was less concerned about some individual criteria such as the participants' race and ethnicity or place of origin.

As gay millennials, we are the age group that is taking over classrooms, city halls, and institutions of higher education. We are becoming professors, mentors, and

supervisors. Some of us are preparing to be university administrators, elected officials, and public servants. We are assuming these roles during a time when social acceptance of historically marginalized groups is improving and as the population more generally is becoming more culturally, ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse. We are making change and I felt as though if it is our time, we need to be prepared. We need to be able and ready and willing to make that difference, make that change, assume that responsibility. How do we start to change that? If not us, then who? It is our time.

Of less concern was the direction in which the participants had transitioned, given ample literature that has examined rural-to-urban and urban-to-rural transitions and which recognizes ongoing multidirectionality in LGBT migration. The research puzzle was formed after the 2016 election when the rural-urban divide was exceptionally pronounced, and I was curious about those who could potentially bridge the divide. I was intrigued by this idea of who are the people that are moving within and across these spaces. What value are they bringing to that experience?

Being a leader or self-identified leader or identified by someone else as a leader was also not a specific criterion, largely because the leadership studies discipline generally recognizes that leaders are made rather than born (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2013); Kouzes & Posner, 2016), and each of my participants was presumed to have developed leadership capacity in some manner. Recognizing that the purpose of my research was not to advance a new grand leadership theory or to generalize the leadership development of gay millennial men, I continued narrowing the participant criteria so that I had a small group of men to work with to tell and honor their individual, particular experiences and the meanings they made from them. I also sought to illuminate the

experiences of a few, rather than a generalizable conclusion, given that neither millennials, gay men, nor rural and urban dwellers are monolithic groups.

I began recruitment for the study with the intention of inviting three participants; three to avoid potentially creating a false binary upon analyzing similarities and differences in the narratives. With such narrow criteria, my recruitment strategy utilized purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) in order to produce an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants through the selection of cases that are information-rich and would help solve my research puzzle. I also utilized convenience sampling (Patton, 2002) by reaching out to two known potential participants and invited them to join the study. One of the known participants aged out of eligibility for the study and the other had scheduling conflicts that prevented us from conducting interviews during the timeframe of the study. As a result, recruitment utilized snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002) and the use of referrals.

Two of the three men were recruited after posting the request for participants on social media; one from an online group for gay men who are either currently involved in agriculture or had been previously and one from an online group for queer academics. The third participant was referred to me by a faculty member in the Ph.D. program. The participants' transition experiences represented multi-directionality between rural and urban places. As a matter of coincidence, one participant made a primarily rural-to-urban transition, another made a primarily urban-to-rural transition, and the third made a full rural-to-urban and back to rural transition. In my own experience, I began my journey in a rural place and subsequently moved between diverse rural and urban communities as I pursued work and higher education opportunities.

Entering in the Midst

Beginning the narrative process involves asking participants to tell stories or moving alongside them in the making of studies as they unfold. "Negotiating entry is commonly seen as an ethical matter framed in terms of principles that establish responsibilities for both researchers and practitioners. However, another way of understanding the process as an ethical matter is to see it as a negotiation of a shared narrative unity" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). Because of the collaborate nature of narrative research, Connelly and Clandinin noted the close relationship between the researcher and the researched. The authors encourage narrative inquirers to ensure that all participants have a voice within that relationship.

Clandinin (2013) described how narrative inquiry will lead to researchers "moving into living alongside" (p. 43) their participants. That is, narrative inquirers, join their participants in a process and journey with an appreciation for how the research and sharing of our experiences with one another have the power and possibility to change us. Though none of the participants in this study were located in close proximity to me, we connected virtually with video and audio functions for each of our conversations. This way, we could still see and hear one another, which provided a surprising level of connection.

From Field to Field Texts (Data Generation)

As opposed to the traditional term of data collection, Clandinin (2013) referred to information gathering in narrative inquiry as developing field texts. Field texts may include an array of items and generally consist of interview recordings and transcripts, notes taken during interviews or conversations with participants, and other artifacts.

Recording and transcribing interviews, including when establishing the research relationship, conversations about rural and urban community, stories about education and leadership experiences, and the conversations about found and created artifacts (such as photographs or other memory box items) are all opportunities to document field texts.

Most narrative inquiries, Clandinin (2013) wrote, begin with a researcher engaging in conversations with participants who tell stories about their experiences. As Caine (2010), described, "Listening to individuals tell their stories visually means to attend closely to the ambiguities, complexities, difficulties, and uncertainties embedded in visual images - imagery and visual expressions that reflect the uniqueness of an individual's life (John-Steiner 1985) ..." (p. 484). Using narrative inquiry for the primary methodology, my research design included a series of three individual and in-depth conversations/interviews with three participants.

Interview protocol. Atkinson's (2002) life story interview guide was used as a guide for developing the interview protocol for the study. Adapting the guide to fit my desired semi-structured interview protocol, I developed a plan for three, two-hour interviews exploring five distinct parts: (1) the story outline; (2) critical events; (3) influences on the story; (4) personal ideology; and (5) story theme. The first interview was intended to focus entirely on part 1, the story outline, which was meant to capture the essence of each participants' story and to understand the story arc or plot and the characters therein. The first interview was expected last approximately two hours. The second interview was meant to focus on parts 2 and 3, critical events (one hour) and influences on the story (one hour). The third interview was meant to be dedicated to the personal ideology (one hour) and the story theme (one hour).

As the conversations began and unfolded, each participant moved back and forth across time and space as he told his story. As such, none of the three sets of interviews closely followed the intended plan, but each subsequent interview was redirected by our previous conversation. Flexibility in the protocol allowed for our conversations to unfold naturally and unforced, while still covering the desired elements, even if out of order. In addition to the recorded conversations, the participants and I were in regular e-mail communication with one another to share feedback and clarify questions that arose.

From Field Texts to Interim Research Texts

Clandinin (2013) wrote, "Field texts allow us ways to see how others make meaning from experience and may also point us to possibilities of diverse final research texts -- that is, the diverse ways we might represent the retold stories." (p. 46). Following each interview, the audio recordings were uploaded electronically and professionally transcribed. I repeated this process a total of nine times, one for each of the individual interviews, which lasted between 42 minutes to 1 hour and 53 minutes each.

Once the transcripts field texts were available, I reviewed them for errors and to fill in the occasional inaudible sections of the conversations. The participants then received each transcript after it had been cleaned up for review. As our conversations occurred and we had field texts (transcripts) to reference and shape subsequent conversations, my e-mail communication with participants also became a valuable method of member checking as I began structuring the narrative portrait for each participant and re-telling their story.

During the data collection period, I did not spend much time doing intentional preliminary data analysis. Though I began mentally organizing each narrative portrait and

had notes from initial readings, I opted to analyze the data all at once, as opposed to in chunks. Using the initial transcripts and notes throughout the data collection process, I was able to verify that I had heard each participant correctly, that I had developed the plot of his narrative in the proper order, and that I had not misrepresented any part of his story. This process continued as I began intently analyzing the data using the Listening Guide, described below.

The Listening Guide

Riley & Hawe (2005) identified two criticisms of narrative analysis that stem from the “blurring of interpretive boundaries” (p. 234) between the researcher and the researched. One criticism is that the researcher can assume too much interpretive freedom without linking back to empirical data; the other is that the researcher can be too weak of an interpreter. Riley & Hawe (2005) encouraged narrative inquirers to consider what is and what is not in the data including characters and viewpoints and to ensure there is a set of principles guiding data analysis.

To ensure rigorous and thorough analysis of the data I collected, the method of data analysis for the field texts was The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015), which engages the researcher in multiple encounters with each participant’s story. Use of the Listening Guide requires multiple readings of the transcripts with a different focus during each reading. The listener becomes attuned to the complexities and structures of the story being told, with each listening amplifying a different voice. Brown & Gilligan (1991) suggested that researchers combine the actions of reading transcripts while listening to the audio of each interview, allowing the researcher to trace the particular voice being listened to. Using a different colored pencil or pen, the researcher highlights each voice

and documents it. Researchers using the Listening Guide become attuned with voice; Brown & Gillian (1991) pose four questions concerning voice: "Whose voice? In what body? Telling what story about relationships (from whose perspective and from what vantage point)? In what societal and cultural framework?" (Brown & Gilligan, 1991, p. 43).

The first reading. Brown & Gilligan (1991) suggested that the first reading is to listen for the plot; an opportunity for the researcher to get a feel for the characters who are present and missing, words used frequently, emerging themes, use of metaphor or symbolism, and the emotional tone of the interview. In this initial reading, the researcher would be expected to notice recurring words, images, metaphors, emotional resonances, and contradictions in style. The listener would also notice revisions or absences in the story and shifts in narrative position or the use of first, second, or third person voice. The first reading requires the listener to reflect and become self-aware of her or his own privileged position concerning the interpretation, naming, and controlling the meaning of another's life events. "The listener is asked to attend to her initial thoughts and feelings about the narrator and the story. In what way does she identify with or distance herself from the narrator? In what way is she different or the same? Where is she confused or puzzled? Where is she certain? Is she pleased or upset by the story? And she is asked to consider how these thoughts and feelings may affect her understanding, her interpretation, her response." (Brown & Gilligan, 1991, p. 46)

As I began the initial reading and listening of each interview, I found myself attuned to these elements. Because my conversations with each participant were non-linear, I merged the three individual transcripts for each participant into one master

transcript for each man. I then began using the cut and paste function to reorganize our conversations into a logical chronology. This reorganization was made somewhat easier because I had asked each participant to identify, where possible, the main chapters of his narrative as well as critical incidents or turning points that had occurred within each one. Using the audio and the text transcript, I was able to restructure each narrative portrait in chronological order of chapters and critical events then I integrated other sections of our conversations where we dug deeper into a variety of topics within and throughout the narrative portrait.

The second reading. In the second reading, the researcher is listening for the “I”. This reading tunes into the first-person voice of the interviewee and how he or she is engaged with the world. During this reading, the listener underlines each singular first-person “I” pronoun the participant uses along with the subsequent words. While listening and reading during this step, the listener becomes familiar with the way the participant speaks of and describes him or herself. The listener also pays careful attention to possible class, cultural, and racial differences and any other implicit statements from the participant. In this step, preliminary understandings of the sociality dimension may begin to come into view. The listener constructs the *I Poem* by assembling each I statement in order of appearance in the narrative; each becomes a single line in the poem. As Woodcock (2016) explained, *I Poems* allow the listener to recognize the first-person voice that runs throughout the narrative and the speaker’s stream of consciousness. The resulting structure allows the listener to understand the rhythms and patterns among the relationship of the speaker with her or himself and others.

I took advantage of working with the electronic interview transcripts to manipulate the lines of text to form the *I Poem* for each interview. Even while working with the data digitally, it was a time-consuming process to identify each use of the personal pronoun, to dedicate a new line in the poem to it, and to determine how much of the text after each I pronoun to retain versus cut away. Developing the *I Poem* for each interview (nine total) easily required two to three hours per participants.

The third reading. In the third reading, the reader looks for different interacting (contrapuntal) voices or themes that are coexisting; this provides insight into how the participant views him or herself in relation to society. Listeners are encouraged to seek and identify at least two voices in each narrative and the relationship between them. Exploring the multidimensionality of the participant's voice is what allows us to honor each individual and gain insight from them; illuminating the particular over the universal. This reading "picks up the tensions, the harmonies, and dissonances between different voices, and underscores the musical aspect of listening where the goal is to listen for nuance" and forces the researcher to explore the complexity of the narrative instead of flattening the data (Gilligan, 2015, p. 72).

The fourth reading. The fourth step of the listening guide is composing an analysis. The listener analyzes the entirety of all data generated in the previous three steps. In this composition, the listener incorporates, synthesizes, and considers all interpretations and reflexive notes made throughout the process. In the fourth reading, I again digitally manipulated copies of the original transcripts to reorganize the three individual conversations with each participant into a single, chronological narrative for each individual. I moved up and down the document countless times to first re-present

their earliest childhood and school experiences, through high school, college, and graduate school, and eventually to their thoughts and feelings at the time of the study and their thoughts on the future. I shared the resulting narrative portraits with each participant for additional review and confirmation that I had re-told their story correctly and honored their experiences.

From Interim Research Texts to Research Texts

Final research texts - those research products that are disseminated to appropriate audiences to share the findings and re-tell the participants' stories - were collaboratively decided upon and produced by the participants and myself. One of the final research texts will be my doctoral dissertation and supplemental materials for defense. These will include co-composed and retold narratives of rural-urban transition experiences and the influence of education and leadership on participants' identity development, as well as the participant's interpreted creation of an *I Am From* poem, as written by George Ella Lyon (1999). Clandinin (2013) reminds researchers that in this stage, we return to the personal, practical, and social justifications of our research and that "...whoever the audience for research texts is, all research texts need to reflect temporality, sociality, and place." (p. 50). My participants had as much discretion in what research texts were worked toward and finally completed.

The importance of the relational. The first two listenings are designed to establish the relationship between the listener and the speaker and to "highlight the relationship between a listener's life history and context and those of the narrator as represented in the interview text" (Brown & Gilligan, 1991, p. 47). Gillian (2015) emphasizes the responsibility of the researcher to create an environment in which participants can tell

their stories with someone with the trustworthiness to draw out and honor the voice given to lived experience.

Clandinin (2013) encouraged narrative inquirers to consider the negotiation of relationships when exploring research puzzles and entering the field. Such negotiations should include the purpose, transitions, intentions, and various texts, all of which are negotiated throughout the process. When we enter into narrative inquiry relationships with our participants, they come to know and see us as persons in relation with them. This, Clandinin (2013) suggested, is a reminder of our relational ethical responsibilities in the short- and long-term. Further, the narrative process requires spending sustained time with the participants; the inquiry may also include spending time with family members and/or time spent in the communities where they are located. As a result of the narrative process and being attuned to the temporality, sociality, and place of the inquiry process, Clandinin (2013) asserted that neither researchers nor participants finish the process unchanged.

The Positioning of Narrative Inquiry

The seventh and final consideration of the narrative inquiry design process involves the unique characteristic of arts-based research seeking to illuminate the particular as opposed to the universal. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, searching for common themes across the research participants' stories "to develop or confirm existing taxonomies or conceptual systems" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 52) is not the aim of narrative inquirers, nor was it a priority for my study. Through the narrative process, researchers attend to the ways in which participants' lives have been composed over time and in relation with people, places, and situations. The resulting knowledge does not seek

to generalize or find certainties, instead, the knowledge leads to alternative possibilities.

Story threads, including those unique to individual participants, and some common characteristics across two or more narratives will be discussed in chapter 5.

Distribution of Effort

Like other research methodologies that are relational and require ample time in the field and for data analysis, the narrative process is time and effort intensive. The following table illustrates the steps in the research process.

Table 2 Distribution of Effort

Participant	Jackson	Gus	Bruce
Interview 1	01h23m36s	01h37m44s	01h52m50s
Interview 2	01h12m20s	01h07m24s	01h14m34s
Interview 3	01h18m10s	00h57m19s	00h41m57s
First Listening	4 hours	4 hours	4 hours
Second Listening + I Poem Construction	3 hours	3 hours	3 hours
Third Listening	3 hours	3 hours	3 hours
Fourth Listening + Narrative Portrait Construction	5 hours	5 hours	5 hours
Total	~15 hours	~15 hours	~15 hours

Research Ethics

Clandinin (2013) reminded readers that narrative inquiry is a deeply ethical and relational project and those relational ethics are rooted in ethics of care (citing Noddings, 1984). Such relational ethics symbolize a commitment to collaborative research relationships that allow us to tell, re-tell, and negotiate stories together. According to Clandinin (2013), “relational ethics call us to social responsibilities regarding how we live in relation with others and with our worlds” (p. 30).

Similarly, Patricia Leavy (2015) provided readers with guidance on ethical practice in ABR, particularly due to the participatory and public nature of some ABR. Leavy (2015) cautioned researchers to be mindful of portraying human experiences in a sensitive manner, to be mindful of how public re-presentation of ABR data may affect intended and unintended audiences, attending to the role of co-creators/participants before, during, and after the research and dissemination of findings, artistic license, and reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

These ethical considerations were central to developing the application for consideration by the Chapman University Institutional Review Board. The proposed and executed research entailed the use of interviews and audio recordings with minimal risk to the research participants and the study received expedited review. Selected categories for expedited review, per the Chapman IRB, included: (1) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes; and (2) research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Tensions in ABR

Elliot Eisner (2008) identified tensions in arts-based research as a psychological sense of discomfort brought on when one feels uncertain in their work. Tensions, the author argued are inevitable as we approach a new paradigm such as ABR. In brief, Eisner's (2008) five tensions are: (1) the imaginative versus the referentially clear; (2) the

particular versus the general; (3) aesthetics of beauty versus verisimilitude of truth; (4) better questions versus definitive answers; and (5) metaphoric novelty versus literal utility. These tensions will be described below.

The first tension, between the imaginative and the clear, concerns interpretive response and the use of open forms to generate something new with diverse interpretations versus something with common or shared understandings. This first tension was minimized in my research, in part, because of my choice to use narrative portraits to present the stories of my participants; through written words, I retained more control of the re-presentation of the data. The use of other art media such as poetry, painting, and sculpture may not convey the researcher's intended interpretation or meaning-making from the data as it is consumed by others.

The second tension is between understanding a particular case (i.e., educational situation) and its distinctive features and understanding its relationship to other cases. As previously described, because arts-based research focuses on the particular, there is less emphasis on finding the universal and I did not seek to explicitly link the individual stories of my participants with one another. Rather, each participant's narrative is presented and open to interpretation as a standalone research product in chapter four. A discussion of the story threads that were unique and those which appeared in more than one narrative are discussed in chapter five.

The third tension is between the aesthetics of the craft or form and the need to accurately portray the situation under study. With a concern on aesthetics, Eisner wrote that ABR "is not simply the application of a variety of loose methods; it is the result of artistically crafting the description of the situation so that it can be seen from another

angle” (p. 22). This third tension arises for arts-based researchers as they make careful considerations regarding the aesthetics of the research product. I was cognizant throughout the research process that I wanted to honor the uniqueness of each participant’s story and present it in an authentic way. Developing the narrative portraits was an iterative process through which the participants were able to verify the authenticity of the re-presentation. Again, this tension may have been minimized in this study by my choice of narrative over other art forms.

The fourth tension concerns whether the aims of arts-based research should be to raise new questions and illuminate areas of future inquiry (as with other research paradigms) and the need for answers in a practical sense. This tension arose as I completed my conversations with each participant and used the Listening Guide to analyze the data. Following each conversation and particularly as I crafted the main narrative portrait, this tension was felt as I considered how to answer the “so what?” of my research puzzle. With an orientation toward social change, ABR was an appropriate method for studying the experiences of millennial gay men on the move as it became clearer how their transition experiences and the particular places where they were had an impact on their social participation and sense of community. As will be discussed in chapter five, engaging in this study was the first opportunity for each participant to tell the story about his experiences on the move and the ways in which his identity was impacted as a result (practical aim).

The fifth and final tension that Eisner (2008) addressed is between developing creative works and developing works that can withstand scrutiny. Eisner (2008) argued that “the recognition of objectivity is always beyond reach and at the same time the desire

of most of us have for our work not to be a projection of whatever we want it to be” (p. 24). Beyond accurately portraying each participant’s narrative, this tension is concerned with the ways in which others consume and evaluate the rigor of the ABR process. I have attempted to demonstrate the rigor of the research process for this study by describing the distribution of effort earlier in this chapter.

It is with these tensions in mind that arts-based researchers carefully navigate the purpose for and develop the final product of their inquiry. As these considerations are made throughout the inquiry process, there are additional criteria for evaluating arts-based research described below.

Evaluation Criteria for ABR and Narrative Inquiry

Leavy (2017) acknowledged the debate about whether arts-based research is a genre of qualitative research or a paradigm of its own. While taking the stance of ABR as a new paradigm, Leavy (2017) also addressed the ongoing debate about how we should evaluate arts-based research. Can or should evaluation be done according to the standards used in qualitative research or should ABR scholars and practitioners establish their own new standards?

Qualitative criteria for evaluation, Leavy (2017) argued, are bound to validity and standards linked to positivism and therefore problematize ABR due to the imposition this may place on artistry, expression, and originality. Another concern over the development of evaluation criteria concerns the practical nature of ABR and how best to prepare the next generation of arts-based scholars and preparing them to use and defend ABR in their careers.

Arts-Based Research Criteria

In true academic form, Leavy (2017) ultimately provided an “it depends” type of answer to readers, calling for general and evolving criteria to be applied to particular genres and projects as appropriate. What follows is an overview of the seven umbrella categories of evaluation criteria, including (1) methodology; (2) usefulness, significance, or substantive contribution; (3) public scholarship; (4) audience response; (5) aesthetics or artfulness; (6) personal fingerprint or creativity; (7) ethical practice.

Concerning methodology, Leavy (2017) directed attention to question-fit, holistic or synergistic approach, data analysis, translation, and transparency or explicitness. First and foremost, arts-based researchers should ensure that research practice aligns with the research goals and a tight fit should exist between research questions and the methodology. The holistic or synergistic approach is concerned with how the elements of the re-presentation of the research data fit together; this approach is concerned with the thoroughness and internal consistency of the research. This re-presentation is also concerned with the choices the arts-based researcher employs to convey the interpretation and meaning behind the final research texts or products.

As for data analysis, arts-based researchers may consider peer feedback (i.e., dialogues and reflective teams), reflections of the researcher (i.e., using a diary to capture internal dialogues), and the use of theory and literature to allow for new interpretations and meaning-making. Translation, concerned with moving from one form to another, requires being attentive to the specific techniques used, such as free writing, the creation of a concept map, or using creative dialogue. Finally, concern for transparency or

explicitness ensures the researcher documents and clearly demonstrates the process by which the research was conducted, and the final artistic re-presentation was created.

When I began this study, I was particularly interested in arts-based research as the methodology because of my research puzzle. I did not approach the inquiry with a predetermined hypothesis about what the research would find, nor was I concerned with advancing a new grand theory on the leadership development of millennial gay men. Arts-based research, and narrative inquiry in particular, was a synergistic fit between the questions guiding the inquiry and my desire to honor each participant's individual story. Upon completion of data analysis, I opted to create a narrative portrait to illuminate the particularities of each participant's experience on the move and subsequently identified story threads or themes which emerged across one, two, or all three of the portraits. The portraits are in chapter four and the story threads are presented in chapter five.

The second criterion concerns the inquiry's usefulness, significance, or substantive contribution. Apart from the aim of research to advance new knowledge; arts-based researchers like all others must be prepared to answer the 'so what' questions about their work and be able to identify what a particular piece of art is good for and what they have learned through the research. Regarding trustworthiness and authenticity, Leavy (2017) urged arts-based researchers to question whether the work resonates, rings true, and feels authentic. I briefly discussed the justifications and significance of this study in the first chapter and will discuss the personal, practical, and social justifications and implications of the narrative inquiry further in chapter five.

Public scholarship is concerned with accessibility and participatory approaches to arts-based research. Accessibility, with its two dimensions, is concerned with how

engaging and jargon-free the work is and that the work is appropriately disseminated to reach stakeholders, both within and outside of the academy. Further, arts-based research should employ participatory approaches. That is, involving non-academic stakeholders in the research process as participants or collaborators. This particular evaluation criterion was difficult to meet satisfactorily given the purpose of the research and the participants in the study. This research was completed in partial fulfillment of a doctorate in philosophy and the primary final research text is a doctoral dissertation, which is not typically a format read widely by non-academics. Further, the participants in this study were all early career academics, though the scope of the inquiry was not limited solely to their experiences in the academy and did seek to understand the meaning they made from other experiences. In addition to this dissertation, additional final research texts include the found and composed poems and forthcoming re-presentation of the data for sharing during a conference symposium.

The next criterion is audience response, which is concerned with soliciting audience feedback and allowing for multiple meanings. With the potential to be emotional, provocative, and transformative, ABR may be employed to create understanding, challenge stereotypes, present counter-narratives, and promote self-awareness. Leavy (2017) suggested that by soliciting audience feedback, arts-based researchers can gauge how effectively they have accomplished the connection to and meaning-making within the intended audience of the project. Response cards and formal and informal group discussions are some possible a couple of strategies for collecting feedback. Allowing for multiple meanings or multiple truths as opposed to a single authoritarian truth in arts-based research may promote critical thinking, deeper

engagement, and self-reflection; ambiguity, Leavy (2017) argued, can be a strength. Arts-based researchers should consider whether their work may be interpreted in more than one way and whether individuals can creatively engage with it.

The original *I Am From poems* and narrative portraits (found in chapter four) for each participant were written to illuminate the individual, particular experiences of being millennial gay men on the move and the influence this had on each man's authentic leadership development. Presented as stand alone, the reader can engage with each poem and portrait individually and understand the individual's story as it is told in his own voice. The story threads and other analysis presented in chapter five illuminate the similarities and shared themes from each narrative. Future opportunities to share this research will create more ways for audience engagement and response.

What would arts-based research be without consideration for the aesthetics or artfulness? As Leavy (2017) argued, the power of the art is bound to the aforementioned audience response and therefore usefulness. In the interest of evoking audience response and real-world effect, art has to be "good." Further, concerning the aesthetic power, arts-based researchers must focus on the incisiveness, concision, and coherence of the final product of the research. Arts-based researchers must ask themselves is it art and, if so, is it good art? Am I moved and/or engaged by it? Further, the audience experience must also be considered when evaluating the artfulness of a project; the audience must view the re-presentation as truthful. Arts-based researchers must carefully consider a balance between remaining true to the data and creating engaging art that communicates the essence of that data.

The artist's style is the single indicator for the personal fingerprint criterion in arts-based research. Leavy (2017) asserted that each artistic practice is a craft and that all works of art have a voice; this voice is unique and representative of this artist. Over time, artists develop skills and devotion to their craft(s), also known as their personal fingerprint, which may accomplish four ends: demonstrating commitment, building an audience, making evident their presence in the work, and pushing creative boundaries. Arts-based researchers should concern themselves with developing art with a distinct voice and unique style. Again, my self-imposed limitations on the ways in which I chose to re-present the data also meant limiting development of my own artist style. The findings as presented in chapter four and discussed in chapter five represent only a few of the ways in which I chose to convey the experiences of the participants. There remain many opportunities to continue sharing the findings of this study and to further hone my craft as an arts-based researcher in future inquiries such as a creative nonfiction work that interweaves the experiences of the participants, a collection of six word memoirs extracted from each narrative portrait representing critical incidents for each participant, re-presentation of the participants' experience through the use of photography and collage.

The final, though not insignificant, of the criterion for evaluating arts-based research is an ethical practice. Arts-based researchers, Leavy (2017) stated, must consider sensitive portrayals, public performances, participatory work, artistic license, and reflexivity. Sensitive portrayal requires arts-based researchers to be attuned to the multidimensionality and depth of the work. With the public aims of arts-based research, protecting audience members should also be a concern; researchers should, when

appropriate and necessary, warn audience members of content and consider how to gauge audience response. In addition to attentiveness to the audience, arts-based researchers should also consider the impact on participants, particularly in regard to anonymity and well-being. Issues of consent, confidentiality, and minimization of potential harms are important; issues of ownership and copyright must also be considered.

I sought to ensure ethical practices from the outset of this study. Not only did I undergo institutional review prior to engaging in this study, I remained vigilant throughout the data collection, analysis, and re-presentation phases of the inquiry. The participants self-selected pseudonyms to be used in the presentation of their narrative portraits in an effort to maintain confidentiality. The participants were also provided transcripts following each interview to review and clarify any confusing or unclear segments of our conversation. In addition to transcript review, the participants were also provided drafts of their narrative portraits to ensure I was accurately portraying their experiences and honoring their stories. In subsequent personal communication, the participants and I have agreed on the ways in which the data may be shared.

Related to the discussion of the artist's fingerprint and truthful re-presentation, an artistic license should be of concern to researchers. Striking balance between artistic practice and research practice remains a priority for arts-based researchers; this emphasizes the tension between producing good art, our obligation to be true to the data, and using our artistry to both entertain as well as educate. Also related to these points is the artist's/researcher's reflexivity. Arts-based researchers should constantly examine and make meaning from their position in the research.

As Leavy (2017) suggested, the criteria serve as a guide to evaluate specific projects and noted there is overlap, with various criteria and their elements overlapping, intertwining, and/or being interpreted in different ways for different projects. Having general and specific assessment criteria in arts-based research is similar to practices in qualitative research where the specific and general are balanced against one another and modified based on the method of choice. With the criteria in mind, arts-based researchers have a guidepost for project planning, development, and implementation that allows for intentional incorporation throughout the project and a standard by which the final outcome may be critiqued and defended.

Narrative Inquiry Criteria

Based on the work of Harvey and colleagues (2007), Leavy (2015) cited three fundamental components of narratives: coherence, turning points, and replotting. The first component – coherence – is based upon the way the story is communicated; whether there is a cohesive narrative being told that has an evident flow and emergent meaning. In evaluating coherence, Leavy urged researchers to attend to talking style, tense, inflection, and tone. During each conversation with each participant, I was attuned to the coherence of the story being told as I allowed the conversations to unfold naturally as each participant spoke. While I had a semi-structured interview protocol and general aims for each conversation, I consciously did not exert too much control over where the participants naturally transitioned from one topic to another, or as we revisited elements of the story that had been previously told. The Listening Guide also engages the researcher in successive readings and listenings of the interview audio and transcripts, which also intentionally brings him to analyze for congruence.

The second element – turning points – enable participants to order their narratives and the experiences upon which they are based. These turning points may be critical incidents that have particular relevance to the narrative arc and or may represent a paradigm shift such as that of victim-to-survivor. Through re-plotting or re-storying, participants re-present their stories based on cultural frames and individual meaning. After listening to the broad overview of each participant's story (this was a focus of the first conversation with each man), I explicitly asked him to identify (1) the ways in which he would organize his life story into chapters and (2) to identify incidents that each man felt were critical to his narrative. Once the participants had identified their critical incidents, it was easier to move between the three transcripts to develop the chronology of each narrative portrait. It is also important to note that stories and their meaning may change over time based on new experiences and the participants' relationship with them. These evaluation criteria for ABR and narrative inquiry as related to my own study will be discussed in chapter five.

Limitations

The first limitation I encountered was the narrow criteria of potential participants and the challenge of recruiting them. As mentioned above, two men that I already knew who fit the study criteria were invited to participate and or refer others who would be a good fit for the study. While the narrative method supports a small number of study participants and emphasizes the particular rather than the universal, one limitation was the recruitment of three participants other than me and the possibility of participants discontinuing their involvement in the study at any point. Unfortunately, by the time I received approval to begin the study, one of the known potential participants had aged

out of the study as a result of the Pew Research Institute revising the age parameters for millennials. The other known potential participant and I were not able to communicate with one another frequently enough to formally include him in the research process.

Since neither known potential participant could join the study, I shared the invitation to participate in two Facebook groups. One is a community for gay agriculturalists, affectionately known as ‘the gay farmers’ group and the other is a community for queer academics. I received several follow-up inquiries from members of both Facebook groups, and ultimately one person from each group joined the study. After speaking with faculty in the Chapman Ph.D. program, I was referred to a colleague of one of the Leadership faculty who fit the study criteria and agreed to participate in the study.

Once I had recruited each participant, I also recognized the commitment of time I was asking of each participant. The interview protocol was designed to allow for three, two-hour interviews with each participant, in addition to personal communication via email. I set out with an ambitious intended schedule of completing all nine interviews over an eight-week period in May and June of 2018. Though I was unsure of how quickly I would be able to connect with each participant and establish a schedule, I was pleasantly surprised that I was able to fully schedule all nine interviews within the anticipated time frame. Outsourcing the transcription of each interview saved a lot of time and effort and I was able to return transcripts to each participant within 24-48 hours of each conversation. This helped to streamline our process and gave each participant an opportunity to review the transcript prior to the successive conversations.

In addition to finding the ideal number of participants and their willingness to commit to the time required for interviews, another limitation was related to geographic

proximity to participants. Because I was based in southern California and the participants were in Idaho, North Carolina, and Texas, it was not feasible to travel to meet them where they were. Though meeting with each participant in person would have enriched the experience, I conducted the interviews using the Zoom conferencing platform and recorded each of the nine conversations, capturing both audio and video.

I also had to be mindful of my own researcher positionality. I am an insider given that I meet all of the criteria for participants and have spent a lot of time reflecting on my own rural-urban transition experiences and the impact of education and leadership experiences on my own identity development. While there were potential similarities between my story and those of my participants, I had to be careful to not assimilate the experiences of my participants' as my own or project my experiences onto the participants. Through the data collection and analysis processes, however, elements of each of our stories became more vivid and meaningful to each of us. As I listened to each participant tell his story, I was able to respond and connect with them about shared experiences like being from a small, rural town or coming out or navigating tense family dynamics. Each individual narrative portrait will be presented in chapter four, and a discussion of the story threads, or themes, will be discussed in chapter five.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to story the rural-urban transition experiences of millennial gay men as well as how these transitions and participants' educational and leadership experiences influenced their identity development, social participation and sense of community. The three participants in the study identified by pseudonyms - Jackson, Gus, and Bruce - represented multi-directional migration (i.e., rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural, and rural-urban-rural) and their stories provided rich descriptions of how geographic place is central to so many of our lived experiences. As millennials, the participants gave voice to coming out - and coming of age - in the twenty-first century as they navigated post-secondary school experiences and life events.

Each participant's story, or narrative portrait, is presented individually to honor the particular experiences of each man's experience of being on the move. While there are some shared experiences among the participants (e.g., moving away from home, coming out as gay, the doctoral journey, seeking community), the overarching goal of the narrative method is to illuminate the particulars of each individual's story rather than seeking out a universal experience. Further, the semi-structured nature of our conversations provided us with an opportunity to move back and forth across time and place. As such, the content and flow of each portrait vary slightly though I made every effort to re-present each narrative in a logical manner.

Narrative research is by its very nature a relational method. From the outset of this study, I documented my own rural-urban transition experiences and the way my own education and leadership development opportunities had shaped my identity, social participation, and sense of community. It was necessary to raise awareness of my own

experiences so that I could identify turning points or critical incidents in my own journey so that I could anticipate potential emotional triggers during the storytelling process. This raised awareness allowed me to enter the research relationship with the participants with great empathy; I was intent to engage with the participants in a meaningful way without projecting my experiences onto theirs.

Establishing and deepening the relationship between each participant and I occurred throughout the research process, including our semi-structured interviews and personal communication before and after each conversation. I encouraged Jackson, Gus, and Bruce to speak freely about their experiences and followed each participant wherever our conversation led. After the three conversations with each participant were complete, I interpreted their stories and reorganized the data into integrated drafts of their individual narrative portraits. Each participant was provided with his draft narrative portrait and encouraged to verify that I had re-presented the data correctly, to make suggestions, and to provide feedback.

The process of refining each narrative portrait was both inspiring and overwhelming; I often second-guessed the organization of the data. Following the initial reading using the Listening Guide - listening for the plot - I grossly oversimplified the data through paraphrasing to the extent of erasing each participant's own voice. I progressed through the additional steps of the listening guide by revisiting the original transcripts and audio recordings and re-inserted direct quotes and passages of each participant's own words to bring each narrative back to life. Once again, the participants were invited to read the revised narratives and provide feedback.

Each narrative below is presented in generally chronological order, beginning with childhood memories and early school experiences, with a progression through middle and high school, then post-secondary experiences. Each narrative portrait reflects the particular experiences, achievements, challenges, and tensions of each participant as they identified critical incidents of their lives. Each narrative is also preceded by a poem, written by each participant, modeled after the poem *I Am From* by Kentucky poet laureate George Ella Lyon. The full “I” poems developed during the second reading for each participant are also included in the appendix.

Jackson

I am from flip-flops
From Sundrop and Zenith

I am from red bricks and banisters
Small, Tenuous, Dissonant

I am from honeysuckles, buttercups, and loblollies
(Sweet reminders of afternoon walks with Granny)

I’m from Thanksgiving Fried Turkey and colorblindness
From Alice and John

I’m from bottomless bottles and what about me?
From “You’re so weird” and “You’re just like your dad”

I’m from the United Methodist Church, where hypocrisy flowed like a baptismal font and
judgment was masked as community

I’m from [hometown] [family 1], [family 2], [family 3], and [family 4]
Chocolate pound cakes, banana pudding
From the time I asked my stepfather if he could be my real dad
The softening of Papa’s eyes each time he bade me hello or goodbye
In a dusty box, in the corner of my closet, in no discernable order, just out of minds reach

I am from a lineage of genetics and life choices. Incomplete, fleeting, fallible
It’s the family you choose that matters

Jackson was born in November of 1986 (age 32 during the study) in a small town in coastal North Carolina. “What I always tell people is that I’m from the biggest city in the most rural county in North Carolina. If you’ve seen the movie *The Waterboy*, with Adam Sandler, that’s kind of where I come from. You know, that sleepy, kind of life. My house sits on this island in a swamp in North Carolina” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Jackson’s parents divorced when he was two years old and he spent every other weekend traveling to visit his father about two hours away; each of Jackson’s parents had remarried by the time he was in early primary school. “My mom and her side of the family are like the stereotypical backwoods swamp people of North Carolina. Where my dad’s side of the family were more like gentry kind of folks in small southern towns or whatever. So, I had this certain perception of them growing up. They were an aspirational family to be a part of. I always felt like I was a little on the outside coming in” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). These fluid family dynamics are a fixture throughout Jackson’s narrative portrait below.

A North Carolina Upbringing

Growing up, Jackson was very close with his mother and maternal grandmother, Granny Alice. “I literally spent probably half of my childhood with her. I had a room at her house. She was pretty well known in our small town because she was a school teacher and pretty much taught half the town. And so a lot of people knew me because of her” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Jackson’s grandparents owned a large farm that allowed them to assist Jackson financially to take private art and music lessons and go on trips; activities he may not have otherwise had access to in their small community.

Jackson went to the local primary school from kindergarten through second grade and among his teachers were two who had a lasting impact on his career path. Miss Ross was always empathetic, encouraging, and sparked curiosity. Her classroom supported that curiosity with several activity stations such as a kitchenette and storybook section where students could explore and create. In second grade, Mr. Jones was one of the only male teachers that Jackson had throughout his time in school. “That was weird for me because it wasn't the norm, I guess, seeing somebody that I identified with was ... interesting as a second grader, seeing that” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Though Jackson could identify with Mr. Jones because he was another male, Jackson recalled that he was aggressive yet challenging and encouraging. “I think he might have been a closeted gay man. In retrospect, just knowing him as I’ve gotten older and other things, I wonder if he was one of my first gay role models? I just remember him because he was challenging in a different way” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

As he spoke about elementary school, Jackson described how he remained in touch with some of his childhood friends and classmates he grew up with, including his earliest childhood friend Jamie. Jackson also recognized how rural places can be equally unique and backward. “A lot of times I’m very critical of rural areas because I come from one. Sometimes I forget to reflect on the things that are actually nice about that experience. It is neat and comforting to be able to go and talk to somebody that’s known you throughout your entire development as a human being” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Beginning in the fourth grade, students who are deemed academically gifted (AG) individuals are placed into AG courses based on an IQ test; neither Jackson nor Jamie

was placed in AG though they remained in the same class together. “We ended up getting retested and magically we got placed into the AG classes in fifth grade. In hindsight, and as a kid, all I know is, ‘Oh, am I not smart enough? What happened with this? Is there something wrong with me? Why did I not get placed in that group?’” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). In retrospect, Jackson had taken a more critical view of the experience and understood the small-town politics that were involved and that his Granny Alice likely pulled strings to ensure they were placed in the AG classes. “As an adult now, how many other kids were deprived of that opportunity and what does that mean? I think it pretty much was an all-white class. A lot of the rich parents in town would use that as a way to shield their kids from interactions with people that didn’t look like them. Namely, black people, because there was, there still is a lot of racial tensions that kind of arise down there, and all those kinds of things” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Middle school. Jackson described his middle school experience as awful and a period in his life he would not choose to relive. In the seventh grade, Jackson’s father divorced again, leaving him to question what, if any, relationship he had with the stepmother and step-siblings he had grown up with and gotten along with. In a subsequent marriage, Jackson’s father introduced another stepmother and step-sister with whom Jackson never got along. “That took a transition because I think it marked my late adolescent period. My and my dad’s relationship faltered off at that point. Just, I don’t know, I started noticing that things can change in your life very quickly. You don’t always have warnings about it” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

During this time, Jackson also began engaging in after-school activities, including student government, marching band, and the school paper. “When you talk about leadership development, all that kind of stuff, that’s when I was really feeling my oats around getting involved” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). This early life period also marked the emergence of Jackson’s civic or political identity. He recalled watching Tom Brokaw every day at his grandparents’ house and his grandfather, a Democrat, engaging in political discussions when he was as young as seven. “He had his old white man problematic ways about him, but for the community he grew up in, I felt like he was a pretty liberal person considering,” (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). This stood in stark contrast to his maternal side of the family who he considered the complete opposite. “They’re crazy people. Being a child where they live on opposite sides of town, they didn’t not get along. They got along well and everything, but observing the political points of views, now how people interpret things through extremely different lenses is something I have observed since I was a toddler” (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

When Jackson was in seventh grade, Al Gore ran against George Bush and Jackson recalled losing a friend following an argument about how foolish his friend was to vote for Bush in their middle school election. “I just felt convinced that as a seventh grader that this was wrong and feeling like the world around me was crazy because all these people were voting for George Bush” (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). Jackson would continue to grapple with this civic identity in college and adulthood.

During middle school, Jackson also became more cognizant of social groups. “I think I always struggled with that in middle school and high school of not necessarily wanting to be a part of a group but kind of wanting to have friends in all different pockets. I would always describe myself as the kid that would float between the different established groups that kind of existed” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Intersecting his social identity, Jackson also began grappling with his gay identity. “Looking back at it, not being out at that time that’s when I first kind of started getting the inkling of ‘something’s amiss here, and I don’t really know what that is and I don’t necessarily have language around this’” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). In hindsight, Jackson realized he had developed a crush on his best friend. “It was an interesting thing to work out whenever you don’t really have anybody to talk to about that. I think the mechanism I ended up using for a long period was, ‘Well, I’m not going to think about it’” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). For the better part of the next fifteen years, Jackson struggled to come to terms with these feelings.

High school. High school started out as a better experience for Jackson.

“Knowing what I know now, I wouldn’t be able to do high school again just because I know what’s out there beyond [my hometown]” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He described having really good friends and teachers, there was a strong sense of community, and four AP classes were offered. The building was run down, and he had seen some of the fancy schools in bigger towns by participating in the all-district band. Jackson was aware of how different his experience likely was compared to the students who went to those schools.

During his junior year, Jackson was selected as one of two students from his county to attend a prestigious residential high school in central North Carolina. “At the time, coming from rural North Carolina and going [there] it was a very diverse area racially and ethnically. It’s definitely big in comparison to where I grew up. I think, for me, that was a critical incident because that was my first, like, putting my toes out into what I would deem as the real world” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Jackson recalled being nervous about leaving his family to go to the residential school after a childhood marked by homesickness when going to overnight camps. “So, they dropped me off and, lo and behold, yes, I’m super homesick again. And on top of that, I find out my roommate was a senior ... and he was an out gay person and that really threw me for a loop” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Until that point, Jackson had only met two other gay people; his mom’s hairdresser, and a classmate that he grew up with, but was not particularly close to. “I’m like, I’m in high school, hormonal mess, I’m homesick, crying. I have a gay roommate. He’s hot. And I’m going to have to force myself to come out by the end of the year and I’m not ready for that” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He tried to convince his family to let him return home, though they encouraged him to stay. Instead, Jackson went on a hunger strike until his parents returned to pick him up and allowed him to drop out of the residential school.

Jackson returned to the high school in his hometown and felt embarrassed; he feared people would assume he dropped out because he could not hack it academically. Jackson became a marching band section leader, joined the National Honor Society, chaired the prom committee, and was voted most likely to succeed by his senior class. He

also had his first girlfriend during his senior year. “I remember fretting the entire year because she kept trying to kiss me and I was like ‘Oop. Nope. We’re not doing all that.’” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He recalled the awkwardness of his parents also goading him to kiss her and the small-town dynamics of gender and relationships. “I feel like particularly my rural town, whatever, little boys who are friends with little girls is always through the context of ‘Oh, that’s his little girlfriend, isn’t that cute?’ It isn’t that they can be friends with each other and just be friends. Like that’s not the thing that happens. Maybe that’s different now, I don’t know. Back then it felt like that’s how things were” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

As he considered options for college, Jackson was aware of his first-generation student status and though his parents could not afford for him to go on college tours, he tagged along with his friend Colby and Colby’s mom to visit some of the UNC campuses. Though Jackson had aspired to go to Duke University, his parents told him they could not afford it and discouraged him from even applying. He visited and fell in love with one University of North Carolina (UNC) system campus in particular, where he enrolled for undergrad and received a generous scholarship.

College: A Time of Rapid Change

Jackson described the first year and a half of college as the time during which experienced the most rapid developmental change. “I learned a lot about myself academically. I learned to let go a little of my perfectionism that first year because I almost made my first C” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Coming from a small town where he considered himself to be a student leader, Jackson navigated the transition to college as a first-generation student largely alone. He recalled having a few

classmates from his high school who also went to the same institution and soon found community by meeting new friends and student affairs professionals who helped to build his confidence. “Even though there was about 15,000 people, it still felt like a small community after that first year because of the relationships that I built and the things that I discovered about myself and my ability to lead other folks or follow when necessary. Discovering who I was as an independent person outside of my hometown and all the identities that go along with being from a small town. Or my own identities that came from being from a small town” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Jackson had declared a double major in biology and psychology with plans to become a doctor. He became engaged in several civic engagement organizations and joined the Beta Beta Beta fraternity, through which he was able to start his own student organization affiliated a national children’s hospital. The student organization raised \$35,000 in its first year.

Changing plans. By his junior year of college, Jackson had abandoned plans to be a medical doctor, which had been his plan since he was a child. He recalled sitting down with his mom and stepdad to tell them he had changed his mind and explained to them that he wanted to pursue a career in higher education and become a Ph.D. instead. “I feel like I had my first coming out experience to my parents whenever I revealed that, because basically [becoming a doctor was the plan] from the time that I could remember” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). To help ease their concerns, he told them he would have the potential to be a chancellor or president of a university one day, though he had no actual ambition to become an administrator. Jackson wanted to assuage their fears over his financial future; they did not want him to live the same way they had.

“I wasn’t worried about [my stepdad]. He and I have always had a really good relationship. I was more worried about my mom. We’ve had a very interesting dynamic growing up” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

During his senior year, Jackson interned at a university in Virginia and worked with student life staff. He was keenly aware of the contrast between this college town and where he grew up, particularly related to socioeconomics. He recalled how he was not allowed to answer the phone at his internship, because they worried people would not be able to understand his accent. After graduating a semester early, Jackson was accepted into graduate school at another large in-state university. He returned to his hometown while he waited for grad school to begin in the fall. “I was waiting tables and worked as a pharmacy technician for seven months, and it was awful. It was absolutely awful because I think I got this taste for freedom and what it was like to be away from [my hometown]. And even though I knew it was for a temporary amount of time it was like being back in that space. I worked so hard to get away and now I’m back here” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Coming of Age

As he reflected on his high school and college experience, Jackson pinpointed how he began to make sense of his own development in the larger context of time and place; as a closeted gay millennial coming of age in a rural place. Jackson acknowledged some important generational differences as he described what ‘millennial’ meant to him. He reflected on being in the middle, if not the older side of the millennial generation; he did not fully identify with the moniker citing differences in technology and the LGBT community.

As he described his own life course, Jackson acknowledged that “I didn’t come out ‘til I was 28. A lot of that had to do with coming from a rural area and growing up in the place I did. My little sister is 10 years younger than I am, graduated from the same high school and there were probably 15 kids that were out in her high school where that was only one kid in the entire school that was out whenever I was in high school. It kind of shows you that weird juxtaposition and how quickly things change with that stuff” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Generational differences. “People around our age, give or take five years are in that really weird juxtaposition in a lot of different ways. I think kids now, they grew up with all this technology that was emerging when we were growing up” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Millennials, he thought, were largely in the middle of appreciating technology for what it is without it being a critical aspect of identity. “With intersecting the LGBT identity, that weird juxtaposition, too, of, I think we were children whenever a lot of the tail end of the AIDS epidemic was coming around and the equality stuff was starting to emerge” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

“Without regard to race or other identities ... it's almost like the generation before us, I would call them pioneers,” who were out in far fewer numbers among straight people, charting paths and making connections (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). They made it possible for the millennial generation to be more open, to be comfortable and likely unharmed for showing affection publicly, and not live in fear. “We grew up hearing all the horror stories of the pioneers that came before us, but our experiences are different because even though there are a lot of barriers, I can go outside with [my partner] and hold his hand. Even though I might feel uncomfortable about it,

I'm probably not gonna get hurt doing it, whereas the generation before us had that legitimate fear" (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

Jackson described the next generation as more vocal and aware, though perhaps taking the current status quo for granted. Millennials were coming of age in the time when the national mood on being out in public dramatically and rapidly swung from intolerance to acceptance. "I think there's this misconception that we're used to it, just because we were children when things were going around, or when all these topics were being brought up, and I think that's not necessarily true. We were alive, so we clearly were experiencing those things, it's just that we were kids so we didn't have much control over it and we were still trying to figure out what that meant through our lens as a kid" (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). The next generation is coming of age in a time of greater acceptance than ever, but Jackson expressed some trepidation. "Maybe that's because I'm from a small rural community. Seeing that it's okay but still having this thing in the back of your mind where it's like, 'Is it really okay?' Or waiting for the other shoe to drop.'" (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

"I was thinking about it as I was writing the poem, too, but kind of unpacking what my identity is as a member of the LGBT community means to me, 'cause obviously it's a part of me, so I've always had it with me, but it hasn't been until my late 20s, early 30s that I've looked back to be like 'Okay, well had I been straight instead of gay, what would've happened?'" (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). He wondered whether he would have dropped out of the residential school or if he would have never gravitated toward student affairs or if he would have continued on as a pre-med student. "I'm grateful for where I am now. I was in an environment that didn't allow me to be

myself until later on in life, but if I wouldn't have had the people around me that I have now, or the community that I'm building now had I taken a different direction. So, you should be grateful for where you are and what life throws at you" (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

Shifting Identities

As Jackson adjusted to college life and began engaging in new experiences, he became more aware of his various identities. "I feel an identity shift depending on the space that I'm in," Jackson said. In urban spaces outside of the south, Jackson's whiteness and socioeconomic background were at the forefront. Jackson was aware of the contrast between growing up in a lower income family to now being Ph.D.-educated and self-identifying as middle class. "Being in urban spaces I feel like I stick out, particularly when I talk. That was one of the things I enjoyed so much about [the west coast], is they didn't make me feel like such an outsider because I spoke differently or because I have that background as a low-income student. But whenever I go back home, it's always flipped on its head" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Jackson credited his education by allowing him to connect with many different people from many different backgrounds, which happens far less frequently for those in rural places.

Gay identity. "By that point, I had kind of accepted that I was gay, but I was like, 'Well, I'll accept this part of myself, but I'm not going to act on [it] and I'm not going to pay attention to it'" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He recalled feeling compelled to face his sexuality as a result of attending various trainings on diversity and allyship. "I was kind of bitter about it at the time just because I was [like] 'Well, by having to be here I'm having to lie, and I don't want to lie. I just want to be in a situation

where I'm not having to acknowledge it one way or another'" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). While he had accepted that being gay was a part of him, he was not prepared to act on it and remained unsure how to process his feelings.

His gay identity came to the fore as well while his fraternity was recruiting new members. Of the 35 or so members of the fraternity, five or six were openly gay and the chapter became known as the gay fraternity. Jackson felt as though recruitment had become a process of trying to determine which recruits were openly or closeted gay. "All of a sudden we were monikered 'the gay fraternity' and led to this witch hunt of 'who's gay? Is this person gay? Are they just not out'?" As we were recruiting people, they were being a lot more harsh" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). As a result of this experience, Jackson sought early alumni status to retain his affiliation but not be a member of that particular chapter and drastically shrank his social group. Once he was no longer active with the fraternity, Jackson realized he had not developed the skills needed to structure his time or his social activities.

Civic identity. Jackson's college experience also illuminated his struggle to find a civic or political identity, which at the time was more closely aligned with community service and student government than national politics. "There was a year in my life where I was a Republican. I was a senior in high school ... and I had this crazy sociology professor [who] convinced me that all gay people were going to hell" (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). In the years since Jackson would come to broadly identify as a Democrat though he acknowledged issues with the party; he voted for Barack Obama twice and recalled how special the occasion was to stay awake until two AM to see the historic election of America's first African American President.

In the 2016 election, Jackson was a Bernie Sanders supporter turned Clinton voter. He recalled going to bed on election night confident, like many, that Clinton would win. Waking to the news of Trump's victory, Jackson sobbed as he questioned what would happen as a result. That same day, as he drove to a conference and stopped for gas in West Virginia, he wondered, "Can they smell the gay on me? Do I smell too good? Do I look a certain way? Have we reverted back to the '90s? Is this what's going on?" (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

Jackson expressed apathy and helplessness as a Ph.D. who knows a lot about very little, with a desire to be more knowledgeable about politics and getting more involved. As an avid listener of National Public Radio, Jackson understood all too well the stories about political fatigue and frustration with America's two-party system. "I hope that people in my generation and earlier have learned their lesson. It may be distasteful to vote for this person, but unless you want to be in a world like the Handmaid's Tale, then you should probably rally behind the person that's not as bad as the first person" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Jackson also acknowledged that because of moving around so frequently, he had been less inclined to be civically engaged at the local level; he recognized the importance of engaging in local government and community. "For people like us that have moved around every two years, how do you establish that?" he asked (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). He acknowledged the tension between the desire to settle down in North Carolina and get engaged and being a 30-something with little financial, political or social community capitals to dive in locally. He expressed a desire for more resources for how 30-somethings can get involved locally.

Leadership identity. Jackson described having a ‘weird’ relationship with leadership throughout his life and explained how his leadership and professional identities are tied to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and CliftonStrengths, two popular assessments. Of the sixteen MBTI personality types, based on psychological preferences in how people perceive the world around them and make decisions, Jackson’s is ENFJ - extroverted, intuition, feeling, judging. Jackson aligns his MBTI type with his top five strengths, which are Developer, Communication, Positivity, Individualization, and Arranger. As Jackson spoke of the critical events in his life course, some of which had challenged his Christian faith, he identified Positivity as a strength that allowed him to remain optimistic. “I guess there’s this intersection between being a relational leader and a situational leader. I don’t mind not being the leader in a group sometimes, but I often find myself becoming a leader whether or not I want to” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

“I think for me there’s this weird interplay between the concept of community for me and this concept of leadership. Growing up as a white guy in the U.S., I think gives us a very strong narrative of what leadership should be like, and I think I default to that sometimes” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). He spoke of the typified person in a business suit at the head of the table telling people what to do or inspiring them to join them on a journey. “I think that, for me, it conflicts with my values around community where I believe that things should be a collective effort” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Reflecting on individuals who came to mind as he thought about leaders, he identified some of his K-12 teachers who established communities of learning rather than being dispensers of knowledge; a college chancellor

who led from the center and knew people's names; peers where everyone was community-focused and led through mentoring.

Transition to Graduate School

Throughout undergrad Jackson largely remained in a state of denial about his sexuality; up to that point, he had not been involved in a relationship and was comfortable being by himself. As he transitioned to graduate school, he was conflicted when he met others who shared stories of their experiences and did not feel he could be equally authentic with them. "I learned a lot about myself and I think that's whenever I started having more of a problem with myself around, I guess, lying to other people about being gay" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He wrestled with himself over being more closely involved with other students and he felt as though he was being unfair to them. "They were telling me their authentic stories and they were going through their own processes and I wasn't doing the same and being authentic with them" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). For so long, Jackson had remained guarded and kept his sexuality to himself; he was never sure of who he could trust and share this part of himself with. He also noticed how as he got older, it was more difficult to make friends as an adult. "You start seeing all these other people getting married and they are in relationships and so I was like 'Oh, I'm kind of lonely now'" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

A taste of west coast life. After his first year of grad school, Jackson landed a summer internship at an institution in the University of California system, an experience he credited with changing who he is as a person during the three months he spent there. "I met some of the most wonderful people that I've ever met in my life. And they're still

mentors and I keep up with them. And I feel like if there are good things about me, a lot of it came from them and their mentorship” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He recognized the stark contrast between his hometown and the west coast as he said, “Going to a big place can be really scary and intimidating and I think particularly in [my hometown] it’s very white and there’s just white people there. So, going to [the west coast] there were less white people and it was a much more visually diverse place. I met a lot of people of different identities that I’d never met before” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Jackson emerged from this experience with a greater appreciation for himself and for others, which he credited with changing his approach during the second year of grad school. When his internship ended, Jackson sobbed at the airport and promised himself that he would move back to California and work at the same institution at some point in his life.

Death brings drama. In late January of his final semester of grad school, Jackson was a month away from defending his master’s thesis and had begun a new graduate assistantship in residence life and was searching for full-time jobs when he received news that his grandmother had died. When Jackson was a senior in high school, his grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. As her quality of life declined, Jackson’s family became increasingly unable to provide in-home care for her. The family opted to put his grandmother in a nursing home, where she later had a stroke and developed MRSA, a bacterial infection in her legs.

Recognizing her imminent death, the family was torn over whether to perform a double amputation and allow her to pass relatively pain-free versus dying from the infection. “I thought the correct choice was we should amputate her legs and be with her

until that time comes. But my uncle and my aunt decided that was not an appropriate course of action. It was me and my aunt versus my other aunt and uncle” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Though Jackson’s relationship with his father remained strained, he recognized that as the oldest of several siblings, his dad held some authority among them. As tempers flared, Jackson called his dad and told him, “Your siblings are batshit crazy. You need to drive down here and handle your business” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). As his father drove to join the family and deal with the situation, Jackson tried to process what was happening to his family. “We are in the middle of this big fight in public and I’m like ‘You people are crazy.’ That just shattered my world view of what my family looked like at that point. To be honest, ever since it’s never really recovered” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Where are the jobs? Upon completing his graduate program, there were no open positions at the California institution and Jackson considered other options, including one opportunity in the middle east. Jackson traveled to the Middle East for an on-campus interview though was hesitant to move there amid the Arab spring and uncertainty of a safe environment as a gay man. Jackson expressed regret over turning down the opportunity, though he eventually accepted a position in residence life at a university in Tennessee. He described the year spent there as probably the worst of his life - the rock bottom of his mental health - as he processed family drama, mourned and grieved the loss of his grandmother, and moved away from his graduate school friends.

“I was overworked, and I still hadn’t dealt with those issues and I got really, really depressed. There was a time there that I didn’t think I was going to survive that year in a very real way. Luckily, I got through it with the help of some friends and was

able to kind of get my life together and be like ‘I need to get out of here for my own safety’ (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He also recalled the environment at the institution as being hostile toward the LGBT community as well. After a year there, Jackson was relieved to find open positions at the California institution and followed through on his goal of returning to the west coast where he was a resident director overseeing two buildings.

Coming out. During the second year of his return to California, Jackson finally came out as a gay man. “That was a joyous occasion. I think I was pretty much the furthest away from my hometown and my family in the United States. It was like the polar opposites of the continent, so I felt that I had a safe enough distance to kind of tiptoe out. I had gotten into counseling at that point and I had realized about myself that if I’m going to be out, I just want to bust the closet door down and be out” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Though Jackson was ready to be fully out, his counselor encouraged him to take small steps.

A few months into counseling and his coming out journey, Jackson joined friends and past colleagues for a collegiate football game tailgate that coincided with a conference they attended. Having started their festivities early in the morning ahead of the noon game, Jackson and his friend Christy were too imbibed to go to the game and opted to watch it at a bar near the stadium instead. Their team was victorious, the crowd went wild, and Jackson, while celebrating atop a barstool, face planted and chipped his front tooth. Numb to the pain, but visibly upset and crying, Christy jerked Jackson up by the arm returned to their hotel. “She puts a beer in my hand and slaps me across the face and she says ‘You are not going to ruin this trip for the rest of us. You have had a tough

start. You're just embarrassed. Yes, we're going back out" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

In the early afternoon, at a bar with the rest of the group, Jackson felt compelled to announce that he was gay. "We're all standing around in the bar and something just possesses me and I'm like 'I have an announcement.' And I came out. Literally, everybody just stared for a second and they were, 'Well, good. Awesome.' and literally turned right back around and started talking. And I was like, 'This is not the response I was expecting'" (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). The reaction from his friends surprised Jackson, as he had expected a big, dramatic response. Their conversations about the situation the following day were positive, though Jackson went on to attend the conference trying to process what had happened and felt somewhat compelled to return to the closet.

Back in California after the game and conference, Jackson came out to his closest work colleagues and slowly to others around him. He felt a sense of a community and began dating and finding balance. Relieved to be out in his west coast community, Jackson continued counseling and weighed his options while he approached the end of his contract. Though he had loved the experience, Jackson did not want to spend an additional two years in his role and applied to Ph.D. programs and opted for a fully-funded program of study at a large public research institution in Virginia.

The Doctoral Journey

Jackson began his Ph.D. program in Virginia and was conscious of the many ways in which he had changed as a result of his two experiences in California. "I really hated my first semester because I'm coming from [the west coast] so I'm super radical,

like ‘everybody’s awful and just fuck everything!’ I’m taking this diversity class and there’s all these white people who never left southern Virginia” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). On one occasion Jackson found himself in an argument with a classmate who abruptly stood up, claimed she did not believe in white privilege and stormed out of the classroom; she never returned. Jackson knew he needed to unpack his layered identities and to be less judgmental in this new environment.

Exploring relationships. Jackson also explored the online dating scene and began a long-distance relationship with a school teacher who was four years younger and lived three hours away. In retrospect, Jackson recalled spending a lot of time commuting that he could have otherwise spent focused on school; having never been in a relationship before, he dove in head first. He found himself balancing multiple school, work, and personal commitments as he figured out how to be in a relationship.

“I’d never been in a relationship at that point and so the way I kind of processed it was 15-year-old Jackson reared his ugly head again and fell deeply in love with this guy and it was my first real relationship. While most straight people get to work out all those kinks when they’re teenagers or maybe early 20s, about the awkwardness of figuring out how relationships work, I was getting to do this at age 28 while I was in a doc program and also waiting tables and working a graduate assistantship and tutoring and doing all of these other things” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Jackson reflected on his late teens and early twenties as he knew he was gay but opted not to acknowledge or act on it; though he felt pressure to come out while at the residential school, he remained closeted as he prioritized school and work opportunities over personal relationships. “At some point in my late teens and early 20s I was like

‘Well, relationships are kind of off the board for me. I know that I’m gay, but I’m not gonna acknowledge that and I’m gonna take whatever energy I would’ve put into that into my career and other things’” (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). He acknowledged that as a gay man, there is not necessarily a template to follow on what a gay relationship is supposed to look like, whereas straight couples in their thirties typically have a fairly typical idea of what is expected in their relationships. Jackson also acknowledged that without a script or template, he and his partner were more intentional in their relationship and made major decisions together like moving in together and practicing monogamy.

“So I think that even though it sucks that I didn’t get to live a “normal” experience in my relationship world when I was younger, I think that in the end, it’s better for me because I don’t have this constraint of what society says a relationship should be. It gets to be what I want it to be, or like we want it to be, clearly” (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018). He went on to describe the process of negotiating and making decisions together. “We come from different points of view, so there could be tensions there, but I think that tension’s good at the end of the day” (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

A second coming out. Jackson’s coming out process had a second phase in which he began to come out to his family. “I was visiting [my ex] at the time and I was texting with my mom and just kind of did the thing again where I was just ‘let’s word vomit and just come out’. I don’t know why I’m that way. It happens” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Though initially shocked, Jackson’s mom came around soon, and it was a relatively positive, if not “anticlimactic experience”. “It seemingly was

going okay for a while” until the holidays two years prior to the time of the study (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Family tensions. As he spoke of his maternal family, Jackson said, “They’re not people that necessarily align with my values in any shape, form, or fashion. Those are people that still use the “N” word and are very much Trump supporters” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Sometime prior to Christmas 2016, Jackson’s mother had essentially outed him to his grandmother, who in turn suggested that if Jackson had not spent so much time with Granny Alice or if she had not coddled him so much, he would have “never turned out that way” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). On Christmas Eve, when Jackson refused to speak to his grandmother whose side his mother had taken, Jackson and his mother engaged in an epic argument.

Because Jackson had been so close to his Granny Alice, he was incensed by the entire incident and explained, “If there’s anything in this world that you can do to piss me off, it’s to talk about my grandmother that passed away because that’s a no-go zone. I don’t care if you’re my mom or you’re my grandma, you don’t go there” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Up to the time of the study, Jackson and his mom remained estranged for nearly two years. In a follow-up conversation, Jackson noted that he and his mother had been in touch and would occasionally text one another, though their relationship remained strained (Personal Communication).

Struggling for serenity. Between August and December that year, Jackson had come out to his parents, relocated to North Carolina to be closer to his then-boyfriend, broken up, had a familial showdown, and struggled with the anxiety of all of these

incidents happening so closely together. Jackson eventually suffered a major panic attack. “It was one of these things where I was crying and I could see myself crying and not understand why I was crying and not make myself stop” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Jackson feared he would need to drop out of the Ph.D. program if he could not get his anxiety under control. He was relieved to have supportive faculty who encouraged him to take a couple of weeks off to regroup. He was also encouraged to reconsider his research topic from a focus on the role of grit in rural education to something more aligned with mental health in higher education.

Reflecting on this, Jackson said, “I don’t think this is very common. In talking to other doc student friends and knowing other faculty members, if I had been [elsewhere] I don’t know if that would have been my experience if I had the same issue” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). With less than a month from his proposal defense, he opted to scrap the past year of work he had completed and assembled a new proposal. “So, I do an *Eat, Pray, Love* thing and go spend two weeks in the mountains and haunt coffee shops doing my dissertation proposal and people watching,” he recalled (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Ultimately, Jackson opted to study traumatic stress in higher education, specifically for those in helping professions such as student affairs professionals, resident assistants, and other student leader positions that include mentorship roles. “In retrospect, I should be thankful that I had that I had that experience because it led me to a research area that I’m really passionate about” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Back on track and beginning the research process, Jackson also eventually joined the dating scene. By the following August, Jackson met his current partner and spent a

year working at a university in North Carolina before focusing on finishing his dissertation, which he completed in 2017. At the time of the study, Jackson had been finished with his doctorate program for about a year and was at another potential transition point in his life and career. He was balancing adjunct teaching and been serving in a legislatively funded position in the UNC system office that was coming to an end. Jackson expressed discouragement about the faculty job market, having applied for some 50 positions without much success. His options had also become limited as he and his partner had grown more serious and where they had begun to settle down. In a follow-up conversation, Jackson revealed he had accepted a research and assessment position at another UNC system institution.

On the Move: Striving for Community

As Jackson reflected on his rural upbringing and the transitions he made for school and work opportunities, he said, “I think I spent a lot of my young adult life getting away from that and being ashamed of that to a certain degree. Not the community piece, but the small-town piece. I wouldn’t move back there, mind you, but I appreciate it a lot more and I think that what I’ve been struggling with lately is this concept of place and for me, place is about community. I like to be in community with people [and] I think that the places I’ve moved to have really been defined by the community that I’ve built” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). As he unpacked his thoughts about being on the move, he said, “I think what you’re raised with you always end up returning to, to some degree. Even if you don’t move back to a place like that” (Jackson, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

“I feel like I’m hitting this 30s crisis thing and having this crisis of community and practice and interest. Because community is such an important part of how I identify with the world around me. Having two out of three constructs be out of whack in my perception, I’m like ‘Okay, some things are forming in my head. Alright.’” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). From laying down roots to figuring out his next professional adventure, to being more attuned to his varied interests, Jackson was striving for community of place, practice, and interest.

Community of place. “I’m an adult. I’m tired of moving. I want to settle down; I think that’s what I’m on the hunt, for now, is place and community” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Jackson connected place with community and expressed how pursuing opportunities allowed him to see new places and meet new friends. Along with this, he described how isolating the experience of earning a Ph.D. had been despite having great people around. Being on the move proved to be a double-edged sword; while he built community in each place he landed, he inevitably moved on and eventually lost touch with many people along the way. By the time he began his doctoral program, he had somewhat resigned to not investing himself in building community and said, “In hindsight, I wish I hadn’t have done that because I think that even if I didn’t go away, there’s some people in my life now from each period. And I think that’s really special, to have all of these people who have been involved in very critical times in your life” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Reflecting at that moment, Jackson acknowledged the tension of embracing adulthood, being ready to settle down, finding a more permanent job, and trying to develop a sense of community. Though he would not classify the area as rural, he said that Durham fit just right; it was big enough to keep his

interest with new things and experiences to enjoy, but small enough to foster a sense of community. He also spoke of the many personal connections he has nearby; a best friend from primary school, close friends from grad school, a friend from the west coast. Even if they were unable to spend time together regularly due to the hustle of adult life, Jackson found comfort in having those connections nearby.

Jackson again said he would prefer to stay in his current geographic area. In addition to work, Jackson considered establishing a family, perhaps fostering kids with his partner. He spoke of a close friend who had always been out and had served as his gay role model. Jackson had served as this friend's best man, which was the first gay wedding he had attended and appreciated the ability to establish new traditions.

Community of practice. Jackson spoke of his career crisis and how working in education created a lot of overlap in his personal and professional life. "It's not like I work in a business where I go clock in and clock out. It's all just a part of the thing" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Jackson reflected on a decade of service in the student affairs profession and how its associated politics had slowly burnt him out. He also reflected on how his Ph.D. program allowed him to do more of what he loved - being in the classroom, doing research, and everything that goes along with being a faculty member. With few open positions and many applicants seeking to fill them, Jackson was discouraged by his unsuccessful job search and described exploring opportunities outside of higher education. "It's very scary for me. I didn't foresee being almost 32 and making a career shift, particularly after I got a Ph.D. in a field that I thought I was going to be staying in" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Despite being discouraged by the job search and opting to take himself off the faculty job market for a while, Jackson remained confident that things would work out as they were meant to and committed to seeking opportunities outside of traditional education. One of his tactics to remain hopeful about the future had been to focus on what he enjoyed most about his work; facilitating, teaching, training, and working with young people. “I think part of the reason I like that is to get to build my own little communities that even if it’s only a community that lasts for an hour and a half or a community that lasts for three hours or once a week. It allows me to be at my best” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Providing specific examples, Jackson spoke again of having met with the 17 student body presidents from the UNC system to address college access and of facilitating a StrengthsQuest training with public service scholars for which he received a lot of great feedback. One person’s anonymous feedback nearly moved Jackson to tears; it said, “From the perspective of instructional strategies, your development of this class and instruction presentation is awesome. I also appreciate the fact that I was not looking at my clock every time I was in class and I really wanted about 10 more minutes for my reflection. Awesome.” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Feedback such as this intensified Jackson’s felt need to find a job that would allow him to thrive in this way. “That’s my crisis of practice with community,” Jackson said, “I’ve found a professional community but I don’t have access to the professional community I want to be a part of so I’ve got to figure out how to make that happen in another way” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Community of interest. Shifting to community of interest, Jackson acknowledged how his background in academia and research skills allowed him to pursue his interest in mental health and wellness without a counselor credential or license. Recalling again the opportunities growing up to take private art lessons, Jackson spoke of his appreciation for painting, drawing, sculpting, and music. Despite owning a guitar, he had never taken lessons and conceded that as he had moved from place to place, he had never invested the time or money knowing he may leave and have to start over again. “I’ve been putting a lot of my personal interests on hold which I don’t think has been very healthy” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). This, in part, because of the uncertainty of his employment and opting not to spend money on special interests.

Expanding beyond his immediate personal life, Jackson also spoke of his desire to develop a stronger gay community, noting most of his friends were straight. “I haven’t had a very strong gay community ever,” Jackson said, “I mostly have straight friends. I feel like I was so late in coming out that I never got that mechanism of being able to date somebody and then not date somebody and it not be awkward at that point” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Jackson was trying to determine how to get more involved, including volunteering at the local LGBT center or going to one of the gay bars more frequently. There was tension as Jackson spoke about navigating the world with a lot of straight friends, but not being straight, and trying to form an LGBT community where he also did not feel as though he quite fit. “It’s weird for me personally because I feel like I’ve straddled for a long time, this world of ‘I have a lot of straight friends but I’m not straight’ and when I try to form a community in the LGBT

community. I don't quite feel like I fit there either" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Jackson also described some of the media he consumed, particularly relevant to the LGBT community and his identity as a gay man. "For whatever reason for my gay side of my identity or whatever, I've become obsessed with Ru Paul's Drag Race" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). In this reality TV show, drag performers compete in challenges to demonstrate their artistic abilities and vie for the title of America's Next Drag Superstar. While acknowledging some problematic issues with the show itself, he had been interested in drag culture for a long time. He even recalled having worked with one of the former Drag Race contestants - Honey Mahogany - while he worked on the west coast.

He also described a podcast called Grizzly Kiki, which features a different drag performer each week from around the country. As a qualitative researcher, Jackson enjoyed hearing stories of their personal backgrounds. "There are a lot from LA and a lot from New York and you really get to hear people's stories about their personal background and how drag has intersected with art from them in community and how that is expressed" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Jackson described enjoying building organic relationships and acknowledged that he is often in spaces with few gay people as a result of his work environment and existing social networks. He acknowledged the need to be more intentional about seeking out those communities to be a part of. He also recognized that North Carolina, while not the most LGBT-hostile southern state, is still conservative and the struggle is particularly highlighted by the controversial bathroom policies for transgender persons. Despite this,

he spoke of being more comfortable holding his partner's hand or showing affection in public while noting there is much progress to be made in North Carolina and society as a whole. He described his colleagues as the oldest, straightest white people that you will meet, with the UNC system headed by a former Secretary of Education who criticized PBS for having a gay theme on an episode of Sesame Street. As the only openly gay person in his workplace, Jackson felt a responsibility to be out, to speak of his partner as his colleagues discussed their relationships, and to be visible and representative of the LGBT community in that space.

Jackson reflected on his role as an educator and catching a glimpse of the future when observing young people. He recognized how kids today are very vocal and that while we have made some progress as a society of being more inclusive, kids still face a lot of barriers. As he unpacked this more, he said, "I feel like when we were kids perhaps, we felt the barriers but we couldn't articulate the barriers, versus now I feel like maybe some of the same barriers exist, but the kids can articulate it, and maybe that's partly because of the movement that we're in or the growth of the internet" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Recognizing ongoing and intersecting forms of oppression, Jackson reflected on what it meant to be a gay white man and what this meant for his role in the LGBT community. "Where I'm at right now," he said, "is that maybe it's time for, whenever there's an opportunity to either amplify a voice or for me to be quiet so another voice can be heard, that's what I do" (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). Jackson spoke again of the opportunity to work with the UNC system student body presidents, who were primarily people of color, and a few identified as LGBT. Jackson stepped back and allow them to share their experiences and

formulate ideas for improving the experience for LGBT students in the system. “I think that as an educator that's where I'm vacillating between these two roles. I'm learning to be me in my identity as a gay person, so being comfortable and transgressive enough to show up fully in spaces where I might be the only one, but then at the same time figuring out where my cues are to take a seat and let others in the community that are working out some tougher stuff come to the forefront” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Jackson admitted that he had struggled with the current movement for queer equality and social justice. He opined that younger people tended to be more dualistic and suggested they may hold their opinions more strongly as a result of people they have relied on being fallible. A result of this black and white worldview, Jackson feared, was a loss of some nuance and fluidity of views. “I'm just sitting with this whole idea of fluidity,” he said, “and coming in and out of spaces with all of these intersecting identities” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018). He explained that depending on your identity, homophobia, ableism, racism, and other forms of oppression are experienced differently and at different times and that context matters.

A journey home. Taking a broader view of his narrative, Jackson identified a theme of a journey home, or trying to find home. Home, Jackson said, had been not completely out of mind but had also not been brought to the fore in the way our conversation allowed. “It’s been nice to give voice to that,” he said, “and it made me be honest with myself.” He also reflected on being a member of the LGBT community and what life may have been like as a straight man. Perhaps, he suggested, he would have never found his roommate attractive or dropped out of the school for science and math;

perhaps he would have remained a pre-med major and never gravitated toward student affairs. Jackson conveyed regret in some ways that it had taken so long to come out; that the environments he was in had not allowed for that. However, he acknowledged that on any other journey, he would not have met the same people nor would he have built the same community.

Gus

I am from church
Church on Sunday
Church on Sunday again
Church on Wednesday
And sometimes church on Saturday

I am from white bread as hamburger buns
I am from you can't watch the Simpsons because they say "hell"
I am from cow feed in a 55-gallon drum
I am from a sprinkler on a water hose as summer fun

I am from playing Barbie with my sister "because she's sick"
I am from twirling my show stick at the barn because I wanna be in color guard
I am from the Queer Eye for the Straight Guy book hidden under my mattress like porn
I am from "look at his skin, you can tell he has AIDS"

I am from "I can never see that part of your life
I am from "We will be there, but it will be hard"
I am from "I will not, not be a part of your life"
I am from "It's so nice to meet you"

I am FINALLY from "Tell [partner] we love him too"

Gus was born in June 1987 (age 30 during the study) in rural southern Mississippi, or as he described it, a conservative state, in a conservative part of the state, in a very conservative family. As the son of a high school agriculture teacher, Gus recalled, "I knew from an early age that I was going to be involved in agriculture in some manner. As I grew up, the less and less I liked being active on the farm, but I still had

some passion for agriculture. And I had grown to develop a passion for education. And I kind of felt that's where I wanted to go" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). Growing up, Gus loved to read *Modern Livestock and Poultry Production*, a textbook his dad used in his classroom, and one that he would carry forward with him in his own teaching career.

Gus the People-Pleaser

Gus grappled with his gay identity from an early age, recalling times when he was young and throughout elementary school that he knew he was different. "I knew I was gay when I was five years old. I remember very clearly this moment when I was at church. I was sitting at this little plastic picnic table with my friend Ryan and he and I had our Swiss Army knives, and we were cutting up paper. Just cutting it up to make a mess. And I asked Ryan to be my boyfriend. He said, 'I don't think boys do that.' And I said 'Oh.' That was really the first moment where I was like, 'Oh, I guess I didn't know that wasn't an okay thing'" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

Gus recalled going to his kindergarten classroom in a portable building at his school because of the high number of students that year and described himself as a goody-goody kid who never got his name on the board the whole year. His kindergarten classroom had play centers around the room and he rushed to finish his work so he could claim a pair of heels and a purse to play with. "I have to assume that Miss Williams told my parents about this at some point. So, the writing was on the wall in 1992. But it officially came to fruition in 2015" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

By the third grade, Gus was sure he was different from the other boys. "[In fifth grade] I felt I started to separate from the other boys in my class. Whereas the things they

were interested in, I wasn't interested in. I started making more girlfriends and being much more comfortable with girls" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). By middle school, Gus knew he was gay. "Coming from a very conservative family, that was a big no-no. I actually have an aunt who committed suicide, and she has a gay son. And the overarching undertone is that him being gay is why she killed herself. So that was kind of the environment... like no one came right out and said it, but that was very much the feeling about it. And so that was like a big wall, I guess, a fear that I dealt with was, 'Oh, if I'm gay, then someone I love is going to kill themselves'" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

High school. In high school, Gus was exploring his interests and navigating his academic performance. "I was never the smart kid. I graduated 46 out of 198. The highest score I made was a 19 which does not mean I'm supposed to be Dr. Gus today. My GRE scores said the same thing. No one was ever trying to copy Gus's homework" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). During his sophomore year, Gus took his one and only agriculture class, which made him eligible to join FFA; he would go on to serve as chapter president and a federation (area/region) officer. Until his junior year, Gus planned to be a veterinarian; he liked animals and planned to go to Mississippi State, but after a poor experience working for a local vet, he opted to major in animal science instead.

Gus described his high school band director, a stern but fun retiree who instilled a passion in Gus for something that was not seen as 'cool' at his school. Gus appreciated that his director knew that not everyone he taught - few actually - would end up being a musician or band director, but he made students see that being committed, practicing, and

becoming good at something were skills that would be applicable in any career they would choose. “He wasn't there to turn everyone into a musician or a band director,” Gus said, “He was there to turn us all into a good person who could contribute to whatever it is that we do after high school” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). Gus said he tries to emulate this same approach in his current role as an educator and expressed frustration about students with great skill sets and potential opt not to pursue careers that would require them to leave their hometown or state and that his director taught him to make the class relevant to whatever it is they choose to do next. “When I teach a journalism writing class, I'm not here to make journalists. I'm here to make good writers who can write in any field that they end up being in. I admire what I learned from him, and I try to mimic that in what I do” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

Becoming political. When Gus was in high school, he did not feel he had to care about politics and that beyond voting, he did not consider himself to be very civically engaged. He recalled an incident in high school during the Kerry-Bush race in which he and a friend were the only unabashed fans of John Kerry among the students in their large, rural Mississippi high school. He could not recall why he was such a fan or what seventeen-year-old Gus believed a Democrat was; while many high school students support the candidate their parents support, he leaned toward Kerry in a break from his family.

Gus expressed disapproval of the current political landscape and criticized the polarization of the two-party system. Considering himself more moderate, Gus acknowledged voting for Barack Obama in his first term but not his second because he felt a president's second term tends to pull us too far to one side or the other. By this

theory, Gus would have been compelled to vote for a Republican in 2016 but could not vote for the party's candidate. The day after the election he recalled being physically unable to work out at the gym and did not know what to say or do; he felt as though someone had died.

Gus admitted that his political ideology had evolved and changed since high school and would probably continue to do so. He reflected on attending Minneapolis Pride for the first time and the awe he felt at seeing candidates for Mayor and Governor participating in the parade. "I had never really thought of that because that's not an option in Mississippi," he said (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). Having spent so much time in conservative states, Gus anticipated that moving to a blue state like Minnesota would likely change his ideology further. Perhaps most salient, Gus directly acknowledged being transient as part of his political ideology when he said, "I haven't been involved or focused on local politics. I'm not active on the local level and I think a big reason for that is my hopping around the country so much since I turned eighteen."

First coming out. The first time Gus told anyone that he was gay occurred in March of 2004 when Gus was a junior in high school. While at a wedding for family friends, Gus opened up to his cousin Samantha who was involved in theatre and had other gay friends and was excited by Gus's coming out. "I think everyone's first time they tell their first person is a critical point in their life and she's still one of my number one supporters. She lives in Florida now, so she doesn't live in our hometown. She's one of the ones that got out" (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018). Gus explained further that whether he was gay or straight, his interests, the activities he was involved in, and his career path would have all been the same. However, Gus's life up to this point

had largely been focused on everyone else around him; “I was always a people pleaser, and at the time the people I was trying to please were my family” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

As Gus recounted this experience, he reflected on how society has changed in the time since then and what it was like to come out and come of age as a millennial. Gus identified with the term millennial and though his parents are younger, he saw definite distinctions between the generations. He recalled the dial-up internet sound, frantically trying to cancel the browser connection on his Motorola Razr, and printing MapQuest directions; this in contrast to Apple Carplay, dictating, text messages, and getting directions from Siri in 2018.

“We are adaptive to change. It's very easy for me to think back to a point in time where I think I can see how acceptance of LGBT people has evolved from when I was a little kid to today.” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018). Gus recalled where he was and how he felt the day the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy was repealed. Though he was not in the military and did not have anyone close to him the policy impacted, he knew it was a legislative and social turning point for liberal and conservative corners of the country alike. “This was, to me, the first little taste of moving toward acceptance and freedom within your home town, outside of the confines of what your friends, family, community thinks about you. This was the first legislative action, that I know of or that I experienced, that said you could be who you are.” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018).

Getting out of Mississippi. Gus described never being the kid growing up that hated Mississippi and never had teen angst nor felt l as though he had to leave, but he had

the desire to do so. “I would never talk poorly about where I’m from, and I will throw shade all day long about the stupid things that go on, but that experience shaped who I am today.” Gus acknowledged that his house and his family was his comfort zone then, but his hometown, Mississippi, and the South were not because he was “constantly wearing a cloak on something” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018).

When he returns to Mississippi, he explained he often has “How did I get out of here?” moments. The Walmart there is *the* place to see and be seen; going there made him more cognizant of how his appearance and accent has changed. “When I go to Minneapolis, they think that I talk like I live on a houseboat on the river, but I find myself recognizing how fortunate I am that I ‘got out’ but also how lucky I am” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). It took leaving Mississippi for Gus to be able to appreciate what it meant to grow up there and the role it played in his development. “I vote differently than Mississippians, I think very differently than Mississippians, there’s a lot that’s different about it. But I never hesitate to tell anyone that I’m from Mississippi. I usually say, ‘I have all my teeth, I wear shoes, and I’m a doctor, too!’” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

“When you’re born in a place that you don’t fit in, you’re innately prepared to move along,” Gus said (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). He explained that where you are from, the time you spent there, and what you experienced there forces you to learn how to move within that realm and to learn to avoid upsetting the norm. “I think out of survival, necessity, to begin with, a lot of us have to learn to move within our own space. And by being able to move within our own space, we’re able to move to new and live in new spaces as well” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). Gus likened

this experience to that of a chameleon; an experience in which we have learned to disguise ourselves with our surroundings out of necessity. When given opportunities to leave, we carry with us our chameleon cloak to be who we need to in the next place and slowly get comfortable exposing ourselves until there is no need for a cloak.

“I don’t know that I would be where I am, personality development wise, had I never left my hometown or my home state. I think those little baby steps that I’ve taken in the other places that I’ve lived, I’ve been able to do those because I was never bound by the what if my family finds out, what if the friends of my family find out. I feared that [in undergrad] being three hours away, but I still stepped out of that a little bit” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018). There was value in leaving his hometown to explore new places and to grow into his identity as a gay man without fear of his family or friends finding out. Going to college allowed Gus to be far enough away to begin that journey.

Junior College and Mississippi State

Gus graduated high school in a class of just under 200 students; three went to Mississippi State while others went to the University of Southern Mississippi about 45 minutes away or the University of South Alabama in the neighboring county where in-state tuition was honored. The high school valedictorian went to Ole Miss and managed a restaurant; the salutatorian earned their bachelor’s degree in six years and then a master’s degree to become a teacher and historian. Gus estimated that thirty or fewer of his senior classmates went on to earn bachelor’s degrees, less than five earned a master’s degree, and he was the only Ph.D. One male classmate became a nurse; the remaining female nurses went to Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College for a nursing associate degree.

Many others attended the local community college but many of them never earned an associate degree. For those who opted to remain close to home, Gus explained that the coastal area of Mississippi had plenty of industry and it was easy to get a good paying job for anyone willing to do the work.

Gus transitioned from high school to a junior college in Mississippi, where he studied for two years, worked on the newspaper staff, and was a member of the livestock judging team. As a newspaper editor his second year, he received a journalism scholarship and tried to balance his interests in agricultural communications and animal science. In the fall of that first semester in 2005, Gus was home for a break doing yard work with his mom when she asked about his dating life. Shrugging off the question, she pressed him further about whether he was interested in dating women, to which he was unable to respond. “Fast-forward through the whole crying, blah blah blah blah, of course, one of the things I told her was, ‘I promise I won’t become a hairdresser’” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). Unprepared to fully come out at that time, Gus did not bring up the issue again or fully come out until the fall of 2015.

As he was coming to understand the gay aspect of his identity Gus met and befriended other gay men for the first time while attending the junior college. “Everybody has this idea of what it means to be gay and it's a lot based on these preconceived notions of what the media tells us and what our family tells us and those sorts of things” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018). Some of his new friends fit stereotypes of gay men, while others did not, and this period was marked by underlying sexual tension as he was part of a queer community for the first time.

Gus was the only one of his friend group who transitioned to Mississippi State, and he arrived there feeling alone. Without that friend group, Gus described a regression in his own self-acceptance but also began to understand himself better and became less concerned with being a people-pleaser. He ultimately opted to major in animal science and was involved in Block and Bridle, meat and livestock judging teams, meat science quiz bowl, and the academic quadrathlon team.

Going Greek. During undergrad, Gus also joined a fraternity. “I felt like being in a fraternity would help me be straight. I still think to this day, being in a fraternity was one of the most important things I did in college. It definitely developed my self-confidence. I used to be a very shy, quiet person. And now I feel like if you told any of my friends that, they would be like ‘Not Gus’” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). His shyness stemmed from the idea he had something to hide; that if he talked too much or was too expressive or spoke his mind, then people would ask more questions; being quiet ensured fewer questions. Being a member of the Greek community afforded him an “unwarranted but get out of jail free card to be whoever I wanted to be and be loud and expressive and confident” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

By his junior year, he was inspired by one of his professors to pursue a career as an educator at the college level. A polarizing figure, this professor was either loved or hated, and Gus loved him. “He is the reason that I’m going to be a professor in a few months. Watching him work with students and help them discover what it is they love, what they’re passionate about and things that they think they were passionate about, I wanted that” (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

Graduate School, Teaching, and a Crisis of Faith

After undergrad, Gus began his master's degree in Agricultural and Extension Education and eventually worked as a temporary lecturer of animal and veterinary sciences at a university in South Carolina and then as an instructor in Kansas. During this time Gus continued exploring who he was sexually and began coming out to more people, though was still not fully out to either his family or his profession. Though Gus had his first sexual experience with another man near the end of his undergraduate career, he was not inclined to be in a relationship or to settle down; he was more focused on continuing his education and preparing to eventually pursue earning a Ph.D. He was concerned that a relationship would hinder his education and career goals, as he had seen happen in his hometown. "People meet someone in high school, they get married, they never leave their hometown, they get pregnant," he said, and, "those sorts of things keep you from advancement. I watched a relationship keep people from advancement, and so I steered away from that." (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

After finishing his master's degree, Gus lived and worked as a teacher in Kansas, and in 2014 he experienced a crisis of faith. While growing up, Gus's conservative family was very religious though he did not attend church regularly after leaving home. When his father became sick, spent forty days in intensive care, and was subsequently in rehab for two months, Gus sought out religion. "So, this 26-year-old man who has sex with men became Mormon. I was a good Mormon," he recalled (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018). In his new faith, Gus dropped everything "cold turkey" and hosted missionaries for dinner every Monday night and became the "door-to-door Mormon salesman."

Though active in the Mormon faith for more than a year, as he prepared to leave Kansas, he decidedly was also leaving the faith. Gus admitted that if he was not gay, he would still be Mormon; that he still believed much about the faith to be truth and enjoyed the faith community he was in. “If I had it to do again, I would do it again because I learned about myself, my faith, what I believed, what I can believe,” he said. “It allowed me to, for the first time, really branch out in my belief system from what I grew up and find something that I personally believed in myself” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018).

Ph.D. and Research

From Kansas, Gus moved to Texas, in 2015 to pursue a Ph.D. and attended the Cultivating Change Summit, a global conference that brings together LGBT agriculturalists, for the first time. Gus found himself in the largest city he had ever lived in and an accepting environment in which he began to come out professionally. He was able to be open with new friends and colleagues; he laughed as he recalled those who had known him prior to coming out as they said "Yeah, it was so weird. Gus tried to pretend like he was straight, but we all knew he really wasn't" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018). Gus described his research interests in agricultural communications, particularly the way agriculture is portrayed in the media and how that influences public opinion. In addition to his dissertation research and other agriculture-based research, Gus has also researched differences in minorities within agriculture, including a focus on gender and sexuality.

Leading through education. “It’s really hard for me to admire someone I don’t actually know. I’m definitely not the type of person to look up to a celebrity of any kind.

As cliché as it is, I would not be doing what I do now if it wasn't for my dad. Because my dad instilled in me a passion for agriculture and a passion for education. So, even though I do think very differently than he does, and we're so incredibly different in lots of ways, I admire him a lot" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

When Gus began his Ph.D. program, he completed the StrengthsQuest assessment and one of his top five was significance, which he credited with playing a role in being an assertive, strong leader and one who is open, out, and authentic. While he does not always desire to be in charge, he appreciates recognition for his contributions and admitted that if he were to be involved in a community or a group, he would need to play an important role. Gus explained that if a person is trying to lead as a made-up person or as an idealized version of what a leader is supposed to be, they will never have true influence over others. "I don't think you're at a place to lead until you're comfortable with who you are and confident in that" (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Gus also credited a significance mindset with pushing him to be a better educator, researcher, colleague, and advisor to his students. He described receiving feedback from a fellow Ph.D. student who thanked him for showing her how to be a better instructor and leader for students. "To this day, my favorite component of being an educator is working with students as their advisor [and] helping them figure out what they want to do with their life and finding what they're good at and passionate about and wherever those things intersect" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

Out in agriculture. Gus described his experience as being an out gay man in the agriculture field and the impact it had in his early career. "I'm out to all of my students, I'm out professionally. It was a scary step for me to take at first. Especially being in

agriculture, I didn't know how that might influence my ability to get a job. But I've never encountered anything negative in any manner with that. I've found a lot of success, and I'm excited about my career and being able to be who I am" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

Gus acknowledged the impact he could have on his students by being out in the classroom. As students confided in him their own minority identities and he represented diversity in the ag field to non-LGBT students, he recognized his role as a leader in the field. Even though he would begin a new tenure track job in an urban, liberal place, he acknowledged that he would still be teaching in ag communications and would likely have students coming from conservative backgrounds. He recognized that students might choose to go elsewhere as a matter of cost or, he feared, because he was the out gay man in the program and students might go elsewhere to avoid being in his classroom. "But there's another piece of me that says the best students who realistically I want working in ag comm, and the students that I want making a real influence aren't gonna [let that] keep them from coming here."

Gus was also determined to ensure his research was inclusive and expressed a desire to push the envelope for diversity and inclusion in the field. One example he provided was focused on gender identity and not limiting questionnaire responses to the female-male binary. In his dissertation, no respondent indicated a gender identity other than female or male, but it was important for Gus to include the option. "Maybe that person on the other side of the survey has never said to another person that I identify as whatever. If I can give them the opportunity to do it one time by the comfort of their

computer where no one's gonna know who did it, then that's helping them as a person take that next step" (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018).

Entering the tenure track. At the time of the study, Gus had recently been offered and accepted a tenure track position at an urban midwestern university. When he was first approached about the position, Gus explained that his initial hesitancy had little to do with the job and much to do with cold winters. Acknowledging that most other agriculture colleges are located in rural areas, Gus realized the opportunity was an ideal one. "The more I thought about it, I was like that would give me the opportunity to do what I love, which is to teach agriculture, at a college, in a big city. Where there are gay people and gay things are happening. It'd be the perfect intersection of what I love and who I am. Whereas I can't really do that for the most part in any other city" (Gus, personal communication, May 2, 2018).

On the move: Opportunities for change. Gus explained that constantly moving had given him experiences and perspectives that he would not have otherwise enjoyed. "It's kind of cliché but they say it in movies all the time, or like TV shows directed at a younger audience, they're like "when you go to high school next year, you can be whoever you want." Or, "when you go to college next year, it's like a point of a restart, be who you want, you don't have to be who you were in high school" (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). Gus argued that given that opportunity to change, move, and be whoever you want as an adult makes you rethink who you are, where you come from, and what your values are. "I think everybody needs to restart sometimes. Especially if you come from a place where you struggled with knowing who you are and where you

fit in the world. Getting a chance to pick that up and push a brand-new start button can help you figure that out” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Impact on relationships. As he pursued education opportunities, Gus had not prioritized being in a relationship. “I was never looking for a relationship. I knew that I wasn’t about to be at the place where I could settle down, and so I was very afraid that I would let a relationship keep me from furthering my education and meeting my career goals because that’s what I grew up with. People meet someone in high school, they get married, they never leave their hometown” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018). However, during his doctorate program, Gus did meet someone when he least expected to.

“For months we were like ‘This won’t work, we’re not even going to try to make it work because we live too far apart.’ But the nagging was still there over the next four months, and so I decided to try to reconnect and see what happened” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). As it were, Gus’s partner was already living in the same city as the institution where the faculty position was created. “Those stars perfectly aligned, that the university where he lives had an open position, I applied and I got that position, and so I have it better than a lot of people in that respect. It was easy for me to see that that family opportunity was coming” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

By being away from his family, Gus’s personal life had been largely out of sight and out of mind for them. Now in a relationship, Gus looked ahead to graduation knowing that his partner and his family would be there and would meet one another. In the spring of 2017, Gus opted to tell his family about his relationship and had prepared

himself for the worst. “I told my parents about my partner three months after we were dating. I met his family over Christmas break, and I knew that my family and [he] were both going to be at graduation in May. So, my parents knew that, and I knew I had to tell the rest of my family. So, if that was going to affect their decision to come to graduation or not” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Impact on friendships. Moving around had not only impacted Gus’s intimate relationships but his friendships as well. “What was always really exciting to me about moving was the combination of excitement, dread, fear,” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018). New places meant new people, though Gus found it more challenging as an adult to make new friends and. Because so many of his experiences revolved around school, Gus felt it was natural to be involved in student and faculty organizations as a member and advisor and to be involved in the community in that regard. He acknowledged that he remained close with a few friends from college, though he did not invest in friends as much in South Carolina or Kansas as deeply as he did in Texas during his doctorate program.

Looking ahead, Gus admitted he did not even know how many more opportunities there would be to get involved at his new institution and in the new, larger city. On-campus, Gus anticipated joining LGBT faculty groups and pursuing collaborative research as he placed emphasis on connecting the university with the community. Off-campus, Gus looked forward to going to his partner’s softball games, Pride in June, and enjoying the apartment complex where many other gay men live and establishing some of his own friends outside of those he shared with his partner.

“What's very different about this next move is I have [my partner] there already. I have [his] friends who I consider my friends because I've been going up to the cities for over a year now and visiting. There would be times when [he] has a meeting at night, so I go out with his friends. I keep calling them his friends, but I definitely consider them mine. That fear of making friends and having stuff to do isn't there for me. There's tons to do. I already have that built-in” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). Gus expressed a fear of moving and making friends of his own, outside of the existing friend group of his partner. “Making new friends is challenging, but making new friends is even more challenging when you have a group already. That's something that I want to prioritize, is trying to meet new people” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Impact on identities: Two personalities become one. Gus had the revelation that “this would be the first time that both of Gus's personalities can hit the ground running at the same time.” Previously, the outgoing, confident Gus had always shown up on day one, but gay Gus “had to go wait in the car for a while.” He would be able to be outgoing, confident, and gay Gus from day one; both of Gus’s personalities would step onto campus at the same time, for the first time.

As Gus prepared for his new job, new city, and starting his life together with his partner, they each had to reconcile the differences in each their personal and professional lives, which occupied two very different spheres. Gus recognized that they had their agriculture, rural home, and right-leaning sphere as well as their gay, city home, and left-leaning sphere. While each would identify as more moderate and in agreement on most issues, they sometimes found their views in conflict depending on the sphere they were operating in. He anticipated the way they would be challenged in the rural-ag-

conservative sphere as gay men who would have a family and not simply be the two quiet men down the street whose relationship others could put out of sight and out of mind. In their urban, gay, left-leaning sphere, Gus and his partner have conservative views on economics and food production and cited counter-experiences of avoiding organic and non-GMO fads and choosing to eat at Chic-Fil-A. “Sometimes our conservative upbringing and our conservative values can become non-congruent with either of these two spheres that we participate in,” he explained, “and these are two [spheres] that are very important to us and neither of us wants to give these up,” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). Gus thought that his and his partner’s experiences had prepared both of them to serve both communities and to “bridge the gap” as the country becomes more polarized.

The key, Gus said, was to live as authentically as possible in both of those spheres, whether by advocating against anti-ag propaganda, being out to students in the classroom, or displaying a safe space sticker in his office. Gus emphasized the importance of showing “the gays” that he is not just doing “gay city things”, advocating that there are gay people where they live who are making significant contributions to the industry; to educate his students that ag in their hometown is not what ag looks like everywhere and that your local gay bar is not what the gay scene is like everywhere.

Gus also expressed being envious of people who had an easy coming out experience and acknowledged his own struggles with acceptance. He acknowledged his status as an educated white man from a conservative part of the country and conservative family and the conflict between who he is and what he believes with his family and their beliefs. “That struggle,” he said, “allows me to be more open-minded and recognize other

people's struggles. I don't know what it's like to be a person of color, I don't know what it's like to be a woman in the workplace and so I can never... fully understand their experience, but I know that my experience was challenging and I struggle with that” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). He recognized that he would like to continue to struggle with that in some aspects of his career and life moving forward. “If I were a straight, white, educated man becoming a professor,” he continued, “it would be more challenging for me to fully understand the experiences of my students and the challenges that some of them might face” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Gus also addressed the common attitude that all professors are liberal and seek to indoctrinate students. “When you take a step back and look at why this assumption is made, generally people with more education travel more, people with more education are exposed to other people, and by being exposed to other people and other people's struggles and challenges and their life experiences, it makes you recognize that other people have needs that don't align with yours,” he said. In his last week at Texas Tech, he noticed a brick for the first time that read “tolerance through education.” He noted that as we educate ourselves through the experiences of others, we are exposed to different experiences and develop tolerance. “I think the fact that I grew up in a rural area, that I dealt with my own minority experience there, and I chose to pursue education,” he said, “has made me recognize that this is why people can be closed-minded” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018). Such tolerance has afforded Gus to serve the traditionally conservative ag community and his minority students therein; he has become a compassionate educator and researcher as a result.

Bruce

It's funny
I ask myself this question
My first interpretation is complex, layered, complicated
Full of resilience, authenticity, and pain
I ask myself this question
All my life, I have experienced stereotypes about where I am from
From the color of my skin to the legacy of my last name
That is the complicated part
When people ask me where I am from,
It is to center my displacement
To remind me of where I am not from,
To amplify my location on the margins
To reify my status as an outsider
When people ask me where I am from,
The assumption is not from here
Nor is the assumption from within these borders
It is the driving force and frame for my agenda,
A legacy of change and action.
So, when people ask me where I am from,
I tell them stories.
I tell them narratives.
I tell them those values passed down to me from my ancestors.
I tell them the things that have been silenced.
I am from hardship.
I am from hard work.
I am from grit.
I am from resilience.
I am from family.
I am from the lives of immigrants.
I am from community.
I am from the wide spectrum of Los Angeles.
I am from complexity.
I am from heart.
I am from humility.
I am from a world of hope that hasn't always been perfect.
But I am never from regret.
I am from these beautiful oceans.
I am from queer histories.
I am now from complexity, privilege, and responsibility.
More importantly,
I am from gratitude.
I am from hope.

Bruce was born in May of 1988 (age 30 during the study) in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California, and experienced an urban-to-rural trajectory in his pursuit of education and work experiences. Bruce began his story by naming and understanding his multiple and complex identities and noted the centrality of these identities to the plot or sub-plots of his life and his own reflexivity saying, “I don’t just speak about these identities, but I live them. I see myself, and the way that I particularly speak to such different experiences with nuance, and emotionality, and particularly sometimes even with just integrity and authenticity” (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). From early in our first conversation, Bruce’s narrative was rooted in empathy, humanity, and service.

Growing Up in Los Angeles: A Pressure to Succeed

While Bruce’s narrative begins in childhood, there was a greater emphasis on family dynamics than early school experiences; he described growing up under the thumb of his parents as a time of immense pressure to succeed academically in addition to their expectation for him to be a cultural bearer. Though close to his family, Bruce described the ongoing conflict in his parents’ relationship and his own role as the family peacemaker. Bruce recalled feeling as though he was a stabilizer in his parents’ marriage; playing the role of a ‘scapegoat’ or like he was “being used as kind of like a prop” (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Bruce had keen awareness of his and his family’s middle-class life while growing up and described the economic and social class hardship his immigrant parents had experienced.

His father arrived in the US with \$2,000 and swept kitchens to make a minimum wage and barely survive, while his mother was a nurse. His parents moved around a lot,

including Chicago and New York, before Los Angeles. “[They] didn't grow up in this country, so they weren't acculturated to all these different issues, particularly around racism and what acts of violence really meant. So, I think that there was kind of delay in the socialization of that because you know how sometimes it's like one of those things like for people of color in communities of colors like we actually have those conversations, so we've prepared for what's to come. My parents really kind of walked me through that.” (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Bruce shared two examples of the racism his parents faced. One time while selling books door-to-door, Bruce's father was assaulted; the man opened the door, tried to strangle his father, and screamed a derogatory word at him and accused him of stealing jobs. Bruce's father escaped and ran, leaving the books behind. Bruce's mother, while working multiple jobs, dealt with co-workers who taunted and talked about her, eventually leading to her leaving her job. Upon reflecting on these incidents and his parents' hardship, Bruce acknowledged the importance of social context and how he benefited from having so much more exposure to urban and suburban environments that affirmed diversity.

Bruce described his experiences as a student attending a Catholic High School as a time when he and his friends were ostracized for not identifying as heterosexual or cisgender and “because they weren't adopting these heteronormative ideals” and were under a lot of pressure to pass as straight (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Focused on graduating and moving on, Bruce recalled how he focused on school and his social life while attempting to avoid drama.

Reflecting more deeply on his childhood, Bruce spoke vividly about a few instances when his parents would fight. With no closed doors at home, Bruce was privy to raised tempers, yelling, and cursing though there was never physical violence. In retrospect, Bruce recognized how resilient his parents were in their marriage and how resilient he became as a result. However, it was his parents' intense focus on him that also made him want to leave home and maintain a safe distance from his family. Bruce's decision to go out of state for undergraduate studies and his subsequent job searches were influenced by these family dynamics. In his own words, Bruce reflected, "I love them, I know they miss me and I miss them too, but at the same time, it helps me stay focused on what I need to do but also it helps me really appreciate what I come home to when I go back to Los Angeles. I don't think that I'd have that same appreciation if I was at home the whole time" (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Undergrad in Indiana: Resilience and Discovery

After high school, Bruce attended a large Catholic institution for undergraduate studies "in the middle of nowhere Indiana" (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018) where he initially declared a pre-med major. Leaving Los Angeles, Bruce recalled, was for the benefit of himself and his family. Bruce recognized that he did not want the "cookie cutter" experience of enrolling in the University of California System and he felt the need to have experiences outside of California. Once in Indiana, Bruce began questioning who he was and spent a lot of time socializing, which often included heavy drinking and skipping class. "I was still functioning on the weekdays, but it was like on the weekends, I was drinking a whole lot and going to parties all of the time. Probably not studying enough or focusing on what I needed to do to achieve in my classes and

courses. And so not really taking advantage of my education” (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Bruce described his early undergraduate years as a period of self-discovery academically, emotionally, and socially. “That’s where it all became kind of seriously real for me. Questioning a lot of who I was. And I kind of, for a minute, I did lose sight of who I was,” Bruce said (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). He again recalled the pressure to fit the dominant heteronormative narrative regarding at a time when he was not out and found a lack of affirmation for queer identities. This was, in part, due to the religious affiliation of the institution and its mix of conservative and progressive makeup. Bruce described a friend with whom he shared the experience of being out in high school and then returned to the closet upon enrolling at the university. At the time, the institution had single gender dorms and lacked resources for the LGBT+ community, such as a gay-straight alliance or a multicultural students center. Bruce’s experiences of exclusion were accented by microaggressions related to race, such as being asked about Asian glow or being told he must be really good at math and science because he is Asian. Bruce also described the experience of being featured on a forum website on which people post anonymously about others; where sexual assault survivors were slut-shamed and where he was called out for drinking, had his body, skin color, culture, and values scrutinized, and was likened to the role of a gay Filipino uncle. He recalled others around him in his residence hall who told him to laugh it off. To Bruce, there was nothing funny about it and he felt as though he had to downplay his reaction. Though Bruce refused to take these experiences too seriously, he took them to heart and described developing a lot of resilience and grit to handle it as a result. “It wasn’t until I

got there that I really realized, like, wow, oppression does exist. And it's a problem. And sometimes it's not just a function of interpersonal issues or individuals, but really this entire culture that it's centered around," (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

After struggling to find the right fit for two years, Bruce abandoned his pre-med plans. His experiences improved as he progressed through his junior and senior years, eventually moving off campus, minimizing drama with other people, and taking part in things he enjoyed. Bruce's undergraduate experience made him hyper-aware of issues like sexual assault and harassment, marginalization of women and minority identities, and the culture of stigmatizing difference. His time in Indiana ultimately raised his consciousness of what was happening to him and as he negotiated and affirmed his own sexual and affectional identity. This raised consciousness is what led Bruce to consolidate his identities, live in their complexity, to find ways to be resilient, to create social change, and create community.

Bruce identified as a second-generation Asian American queer person of color; as able-bodied, cisgender, and millennial; and as a pluralistic Catholic centered in liberation theology. He interrogated not only the taken-for-granted privilege typically afforded to these identities but his own experiences of oppression as well. Bruce expressed frustration over binaries, the nuance of sexual and affectional identity, the complexity and fetishization by others for being multiracial and of mixed heritage, on ageism and ableism as a young scholar, and differences between traditional and progressive faith.

The myriad identities and experiences that shaped them led Bruce to focus on liberating marginalized communities in America, developing a social justice agenda, and the scholarship research activism in which he is now engaged. "The reason why I do the

kinds of scholarship, research, activism that I do now is central to kind of what I knew, my connection to who I am and what I do to live authentically. Knowing that I've had many experiences of oppression and not too many experiences of privilege" Bruce said (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). The complexities of these identities also caused Bruce to recognize that he does not fit into established molds or social systems.

The Bronx: A Grounding Experience

Once he had completed undergrad, Bruce searched for AmeriCorps-like service opportunities and opted for a position at a foster care agency in the Bronx, NYC. This position, he recalls, was a life-changing experience and provided him with the direction in life as he became more comfortable in his own skin, began to come out to himself, and engaging in the queer scene by dating and going to gay bars. It was during this time that Bruce began to feel centered and grounded; he recognized he was where he needed to be and doing what he needed to do.

As Bruce began to understand the way families interact with the system, he recognized how communities of color were especially disadvantaged and he felt a renewed passion for engaging in work on activism, diversity, inclusion, and social justice. "It kind of helped me see holistically not only who I was in my career. Really thinking about all these different layers because I saw so much of what the system had done to these families and how it was not helping people," (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

Through his role in case management, Bruce realized that pursuing a master's program in clinical and mental counseling was a way to not just help people but to engage with them through their stories and their narratives; to allow them to live

authentically. Though his early undergraduate experiences had resulted in an overall lower-than-ideal GPA, Bruce was determined to continue his education and began applying to numerous master's programs. Of the nearly 15 applications he submitted he received only two or three rejections while receiving multiple offers to interview and eventually was offered scholarships. Though Bruce loved New York City, none of the graduate programs he wanted to pursue were nearby and he ultimately relocated to Washington DC to pursue his passion.

Washington, DC: Learning to Survive and Thrive

Bruce noted the clean albeit stiff feel of Washington DC though enjoyed remaining in the urban environment. The transition from NYC to DC was easy enough and Bruce found places to go, people to hang out with, and reconnected with friends from undergrad. The academic transition was also a successful one for Bruce, who was surprised by how well he performed as a graduate student and was seen very highly by the department.

Bruce began his master's program at the same time as his faculty advisor was eager to assemble a research team. Though he was more inclined to be a practitioner rather than a researcher, Bruce reached out to her about the opportunity and began working with her. Unlike previous lab and teamwork in which Bruce found it difficult to be invested, he enjoyed the opportunities to research, present at conferences, and share authorship with his mentor. As he progressed in the program, Bruce struggled to balance academics, working with clients, and navigating relationships with his supervisors.

Despite doubt from some friends about his readiness to continue his education, Bruce remained in the same department and began doctoral studies after completing his

master's degree. One of the influential people during Bruce's graduate school experiences was the department chair. Bruce recalled, "[she] was like fighting for me because she really believed in my leadership and what I had to offer in terms of cultural capital" (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). This department chair recognized the different perspective that Bruce would offer the program and as Bruce made the transition from the master's program to the Ph.D. program, the chair announced her retirement.

Bruce characterized this time as one of learning to survive and thrive. It was a time during which he performed departmental service without pay and dealt with several challenging faculty relationships. Without a graduate assistantship, Bruce was not afforded the same opportunities for research or funding as colleagues in the doctoral program. Instead, Bruce pursued opportunities outside of the department to attend conferences, networking, and building a body of presentations and publications in partnership with colleagues from other institutions. "I was in the office from nine to five doing my full-time job and going to evening classes for my own class and then co-instructing as a TA for other classes. So, it's almost like I was taking six or seven classes per semester. It was a little bit crazy those first two years. And there was all this crap. And it wasn't like, it was rough, but I was able to survive" (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

On one occasion, Bruce returned from a major conference and discussed the experience and potential research projects to pursue with a member of the faculty. Six months later, Bruce returned to the faculty member's office and was shocked to find a dry erase board of project ideas, including the one Bruce had proposed, with no attribution.

On another occasion, Bruce had to navigate program requirements and personality differences among faculty. Bruce was nearly forced to delay his program progress by more than six months over a scheduling conflict between the comprehensive exam period and the premier counseling conferences where students are encouraged to attend and present. An additional incident occurred when Bruce was seeking IRB approval for dissertation research and had to negotiate conflicting feedback he received from his committee and the department chair. Bruce and his dissertation chair perceived these slights and roadblocks as intentional and recognized systemic oppression in the academic department. Each of these incidents served as reminders for Bruce about the kind of faculty member and mentor he wants to be to his students and to avoid treating them in the same manner.

Rural Idaho: Living Intersectionally and Learning How to Flourish

As Bruce neared the end of his doctoral program, he also began the faculty job search and found a position posted at an institution in Idaho. Initially, Bruce, his colleagues, and his friend and family were skeptical; despite the quality reputation of the institution, they wondered whether Bruce would be supported and successful there. “What’s in Idaho?” “Will they pay you enough there?” “Will you be okay?” The questions from concerned family and friends poured in. Though Bruce had applied at other institutions, he did not feel as though they would be the right fit and opted to give Idaho a chance.

The position in Idaho was Bruce’s last application and first campus interview in what amounted to a whirlwind three-week search process from application to campus interview. Unsure of what to expect, Bruce traveled to campus and immediately

understood the community-centered nature of the department. “I was looking for anything that was opposite of what I experienced in my doc program,” Bruce said (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Bruce was optimistic about the possibilities in Idaho, of becoming the first faculty member of color and the first out LGBTQ+ faculty member. He knew in his heart that it was the right choice; the faculty and students treated him well, he recognized the value the institution placed on mentoring and community and taking care of each other.

In his new position, Bruce described feeling driven, “not only by this experience of being in the mountains, being authentic, being congruent with who I am, and being able to live proudly and celebrate who I am” (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018). Welcoming the change of pace, Bruce also realized his potential for creating change as a scholar-activist and representing his authentic self with his students. Bruce has accepted responsibility for being available to students to share their experiences and traumas and to affirm their experiences while living his own truth and living proudly. Bruce acknowledged the power and privilege afforded to him and the ways he can work to change the system from within; to make a difference for his students, his colleagues, and those “who are harmed, marginalized, oppressed, ostracized in ways that I’m not” (Bruce, personal communication, May 9, 2018).

On the Move

Bruce’s transition experience led him from an urban environment near Los Angeles to a religious institution in the Midwest, to urban NYC and Washington DC, to a college town in rural southeastern Idaho. “At the end of the day, what made that transition so seamless was that I was congruent and authentic to who I am, and that helps

me. It helped me not only internally, but it helped me realize who's here with me, who's acting in solidarity with me and who isn't. If I can determine who isn't then this place isn't for me” (Bruce, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

Bruce described the stark differences between living in two major cities for seven years and then relocating to Idaho. Despite the population density, he did not consider the town to be rural but appreciated the contextual factors that make it so. He described the economic factors and social class parity he observed and recognized families that were struggling to survive and acknowledged the privilege of having somewhere to return to if he so chose. Bruce spoke several times of the importance of social context and the people that surround him wherever he is and how he thrives on interpersonal networks and communities of people acting in solidarity.

Leadership development. As Bruce reflected on his role both at his institution and in the counseling profession and related associations and professional organizations, he identified two important characteristics of a leader: someone who both creates a long-term vision and who does the grunt work. With just a vision, a leader is all talk and no actual work gets done; without a vision, a leader can work all the time and change nothing. Bruce also reflected on being one of two clinical faculty members of color and the role he plays for students who represent bodies, identities, and experiences that are not shared with other faculty members. Finally, Bruce acknowledged that staying authentic and congruent to who he is, helps to keep him committed to action, equity, social justice, and efforts to systematically undo broken systems of power. By demonstrating this commitment, students see Bruce as a leader and as a representative of them and as an advocate for them. Though Bruce never specifically envisioned himself in

this role, it happened, and he allowed it to inspire him to be present and to make a difference.

While his students see him as a leader for what he represents in them, Bruce views himself as a leader in his community of colleagues based on his productivity as a scholar-activist. As someone committed to the growth and success of the institution, Bruce spoke of his approach as the integration of elements of both servant leadership and authentic leadership. For Bruce, this means serving the greater good and the community, fostering relational energy, and focusing on empowering others through his words, actions, and the way he represents himself to them and inspiring them. Another aspect of Bruce's authentic leadership was cultural humility. "Just because I'm a leader doesn't mean that I just run the show. I really want other people's voices to be featured in this" he said (Bruce, personal communication, June 6, 2018). Bruce described a felt responsibility to ensure many voices, not just his own, are reflected in decision making and that representation of his community ensures the good of the group and the success of individuals.

"I always think that there's always this kind of dichotomy, where people if they see you succeeding then they think that you've never struggled, or that you're not struggling. I've always thought about that. ... everybody comments on, "Oh my goodness, you're a prolific scholar and you're doing all this stuff and you're writing, you inspire me." It's always sometimes reaffirming and validating to hear that, but I think there's also some people who believe it's because you have all this stuff that you could ... it's because you're part of the club or it's because you're part of this. Kind of like almost diminishing the work that I've produced or the contributions that I've had or the hardships I've

experienced, or what my journey was. It's almost like people made assumptions without really fully knowing my journey.”

Each of the narrative portraits presented above reflect the rural-urban migration of three millennial gay men and illuminate their particular, individual experiences of coming of age, moving to new places, and pursuing educational opportunities and careers in higher education. While the participants were selected using narrow criteria, the portraits above demonstrate how unique each of their journeys was and contrast the ways in which they made meaning of their experiences. In the next chapter, the research puzzle will be revisited and the findings of the study will be discussed through the lenses of the narrative commonplaces, followed by a discussion of story threads, or themes amongst one, two, or all three participants, and an analysis of the justifications and implications of the research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This final chapter provides a discussion of the research findings and their implications. I begin by revisiting the research puzzle which informed and guided the narrative inquiry and summarize the plot of each narrative portrait presented in chapter four. I then revisit the narrative commonplaces and present story threads, or themes, which emerged in one, two, or all three of the participants' narratives. The personal, practical, and social justifications for engaging in the research and the implication of the findings are discussed next and I conclude with my own researcher reflections.

Research Puzzle, Revisited

This narrative study was based on a research puzzle that sought to understand the rural-urban transition experiences of millennial gay men, and the way these transitions, as well as school and leadership experiences, influenced participants' identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement. As discussed in chapter one, I arrived at this research puzzle following the 2016 election and a crisis of professional identity as I contemplated my role as an emerging scholar, community developer, and social justice educator. As I reflected on my own experiences moving from a small rural town in northern Kentucky to larger and more diverse places, I was unable to name what was unique about my experience and developed a curiosity about how others have experienced these transitions.

Three individuals were invited to participate in this narrative study of rural-urban transition experiences and their influence on identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement. Two participants responded to recruitment information shared in two Facebook groups; the third participant was referred to me by a member of the

Chapman Ph.D. in Education faculty. Once each participant had reviewed informed consent documentation and agreed to participate, I established a series of three, two-hour interviews with each participant. Through semi-structured interviews, each participant shared stories about himself and identified critical incidents within his story that were most meaningful to him and relevant to the research puzzle. Using the Listening Guide, multiple readings of the interview transcripts along with multiple listenings of the interview audio were completed to establish the plot, first-person perspectives, tensions and participants' contrapuntal voices, and finally assembling the completed narrative portrait for each participant.

Narrative inquiry, as discussed in chapter three, was selected as the methodology for this study in order to illuminate the particular, individual experiences of each participant as related to being on the move between rural and urban places and the influence this had on his identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement. By first understanding my own trajectory and the meaning made from my experiences, then hearing the stories of others, I sought to understand what was unique about our experiences as opposed to generalizing the way in which all millennial gay men experience being on the move. Short of advancing a grand new theory, I revisited each individual narrative portrait and searched for themes, or story threads, that appeared in one, two, or all three, of the narrative portraits. I also considered my own experiences in the discussion of the story threads.

The following discussion includes a summary of the findings detailed in chapter four; a discussion of the narrative commonplaces; the story threads that emerged from the

individual narrative portraits; justifications and implications of the study; and my personal reflections on my role as the researcher.

Summary of Narrative Portraits

Jackson was born and raised in rural North Carolina and represented a rural-to-urban-to rural trajectory as he left his hometown for a residential high school, completed undergraduate studies at a state school, spent time professionally on the west coast, and eventually returned to Virginia and North Carolina for doctoral studies and his current career. While family dynamics, discussed further below, were a major story thread for each participant, they were an especially prominent thread in Jackson's narrative. Having come out as gay relatively later than the other participants, Jackson conveyed a keen awareness of his shifting identities from middle school through the time of the study.

Gus was born and raised near the Mississippi gulf coast and represented a rural-to-urban trajectory as he pursued junior college, undergraduate studies, work opportunities, and eventually graduate school and doctoral studies in increasingly urban environments. At the time of the study, Gus was preparing to move a midwestern metropolitan area with his partner and was eager to begin a tenure track position in the field of agriculture education. Sharing many story threads with Jackson, Gus also spoke at length about family dynamics such as growing up in a conservative family, coming out to his cousin, and worrying about telling his parents about his partner. A highlight of Gus's narrative is the way he expressed a younger, shyer version of himself juxtaposed with his out of the closet and outgoing present self and the way he felt his identities had integrated, allowing him to be a more authentic version of himself at all times.

Bruce was born and raised in the suburbs of Los Angeles and represented an urban-to-rural trajectory as he pursued undergraduate studies at a religiously affiliated institution in Indiana, then worked and completed graduate programs in New York City and Washington, DC, before moving to rural Idaho for a faculty position. Perhaps because Bruce was the lone participant of color, our conversations and his completed narrative portrait had a contrasting tone to that of Jackson or Gus. Whether by training in the field of counseling or perhaps based on his identities, Bruce spoke very vividly about himself and more explicitly in relation to the research puzzle. One particular distinction of Bruce's narrative is related to his passion and purpose related to social justice through his role as scholar-activist.

Narrative Commonplaces

I return to the narrative commonplaces (Clandinin, 2013) of temporality, sociality, and place, which were the foundations upon which this narrative study was designed, and which are inextricably linked to the narrative portraits presented in chapter four and the story threads discussed below. As the participants' stories moved across time, physical places, and social contexts, their experiences became more nuanced and their narratives came to life. It was by attending to the commonplaces from the design to execution to analysis of the inquiry that I came to understand the meaning and significance of the participants' experiences on the move.

Prior to engaging with the participants, I created my own personal chronology from early childhood to present and noted the age I was in each grade and reflected on significant memories from elementary school through my doctoral program. In addition to personal memories and critical incidents, I also noted significant events and shifts at

the societal level that occurred throughout the years. Completing this exercise allowed me to identify my own critical incidents related to my time on the move and the education and leadership experiences that influenced my identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement.

As I began the study and engaged with the participants, I encouraged them to similarly reflect on their earliest childhood and school memories and to tell me about particular events and significant memories along the way. Once each participant had returned to the present (at the time of the study), I encouraged him to think of how he would segment his story into individual chapters and identify the especially critical incidents that had occurred. This made the first listening and eventual re-storying of each narrative a bit easier, as I was able to move elements of the story as they were told across three conversations into a single, integrated chronology. The story threads below reflect the movement across the past, present, and future of the participants' lives.

While developing my personal chronology mentioned above, and then revisiting it as I developed the individual narrative portraits, I turned to a digital timeline program to plot my own as well as the participants' critical events and other happenings that were experienced by one or more of us individually or as a societal event or shift. In creating this timeline, I re-presented the data in a visual way and in a format that presents our personal timelines alongside one another. A considerable number of story threads related to the cultural, familial, institutional, linguistic, and social contexts are discussed below.

The narrative commonplace of place was central to this study from the outset, as I sought to better understand my own transition from rural northern Kentucky to places including the Lowcountry of South Carolina, Ohio in the Midwest, the global metropolis

of Hong Kong, New Orleans, southern California, and most recently central Iowa. As previously mentioned, this research study was born out of recognizing the growing divide between rural and urban America, which was punctuated by the 2016 presidential election. Unsure of whether being on the move and transitioning between rural and urban places was unique, I puzzled about whether those of us who had made such transitions could be more adept at bridging the divides that are widening between us.

Physical and topographical boundaries define place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) and Clandinin (2013) remind narrative inquirers that all events occur in a specific place and that an inextricable link exists between people, places, and stories. As I engaged in this study and reflected on the many different and diverse places I have lived and traveled short-term, I considered how I was changed by each place and how I impacted that place. During our conversations, I encouraged the participants to do the same. Reflections on the importance of the various places in which the participant's narratives unfolded are apparent throughout the story threads below.

Story Threads

Each narrative portrait presented in chapter four was developed to stand alone, independent of the other two, in an intentional effort not to project one's experience onto another. There are, however, themes or story threads, which appeared throughout one, two, or all three of the narrative portraits. These story threads are discussed in the following sections, organized according to the research puzzle, and include being on the move, identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement.

On the Move

Through this study, I wanted to understand the meaning made from making such transitions, regardless of the direction in which the participants had migrated. By moving throughout these multiple spaces, those of us on the move are expanding our worldview. This was certainly true for me. I grew up in rural Kentucky. I ended up living in Hong Kong for a while. I have lived on the West Coast. I currently live in Iowa. I have certainly expanded my worldview through travel and seeing the world through the eyes of others.

The participants in this narrative study represented multi-directionality in their transitions between rural and urban places with participants on the move between rural North Carolina to the west coast and back again, from the gulf south to the Lonestar state, to a Midwest urban metro, and from the suburbs of sunny LA to Indiana to New York and DC to rural Idaho. Some of the literature discussed in chapter two would suggest that some seek a rural idyll (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Bell & Valentine, 1995) while others seek urban opportunity and anonymity (Aldrich, 2004). However, none of the three participants placed particular emphasis on moving from rural to urban or urban to rural as their primary motivation for being on the move. Rather, opportunities to continue their education and pursue professional opportunities were the catalysts for such transitions.

The places where the participants originated from and would eventually move to were of great importance to their experiences and the ways in which they told their stories. Jackson and Gus shared the common experience of being born and raised in a rural place. Jackson, as he described it, was born in a swamp of place reminiscent of the fictional locale of *The Waterboy*, while Gus described being brought up in a conservative

state, in a conservative part of the state, and in a conservative family. Bruce, on the other hand, was born and raised as an only child of immigrant parents in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California.

Each of the participants, regardless of directionality, expressed a degree of antipathy toward living in the places where they grew up, yet by the end of their narrative, their reflections on their hometowns had changed. By moving away from something familiar to you, you get a new perspective on it. It is retrospective in that you come to appreciate what you have, even if it is not what you want right now. You know it remains there and that it is a part of you and always will be.

Though all three participants expressed a desire to move away from their hometown, it is worth noting that none of the participants cited concerns about safety or feeling forced to move away. Rather, each was able to choose to leave. For each participant, his first move was for college: Jackson, the first generation student, went to a state school; Gus, one of many in his family to attend the same state university, started a junior college then transferred; and Bruce, who was grappling with shifts in his racial, sexual, and religious identities, moved across the country to a religious institution in the Midwest. As each participant aged and eventually relocated multiple times for college, graduate school, and work experiences, his individual journey would uniquely affect his identity development, sense of community, and civic engagement.

Identity Development

Throughout the study, as our conversations unfolded, each of the three participants expressed a keen awareness of his shifting identities based on the various contexts he was in as well as the contextual factors such as home life, family dynamics,

school settings, and extracurricular activities. Reflecting on these factors illuminated the importance and centrality of the sociality narrative commonplace in this inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). One such identity shift, which was recurring throughout each participant's ongoing experience, was related to sexual identity formation (Cass, 1984). From an early age, Jackson and Gus recalled knowing they were different if not actually gay, though neither was in a place developmentally nor socially (i.e., living at home, not out to family) to begin the process of coming out. Both Jackson and Gus expressed a process of internalizing this tension with their sexual identity and choosing to suppress it. Bruce spoke about his sexual identity early on in our conversations, though he placed less emphasis on his sexuality as a child and described fitting in with other queer or different kids during high school.

The coming out experiences for those in the LGBTQIA+ community can be different and unique to each individual. Some enjoy the freedom and safety to explore their sexual identity and express it from a young age while others are forced to remain in the closet for much if not all of their lives. Some find great acceptance from their closest family and friends while others are ostracized or worse. Some are able to be out in the workplace without being oppressed or held back from advancing in their careers while others never reach their full potential for fear of retaliation or termination.

For each of the participants in the study, their coming out experiences varied, but were relatively positive experiences for each; none of the participants expressed receiving backlash from friends and immediately family or fear of rejection. Jackson grappled with his sexual identity from an early age all the way through graduate school. Having admittedly come out later than most of his peers, Jackson described the impact this had

on his past relationships and reflected on how he experienced relationship tensions and breakups later than others he knew. While Jackson's immediate family accepted that he was gay, there were tensions with extended family members that eventually came to a head and caused a major falling out between Jackson and his mother. At the time of the study, Jackson and his mom had not spoken to one another in roughly two years. In personal communication following our conversations, Jackson updated me that he had spoken to his mom a couple of times since we had last spoken.

Though Gus came initially came out to his cousin in high school and was asked about his sexuality by his mom around the same time, he also did not fully come out or engage sexually with other men until he was in college. During our conversations he laughed about how he had friends and graduate school colleagues who he met before and after he was out professionally and how anyone he knows now cannot imagine him being closeted. The ability to be out as an agriculture educator was a highlight of Gus's narrative. Both Jackson and Gus spoke about how each had prioritized continuing education and advancing their careers rather than prioritizing intimate relationships. Both would go on to date during his doctorate program.

Bruce did not speak at length about his own coming out experience, though he described being among other queer or non-hetero students in high school and the dynamics of undergrad where others who struggled with coming out at a religiously affiliated institution. While Bruce had dated women prior to coming out, he had struggled with understanding his various identities and the way they shifted and came to the fore as he moved from the LA suburbs to a religious institution in Indiana to the NYC and DC

metro areas, and finally rural Idaho. His visible and invisible identities were always on his mind.

Authenticity, Congruence, and Integration

Gus and Bruce spoke about the importance of being authentic (George, 2007), about the integration of multiple identities, or about finding congruence. Gus reflected on the impact of being in a fraternity and his growth during his Ph.D. program. He credited each of these formative experiences making him less shy and more self-assured and confident. Gus spoke on several occasions about how important it was for him to be out professionally. He is out to his colleagues, his students, and in the field of agriculture communications and excitedly described how confidently and comfortably the outgoing and confident side of himself can step onto campus alongside his gay out and proud self. He spoke about how he was relieved that being gay had not hurt his ability to succeed in his field and in beginning his career. Gus also described his views of leadership and recognized that if you are not being true and authentic to who you are, you are never going to be able to lead.

Similarly, Bruce spoke about his experience since he had moved to Idaho and how he is driven by being in the mountains, being congruent with who he is, and living proudly and celebrating who he is. He noted the lack of competition among his colleagues that he had dealt with during his doctorate program. His felt authenticity and congruence were accompanied by a drive to be unique and to contribute with his students. Staying true to himself and being authentic helped Bruce as he transitioned from student to faculty and helped him, as he put it, to understand who is acting in solidarity with him and who is not.

Sense of Community

Jackson and Gus each described how they found it increasingly difficult to make new friends as they grew older. Each benefitted from the social networks they gained by being in fraternities; Jackson recalled what it was like to lose this social support and no longer having much of his time structured for him. Neither Jackson nor Gus described investing much locally, though each was excited to do so as they looked to the future. Jackson and his partner wanted to get more involved in the local community by volunteering with LGBT-friendly organizations and perhaps even getting involved politically in some way. Gus was excited about the possibilities awaiting him as he was about to relocate to be with his partner and start his new job.

Throughout our conversations, each of the participants either explicitly or implicitly addressed McMillan & Chavis' (1986) four elements related to sense of community. The first element, membership, is the feeling of belonging or personal relatedness. In our conversations, Bruce, Gus, and Jackson each described times, places, and contexts in which they did and do not have a sense of group membership. These insider-outsider dynamics were present in familial settings, classrooms, work places, and public spaces.

Influence, the second element, is related to mattering (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Gus was especially vocal about mattering, as he described significance as one of his top strengths and reiterated that he opts into groups and teams in order to make a difference and for his contributions to be recognized. All three participants gave voice to their role as educators and mattering to their students. Each had accepted responsibility

for modeling authentic leadership behaviors through transparency and fostering equality in their work.

The third element, closely related to membership, is integration and fulfillment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Not only do we need a sense of belonging, but this element is concerned with reinforcement, and in the sense of community, this is represented through rewards of membership, having shared values, and meeting the needs of self and others. As the participants transitioned between rural and urban places and pursued educational and work opportunities, there were varying degrees of successfully integrating into various communities of place, practice, and interest. Gus and Jackson, in particular, spoke about their desire to be more invested in the local community as well as the LGBTQIA+ culture where they now live. This integration into place was likely impacted by the fact that these two participants are in relationships.

The final element is shared emotional connection based upon shared history, common places, time together, and similar experiences (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). This emotional connection was communicated as the participants described their hometowns and upbringing in retrospect with a near sense of pride and comfort. The participants also conveyed this in the present as each described his role as an educator in pursuit of a more socially just world.

Personal Relationships

Whether by choice or chance, each of the participants also expressed a reluctance to engage in intimate relationships. It was easier to channel energy into education and career advancement than seeking personal relationships or reconciling sexual identities. It is true for me, too, that it requires a lot of energy to try to adopt a heteronormative

relationship as a person in a queer community. We have to subscribe to the epitomized version of a nuclear family, a white picket fence, and what a fulfilling career or meaningful relationship or a successful marriage should look like.

Jackson and Gus shared the experience of not prioritizing intimate relationships, while instead focusing on continuing their education and beginning their careers. As Gus said, “I knew I was gonna be doing this for a little while before I go do my Ph.D. So I knew that I wasn't about to be at the place where I could settle down, and so I was very afraid that I would let a relationship keep me from furthering my education and meeting my career goals because that's what I grew you with” (Gus, personal communication, May 15, 2018).

In his current relationship, Jackson acknowledged the partnership he has and the way he shares decision making, as well as the freedom to show affection in public. Now in partnership, Jackson was also concerned with the community they had begun to establish and the desire to settle down where they had been living in North Carolina.

For Gus, his current relationship came when he was least expecting it. Though they had initially sparked a connection with one another, the long-distance nature of the budding relationship created a lot of uncertainty and they did not pursue it further. Then they reconnected and by happenstance, as Gus was preparing to graduate and go on the faculty job market, an opportunity opened up where his partner was living. His relationship was further tested when he was making graduation plans, knowing that his partner and his family would all be there. While he feared the worst - a forced choice of his partner or his family - he was relieved that there was little animosity and they all

attended his graduation ceremony. At the time of the study, Gus was excitedly preparing to relocate to be with his partner in a new, larger city, and to begin their lives together.

Family Dynamics and Expectations

Such family dynamics and expectations were a story thread throughout all three of the participants' narratives. The first relationship each participant described was family, regardless of the place in which they grew up. They each acknowledged they had some struggles and issues with family growing up, but it was never unsafe. It was never a life or death situation. This is an important distinction for the participants in this study; none indicated feeling unsafe or insecure or forced out of the place that they were. There are likely many of us in the LGBT community that we are in places or situations that we are not safe, and we have to get out as a matter of life or death. That was not the case for any of my three participants. So, while the family was an important part of each participants' development, each shared a need to distance himself from his family in order to grow.

For Gus, he spoke on several occasions about growing up in a conservative family. When he was young and determining his sexual identity, he spoke about his gay cousin whose mother committed suicide; he internalized the fear that if he was gay, someone he loved might kill themselves. There was also pressure from his family to return to teach at the same school where several members of his family had gone. Despite a lot of differing views and opinions, Gus did acknowledge that his dad was one of his greatest role models and his inspiration for pursuing a career in agriculture education.

Jackson spoke about his parents' divorce when he was very young, followed by subsequent remarriages and step-siblings in addition to ongoing tensions with blood relatives on each side of his family. Socioeconomics, faith, politics, and his queer identity

all played key roles in his relationship with his family members. From disagreement over the end of life care for one of his grandmothers to a holiday fallout with his mother, Jackson spoke about his family dynamics and the toll it had taken on his own mental health.

In my own rural-urban transitions, I have similarly experienced the desire to experience life away from my family and beyond my hometown. Like the two rural-born participants, I grew up understanding that if you do not leave your hometown, you will likely stay forever; maybe you will have children, maybe you will get married, maybe you will do both. My own brother and sister still live near our childhood home. They live a heteronormative rural experience that is comfortable and safe for them, though neither completed a four-year degree. Pursuing higher education was the opportunity and pathway forward and out of my hometown, as it was for the three participants in the study.

Greek Life

Jackson and Gus were both involved in fraternities during undergrad and they had very different experiences. For Jackson, being in the fraternity provided him with friendships and brotherhood, the opportunity to be involved in extracurricular activities, and to eventually start his own organization that raised more than \$35,000 for charity. Being involved in the fraternity also afforded Jackson the convenience of a structured schedule and organized social life. However, as one of several gay members of the fraternity, Jackson felt an increasing spotlight on sexuality in the chapter and their reputation on campus. When recruitment efforts began to explicitly focus on, if not

antagonize, gay and bisexual pledges, Jackson recognized he could no longer remain a part of the fraternity.

Gus credited his involvement in the fraternity with helping him to come out of his shell and develop self-confidence. Though he joined thinking the experience would help him be straight, Gus recognized this was not going to be the case. However, he credited his experience in the fraternity with being the greatest experience of his college career and how it gave him a great group of friends. Rather than making him straight, Gus enjoyed the opportunity to be happy and comfortable with himself, as himself.

Faith and Spirituality

Each of the participants described his sometimes-problematic relationship with faith and spirituality. Jackson addressed the church in his *Where I'm From* poem and noted his own sarcasm when he described his experience. Bruce grappled with his Catholic faith from a young age. He attended a religious institution for undergrad and saw the ways in which others around him who had been out of the closet previously, were compelled to regress and hide that aspect of their identity. Bruce also credited his Catholic faith as driving his social justice and service agenda. Gus shared a very engaging anecdote about his crisis of faith following his father's hospitalization. Though he had grown up in a conservative family and the church, he turned to Mormonism and was invested fully in the faith.

Civic Engagement

Each of the participants described becoming civically engaged and politically aware throughout middle school, high school, and college. Jackson and Gus both described an interest in and awareness of politics from early ages. Jackson recalled

consuming the news as a child when he visited his grandparents and the tension he felt in middle school as an Al Gore supporter when others around him voted for George W. Bush in their mock election. When Gus was in high school, he similarly felt like the odd man out as a John Kerry supporter among primarily conservative classmates. Jackson's high school crisis of political faith was punctuated by a dual credit instructor who told him that gay people were going to hell, leading Jackson to identify with conservative, Republican ideology for a while. Gus also reflected on his evolving political views and the way it had evolved from high school to the time of the study.

While Bruce did not speak to early political identity, he did acknowledge the importance of being involved in the present. "My personal philosophy is yes, because I believe that we are fighting for something that is for the good of our communities, but at the same time, I don't expect that from other people. Of course, I'm going to pick up on energy from other people. But if other people aren't doing it, I'm not gonna judge them for not doing it. For not teaching the LGBTQ+ class, for not teaching this class on diversity, for not teaching or participating in lobbying or all these community organizing or setting that up. If they're not doing that, that's okay, I just don't get it" (Bruce, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

Jackson was deeply impacted by the 2016 election and recalled the disappointment and fear that he and his partner felt the next morning when they woke to the news of the outcome. He continued to reflect on politics in the time since then. "I'm kind of frustrated with the two party system, and maybe it's just because I don't understand it well enough, but I vote democrat because I have to, because I feel like if I don't then the alternative is just absolutely complete shit, versus a party that I feel is

somewhat questionable. So, I don't know. I'm just trying to figure out what all that means right now. I hope that people in my generation and earlier have learned their lesson of all right, well it may be distasteful to vote for this person, but unless you want to be in a world like the handmaid's tale, then you should probably rally behind the person that's not as bad as the first person” (Jackson, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Jackson and Gus also shared the experience of not investing locally as much as either could have, largely due to moving from one place to another. “I think because I've moved so much, that it's hard to ... I would like to be very much more civically engaged on a local level, because I think that's how things have gotten so, for lack of a better term, fucked up right now. People have forgotten the importance of local government and being engaged civically in your local community. But for people like us that have moved around every two years, how do you establish that?” (Jackson, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

Similarly, Gus reflected on the various places he had moved and the sets of friends and colleagues he had made in each place. He also described how he had remained in contact with some and completely lost touch with others. As he described being relatively uninvolved in local politics and community work along the way Gus said, “It didn't feel like it was something I was missing, it's something that I'm very much looking forward to here, because it's an important part of connecting with the community and making that university tie into the community and those sorts of things. I don't know what that might look like just yet, again because in such a much bigger city than I've ever been before and so there's so many things to get involved with that I don't know what I want to do yet” (Gus, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Leadership Development

Perhaps counterintuitively, the criteria to participate in this study did not require any past or current involvement in leadership. Recent scholarship would advocate that leadership can be learned and is not limited to a chosen few (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2016). With that in mind, I assumed that my participants would demonstrate some aspects of leadership and I was interested in understanding how each came to see himself as a leader. During my conversations with each participant, leadership was discussed at times intentionally and arose naturally at other times.

Gus largely credited his involvement in Greek life with shaping his leadership. Being in the fraternity allowed him to come out of his shell, be less of a follower, and to be comfortable being himself. As described above, Gus asserted that if you are not true to yourself or if you are not authentic, you cannot perform as a leader. Jackson described a tension he felt with the idea of leadership and how our societal view of leadership is dominated by a white, straight, male-centric business environment. His views of leadership were more closely aligned with a distributed or collaborative leadership style and process. Bruce saw himself as a leader among his colleagues based on his scholarly productivity and living authentically with his various identities. Bruce even specifically named servant leadership and authentic leadership as informing his own leadership identity.

Clifton Strengths

Jackson and Gus both mentioned the popular CliftonStrengths (n.d.) that identifies and rank orders a person's signature strengths that they bring to teams and the workplace.

For Gus, one of his top themes is significance and it resonated with him as he spoke a few times about needing to feel like he is making a valuable contribution to the groups of which he is a part. For Jackson, positivity was near the top of the list and he relied on this strength in times of anxiety, depression, and tense family dynamics.

Mentors

Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella & Osteen (2005) observed the role of adults and mentors in encouraging emerging leaders to become engaged in opportunities for personal development and the ways in which college students become mentors to their peers. This cyclical nature of mentorship would not seem limited to college students, as each of the participants described the role of influential teachers, coaches, club advisers, professors, administrators, and other individuals who they credit with being inspirations and mentors.

Bruce described one of his mentors who is a straightforward, New-York born, and out lesbian and a mutual gay male friend who once described her as an “old school lesbian”. This was attributed to the way she refers to everything as either gay and lesbian despite knowing about the way others in our communities and groups choose to identify and the language they choose to use (e.g., bisexual, transgender, gender nonconforming). Bruce, acknowledged his friend’s description was less than politically correct, also acknowledged that his mentor grew up in a different time and that her choice of language is authentic to her.

Jackson spoke to the importance of two influential elementary school teachers, peer mentors in his job on the west coast, his counselor who helped him deal with anxiety

and depression issues, and a few administrators and faculty members who encouraged him to pursue his passions and a career in student affairs.

Gus also spoke about several teachers from middle school and high school who encouraged him to try new things and develop skills in new areas. Among role models and mentors Gus described were his father, who was also an agriculture educator, his marching band director, and several professors.

Authentic Leadership Development

The three participants and I are all out of the proverbial closet and we each experienced the coming out process multiple times. A lot of us in LGBT community experience multiple comings out, with family, with friends, with colleagues. It is a never-ending process. It involves returning to the narrative commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place. It is always changing, as are our narratives and as are the meanings that we make from those experiences.

Given each of our multiple comings out and our evolution into the current, most integrated versions of ourselves, the participants' narratives as well as my own reflect the need for authenticity. Each of the participants described how, if you are not authentic or true to yourself, then how are you really going to be able to authentically lead or to be in a position of influence or to create any sort of desired social change. That is what I really found was through these processes of moving across places and time and context. Being on the move continually changed us but brought us to a more complete version of ourselves.

In a final analysis of the narratives, I used George's (2007) five dimensions of authentic leadership to understand each participant's leadership development. Those

elements, again, are pursuing purpose with passion, practicing solid values, leading with the heart, establishing enduring relationships, and demonstrating self-discipline. In discovering your authentic leadership, George (2007) wrote that you must know your authentic self, practice your values and principles, understand what motivates you to be a leader, build your support team, and to stay grounded. George (2007) encouraged readers and leaders to think of a compass as a metaphor for leadership and to find our True North, which guides us in our leadership practice and is rooted in self-awareness, values, motivations, support teams, and an integrated life.

Knowing Your Authentic Self

Knowing ourselves at the deepest of levels is essential to being and living as the most authentic versions of ourselves. Not only does this enhance our self-awareness, but it also helps us develop emotional intelligence. Among individuals that George (2007) interviewed, leaders suggested that increased self-awareness and authenticity would allow us to find the right role, increase self-confidence, be consistent, connect with others, and develop complementary skills. These were all themes the participants in this study identified. Jackson was struggling with his training as a Ph.D. teacher and researcher but experienced difficulty landing a faculty job. Gus recognized how important being an agriculture educator was to him and how being out personally and professionally allowed him to integrate his two personalities. Gus also credited his involvement in a fraternity with helping him develop self-confidence. Bruce discussed authenticity and congruence throughout our conversations and how being his authentic self and bringing himself fully to his teaching and research was in service to his students.

Reflection and introspection are also important to knowing your authentic self. By engaging in the narrative process, the participants were able to dive into their past experiences and ideas for the future and share the ways in which this influenced their identity, sense of community, and civic engagement. By peeling back the layers of their proverbial onions, the participants shared the high points and low points of their stories and made sense of the tensions and critical incidents they identified.

This element is also concerned with accepting yourself. In my conversations with each of the participants, each described the period in his life when he was not openly gay, not open to relationships, and unsure of how his identities would impact his employability and career. Through the processes of coming out personally and professionally, the participants each described a degree of comfort in accepting and being who he had become and the ways in which this enhanced rather than hindered his ability to teach and serve his students.

Practicing Your Values and Principles

During conversations with the participants as they shared their experiences, they sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly spoke to their values and principles (George, 2007). As mentioned elsewhere, each of the participants had come to understand his role as an educator in service to social justice and student development. Each carried with him elements of his childhood and the values he developed at that time. These values transcended the moves the participants made as well as the communities of which they were a part. These values were also evident in their teaching and research and training. Jackson expressed how much he enjoys working with college students and emerging leaders and facilitating trainings related to identity, intersectionality, and

leadership. Gus expressed the importance of diversity of gender and sexual identities in agriculture education and the way this informs his research. Gus also spoke about the duality of being gay and being in agriculture and his assumed role to breakdown stereotypes and educate others. Similarly, Bruce spoke to the importance of living out his identities in his teaching, research, and mentorship of emerging scholars. He also recognized that not everyone is going to step up and accept responsibility for creating change they seek.

Motivations for Leading

George (2007) also examined what motivated leaders to pursue their passions and careers. He recognized the importance of sustaining high levels of motivation and keeping motivations in balance. He distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations with the former being measured by the external world (e.g., good grades, accumulating wealth) and the latter derived from meaning making about your life (e.g., personal growth).

This distinction between what society values and the value we derive internally connect back to the sociality commonplace and the cultural, familial, institutional, and linguistic narratives which shape the contexts we move in and out of. Many of our extrinsic motivations are derived from what others expect from us or what dominant cultural norms define and dictate. Familial pressures, faith and spirituality, and heteronormative social norms each influenced the three participants in this study. The intrinsic motivations were inspiring, as the participants described their personal growth, feeling significant to and appreciated by others for their group memberships and

contributions, being true to himself and living authentically, and making a difference in the world beginning in their classrooms.

Building Your Support Team

Team members help you stay focused on your True North, ground you in reality, and support you throughout your leadership journey. Support teams affirm, advise, provide perspective, and call for course correction when necessary. George (2007) acknowledged that most support teams are multifaceted and include significant others, family members, friends, mentors, and other personal and professional groups. Each of the participants identified mentors from their past who influenced their development as students and scholars and who had a lasting impact on them. Each participant also described various individuals they continue to work with and learn from in their current roles. Not only were the participants mentees, but they were also becoming mentors to undergraduate and graduate students and becoming a part of others' support teams. Jackson and Gus also spoke about the importance of their partners and the support they receive in those personal relationships.

Staying Grounded: Integrating Your Life

“For authentic leaders, being true to themselves by being the same at work as they are at home is a constant test, yet personal fulfillment is their ultimate reward” (George, 2007, p. 134). Leading an integrated life requires bringing together major elements of your personal and professional lives so that you can be and be seen as the same person in each environment. In the discussion of authenticity and congruence above, the participants spoke directly to feeling as though they navigated personal and professional spaces as an integrated self and that they were better educators because of it.

Influences on staying grounded and integrating your life include staying true to your roots, finding time for yourself, spiritual and religious practices, and taking sabbaticals. The participants started by sharing with me where they grew up and what life was like in their hometown. Jackson spoke directly to reflecting on his rural upbringing and how he is equally critical and appreciated of growing up in the North Carolina swamp. Bruce and Gus also spoke about the importance of where they grew up and how reflecting on their upbringing provides a frame of reference and perspective. Storying their migration and transition experiences enabled the participants to stay grounded as they reflected on where they were from.

Justifications and Implications

I return to Clandinin's (2013) justifications for narrative inquiry: the personal, practical, and social. These three justifications are important considerations before and during the narrative inquiry process, as they keep the inquirer cognizant of the 'so what' and rationale for engaging in the research. The personal involve my own reasons for engaging in the research, the practical involve changing practice, and the social involve advancing theoretical knowledge and social change. Each of these justifications, and their implications, are described below.

Personal Justifications

Narrative inquirers seek personal justification by first understanding who we are and who we are to become by engaging in the inquiry. As a result, narrative researchers minimize the risk of entering the research relationship unequipped with the stories we are living and telling. Finally, by understanding ourselves and our role in the research

relationship, we are better prepared to attend to the experiences of the research participants.

As a personal justification, I engaged in this research based on an understanding of the many formative experiences I had as a youth in rural Kentucky and the experiences in and out of the classroom since then that served as the basis of an engaged education. As I worked through my own narrative as it relates to being a millennial gay man from the south and how I have experienced the rural-urban divide, I reflected on how I situated myself in the research context and developed a more refined ability to relate to – but not appropriate – the experiences of the participants.

By engaging in this research, I have reflected on my own experiences transitioning between rural and urban places, coming out, and my evolving role as an educator. As a result, I have a better understanding for the justifications of this research for myself and for others. Arguably, we have seen a lot of social change since I was in my undergraduate studies from 2006-2010. I cannot recall ever having an undergraduate professor acknowledge explicitly that they were queer. Now in my own teaching practice, I recognize the importance of being transparent with my students. This was in no small part influenced by my conversations with Gus.

Gus's description of his evolving and eventually integrated personality and that way this is evident in his teaching and relationships with his students resonated with me. He described finding himself, developing a sense of his leadership capacity, and feeling as though he belonged in his personal and professional communities. At the time of the study, I was teaching at the University of California, Irvine in a new undergraduate leadership academy. I was inspired by Gus's ability to be the most authentic version of

himself and recognized that I was withholding part of myself from my role as an educator. After my conversation with Gus, I decided to be more forthcoming with my students about growing up as a closeted queer person in rural Kentucky.

I now primarily teach several sections each semester of a class focused on leadership in a diverse society. In this course we look at leadership in relationship to social identities and intersectionality, power, privilege, and difference. Through the research process I have developed a better understanding of my own experiences and to give meaning and voice to some critical events I had been unable to previously. By being vulnerable, transparent, and more authentic in my classroom, I have already begun changing my own practice and connected with students in a different and more meaningful way.

Practical Justifications

According to Clandinin (2013), "To justify a particular narrative inquiry, a researcher needs to attend to the importance of considering the possibility of shifting, or changing, practice" (p. 36). To understand the practical justifications, I asked myself whether I was engaging in the research for the sake of research or whether it could actually change something. Practical justifications of my research included building community with the participants, telling my own story and those of others that have likely never been told in this way before, and sharing these narratives in appropriate formats and venues both within and beyond the academy.

Each of my participants were working in higher education. Two were in tenure track positions and one was in a junior administrative role. Each one understood the impact that they can have on the students with whom they work. They understand that,

while three of us are white, all four of us are male and therefore we primarily occupy privileged spaces within the academy, but with an asterisk. We are the queer ones. We are given a fairly loud voice, but we are still a rung down the ladder. For the participant of color, perhaps a couple of rungs down.

We recognize that is not right and that is not the type of institutional culture that we want to have for the next group of students that we are responsible for cultivating. That is why, as millennial gay men and high achievers, we are in positions to create change. We can change the culture of the academy. If we do not create this change, then who will? Otherwise, we are just going to keep perpetuating the cycle. We all recognized that part of our authentic leadership development is that we have practical responsibility for changing this dominate institutional culture of which we are a part. By engaging in this research, I was able to re-story the narratives of the participants and illuminate the particular, individual experiences as they transitioned between rural and urban places and engaged in education and leadership experiences.

As Leavy (2015) noted, ABR also has the potential for critical consciousness, raising awareness, and developing empathy. Near the end of the third conversation with each participant, I asked each man to reflect on the experience of sharing his story and what it meant for him. This, in part, addressed the practical justifications and begins to address the social ones as well.

Each of the participants found the use of narratives as well as poetry as beneficial methods for sharing their stories. For Bruce, it seems engaging in the narrative process and writing his interpretation of the *I Am From* poem had quite an effect as he described the emotional nature of talking about and writing about himself in this way and how the

narrative process captured his multiple stories. He recognized how layered our lived experiences are and how his own narrative had been influenced by many contextual, historical, political, and social contexts.

The use of language. In a study situated within a narrative framework, attention must be paid to language; to what is and is not said. This focus, in turn, addresses the practical justifications of using narrative methods to change practice around the way we tell and consume stories and make meaning from our experiences. Throughout the study, I reflected on the use of language related to identity and community and how it has evolved over time. As millennial gay men, we have come of age in a time very different from those before us and have much to learn from their experiences, I wondered, then, how do we name our experiences and make sense of them and leverage those experiences for our students, colleagues, those who come after us, those who are in our elected spaces? Essentially, what is our role in all of this?

Bruce acknowledged the way he used language to think about and give meaning to the ways in which he identifies, how he interacts with the world and systems in it, and how he has translated his individual journey. Bruce spoke about how so much of language is shaped by context, community, history, place, political factors, social structures, and time. He reflected on the way he refers to himself as queer and what that means to him, but that not everyone will identify that way or share the same meaning. He was conscious about not ascribing that to others, recognizing that may not be the way to authentically tell others' stories. Rather, Bruce said, we use our stories to show the ways in which we have been othered; to illuminate systemic problems that render people

invisible; to show up in spaces to break up power; and to dismantle the binaries, the dichotomies, and categories that limit and render individuals powerless and inauthentic.

Another example of the way in which language challenges or changes practice around naming and honoring multiple identities stemmed from a presentation I gave on the preliminary findings from my study at the annual international conference of the Community Development Society. A straight, female colleague in the Society who works at another university is a member of the Baby Boomer generation and asked me at the end of my presentation about my choice to use the umbrella term queer alongside other individual identities within the LGBTQIA+ community. The essence of her question, understandably, was whether the use of so many different names and terminology did more to confuse lay persons than it did to enlighten them. I considered for a moment our generational and identity-based differences and quickly appreciated her question. I acknowledged that using so many different terms and using some of them interchangeably is a matter of choice, as is choosing one or more of those terms by which to self-identify. I also explained that at the risk of confusing others who are less familiar with the diverse terminology, it is important to use language and labels by which others choose to be identified lest we also run the risk of erasure and diminishing the lived experience and agency of minority identities.

Social Justifications

The social justifications and the significance of the study is focused on advancing, at least in small part, arts-based research, narrative inquiry, poetry through research, and the Listening Guide, and really lending one more rigorous way of using those methodologies. Social justifications and the significance of the study are also related to

social justice. As Clandinin (2013) described, the social justifications of narrative inquiry may be related to concerned theoretically or with social action and policy. Theoretical justifications advance new methodological and disciplinary knowledge, whereas social action and policy are concerned with creating change.

Theoretical justifications of this research include making arts-based research accessible, including inside and outside the academy. Not everybody can get behind a paywall to go visit our academic journals that this is going to end up in. Not everybody is going to be able to come to campus and check out my dissertation from the library shelf. Inside the academy, changing practice must be concerned with turning an arts-based inquiry into a scholarly publication that is valued in the promotion and tenure process.

When we write to an academic audience and community, it is primarily straight white men. That is how it has been for 300 years. As scholars, we must reflect on our role in contributing to the same academic journals, written in the same academic language, to the same audiences. How do we change that? Through arts-based research, we can create new creative works to make it more accessible by writing poetry, staging a theater production, and by painting, building, and sculpting. It is important, however, to note that by pursuing arts-based research, we are not simply enjoying arts and crafts hour. We are presenting data and information and lived experiences and the meanings behind them to a broader audience.

Through this research, I have come to understand the ways in which arts-based research is useful in my discipline areas of community development and leadership studies. For example, creative placemaking allows people to be creative, to create desired change, to improve their communities through grassroots movements. This work can be

completed and understood in a rigorous and research-based way at the community level. We can then translate that back into a community development journal and further analyze the work to understand community leadership processes. Fortunately, there is a group body of arts-based researchers, more conferences, more publishing that is occurring and demonstrating the scholarly as well as social value of the work.

It was evident in my conversations with the participants that each is concerned with social justice and working to change the institutional culture of higher education from within. I puzzled over what my participants and I are doing that allows our students to see themselves in us. Often, we hear and repeat the phrase “Representation matters.” If we cannot see ourselves in leadership positions, then we are never going to strive for them. By acknowledging our asterisks and creating spaces for others to develop authentically, my participants and I can make it more accessible for other people to do this work and to help cultivate the people that are coming in behind us.

Jackson remains focused on working with emerging student leaders, Gus is concerned with gender equality in agriculture education, and Bruce’s commitment to social justice is rooted in his spirituality, in training as a counselor, and in his role as a scholar-activist. I can imagine how participants may seek to create more socially just places to learn, teach, and work and how participants may use their understanding of their lived experience to influence change at their institutions and in their communities. It starts with telling a story – mine, theirs, ours – and that is what I plan to accomplish through my proposed research.

Limitations

As described in chapter three, limitations included participant recruitment, the time commitment asked of the participants, geographic proximity (or lack thereof) between myself and the participants, and finally, my positionality within the research and relationship with the participants. Prior to receiving IRB approval to begin the study, I had two participants in mind to invite to the study and thought I would only need to recruit one additional participant. Neither of the known participants was able to join the study and I recruited participants from two Facebook groups instead. A faculty member in the Ph.D. program also referred me to one of his colleagues in North Carolina who agreed to join the study. Once each participant had joined the study, I then had to consider the amount of time I asked each participant to engage in the study – up to six hours split between three conversations. Fortunately, each participant obliged and once our conversations began, we were efficient with our time and covered many topics anticipated in the semi-structured interview protocol. Finally, because none of the participants were local, we connected with one another via Zoom and I recorded the audio and video of each conversation, which was then used for transcription. While I feared that not connecting in person would diminish the quality of our conversations, I am fortunate that each participant and I quickly established rapport and a sense of ease in conversing with one another.

My positionality with the research and the participants was also a potential limitation. As described previously, I spent a considerable amount of time before and throughout the study reflecting on my own lived experiences as someone who transitioned from a rural place to a variety of other places, had come out personally and

professionally, and shared other similar experiences as the participants. I had to be cognizant not to allow my experiences to diminish those of the participants and to not project my experiences onto theirs. It was helpful, however, to have some shared experiences as diving deeper into these topics enriched our conversations.

One additional limitation or cautionary factor in the study were the persistent tensions in ABR. These tensions were discussed in chapter three, though perhaps the most critical to this study and my development as an arts-based researcher was the tension concerned with the particular and the general. Traditional research paradigms (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) are concerned with generating findings that generalizable or transferable to other individuals and broader groups. Arts-based research, and narrative inquiry in particular, seeks to illuminate the particularities of the individual(s) under study, without the explicit motive to be generalizable to other individuals and groups. For this reason, I did not seek to find a universal experience of authentic leadership development of millennial gay men on the move. While there were some similarities and shared kinds of critical incidents, this study was designed to honor each participant's unique, individual experience. I contend that the tension between the individual and particular is not an either/or in the context of arts-based inquiry but is rather a both/and, for we can never truly understand the larger whole without also understanding the individual.

Significance

As described in chapter one, and as briefly reiterated above, I found this study to be significant first and foremost as related to the social justifications and the social justice orientation shared by each of the participants and myself. The use of narrative methods

and poetry allowed the participants to share their stories and the meaning they made from their experiences transitioning between rural and urban places. They also reflected on their education experiences and how they came to view and practice leadership. For each of the participants, telling their stories this way was a first for them. Further, by unpacking elements of their identities – rural/urban, millennial, gay, male, high-achieving, and others – they all expressed the ways in which they have developed into the educators they are today and how they feel compelled to create more just classrooms, campuses, and community spaces. The narratives and poems also serve as counter-narratives to those of white, straight men which are most often privileged in the academy and beyond. This makes the narrative methods and poetry composing compelling forms of storytelling and challenging taken for granted societal norms.

The study is also significant in its contributions to the literature on queer migration, millennial experiences, and leadership development. As gay millennial men in the academy, we have the possibility to continue developing our own leadership capacity, as well as that in others and particularly younger generations, and to help ease the transitions into a more diverse American society. It seems as though the multi-directionality represented by the participants informed their worldviews and gave them an appreciation for the value in diversity of places. While each participant expressed some initial dislike for the place in which he was raised, each also expressed a degree of appreciation for it as an adult. The places where we grow up, choose to move to, and sometimes leave behind are imprinted on us and can be understood using the narrative commonplaces of temporality—the time at which the experience occurred and where we

were in our personal development, the physical places and geographies, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which the experiences took place.

Researcher Reflections

As I reflect on the experience engaging in this narrative inquiry, I am thankful for the opportunity to better understand my own experiences and to help amplify the voices of my participants in new ways for the first time. As a result of hearing the participants speak about the ways in which they have integrated their identities and the way this influences their teaching and practice, I felt inspired. So much so that I consciously began disclosing to my own students that I am gay and describing my research to them. In doing so, I believe I am bringing the most authentic and transparent version of personal self into my professional arena. Some of my students from the University of California Irvine wrote in their final assignments how important it was for them to see a queer person teaching them and being open with them, as they were struggling with their own queer identities.

Describing my research to my students also advances scholarship on LGBT people, on millennials, on rural and urban divides, and on leadership studies. To have the opportunity to incorporate so many elements of my own identity into my research was incredible. I did not have to compartmentalize or prioritize one aspect of my identity of another and was instead able to conduct “me-search” based on my wholeness. Similarly, the participants were able to authentically bring their whole selves into the research relationship.

I found value in using arts-based research and narrative methods for this study. It was an appropriate methodological choice to understand the individual, particular

experiences of my participants rather than replicate past studies or advance a new grand theory of leadership development. Bruce even asked to publish his *Where I'm From* poem on his social media at the conclusion of this study, demonstrating the powerful effects of excavating and understanding our own narratives and re-presenting them in new ways. In the process, we make meaning of our experiences and continue developing our self-awareness, practicing our values, understanding our motivations to lead, building support teams, and staying grounded by integrating our lives.

I would like to continue advancing arts-based methods, especially narrative. I would also be interested in engaging in the performance genre, namely using arts-derived data and re-presenting it in theatre performances. This will connect me back to my high school days when I was involved in school and community theatre productions. Because of my background in community development, I foresee using narrative methods to capture individual and community narratives to advance community-level change. This may be accomplished through grassroots work, advocacy, policy, and action inquiry that integrates the arts.

Generational research, with millennials in particular, was at the heart of this inquiry. I envision pursuing a research agenda in the future that continues to examine community leadership, inter- and intragenerational leadership, and LGBTQIA+ leadership. As we age into leadership positions, we must recognize that we now serve members of all generations, including the post-millennial generation, monikered by some as Gen-Z, as well as the generations that came before us.

Generational divides are reflected in attitudes about the changing composition of society and can be observed in many places. The dynamics of old guard versus new guard

are on display in Congress, in cities as well as small towns, and in organizations like one in which I am part of the leadership. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our organization, we have been plagued by declining membership, leadership turnover, and intergenerational conflict. I see the pitfall of not building enough organizational and individual capacity to create smooth transitions over time.

In the context of higher education, there are opportunities and challenges presented in the way we meet the needs of Gen-Z students, particularly those with minority identities. In recent years, campuses have explicitly devoted attention to increasing and valuing diversity and creating spaces for minorities. In doing so, we run the risk of siloing off and tokenizing individuals and groups. I believe we will see a second wave of campus efforts to integrate and serve these populations in more intentional ways. Minority or otherwise, students are arriving at our institutions from diverse hometowns and exacerbating a brain drain from rural places in particular. For many students, this means they leave their hometown and never return.

Only focusing on the students that come to us in the academy is partly exacerbating the problem. We should not just wait for them to come to us, but instead also meet them where they are and understand how they experience life where they have grown up. It is important to pursue research that will help us what would keep our youth in place, or, what would make them want to return after college. This is directly related, again, to the notion of community and community development. By understanding these dynamics, we can understand what is distinct within and across generations that will keep individuals invested in their communities and empower them to develop the capacity to lead authentically in fulfilling ways.

Like the participants, I have come to better understand my identity and leadership development over time, the ways in which the places I have lived have influenced my growth, and the immense responsibility I have accepted as a doctoral scholar and educator. I value the opportunity to have engaged in the highest level of education as a way to reconsider what I know and how I have come to know it. I have become more confident in my ability to be transparent and authentic with my students and continue developing skills related to narrative methods and the power of sharing stories and giving voice to that which has been previously unheard.

At the time this dissertation was written and prepared for defense, I had the opportunity to travel with a group of undergraduate students to the Netherlands. While visiting the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam, I saw a quote from her diary written nearly 75 years to the day and projected on the wall near the original copies of her diary that were on display. This quote resonated with me as I reflected on my doctoral journey and seemed like an appropriate way to conclude this chapter. "I'll make my voice heard. I'll go out in the world and work for mankind" (Frank, 1944).

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Appendix

Jackson "I" Poems

Interview 1

I'm Jackson.

I was in your shoes at this point last year.

I, too, went full time for my doc program

I looked at traumatic stress in higher education specifically for helping professionals

I was going to study the role of grit

I was giving a talk in one of [a colleague's] classes about mental health

I was one month out from my professional defense and we scrapped a year's worth of work

I don't wish that upon you.

I am glad that I did.

I worked at [a west coast school] for a while.

I know what it's like to be an East coast transplant to the West coast.

I'm serving as a consultant there with some of my research with trauma studies.

I am adjuncting.

I teach qualitative and advanced qualitative methodologies for a doctoral program

I serve as the Coordinator for Academic and Student Affairs

I work for the Vice President of Student Affairs

I guess that is me right now.

I am from a super small town in North Carolina.

I don't know if you're familiar with that

I always tell people I'm from the biggest city in the most rural county in North Carolina

I have an accent that other people find to be a deep accent.

I don't mind.

I think that's the five second nutshell

I don't know where you want to start

I read your email with the chapters and all that kind of stuff

I don't know how you want to approach that.

I was born November 11, 1986.

I think I'm right in the middle of the Millennial generation

I don't know if I'd necessarily identify with that moniker as much.

I think it's useful to a certain degree,

I don't actually, maybe relate.

I'm more of the older side of the Millennial generation.

I guess there's a problem with the Millennial part there.

I think kids now, they grew up with all this technology that was emerging when we were growing up.

I feel like the technology, people older than us fear technology, or they have a certain hands-off, distance from technology to some degree.
I feel like kids now-a-days, it's way too integrated.
I feel like we're that weird in-between
I think we were children whenever a lot of the tail end of the AIDS epidemic was coming around and the equality stuff was starting to emerge.

I didn't come out 'til I was 28.

I know in the email you talked about different grade levels
I get to go all the way back if you want to.

I grew up in [hometown], North Carolina where I spent the first 18 years of my life.
I used to consider [Wilmington] a big city
I've actually lived in cities like San Francisco or Raleigh
I know that now it's more of just a big town.

I went to [hometown elementary school].
I had two influential teachers in my career path in my primary years.
I always consider her to be very influential but whenever I actually have to pinpoint it, it's hard to talk about, I guess.
I think she really knew how to spark curiosity in children.

I think he was somebody that...
I think, about one of the only male teachers I had the whole entire time I was in school.
I identified with [him]
I thought that was interesting as a second grader, seeing that.

I also think he might have been a closeted gay man.
I've gotten older
"I wonder if he was one of my first gay role models?"
I remember him because he was also super encouraging
I think he was challenging in a different way.
I was challenged in class.
I was occupied and he would help my mom figure stuff out.

I don't really remember them being together.
I would probably spend every other weekend.
I was super close with his mom, so my grandmother on that side.
I literally spent probably half my childhood with her.
I had a room at her house.
I was super close with her.
I grew up in a sort of low-income house.
I was able to do a lot of things that I probably wouldn't do or be exposed to in a small town.
I took 12 years of private art lessons that she paid for and music lessons.

I was able to go on trips because they paid for it.

I'll talk about primary school.

I didn't really think it was unique at the time compared to people that might not have been brought up in a rural area.

I show up for kindergarten, there's [my best friend]

I have all these connections of people I've literally known since I was five

I keep up with people

I stay in consistent communication

I'm very critical of rural areas

I come from one.

I forget to reflect on the things that are actually nice about that experience.

I was trying to think of there was anything unique about elementary school.

I don't know if this is like all small towns but, and now looking back, there were definitely some intersectional things going on here.

I didn't get into AG in the fourth grade and that was a huge scandal.

I got to go to the math and English AG classes instead of the regular classes because our family kind of pulled strings.

I not smart enough? What happened with this? Is there something wrong with me? Why did I not get placed in that group?

I kind of interpret everything that happened as an adult now, having a more critical insight of life in general

I think the way I viewed it and understanding the politics of life is that basically, the rich white kids get placed in AG.

I have some mixed emotions about that.

I think it pretty much was an all-white class

I'm sure most people's middle school [experience] was awful

I started, when you talk about leadership development, all that kind of stuff

I was really feeling my oats around getting involved with after school activities.

I was on the student government, and marching band, and the school paper

I always kind of struggled with that in middle school and high school of not necessarily wanting to be a part of a group but kind of wanting to have friends in all different pockets.

I would always describe myself as the kid that would float between the different established groups that kind of existed.

I first kind of started getting the inkling

"I really think something's amiss here, and I don't really know what that is, and I don't necessarily have language around this."

I had a crush on my best friend

"I'm not going to think about it."
I did probably for the next 15 years.

I go to high school.
I wouldn't be able to do high school again
I know what's out there
I was experiencing high school in the moment; it wasn't a bad experience.
I had really good friends, had really good teachers.
I didn't really know what I was missing out on.
I went for all-district band, we got to see the fancy schools in some bigger areas.

I was one of the people who got selected to go to the [residential school]
I was a junior and I was supposed to stay my junior and senior year.
I got really homesick really easily.
I tried to go to this summer camp one time in fourth grade
I literally cried from the moment that I got there to the moment that they picked me up.
I cried from the time they dropped me off all they till the day before they picked me up.
I finally kind of got myself together and had somewhat of a good time

I was super nervous
I'm super homesick again.
I find out my roommate was a senior.
I had only met two gay people in my life other than myself
I had only met those two people.
I get to the college, and he's cute, too.
I'm in high school, hormonal mess.
I'm homesick, crying.
I have a gay roommate. He's hot.
I'm going to have to force myself to come out by the end of the year
I'm not ready for that.
I had this meltdown
I decided I was going to go on a hunger strike.
I refused to eat.
I ended up dropping out of the [residential school]
I thought people were thinking that I couldn't hack it academically.
I would have been fine.
I just wasn't in a developmental space in a lot of areas in my life to be able to live there
I didn't know this until last year but now they have an online program where you can stay
in your hometown and take classes online through the school.

I had a really good time my junior and senior year.
I was super involved on campus.
I was section leader in marching band and National Honor Society.
I got voted most likely to succeed from my high school senior class.
I was chair of the Prom Committee
I really liked creating and doing artsy stuff

I had a really nice budget to work with
I enjoyed it.

I had my first girlfriend my senior year of high school.
I remember fretting the entire year because she kept trying to kiss me
I was like, "Oop. Nope. We're not doing all that. We're not doing all that."
I remember my parents goading me to do it, too.
"I don't want to answer that question."
I was in primary school
I had little girlfriends
I mentioned earlier

I feel like
I don't know
I don't have a basis for comparison
I feel like particularly in my rural town, whatever, little boys who are friends with little girls is always through the context of, "Oh. That's his little girl friend."
I don't know. Back then it felt like that's how things were.

I'm a first-generation student.
I was able to go see East Carolina University and maybe a couple others.
I went to [one UNC school] and fell in love
I ended up going to undergrad
I'd applied to a few different colleges
I wanted to go to Duke University
I applied to all in-state schools.
I got in to Chapel Hill, but I detest Chapel Hill.
I was accepted and was able to reject them.
I wound up going to [school]
I really enjoyed the campus.
I got a pretty decent sized scholarship

I'm going to pause for a second.

I'm at [college]
I can still say those are probably three and a half...
I graduated a semester early, three and a half of the best years that I've ever had.
I would pay a lot of money to relive those years again.

I joined a fraternity.
I am a member of [fraternity]
I get one of two reactions.
I had a really good experience in the first year.
I was involved in a lot of civic engagement organizations and stuff.
I was able to start my own student organization.
I started that on my campus and at the end of freshman year we had raised \$35,000.00

I learned a lot about myself academically.
I was a biology and psychology double major
I was going to be a doctor.
I learned to let go a little of my perfectionism that first year
I almost made my first C
I've got to lessen my expectations a little of myself.

I never lived on campus.
I lived in an apartment with somebody I knew from high school
I think by freshman year I was being faced a lot more with my identity as a gay man.
I'm assuming you were involved in undergrad
I had to do a lot of diversity training
I had kind of accepted that I was gay
"I'll accept this part of myself"
"I'm not going to act on and I'm not going to pay attention to it."
I was forced to pay attention to it.
I was forced to pay attention to it by going to all these different trainings and stuff like that.
I was kind of bitter about it
"I'm having to lie, and I don't want to lie."
"I just want to be in a situation where I'm not having to acknowledge it one way or another."
I'm not out dating anybody. Not a soul.

I think by time sophomore year hit that's whenever; sophomore year of college was probably the biggest identity shift for me as a gay man.
I actually came out many years later.
I had a really big social group.
I remember, my best friend in fraternity, he was an out gay person.
I ended up going what they call early alumni status.
I was able to retain my affiliation with the fraternity to be able to use for my own purposes but not actually be a member
"I don't want to deal with this."
I recognized that that was not a good way to be with other folks at that time.
I for better or worse, I quit the fraternity,
I lost a lot of my social group
I didn't develop the skills to be able to structure that myself in a lot of ways.
I didn't have that anymore
"I don't know how to be social because I'm in this super large environment".
I come from a super small town where there's nothing to do to begin with.

I had an experience with one of my fraternity brothers
I'll say, it didn't lead to very much, but basically, he ended up trying to out me to a lot of folks on campus.
I remember going into this super big depression
I didn't recognize it as depression at the time.

I knew what it was
I did end up going to the counseling center for a bit and didn't find the counseling center to be helpful
I didn't understand that you have to go, and they have to basically triage you and then send you to another counselor.
I'd go in and I'm divulging my heart to this person and then
I definitely didn't want to tell my parents
I was going to counseling
I still had a lot of good friends and had a lot of good times.

I made a decision that I wasn't going to be a doctor anymore.
I feel like I had my first coming out experience to my parents
I revealed that
I could remember "Jackson is going to be a doctor."
I guess I am a doctor now, just a very different kind of doctor than what they thought.
I remember sitting down with my mom and my stepdad.
I wasn't super worried about my stepdad.
I wasn't worried about him.
I was more worried about my mom. We've had a very interesting dynamic growing up.

I divulged to them, and it came out in just this word vomit.
"I don't want to be a doctor, but I guess I could be another kind of doctor, but..."
"I could be a chancellor because I'm going to go into higher education."
I have no intention of becoming a chancellor.
I've never had any intention of being a chancellor.
I just wanted to throw that out there, but that's what they understood.
I could be the president of a university one day if I go on this track.

I graduated a semester early from college.
I would have stayed an extra semester
I wanted to finish out a chemistry minor
I got into grad school but that doesn't start until August.
I couldn't afford to stay move on my own.
I moved back home.
I was waiting tables and worked as a pharmacy technician
I got this taste of freedom and what it was like to be away
I knew it was for a temporary amount of time
I worked so hard to get away from this and now I'm back here.

I'd kind of gotten over that depression from sophomore year and back in my denial space
"I'm fine now."
"I'll just continue to be fine. Everything will be fine."
I'd never really been in a relationship up to that point
"I don't need to be in a relationship. I'm fine being by myself and all these things."
I go to grad school
I always tell people that grad school was probably the second-best time of my life.

I really enjoyed my experience in grad school with the people I went to school with.
I'd do it again.

I learned a lot about myself
I started having more of a problem with myself
I was involved with a lot more students and their experiences
I was really not being fair to them.
I wasn't doing the same and being authentic with them.

I feel like I'm telling five different stories all at once
I'm trying to put it into something that's more cohesive.
I was in grad school
I thought about in undergrad how there's a lot of different training
I had to lie.
I was in grad school
I was kind of toying around
I thought maybe I could tell them.
"I don't know if I could trust you."

I started recognizing
I was getting older, particularly after undergrad it starts to get really hard to make friends
as an adult.
"I'm kind of lonely now."

I get this internship for a summer.
I got this housing internship
I was a resident director for their summer program
I met just some of the most wonderful people that I've ever met in my life.
I keep up with them.
I feel like if there are good things about me a lot of it came from them and their
mentorship.

I go there
I don't know if you've had this same experience coming
I'm assuming rural Kentucky going to a big place can be really scary and intimidating
I think [my hometown is] very white and there's just white people there.
I met a lot of people of different identities that I'd never met before.

I'd never met somebody that identified as trans before that point.
I knew that trans people existed
I'm sure that I'd met some that were not out or whatever.
I don't know.
I really it; everybody was there for a learning opportunity

I did another internship through the same organization.
I did one my senior year in college

I wanted to go into higher ed, just to get something on my resume.
I ended up interning
I remember one of my big takeaways from there was this stark contrast of where I grew up
I took on the same mindset [going to the west coast] "Oh. They're going to think I'm this way or that I'm stupid or things like that".
I got there
I had curiosity
I was debriefing language or perceptions I might have had.
I emerged from that with a greater appreciation for myself and greater appreciation for other people
I became interested
I kept this blog
I remember sobbing in the airport
I was having to come back to the East Coast.
"I swear to God that I will move back at some point in my life."

I graduate from grad school and [the school] has no jobs.
I almost took a job in Doha, Qatar.
I was interviewing for a resident director position for one of their universities.
I got scared at the potential of moving to the Middle East
I made the large mistake of going on to the Interwebs and looking up what it is like for gay people to live out there.
I'm sure those were all very one sided or ignorant posts
"I'm still not out."
I want to be out within the next three years
I don't see myself being able to do that by moving to the Middle East.

I wish I would have taken that opportunity because that three-year mark didn't happen for me.
I turned down this opportunity
I didn't reach my goal
I took my first job at [another] university
I hated them.
I was a resident director
I was overseeing about a thousand freshmen students
I just wanted to go sleep
I couldn't do that.
I had to get somebody to sleep in my building for me.

I was overworked
I still hadn't dealt with those issues
I got really, really depressed.
I didn't think I was going to survive that year in a very real way.
I got through it with the help of some friends
I need to get out of here for my own safety.

I was able to move out to [the west coast] like I had wanted to.
I was a professional resident director.
I was over two buildings.
I enjoyed my time out there.
I knew it wasn't going to be a permanent move.

I finally came out.
I was pretty much the farthest I could get away from my hometown and my family
I felt that I had a safe enough distance to kind of tiptoe out.
I had gotten into counseling
I had that if I'm going to be out, I just want to bust the closet door down and be out.

I'd left [the other university]
I had to go to a conference
I'm on the verge of every day telling somebody.
I haven't gotten the courage to do it.
I wanted to get on top of my bar stool to cheer with everybody else
I flipped and face plant right onto the bar stool and half of this tooth is fake now.
I only have half a tooth there.
I start crying and finally she just leaves.
I'm embarrassed
I think that it's going to hurt
I'm drunk. So, I just start bawling.
"I have an announcement."
I came out.
I was like, "This is not the response I was expecting."
I went to my conference and put myself back in the closet for a bit
I'm trying to process
I had to figure myself out.

I came out to them
I slowly started coming out to folks.
I was able to find a lot more community
I started dating
I was finding a lot more balance.
I was really burnt out by my second year
I was still doing counseling
"I love everybody here, but I can't do another two years of this. It's just crazy."

I applied to Ph.D. programs
I ended up getting in.
I start this doc program
I really hated my first semester
I'm coming from [the west coast]
I'm super radical

I'm taking this diversity class
I got into this really bad argument with this one woman. And she got up and said, "I don't believe in white privilege"
"I can't be with these people!"
I calmed myself down a bit
I also hold a lot of deep identities
I'm judging.
I was exploring the online dating scene and met this boy
I was having to drive three hours every other week to go see him.
I was 28 at the time but he was like 24.
I think in retrospect I am still kind of unpacking that relationship
I think it stunted some things I could have done in my doc program.
I was a good student and did research
I probably could have done a lot more with that chunk of time.
I'd never been in relationship at that point
I kind of processed as 15-year-old Jackson reared his ugly head again and fell deeply in love

I finished my first year of coursework.
I was having a lot of things come up, like residual anxiety issues.
I came out to my parents August of the second year of my grad program.
I was visiting with [my boyfriend] at the time
I was texting with my mom and just kind of did the thing like I did
I was just 'let's word vomit and just come out. Let's just do that.'
I don't know why I'm that way.

I was exploring counseling
I had all this anxiety built up
"I don't need to be anxious, because there's nothing to be anxious about."
I had this super big panic attack.
I had this complete breakdown.
I was sobbing.
I was crying
I could see myself crying and not understand why I was crying and not make myself stop.
I ended up going to the campus health center and they gave me some anxiety medication
I ended up going to another doctor and they got all that worked out.

I'm thinking I'm going to have to drop out of my doc program
I can't get this thing under control.
I had some very, very supportive faculty members
I don't think this is very common.
I don't know if that would have been my experience [elsewhere] if I had had the same issue.
I kind of got everything under wraps
I ended up moving
I'm like, "Well, maybe part of this issue between us is the long-distance thing"

I knew that I was going to get back to North Carolina eventually
I did that and I moved in with my little brother
I finished my last semester of coursework online and stopped my dissertation process
I was giving some thoughts about mental health and taking classes
I should be thankful that I had that experience
I moved in December. Me and my boyfriend at the time broke up in January.
"I haven't gone through this process before, and I don't know what to do with myself again."

I do an Eat, Pray, Love thing and go spend two weeks in the mountains with my parents
I get better and start my research process and try to get back on the dating scene.
I met my current partner, who I live with now, and had finished up a lot of my proposal stuff
I started working at a university because I'm poor and I need benefits again.
I stayed in that job for a year.
I quit there and focused on the rest of my dissertation
I've been trying to definitely search for a faculty position over the last year.
I'm fifty applications in and fifty rejections deep.
I've decided to switch my focus back to administrative positions.
I'm really passionate about research and faculty but that door has been closed for me right now. I'm trying to figure out what my next steps are.
I guess that is my life story in an hour.

Interview 2

I'll pick up on the critical incidents piece
I feel like I can come up easily with five critical incidents
I may have to dig a little bit, perhaps, if we're talking about layering on the leadership and the rural piece.
I don't know, maybe you'll have some insight that I don't about myself

I feel like there's been a lot of events in my life that have tested that and my Christianity
"I innately know myself to be an optimistic, positive person but sometimes life just throws you those curve balls."
"I don't know if I view the world the same way again."

I talked last time about getting accepted to the [residential school]
I think, for me, that was a critical incident because that was my first, like, putting my toes out into what I would deem as the real world.
I came back and was like, "No. I can't do this yet."
I think that period was over the course of three or four weeks of my life.
I ended up going to a regional college near my hometown
I was like, "Alright. Well, my college is 30 or 40 minutes from my hometown. That seems safe."
I'll really say is my next critical time period in my life outside of that divorce period in middle school, is my first year and a half in college.

I think that's probably the time that I've seen the most rapid change in myself, developmentally

I was a student leader in my high school.
I wasn't exactly the popular crowd
I was friends with a lot of people
I didn't really have any problems in that area.

I consider myself a first-generation student because neither of my parents went to college.
I didn't really have anybody to help navigate me through what all of that looked like.
I also didn't want to be that person that only hung out with my high school friends in college.

I guess the reason it was transformational for me is because there was a lot of really awesome people.

I discovered about myself my ability to lead other folks or follow when necessary.
I was as an independent person outside of my hometown and all the identities that go along

I say the first year and a half because by the time you get to your senior year
“I'm done with this. Get me out. I don't feel like I'm changing as much. I'm in a plateau period.”

I joined a fraternity.
I ended up going into student affairs after undergrad.

I talked about last time, was my internship [on the west coast]
I think it just brought me into contact with people I really respect in my life
I really like novelty in my life so anything new was very attractive to me

I had a really great academic year
I had really great friends and faculty members there.
I was a senior in high school, my grandmother developed Alzheimer's
I was defending my master's thesis.
I just started a new graduate assistantship
I was doing an internship
I was job searching full time and my grandmother passed away.
I think she had a stroke and they put her in a nursing home.
I drove down to go see her and both of my aunts were down there and my uncle
I thought the correct choice was we should amputate her legs and be with her until that time comes.
I ended up calling my dad.
I don't have the best relationship with my dad,
I called my dad
I was like, “Your siblings are bat shit crazy. You need to drive down here and handle your business.”

I think growing up, my dad's side of the family was...

I guess they were more...
I would not say they were wealthy
I was growing up
I viewed them as wealthy because they were a lot more wealthy than my mom and her side of the family.
I had this certain perception of them growing up. They were an aspirational family to be a part of.
I always felt like I was a little on the outside coming in.
I'm like, "You people are crazy."
I have a good relationship with everybody, but they don't have a good relationship with each other.

I'm coming off all that family drama.
I had such a good time in graduate school and made such good friends.
I don't feel safe as a closeted gay man.
I got through that
I say that's a critical event of my life because from a mental health perspective that was my rock bottom.
I was able to see that and make an action plan of what to do.

I went to [the west coast]
I definitely want to make sure that I mention a critical figure in my life
I guess she wasn't in my life for that long, but my counselor I had
I really am sad that I don't think I had a chance to tell her that
I was talking to her about my coming out process
I was, "Oh, I just want to do it all at once."
I think that'll always stick with me
I can be really stubborn sometimes and she's the one that broke through that
I really enjoyed her.

I ended up being in my first relationship
I talked about how that was weird, being almost 30 in your first relationship.
I'm in this really great relationship.
I think from a personal standpoint that's been a life changing journey.
I'm job searching
I have this partner that I live with and we're probably going to get married soon.

I'm now having to make a decision for two people instead of just one.
I don't have a lot of practice.
I make decisions not on purpose, sometimes I make decisions unilaterally
I get called out for that, which I should.
I think that's been a difficult transition.

I was coming out to my family.
I feel like I've had two coming out processes.
I came out to my parents.

I should say, my mom's side of the family.
I'm not completely out to my dad's side of the family yet.
I said, originally it went well.

I was at home and it was the night of Christmas day, not Christmas eve but the next evening
I was close to them when I was super little
I don't think she was yelling or anything in that way
I don't care if you're my mom or you're my other grandma, you don't go there.
I understood that was coming from a good place
I'm glad to have known it, I guess.
I'd found all this out
I was not in a place that I wanted to talk to her.
I told mom, "Just tell her I'm in the bathtub, or whatever."
I can't talk right now.
I ended up leaving the house and haven't talked to her since.
I haven't talked to my mom in almost two years because of that.
I think that is a pretty critical incident.

I'm trying to think of how those things might can intersect with the rural and leadership pieces of it.
I just don't know in what direction perhaps to talk about it.
I'll stop there and pause. And figure out what to do.

I'm glad you brought that up
I think that's a piece that I want to share but I forgot in all my ramblings.
I've been talking to my partner a lot with my partner about this
I spent 18 years of my life in rural North Carolina
I talked to you last time about how my partner and I were talking about how special it can be to grow up in an area like that
I spent a lot of my young adult life getting away from that and being ashamed of that to a certain degree.
I wouldn't move back there, mind you
I appreciate it a lot more
I think that what I've been struggling with lately is this concept of place and for me place is about community.
I like to be in community with people.
I'm happiest when I'm in community with people.
I think that's something I've been struggling with
I think it got exacerbated in the Ph.D. program.
I'm not sure if your experience has been the same as mine.
I think that the places that I've moved to have really been defined by the community that I've built.

I got to [college] for undergrad and develop this wonderful network of people
I got to grad school

I build this wonderful community then I move away,
I moved. It's the same story that's over and over and over again.
I think where I'm at in my life now, there's all these different things that, like you said,
intersect.

I'm an adult
I'm tired of moving
I want to settle down
I'm also technically unemployed
I'm in this contract position that's about to end
I've applied to literally almost a hundred jobs
I want to stay here and build my community and get some semblance back of my old self.

I got to my Ph.D.
I'd realized that I've moved to these people, built community, then lost people.
I got to [grad school]
I'm going to be here for two or three years.
I'm not investing myself in the community here.
I'm going to do my work and get out.
I wish I hadn't have done that
I think that even if I didn't go away, there's some people in my life now from each period.
I think that's really special,
I might have one person that I might consider that check-in point right now from my time
in my Ph.D. program.

I teach in the program that was my Ph.D. program
I still feel this separation.
I think that's what I'm on the hunt for now, is place and community.
I thought I'd fallen in love with [another town].
I went from a town of 5,000 people to eventually living in an area that's millions and
millions and millions of people
I realized that was fun but it's so easy to get lost there.
I can build community, but it just feels different.

I think what you're raised with you always end up returning to to some degree.
I moved back to North Carolina
I wouldn't consider [it] rural.
I like new things and experiences, so there's always that to do.
I do feel that there's a big sense of community
I think that's where I'm at right now with place and community.

I feel like we've talked a little bit about place
I feel like I'm hitting this 30s crisis thing and having this crisis of community and practice
and interest.
I feel like I'm in this weird juxtaposition of a career crisis.
I'm practicing community in my professional life.

I work in education.
I feel like all of that is so intertwined.
I have a lot of people from different areas in my life that live in this area.
I have a friend from [west coast] who's moving nearby soon.
I have friends that are scattered.
I don't hang out socially with everybody as much as I would like to

I'm struggling right now in practicing community
I'm looking more through the lens of occupation or what I do.
I've worked in student affairs for nearly a decade
I think that I've got burnt out on the politics that go on in student affairs.
I end up finding myself working in positions that end up being highly political for one reason or another.
I finally found in my Ph.D. program a place where I'm really happy.
I love being in the classroom.
I love doing research.
I love everything that goes along with being a faculty member but that's being withheld.

I'll be honest.
I've been in a really bad place around anger and bitterness lately, of this process.
I've finally gotten up to the door of finding what I want to do with my life and truly be happy in my profession and the door is locked
I can't get through it.
I'm working through what that means for me right now.

I didn't foresee being almost 32 and making a career shift, particularly after I got a Ph.D. in a field that I thought I was going to be staying in.
I've gotten to the point that I've stopped applying to faculty positions.
I'm taking myself off the market, at least for a couple years.
I'll do better if I take care of myself for a little while and still do some research on the side.
I have my adjunct thing that I do which is nice.
I don't know, probably in a couple years I'll have some more experience under my belt maybe.

I've found a professional community
I don't have access to the professional community that I want to be a part
I've got to figure out how to make that happen in another way.

I think there's all different aspects of that in community.
I recently completed a Ph.D. program, interest for me intersects with academics a lot.
I don't have a stable job right now,
I have enough in savings that I could not work for a few months and be fine
I'm very cognizant about not spending money on things that may or may not be my interest right now.

I grew up and my grandmother paid for me to do private art lessons
I went to Governor's School for the Arts
I have a big passion for different artistic expression.
I like to paint
I like to draw.
I like to sculpt and all those things.
I have a guitar.
I used to play trombone
I've been wanting to learn to play guitar
I feel like I need lessons and that costs money.
I've never sat down and
I don't want to get invested in this structure and then move, having to start over again

I've been putting a lot of my personal interests on hold
I don't think has been very healthy.
I feel like I'm in, as far as community, in a lot of different ways
I feel like I'm in just this pause mode
I feel like I've been paused for probably half a year at this point and getting frustrated with that.
I feel those different areas intersect.
I'm talking about this as though I know what you mean by place, practice and interest
I just took a guess.

I guess, to a degree and perhaps you'll be able to commiserate with this
I don't know if you watch this TV show
I've become obsessed with RuPaul's Drag Race.
I know they have a lot of problematic things to it but drag culture has been something that's very interesting to me for a long time.
I don't perform drag.
I've actually thought about it lately
I think it melds with some of my artistic interests that I have in the community aspect.
I've really gotten into the show and I listen to the podcast.
I used to be involved with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
I used to hang with them a lot in San Francisco. That was a wild time.

I feel like I'm a hopeless optimistic person or whatnot.
I get really down about stuff
I feel like there's some force that always ends up like, shut up Jackson.
I think that that is a place that I'm in right now.
I think I'm hopeful about that.
I've been doing a lot of trainings.
I haven't done those for a while and my classes have started.
I came to an epiphany today.
I've been in such a crisis because I'm not really aligning the jobs that I'm applying to with what I want to do

I enjoy teaching and facilitating trainings and stuff like that.
I was really privileged to be able to meet with all 17 student body presidents from the North Carolina system
I was like, "Crap! That's impactful. Right?"

I did a StrengthsQuest training with some public service scholars and I had the class I taught
I do this thing at the end of class
I send out this anonymous Google Form so they can just give me some formative feedback
I got some really good feedback.
I almost was in tears.
I get to build my own little communities

I really want to stay here.
I can see me and my partner establishing a family here.

I want to attend in the future and I'm not sure how I'm doing this yet.
I haven't had a very strong gay community ever
I think, like I said, my best friend's gay but I wouldn't say that he has a gay community either.
I mostly have straight friends.
I feel like I was so late in coming out
I never got that mechanism of being able to date somebody and then not date somebody and it not be awkward at that point.

I feel like I've straddled for a long time, this world
"I have a lot of straight friends but I'm no straight"
I try to form a community in the LGBT community
I don't feel like I quite fit there either.

I've had this weird relationship with leadership throughout my life.
I frame a lot of my identity is through the Meyers Briggs
I know some people aren't in to [it]
I first took it my freshman year of college.
I'm an ENFJ.
I married that a lot with my top five strengths.
I frame my leadership identity and my professional identity
I don't mind not being the leader in a group sometimes
I often find myself becoming a leader, whether or not I want to.
I was Prom committee chair and student editor for our paper
I was a regional vice president for our health club

I find myself in these positions, not necessarily because I want to lead a group of people, because sometimes I find that cumbersome.
I have visions for things.

I can see how I think things can be, so I start working towards that.
I find myself in places where I take on leadership roles like that.

I think for me there's this weird interplay between this concept of community for me and this concept of leadership.

I'm asked questions like that about, like, what's your leadership?

I feel like the default message we get in the U.S. about leadership is some person in a business suit at the head of a table telling people what to do or inspiring them to join them in this journey to go do something right.

I think that, for me, it conflicts with my values around community

I believe that things should be a collective effort.

I feel had a really good leadership in the classroom.

I really started seeing other people as leaders.

I think there's a lot to be said for peer leadership and peer mentoring.

I definitely think that's where I'm at right now. You used the word puzzle.

I'm trying to put myself together as a puzzle, I guess.

Interview 3

I think whatever you said about picking out a theme and reflecting on our time together I felt like a common theme and putting it in terms of a story, or a narrative is this idea of a journey home or trying to find home.

I think that's been something that I've been thinking a lot about lately

I think it's a concept that I've probably thought about briefly in recent years, but it's not something I've actually just sat down and talked with somebody about. So, it's been nice to give voice to that

I feel like you spend a lot of your 20s running around trying to get stuff set up for your adult life

I'm like, well, I'm definitely in the know, like I'm in it

I've got to figure out what that means for me.

I was thinking about it as I was writing the poem too, unpacking what my identity is as a member of the LGBT community

I've always had it with me, but it's hasn't been until my late 20s, early 30s that I've looked back

I told you about dropping out of the [residential] school

I was kind of scared about what that meant about me and my roommate.

I would have stayed there.

I'm grateful for where I am now

I was in an environment that didn't allow me to be myself until later on in life

I wouldn't have had the people around me that I have now, or the community that I'm building

I think that's my initial reflection for right now.

I'm more than willing to unpack the poem.

I think you hit something for me around the relationship piece
I think that at some point in my late teens and early 20s
I was like, "Well, relationships are kind of off the board for me"
"I know that I'm gay, but I'm not gonna acknowledge that"
"I'm gonna take whatever energy I would've put into that and put it into my career and other things."
I think now that I'm in a relationship though, I'm like
"I don't know what to do with that now,"
"I never thought that I would have that."
I feel like I'm working out the kinks
I should've worked out these kinks as a teenager honestly, like straight people would have.
I think it's made my relationship a little more enduring
I feel like all my straight friends there's a template that they have to look at

I'm a big podcast person
I listen to Hidden Brain and TED Talks and stuff
I know there's a lot of research out there about intentionality in relationships
I know that all of our major milestones we've discussed as a couple.
I think that even though it sucks that I didn't get to live a "normal" experience in my relationship world when I was younger
I think that in the end it's better for me
I don't have this constraint of what society says a relationship should be
I think that tension's good at the end of the day
I think that's one aspect of a different narrative that I'm living.

I feel like the depiction of gay men in media has shifted a little bit
I think it's shifted from a narrative where you see the lone gay man with his gaggle of women
I think that there has been more focus on groups
I feel like I'm not living a narrative that's talked about or shown in media or whatnot.
"I'm this gay guy that has a bunch of other gay friends, and that's all I do is hang out with the other gay friends."
I'd like to have some gay friends to hang out with
I'm a little bit too passive sometimes
I enjoy building relationships with people
I enjoy when relationships are organically grown
I need to have a little bit more intentionality about that, about seeking out those communities to be a part of.
I think it's just hard sometimes.

I'm getting more comfortable with trying to be more comfortable with holding [my partner's] hand when we're in public or graze their back or something in public.

I think there's a lot of changes that need to be made, in North Carolina particularly, but I guess society as a whole.

I'm almost 99% certain I'm the only out-gay person in that building.

I feel like I have a responsibility to be out in that space.

I will talk about my partner

I've invited my partner to come do things, or be a visible presence in the building

I think just living and being a gay person, an LGBT person is sometimes enough in a space, whenever you're the only one to be representative of your community in that space.

I'm still figuring things out in my role as an educator...

I feel like when we were kids perhaps, we felt the barriers, but we couldn't articulate the barriers, versus now

I feel like maybe some of the same barriers exist, but the kids can articulate it, and maybe that's partly because of the movement that we're in or the growth of the internet.

I'm starting to try to figure out my roles in education, we have all these intersectional areas of oppression

I think I've been sitting with that a little bit.

I was in a training with some student body presidents the other week

I think 13 of the 17 of the student body presidents were people of color

I feel like it's my turn to take a step back and let them share their stories and share how they think the platform should be developed.

I think that as an educator that's where I'm vacillating between these two roles.

I'm learning to be me in my identity as a gay person,

I think it's such a fluid experience.

I'll start off by addressing what you were talking about with rural and urban maybe.

I feel an identity shift depending on the space that I'm in.

I guess I'd be considered middle class.

I have a PhD,

I'm educated.

I certainly don't make enough to represent that PhD

I still think I'm solidly middle class at this point.

I think by having grown up in a lower income family from a rural area, being in urban spaces

I feel like I stick out, particularly when I talk.

I go back home; it's always flipped on its head.

I have a PhD now

I don't make a lot of money

I probably still make more money than a lot of people in the town, or in those rural spaces,

I have an education that's allowed me to connect with a lot of different people from a lot of different backgrounds
I just learned that everything's so fluid, and nothing is ever really black and white.
I think that's where I've struggled
I think with the movement right now, I don't think that we've..
I think that younger people perhaps developmentally speaking, the younger people tend to be more dualistic.
I think the young people have a lot to contribute and are drivers of movements, particularly our movement right now
I think the downside to that is that we lose some of the nuance and some of the fluidity to some of those things.
I might experience something as homophobic in one context
I might not experience it as homophobia in the next
I feel like context does matter in a lot of situations.
I'm just sitting with this whole idea of fluidity and coming in and out of spaces with all of these intersecting identities.

I'll speak to our identity as a millennial gay
I won't include race and other things like that
I'm just gonna speak generally as a millennial gay. It's almost like the generation before us
I would call them pioneers.
I feel like we're the first recipients of that
I feel like we as a generation are still grappling with that question. What does that mean?

I can go outside with [my partner] and hold his hand.
I might feel uncomfortable about it
I'm probably not gonna get hurt doing it
I think there's this misconception that we're used to it, just because we were children when things were going around, or when all these topics were being brought up,
I think that's not necessarily true.

I think the kids coming up now, this next generation is gonna be ...
I don't want to say taken for granted,
I think that we're this weird middle where it was super, super bad and this big tidal wave of acceptance for the most part.
I think that we're as a generation perhaps trying to figure out with that means for ourselves
I don't know if any of that made sense.

I think that we could do better in having spaces where you reflect on it
I think that's kind of a product of our culture right now
I feel like we would benefit from, just taking a moment and talking about it
I think that as human beings we're able to navigate on an unconscious level that fluidity a lot.
I think there's definitely some space to be able to engage in some learning there.

I think that this conversation too
I was like maybe I need to stop a little bit more every once in a while, and think about those different kind of things whenever I'm in spaces that I take for granted.
I do think there's some space that we could have some educational moments.

I think me telling my story to somebody that doesn't know me is gonna be less impactful.
I think that person that doesn't know me would benefit from experiencing it themselves, whatever that move is
I go back home and talk with people that I know about
I feel like those experiences mean more, because they have a relationship with me.
I feel like it's gonna be more impactful to the people that have some sort of connection with me versus if I'm talking to people that don't know me or have a connection
I feel like them having some sort of experience is gonna be more impactful for them.
I'm not saying it wouldn't have any impact and plant a seed at some point,
I think particularly when we talk about personal experiences
I feel like trust goes a long way or plays a big factor in it.
I'm more willing to trust the experiences of people that I have a relationship and that I know
I don't think that's the best way to be
I think that's human nature to be doubtful of things that you're not aware of.

I scaffold in my practice as a student affairs professional
I start off with trust building
I think oftentimes particularly in the work that we do from a social justice perspective, we take for granted that people should just believe everybody, and they should.

I think I am struggling with ...
I'll tell you two stories and then tell you my struggle.
I think my family is a little bit political.
I literally watched Tom Brokaw every day of my life at my grandparents growing up
I think I've just always kind of been in that space, and my grandpa, even when I was seven would engage me in political discussions
I felt like he was a pretty liberal person considering.
I remember losing a good friend
I was trying to explain to them how absolutely stupid they were for voting for George Bush in our 7th grade election
I remember being furious
I remember feeling convicted that as a 7th grader that this was wrong, and feeling like the world around me was crazy
"I can't articulate it as a 7th grader, but this is not good, and I can't figure out how I can't get you all to understand reason."

I kept up with politics
I wasn't active in any political or civic organizations in that way
I was very much into community service and all those kinds of things.

I voted for Obama twice
I remember that being a very special part of my undergraduate years
I was involved to some degree with civics
I was vice president for student government
I think because I've moved so much, that it's hard to ...
I would like to be very much more civically engaged on a local level
I think that's how things have gotten so, for lack of a better term, fucked up right now.
I'm 30 something.
I don't have the political or social capital in the community to dive right in
I would enjoy running for a local office and figuring out how things work.
I feel like it takes money and it takes social capital, and neither of those things are really there for me right now.
I think for me
I'd like to see ...
I'd really like to see more instruction for people our age about how to get involved in local politics, local civic engagement in that way.
I just don't feel like I have ...
I mean, I have the internet, but that doesn't help.
I need something that's curated
I'm a verbal processor
I need to be able to talk to people.
I just don't know how to get involved

I guess right now too, as far as political identity
I think that's something that I'm kind of struggling with right now too.
I was a Republican.
I was a senior in high school
I dipped my toe in Republicanism
I had this crazy sociology professor and he had me convinced that all the gay people were going to hell
I was a 17, 18-year-old. It was a very dark time of my life
I'm only revealing this to you within the context of our interview.
I don't speak about that.

I guess broadly I would identify as a democrat,
I have issues with that
I was a Bernie Sanders supporter in the last election.
I voted for Hillary, so people can get over it.
I did what I needed to do.
I've reached this point where I'm trying to fight apathy
I feel helpless
I know a lot of things having a Ph.D., but I know a lot about very little.
I want to know more about, and it's just hard to figure out where to start the get involved with all that stuff.
I think this kind of "woe is me" feeling around politics started the day after the election.
I went to bed; we didn't even stay up.

I had to drive to Kentucky the next day
I just remember waking up the next day, and we found out that Donald Trump was our president,
I'm sobbing driving
I had to pull over at one point
"I don't know what's going to happen."
I ended up having to stop for gas in this rural-ass place in West Virginia
I was like, "Can they smell the gay on me? Do I smell too good? Do I look a certain way?
Have we reverted back to the '90s? Is this what's going on?"

I listen to a lot of NPR
I'm just tired.
I'm kind of frustrated with the two-party system
I vote democrat because I have to
I feel like if I don't then the alternative is just absolutely complete shit, versus a party that I feel is somewhat questionable.
I don't know.
I'm just trying to figure out what all that means right now.
I hope that people in my generation and earlier have learned their lesson
I don't know
I'm just tired,
I know I need to figure stuff out with it
I'm tired
I don't know.

I can just summarize really quickly
I guess I can go by stanza.
I didn't realize that flip flops went out of fashion until earlier this year
I got called out about it
I don't think that flip flops go out of fashion whenever you grow up at the beach.
I was quickly told no,
I went out and bought some close-toed shoes, 'cause whatever.
I still wear flip flops whenever I can.
I grew up with Sundrop.
I watched a lot TV growing up.
I guess that's probably a staple of the millennial generation is being brought up where the TV was our babysitter

I don't know
I guess this is a regular part of marriage, but they fought a lot

I think it said to describe some plants or whatnot.
I think this is one of my favorite things about southeastern North Carolina is some of the plants that you find down there.
I just remember

I would stay over with my grandparents, after dinner me and my grandma would always go walk around the farm
I remember there was one year where me and my grandma went and planted hundreds of buttercup bulbs in the field across from their house
I remember how much I hated pine trees when I left North Carolina
I was in California
I was like, "Oh my God, I miss pine trees so much. It reminds me of home."

I threatened one year not to show up unless they had one for Thanksgiving and for Christmas.
I'm color blind, so it asks for a family trait.
I talked about family habits
I interpret it as bad habits.

I got called weird a lot.
I got called weird a lot, but with my friends it was within a positive context.
I didn't take it badly.

I think it asked for your religious affiliation or something like that.
I had a very positive experience with the United Methodist Church.
I'm being very sarcastic there

I'm from [my hometown]
I think it asked something about your family lineage,

I remember there was a time
I was seven or eight and my mom and step-dad had been married for a few years
I asked my step-dad if I could call him dad, but he was like, "No, that's not appropriate."
I just remember my grandpa that's deceased now, but he was always known as an asshole.
I could always see him soften whenever I pulled into the driveway
I grew up and would see him less and less
I left.

I don't really look at them very much anymore.
I think what I've learned is, for me anyway, my family are the people that I choose to keep in my life and build relationships with. So, there's that.

Gus "I" Poems

Interview 1

I grew up in rural south Mississippi in a very conservative state.
I knew from a very early age that I was going to be involved in agriculture
I liked being active on the farm
I still had some passion for agriculture.
I had grown to develop a passion for education.

I had a professor
I loved him.
I am going to be a professor in a few months.
I wanted that.

I enrolled in my master's program
I thought I would probably end up being an extension agent
I had a great opportunity to go
I was a temporary lecturer
I moved to Kansas
I taught

I went to rural Mississippi for college
I went to rural South Carolina to teach
I went to even more rural western Kansas to teach

I knew I was gay when I was five years old.
I remember very clearly
I was at church.
I was sitting at this little plastic picnic table
I asked Matt to be my boyfriend.
I guess I didn't know that wasn't an okay thing.

I had this boy who I thought I just wanted to be a lot like.
I thought he was really cool.
I think it was around third grade
I started thinking, "Oh, there's something different about me than the other boys."
I knew I was gay.

I actually have an aunt who committed suicide
I guess, a fear that I dealt with was, "Oh, if I'm gay, then someone I love is going to kill themselves."

I know I'm jumping around
I was at home for a break, my mom asked me about girls
I was like "Eh, whatever."
I didn't say anything.
"I promise I won't become a hairdresser."

I went one time
"I'm not gay anymore."
I didn't go back anymore.
I wasn't ready to come out at that point
I don't think I was ready at that time anyway.
I didn't bring up the issue or tell my parents again, like really come out, for real, until Fall of 2015

I came back from the first Cultivating Change Summit.
I was teaching as an instructor
I had been dating guys and all that sort of thing.
I came out my cousin in the 11th grade
I came out to the rest of my family in January of this year.

I told my parents about my partner three months after we were dating.
I met his family over Christmas break,
I knew that my family and [he] were both going to be at graduation
I knew I had to tell the rest of my family.
I told them

I started in my field,
I would go to conferences and potential job opportunities were on my radar
I was presenting
I'd be graduating.
I smiled
I was like, "No, it's too cold there!"

I thought about it
I can't really do that for the most part in any other city.
I was like, "That would be ideal."
I met my partner,
I actually got the job offer.
I will be moving at the end of this month.

I'm very excited about the opportunity to do what I love in a city that allows me to fully
be myself.
I'm out professionally, everyone at all the other universities knows about me.
I show pictures of [my partner] and I.
I say, "This is my partner."
I'm out to all of my students,
I'm out professionally.
I didn't know how that might influence my ability to get a job.
I've never encountered anything negative in any manner with that.
I got interviews with the two places I was most interested in
I've found a lot of success,
I'm very excited about my career and being able to be who I am.

I have a sister who's five years younger than me.
I turn 31 next month

I don't think so.
I don't understand.
I don't know what to ask, I guess.

I have two areas of research
I primarily look at how the media portrays agriculture and how that influences public opinion.

I used two methodologies.

I used the social media monitoring program to monitor social media discussions

I collected date lagged data

I was looking at who the opinion leaders were for that topic

I used Washington Post, USA Today, and New York Times

I did content analysis of those articles

I was looking for frame elements

I used hierarchical cluster analysis

I did an experimental survey

I developed these mock Twitter accounts

I'm an animal scientist at heart, most of my research has to do with animal agriculture.

I've done previous research

I showed College of Ag and non-College of Ag students, the pork and beef harvest process

I did a focus group study with College of Ag and non-College of Ag students

I showed them the Netflix film Okja

I had them discuss

I've done some other things in the realm of ag communication

I have done some scholarship of teaching of learning research

I've done some previous research with traditional gender roles within student teams.

I did some qualitative studies with male students as a gender minority within our field

I wanted to get their experiences

I grappled at workplace homophobia for gay and bisexual men in agriculture.

I had to put aside the gender and sexual minority research

I was my first kindergarten teacher's class too!

I have a good map of through the years ready.

I remember kindergarten.

I was the goody-goody

I never even got my name on the board one time.

I should have

I blamed it on this guy in my class who always got in trouble

I remember there was this girl

I would always try to work so quickly to finish

I have to assume that Miss [name] told my parents about this at some point

I was always trying to finish my work in time

I was setup to not be the best student

I all of a sudden decided to be talkative.
I got in the most trouble.
I never got to black,
I got to red a few times.
I would talk so much.
I got caught making out with my girlfriend that year

I was horrible at it.
I can only sign my first name and last name in cursive.

I had the most trouble with spelling.
I was so bad at it.
I would be screaming and crying over spelling words,
I hated it
I was so bad at it.

I would think it was going to be art and it wasn't.
I was really disappointed.

I started to separate from the other boys
I wasn't interested
I started making more girlfriends

I changed classes all seven periods.
I joined the band
I was bad at everything except science.
I was succeeding

I started reading a lot.
I had an English teacher who literally changed my life.
I was a horrible speller.
I was never the smartest kid.
I was never the smartest kid until my master's
I started reading.
I read 70 novels
I wasn't good at math,
I was going to have to take pre-algebra

I tried it
I ended up being in accelerated English
just did the extra work for nothing,
I went to high school
I did really well in science.
I was in harder science classes than the rest of my class,
I was in the remedial math classes.
I took my first ag class my sophomore year.

I took intro to ag science
I was interested
“I took my one ag class. I can be in FFA now.”
“I’m going to college.”
I got involved in FFA
ended up being president of my chapter.
I ended up being a federation officer.
I didn’t do well on the ACT.
I made a 19

I thought I was going to a veterinarian.
“I like animals.”
“I’m going to Mississippi State.”
“I’m going to be a veterinarian.”
I went to work for a veterinarian
I hated it.
I decided to major in animal science
I would have anyway.
I went to Junior College for two years
I ended up getting a journalism scholarship
I was editor for our newspaper,
I had that professor I spoke about earlier
“I want to be an educator at the college level.”

I was the kid that was overly involved in everything in college.
I was an ambassador for College of Ag.
I was in a fraternity.
I was in block and bridle.
I was on the meat judging team, on the livestock judging team, on the academic
quadrathlon team, on the meat science quiz bowl team
I applied to six graduate programs
I got into five.
I earned my master’s degree
I told that story from that point.

I was never the smart kid.
I graduated 46 out of 198
I barely sneaked in there and got that.
I had like a 99.8 in
I started teaching
I used the new version of that book
I still have that old version
I fell in love with the science of animal agriculture.

I see her when I go back home
I really liked her

I really enjoyed that class.
I didn't feel like I was learning to regurgitate

I loved to hate was my junior year English teacher that year.
I was so much more prepared for writing in college because of her.

I'd never even heard about communications.
I had a friend who was in a class with me,
I Googled it
"I love agriculture, and I love journalism, so maybe this is what I want to do."
I don't regret getting my bachelor's degree in animal science.

I mentioned from my undergrad
I really enjoyed
I see how great I have it as her advisee.
I really strive for.
I model
I hope to be as a faculty member one day.

I don't care about celebrities
I most of the time don't know who sings what song, who's in what movie.
"I don't know anyone."
I'm definitely not the type of person to look up to a celebrity
I don't have any role models.
I would not be doing what I do now if it wasn't for my dad.
I do think very differently than he does
I admire him a lot.
I can't tell you anyone that I admire
I don't have people that I think about like that.

I think of a leader
I think of my high school band director actually.
I didn't even mention
I think I can relate to him
I really value the way he chose to go about that.
I try to do that.
I have a student who's an amazing graphic designer
I try to take in my teaching
I lead my students
I'm teaching them
I teach a journalism writing class
I'm not here to make journalists
I'm here to make good writers who can write in any field
I admire what I learned from him
I try to mimic that in what I do.

I would say that of the 198 of us, there was less than 30 of us with a bachelor's degree.
I went to one in another part of the state for livestock judging.
I'm from the coastal part of Mississippi.
I don't count Mobile, Alabama.
I always knew I was going to [the state school]
I told people
I was going with a cowbell in my hand
I got to go for half tuition
I decided I was moving
I was going to get my Ph.D.,
I applied
I didn't even get an interview
"I tried."

I go home,
I have so many, "How did I get out of here?" moments
I go to Walmart
I see and hear people talk
I talk like I live on a houseboat on the river.
I find myself recognizing how fortunate I am
I got out
I was never the kind of kid growing
"I hate Mississippi, I want to get out of my hometown."
I wanted to, but it wasn't because I hated it

I remember from a very young age telling my parents
"I'm going to move to Vermont one day."
I don't know why Vermont,
I moved out of Mississippi for the first time
I really became proud to be a Mississippian.
I vote very differently to Mississippians
I think very differently than Mississippians
I never hesitate to tell anyone that I'm from Mississippi.
"I have all my teeth, I wear shoes, and I'm a doctor, too!"

I'm not very creative about that.
I was very much still the Gus that everyone expected.
I was always a people pleaser
I was trying to please my family.
I actually got to [college]
I started learning who the real Gus was,
I was in a fraternity
I'm very much trying to be straight Gus.
I felt like being in a fraternity would help me be straight.
I still think to this day, being in a fraternity was the most important thing I did in college.
I used to be a very shy, quiet person.

I think it really stems from that experience

I started my master's
I taught as an instructor
I was coming out to some people
I talk to grad students who have known me here
I didn't have to come out
I wasn't out professionally
I came out

I did.
I have a huge crush on him.
I want my pseudonym to be Gus. For Gus Kenworthy.

Interview 2
I just got back from the gym.
I gave my final exam yesterday.
I'm just waiting for graduation on Friday.

I identify with the term millennial.
I'm turning 31 in June
I have fairly young parents
I definitely don't identify with their generation
I think for me a millennial is someone who can adapt to change easily
I was born in '87.
I can think back to when you learned people's phone numbers to their landline.
I remember what that sounded like when you did dial up internet.
I remember when there was an internet button on my Razor
I remember printing off Map Quest directions to go somewhere
I have Apple Carplay in my car.
I talk my text messages
I tell Siri to get me my directions
I think we are adaptive to change
I can see how acceptance of LGBT people has evolved from when I was a little kid
I mentioned this before.
I remember exactly where I was and how I felt the day that Don't Ask Don't Tell was repealed
I've never been in the military.
I don't have anyone close to me that was impacted by that
I knew that things are going to happen.

I think watching how we communicate and watching changes in the LGBT community over time has impacted me
I think we can see that

I don't want to go back

I can remember the challenge.

I told someone else
I was gay
I don't think there would be any differences in things I was interested in
I don't think any of that would've changed.
I told her in March
I think was March 5 of 2004.
I was kind of at that point
I was like someone has to know.
I told her.

I think everyone's first time they tell their first person is a critical point
I think being able to tell someone and to talk about it is a critical moment.

I met and became friends with another gay person.
I met a group of friends there.
I went to [college]
I went there essentially alone.
I didn't have those gay friends anymore
I knew that I was looking for...
I don't know.

I have a more significant story than this one to tell, of still not fully accepting who I was
I joined a fraternity thinking that would help me be straight.
I value the friendships I made
I wouldn't have met them had I not been in my fraternity.
I joined my fraternity
I was shy, quiet Gus.
I had something to hide,
I'm quiet
I don't know that I would be ... Being in a fraternity changed my personality.

I had my first sexual experience with a guy
I was never looking for a relationship
I finished my undergrad
I'm going to get a master's
I'll move somewhere else.
I was gonna be doing this for a little while before I go do my PhD.
I wasn't about to be at the place where I could settle down
I was very afraid that I would let a relationship keep me from furthering my education
and meeting my career goals
I watched a relationship keep people from advancement
I steered away from that.

I was living in Kansas in 2014

I had a very big crisis of faith.
I went to church some
I had a crisis of faith
I became Mormon at 26.
I was a good Mormon.
I was a very good Mormon.
I dropped everything cold turkey
I had the missionaries over for dinner
I went out with them knocking on doors.
I was the door-to-door Mormon salesman.
I will say to this if I wasn't gay, I would be Mormon.
I still believe
I would do it again
I learned about myself, my faith, what I believed, what I can believe.
I came out to my parents as Mormon
I'm gay again, whatever.

I was Mormon for a little over a year, active Mormon
I left Kansas
I started saying when I leave, I'm not gonna do this anymore.
I left,
I stopped going to church.
I guess technically I am still Mormon.
I haven't removed my records from the church.

I moved to [Texas] that summer to start my PhD
I went to Cultivating Change.
I came out to my parents for the whatever time,
I came out to a few people that first year,
I didn't really come out professionally until the end of my first year

I told my mom and dad and sister about [my partner]
I was like ... It was always that out of sight, out of mind situation with my parents.
I'm willing to lose a relationship with my family if that's the case to be with [him].

I finally figured out who Gus was as a personality during my undergrad, fraternity days.
I'm sure my personality has changed some since that point
I've become more and more and more out.
I was constantly hiding who I thought was
I was so worried if I acted like myself, then that would read very gay, very easily, very quickly.

I am no longer afraid to do a hair flip.
I'll do that in class.
I'll say something like hair flip in class or something like that.
I realized who Gus is as a personality,

I was trying to do this and not do that.
I can recognize how this is Gus's personality.
I am being Gus.
I'm just being Gus.

I communicate with people
I connect with people authentically
I'm not pretending to be someone I'm not
I look at the chapters of my life
I have to figure out how to authentically communicate who I am
I'm not holding anything back.
I think that shaped my personality.

I think it's also shaped my leadership style.
I was always a super shy kid
I was very much a follower.
I'm very much a leader in the classroom, outside of the classroom.

I'm supposed to be [here].
I'm supposed to be doing [this]
I'm doing it right
I think my fraternity days and then coming out allowed me to be a better leader
I don't think you can be a good leader if you're not authentically yourself.
I don't think you're at a place to lead until you're comfortable with who you are and confident in that

I think that significance plays a role in being an assertive, strong leader
I don't need to always be in charge
I helped
I better get some recognition.
I'm not that kind of person either.

I need to always feel important
love to help them because it's what I love to do.

I like to be an important person in my group
I've made an impact
I enjoy that.
I can help other people enhance their experience.

I want to be a significant pusher of those envelopes within our field
I'm definitely doing
I'm the person they come to
I think that Significance part of my strengths quest
I see that in both of those personalities that I have.

I'm excited about the opportunities to get involved
I can do that from day one
I can continue to meet and grow and develop those relationships.

I don't know that I would be where I am, personality development wise, all that good stuff, had I never left my hometown or my home state.
I think those little baby steps that I've taken in the other places that I've lived, I've been able to do those
I was never bound by the what if my family finds out, what if the friends of my family find out.
I feared that at [college] being three hours away
I still stepped out of that a little bit.
I know moving forward on day one gay Gus and big, loud, confident Gus would've step foot on campus
I am out professionally.

I presented LGBT research at a national meeting before
I am professionally out
I got to the job search process
I've never had anything but open acceptance
I knew that moving forward that both of my personalities could easily integrate.
I wouldn't go somewhere where I felt like both of those couldn't be.

I'm going to this new place and meeting new people.
I was afraid
I dreaded
I have [my partner] there already.
I have [his] friends who I consider my friends
I've been going for over a year now and visiting.
I go out with his friends.
I keep calling them his friends,
I definitely consider them mine.
I already have that built in.
I want to prioritize trying to meet new people.
I am not gonna play softball.
I would never play on his team.
I would play on a different team
I hate softball
I wouldn't do that.

I have a real gay city to do real gay things in
I go out
I do not go to the gay bar in [Texas] on other nights.
I've tried it, and it's just like there's nothing.

I don't [it] have planned out.

I'm waiting for the semester to start
I'm landing there.
I'll be going to [his] softball games to cheer him on.
I'm just going to enjoy the summer.

I'm definitely looking forward to getting involved
I want to do some collaborative research
I consider myself not just an ag communicator, but a social scientist.
I probably very easily could've into rural sociology
I can do both.

I have to feel like I'm significant and I'm playing an important role
I need to be getting something out of it
I also need to see that other people are getting something out of the fact that I am there.
I test the waters about my involvement in community

I look at community and community involvement
I have to see some sort of reciprocation between their benefiting from me
I'm benefiting from them

Interview 3

I've been envious of people who "had it easy" coming out
I am where I am
I still have struggles that I deal with
I'm still an educated white man on paper.
I don't know what it's like to be a person of color
I don't know what it's like to be a woman in the workplace
I can never fully understand their experience
I know that my experience was challenging
I struggle with that
I'll probably continue to struggle with that

I think if I were a straight, white, educated man becoming a professor, it would be more challenging for me to fully understand the experiences of my students and the challenges that some of them might face.

I think being a part of a minority community allows me the opportunity to... if nothing more, than just recognize that other people have struggles.

I think throughout the country, people say that all professors are liberal and we're just trying to indoctrinate everybody

I think when you take a step back and look at why this assumption is made, generally people with more education travel more, people with more education are exposed to other people, and by being exposed to other people and other people's struggles and challenges and their life experiences, it makes you recognize that other people have needs that don't align with yours. Other people have experiences that don't align with yours, and therefore your voting patterns reflect your desire to help those people have as good of an experience as they possibly can.

I think the fact that I grew up in a rural area
I dealt with my own minority experience there
I chose to pursue education, that has made me recognize that this is why people can be closed-minded.

I think that that allowed me to become a more compassionate educator and researcher
I'm interested in researching things that other people in my field are [not] researching.
I find interest in them because of my experience.

I always pictured myself having a family.
I avoided relationships
"I'm going to school"
"I don't want to meet someone and then feel obligated to give up my career or to move somewhere I don't want to go"
I wasn't looking for a relationship when I met [my partner]
I wasn't looking for a relationship
I decided to try to reconnect and see what happened
I am so incredibly grateful

I applied and I got that position
I have it better than a lot of people
I deal with these two spheres that we live and work in.
I have conservative values
I eat at Chick-fil-a
I am trying to work and communicate and live in these two spheres
I think our experiences will better prepare us to serve both of those communities, to help kind of bridge the gap as our country continues to get more polarized
I will be standing there holding the pink John Deere flag
I think the biggest key is for [us] to live as authentically as we can in both of those spaces.

I introduce myself the first day of class
I show pictures of [my partner] and me.
I talk about [him] as my partner
I have a "safe space" sticker at my office
I think it's important to show "the gays" that... we're not just in the city doing "gay city" things
I can be that example to my students
I think that's how you get in both of those places. Not being afraid of conflict.
I tend to never be one who tries to dig it up or make it happen
I'm very adamant about what I will and I won't do
I will be very clear about why I will and I won't do it.
I teach a lesson on the diverse audiences
I showed a video from "Cultivating Change"
I know two of my class reviews were negative because of that

I had two comments that were very negative about that topic
I had two evaluation scores that were as bad as you can have it.

I was really open with my undergraduate students,
I have one student who thinks that what I do, or who I am isn't significant
I don't know how I face that just yet
I haven't dealt with a lot of conflict in that sense
I just tell them how it is and go on again.
I'm a teacher,
I'm not going to sit and teach you everything that there is to know about genetic
modification at the bar, that's not what I came to the bar for.

I do what I can.
I don't stray away from conflict
I don't start it.
I'm not going to ignore negative comments or someone putting out information that I
know to be untrue, on either side of the spectrum.

"I didn't have to care about it"
I'm not civically engaged
I vote
I don't work for any campaign
I share very little political things online.
I wasn't old enough to vote yet
I was still seventeen
I don't know where that came from
I don't know how to explain it
I can't say that I did research.
I was at this place where, to me, voting Democrat meant whatever
I don't know what seventeen-year-old Gus believed what a Democrat was.
I would have voted for John Kerry.
I don't like the two-term system.
I think that the first term helps
I voted for Barack Obama for his first term
I did not vote for him for the second term.
I find myself more in the middle
I consider myself in the middle.
I remember the day I went to vote in this past election
I was just so confident that Hillary was going to win
I obviously was not going to vote for Donald Trump.
I remember being at the gym
I physically couldn't work out when we found out that he had won.
I didn't know what to say, didn't know what to do, it felt like someone had died.
I started thinking about it earlier than my peers for sure.
I'm not active on the local level and I think a big reason for that is my hopping around the
country so much since I turned eighteen

I haven't been involved or focused on local politics
I came to Minneapolis Pride for the first time.
I was awe that these candidates were in the Gay Pride Parade
I had never really thought of that, because that's not an option in Mississippi.
I think my political ideology will change

I did invest in friends in [Texas]
I wouldn't say I did as much in Kansas or in South Carolina.
I'm still great friends with my friend from college.
I did make a lot of great friends
I had a great time
I was involved in organizations related to school.
I was involved in the clubs that I advised.
I was involved in my graduate program
I didn't join any local organizations or communities
I'm very much looking to [it]
I don't know what that might look like just yet
I don't know what I want to do yet

I think my viewpoint of leadership and seeing myself as a leader comes back to this one
very key piece of who I am
I'm the kind of person that doesn't try anything I don't think I'll be good at.
I'm probably not going to be involved in and organization, or group, or cause that I can't -
I'm not going to be just a member for the sake of being a member.
I want to do something for the organization, my experiences, my connections forever
have to be influential.
I definitely think it's going to be places where my... obviously interests, but also my
experiences can be helpful.
I just think that if I can't contribute in some manner, as a leader, whether it's for the whole
entire group, or if it's for a committee, or an event, or whatever
I'm generally not the kind of person to get very involved in it.
I'm generally not one to join or participate if I can't contribute a lot.
I don't like to be dead weight
I don't want to be that person

I think the constant moving.
I wouldn't have the experiences that I have today.
I wouldn't have the perspective that I have today.
I think there's a component of upgrading who you are, moving and essentially hitting
restart on your life.
I think, given that opportunity to change, move, be whoever you want as an adult
I think that makes you rethink who you are, where you come from, what your values are,
I've had the opportunity to do that several times has added some layers of experience and
layers of..
I think everybody needs to restart sometimes.

I think when you're born in a place that you don't fit in, you're innately prepared to move along.

I think we've learned to disguise ourselves with our surroundings, we've learned to become chameleons, because we had to be. We're born a chameleon.

"I gotta put on a show".

"I don't have to wear that cloak anymore."

"I can if I need to, because I'm really good at it and I've had a lot of experience"

I never felt like "oh I hate this place, I want to leave"

I knew that there were things I didn't like about my town

"I'm moving to Vermont one day."

I haven't been to Vermont,

"I'm going to not live here, I'm going to go somewhere else."

I would never talk poorly about where I'm from.

I will throw shade all day long about the stupid things that go on

I definitely wouldn't say I had teen angst that made me leave

I think I'm good.

I'm glad I could help.

Bruce "I" Poems

Interview 1

I may have gotten into the wrong meeting room, sorry about that.

I submitted grades yesterday

I thought, this is all gonna be smooth sailing from here.

I'm really appreciative that you shared a lot about what drove you to your research.

I remember my own dissertation process and finding parallels

I was in a little bit of a, let's just say a little bit of a panic with the contract

I think the sample that I was looking for was so tight

I'm doing it on queer men of color

I think as many connections as I have who may have fit into those social identities

I wasn't just gonna text somebody and say, hey, be come part of my study.

I had three wonderful, wonderful participants

I spent six hours with, with each person.

I love quant research, but I love qual research even more.

I love mixed methods.

I've heard from so many of my colleagues about what kinds of feedback they get from reviewers.

I think that sometimes is what drives me to make a difference and what also sometimes acts as a trepidation in the production of scholarship and research.

I heard from another one of my friends two weeks ago

I know this journal and this editor

I'm pretty sure a majority of them are not affirming

I just watched the Avengers: Infinity War

I'm thinking of like super hero names.

I'm gonna go with Bruce.

I was born in May.

I think, it's funny.

I'm thinking about the life story and how I got here.

I think very much

I am who I am now

I do the kinds of scholarship research activism that I do now is central to kind of what I knew, my connection to who I am and what I do to live authentically.

I've had many experiences of oppression and not too many experiences of privilege

I often find that central to my being

I am so complex

I don't fit into these molds.

I don't fit particularly into the systems that were not made for me

I find that very central, particularly to the social identities that I carried with me throughout my life. And how they played a different role in each of the complex that I move through.

I would say pretty significant changes over my life

I move

I grew up in Los Angeles

I still like back home

I said I am going out of state

I know that my family would have loved for me to stay.

I said, no,

I'm leaving.

I did that for their benefit but for mine,

I wanted to experience something

I didn't want to be the cookie cutter.

I always believed that there was another world just out there.

I grew up as a child of two immigrants.

I identify as a second generation Asian American.

I'm a queer person of color.

I see myself

I speak to such different experiences with nuance, and emotionality, and particularly sometimes even with just integrity and authenticity

I'm gonna walk through some of my identities

I always feel like this kind of a reflexive a part of being

I don't only just speak about these identities
I live them.

I identify as a queer person of color.
I identify as queer and gay.
I'm not at the ends of binaries.
I grew up in the Catholic church
I know that there's a lot of different characteristics
I'm centered as a pluralistic catholic centered in liberation theology.

I think about service and empathy and humanity.
I would say that that still is an integral part of my being
I always find everybody held up on the religiosity part, and held up on the doctrine
I have very different opinions about that

I have heritage particularly as a Filipino American, Asian American, and a Chinese American.
I carry with me being brown.
I show up
I'm not fetishized in the same way
I don't know what that is.
I grew up in a middle-class family.
I identify as able bodied.
I often don't have to think about
I have to interrogate that privilege as part of who I am
I can continue to walk through life.
I identify as a cisgender male.

I often present as male
I don't always present as feminine
I don't pass in the same way

I am listened to more
I identify as cisgender male
I present in terms of masculinity instead of femininity.
I can pass

I try to capture some of my identities.
I am a millennial.
I have particular abilities because of my age.
I'm not seen as this old washed up person that's older
I didn't exactly go straight through all my degrees
I did move pretty quickly through most of them

I kept continuing

I felt so committed to who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do.
I describe my identities
I see the world.

I became so conscious of my difference
I had a theme to describe growing up
I would say it was a pressure to succeed.

I was under the thumb of my parents
I still very much love dearly
I'm very close
I was the only child.
I was the peace maker in my family.
I would be triangulated to stabilize their marriage or relationship
I was being used as a prop.

I become a cultural bearer
I held on to that.
I still do.

I remember,
I reflect
I think

I was a child,
I think about them
I was able to have much more exposure to diversity

I experienced a lot of pressure academically.
I experienced a lot of pressure.
I was kind of pressed into the dominant narrative as a child.
I went to a high school that had many, many students of color,
I remember what it meant
I hang out with a bunch of my friends who from high school
I come back to Los Angeles
I was trying to pass
I didn't clearly know myself

I went to a Catholic high school.
I'm gonna finish,
I'm gonna get out of here,
I was so involved in my studies and social life
I try to avoid the drama
I don't know that that necessarily helped me.
I went to a large Catholic institution for undergrad

I did kind of lose sight of who I was.
I had such a good time socializing
I was getting into a lot of trouble
I was drinking lots

I wanna be a doctor
I really wanna help people
I fully switched majors
I said this was not right for me.

I got into a lot of trouble
I was drinking a lot.
I was still functioning on the week days,
I was drinking a whole lot.
I needed to achieve in my classes and courses.

I was also kind of like trying to figure out like my social life.
I was not out in undergrad.
I like to call them single gender dorms.
I was experiencing exclusion
I was dating women and so.
I don't even know what the fuck I'm doing.
I had a lot of break ups in undergrad

I experienced,
I remembered
I would get like all these really weird questions.
I was privy to the experience of being on Forums for three months.
I find it comparable to Mean Girls when they had the burn book
I ended up on this website

I characterize myself.
I have a lot of resilience and grit
I didn't take it personally.
I said whatever, fuck these people.
I was trying to figure out myself.
I was figuring a lot of stuff out.

I was living off campus
I didn't deal with people's drama all the time
I was doing things that I liked.
I felt better.

I'm organizing my narrative
I've lived.
I had to deal with some bullshit.

I realized oppression does exist.

I ended up finding this service program
I ended up looking for a lot of AmeriCorps kind of like stuff
I was in a very limited budget
I ended up living in New York City
I had direction with my life.
I started to become more comfortable in my own skin.
I started coming out to myself.

I'm discovering
I was able to re-position myself

I was so driven
I felt so much more grounded
I was working in that foster agency.

I was in my career
I saw what the system had done to these families.

I was working in the Bronx
I felt much more grounded
I wanna be for other people.

I got a little too ambitious
I had this 2.93 GPA
I think my major GPA was lower.
I was screwing up in all the other classes
I might not have a good chance to get in.

I was so shocked
I was getting these letters back
I thought I bombed that interview.
I thought it was really terrible.
I felt much more passionate.
I wanted to go with my career.

I love New York City
I ended up moving to Washington DC.
I ended up doing really well
I had not done well.
I was seen highly in my department
I was very confused
I can actually do this.
I didn't really want to transition to the city because it was a city.
I still kind wanna live this up.

I had always envisioned this life as a practitioner
I had started my master's program
I went on a limb
I said I'd be really interested
I'm really interested in your work
I would really gain a lot of experience
I sent her an email
I ended up really loving that experience.
I thought that was so me.

I am doing somebody else's research
I don't really care
I felt like a work horse.
I wasn't invested
I was doing research
I ended up loving presenting and teaching.
I saw this conglomeration of all these roles
I ended up pursuing this multi culture perspective on research
I had a really hard time that year.
I was working with clients
I had a hard time with my supervisors.

I didn't want to start a shit with her,
I'm gonna pick my battles
I'm not gonna start any conflict.
I was pursuing a PhD program
I'm gonna stick around
I had cultural capital

I'm not gonna do this to my students.
I need to see other perspectives
I will not become a part of this system in reproducing oppression.

I was so much more grounded
I was as a doctoral student.
I tried to reach out
I knew I was committed to the doc program
I'm still interested in working with you
I didn't understand the gravity of that situation
I need to move on

I experienced a painful moment.
I'm the only one who finished.
I was getting this shit done in four years,
I'm not doing this

I'm more invested in this process than my colleagues
I'm just gonna keep moving on and doing what I do.

I didn't have a GA.
I was never getting research experience
I made my own path
I attended conferences.
I become intentional
I didn't have a GA
I had zero funding
I worked full time
I was a full-time doc student.

I was in the office from nine to five
I was taking six or seven classes
I was able to survive.

I don't feel like I'm gaining opportunities
I don't feel like I'm being supported.
I made some really beautiful relationships with mentors
I didn't even know
I finally had these conversations with these mentors
I kept this relational connection with all these mentors and colleagues
I would define that period of my life learning how to survive and thrive

I have faculty who don't give a shit.
I was doing things for free.
I was never getting paid
I got zero pay for it.
I came back from a conference.
I spoke with one of the faculty.
I was interested.
I walked in
I saw that exact project.
I don't understand how you even came up this shit.
I was in shock.
I don't wanna start shit
I don't wanna start conflict,
I was trying to make excuses for this person.
I was totally denying it.
I was denying that this entire event happened.

I keep moving on.
I remember that.
I will not do this to my own student.
I'm gonna be so conscious

I don't need to do that.

I was one of those people
I'm gonna keep my head down
I did that
I didn't have a lot of problems in that way.

I found out
I looked at some of the dates.
I looked at it in summer.
I think they had moved up one of the dates
I was getting three awards
I was on a board
I was on a committee.
I was doing four presentations.
I was doing a whole lot

I told him
I didn't realize all the shit he was going through as a black man
I did not realize all the shit he was going through.
I tell him ahead in advance
I tell him all this stuff.
I'm done with all my coursework
I'm done with all my credits
I would have to register for more useless credits and pay money
I can't defend my proposal.
I have a pass on all my comprehensive exams.
I keep following up,
I sent a retort
I've been planning for this
I'm ready
I've been preparing for this

I come back from that conference.
I have no idea what's happening.
I didn't receive answers,
I was given that answer every time too.
I sat there
I proceeded to update my dissertation chair.
I tried to explain it
I've never seen this from my dissertation chair.
I have never seen him upset.
I never hear from this doctoral program coordinator.
I passed comps.

I'm on the job market.

I gotta get it going.
I need to finish.
I keep speeding it up.
I had no idea what to do.
I called my dissertation chair,
I finally sent her all the stuff

I remember who I want to be for my students
I remember that to this day that,
I will not be those people.

I did not expect this to happen,
I had my own trepidation
I was experiencing.
I end up with a faculty position in rural southeastern Idaho.
I know this institution has a name
I don't know if I'm ready
I don't know, it's Idaho.
I'm a little scared for me.

I said why not?
I submitted a CV and my cover letter and three references.
I had received invitation to campus interviews with other places
I didn't have a good feeling.
I didn't feel like they were excited to take me on.
I submitted my application December 26th
I was offered the job verbally on January 11th.
I was offered this job

I felt exasperated with my doc program
I get a call from my current department chair.
I have a really wonderful Skype interview
I feel good
I send a thank you email
I get a response in 30 minutes
I don't think I can say no to that
I get on the phone
I was like oh my God
I'm so excited,
I'm not even prepared.
I have to go buy a suit
I didn't bring any dress clothes home.
I'll do it.
I'm doing it.
I fly there.
I had one of the most beautiful campus interviews

I feel like it's an extremely community centered department.

I was looking for anything that was opposite.

I disclose on day one.

I was out there for my campus interview.

I love the mountains.

I belong.

I feel so driven,

I realized the difference I can make here.

I was the only faculty of color.

I was very, very out as a queer LGBTQ+ faculty

I went on a limb.

I had my parents ask me

I had other friends and colleagues ask me,

I still get those questions today

I become the faculty who teaches all core classes.

I am driven to be unique, to be authentic, to be congruent with who I am.

I am driven to contribute together with my students.

I have that privilege to fight for them

I hear it from my other colleagues

I don't think you quite realize what you mean to some of those students who are here.

I have students who pass

I'm here for those students.

I'm able to live in my own truth.

I'm living

I helped students

I'm on their committee,

I have to be there for these students.

I also have to keep pushing those narratives

I'm not gonna participate in oppression Olympics.

I have to keep pushing

I can use that privilege

I have to be the one who pushes.

I remember my privilege

I have a lot of power as a faculty

I feel so empowered by that.

I think that's where I'm at.

Interview 2

I always think there's this dichotomy

I've always thought about that
I've been thinking about that

I think it was really hard growing up.
I think about particular moments in my life
I remembered there were a times my parents started fighting
I used to fear that

I really didn't have anybody else to go to.
I remember one time there was a fight
I don't really understand what's going on and then my mom just leaves.
I know she's probably staying at a friend's house,
I just don't know what to do in these moments.

I think I was nine years old.
I don't know what to do.
I could hear everything.
I could hear what my parents are fighting about,
I know that's when it gets bad is when she starts cussing.

I don't think that's the way how things should be going.
I looked back upon that time
I'm proud to see where my parent's marriage has gone
I understand who she is now.
I think about that time
I don't really know what's going on.
I think that's why I've wanted to leave home.

I went to college
I got jobs
I come back to my parents and my family.
I just remember that moment.

I struggle hearing about Kate Spade.
I remember that suicide note
I remember growing up there were instances just like this.
I know my parents were extremely resilient
I was particularly resilient as a child

I remember struggling with growing up.
I remember writing this in a counseling course
I was in my master's program.

I didn't want to move back.
I especially didn't want to move back to Los Angeles.
I don't want to live there.

I would move to San Francisco or San Diego.
I would not move to Los Angeles.
I do this to keep a safe distance for me and my family.
I love them
I know they miss me
I miss them too

I participated in this five-minute study
I feel like there's this assumption or stereotype
I was congruent and authentic to who I am,

I don't think our city here would be classified under rural
I see it in the economic resources and social class around here
I have a place to go back to if I wanted to.
I can go back to Los Angeles.

I think about community
I've thrived in having these interpersonal communities and networks
I have those people
I think about place
I could be living on a farm by myself,
I could do it, but it just depends on who's around me

I still remember that I said yes to this institution
I got here
I was not only treated so well
I was also thinking this is exactly the type of place I want to be
I don't know if I'll find that at a research one

I think of place
I think about the people who are there
I felt like that that was a good fit with who I was, who I am.

I think about leader in so many different spaces and context.
I think about being a leader in my institution, in my profession.
I'm highly involved in my service to my profession
I see myself as a leader in that right.

I think of successful leadership in that way,
I see these other images of me as a leader.
I fill up a different space for our students
I struggle with this reality
I mean so much more to students than I can ever possibly imagine
I don't ever see myself in that light
I am a leader in that way
I mean so much to students who represent these bodies, these identities, their experiences,

I know that staying authentic and congruent to who I am positions me to be somebody who's committed to my work.

I'm congruent to who I am

I see you as a leader

I see you in these identities and I share it with you.

I see you as a leader because you can advocate for me

I've taken that as the inspiration

I get what I mean now to these students

I need to remember that responsibility,

I was here to make a difference.

I hold onto that

I was here to make a difference.

I've scared some of the students

I'm too passionate or something.

I show up like a ghost in their other classes.

I think about being a leader in the community of colleagues that I have

I see myself

I'm a leader because I produce.

I do so much for the department.

I have always been committed to making sure this community is going to grow.

I see myself as a leader integrating these elements of servant [and] authentic leadership

I'm here to serve the greater good and the community

I think back to that relational energy.

I want other people's voices to be featured

I really care

I now have a responsibility

I think about authentic leadership,

I bridge that cultural humility

I can be confident and self-assured

I'm not gonna drown out other people's voices,

I think about language

I have a way and meaning to how I identify myself

I'm grappling with these other pieces,

I'm in these other spaces now,

I've influenced in this particular way.

I'm also a function of that,

I'm a function of my interactions with all these different systems.

I understand that.

I get that because it really shouldn't be our burden
I've already been doing all the work,
I've already had this burden to carry,

I teach
I have a responsibility

I believe that we are fighting for something that is for the good of our communities
I don't expect that from other people.
I'm going to pick up on energy from other people.
I'm not gonna judge them for not doing it
I just don't get it.

I haven't really been able to kind of tell my story in this way.
haven't really told my story in this way. Not like this.
I think it's great to share in this way and how it's been meaningful to me.
I've lived being in all the personal experiences with commitment and values
I think it threads altogether.

I really feel like this is exciting to share
I really appreciate this,
I think this has been exciting to kind of participate and to say here's what I'm doing.

Interview 3
I am from.
I ask myself this question.
I ask myself this question.
I have experienced stereotypes about where I am from.

I tell them stories.
I tell them narratives.
I tell them those values passed down to me from my ancestors.
I tell them the things that have been silenced.
I am from hardship.
I am from hard work.
I am from grit.
I am from resilience.
I am from family.
I am from the lives of immigrants.
I am from community.
I am from the wide spectrum of Los Angeles.
I am from complexity.
I am from heart.
I am from humility.
I am from a world of hope that hasn't always been perfect.
I am never from regret.

I am from these beautiful oceans.
I am from queer histories.
I am now from complexity, privilege, and responsibility.
I am from gratitude and from hope.

I have no idea how I came up with that.
I'm teetering on this emotionality behind the words and the entirety of the poem.
I never really expected myself to write in this capacity
I think it captures that story, or multiple stories.
I think the stories that we talked about across our time working together,
I relayed in my first two interviews that there are particular moments
I think that has a lot to do with contextual, social, historical, and political influences.

I share
I have come to know
I've always remembered that question, where are you from?
I think that's what started it all.
I remembered being asked that.
I was in my undergrad career
I just remembered feeling it was still not to ask me where did I grow up?

I don't fit in
I don't fit in into this normative experience.
I take that with me.
I never became conscious of it until I started taking any class that related to cultural diversity or social justice
I took one
I still remember feeling like that class was me.
I finally realized what was happening,
I think we tend to forget that.
I came to formulate this poem,
I really found myself thinking about, that is what these experiences are about.

I just remembered
I can't believe that was real.
I just remember seeing it
I remember people who were living in my residence hall
I should be laughing about it
I wasn't laughing about it,
I just carried so many of these experiences with me

I highlight my undergraduate career as that moment where it became so much more salient
I became so much more conscious of what was happening to me.
I really started figuring myself out, particularly with my sexual and affectional identity
I am complex,

I didn't fit into whatever this heteronormative and cisnormative crap that I was getting

I'm making that connection about that transition, and that transition made me conscious.

I needed.

I think about it now

I think about New York City

I experienced.

I remember sitting with a Lyft driver

I was living in DC

I was visibly uncomfortable

"I think you just need to stop this Lyft right now, and just drop me off here."

I told him Los Angeles.

"I'm not sure you would have asked me if the color of my skin wasn't brown."

I'm getting these heteronormative pressures

I want to be friendly and cordial

I don't know their circumstances.

I carry those experiences.

I feel that is a reminder of living on the margins.

I am proud

I am proud of the identities that I carry.

I tie that particular experience back to this poem and what it really means to me

I think about my work identity

I think about the world.

I don't have many opportunities to speak openly about it, to process about the story

I could probably go for counseling

I sort that out

I will just for my own self-care and wellness.

I think about the academy

I need to fit into this conformed nature of what the academy will look like

I'm trying to make some inroads and some opportunities to initiate this action

I don't really tell these stories to my students, nor my colleagues.

I don't think it's out of the nature of trying to, for self-preservation or to protect myself

I think it's moments of just time.

I don't think people spend six hours with each other talking about this

"I feel like I'm a little bit too much of a counselor right now."

I think we just don't have that time and energy

I think about this particular medium, and even writing a poem.

I don't even have time.

I'm so steeped in writing academically,

I almost want to ask you, maybe after this, if you're cool with it

I almost want to share this on social media

I feel like this is so defining of me.
"I can actually come up with this?"
I'm convinced.

I think about the communities that we start in this process.
I think about these different mediums that we all have to tackle with
I've always thought about these different ways.
I write in a newsletter, write in a book
I think this is sometimes a bridge

I think I'm solid.
I'm just really excited that you embarked on this trajectory
I'm really thankful to be a part of the process.
I might email you later
I can wait until later.