PRoud and Fabulous:

The Career Experiences of Gay Male Public Relations Practitioners in Canada

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Submitted by: Lonny Kates
Student ID: 1353288

Email: LKates@sympatico.ca
Tel: 416-432-7372

Capstone Supervisor: Dr. Terence (Terry) Flynn, Ph.D., APR, FCPRS
Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia
Faculty of Humanities
McMaster University
Hamilton, Canada

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Abstract

Despite the increasing focus on understanding diverse groups of public relations practitioners, there is a portion of the public relations sector, those with diverse backgrounds, that has not seen much recognition in terms of academic research on marginalized groups – specifically the gay community. This qualitative study examines the career experiences of 19 gay men working in public relations in Canada. In-depth interviews were used to allow participants to discuss their careers openly. Practitioners felt they could be themselves in their workplace, had equal opportunities for advancement, and in many cases, felt that being gay was an advantage. While a similar study was completed in 2012 in the United States, the results of this study indicate the career experiences of gay public relations practitioners in Canada is considerably more inclusive than their American counterparts.

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1. **Introduction**

Since the early 1990s, public relations practitioners and scholars have called for an increased understanding of diversity and its implications for the discipline (L. A. Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2001). In an effort to increase this understanding, L. A. Grunig (2001), E. Toth (2009) and other academics have suggested that there should be future research to study diverse public relations practitioners, including gay and lesbian practitioners. Although Walmsley (1998) suggests that there is indeed a diverse range of public relations practitioners and students enrolling in public relations programs, Hon and Brunner (2000) argued that public relations scholarship has not expanded to match the diversity as it has mostly focused on the industry's gender and race issues. As a result, there is a portion of the public relations sector, those with diverse backgrounds, that has not seen much recognition in terms of academic research on diverse communities – specifically the gay and lesbian community.

In order to address this deficiency in academic research, Tindall and Waters (2012) published a study in the *Journal of Public Relations* entitled, "Coming Out to Tell our Stories: Using Queer Theory to Understand the Career Experiences of Gay Men in Public Relations." This study was the first of its kind, as far as public relations academia was concerned, as it was able to address a specific diverse community of public relations practitioners where other studies had previously failed to address nonobservable identities like sexual orientation. Although this study certainly pioneered major concepts in public relations scholarship in regards to research among gay public relations practitioners, it was limited in its scope as it only tried to understand the career experiences of gay male practitioners in the United States. This study aims to further the research of Tindall and Waters (2012) by both replicating and extending their study, thus reducing, and perhaps eliminating the field's oversight by applying queer theory in the critical understanding of the career stories from gay male practitioners in Canada. This research

undoubtedly contributes to the academic body of knowledge at large and provides important academic research from a Canadian perspective that is often absent from scholarly journals.

2. Literature Review

Being that the topic of this study falls within the areas of practitioner experiences, diversity issues and organizational management, the literature review that follows provides context and support for the multidisciplinary viewpoints discussed in order to understand the dynamics of nonobservable identities, like sexual orientation in the practice of public relations in Canada and the functioning of organizations.

To integrate and apply queer theory to public relations and to grapple with the existence of nonobservable identities in the work place, the researcher extracted from traditional diversity work in public relations literature in addition to research essays and studies from outside the discipline. The theoretical constructs that structure and frame this research are divided into the following sections: gay and lesbian public relations practitioners, organizational value of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) diversity and public relations practitioners and their roles in Canada.

2.1 Relevant Theory

Much of the theoretical framework that informs this study is linked to queer theory. Queer theory critically analyzes the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Heavily influenced by the work of numerous theorists including Berlant and Warner (1995), Butler (1993), Edelman (1995), and Sedgwick (1989), queer theory challenges the validity and consistency of heteronormativity, which suggests that pure heterosexuality is the only normal sexual orientation, that men and women each have certain natural roles to play and

that in our conventional society, heterosexuality is to be considered the social norm. Italian

feminist and film theorist Teresa de Lauretis coined the term *queer theory* for an academic

conference she organized at the University of California in 1990 and a special issue of

Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies she edited based on that conference (Minton,

1997).

Queer theory's origins can be traced from the homosexual rights movement through the

gay liberation movement as the LGBT community resisted all forms of societal domination

(Tindall & Waters, 2012). The gay liberation movement worked to break away from stereotypes

and heteronormative representations of the gay experience to focus on representing the gay

community with its own words and actions (Beasley, 2005). This shift in representation is one of

the principle components of queer theory, which argues that sexuality cannot be categorized into

simple groupings such as gay, straight, bisexual or transgendered (Butler, 1990). Sedgwick

(1990) argues that an identity consists of many varied components and that categorizing an

individual can be limiting and misrepresentative. Tindall and Waters (2012) liken this to an

example where placing an openly gay, white man from Tennessee and closeted black man from

Chicago into the same collective identity (gay man), which "negates the individual experiences

that have shaped their lived existence" (p. 453).

Queer theorists and other academics have critiqued the concept of identity from multiple

perspectives. Butler (1990) introduces the concept of *performativity*, which allows us to consider

how sexual orientation and even gender are *performances*; that individuals use performances to

create and maintain their identity, whether it is a personal reflection of who they are or what

society says they are. It is because of this performance, queer theorists have discovered that in

their profession, gay men tend to sacrifice openly gay identities in order to advance in the

workplace (Bairstow & Skinner, 2007). Furthermore, Ragins and Cornwell (2001) coined the

term *lavender ceiling*: a barrier that gay men face in the workplace, where they could only be considered for management positions if their sexuality was severely downplayed. Subrahmanyam, Greenfield and Tynes (2004) examined the social influence of how sexuality and identity is defined in everyday, modern situations ranging from media representations of the queer community to the construction of sexuality and identities in social media and online chatrooms. Whether defined by individual or society, one's identity is resistant to change, yet Didomenico (2015) suggests that for gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identifying individuals, identity is a fluid concept. Furthermore, studies have shown that an individual's identity plays a significant role in the distribution of power of an organization (Sposato, Feeke, Anderson-Walsh & Spencer, 2015) and such individuals can perpetuate normative power dynamics; the implicit foundation in both heteronormative and gender normative discourses (Anglin, 2015). Finally, more recent studies have indicated that even in today's modern society, heteronormative constructions of gay male sexualities tend to constrain access to work, suggesting there are indeed limits to the abilities and roles gay men possess and are able to play (Rumens & Broomfield, 2014).

While queer theorists challenge the notions that are commonly accepted as natural identities, there is a considerable segment of academia that disputes these ideas. Slagle (2014) argues that queer theorists overlook the fact that all human beings are by nature unique individuals – that is to say no two people experience their identities in the same way. Therefore, by grouping the queer experience into one identity, queer theorists fail to notice the diversity of humanity by emphasizing diversity and difference of those who are oppressed by the mainstream (Slagle, 2014). This also mimics the conclusions from Marcus (2005) that suggests scholars who want to understand diversity within organizations must study gender and sexuality in all of their manifestations, and not limit them to queer identities.

2.2 Gay and Lesbian Public Relations Practitioners

Queer theorists have suggested that various institutions, including for profit, nonprofit

and government organizations should oppose assigning a collective identity to the LGBT

community (Humphrey, 1999). Buford (2005) suggests that limited time and resources have

dictated that the public relations industry's engagement with the gay community is broad-

reaching and based on stereotypes. Some of these perpetuated stereotypes suggest that gay men

are not good at sports, are the creative types in the workplace or simply have good fashion sense

(Maddon, 1997); identities that many would consider negative in this context, even though

Pompper's (2004) study regarding workplace performance expectations concluded that many of

these same stereotypes found in gay public relations practitioners can have an advantage in the

workplace. This advantage, however, might be moot unless an appreciation for diverse

perspectives is incorporated into public relations programming without demonstrating financial

gain for the organization (Toth, 2002). Goldman (1996) also suggests that if the industry does

eventually become more inclusive for LGBT employees, this acceptance will be slow.

Furthermore, Grates (1993) said of public relations campaigns that in their efforts to create

effective promotions, PR practitioners should become sensitive and knowledgeable about the

needs of gay and lesbian groups.

An example of this sensitivity and knowledge in practice is the effort put forth by

Toronto Dominion (TD) Bank Financial Group. Recognizing the value of identifying trends and

issues in the Canadian gay community, TD actively recruits talented professionals to work for

the bank to specifically work on campaigns targeted to LGBT audiences. The public relations

professionals working for TD Bank on their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender communities

and their Allies (LGBTA) work with clients to help secure media placements in gay media and to

engage clients in appropriate partnerships with organizations that service the gay community

(TD, 2014). Although the bank actively recruits gay practitioners, it encourages all of its employees to learn more about issues impacting the LGBT community. Furthermore, TD reports that in 2014, it actively supported 42 pride festivals in North America and since first introducing same-sex benefits to their Canadian workforce in 1994, the bank has made significant inroads in creating an inclusive workplace for LGBT employees (TD, 2014).

Although this example suggests that PR practitioners have embraced the gay community externally, and to some extent, internally as well, there exists disagreement within the literature. Hon and Brunner (2000) conducted a study about diversity issues in the public relations industry in the United States, and their study concluded that a number of organizations had no commitment to diversity while others had several diversity policies, particularly regarding equal employment opportunities and benefits. In this study, numerous respondents discussed their organization's weak commitment to diversity, citing personal instances: "They express it (commitment to diversity), but I don't know if they do anything about it," she said. "To me, they are [just] statements and not put into action" and "Some people don't care [about diversity]," she said. "They don't think this is important. We 'talk the diversity talk,' but I'm not sure we 'walk the walk' as much as we could" (Hon & Brunner, 2000, p. 320). Public relations practitioners/participants in the study revealed valuable insights about the status of diversity management within the profession – at least in the USA. It is also worth noting that this study rarely discussed diversity in any context other than race, and no references were made to age, sexual orientation, religious background or disability.

In explaining the need for increased diversity in the public relations industry, James and Larissa Grunig (2003) stated that:

> Organizations need as much diversity inside as outside if they are to interact
> successfully with all strategic elements of their environment. Excellent public
> relations departments empower both men and women in all roles as well as

practitioners of diverse, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds (p. 324).

Although the discussion regarding diversity of PR practitioners is present in academia, again,

there appears to be a general ignorance surrounding sexual orientation.

More recent studies, however, have begun to explore how LGBT advocacy organizations

strategically communicate in order to position LGBT issues as legitimate and build positive,

widespread policy support for those issues and how it provides an important insight regarding

how social movement organizations can use public relations to influence civil society (Mundy,

2013).

2.3 Organizational Value of LGBT Diversity

It is often argued that it is important for organizations to understand the real value of

diversity in the workplace, and in particular, the relationship between diverse groups of people

and performance, in order to discover if there are practical, real-world implications for both

employers and employees (Applebaum, Kryvenko, Rodriguez Parada, Soochan, & Shapiro

2015). In fact, as the workplace becomes more diverse, the notion of diversity management has

become more familiar. There exists considerable research on diversity in the workplace,

however, most of the research conducted to date has more to do with the male/female gender

stereotypes than other issues of diversity (Heilman, 2012). As a result, relatively little is known

about whether other minority groups (e.g. the LGBT population) contribute to diversity

management since these groups are considered to be an understudied cluster in the workplace

(Liberman & Golom, 2015).

A review of the existing literature that does exist surrounding the LGBT population as far

as workplace diversity is concerned has shown a significant social change over the past number

of decades. In 1993, a Yale University scholar wrote that, "In a society that has grown more

diverse and, arguably, more tolerant of its diversity, antigay prejudice remains a publicly

acceptable and expected form of bigotry and systematic subordination" (Byrne, 1993, para. 4).

Byrne (1993) also suggested at the time that given such widespread antigay prejudice in society

at large, it is inevitable that antigay bigotry also manifests itself in the workplace. This

intolerance was also discovered in numerous research studies on the experiences of sexual

minorities at work that found that between 25 and 66 percent of gay, lesbian, and bisexual

employees have experienced discrimination because of their sexual orientation (Croteau, 1996).

Ragins (2004) also believes that the majority of the LGBT community in the workplace has

experienced homophobia or discrimination at some point in their career. It is perhaps because of

this that nearly half of LGBT employees hide their sexual identity for fear of risking professional

advancement for being gay (McDermott, 2006). Even up until 15 years ago, discrimination

against sexual minorities was still prevalent (Black, Gates, Sanders & Taylor, 2000). Likewise,

recent research performed in the United Kingdom by Everly, Unzueta, and Shih (2015) suggest

that many hiring managers see gay and lesbian job applicants as less hirable over their

heterosexual counterparts.

   In other countries, however, this sentiment appears to have changed over time as Carreiro

(2014) believes that employers nowadays are actively seeking out "the talents, perspectives, and

problem-solving skills that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people bring to an

organization" (p. 13). This is due mostly to the fact that an LGBT-inclusive workplace can assist

an organization by improved relationships with shareholders, governments, and the local

community, improved market image, and even considerable, positive changes in financial

performance and that "organizations with LGBT-inclusive workplace climates not only reap

such benefits, but those organizations that incorporate and maintain an LGBT-inclusive business

strategy also secure a competitive edge over organizations with little to no such strategy in

place" (Carreiro, 2014, p. 13). Although organizations understand the benefit of attracting

sexual minorities as employees, many employers have not yet realized the financial benefits of

active recruitment from these communities (Banks & Sallot, 1997) and protecting their rights at

work, managing a work climate that values LGBT workers is challenging as backlash may still

develop from heterosexual employees (Kaplan, 2006). Some heterosexual employees believe

that minority sexual orientations are morally wrong, their right to religious freedom and religious

accommodations is violated (Kaplan, 2006), they feel sexual minorities are socially attracted to

others like themselves (Byrne, 1976) or they may perceive that working in an LGBT-friendly

work environment is socially uncomfortable due to limited experience interacting with members

of the LGBT community (Lambert, 2015). The literature reviewed also suggests that whether

inside or outside the workplace, individuals seek environments that affirm their identity (Saylor

& Aries, 1999) and are therefore more likely to identify with a group with whom they share

similarities (Knippenberg & Schie, 2000).

2.4 Public Relations Practitioners and their Roles in Canada

From a history of publicity and promotion to its current and contributing association with

political spin, propaganda and persuasion, public relations continues to be a contested field of

study and practice (Flynn, 2014). Furthermore, Johansen (2001) states that "even today, public

relations has failed to achieve all that is possible in its march towards professionalization" (p.

67). In order to counter this, in Canada, the public relations field has taken a number of

important steps towards professionalization (Flynn, 2014) through formal education in the hopes

that the industry can be seen as a credible discipline. As a result, numerous public relations

degree programs have recently been approved and others are under consideration (Flynn &

Sévigny, 2013). While the increase in educational emphasis can be seen as an important step in

furthering the field, there is little in the way of public relations scholarly research in this respect

(Flynn, 2014), and in particular from Canada. Even with this absence of scholarly research in

public relations, there does exist research on professionalism in general that does relate to

Canada. Murray, Owen, and McGaw (2005) said in their research that in Canada, "each

additional year of schooling is on average associated with about five percent higher weekly

earnings even after adjusting for directly observed skills" (p. 167). This is in agreement with

conclusions other academics have made that suggest a relationship exists between income and

education towards professionalization (Ahangar, 2011). Therefore if the public relations

profession wants to improve its credibility, it should do so through formal education, thus

agreeing with what other scholars have said (Flynn, 2014) in order to professionalize the field.

   Wright (1976) points out that "the manner in which the Canadian public needs to be

reached in terms of public relations, advertising and marketing is not only different from the U.S.

but is evolving much more rapidly," (p. 25) therefore, in order to understand how the profession

in Canada has evolved, a look into the 1980s Broom (1982) and Dozier (1981) research about the

role of public relations practitioners was reviewed. While limited to the United States, the

findings from these studies, along with further research conducted by Dozier, Grunig, and

Grunig (1995), concluded that there were two types of roles being performed by public relations

practitioners: technical and managerial. While other researchers have replicated these studies

and have since validated these findings (Gregory, 2008), in Canada, there has only been one

published study testing Broom (1982) and Dozier's (1981) research. As a result, the relatively

limited body of research on public relations practitioners is significantly American-centric

(Flynn, 2014) and that the practice of public relations in Canada has been one of the most

understudied disciplines within the traditional suite of communications studies programs (Flynn

& Sévigny, 2009; Flynn & Sévigny, 2013).

   That one research study in Canada to test Broom (1982) and Dozier's (1981) research

was performed by Peikos and Einsiedel (1990) where they looked at 700 members of the

Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) and International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). Their study highlighted that the single largest majority of respondents were categorized as *communication technicians* (41.7%), followed by *expert prescribers* (16.2%), *problem-solving process facilitators* (15.2%) and lastly, *communication facilitators* (12.3%) (Peikos & Einsiedel, 1990). The findings show that communication practitioners in Canada "are involved in all phases of program evaluation whereas in the United States, technicians generally do not conduct evaluation" (Piekos & Einsiedel, 1990, p. 110).

To further this Canadian-based research, in 2011, Killingsworth and Flynn (in press) conducted a number of focus groups about Canadian senior leadership perceptions of communicators. Their findings revealed that the communicator's role within an organization was one of advocacy for business and stakeholders, creating strategy, offering an external perspective, social media use and reputation management (Killingsworth & Flynn, in press). Moreover, Killingsworth and Flynn (in press) concluded that communication practitioners also assume the duties of issues management, government relations/public affairs. There is also agreement within the Canadian literature that Killingsworth and Flynn (in press) echo the Piekos and Einsiedel (1990) study that Canadian communication practitioners are involved in evaluation and measurement. This supports much earlier research at that time by Tisdall (1966) that public relations in Canada is "somewhat more demanding and somewhat less rewarding" (p. 69) when compared to the industry in the United States.

3. Research Problem

As mentioned earlier, queer theorists have suggested that organizations should oppose assigning a collective identity to the LGBT community (Humphrey, 1999). Others have said that much of the public relations industry's engagement with the gay community is only based upon

widely accepted stereotypes (Buford, 2005). Furthermore, PR practitioners should become sensitive and knowledgeable about the needs of gay and lesbian groups (Grates, 1993). This would suggest that the LGBT community is an important demographic that requires further exploration. As a result, there exists considerable academic research on how to outreach to diverse communities, including the LGBT community, but little exists on the LGBT practitioners that carry out this role.

4. Research Questions

Given the fact that there exists a plethora of academic research on the issue and the fact that public relations practitioners are being strongly encouraged to engage with the LGBT community, it gave rise to Tindall and Waters (2012) question of whether or not gay men perceive that the public relations industry is as accepting as it appears since most practitioners and researchers have failed to reference sexual orientation in their discussions of diversity in public relations. This notable exclusion was the basis for Tindall and Waters' (2012) first research question: how do gay men describe their career experiences in the public relations industry? For the purposes of this research, however, the researcher is interested in the career experiences of gay male public relations practitioners in Canada, and therefore the first research question for this paper is:

> ***RQ1:*** *How and to what extent do gay men describe their career experiences in the public relations industry in Canada?*

In their original research, Tindall and Waters (2012) also examined the organizational value of diversity and suggest that as the workplace becomes more diverse, diversity management has become more commonplace. Haas (2005) argues that the LGBT community is more likely to show support in the form of patronage, donations and participation in events when

an employer offers domestic partner benefits to its gay employees because the LGBT community

recognizes and supports that the employer is engaging its community members. Tindall and

Waters (2012) also looked into how more and more public relations firms are adopting LGBT-

friendly policies of extending domestic partner benefits and using language that encourages

inclusion of all employees in the workplace. As such, adopting these policies is likely to result

in more satisfied employees. In fact, a poll conducted by Lambda Legal, an advocacy group for

the gay community in the United States found that 54% of its 1,200 respondents believed that

gay-friendly nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies were critical to their decisions about

where they decide to work; an additional 38% stated that gay-friendly policies contributed to

their current job happiness (as cited in Tindall & Waters, 2012, p. 455). Tindall and Waters

(2012), impressed with media coverage of the Lambda Legal's survey that concluded that

organizations should aim to be more inclusive for gay practitioners, led them to their second

research question: how can the public relations industry become more welcoming for gay male

practitioners? Again, for the purposes of this research study, however, the researcher is interested

in the career experiences of gay public relations practitioners in Canada, and therefore the second

research question for this paper is:

> **RQ2:** *How and to what extent can the public relations industry in Canada become more*
> *welcoming for gay male practitioners?*

5. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the gay male experience

in public relations in Canada. Since there is little research available on the career experiences of

gay public relations practitioners in Canada, the study aimed to address questions stemming from

real-world issues and scenarios (Yin, 2014). It is also an attempt to compare and contrast the

study that Tindall and Waters (2012) completed in the United States to that of a Canadian experience. In order to do this, a similar research methodology was maintained to be able to draw meaningful conclusions between the two studies. In order to conduct this study, an exhaustive ethics approval process was employed by the researcher through McMaster University's Research and Ethics Board. As the research questions above explore the in-depth professional lives of gay men in public relations, a qualitative methodology was chosen. The researcher used in-depth interviews to allow the participants to discuss their career experiences, and this replicates a similar methodology that Tindall and Waters (2012) employed in their original study. The interviews reflected on participant views of the organizational culture where they work.

This research depended on various data collection methods, including: interviews, academic research, professional journals and reviews and mass media articles. In employing the use of these methods, this research developed "converging lines of inquiring" (Yin, 2014, p. 120) in order to substantiate the information collected, drawing upon "multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in triangulating fashion" (Yin, 2014 p. 17).

The research questions that govern this academic study also align with Yin's criteria that comprise a qualitative research study. With an emphasis on exploring how and to what extent gay men describe their career experiences in the public relations industry in Canada, one of the primary requirements of a qualitative study in Yin's estimation is met (Yin, 2014). Yin suggests that a "how" question serves as the basis for choosing the qualitative study method because these questions are "explanatory," and provide insight into "operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence" (Yin, 2014, p. 10). The way gay men describe their career experiences and interact within their workplace environment is an on-going phenomenon with multiple occurrences across a number of locations and time periods. The

complexity of this research topic and the normative patterns that have already emerged from established secondary research further strengthen the researcher's suggestion that the qualitative study method can most appropriately address the guiding questions of this study.

6. Data Collection

The primary research underpinning this study was collected through 19 confidential participant interviews with gay public relations practitioners from Canada. These participants were recruited using a variety of methods including reaching out to various professional associations, identifying participants through their online LinkedIn professional profiles, through professional Facebook groups, and the "snowball affect:" where one participant knows another that knows another that would be interested in being a participant in the research. Confidentiality of the interview participants was maintained to ensure there were no negative repercussions for those who were not "out" about their sexuality or simply did not want to be publically identified as a participant in this research study. The interview method was chosen as the primary research tool for its unique tendency to evoke candid and meaningful responses.

The majority of participant interviews were conducted in-person; the location chosen by the participant in order to ensure their comfort in speaking openly about the subject matter. When an in-person interview was not feasible, due to various reasons including time and distance, both Skype and Apple FaceTime were utilized. Skype and FaceTime were suitable platforms to hold the interviews in that the participants could participate in the study without leaving their offices or homes. These technologies are also widely available, and again, the choice of video conferencing technology was up to the participant for the benefit of their comfort. This also enabled participants to choose whether they wanted to be interviewed on or off camera. Each interview was recorded using a digital audio recording device, with the

exception of three of the interviews, where the participants were not comfortable being recorded. Interviews with the participants would last between 30 minutes and one hour. All participant interviews took place between October and December 2015.

7. Participant Demographics

In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 gay male public relations practitioners from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec. The participants work in a variety of industries (e.g. financial services, government, entertainment, higher education, law and non-profit) and several were entrepreneurs, having creating firms, freelance opportunities and consultancies of their own. Further demographic information breaks down as follows:

Job Title of Participants

Job Title	Count
Other	1
Owner	3
President or CEO	2
C level executive (CIO, CTO, COO,...	2
Senior Vice President	1
Senior Manager	4
Manager	6
Analyst / Associate	1
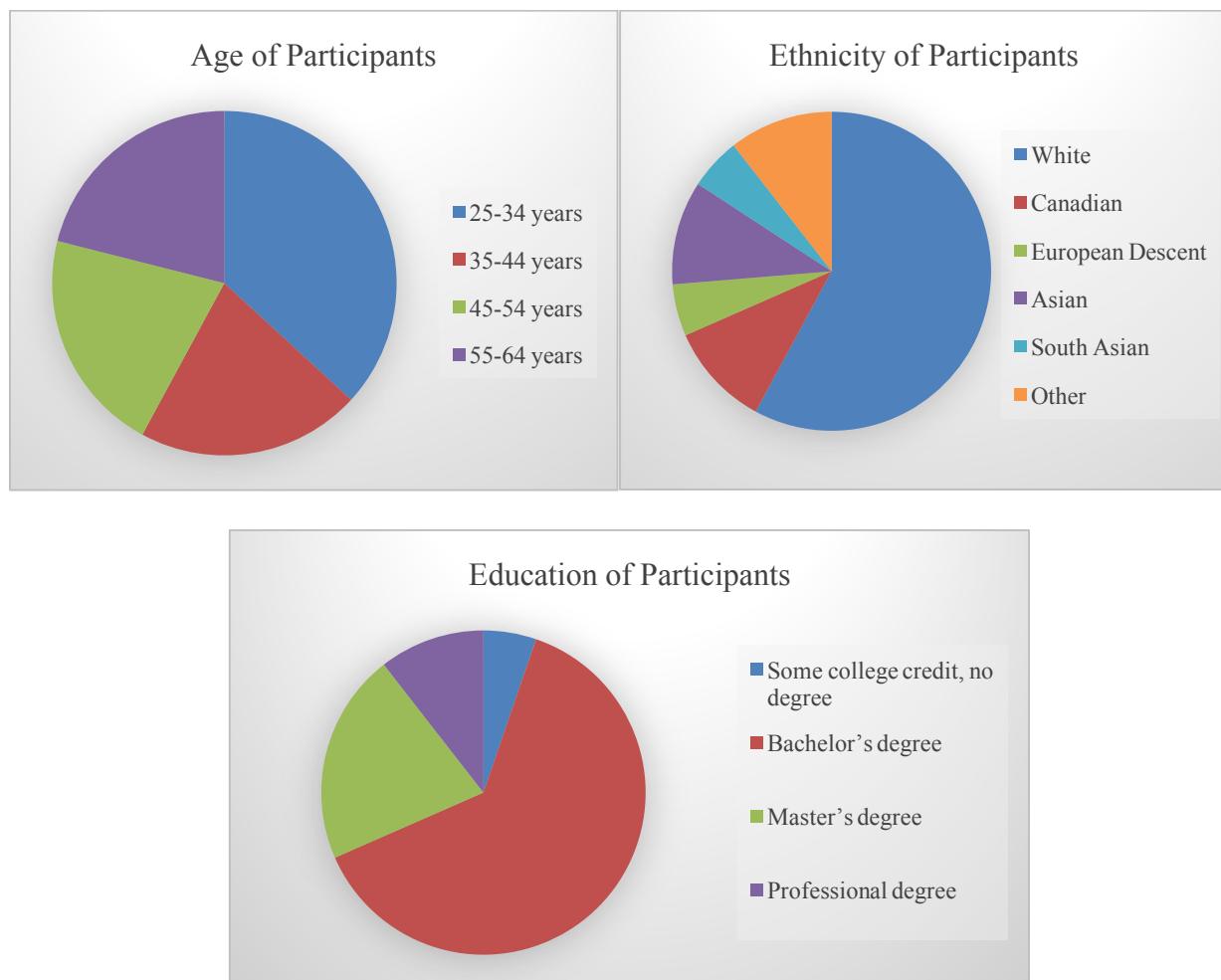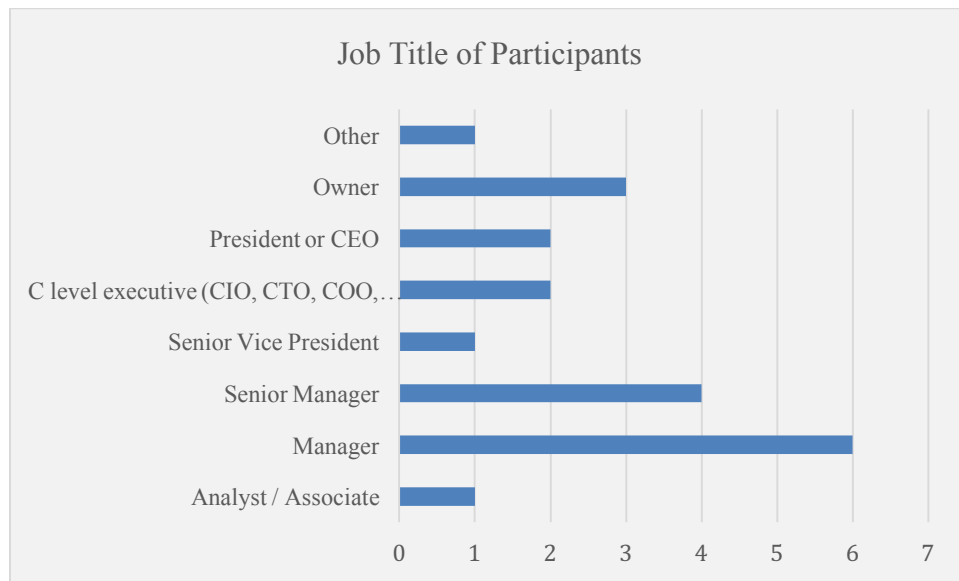
8. Data Analysis

The theoretical framework that served as the lens through which this research topic was analyzed is Teresa de Lauretis' queer theory: a theory that challenges fixed identities and challenges the validity and consistency of heteronormativity, which proposes that heterosexuality is the only normal sexual orientation (Minton, 1997). This theory provides the groundwork to address the main question of this research: how and to what extent do gay male public relations practitioners describe their career experiences in Canada? Queer theory serves to focus the evidence that was gathered, and allow it to be suitably evaluated and corroborated. Furthermore, Yin (2014) recommends following the model of identifying a theoretical framework that operates as the study's foundational argument when a researcher pursues a qualitative study. Additionally, a number of secondary sources, both academic and industry-based provided a further framework through which to analyze the confidential participant interview results. All primary interview data was compared against secondary research findings.

According to Yin (2014), a researcher can analyze data by "building an explanation" (p. 147) about the case. This explanation building method was used to analyze the data gathered, as

it is useful for explanatory research. This approach allowed for the examination of relationships that may explain how or why a phenomenon is taking place (Yin, 2014). Even though the research about the career experiences of gay male public relations practitioners in Canada is quite distinctive, and the fact that this research specifically looks at one group of public relations practitioners, it builds an overarching explanation that can be applied to other research in other areas (Yin, 2014). As a result, this research has been applied to the Tindall and Waters (2012) study that was completed in the United States by comparing and contrasting their research with the results of this study.

To allow for a careful analysis, a thematic analysis was also completed – the same method that was utilized by Tindall and Waters (2012) in their study; reviewing the recorded interviews and hand-written notes taken at the time of the interviews and comparing each one with the others while looking for similarities, which are grouped together by category (Lindolf, 1995). The researcher consulted and then used the Miles and Huberman's (1994) thematic conceptual matrix, which is a data analysis method that allows researchers to sort ideas conceptually. Miles and Huberman (1994) believed the value of this matrix as having ''the rows and columns arranged to bring together items that belong together'' (p. 127). Using this method, the researcher collected, aligned, and ordered themes to see and decipher patterns and to organize the data. The researcher did not reduce the career experiences of the participants down to specific labels, instead, the quotations used in this study, are used to illustrate common themes that emerged during the analysis.

9. Results

The following Results and Analysis section will summarize the qualitative data collected through a total of 19 in-depth interviews with gay male public relations practitioners in Canada

about their personal career experiences. This section has been broken down into a number of

relevant subheadings including: *Major Themes Raised*, in which the most significant issues and

ideas broached by the interview participants are highlighted; *Identity and Distribution of Power*;

in which ideas of organizational diversity and inclusion are summarized, and lastly, *Becoming a*

More Inclusive Industry; how participants feel the public relations profession in Canada can be

more welcoming to gay practitioners.

9.1 Major Themes Raised by Interview Participants

9.1.1 Roles, Identity and Performativity

The interviews conducted for this research revealed much about the career experiences of

gay public relations practitioners in Canada with both similar and differing perspectives on the

roles of what a gay public relations practitioner in Canada constitutes. Many of the participants

considered themselves assets to their organization as they saw themselves as adding value to the

public relations practice because of their identities and skill sets. Many participants suggested

that their identity as a gay individual helped their organization build relationships with the gay

community externally. While many said that this role as "cultural interpreter" was performed

unofficially, others said that their affiliation with the gay community helped them in their career

where their organizations were specifically attempting to build a relationship with the gay

community. A corporate public affairs manager for a national financial institution mentioned

that, "I feel completely supported by my employer being from the LGBT community. It's been

more beneficial being out at work. [My organization] does a lot of work for newcomers, the

LGBT community and aboriginals." A senior communications manager at a different national

financial institution said, "Being out at work allows you to make connection to issues and brings

diversity issues to the forefront. Through my own personal connections, it has enabled us to

sponsor an LGBT film festival. Being senior within [my organization] helps to be a stronger

voice." Additionally, a film publicist mentioned that, "being gay is certainly an advantage, especially when dealing with hair and makeup people. It makes connections easier" which is of particular importance in the entertainment industry.

Interestingly, all participants except for one felt positively about this interpreter role. A youth engagement manager felt their representative status as a gay cultural interpreter was also a cause of distress and stated that, "I have a bigger responsibility to speak out for allies of the LGBT community. There's pressure to be out there and make public appearances [because I'm gay and the organization I represent]." However, he did also state that being gay, "informs how I understand my role although it does make it more personal than I would like it to be."

Being an ambassador for the gay community within their workplace was an official component of some of the participant's work responsibilities. An independent public relations consultant said that, "my business is partly anchored in the LGBT community. This is my network of people. Being gay has elevated my abilities to reach out to gay clients and being gay helps to develop trust." A senior communications manager mentioned that "being authentic at work has opened a lot of doors. I have become [my organization's] LGBT resource leader. I get to go to a lot of events [because I'm gay]. I haven't had this at other organizations I've worked at."

The idea of gay male stereotypes also came up as an issue for many participants, however, it wasn't always in a negative manner. One participant, an executive chairman of a public affairs firm stated jokingly, "we have nice offices, flowers and good food. You won't get that elsewhere," generalizing and reinforcing the common stereotype that gay males have good taste. Conversely, though, he also said that, "I've been left out of lots of social activities like being invited by colleagues to sporting events because they don't think I'm interested in sports. There have been times when people don't want to deal with someone that's gay." Another

participant that works within the music industry stated that, "I talk to co-workers about guys I date and all kinds of stories, but the thing with musicians is that they're pretty open about that sort of thing. It's very common in my field," a common stereotype that those that work in the performing arts are comfortable with gay identities in the workplace. Similarly, an executive director at a government agency said, "When I started my career I chose to go into fine arts because it was a positive gay experience. Then I worked in dance. You had to tell people you weren't gay."

For many participants, however, the identity of being gay within the workplace was never seen as an issue. One senior principal at a public affairs firm shared that, "I've never had to make any concessions. Even though I'm a minority, I've never had any negative experiences." Similarly, a senior communications manager shared that, "I've always been comfortable in my career as gay. I've never wanted to be the person in an organization that isn't out. This is who I am." Likewise, a public relations manager at a government department said, "I stand on the shoulders of people before me. Previous people in the workplace have created safe spaces," and a communications officer at a higher education institution remarked, "I haven't been led to believe anyone cares about my sexuality at work."

Another dimension of this identity is the perception that as a minority group, gay male practitioners were better able to connect with other minority groups, particularly on the basis of sexual diversity. An independent public relations consultant said, "being gay is a product of my DNA. It changes the way I look at things and awakens your senses to issues that are not mainstream. Being gay has elevated my abilities." Another participant noted that, "being gay gives me a sensitivity towards the LGBT community in my job," when describing how his organization reaches out to the gay community. A manager at a government department said, "I like social issues and fighting for the underdog. Being gay constitutes to a better sense of

empathy and emotional intelligence. My sexuality is perhaps one of the causes for my passion in

public engagement." Similarly, a senior communications manager at a financial institution

mentioned:

> Being gay allows you to make connections to community groups or to resources
> or to bring people's attention to [LGBT issues] in a different way. The fact of
> the matter is there is a lot of money out there in the LGBT community, and as a
> client, we need to be attracting these people to [the organization], and I really
> put a business face to it.

Most of the participants commented that they had professional mentors in the industry

that helped advance or promote their career. These mentors generally offered encouragement,

support, advice and help in order to deal with the challenges of their career. According to one

practitioner, their mentor "helped introduce me to the right people in the industry. They've also

been a sounding board and been instrumental in helping and providing me with good

intelligence." Another participant commented that their mentor's "feedback was great. They

helped me learn more about PR." Many of the participants, however, also noted that many of

their mentors were not specific in a public relations capacity, or even gay, but rather, generalists

in the business field they were practicing. One communications manager said, "I had mentors,

but not so much in communications, but leaders in the business. The VP of finance helped me

learn about the business as a whole which made me a better communicator." Similarly, an

executive director at a government agency shared, "the director of [my previous organization]

really helped me push my career forward." Also, a communications manager for a government

department mentioned, "I have a list of people I go to at all levels. Senior executives, peer

mentors, a leadership community of practice. They've all helped to promote my career and

navigate the public service." Interestingly, a public relations professor who started out their

career as a practitioner noted:

> There's something about working in a small, privately owned company. It was very entrepreneurial. The owners had faith in my abilities. One day we landed a very high profile account, and I was able to take it on in this supportive environment and was allowed to grow. I worked really hard and helped them grow the company. Now that I'm working in a college, the Dean has been a great mentor in terms of helping me understand the administration side of things.

Conversely, quite a number of participants shared that they did not have any mentors at all. A youth engagement manager said, "I don't have any mentors. I learned it all on the fly. It's a lot of *hands on thrown into the fire* sort of experience when you're dealing with [my organization]. That's how I learned communications." Likewise, an operations and events manager for a non-profit agency said, "my professors in school were a big help, but I don't have any LGBT mentors."

9.1.2 Heteronormativity and Isolation

Inclusion in the workplace or any social environment is an important aspect of the human experience. The majority of the participants felt they could openly be themselves, including bringing up personal stories into the office environment. Gay men reported that many of their work colleagues were extremely supportive of their personal situations and wanted them to be included in casual conversations – including heteronormative experiences like dating, relationships and childrearing.

An executive director said, "I always felt I could be myself. I always make it very clear [to my colleagues]. I've never represented myself as a straight person." Similarly, an entry-level practitioner commented, "I could always be myself. If they (my colleagues) have a problem with me being gay then it's their problem, not mine." On the other hand, one freelance communications specialist said:

> I can't always be [open with my colleagues]. There are a number of reasons for that. I find it very difficult to be around heterosexual men sometimes because in many instances they've never met another gay person. I find it very difficult to be around people who are Christian, who are Muslim, etc. I do find sometimes I have to be a

> little bit less talkative about my personal life. I think women are more free to talk about their husbands, boyfriends, and if I do that I feel it makes people uncomfortable, so I'm less inclined to speak about my private life as a result of that.

In an interesting story, a public engagement manager that was employed by a queer-based performing arts group said that, "People have told me that I have not experienced enough discrimination to represent the [LGBT] community and have said that I've been privileged in the queer community," referring to his race and sex (a white man). He also said that his colleagues have put him down in a number of instances because they feel, "Who has suffered the most is who should be able to speak and represent [the LGBT Community]. I don't really agree with that."

While the issue of sexuality was the focus of this study, many of the participants reported they felt isolated from colleagues in other ways aside from the fact they are gay. A communications officer commented that, "I can always be myself at work, but I am reminded I'm a minority more about my ethnicity rather than my sexuality. It occurs to me sometimes I'm the only coloured person," referring to his brown skin tone. Likewise, an independent communications consultant said that when he started his career over 30 years ago, "Being Jewish was more of a problem than being gay."

Although many of the participants agreed that isolation from their work colleagues was not an issue nowadays, many of the older generation participants shared their experience that when they started out in the profession, this was not always the case. An executive chairman commented that, "My level of openness has totally changed. I'm 55 years old. 30 years ago life was very different. Even after I came out I was still closeted at work. I still get excluded from things for being gay." Similarly, an independent communications consultant said, "Since my career has spanned a couple of decades, I can't say I was out originally when I started in the early 90's. People knew, but it just wasn't talked about as much. Today it's a non-issue."

One of the other major issues brought up by participants that defined the practitioners in the workplace concerned an association with assumed femininity because they were gay. Many participants commented that their workplace colleagues saw them as "one of the girls" and many assumed that because they were gay they had special insights and intuition regarding interactions with women. One communications officer recalled a time, "I was walking in my office and a female colleague came up to me and slapped my ass. Would it have happened if I wasn't gay? They see me as one them, so maybe they think its ok." Likewise, and entry-level communications advisor said that of his colleagues in the workplace, "females seem to be more comfortable around me. I'm not sure if its because of my sexuality or my personality. It's mostly females that want to talk about sex. Maybe because I'm a good listener people feel comfortable talking to me?" An independent communications consultant said, "there are people who respond more positively because I'm gay. Women executives in particular because they assume we're not as aggressive as men." Similarly, a film publicist said, "Female actresses in particular respond better to me because they know I'm gay. Lots of hand-holding goes on in this business. A part of it is emotional support."

9.2 Identity and the Distribution of Power

Most participants in this study felt that workplace colleagues made significant efforts to understand the gay community. This was particularly true from a management perspective where the organization really tried to make a sincere effort to understand its issues. Participants noted that there are degrees or variations of being out in organizations. An executive director noted that, "one colleague that is gay has a problem with me [and my openness] because it seems he's unsure of how to react. I'd really like to discuss it with him some point." An engagement manager for an organization that preaches workplace inclusivity said, "It makes sense [for someone like me] to be in this position if you're gay. It helps me connect." A CEO for a public

relations firm said, "We lead a pretty charmed life. People are getting more sophisticated," referring to how being gay and out is becoming more commonplace.

For the most part, none of the participants currently hide their sexuality in the workplace. Most said they are comfortable being out. Some participants, however, did note that homophobia and the fear of repercussions if they did reveal their sexuality forced them at one point in their career to be less than forthcoming about their sexual orientation. One communications manager recalls, "at previous job, when it was time for the employee Christmas party, colleagues were asking me if I was going to bring my girlfriend, even though they pretty much knew I was gay. It was almost like a jab at me."

In a surprising account, one senior executive recalls a story that became an extremely personal attack in the workplace:

> I work for a global company. There was a blog post that I had done on our internal internet because we were profiling various employees for pride. I wrote a story about my family, talking about my husband and my kids. In the online comments, there were 40 comments all positive about the story, but one comment, originating in a different country, and perhaps this is because of cultural differences, said '*I feel really sorry for those two kids. They should give those children to a heterosexual couple.*' It was one of those moments where I thought someone had a lot of guts to post that.

Interestingly though, this executive shared that, "You have to park your anger for a moment and find out how we can use this as a learning opportunity. It reminds us that there is still stuff that has to be changed."

Reflecting on a range of organizational inclusion, many practitioners felt that being open about their sexuality gave them power in the organization. A college administrator noted that:

> I was involved in a public initiative at the college where we took a group of 15 students to New York, you know, because it was the gay thing to do. We went to the United Nations, the Human Rights Commission, a few gay organizations, etc. The students came back and did a project about human rights. I was involved with that as were a couple of other gay colleagues. Interestingly the lead from administration was straight and most of the students that participated were straight.

It was a fascinating experience. I think being gay helped me sell the program
through the organization and championed why we should do things like this.

A CEO of a public affairs firm said, "being gay is a major competitive advantage. It's good because I'm gay." Likewise, a senior communications manager said that being gay, "helps me be a role model at work. I have to be ready for that."

Many of the participants also noted that their gay identity and the experience growing up gay certainly shaped their view of the world positively, and that through practicing public relations, they were better suited for this type of work. A communications coordinator commented that "I can understand people better because I'm gay." A publicist said being gay, "allowed me to do my job better." One participant, a senior managing partner at a public relations firm, however, disagreed that their identity impacted the way they performed their job. He said, "I don't believe the sympathy gene is attached to the gay gene. It has no impact on my job and is not particular to public relations."

9.3 Becoming a More Inclusive Industry

Most participants reported that they generally enjoyed working in the public relations profession. When it was asked of them how the industry could be more welcoming to gay male practitioners, surprisingly, most said they did not think the industry was particularly unwelcoming. One participant mentioned that they "don't see a need. Most serious businesses are trying to do the right thing." Another participant said, "I've never felt unwelcomed because I'm gay." An entry-level communications coordinator said, "It's not really about sexuality, but more about personality. My industry is very specific. I've never thought about it. I've never had to. It's already welcoming." A communications officer reiterated these comments by saying, "[My organization] does a great job of being welcoming. They let people know of positive resources. Perhaps they're welcoming because it's a higher-education institution and we

have programs that are queer-focused. In fact, I met my ex-boyfriend at one of the LGBT

programs." An independent communications consultant remarked that, "In my experience, they

are extremely welcoming. I don't know any organizations that aren't."

An executive director, however, made an interesting observation. He said, "I've never

had the experience where gay men have had a problem. It seems to me lesbians have the

problem. There's a much stronger stigma for lesbians, but that might be changing." Likewise, a

public relations CEO commented that, "I'm not aware that they're not welcoming. In fact, I

think the public relations industry is one of the most enlightened work places."

There were some participants that felt that even though the industry was generally

welcoming to gay practitioners, there was always room for improvement. A college

administrator said, "Spousal benefits are important. All organizations need to recognize

diversity of their workforce. There also needs to be acceptable behaviour around language,"

referring to the use of specific pronouns that might offend some people (e.g. using the word

'partner' rather than assuming someone has a husband or wife). Similarly, an outreach

coordinator said, "We have to get over heteronormativity. Take away that blue is for a boy and

pink is for a girl. We need to stop assuming certain things, especially around gender." One

communicator said that although "companies talk about diversity, they're not talking about my

diversity," pointing to issues more about race and gender than sexual orientation.

Perhaps an independent communications consultant summed it up best when he said of

the PR industry:

> It's no more an issue by in large. I'm not sure if you would say that working in
> certain sectors, but even then it's changing. I can't say I see the industry as being
> homophobic or hostile. In the PR industry, part of your training is to deal with
> different types of clientele. When you're doing that you have to be sensitive towards
> the audience you're crafting your message for. It tends to make you more aware
> about what the realities are and it opens your mind and eyes more. I can't say I see
> there being a big problem with homophobia in the industry. I can think of many

industries nowadays where being gay is not an issue – PR being one of them. By in large, in PR you're dealing with people who tend to be university educated or have a post secondary education. Doing PR you're aware of things, are much more conscious of your surroundings and environment. You can't do PR without having that sensitivity. You're just exposed to differences much more frequently. As much as you may have PR professionals working in outlying regions, for the most part, it is an urban phenomenon. The demographics of the industry are such that it tends to be much more open and welcoming about sexualities.

Several participants said that organizations could improve the working environment by participating in events designed for the LGBT community. One government manager said, "A group of us started up a pride network. Another group started a Black network. These two groups led to the creation of diversity strategies and policies and have really turned things around." Similarly, an outreach coordinator at a non-profit organization echoed these sentiments. He shared that, "Having pride groups within an organization, having employee resource groups, and options for volunteering. This shows that employers care."

10. Discussion and Analysis

Although participants in this study were from a variety of different sectors and were in different career stages, they shared many experiences during their careers in public relations. Most of the participants interviewed as part of this research study were intrigued about the basis for conducting this research and therefore agreed to be a participant solely for the reason the subject matter attracted them. At the conclusion of many interviews, participants told the researcher that the questions were extremely well-received and as one participant mentioned, "the questions made me think about aspects of my career that I never thought of before. I didn't think that my sexuality played a big role in my career, but after this interview, I realize it did." This introspection by the participants, where they explored their career by looking at it from the perspective of their sexual orientation, their experiences began reflecting the challenges outlined

by queer theorists. While a number of participants did outline some internal struggles of being

openly gay in the workplace, it would appear that this generally conflicts with a good portion of

the literature that being openly gay in the workplace can sacrifice professional advancement

(Bairstow & Skinner, 2007), as most participants suggested their openly gay identity was "not an

issue" or "no longer an issue," and in some cases felt that being gay helped them to advance

professionally.

Queer theorists also suggest that when defining their identity, gay men walk a fine line

between professional and social situations (Cerulo, 1997), however, most participants in this

study felt they could actively bring themselves to work, and being out to colleagues was not a

problem. Furthermore, the idea of Ragins and Cornwell's (2001) *lavender ceiling* was not a

concern to any participants. In fact, many participants argued that being out helped them to

propel in their career, and nothing was stopping them from advancing professionally.

Most of the participants interviewed for this study said they had not experienced blatant

homophobia or heterosexism in their careers "that they know of." Some participants suggested

that they might have experienced homophobia when applying for a job if the recruiter was

homophobic, however, they would never outright know this as a matter of fact. This contradicts

the conclusions in much of the literature that suggests homophobia and heterosexism is

widespread (Ragins, 2004). This also raises the fact that much of the literature that exists on

LGBT inclusivity in the workplace is predominately written from a U.S. perspective, thus

perhaps these negative experiences are a phenomenon more commonly associated to an

American experience. All participants felt that heterosexism in the workplace was a non-issue,

and most argued that if there was some type of disregard for their sexuality, then it was not a

place they would be interested in working at. This appears to be in agreement with the literature

that suggests individuals seek environments that affirm their identity (Saylor & Aries, 1999) and

that people would rather be in a group with whom they share similarities (Knippenberg & Schie, 2000).

Many of the practitioners did believe, however, that their comfort with being gay and open in the workplace had changed over a period of time. This was particularly true from those that had been in their careers the longest. Many of these older-generation public relations practitioners revealed that when they started their careers, society in general was not as accepting of gay men, and therefore they had to hide their identities. This concealment of their sexuality is akin to a performance where individuals use performances to create an alternative identity, whether it is a personal reflection of who they are or what society says they are (Butler, 1990). This both agrees and differs with the literature. The older generation of public relations practitioners had to perform in order to fit into a workplace that wasn't necessarily accepting at the time, however, the younger generation of practitioners nowadays felt that they could be themselves. Even today, the older generation remarked that they no longer had to act differently in the workplace, therefore the notion that there is performativity in the workplace, at least in Canada, may no longer hold true. Furthermore, queer theorists that suggested antigay prejudice remains a publicly acceptable form of bigotry (Bryne, 1993) completely disputes what many of the participants disclosed in this study. Most participants felt an equal comfort level to their heterosexual colleagues, and none had experienced any intolerance or subservience in their current job.

As practitioners advanced through their careers, some did encounter resistance to their advancement, and this was not necessarily for reasons regarding their sexuality. Many did reveal that if this was the case, they would simply go to another employer where they were more welcoming. As this study examined the nonobservable identities of public relations practitioners in Canada, it helps to understand the importance of invisible social identities in public relations

and within the workplace, and to understand how these identities can influence and complicate the social interactions with colleagues and the shaping of practitioner roles within the publics and within the workplace (Tindall & Waters, 2012). Acknowledging and understanding the workplace challenges and shift in roles and responsibilities for those who have disclosed is important for improving practitioner experiences and building richer theory.

The findings of this study parallel the findings of Pompper (2004) where many gay public relations practitioners felt that their sexuality was an advantage. This advantage may be based on mainstream stereotypes about how gay men should act, perceptions about what would interest gay men, and beliefs about minority groups in general. This was certainly in agreement with the literature that specific stereotyped identities are associated with gay male practitioners (Maddon, 1997). Participants in this study did reveal anecdotally that they were not good at sports, were the best dressed at the office, were "one of the girls," etc; all stereotypes perpetuated by the mainstream. While stereotypes are often considered negative, many of the practitioners interviewed believed these were positive attributes that only helped them both personally and professionally. For example, the cultural interpreter role many practitioners unofficially performed in the workplace, was enacted when they were asked to reach out to a particular community or group. As a result of this, many gay practitioners were considered better in touch with certain groups – particularly the LGBT culture and community. This appears to be in agreement with the Canadian literature that suggests a communicator's role within an organization is about advocacy for business and stakeholders (Killingsworth & Flynn, in press). In fact, many participants fell into this role easily and were willing to be the voice of their community within their workplace. Few of the participants felt that having this responsibility was a hindrance. For most, the idea of being a cultural interpreter was of a huge benefit and is also in agreement with conclusions made by Tindall and Waters (2012).

None of the participants in this study currently claimed that because of their sexuality, there was a limit to how far they could progress in their career. This conflicts with the literature that suggests gay men fear professional advancement due to the fact they are gay (McDermott, 2006). Similarly, Hon and Brunner's (2000) ideas that gay men could not fully express themselves at work and that there should be cause for concern when it comes to outing themselves at the office appears to be debunked; instead this is seen as a strategy to enhance organizational image.

Although many participants commented that the industry understands the need for conducting campaigns to reach minority groups, there was disagreement with the literature that suggests organizations have not yet realized the financial benefits of recruiting employees from minority groups (Banks & Sallot, 1997). In fact, many participants felt that they were actively recruited because they were from a minority group (either race, ethnicity or sexuality), and in many cases, their employers absolutely saw the financial benefits of recruiting such employees. This was most particularly pronounced by participants that worked for large national financial institutions where many commented that reaching out to the LGBT community, newcomers to Canada, ethnic groups and the indigenous population was important to recruit people from because these communities had demonstrated they had disposable income; a value which could be a financial incentive for an organization, particularly financial institutions. This mirrors Toth's (2002) assertion that diverse employees will not be actively incorporated into public relations programming without the demonstration of financial gain for the organization; and this financial gain, according many participants, has certainly been realized.

The career experiences of the study's participants further conflict with some of the queer theorist's early claims that societal movements to become more inclusive of the gay community will be slow (Goldman, 1996). The participants argued that the progress made over the last

number of years, in terms of acceptance of the gay community in all facets of society has

progressed at lighting speed, and is comparable to the findings of Carreiro (2007) where

employers nowadays are actively seeking out LGBT employees. In fact, many of the stories told

by the participants were that society in general, both professionally and personally were

extremely welcoming of gay people, and this appears to be very encouraging news. In fact, a

number of younger generation practitioners mentioned they don't recall a time when society was

not accepting of their identity as gay. These stories not only are indicative of changes in the

practice of public relations, but also in the theoretical understanding of the importance of

diversity (Tindall & Waters, 2012).

This raises a number of issues in regards to queer theory, because it suggests that the

value queer theory brings to public relations research is somewhat questionable. Much of the

research reminds us that most of queer theorist's scholarly work occurred at a time when LGBT

culture was not as accepting as it is nowadays – at least not in Canada. Many of the responses

garnered by participants in this study somewhat disagree with what queer theorists have been

asserting, and perhaps there is a greater need to evaluate what queer theorists have said in the

context of a post modern society. This also tends to agree with with the assertions made by

Slagle (2014) that suggests all human beings are by nature unique individuals and perhaps queer

theorists do not recognize that fact that the world is a diverse place. Furthermore, the

conclusions made by Marcus (2005) argues that queer theorists, to their detriment, limit their

understanding of diversity by not studying all issues surrounding gender and sexuality, and as

result, could certainly limit the scope of any research that would be representative of a diverse

population like that one that exists in Canada.

This disagreement with a bulk of the literature on queer theory based on this particular

research study might prove to have larger implications for the study of the career experiences of

gay male public relations practitioners in general and perhaps other professions too. Therefore, a

contrast and comparison between this study and the original Tindall and Waters' (2012) study

would be important to highlight differences between the career experiences of gay male public

relations practitioners in the United States and in Canada.

One of the major conclusions that Tindall and Waters (2012) discovered through their

research was the fact that the career experiences of the participants in the United States felt that

there was a slow progression in American society to become more inclusive of the gay

community. This was not at all the case from this research. All participants agreed that

Canadian society and their workplaces were extremely welcoming for them as both an individual

and a professional. This appears to be in agreement with the Canadian literature suggesting that

the public relations environment is not only different from the United States, but is evolving

much more rapidly (Wright, 1976). While it can be argued that since the Tindall and Waters'

(2012) study was completed three years ago, things may have progressed in the United States

since then, however, much of the literature reviewed still suggests otherwise. In fact, American

academics like Lambert (2015) have pointed out that working in an LGBT-friendly work

environment is still socially uncomfortable for many. Sadly, this is also in agreement with

literature based in the United Kingdom that suggests to this day, gay and lesbian job applicants

are seen as less hirable over their heterosexual counterparts (Everly, Unzueta, & Shih, 2015),

something the participants in Canada vehemently disagree with.

This idea of contrasting workplace environments suggests that there could be other

differences between the Canadian and American experiences of gay male public relations

practitioners. Tindall and Waters (2012) stated in their findings that "the value queer theory

brings to public relations research is evident in the exploration of avowed and ascribed

identities" (p. 469). This study however, within a Canadian context, suggests that the value

queer theory brings is somewhat questionable. While queer theory might provide a good

theoretical framework for the research that was conducted in the United States, much of the

literature reviewed in this study indicates these theories (e.g. performativity) by Butler (1990)

and Bairstow and Skinner (2007) (e.g. gay men must sacrifice openly gay identities for

professional advancement) are not indicative of real-world scenarios, at least not in Canada.

Furthermore, Tindall and Waters (2012) concluded that "gay practitioners who are in the field

may have similar experiences to gay employees across all fields and organization:

discrimination, heterosexism and the lavender ceiling" (p. 469) and that "all of the interviewed

practitioners experienced homophobia and heterosexism – either in their current workplace or at

a former workplace" (p. 465). This was not indicative at all of the results from this study. Most

of the participants felt that they had rarely, if ever, experienced discrimination, heterosexism or

the lavender ceiling. In fact, many participants indicated quite the opposite; they were very

welcomed by colleagues in the workplace and were encouraged to be open about their sexuality.

Where there was some agreement between this study and the Tindall and Waters' (2012)

study was where they concluded that "gay male practitioners [have] a certain advantage in the

workplace" (p. 466). Many participants in Canada felt that their personal experiences of being

openly gay in the workplace was an advantage and helped to advance them professionally. In

particular, Canadian gay public relations practitioner's affiliation with the gay community helped

them in their career where their organizations were specifically attempting to build a relationship

with the gay community. This mimics Grates' (1993) assertion that PR practitioners should

become sensitive and knowledgeable about the needs of gay and lesbian groups. Even many of

the common stereotypes associated with being gay were seen by participants as positive

attributes that only furthered their professional interests. This also mirrors what Tindall and

Waters (2012) said when they concluded that "Gay male practitioners can be considered the

touch-stones and dictionaries who can explain and interpret LGBT culture for people not within the culture" (p.466). Many of the Canadian participants in this study took to this cultural interpreter role very seriously, and agreed that being that liaison person between the LGBT community and their place of work was a role they were proud to embrace. This also represents further conclusions by Tindall and Waters (2012) that states public relations practitioners "serve as the boundary spanners and relationship builders with key publics and the organization" (p. 469).

There is one particular conclusion, however, that Tindall and Waters (2012) state in their study that needs further exploration. They claim that their study "suggests that major concepts in public relations scholarship have failed to address nonobservable identity like sexual orientation, and this study rectified the field's oversight" (Tindall & Waters, 2012 p. 469). While it is true that their study does address nonobservable identities like sexual orientation, it does not completely rectify the field's oversight. This Canadian research study revealed other important aspects of nonobservable identities of public relations practitioners, like religion. The story of the participant that felt they experienced discrimination because they were Jewish is a further nonobservable identity, and the idea that Tindall and Waters (2012) have addressed and rectified the field's oversight is misleading. There would certainly be strong academic value in conducting research of other nonobservable identities like religious identification within the public relations profession.

11. Limitations

Perhaps the most significant limitation of this study was the choice to recruit participants using online methods (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn). As a result of this recruitment strategy, most participants were already identified as gay to the researcher by the very nature of them

identifying with some aspect of the LGBT community on their online profile. Therefore, many

of the participants had some comfort level with their sexuality by providing this information

online in the first place. This suggests that the participants were out of the closet and the data

they provided over the course of this research would have elicited very different responses than

had closeted gay professionals participated in this study.

Although the practitioners in this study provide rich data and shared similar stories and

career experiences, it is necessary to note that this data cannot be generalized beyond the

participants in this study. Due to the relatively small sample size of 19 participants, the risk

exists that the data may not be replicable with another group of interview participants. While

this number matches the same number of individuals Tindall and Waters (2012) interviewed for

their research, 19 is still limited, whereas had more participants been interviewed, the better the

data would be. That being said, the 19 participants interviewed in the United States for the

Tindall and Waters (2012) study is nowhere near as statistically significant as the 19 participants

interviewed for this (Canadian) study given the fact that the population of the United States (e.g.

322M; United States Census Bureau, 2015) is almost ten times larger than that of Canada (e.g.

35M; Statistics Canada, 2015).

Finally, the author of this research paper must acknowledge a bias that may have served,

unintentionally, as he identifies as a gay male public relations practitioner in Canada. The

researcher attempted to mitigate this concern by utilizing a similar interview protocol and same

methodology employed in the original Tindall and Waters (2012) study. It is possible, however,

that the fact the researcher identifies as a gay male public relations practitioner in Canada might

also be seen as an advantage since the participants might have felt they could open up and speak

more freely to someone that reflects their own identity.

12. Conclusion and Future Research

The results of this research have shown that overall, the Canadian workplace is very welcoming for gay public relations practitioners. Many of these practitioners felt that they could be themselves in their workplace, had equal opportunities for advancement, and in many cases, they felt that being gay was an advantage. These findings differ in many areas from the similar research study conducted by Tindall and Waters (2012). This begs the question, is it more difficult to be an openly gay public relations practitioner in the United States compared to Canada? Are Canadian workplaces more open to diverse groups compared to the United States? Are Canadians generally more tolerant or accepting of the LGBT community?

Based on the results of this study, the answers to these questions is a matter for each individual to debate on their own. What has been acknowledged, however, is the fact that many of the queer theorists believe that acceptance of the LGBT community will continue to be slow and that academics still hint that working in an LGBT-friendly work environment is still socially uncomfortable. The findings from this study suggests this is more of an issue from an American perspective, and these do not relate to society north of the border. As a result, the researcher is calling upon other academics to repeat the original study Tindall and Waters (2012) conducted to determine if there has been a societal change in the United States with respect to how welcoming the industry is nowadays for gay public relations practitioners. Furthermore, it would be interesting to determine whether or not the results from the Tindall and Waters (2012) study is isolated to the United States or is it the same in other countries? Unlike the United States, Canada is seen by many as very progressive when it comes to workplace diversity and issues that affect the LGBT community. In particular, the fact that Canada dealt with and legalized same-sex marriage over a decade ago could suggest that Canada is simply a country where diversity and equality is embraced, and there is little tolerance for discriminating against minority groups.

Furthermore, the basis of Canadian culture is one that is accepting of minority groups, simply based on the number of newcomers that Canada accepts each year (e.g. the welcoming of Syrian refugees in late 2015/early 2016). This diverse culture, where people from all walks of life are welcome is extended not just to race, ethnicity or even sex – it also appears to have been extended to sexual orientation as well.

Although this study further fills the gaps in research on the gay community in public relations, it is just a small step. There are many areas of study in public relations that are waiting to be addressed. While the basis of this study was to examine one area of nonobservable identity (sexual orientation), future research should consider examining other marginalized groups of practitioners including lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered individuals. Also, as previously mentioned, other nonobservable identities such as religious affiliation should also be considered when conducting future research as it would also provide excellent academic value. Furthermore, continued observable identities in public relations research such as gender, race, ethnicity, etc., would also be key identities worth analyzing. Finally, future research needs to further explore minority/marginalized groups of public relations practitioners' job satisfaction and retention rates from major industrialized countries like Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Germany and France.

13. Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Information about these interview questions: This gives you an idea what I would like to learn about your career experience as a gay public relations practitioner in Canada. Interviews will be one-on-one and will be open-ended (not just "yes or no" answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: "*So, you are saying that …?*"), to get more information ("*Please tell me more?"),* or to learn what you think or feel about something ("*Why do you think that is…?").*

1. Tell me a little bit about your position as a public relations professional in your current organization. How valued is public relations in your organization? Why or why not?
2. What influenced you to enter public relations?
3. Why did you want to work here? Do you have a sense of how long you would like to stay? How would you classify your role in the department?
4. Do you have any mentors at work or in the industry? How have your mentors helped advance or promote your career?
5. Currently, how many people from the gay community work in the public relations function/communication function in your organization?
6. Do you work with a mix, mostly men, or mostly women?
7. How many of your projects are related to minority groups, organizations, or issues?
8. How many of your projects are related to mainstream projects?
9. Do you feel you can be yourself in this organization as gay? Are there ways you deliberately tailor yourself to fit more with the organization? How so? Has this changed over time?
10. Does being gay at the senior level/junior level (whichever is appropriate for the interview) in the organization affect the way you do your job?
11. Do your coworkers know that you're gay? Does it matter to them?
12. In what contexts do you interact with senior management?
13. Have you experienced discrimination in your career?
14. Do you think your race/ethnicity/sexual orientation has affected your job or career?
15. Do you think people respond differently to you as gay than they would a heterosexual man in the same position?
16. How do you think PR organizations could change to be more welcoming to gay practitioners?
17. Is there anything else that you believe is important or interesting that we have not covered that you would like to share regarding the career experiences of gay public relations practitioners in Canada?

END

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