

RURAL PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL
JUSTICE LEADERSHIP IN
SCHOOLS

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

August 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to whom I owe the completion of this degree. First, I would like to thank Dr. Rhonda McClellan for the hours she put into reading, questioning, redirecting, and reordering the many drafts of both my proposal and this dissertation. Because of her guidance and demand for constant improvement, this work is so much better than it otherwise would have been. She has made me work harder and longer toward this goal than I have ever worked before, and because of her constant support, encouragement, and high expectations, I am a better person both academically and personally. She demanded nothing but excellence along this whole journey. So thank you, Dr. McClellan, first, for taking me on even though you did not know me, second, for leading me through the journey to finally land on this topic after numerous other paths, and third, for insisting on my best throughout this process. Finally, thank you for all the discussions we have had, the inspiration and support you have been, and for being a true mentor I respect, admire, and cherish.

Additionally, thank you, Dr. Adrienne Hyle, for being on my committee, for always being supportive, and for always taking the time to help me when I needed it. Dr. Hyle, you always make me feel valued as a graduate student and as a person, so thank you. You are a great leader for the program, and I am glad you came on board when you did. Your leadership has made the program become one to be patterned after and one of which I am proud to have been a part. Many thanks also to Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky for serving on my committee, for helping with my interview protocol, for all I learned in your two classes, and for always being a smiling, supportive face. I always knew you wanted nothing more than my success in this program, and I greatly appreciate your tireless efforts to push all of us to be better writers and researchers. Thanks also to Dr. Jim Hardy for your guidance in getting me admitted to the program, for your support and encouragement, and for listening to me many times on the phone in your calm,

encouraging manner when I encountered perceived road blocks. You are a kind, wonderful man, and I am grateful for your help and leadership.

I would also like to thank my cohort members. Without your support, I can honestly say I would not have been as driven. Thank you especially Wendy Brower for helping me with this research project. Thank you also Charles Rowett, Isela Russell, Lilly Moreno, Asha Gibson, Michelle Amrine, Lamar Goree, Heather Casida, Jeanne White, Alex Frasier, and Demetrius Liggins for your support, laughter, friendship, numerous phone calls, and for being part of such a wonderful cohort and network of educators.

Thanks to Dar Williams; I do not know her personally, but her song “When I Was a Boy” addresses gender roles so well and describes my youth perfectly. Listening to this song motivates me to work to change minds about traditional gender roles and the price we pay as a society by denying individual identities and expression of self.

Finally, thank you Ashley Doyle. You are my partner, my friend, and my life. I know you had to tolerate quite a bit as I worked toward this goal. I apologize for some of the very foul moods, the inattentiveness to household chores, the time spent on this rather than with you and Caleb, and the constant distraction of this weighing on my mind. Thank you for your patience and for pushing me to hurry up so I could get on with life! I love you so much and appreciate your support.

July 9, 2012

ABSTRACT

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2012

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This qualitative study explores how principals who are leaders for social justice in rural high schools perceive student diversity, specifically lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) students, and if, how, and why they support all students through the establishment of a socially just school climate. Additionally, the study investigates how the context of the schools, specifically rural communities with conservative values, affects principals' perceptions and implementation of a positive climate for all students. This study offers modifications to Theoharis' (2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and extends Theoharis' (2007) model of resistance, offering insight into how rural school communities reflect a unique context for examining equity constraints. The study's findings suggest that these leaders, despite their social justice orientations, upheld community normative values and did not perceive bias against LGBTQ students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2010, the suicides of students of varying ages from different areas of the United States and at different levels within K-16 education drew national media attention (McKinley, 2010). The suicide victims included 13-year-old Seth Walsh from California, who hanged himself after relentless taunting and bullying by his peers (Alexander, 2010). Another victim was Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University freshman, who jumped off a bridge after his roommate posted messages on Twitter about a private encounter between Clementi and another male (Friedman, 2010). Additionally, there was Billy Lucas, a 15-year-old from Indiana, who hanged himself after constant harassment by peers who called him “faggot” and “gay” even though he never said that he was gay (Brooks, 2010). Another 13-year-old, Asher Brown from Texas, shot himself because of bullying and harassment even though his parents had gone to the school district and requested protection numerous times (O’Hare, 2010). Many of the suicides across the country, including these, have been blamed on bullying and harassment due to sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation. These events indicate a breach in the first priority of education: to provide a safe environment for optimal learning to occur (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, & Walker, 2002). The need for safety and security are basic requirements for optimal growth and development (Maslow, 1968), and, therefore, are essential for schools and colleges. However, as evidenced by the suicides above, not all students are safe in our educational institutions (McKinley, 2010).

Schools are not places of safety and belonging for all students (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010) and this lack of safety results in an abundance of negative social, emotional, developmental, and academic consequences for some students (Berk, 1999; Craig & Dunn, 2010; Henze et al., 2002; Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza,

2010; Rivers & Noret, 2008). Additionally, the fear of being bullied not only affects those who are victims of abuses at school, but also those who witness the abuse and all who alter their own identities to conform to what is perceived to be normal (Craig & Dunn, 2010). This alteration limits students in reaching their full potentials as individuals (Berk, 1999).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) students are especially vulnerable to identity change or concealment because schools tend to be heterosexist environments (Blackburn & Smith, 2010) where sexuality other than heterosexuality is silenced (Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2000-2001; Lugg, 1998, 2003), and where victimization of LGBTQ students is particularly high (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Hershberger, Pilkington, & D'Augelli, 1997). While schools are traditionally heterosexist (Lugg, 2006), the degrees of this heterosexism and victimization of LGBTQ students varies among communities and regions of the country (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). Some areas of the U.S. have been found to have communities that may be more resistant to social justice for all students than other communities (Kosciw et al., 2009) These include communities in areas of the country with large numbers of participants or believers in conservative Christian ideology (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Rosik, Griffith, & Cruz, 2007). Some legal protections, however, may play a role in reducing marginalization of LGBTQ students in such areas of the U.S.

Increased scholarly research and media attention to LGBTQ suicides linked to bullying have prompted a national anti-bullying campaign initiated by President Obama (Anderson, 2010) as well as policy changes at the state level including "Asher's Law" in Texas, named after a 13-year old bullying victim in Texas who committed suicide (Coleman, 2011). Additionally, constitutional protections, specifically the First Amendment Free Speech Clause and the Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause, are afforded students regardless of sexual orientation and courts tend to uphold these laws ruling against school districts that do not treat all students fairly and protect all students equally (Biegel, 2010). Laws and policies offer protection for all students, but more immediate change can occur at the campus level.

Research shows socially just school climates have positive impacts for LGBTQ students (Birkett et al., 2009) as well as for all students (Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2005; Ruus et al., 2007). Socially just school climates are climates where social inequalities, marginalization of students, and other such barriers have been recognized and removed. Socially just schools are open and inclusive of all forms of diversity and social structures of oppression have been removed (Brown, 2006). Socially just school climates instill in students “a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom and ends in action to move against those obstacles (Ayers, 1998, p. xvii). By establishing positive climates on their campuses, principals may be able to not only protect LGBTQ students, but may also avoid lawsuits due to accusations of violating civil rights or state or local policies. Even in the face of resistance from communities, an education in and promotion of social justice leadership may help principals be successful in leading a socially just campus resulting in a positive school climate (Brown, 2006; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007) that will benefit all students.

This study explores how principals perceive and support all student diversity, specifically LGBTQ students, through the establishment of socially just school climate. It investigates how the schools’ communities and their unique contexts may affect the principals’ perceptions and implementation of the climate they have established or are working to establish. This study also explores how the theoretical framework of social justice leadership and Theoharis’ (2004, 2007) model of resistance frames and explains this study’s findings. Modifications to Theoharis’ (2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance are suggested to broaden social justice leadership theory to encompass LGBTQ students and the resistance rural principals in this study faced that is not described by Theoharis.

1.1 Context of the Study

1.1.1 The Student Experience

For many students, schools and colleges are not safe havens. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2010) reports of national hate crime statistics show 11.4% of all hate crimes occur at schools or colleges, including 12.4% of racially motivated hate crimes, 12.9% of hate crimes based on religion, 10.1% of hate crimes based on sexual orientation, and 8.2% of crimes based on ethnicity or national origin. The consequences of not fitting in are often dire for adolescents and young adults (Berk, 1999; Craig & Dunn, 2010; Henze et al., 2002; Rivers & Noret, 2008). Feeling ostracized by peers affects students' psychological, emotional, social, and academic development (Craig & Dunn, 2010). Constant teasing, bullying, and harassment may result in lower academic achievement (Juvonen et al., 2010), higher instances of alcohol and substance abuse, higher likelihood of skipping school, increased instance of carrying weapons to school, and increased likelihood of being physically injured or threatened (Rivers & Noret, 2008). Long term negative effects on mental health including suicidal thoughts or attempts have also been found to be the result of harassment and bullying because of their adverse effect on self-acceptance (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995).

The effects of fear, however, are not limited to minority students or those who fall victim to hate crimes. Because of crimes and abuse against students considered minorities of one form or another, fear of being ostracized, hated, or rejected for being different may affect all students to some degree. Witnessing the victimization of others can cause students to alter their identity in order to blend in with their peers and fit the perceived acceptable persona (Craig & Dunn, 2010) resulting in conformity (Berk, 1999).

Conformity reinforces hegemony and may limit personal growth and identity development (Berk, 1999). Maslow (1968) designated the need for love, belonging, and positive self-esteem as the next levels after safety that are necessary in order to achieve self-actualization, or the ability to reach one's full potential. One of the educational ideals of schools

in a democratic society is to help students realize their full potentials as individuals (Henze et al., 2002). However, the self-actualization process of all students is limited when their need for peer approval and safety from bullying and harassment leads them to conformity with their peers (Berk, 1999). The need to blend in with peers particularly affects teenagers and young adults whose self-worth is often contingent upon the approval of others (Berk, 1999; Ormrod, 2008). Research shows peer group homogeneity and social conformity among friends in high school directly affect identity; further, inconsistency or perceptions of inconsistency result in outward identity change or concealment (McFarland & Pals, 2005).

LGBTQ students may be particularly vulnerable to attempting to blend in with others in order to fit in with peers and avoid bullying. Many LGBTQ people realize their sexual orientation in late high school and early college (Lopez & Chism, 1993), yet are a part of an education system where deviation from heterosexuality is often silenced (Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Lugg, 1998, 2003), and where heteronormativity is so firmly established it goes virtually unquestioned (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Research shows LGBTQ students report higher levels of bullying, victimization, depression, alcohol use, and drug use than their heterosexual peers (Birkett et al., 2009). Victimization and bullying of students have been shown to be directly linked to lower academic performance (Juvonen et al., 2010) and to an increase in suicidal thoughts and/or attempts (Rivers & Noret, 2008). Because of the high rate of bullying and victimization toward LGBTQ students, this subpopulation is more likely to have suicidal thoughts or attempts than their heterosexual peers (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Hershberger et al., 1997). Sexual identity is an important factor of self-concept that helps students transition into mentally healthy adults (Craig & Dunn, 2010), yet sexual identity for LGBTQ students may be hidden or denied.

An improved school climate of safety and belonging for all students in order to protect them from physical abuse, psychological harm, or even suicide is mandatory. School must foster identity development and the achievement of self-actualization. Educational scholars have begun to explore how K-12 institutions advocate for all students (Cooper, 2009; Riehl,

2000; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2004, 2007). Some researchers have turned to the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ students and school leaders (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003) while others study perceptions of school administrators or future administrators and teachers toward LGBTQ students and faculty (Dessel, 2010; Tooms & Alston, 2006). Further research is needed to determine approaches that foster a socially just school climate for LGBTQ students. Such approaches may have direct benefits to all students (Birkett et al., 2009; Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002) because if schools are to be optimal places of learning and development for all students, they must be non-threatening environments (Henze et al., 2002). In addition to research, improvements in laws and policies may bring about positive outcomes.

1.1.2 Policy and Law

Regardless of sexual orientation, the students' right to openly be themselves is protected by the First Amendment Free Speech Clause and Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution (Biegel, 2010). Court cases against schools and universities where violations of First Amendment and/or Fourteenth Amendment protections are cited often find in favor of students, particularly if the student was treated differently than other students by the district or university employees for being openly different (Biegel, 2010).

In addition to constitutional protections, state and local governments are adding protection for LGBTQ students. One example of an attempt to address school safety and in turn, school climate, through legal/policy changes is Texas House Bill 2343, passed in March, 2011 (Coleman, 2011). The law was named "Asher's Law" after 13-year-old Asher Brown's suicide which was attributed to bullying and harassment at school by his peers because of his perceived differences. The law requires the development of suicide prevention programs in all public schools and makes changes to the Texas Education Code regarding discrimination, harassment, bullying, and retaliation for reporting such abuses. Schools will be required to report instances of bullying annually to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and school leaders

will be allowed to transfer bullies out of classes or even to other campuses rather than transferring the victim, as was the case before the law. The law also addresses “a certain sexual orientation” as an area particularly vulnerable to pervasive bullying, but it stops short of saying what that certain sexual orientation is (Coleman, n.d.).

1.1.3 Role of School Climate

In addition to improved policy, research shows school climate plays a key role in acceptance of differences at educational institutions and lessening the threats associated with being different (Birkett et al., 2009), thus strengthening the potential for positive identity development. Socially just school climates benefit all students. Research shows all students, regardless of sexual orientation, report lower levels of depression and suicide, drug and alcohol use, and truancy when educated in a learning environment with a positive school climate with an absence of homophobic teasing (Birkett et al., 2009). Additionally, students educated in positive school climates with acceptance of diversity are better prepared to negotiate a diverse, democratic society (Hurtado et al., 2002; Mayhew et al., 2005), are more optimistic, have better over-all well-being and academic success (Ruus et al., 2007), have improved feelings of belonging and social trust (Flanagan & Stout, 2010), and receive higher scores on standardized tests (MacNeil et al., 2009).

1.1.4 Role of the Principal

Principals have a large influence on creating a nonviolent and positive school climate of the schools they serve (Brown, 2006; Kose, 2009; Szalacha, 2003), potentially resulting in a socially just school where diversity is valued and marginalization does not occur. The leadership of the principal has been found to be the most important variable in a school’s reform towards a safe environment (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009). The principal sets the tone for what is acceptable behavior by establishing and enforcing school policies (Szalacha, 2003), by connecting with the teachers, and by leading their schools toward a socially just and positive school climate (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010).

Even with the tremendous benefits of a positive school climate (Birkett et al., 2009; Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2002; MacNeil et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2005; Ruus et al., 2007), research has shown instances where principals are apathetic toward developing cultural competence and harbor negative bias toward inclusive practices and policies (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009), particularly regarding LGBTQ students (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Lugg, 2006; Tooms & Alston, 2006). Historically, school leaders have often been promoters of social and political status quo (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006) including promoting heteronormativity (Lugg, 2006). A study of 174 aspiring school administrators found 30% to be intolerant and non-supportive of the LGBTQ community; additionally, 25% were not supportive of equity for LGBTQ people, and 35% were found to be neutral concerning equity based on sexual orientation (Tooms & Alston, 2006). Intolerance of any marginalized group or lack of effort to promote equity for all students could affect the ability of principals to develop a socially just school climate at their schools. Regardless of personal biases or perceptions, principals as state and district employees are required to educate all students in a safe learning environment and treat them all fairly and justly (Biegel, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Henze et al., 2002; Lugg & Tabbaa-Rida, 2006). Scholars are working to develop theories describing how and why principals lead for social justice.

1.1.5 Social Justice Leadership Theory

Social justice leadership theory focuses on the investigation of issues that cause or perpetuate social inequities or oppression and the proposal of solutions to eliminate these inequities (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Principals who lead with a social justice leadership framework seek out marginalized groups in schools where the status quo has been maintained at the expense of these students (Brown, 2006). Social justice leadership involves questioning the assumptions behind school policies and traditional school practices (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). This type of leadership critically assesses the use and abuse of power, discovers how leadership practices allow and encourage the perpetuation of inequities, and

actively seeks to transform these injustices into equality for all students (Dantley & Tillman, 2006).

Research and theory show principals who explore a social justice orientation tend to work better with others toward social change through transformative learning processes and leadership (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). Research shows principals who are interested in promoting a welcoming climate of acceptance and leadership for social justice lead their schools toward this end through analyzing their own identities and commitment to diversity and by using professional development opportunities to teach this vision to their teachers and schools (Kose, 2009). By creating and leading for diversity with a social justice lens, school leaders can develop heterogeneous classrooms that prepare students to become critical citizens who take issue with marginalizing conditions (McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007), which could result in positive identity development for all students.

Social justice leadership goes beyond “good leadership” (Theoharis, 2007, 2009). Theoharis (2007) cautions “us all to consider that decades of good leadership have created and sanctioned unjust and inequitable schools” (p. 253). He found through his research of principals who lead for social justice 12 qualities of a social justice leader that go above and beyond good leadership (2009). Principals who are social justice leaders rather than simply good leaders according to Theoharis’ model would develop a socially just school climate and therefore improve identity development for all students while improving student success and achievement.

In his own research, Theoharis (2007) found principals in urban areas who embody the characteristics of a social justice leader showed success through a “three-pronged framework of resistance” (p. 248). The principals (a) resisted inequality and marginalization of students in schools, (b) faced resistance from others both within the school as well as outside its walls, and (c) developed resistance themselves to continue their social justice agenda regardless of the resistance of others. Theoharis found resistance to be a common theme among principals

leading with a social justice leadership framework, but his study did not investigate principals in rural settings, nor did the participants in his study include social justice leadership for LGBTQ students specifically.

1.1.6 Community Resistance to Social Justice Leadership

Through the development of a socially just, positive school climate, social justice leadership benefits all students in a variety of ways. Some of these include reducing threats (Birkett et al., 2009), improving trust and belonging (Flanagan & Stout, 2010), preparing students for a diverse world (Hurtado et al., 2002; Mayhew et al., 2005), enhancing optimism (Ruus et al., 2007), and improving educational outcomes (MacNeil et al., 2009). Yet bullying and hate crimes are still prevalent (FBI, 2010; McKinley, 2010). Research shows principals who are social justice-driven often meet resistance to social justice leadership practices within the school, district, community, and beyond (Theoharis, 2007). Because of this resistance, the context of the schools, specifically the communities, may have a large influence in the principals' development of a socially just school climate.

Communities may influence social justice leadership in some areas of the country more than others. Communities where subpopulations are vulnerable to abuses of the majority may prove more likely to be resistant to social justice leadership for those subpopulations. Research has found LGBTQ students in certain areas of the United States to be particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment. Schools that are in Southern or Midwestern regions of the U.S. and in rural areas with high poverty rates and few college-educated residents are less safe for LGBTQ students than schools in other regions of the country, in urban settings, in affluent areas, and in areas with higher percentages of college educated adults (Kosciw et al., 2009).

Additionally, research has found conservative values associated with religious ideology tend to result in homophobia (Rosik et al., 2007) with conservative protestant forms of Christianity having the highest levels of homophobia (Finlay & Walther, 2003). Other school district-level characteristics, such as school size, student-teacher ratio, and student-support

personnel ratios, were not found to be significant regarding victimization of LGBTQ students. (Kosciw et al., 2009). These areas may be especially resistant to social justice leadership, particularly regarding equity and justice for LGBTQ students.

1.1.7 Need for Further Research

Theoharis (2004, 2007) calls for more research of principals who are social justice leaders and the resistance they face to advance social justice in their schools. He suggests expanding his study to include schools in rural areas, suburban areas, and areas with more racially diverse leaders due to the lack of research in these areas. This study investigates principals who are leaders for social justice in rural, east Texas schools. The focus is on how these leaders work to establish a positive climate for all students, but particularly LGBTQ students in an area that, according to the literature, may be resistant to such leadership.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

We know from current events that educational institutions are not places of safety and belonging for all students (FBI, 2010) and this lack of safety has an abundance of negative consequences on students (Berk, 1999; Craig & Dunn, 2010; Henze et al., 2002; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Juvonen et al., 2010; Rivers & Noret, 2008) including the inability to fully develop identities (Berk, 1999) which could affect their development into mentally healthy adults (Craig & Dunn, 2010). Bullying and fear not only affect those who are victims of abuses at school, but also those who witness the abuse and who alter their own identities to conform to what is perceived to be *normal* (Craig & Dunn, 2010), often limiting students in reaching their full potentials as individuals (Berk, 1999). LGBTQ students are especially vulnerable to identity change or concealment because schools tend to be heterosexist environments (Blackburn & Smith, 2010) where sexuality other than heterosexuality is not only silenced (Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Lugg, 1998, 2003), but victimization of LGBTQ students is particularly high (Birkett et al., 2009; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Hershberger et al., 1997).

School climate affects students. Specifically, positive, socially just school climates have been shown to have positive impacts for LGBTQ students (Birkett et al., 2009) as well as for all students (Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2002; MacNeil et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2005; Ruus et al., 2007). Additionally, principals have a large influence on school climate (Brown, 2006; Kose, 2009; Moolenaar et al., 2010; Szalacha, 2003). An understanding and promotion of social justice theory and social justice leadership theory help principals be successful in leading a socially just school climate (Brown, 2006; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007) resulting in a positive school climate for all students.

We know that all students do not feel safe to explore their identities at their schools, and we know that principals influence the climate of their schools. We know that social justice leadership shows promise in creating socially just climates for all students despite their diversity. On the other hand, we, as researchers, have yet to explain how social justice-driven principals perceive all student diversity at their schools, especially the LGBTQ student population, or how their schools' communities may influence the principals' own thinking and reaction to student diversity, particularly LGBTQ students. We have yet to explain how the communities in which principals serve affect their shaping of school climate and, in turn, the development of student identities.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how principals who are leaders for social justice in rural areas perceive student diversity, specifically LGBTQ students, and if, how, and why they support all students through the establishment of a socially just school climate. Additionally, the study will investigate how the context of the schools, specifically rural communities, may affect the principals' perceptions and implementation of a positive climate for all students. This study will also explore how the theoretical framework of social justice leadership and Theoharis' (2004, 2007) model of resistance explain the study's findings.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do social justice motivated principals in rural communities describe student diversity at their schools?
2. How do they generate a school climate demonstrating a valuing of diverse student identity that is inclusive of all students, including LGBTQ students?
 - a. What types of resistance and support have principals encountered from the community?
 - b. What specific strategies do principals use to overcome any perceived resistance from the communities that may affect establishing a socially just school climate for LGBTQ students?
 - c. What artifacts within the schools show evidence of a socially just school climate for all students?
3. How do Theoharis' (2004, 2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance explain this study's findings?

1.5 Orienting Theoretical Framework

The orienting theoretical frame for this study is social justice leadership theory. Findings of this study will be examined from a social justice leadership lens to help explain the principals' perceptions of diversity at their schools. Theoharis' (2007) characteristics of a social justice leader will be used as a comparison to better define the leadership of the principals as they describe their attempts to generate a socially just school climate for LGBTQ students. Theoharis' (2007) model of resistance will be used to analyze and understand any resistance these principals face and help us better understand the role of resistance and the strategies used to overcome resistance in the communities in which the principals serve.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study has significance in its contribution to research, theory, and practice.

1.6.1 Research Significance

Studies and articles have been published to bring social justice leadership to the forefront in schools and in educational leadership preparation. Marshall and Oliva (2006) edited a compilation of such articles written by leading scholars in the field. Other scholars have collaborated to produce an article underscoring the importance of training educational leaders for social justice (McKenzie et al., 2008), while others reveal the effects of social justice education on educational leaders (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). Research abounds in exploring the positive outcomes of schools with socially just school cultures led by administrators with social justice ideology (Birkett et al., 2009; Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2002; Mayhew et al., 2005; MacNeil et al., 2009; Ruus et al., 2007).

While some research demonstrates apathy and bias among school leaders toward inclusiveness, diversity, and equity in general (Bustamante et al., 2009), and other research found intolerance of homosexuals among aspiring future principals and school leaders (Tooms & Alston, 2006), the literature is almost silent concerning leadership in schools specifically aimed at developing equity for LGBTQ students. Theoharis (2004, 2007) conducted an in-depth study of principals as social justice leaders and the resistance they face. He included sexual orientation as part of that social justice leadership in his abstract and conclusion, but the principals he worked with never addressed sexual orientation specifically. In addition, he recommended a replication of his study in rural areas as well as in other areas of the country for future research because the literature is lacking in those areas (Theoharis, 2004). There is also lacking a regional study in an area of the United States that meets the demographics found in the literature of areas where resistance may be high to social justice for LGBTQ people. This study adds information to current literature of how rural, high school principals view and support LGBTQ students through the establishing of socially just school climates and how/if they are affected by the characteristics or cultures of their communities.

1.6.2 Theoretical Significance

The concepts behind social justice leadership include becoming a critical observer of the status quo in order to realize when established norms are marginalizing people (Brown, 2006; Theoharis, 2007), then, working to end the oppression suffered by these marginalized groups (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). One of the results of witnessing and being part of a school climate where marginalization and victimization occur is conformity by all students regardless of if they have ever been victimized themselves (Craig & Dunn, 2010). Such conformity affects student identity to the point of identity change (McFarland & Pals, 2005) and reinforces the hegemony of what is considered normal and acceptable in schools further marginalizing those who are different. By reducing or eliminating this marginalization and providing safe learning environments, all students may be free to explore and develop their own identities without feeling the need to conform to their peers. Social justice leadership seeks to end this marginalization (Dantley & Tillman, 2006).

Differences in cultures and values shape the norms of people in different regions and communities of the country. Karpinski and Lugg (2006) point out “one of the goals of a social justice approach is that by ‘schooling’ future educational administrators in theories of social justice, these future leaders will be more aware of and work to ameliorate and/ or eradicate these injustices” (p. 280). In an effort to help ameliorate and/or eradicate the injustices faced by LGBTQ students as described by Karpinski and Lugg, this study is significant because it provides insight to how school leaders perceive social justice leadership for all students, particularly LGBTQ students, in areas of the country where resistance to such leadership may be high, and where such a study has not been conducted previously. This study contributes to the body of literature in social justice and refines Theoharis’ (2007) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance by including social justice leadership for LGBTQ students in rural areas that may be particularly resistant to such leadership.

1.6.3 Practical Significance

The data from this study may help provide strategies and support for social justice-driven principals who face resistance in their own communities and schools. It provides data explaining how principals in rural schools perceive student diversity, particularly LGBTQ students, and if, how, and why they support all students through the establishment of a socially just school climate. Further, this study investigates how the context of the schools, specifically the communities, may affect the principals' perceptions and implementation of a socially just school culture. This could be particularly valuable for principals who seek the promotion of social justice in areas where resistance to their leadership may be high. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of community and regional influences on school leadership for social justice so strategies may be developed to help principals in similar communities lead for social justice more effectively.

1.7 Overview of the Methods

To explore how social justice-driven principals perceive student diversity, specifically LGBTQ students, and how the context of the schools, specifically the communities, may affect their perceptions and leadership toward a positive school climate for all students, the participants needed to be allowed to express their own perceptions, views, experiences, and thoughts. This study required the perspectives, rich descriptions, and explanations from the principals rather than the assumptions of the researcher; therefore, qualitative data collection was appropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on the context of the situation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and is used when a “complex, detailed understanding of the issue” is needed (Creswell, 2007, p. 40), as was the case in this study. This study was conducted to attempt to find meaning in the lived experiences of principals in rural east Texas to better understand how social justice leaders work to establish socially just school climates for all students, especially in areas that may be resistant to the inclusion of LGBTQ students.

1.7.1 Setting

To gather data from principals serving in areas where the community may be resistant to social justice leadership for LGBTQ students, I used the demographics found in the literature to determine where such resistance is most likely found. The regional characteristics found in the literature of areas that tend to show resistance to social justice for LGBTQ people (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2009; Rosik et al., 2007) align with the characteristics of east Texas (Association of Religion Data Archives, n.d.; The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010; TEA, 2011a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Therefore, in order to investigate if/how the context of the schools, specifically the communities, affect the principals' perceptions and leadership for a socially just school climate, I selected the rural schools in Region 7 of east Texas as the region for my study.

1.7.2 Selection of Participants

Prior to contacting principals, I secured IRB approval. Then high school principals ($N = 74$) working at rural school districts in Region 7 of east Texas were emailed a survey that served as a participant screen (see Appendix A for the survey). Of those surveyed, five principals who most closely met Theoharis' (2004) criteria as leaders for social justice were selected for interviews. In his study of social justice leaders in schools, Theoharis (2004) sought principals that met the following four criteria for further data collection: the principals must (a) work in public schools, (b) believe fostering social justice is the main reason they entered the profession, (c) work to keep issues of injustice and marginalization of groups of students at the forefront of their practice and vision, and (d) have evidence to show their school is more socially just due to their leadership. The final criterion used for this study but not used by Theoharis was: the principals must (e) include LGBTQ students in their description of diversity at their schools. The principals must also be willing to be interviewed in order to answer the research questions, and must work at high schools because high school is often when students realize their sexual orientation (Lopez & Chism, 1993).

I initially targeted five to 10 principals for interviews because that number fit into Creswell's (2007) suggestion when he cites Polkinghorne (1989) as recommending five to 25 participants and Dukes (1984) as recommending three to 10 subjects. None of the principals met all of Theoharis' criteria, so five principals were selected who met the most criteria and who were willing to be interviewed. To best answer the research questions, school principals who were leaders for social justice based as closely as possible on criteria from Theoharis' (2004) study, would provide the best data for determining if Theoharis' (2004, 2007) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance are useful in explaining social justice-driven principals' leadership in rural communities and for LGBTQ students.

1.7.3 Interviews

Three of the interviews took place at the campuses of the selected principals, and two were conducted over the telephone. Data were collected via qualitative semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007) with each principal (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). The interview questions were semi-structured in order for the principals to provide data to answer the research questions, but additional time was permitted during the interviews for them to share their own lived experiences, goals, successes and possible road-blocks in establishing a socially just school climate for all students.

The interviews were recorded and saved digitally. Each was then transcribed word for word. To ensure the validity of the data and present it most accurately, I emailed each principal a copy of the transcript from his or her interview for review to be sure each transcription was accurate and reflected the true experiences of each principal. This member checking is described by Stake (2010) as being vital to qualitative research for validation. No corrections were requested by the principals although possible revealing information was omitted from one transcript to ensure the confidentiality of one of the principals.

1.7.4 Artifacts for Textual Analysis

In addition to survey data and the interviews, I researched the websites of the schools in which the principals being interviewed worked. I looked for artifacts that showed or contained evidence of the school climate, particularly artifacts for textual analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) that showed evidence of a socially just school climate for all students, such as inclusive language, and a welcoming environment for all students. Such artifacts included school policy documents, school goals, codes of conduct, anti-discrimination statements, lists of student organizations, student dress codes and student handbooks. While at the schools where three of the interviews took place, I looked for posters or displays with inclusive language, and looked for diversity within student groups at the schools.

1.7.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis of the interviews was guided by Creswell's (2007) procedures for data analysis. This included typing the transcription the data as previously mentioned, and highlighting quotes, statements, or sentences that were important for understanding how the participants experienced and viewed social justice leadership for all students. The statements were organized by themes and were used to write a "textural" and "structural description" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) of what each subject experienced and the context or setting in which it was experienced. Peer review or debriefing (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of the data, descriptions, and themes was used to further validate the findings and serve as an external check of the research process (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Findings were composed, presented, and discussed based on the emergent themes from data.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Social justice as relating to leadership in schools is defined by Theoharis (2004) as "principals who advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing factors in the U.S." (p. 8). He also notes social justice leaders work to develop inclusive practices at

school. Dantley and Tillman (2006) link social justice with moral transformative leadership. They go on to say the following:

These three essential components – leadership for social justice, moral transformative leadership, and social justice praxis – link the principles of democracy and equity in proactive ways so that the social justice agenda becomes a vibrant part of the everyday work of school leaders” (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 20).

Socially just schools or socially just school climates refer to schools where marginalization does not occur and where diversity is valued (Brown, 2006). Students are taught to value and respect differences and to notice and work to end marginalizing conditions in the world as well (Ayers, 1998).

LGBTQ refers broadly to members of society who do not fit heterosexual norms. For this study, LGBTQ specifically refers to individuals who consider themselves to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender or in the questioning phase of their sexuality.

Heteronormativity is defined by Blackburn and Smith (2010) as “a way of being in the world that relies on the belief that heterosexuality is normal, which implicitly positions homosexuality and bisexuality as abnormal and thus inferior” (p. 625).

1.9 Limitations

It is important to disclose my position, assumptions, and biases because my own “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208) are influential on my interpretations of the data. I want to make every effort to keep my position as a researcher open in how my assumptions and biases may impact the study.

Both the setting and topic of this research are very personal and very important to me. I have worked in two school districts in Region 7 of east Texas, have attended a university in the same region, and have family who live there. Not only am I an educator with close familial ties to east Texas, but I once held some of the same cultural and religious beliefs as are commonly found in that region of the country. I was raised in a religiously conservative, evangelical

Christian household with family members and friends who were (and many still are) very homophobic and against any identity other than heterosexuality. I was very homophobic myself and subscribed to the religious values of my family and the culture of my community. Although I grew up in far west Louisiana, these beliefs are very similar to those of east Texas where much of my family originates and currently lives.

Heterosexual behavior was the only sexuality allowed, respected, or even spoken of in my childhood home and school. Yet, through a very difficult coming out process, I finally realized that I am a lesbian. I also have a strong belief in allowing all students to be themselves and to embrace diversity. This dichotomy of ideology at different stages in my life has proven very useful in this particular study. Because I understand both views, I feel I can see and understand the dilemma in which social justice principals in east Texas and other rural, conservative regions of the country find themselves. I notice subtle heteronormative values all students face constantly in the school system, while the principals in those schools may feel they are being fair and protective of LGBTQ students' rights, just as they are being fair to all students. I can see the effects of the hegemony of heterosexism on students, particularly LGBTQ students, because I was one of them, although I did not realize it at the time. I was not allowed to because knowledge of anything other than heterosexism was silenced in my community.

While I understand the conservative viewpoints and value religious freedom, I have a passion for equity for all students, particularly LGBTQ students. Although I am fervent about equity in schools for all students, throughout this study, I have worked to ensure trustworthiness and reliability by curbing my bias as much as possible and representing the principals accurately in their statements. I hope the findings from this study will help future students be able to openly and safely explore and develop their own identities in conservative regions of the country because the leadership understands the importance of allowing this freedom.

In addition to my background possibly being a limitation, another possible limitation to this study was the problem with finding principals who were social justice leaders in east Texas. I may have incorrectly assumed the principals would know what the term “social justice” means when I sent out the initial survey which included a cover letter explaining a bit about my research (see Appendix A). One of the principals told me before we started the interview that he was not sure what that term actually meant. He went on to say he did not think many principals would know what it meant or specifically what I, the researcher meant by it. Another principal sent an email asking me to define social justice for him after he returned the survey, but before the interview was conducted. He knew from the email introduction that accompanied the survey that I was looking for a social justice leader, but he was not sure exactly what that meant either. One of the principals who was interviewed had a Ph.D. in educational leadership. I asked if any of the coursework at the graduate school he attended had included education about social justice. He said it had not. He said they may have mentioned it, but there was no specific course covering social justice. Because of the lack of education regarding social justice, and because I failed to define social justice to the principals, there may have been some misunderstanding as to what I was looking for in these leaders, and therefore participation may have been limited.

The homogeneity of the schools of the principals who were interviewed may also be a limitation. Data from the TEA (2011b) revealed little ethnic or racial diversity on the campuses. All of the schools had a higher percentage of white students than the state and region averages, with one school reporting 92% white students. All schools had less than the regional average for African American students with one having no African American students at all. All schools also had a smaller percentage of economically disadvantaged students than state and regional averages as well. This lack of diversity may result in skewed perspectives of social justice leadership. However, no principals in other, more ethnically or racially diverse schools met the research criteria or were willing to participate.

Other limitations include the small number of principals who were selected and who participated in the interviews, as well as the absence of student or community participation. I also had no way of controlling the principals' biases. I relied on their statements as their actual views, when, in fact, they could have been providing politically correct answers rather than their own perspectives.

It must also be noted, the rural, conservative communities in this study are not representative of all rural conservative communities, nor do the participants' experiences reflect the experiences of all principals in all rural, conservative communities. Additionally, the views shared by the principals do not reflect the views of all members of their own communities, nor a consensus of members of their communities. The data are not generalizable, but the information gleaned from it may be transferable to principals in similar communities to help them lead for social justice for all students, including LGBTQ students.

1.10 Summary

This chapter served as an introduction including a brief overview of the literature, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the orienting theoretical framework, the significance of the study, an overview of the methods, definitions of terms, and limitations and delimitations of this study. Chapter 2 is the review of the literature. Chapter 3 includes the design of the study, the positioning of the researcher, procedures, instrumentation, ethical considerations and a description of how this study is trustworthy. Chapter 4 explains the setting, how the participants were selected, survey results, the selection process of the interview participants, and the textural and structural descriptions of the principals who were interviewed including interview and artifact data. Chapter 5 is the analysis section including an analysis and discussion of the survey data, a discussion of the demographics of the schools of the principals who were interviewed, discussions about the themes found in the data and how they tie into the literature, and an analysis of the research questions. Chapter 6 includes a summary of this

study, the conclusions, the implications of the study, and areas where further research is needed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phrase, “one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all,” can be heard across the nation in schools everywhere. But is “justice for all” occurring in our schools? What does it mean to be a social justice leader in public schools for all students and how can social justice be accomplished in the face of resistance? To begin the review of the literature applicable to this study, I start with heteronormativity in schools and how it affects all students regardless of sexual orientation. I then discuss why there is a need to protect students in public schools and organizations that are working for such protection, followed by some policy and law changes in response to the need for protection of LGBTQ students. I then discuss social justice and social justice leadership, and how social justice leadership theory has evolved to explain social justice leadership in schools. Next, I discuss the impact of socially just school climates on all students, and ways the principals influence the climate and social justice at their schools. This is followed by a discussion of community influence on social justice leadership including how the status quo of schools may be maintained by the leaders of the communities. I end with the relevance of this research.

2.1 Heteronormativity in Schools

The reality of victimization in all aspects of life for LGBTQ students, or for those who are perceived to be homosexual, is a constant reminder of the hegemony of heteronormativity pervasive in society and also prevalent in schools (Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Ferfolja, 2007; Lugg, 2003, 2006; MacGillivray, 2000). Heteronormativity is the idea and promotion of

heterosexual behavior, including masculine males and feminine females, as normal whereas anything other than this is abnormal (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Heterosexual relationships are often encouraged and praised in educational settings (MacGillivray, 2000).

MacGillivray (2000) points out some examples of this heteronormativity in schools including the election of homecoming king and queen, the encouragement of boys asking girls to prom and dances, heterosexual teachers wearing wedding bands and including pictures of their spouses and families on their desks, and schools sending permission slips home for signatures of the mother and father. In addition, common gender expression can be seen in the faculty and staff; elementary teachers are usually the motherly, nurturing females, while fatherly men tend to dominate administration and coaching positions (Blount, 2000). The promotion of heterosexist values is strengthened by the elimination of any reference to anything other than heterosexism.

Any deviation from heterosexuality is often silenced in schools including the acknowledgement of homosexual students, teachers, parents, or even the very existence of anything other than heterosexual relationships (Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Lugg, 1998, 2003). According to Blackburn and Smith (2010), "Heteronormativity is so prevalent that it largely goes unexamined in mainstream conversations about education; it is simply *in place*" (p. 627). Silencing any form of sexuality other than heterosexually may imply anything else is less desirable. Hunter (1993), a law professor at Georgetown, purported:

In the absence of identity speech, most persons are assumed to be heterosexual. To compel silence, then, is to force persons who are not heterosexual in effect to lie.... If speaking identity can communicate ideas and viewpoints that dissent from majoritarian norms, then the selective silencing of certain identities has the opposite, totalitarian effect of enforcing conformity. (p. 1718-1719)

In addition to promoting heterosexism, homophobic comments heard commonly in schools reinforce heterosexism and are particularly injurious to the sense of self necessary for

proper identity development (Espelage, Aragon, & Birkett, 2008; Vicars, 2006). Because of the promotion of heterosexuality and silencing other forms of sexuality in education, LGBTQ students often experience prejudice and victimization in schools, while heterosexual students learn that the status quo of heteronormativity and homophobia is acceptable (MacGillivray, 2000).

Heteronormative environments do not affect only LGBTQ students, but all students suffer when information about any behavior other than heterosexual relationships is suppressed. Silencing information about homosexuality denies heterosexual students information and opportunity to learn about themselves as well as the LGBTQ people they will form relationships with in a diverse, democratic society (MacGillivray, 2000). “Even in school settings where children are perceived to be racially and culturally homogeneous, school leaders have a moral obligation to prepare these students to interact appropriately and effectively with people who are different than them” (Bustamante et al., 2009, p. 821).

In addition, the perpetuation of heteronormativity reinforces traditional gender roles that affect all students (Lugg, 2006; MacGillivray, 2000). MacGillivray (2000) states the following:

The fear of being perceived as gay restricts boys to making choices that will affirm what it means to be a man in our society and restricts girls to making choices that will affirm what it means to be a woman. (p. 305)

This fear limits opportunities for all students to explore various interests and talents that may not fall within ridged gender boundaries, and therefore limits the identity formation of heterosexual students as well as their LGBTQ peers.

Conformity reinforces hegemony and may limit personal growth and identity development (Berk, 1999). Maslow (1968) designated the need for safety, followed by love, belonging, and positive self-esteem, as necessary to achieve self-actualization, or the ability to reach one’s full potential. One of the educational ideals of schools in a democratic society is to help students realize their full potentials as individuals (Henze et al., 2002). However, the self-

actualization process of all students is limited when their need for peer approval and safety from bullying and harassment leads them to conformity with their peers (Berk, 1999).

The need to blend in with peers particularly affects teenagers and young adults to the point where many young people's self-worth is contingent upon the approval of others (Berk, 1999; Ormrod, 2008). Research shows peer group homogeneity and social conformity among friends in high school directly affect identity; further, inconsistency or perceptions of inconsistency result in identity change (McFarland & Pals, 2005). Because of crimes and abuse against students considered minorities of one form or another, fear of being ostracized, hated, or rejected for being different may affect all students to some degree. Students who are allowed to bully others without consequence are more likely to end up in juvenile court and be convicted of crimes later in life, and students who witness bullying waste energy worrying about fitting in to avoid bullying (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002). Witnessing the victimization of others could cause students to alter their identity in order to blend in with their peers and fit the perceived acceptable persona (Craig & Dunn, 2010) resulting in conformity (Berk, 1999). The negative consequences to LGBTQ students caused by the excessive bullying they endure (Birkett et al., 2009; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Hershberger et al., 1997; McKinley, 2010) sheds light on the need for protection for these students.

2.2 The Need for Protection

In the fall of 2010, the suicides of students of varying ages from different areas of the United States and at different levels within K-16 education drew national media attention (McKinley, 2010). These and many more suicides across the country have been blamed on bullying and harassment due to sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation. Evidence abounds of a need for social justice leadership both in policy and law development as well as in schools.

The FBI (2010) reports of national hate crime statistics show 11.4% of all hate crimes occur at schools or colleges, including 12.4% of racially motivated hate crimes, 12.9% of hate

crimes based on religion, 10.1% of hate crimes based on sexual orientation, and 8.2% of crimes based on ethnicity or national origin. Because research of LGBTQ student issues is still lacking in many mainstream publications, the majority of research concerning this minority group of students is published in special interest journals or by special interest organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN). The data and research published by these journals and organizations is compelling and therefore included in this literature review.

The *2009 National School Climate Survey Executive Summary* (GLSEN, 2009), which was a study of 7,261 LGBTQ students aged 13-21 from all 50 states found that students who identify as LGBTQ commonly endure bullying and harassment based on their sexual orientation. A similar report (GLSEN, 2005a) based on a study of 1,732 LGBTQ students ages 13-20 from all 50 states found homophobic remarks to be the most frequent biased language heard in schools. Further, the 2005 report found only 16.5% of respondents said staff frequently intervened when homophobic slurs were made. Staff members were found to intervene less for homophobic remarks than for racist or sexist remarks, and 18.6% of the respondents from the survey reported hearing homophobic remarks from school staff members themselves (GLSEN, 2005a). In addition to verbal abuse, the GLSEN (2009) report found 61.1% of LGBTQ student respondents felt unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation, and 39.9% felt unsafe specifically for their gender expression.

LGBTQ students' fears are justified. Findings from an analysis of 14 years of data from FBI reports of national hate crime statistics show that "homosexuals are by far more likely than any other minority group in the United States to be victimized by violent hate crime" (Potok, 2010, p. 29). In the 2005 GLSEN survey, 17.6% of LGBTQ student respondents experienced physical assault for sexual orientation and 11.8% reported having been assaulted due to their gender expression (GLSEN, 2005a). In the 2009 GLSEN survey, the percentages were even higher; 18.8% of the LGBTQ student respondents reported they had been physically assaulted due to sexual orientation, and 12.5% reported being physically assaulted due to their gender

expression. There was also an increase in harassment and threats via electronic media from 41.2% in 2005 (GLSEN, 2005a) to 52.9% in 2009 (GLSEN, 2009). Furthermore, the report found students who turned to school staff members for help were often denied it. Of the 37.6% of students who reported incidents of either verbal or physical harassment or assault to school staff, 33.8% reported the staff did nothing about the incidents (GLSEN, 2009).

The need for safety and security are basic requirements for optimal growth and development (Maslow, 1968) and are essential for schools and colleges to maximize student learning potential (Henze et al., 2002). There are many adverse effects to the well-being and the education of LGBTQ students in an unprotected environment. LGBTQ students report higher levels of bullying, victimization, depression, anxiety, alcohol use, and drug use than their heterosexual peers (Birkett et al., 2009), as well as an increase in suicidal thoughts and/or attempts (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Hershberger et al., 1997). Their education itself is also directly impacted by an unsafe environment. Poor academic achievement, skipping school, and low future educational aspirations including no plans to attend college are some of the deleterious outcomes bullying and harassment can have on LGBTQ students' education (GLSEN, 2005a, 2005b, 2009). Statistics and the reported episodes of bullying and harassment indicate students are not safe in schools. If they do not find safe environments while there, then the first priority of education, which is to provide a safe environment for optimal learning to take place (Henze et al., 2002), is not being afforded them.

In order to clarify that the negative impacts previously listed are not due to homosexuality itself, Rivers and Noret (2008) conducted a study of 53 students who reported being attracted to the same sex, and 53 students with similar demographics who reported being attracted to the opposite sex. The study compared the well-being of homosexual youth to heterosexual youth. They found little difference between students who are attracted to the same sex and those who are attracted to the opposite sex if bullying and marginalization are not occurring; the negative consequences the LGBTQ students are facing are not due to their

sexuality itself, but rather the victimization they face because of how others react to it. Victimization and bullying of students regardless of sexual orientation have also been shown to be directly linked to lower academic performance (Juvonen et al., 2010). Further, Hershberger and D'Augelli (1995) conducted a study of LGBTQ young adults and found that self-acceptance, including a sense of personal worth and a positive view of their sexual orientation, to be the single largest predictor of positive mental health. A positive self-image along with family support were found to be critical in insulating against some of victimization's effects on mental health; yet even with a positive self-image and family support in place, researchers found "a strong residual effect of victimization on mental health" of bullied individuals (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995, p. 72). This research suggests it is specifically the bullying and harassment LGBTQ students' face that is directly related to the negative results to their well-being and academic performance. The perceptions of homosexuality by the students and others in schools may also take a toll on LGBTQ students.

Research shows the consequences of simply not fitting in are often dire for adolescents and young adults (Berk, 1999; Craig & Dunn, 2010; Henze et al., 2002). Feeling ostracized by peers affects students' psychological, emotional, social, and academic development (Craig & Dunn, 2010). Add bullying to the scenario and the situation becomes worse. Constant teasing, bullying, and harassment may result in lower academic achievement (Juvonen et al., 2010) which could affect the future of the students subjected to it. Bullying and harassment also affect the students' mental health and self-acceptance (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). Self-acceptance and identity development for LGBTQ students in unsafe schools could be particularly detrimental.

While being bullied for any reason is harmful to students (Craig & Dunn, 2010; Juvonen et al., 2010; Rivers & Noret, 2008), a study of 251 high-school aged adolescent males by Swearer, Turner, and Givens (2008), found that being bullied specifically for being gay or perceived to be gay results in more psychological distress, more negative views of school

experiences, and a greater amount of bullying itself than results from being bullied for other reasons. Sexual identity is an important factor of self-concept that helps students transition into mentally healthy adults (Craig & Dunn, 2010), but LGBTQ students are often a part of an education system where deviation from heterosexuality is often silenced (Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Lugg, 1998, 2003), and where heteronormativity is so firmly established it goes virtually unquestioned (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Draughn, Elkins, and Roy (2002) point out, "Many LGBT students arrive on college campuses having survived high school environments steeped in homophobia and heterosexism" (p. 11). Students may bring with them negative perceptions of LGBTQ peers from their K-12 experience that carries over to the higher education environment. Since LGBTQ people often realize their sexual orientation in late high school and early college (Lopez & Chism, 1993), being in these heterosexist environments could make LGBTQ students particularly vulnerable to identity concealment beyond their years in high school.

2.3 Resources

In response to the problems faced by LGBTQ students in schools, and in a national effort to educate school leaders, the National Education Association (NEA) (n.d.) has as part of the Diversity Toolkit on their website, a section about LGBTQ issues in education as well as definitions and resources to improve school environments for LGBTQ people in schools. Also, the NEA joined with the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and 10 other education and educational related associations and religious organizations to create the Just the Facts Coalition to promote the truth about homosexual people. The Just the Facts Coalition (2008) wrote a booklet for school administrators, teachers, counselors and others containing facts about students and sexual orientation as well as the hostilities they face. The booklet was developed by "a coalition of education, health, mental health, and religious organizations, that share a concern for the health and education of all students in schools, including lesbian, gay, and bisexual students" (p. 2).

Private entities are also becoming involved in promoting positive cultural changes. An example is Rachel's Challenge (2012). This organization's mission is to "inspire, equip and empower every person to create a permanent positive culture change in their school, business and community by starting a chain reaction of kindness and compassion" (p.1). The organizers teach students and teachers to affect positive change on school campuses. Together, they work to "create a safe learning environment for all students by re-establishing civility and delivering proactive antidotes to school violence and bullying" (p.1). The training is both social and emotional and based on kindness and compassion. This particular program is not designed specifically to focus on any particular student groups, but to generate positive attitudes and relationships between and for all people, and might therefore, have a positive impact on LGBTQ students.

In addition to national organizations and private entities, some states in the U.S. are responding to the needs of LGBTQ students. Massachusetts established a Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students (SSP) in 1993 (Szalacha, 2003). The SSP initiative's goals are to enhance support and safety for sexual minority youth and inform and sensitize all members of the school community to improve the sexual diversity climate. Szalacha's (2003) research found the SSP to be effective in meeting these goals through the establishment of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), training for school personnel, and improving school policies to include sexual orientation. Massachusetts also established the Massachusetts Commission on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Youth in 2006 (Massachusetts Commission on GLBT Youth, 2010). Its purpose is to investigate and make recommendations to the government to improve the use of resources and the ability of state agencies to protect and support LGBTQ youth in schools and communities with a focus on suicide prevention and violence intervention including harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ youth (Massachusetts Commission on GLBT Youth, 2010). Another New England state, Rhode Island, developed The Rhode Island Task Force on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered

Youth in 1996, which is composed of government officials, teachers, administrators, parents, students, and others to ensure safety for all students regardless of their sexual orientation (Rhode Island Task Force on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Youth, 1996). Other states around the U.S. are also working to improve learning environments for LGBTQ youth, including the passage of policies and laws protecting LGBTQ students.

2.4 Policy and Law

Some states have adopted non-discrimination laws that protect students regardless of sexual orientation in schools (Wisconsin) and gender identity (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and Washington D.C.) (GLSEN, 2012). Some of these states, as well as a few others, have passed laws that prohibit bullying and harassment in schools specifically based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington) (GLSEN, 2012). Enacting these specific policies and laws against discrimination, bullying, and harassment based on sexual orientation is one of the most effective methods of improving school climates and making schools safer (GLSEN, 2012).

One attempt in Texas to address school safety through legal/policy changes is Texas House Bill 2343, known as “Asher’s Law” passed in March, 2011 (Coleman, 2011), which requires schools to develop suicide prevention programs and makes changes to the Texas Education Code regarding discrimination, harassment, bullying, and retaliation for reporting such abuses. Schools are also required to report instances of bullying annually to the TEA, and the transfer of bullies out of classes or even to other campuses will be possible. The law addresses “a certain sexual orientation” as an area vulnerable to pervasive bullying, but it does not say what that certain sexual orientation is (Coleman, n.d.). The large, urban school districts in Texas (e.g., Houston ISD, Dallas ISD, Fort Worth ISD, and Austin ISD), however, have taken more stringent measures that go beyond the current state law and include sexual orientation or

even gender identity in their anti-discrimination policies (Austin ISD, 2012; Ayala, 2011; Dallas ISD, 2012; Fort Worth ISD, 2012; Houston ISD, 2012).

Regardless of state law or sexual orientation, students' right to openly be themselves is protected by the First Amendment Free Speech Clause and Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution (Biegel, 2010). Court cases against schools and universities where violations of First Amendment and/or Fourteenth Amendment protections are cited often find in favor of students, particularly if the student was treated differently than other students by the district or university employees for being openly different (Biegel, 2010). If schools are to be optimal places of learning and development, they must be non-threatening environments (Henze et al., 2002), and improvements in laws and policies may bring about positive outcomes.

While policies and laws are important steps in protecting students from bullying and harassment and an attempt to create change for students currently in schools, immediate change is necessary on school campuses. Unfortunately, even with laws and policies enacted to protect LGBTQ students, the enforcement of heteronormative values permeates the field of education as well as everyday life for most Americans (Lugg & Tooms, 2010). As Lugg and Tooms point out, none of the 14 states that had statutes against sodomy have revoked the statutes even with their very invalidation due to the Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), nor have they revised public school codes or licensing requirements to be compatible with that decision. The scholars further point out that even though student-initiated Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA's) are legally protected under the federal Equal Access Act of 1984, they can be barred by administrators concerned with "promoting immorality and illegal behavior" (p. 82). For example, since Texas still has the anti-sodomy statute in the law books, educators can fall back on this legal technicality as an excuse not to allow GSAs in their schools. Further, most states do not allow full civil rights for LGBTQ citizens including marriage (Lugg & Tooms, 2010). Laws and policies keeping LGBTQ people as less than full citizens

reinforce the power of heteronormative values in these areas of the U.S., thus perpetuating the difficulties for LGBTQ students.

2.5 Social Justice

Disparities in educational outcomes and opportunities for students who differ by race, socio-economic group, ethnicity, primary language, sexual orientation, and other marginalizing factors point to unjust schools (Furman, 2012) that may be deemed oppressive (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Oppression is defined by Kumashiro (2000) as “a situation or dynamic in which certain ways of being (e.g., having certain identities) are privileged in society while others are marginalized” (p. 25). The achievement gaps caused by this marginalization indicate a societal problem and are viewed by scholars as “unacceptable” (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). Freire (1990) suggests educators and school leaders should accept as their duty the task of ending such oppression. Social justice is defined as the ending of oppression that is often veiled in the form of inequities and marginalization of those who exhibit some form of “otherness” (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 19). Recognizing the inequities and marginalization of others and working toward the end of such oppression is a conscious effort (Bogotch, 2000; Brown, 2006; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). “Social justice, just like education, is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power” (Bogotch, 2000, p. 2). Working toward this type of intervention is the goal of social justice leaders (Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

2.6 Social Justice Leadership

Social justice leadership “investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce social inequities” (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 17). Dantley and Tillman link social justice leadership with moral transformative leadership. They further “leadership for social justice, moral transformative leadership, and social justice praxis link the principles of democracy and equity in proactive ways” (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 20). They point out that social justice leadership becomes “a vibrant part of the everyday work of school leaders” (p. 20).

Researchers have turned to social justice leadership to understand K-12 principals who seek to end social injustices in schools.

Research shows principals who lead with a social justice leadership framework seek out marginalized groups in schools where the status quo may have been maintained at the expense of these students (Brown, 2006). Social justice principals view their schools through a social justice lens questioning the assumptions behind school policies and traditional school practices (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005) to bring about justice for all students. This type of leadership critically assesses the use and abuse of power, discovers how leadership practices allow and encourage the perpetuation of inequities, and actively seeks to transform these injustices into equality for all students (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Marshall and Oliva (2006) describe social justice principals as activists with plans and strategies to make schools equitable. In addition, by leading for social justice, school leaders not only notice marginalizing conditions themselves, but they can also prepare students to become critical citizens who take issue with marginalizing conditions (McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007), thus lessening discrimination and providing justice and equity for all students.

The research of scholars of social justice leadership shows leaders for social justice in schools tend to exhibit similar characteristics in their leadership style. The literature describes social justice leaders as having characteristics such as being open-minded and willing to explore their own views, experiences, and values (Brown, 2004), being self-reflective, willing to take risks, willing to learn, possessing a strong belief that social justice is necessary to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, and consciously working to promote equity and justice (Marshall & Young, 2006). Social justice leaders also have “a reflective consciousness centered on social justice and a broader knowledge and skill base” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 250). They build networks of support in the larger community and purposefully lead for equality for all (Theoharis, 2007). Social justice leaders network with others to work to rectify injustices, value human rights and individual dignity, and provide on-going professional development for every staff member

around issues of class, race, language, ability, and sexual orientation (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). They have an attitude of advocacy, care, and concern for individuals and work politically on behalf of minority groups in their schools (Dillard, 1995). Social justice leaders are visionaries who promote their vision to stakeholders, train faculty to recognize marginalization in every aspect of school, and allow teachers to learn from each other and cultivate an atmosphere of education for social justice (Kose, 2009). Additionally, social justice leaders institute changes at their schools to make the schools more inclusive with the goal of each student reaching his or her highest potential while helping teachers recognize how their own assumptions can create barriers for students (Shields, 2010). These characteristics of social justice leaders enable them to both recognize marginalization as well as work to eradicate oppression in schools. Based on studies of social justice leaders, social justice leadership theory has been generated to explain and understand these leaders (Theoharis, 2004, 2007). See Table 2.1 for the attributes of social justice leaders.

Table 2.1 Attributes of Social Justice Leaders

Author(s)/Year	Attributes of Social Justice Leaders
Brown, 2006	Are open-minded Are willing to explore their own views, experiences, and values
Marshall & Young, 2006	Are self-reflective Are willing to take risks Are willing to learn Have a strong belief that social justice is necessary to ensure a better quality of life for everyone Consciously work to promote equity and justice
Theoharis, 2007	Have “a reflective consciousness centered on social justice and a broader knowledge and skill base” (p. 250) Build networks of support in the larger community Purposefully lead for equality for all
Karpinski & Lugg, 2006	Network with others to work to rectify injustices Value human rights and individual dignity Provide on-going professional development for every staff member around issues of class, race, ability, language, and sexual orientation
Dillard, 1995	Have an attitude of advocacy, care, and concern for individuals Work politically on behalf of minority groups in their schools
Kose, 2009	Are visionaries Promote their vision to stakeholders Train faculty to recognize marginalization in every aspect of school Allow teachers to learn from each other and cultivate an atmosphere of education for social justice
Shields, 2010	Institute changes at their schools to make them more inclusive with the goal of each student reaching their highest potential Help teachers recognize how their own assumptions can create barriers

2.7 Social Justice Leadership Theory

Dantley and Tillman (2006) describe social justice theorists and activists as those who “focus their inquiry on how institutionalized theories, norms, and practices in schools and society lead to social, political, economic, and educational inequities” (p. 17). Social justice leadership theory focuses on those who are able to recognize and investigate issues that cause or perpetuate social inequities or oppression and the proposal of solutions to eliminate these inequities (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Social justice leadership theory as relating to campus leadership in schools is defined by Theoharis (2004) as the research of “principals who

advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing factors in the U.S.” (p. 8).

2.7.1 Theoharis' Social Justice Leadership Theory

Theoharis conducted qualitative research (2004, 2007, 2009) that focused specifically on seven principals who were leaders for social justice to develop a theory of social justice leadership in education. According to Theoharis, simply good leadership in schools is different than social justice leadership. Social justice leadership goes beyond good leadership (Theoharis, 2007, 2009). He cautions “us all to consider that decades of good leadership have created and sanctioned unjust and inequitable schools” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 253). Through his research, he outlined 10 qualities that embody principals who are social justice leaders that distinguish social justice leaders from good leaders and modified these to 12 characteristics of social justice leaders in his book in 2009.

Theoharis (2009) described social justice leaders as those who value diversity, learn about and understand the diverse student groups and extend cultural respect to members of those groups. These leaders eliminate segregation and pull-out programs for marginalized students, strengthen the core curriculum and make it inclusive for all students, and provide collaborative professional development with thought to race, class, gender, and disability. They also work to provide struggling students the same academic and social opportunities as more privileged students may have. Social justice leaders demand success from every child and work collaboratively to this end by building coalitions with all stakeholders. They seek out like-minded school leaders for support and view data with an equality lens. Social justice leaders know that building a sense of community in schools while allowing for differentiation ensures cohesive success. They also promote inclusion and access to improved curriculum and teaching in a way that instills a sense of belonging for students. Finally, he describes social justice leaders as “becoming intertwined the school’s success and life” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). See Table 2.2 for Theoharis’ characteristics of social justice leaders.

Table 2.2 Differences in a Good Leader and a Social Justice Leader*

Good Leader	Social Justice Leader
Works with subpublics [sic] to connect with community	Places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity
Speaks of success for all children	Ends segregated and pull-out programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized children
Supports variety of programs for diverse learners	Strengthens core teaching and curriculum and insures that diverse students have access to that core
Facilitates professional development in best practice	Embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability
Builds collective vision of a great school	Knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich academic, extracurricular, and social opportunities as those enjoyed by their more privileged peers
Empowers staff and works collaboratively	Demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success
Networks and builds alliances with key stakeholders	Builds and leads coalitions by bringing together various groups of people to further agenda (families, community organizations, staff, students) and seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her/him
Acts as a positive ambassador for the school	Builds a climate in which families, staff, and students belong and feel welcome
Uses data to understand realities of the school	Sees all data through a lens of equity
Understands that children have individual needs	Knows that building community, collaboration, and differentiation are tools for ensuring that all students achieve success together
Engages in school improvement with a variety of stakeholders	Combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging
Works long and hard to make a great school	Beyond working hard, becomes intertwined with the school's success and life

Note: Copied with permission from author. (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160)

2.7.2 Theoharis' Model of Resistance

In addition to characteristics of social justice leaders in schools, Theoharis (2007) added to social justice leadership theory by including the types of resistance these leaders face. Theoharis found principals in urban areas who embody the characteristics of a social justice leader showed success through a “three-pronged framework of resistance” (p. 248). The principals (a) resisted inequality and marginalization of students in schools, (b) faced resistance from others both within the school as well as outside its walls, and (c) developed resistance themselves to continue their social justice goals regardless of the resistance of others. Theoharis found resistance to be a common theme among principals leading with a social justice leadership framework.

Theoharis' study, however, was not all-inclusive of all types of marginalized groups or all demographic or geographic areas. His study did not investigate principals in rural settings, nor did the participants in his study include social justice leadership for LGBTQ students specifically. Continuing research in social justice leadership in different communities and for different marginalized groups might add to or modify social justice theory and enable current and future principals to become better equipped to lead for social justice which might cause more immediate equity in schools for students who are marginalized. Such leadership could have a critical influence on the climate of the school and on the outcomes for LGBTQ students.

2.8 Socially Just School Climates

Research shows school climate plays a key role in acceptance of differences at educational institutions and in lessening the threats associated with being different (Birkett et al., 2009). Socially just school climates are beneficial to all students. Research shows a positive school climate without homophobic teasing results in a learning environment with lower levels of drug and alcohol use, depression, suicide, and truancy (Birkett et al., 2009). Schools with positive school climates with acceptance of diverse student groups prepare students for the reality of a diverse, global society in which they will live and work (Hurtado et al., 2002; Mayhew

et al., 2005). Additionally, a positive school climate that values diversity results in students who are optimistic, academically successful with a sense of positive well-being (Ruus et al., 2007), have improved feelings of belonging and social trust (Flanagan & Stout, 2010), and generally do well on standardized tests (MacNeil et al., 2009). Building a positive school climate can be challenging because principals may harbor their own biases or be ignorant of both the harmful effects of inaction to establish a positive school climate and the benefits to all their students if a positive climate was created (Bustamante et al., 2009; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Lugg, 2006; Tooms & Alston, 2006).

2.9 Social Justice Leadership and Principals

School leadership toward positive school climates could be a more immediate answer to protection of students on school campuses than protective laws and policies which may or may not be followed. Principals have a large influence on creating nonviolent and accepting school climates for the schools they serve (Brown, 2006; Kose, 2009; Szalacha, 2003), potentially resulting in a more positive, socially just school climate for all students. The leadership of the principal has been found to be the most important variable in a school's reform towards a safe environment (Astor et al., 2009), which is crucial for optimal growth and development (Maslow, 1968) and for maximum learning potential for students (Henze et al., 2002).

Principals who are interested in promoting a welcoming climate of acceptance and leadership for social justice lead their schools toward this end through analyzing their own identities and commitment to diversity and by using professional development opportunities to teach this vision to their teachers and schools (Kose, 2009). The Massachusetts' Safe Schools Program has shown that allowing clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools, providing training for school staff about bullying and intervention, and providing accurate information to students about LGBTQ people through an inclusive curriculum are methods that provide a safer, more accepting environment for all students (Szalacha, 2003). Implementation

of such measures relies on the leadership of individual campuses and principals who are leaders for social justice. The principal sets the tone for what is acceptable behavior by establishing and enforcing school policies (Szalacha, 2003), by connecting with the teachers, and by leading their schools toward a positive school climate (Moolenaar et al., 2010), yet their own beliefs and values may influence their leadership (Lugg, 2006).

Historically, school leaders have often been promoters of social and the political status quo (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006) including promoting heteronormativity (Lugg, 2006). Even with the tremendous benefits of a positive school climate free from discrimination (Birkett et al., 2009; Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2002; MacNeil et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2005; Ruus et al., 2007), research has shown instances where principals are apathetic toward developing positive school climates and some even harbor negative bias toward inclusive practices and policies (Bustamante et al., 2009), particularly regarding LGBTQ students (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Lugg, 2006; Tooms & Alston, 2006). For example, a study of 174 aspiring school administrators found 30% to be intolerant and non-supportive of the LGBTQ community; additionally, 25% were not supportive of equity for LGBTQ people, and 35% were found to be neutral concerning equity based on sexual orientation (Tooms & Alston, 2006).

Laws have been passed to protect students against such biased behavior by state employees, so regardless of possible personal biases or perceptions, principals as state and district employees are required to educate all students in a safe learning environment and treat them all fairly and justly (Biegel, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Henze et al., 2002; Lugg & Tabbaa-Rida, 2006). Principals must maintain separation of church and state while performing their duties as representatives of the state, and therefore their own religious beliefs cannot be expressed while at work (Gey, 2000). Even with laws in place, intolerance of any marginalized group or lack of effort to promote equity for all students would certainly affect the ability of principals to develop a socially just school climate at their schools.

The neutrality and intolerance of some school administrators speaks heavily of the need for education regarding sexual orientation and social justice leadership for future educational leaders. Many school leaders lack knowledge regarding diversity, do not see developing cultural competency as necessary, or have negative views toward issues of diversity and equity (Bustamante et al., 2009; Tooms & Alston, 2006). Educational leadership certification and degree programs are at the crux of the matter in preparing school leaders for social justice (Tooms & Alston, 2006). Traditional educational leadership training “reflects a culture that has marginalized issues and concerns of social justice” and the “policy, leadership training, licensure, and selection processes for school leaders often provide only token, isolated stabs at inequities or see them as management challenges” (Marshall, 2004, p. 4). Scholars are pushing for improvement or the addition of social justice leadership education in educational leadership programs (Bogotch, 2011; Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Furman, 2012; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Marshall, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2006; Tooms & Alston, 2006).

Research of social justice leadership has found educating school leaders with a social justice lens helps them to realize the promotion of marginalization often caused by the status quo (Cambron-McCabe, 2006). When perspective school leaders explore their own mindsets, views, and values while being engaged in assignments requiring them to examine the values and beliefs of others, they can become better able to work with others toward social change through transformative learning processes (Brown, 2005). Educating school leaders about social justice improves awareness of biases and prejudices in their schools in order to improve or eradicate such discrimination (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). By providing strategies for future educational leaders that focus on empathy toward LGBTQ people and promote an understanding of the heterosexist school culture, educational leadership programs will help school leaders build a social conscience to empower them to create a positive school climate promoting tolerance and understanding in their own schools (Tooms & Alston, 2006). “One of

the goals of a social justice approach is that by ‘schooling’ future educational administrators in theories of social justice, these future leaders will be more aware of and work to ameliorate and/or eradicate these injustices” (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006, p. 280).

Even with education in place to open the minds of educational leaders toward social justice, building a strong foundation of social conscience and establishing determination to eradicate injustice among school administrators can be a challenge. Addressing issues of sexual orientation in schools can be risky and politically sensitive (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Rienzo, Button, Sheu, & Li, 2006). This is particularly true in conservative areas of the country. Lugg (2003) states, “Two of the most prickly political issues involving U.S. public education have been gender and sexual orientation” (p. 96). Karpinski and Lugg (2006) warn that as at-will hires, school administrators who advocate for social justice “may exact professional and personal tolls” (p. 288). School administrators should be trained to deal with homophobia and the negative social and educational consequences that accompany it in a positive manner (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001). Additionally, school administrators may have other pressures causing them to neglect social justice in their schools. Accountability pressures from state standardized testing may cause many principals to be tempted to focus on managerial issues rather than issues of social justice (Bustamante et al., 2009; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006) putting both the rights of LGBTQ students and their well-being low on the list of priorities. With so much research pointing to the negative effects of both heteronormative practices in schools as well as bullying of LGBTQ students (e.g., Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Espelage et al., 2008; Ferfolja, 2007; Rivers & Noret, 2008; Swearer et al., 2008; Vicars, 2006), ignoring or putting aside these issues will continue to result in negative outcomes for all students.

2.10 Social Justice Leadership and Community Influence

Through the development of a socially just school climate, social justice leadership benefits all students in a variety of ways. Some of these include reducing threats (Birkett et al., 2009), improving trust and belonging (Flanagan & Stout, 2010), preparing students for a diverse

world (Hurtado et al., 2002; Mayhew et al., 2005), enhancing optimism (Ruus et al., 2007), and improving educational outcomes (MacNeil et al., 2009). Yet bullying and hate crimes are still prevalent (FBI, 2010; McKinley, 2010). Research shows principals who are social justice-driven often meet resistance to social justice leadership practices within the school, district, community, and beyond (Theoharis, 2007). The context of the schools, specifically the communities, may play a role in the principals' development of a socially just school climate.

Multiple factors affect how different communities view and react towards LGBTQ students. Research shows some areas of the U.S. to be less tolerant of certain subpopulations than others. Specifically, schools that are in Southern or Midwestern regions of the U. S., in rural areas with high poverty rates, and in areas with few college-educated residents have been found to be less safe for LGBTQ students than schools in other regions of the country, in urban settings, in affluent areas, and in areas with higher percentages of college educated adults (Kosciw et al., 2009). Other school district-level characteristics, such as school size, student-teacher ratio, and student-support personnel ratios, were not found to be significant regarding victimization of LGBTQ students (Kosciw et al., 2009). Additionally conservative values associated with religious ideology tend to result in homophobia (Rosik et al., 2007) with conservative protestant forms of Christianity having the highest levels of homophobia (Finlay & Walther, 2003). Parents with conservative values often oppose the inclusion of sexual orientation in school policies (MacGillivray, 2004) regardless of constitutional protection. Some conservative Christian parents feel schools that institute policies protecting students from discrimination based on sexual orientation serve to legitimize and promote homosexuality (MacGillivray, 2008). Further, some of these parents claim these policies violate their First Amendment rights as parents and therefore position themselves as the victims of discrimination (MacGillivray, 2008). Lugg (1998) states:

Because homosexuality is portrayed as a threat to Western civilization, to Christian salvation and, in particular, to school children, any policy or program that can be

perceived as being remotely progay [sic] is quickly denounced as part of an overarching conspiracy by gay activists to recruit children. (p. 279)

Because of these beliefs, some residents of some communities may be especially resistant to social justice leadership, particularly regarding equity and justice for LGBTQ students. This resistance could be perpetuated by the selection of school leaders by local school boards.

In their discussion of how a school leader “fits” the principal position in a certain school or community and is therefore hired for that position over another, Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch (2010), point out that the “fit” depends on how well the leader matches the values of those who do the hiring, therefore perpetuating the hegemony of traditional school leadership in that community. This could explain why school leaders have historically been promoters of social and political status quo (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006) and the promotion of heteronormativity (Lugg, 2006) particularly in rural, Southern areas of the U.S. with high poverty rates, few college educated residents (Kosciw et al., 2009) and conservative, protestant forms of Christianity (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Rosik et al., 2007). Because principals are hired based on how they “fit” with the community and the position offered, “one group can decide and perpetuate whichever values (and therefore reality) they choose under the guise of crafting who best ‘fits’ as a leader” (Tooms et al., 2010, p. 121). Therefore, the community’s influence and resistance to social justice leadership might be deeply rooted.

2.11 Relevance of This Study

The literature is almost silent concerning leadership in schools specifically aimed at developing equity for LGBTQ students. Theoharis (2004, 2007) conducted an in-depth study of principals as social justice leaders and the resistance they face. He included sexual orientation in his definition of social justice leadership theory, as well as in his abstract and conclusion, but Theoharis did not contribute evidence in this regard. This study will specifically include how social justice principals lead for equality regarding sexual orientation and use Theoharis’ social justice leadership theory as a model.

Theoharis (2007) recommended a replication of his study in rural areas as well as in suburban areas of the country for future research because the literature is lacking in those areas. He also calls for more research of principals who are social justice leaders and the strategies they use to cope with resistance and to advance social justice in their schools. A regional study of social justice leadership similar to Theoharis' study in an area of the United States that meets the demographics found in the literature of areas specifically where resistance may be high to social justice for LGBTQ people is also lacking in the literature. This study adds relevant data to current literature of how principals view and support LGBTQ students through the establishing of socially just school climates in rural communities with the possibility of high resistance to such leadership. This study also examines the role of the communities in influencing the principals' leadership for social justice.

2.12 Summary

This review of the literature examined heteronormativity in schools and the need for protection for LGBTQ students to support individual identity development of all students. The effects of policy and law were examined, followed by a discussion of social justice, social justice leadership, and social justice leadership theory. The importance and influence of socially just school climates were discussed as well as the influence principals have on the climates of the schools, their own resistance to social justice leadership, and ways educational leadership preparation programs may improve social justice leadership. The community influence on social justice leadership was then discussed followed by the relevance of this study to the current body of literature. Chapter 3 will explain the methods for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

To explore how social justice principals perceive diverse student groups, specifically LGBTQ students, how/if/why they create socially just school climates to support these students, and how/if the community influences the principals' leadership for social justice, I used qualitative methodology. I looked to Theoharis' (2004, 2007) research as a theoretical foundation to continue the research he started to find how principals lead for social justice and the types of resistance they face. This methods chapter will include a description of the design for this study, the positioning of the researcher, the procedures, the instrumentation, ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of this study.

3.1 Design

To explore how social justice-driven principals perceive student diversity, specifically LGBTQ students, and how the context of the schools, specifically the communities, may affect their perceptions and implementation of the climate they are working to establish, the participants needed to be allowed to express their own perceptions, views, experiences, and thoughts. This study required the perspectives, descriptions, and explanations from the principals rather than the assumptions of the researcher; therefore, qualitative data collection was appropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on the context of the situation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and is used when a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" is needed (Creswell, 2007, p. 40), as was the case in this study. As mentioned in the limitations section of the study, I must position myself as the researcher and disclose my personal relationship to this study in order to make this study more trustworthy (Creswell, 2007).

3.2 Positioning the Researcher

Since I am a lesbian who lives and teaches in Texas and who was raised a religiously conservative household, I feel I might have an advantage of many who otherwise might conduct such a study. I can understand multiple viewpoints in the clash of values between those with conservative religious values and LGBTQ people seeking a state of non-discrimination. I once was very homophobic myself. I was raised to believe homosexuality is wrong, and those who participate in such activities choose to do so at their own peril. I knew people who we suspected were gay or lesbian, but was torn between believing they either chose that lifestyle or that homosexuality was their temptation in life (we all have different things that tempt us after all), and it was up to them to overcome it or they would “burn in hell’s eternal flame”. I lived in a rural community most of my life where this was the accepted dogma, and anything else was looked on as either liberal or sinful (the two were synonymous in my family and community).

As I got older, I came to realize the reason I was not finding the good, Christian man I had been praying for since my late teens, was because I kept falling for women instead. I made my way through the coming-out process, that is, the process of realizing I was gay and then sharing it with my friends and family, some of whom have tried to disown me. I came to realize how my identity had been stifled by the way I was raised and the way my beliefs were shaped. Being a lesbian simply was not an option in my family or at my school. Even as an adult and a teacher in rural east Texas, I felt I had to hide my sexuality from not only my students, but also from most of my colleagues to keep my job. As I began to see a few brave LGBTQ students in the hallways as the years went by, I wanted to somehow make the road easier for them particularly in school. I now work in an urban school district where being out does not bring with it the consequences it might in other districts. I wondered though, how those LGBTQ students in less tolerant districts are treated. I wondered if they are ever exposed to positive LGBTQ role models. I wondered if they are ever truly accepted in their communities and schools.

I felt an urgent need to make it easier for future generations of LGBTQ people in similar situations as mine. Hearing of recent suicides of LGBTQ students and the bullying LGBTQ students so often endure broke my heart. Being an educator, I knew the way to correct this atrocity was through education. I wondered if the need for education in this regard applied only to students, or did educators and administrators need to be educated about LGBTQ students as well.

I believe all students should have the right to openly and safely explore and develop their own identities, yet some students are not allowed to explore the shaping of their sexual identities. Heteronormativity abounds in schools, and students who do not fit this identity category (i.e., LGBTQ students) are silenced by policy, curriculum, and school personnel (Lugg, 2003, 2006). As an educator for 15 years and as a doctoral student in educational leadership, I recognize that school leaders, namely principals, have a great influence on how schools interpret and influence policy and how teachers determine what should be taught and practiced (Henze et al., 2002). Knowing this makes me wonder how principals view their role in creating a school free for all to develop their identities in the context of their own experiences and communities. Having grown up in rural communities and having spent several years in east Texas and with family from that region of the state, I wonder how principals are influenced by their communities in leading for social justice for LGBTQ students, or if they even feel compelled or able to do so.

3.3 Procedures

3.3.1 Setting

To gather data from principals serving in areas where the community may be resistant to social justice leadership for LGBTQ students, I turned to the literature to determine demographics where such resistance is most likely found. Research shows LGBTQ students in certain areas of the United States are particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment. Schools that are in Southern or Midwestern regions of the U.S., and in rural areas with high

poverty rates and few college-educated residents are less safe for LGBTQ students than schools in other regions of the country, in urban settings, in affluent areas, and in areas with higher percentages of college educated adults (Kosciw et al., 2009). Additionally, research shows conservative values associated with religious ideology tend to result in more resistance (Rosik et al., 2007) with conservative protestant forms of Christianity having the highest levels of resistance (Finlay & Walther, 2003). Other school district-level characteristics, such as school size, student-teacher ratio, and student-support personnel ratios, were not found to be significant regarding victimization of LGBTQ. (Kosciw et al., 2009). The regional characteristics found in the literature of areas that tend to show resistance to social justice for LGBTQ people align with the characteristics of east Texas.

The TEA divides Texas into 20 regions. Region 7 includes the school districts and counties in central east Texas (TEA, 2011a). There are 17 counties and 97 school districts listed as being in Region 7 (Region 7 Education Service Center, 2011). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (n.d.a), of the school districts listed in Region 7, 79 (81%) are considered rural, 13 were considered to be in a town, two were considered to be in suburbs, and three were considered to be in cities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) 2010 census report, 13 of the 17 counties have fewer people per square mile than the number of people per square mile in Texas as a whole and the U.S. as a whole. Additionally, all the counties in Region 7 have a lower percentage of people aged 25 or older who have a bachelor's degree or higher compared with both Texas as a whole and the U.S. as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Compared to the statistics from the state of Texas, the percentage of those over age 25 with bachelor's degrees in the counties in Region 7 ranges from 1.8% fewer people to 14.3% fewer (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). All but one county have higher poverty levels than the U.S. as a whole, and seven have higher poverty levels than Texas as a whole. The median income for every county in this region is less than the median income for the state of Texas and for the U.S. as a whole. The average median income for the counties in

Region 7 ranges from \$1,830 to \$18,786 less than the average median income for the state of Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Finally, Texas has a higher percentage (34% in Texas, 26% in the U.S.) of evangelical protestant Christians than the U.S. as a whole (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010) and is ranked number 11 in the U.S. based on people per 1000 who adhere to evangelical Christian denominations (Association of Religion Data Archives, n.d.). Therefore, based on the data, east Texas, particularly Region 7, has a large percentage of schools in rural areas with adults who are less educated than the state and national average, with adults who earn less than the state and national average, where the poverty level is greater than the state and/or national average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and where the percentage of those who adhere to conservative religious beliefs is higher than the national average (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010). In order to investigate how the context of the schools, specifically the communities, may affect the principals' perceptions and implementation of a socially just school climate, I selected the rural schools in Region 7 of east Texas as the setting for my study.

3.3.2 Participant Screen Survey

After securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Texas at Arlington on January 12, 2012, I used TEA's (2008) Ask TED webpage to find email addresses for the principals in the 79 rural school districts in Region 7 of east Texas. Three of the independent school districts in Region 7 were found to not have high schools. These three were eliminated from this study. Fifteen of the school districts listed on TEA's website did not have principal information or email addresses for their high school principals. I searched the websites of the schools whose principals were not listed on TEA's website and found 13 more email addresses. The 74 principals who had email addresses listed on TEA's website or their schools' websites were emailed a survey on January 15, 2012 that served as a participant screen (see Appendix A). In the first round of emails, the participant screens went to the 74 principals identified through TEA. I received seven responses, and seven others were returned as

undeliverable. School district websites were searched for correct email address for the seven undeliverable email addresses. Two new email addresses were found, but five of the email addresses matched the email addresses listed on the schools' websites. A participant screen survey was immediately emailed to the new addresses and resent to the five that were listed as being correct. Two more principals responded to the survey for a total of seven principal responses for the first round of surveys. Five were returned as undeliverable.

After one week passed, a second round of email participant screen surveys was sent to the email addresses of the principals who had not responded, yet had been successfully sent in the first round ($N = 62$). Nine more principals responded for a total of 18 responses by principals, which is a 26% response rate.

3.3.3 Selection of Interview Participants

In his study of social justice leaders in schools, Theoharis (2004) sought principals that met the following four criteria for further data collection: the principals must have (a) worked in public schools, (b) believed fostering social justice was the main reason they entered the profession, (c) worked to keep issues of injustice and marginalization of groups of students at the forefront of their practice and vision, and (d) had evidence to show their school was more socially just due to their leadership. I used Theoharis' (2007) criterion to determine which principals were social justice leaders to find participants for the interviews. Additionally, the final criterion used for this study but not used by Theoharis was: the principals must have (e) included LGBTQ students in their description of diversity at their schools.

Theoharis chose public schools to have the greatest effect on marginalized children. "Since most children from marginalized groups attend public school, our deep thinking about improving the lives of children and schools must impact and be centered in public schools to make real change" (Theoharis, 2004, p. 63). All principals in both Theoharis' (2004, 2007) study and this study were public school principals. Differing from Theoharis' study, I only included high school principals in my study, whereas he included principals at all grade levels. I chose to

focus on high school principals because students usually realize their sexual orientation in high school or college (Lopez & Chism, 1993). Principals of students who are younger would be less likely to be able to answer the research questions.

The second criterion, the principals believed fostering social justice was the main reason they entered the profession, was one of the crucial elements of Theoharis' (2004) work. He found this group had not been specifically studied, yet had a major impact on the lives of marginalized children. The principals in Theoharis' (2004) study were from major metropolitan areas who became social justice leaders to bring equality to the students in their schools. Theoharis (2004) recommended a replication of his study in rural areas (p. 311), which is where my study was conducted.

One of the differences I found between his data and mine was that for my study, none of the principals who participated in the survey or the interviews entered the profession specifically for the reason of being social justice leaders. Many did, however, include language during their interviews that led me to believe they felt social justice was an important part of their job and were self-described leaders for social justice. Examples of such language include one principal stating he wanted "everybody to have a fair opportunity to get an education" and leading for equality. Another said she had always "been for the underdog and the kids that aren't understood." Another reiterated over and over that he viewed every student with love and respect and treated them as if they were his own children, regardless of any differences. Additionally, all of the principals led for social justice on their campuses by working to end racial discrimination, to encourage tolerance and inclusion of all types of students regardless of race, gender, nation of origin, or ability level.

The third criterion was the principals worked to keep issues of injustice and marginalization of groups of students at the forefront of their practice and vision. This criterion was met by the principals I interviewed. Theoharis (2004) specified the issues of "race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and/or other historically marginalizing factors" (p. 63) in his

third criterion, yet in his study, none of the principals specifically addressed sexual orientation as an area they had dealt with as principal. Their main focus was racism and inclusive education for all students, including those with special needs. Since my study focuses on LGBTQ students, I added the fifth criterion, which was that the principals included LGBTQ students in their description of diversity at their schools on the survey. This was crucial for my study in order to answer the research questions.

His fourth criterion, as well as mine, was the principals had evidence to show their school was more socially just due to their leadership. Theoharis (2004) looked at their student achievement, particularly for students of color, those with disabilities or special needs, low-income students, and students whose primary language was not English. He also included the school climate, community and school norms that were fostered by the principals. For my study, I investigated the school climate primarily, as well as the influence of the community. I researched the school documents and policies looking for inclusive language to indicate an open and welcoming climate for all students, including LGBTQ students.

Also imperative for my study, the principals had to be willing to be interviewed. While Theoharis (2004) used purposeful and snowball sampling methods to find his seven principals who were social justice leaders, I relied on participant screen surveys to find principals in rural schools who met my criteria. This led to some difficulty because some principals who best met the criteria were not willing to be interviewed. The goal of the survey was to target five to 10 principals for interviews fit into Creswell's (2007) suggestion where he cites Polkinghorne (1989) as recommending five to 25 participants and Dukes (1984) as recommending three to 10 subjects. Of those who were selected for interviews ($N = 5$) and who participated, only one ranked social justice leadership as one of the top three reasons for becoming a principal. Two of the principals did not become principals for reasons of social justice at all. However, all of the principals interviewed indicated they believed social justice was important and indicated there had been improvements at their school regarding climate, bullying, safety, and/or acceptance of

diverse student populations since they became principal. All the principals who were interviewed included LGBTQ students as part of their student body.

3.3.4 Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions were semi-structured in order for the principals to answer all the research questions, and additional time was allowed for the principals to share their own lived experiences, goals, successes and possible road-blocks in establishing a socially just school climate for all students while still maintaining a focus on the research questions. Before the interviews, I developed an open-ended semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2007) that was approved by one of my committee members, my dissertation chair, and the IRB of the University of Texas at Arlington (see Appendix B). The core of the interviews lasted approximately 30-35 minutes, not including introductions and small talk after the interview. The total length for the interviews was approximately 40-50 minutes. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder.

Five principals were selected based on the criteria and their willingness to participate in the interviews. I emailed each principal a copy of the Informed Consent document stamped and approved by the University of Texas at Arlington. We made arrangements for a time and place convenient for each principal for the interviews to take place. Three of the principals wanted to meet in their offices during school hours. Two principals told me they found it difficult to fit me into their schedules at a set time and were afraid I would make the drive just as they had to cancel the meeting. I asked these two to conduct the meeting using technology (i.e. Skype) so I could see their body language and expressions, but neither had access to the technology or felt it would work reliably. They said they could do the interviews over the telephone. Rather than lose the possibility of the interviews altogether, I agreed to this method. Telephone interviews “provide the best source of information when the researcher does not have direct access to individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 133), but the drawback was not being able to see the “informal

communication” (p. 133) or body language. The telephone interviews were my first and last interviews.

I mailed a copy of the approved Informed Consent document with a stamped, self-addressed envelope and waited until the signed forms were returned before conducting the two interviews via the telephone. I found these two interviews to be a little more difficult than the face-to-face interviews as Creswell (2007) suggested. The inability to read facial expressions and body language made the comfort level more of a challenge for me. I felt more nervous about asking the probing questions, especially about the LGBTQ students, because I had no idea what the reaction would be. Being able to have a face-to-face introduction where one can observe the other person’s reactions made conversation easier. The other problem, not noted by Creswell, was a technology issue. I held the digital recorder next to the phone to record the first interview, and it made a constant humming sound on the recording. I did not realize the phone was causing interference with the recorder until after the interview when I began the transcription. The persistent hum made listening to the recording for the transcription process difficult. For the second telephone interview, I put the phone on speaker and placed the recorder a little further away from the phone; this eliminated the distracting humming.

After the interview with the first principal, I realized I needed to probe deeper with the remaining principals to get thicker, richer data (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2010). I had used the research protocol, but felt I was a little too structured with the interview. When I was listening to the interview and transcribing it, I made note of the questions where I should have probed deeper for more data. For example, when I asked the principal if he perceived that any type of students at his school were marginalized, he simply replied, “No.” In the remaining interviews, I referred back to the survey results and followed that question up with, “On the survey, you indicated you have gay and lesbian students on campus. How does that group of students fit in?” This type of questioning brought about much more of a response from the principals, which led to further discussion that

was more specific to answer my research questions. Additionally, when asking about diversity, I added questions about minority religious groups on campus such as Muslim students. Although, this question had nothing specifically to do with my research questions, I found that the more types of diversity I included, the more the principals opened up about acceptance on their campus and the climate in general. I could also tell too much discussion about LGBTQ students all at one time seemed to push them into a corner of political correctness in their answers. I wanted honesty rather than textbook answers or legalese, so I included more diversity to the interview than was necessary for the research questions.

Another thing I noticed right away was that in the introductions prior to the actual interviews, establishing rapport was very helpful to probe for information later in the interviews. The commonalities established better trust from the principals; they seemed to respond better when they realized they were speaking to someone who understood the communities and culture of east Texas. I found it helpful that I had attended the same university that four of them had attended. I found that mentioning the schools in east Texas where I had previously worked, principals I knew from the area, where I had previously lived, where I grew up, and/or where my parents were from, made me better received as “one of them” rather than an outsider coming in asking questions. Being familiar with the area was definitely an advantage. Understanding the culture enough to realize the principals in the rural schools would open up more to someone who they could relate to rather than an outsider helped tremendously with data collection.

Along with finding common ground with the principals, I felt the need to leave my identity as a lesbian undisclosed. I did not want to appear as feminine as was possible, but I did not want to look like a stereotypical lesbian either. My hair is short, and I wore professional, somewhat androgynous clothing. I put on more make up than normal, and I mentioned my son during the introductions to all the face-to-face interviews. I did this not so much because of the pride my son brings me, but because it has been my experience that many people who are not very familiar with the gay and lesbian community do not expect a lesbian or gay man to have

children. I mentioned my son in hopes that by having a child, it might cause the principals to have no indication of my sexuality. I was afraid if they knew about my sexual orientation, they might automatically be politically correct in their answers rather than honest, which is what my research questions require. Keeping my sexuality private, as a researcher, in no way harmed the participants, nor was it designed to be deceitful, but rather to remove a possible obstacle to the principals' being honest and open with the interview questions. I tried to appear and be neutral in the interviews so that my appearance had little or no influence over the data the principals provided.

The three face-to-face interviews took place in the offices of the principals during school hours. These principals were given a copy of the stamped, approved Informed Consent document to sign prior to the interviews; they were also given a copy to keep for their records. Conducting the interviews in the offices of the principals was beneficial in several ways. First, I was able to establish a better rapport with the principals. The introductions were much easier in person, and it was easier to develop trust. Meeting in their offices helped me learn more about them and look for common areas of interest. I found having commonalities helped the principals warm up to me and feel at ease answering the interview questions. Second, I could see their body language, and they could see mine. This helped during the pauses to know if they were thinking or waiting on me to ask another question or rephrase what I had previously asked. It also calmed my nerves a little because I could see if they were smiling or contemplative, rather than worrying if the questions were bothering them. Third, I was able to think of better follow-up questions. I felt less rushed in the offices because I knew the principals had carved out a time slot specifically for the interviews. This gave me more time to think and reflect during the interview process. Finally, being on campus gave me a feel for the tone of the campus. One principal was excited to give me a tour of his campus and pointed out one of the gay students on campus whose path we kept crossing. Although this was probably a breach of confidentiality on the part of the principal and possibly a violation to the student's rights, the principal meant no

harm, but only wanted to show how well that student fit in with the others since many of the questions during the interview were asking about LGBTQ students.

3.3.5 Interview Data Analysis

The recordings were transcribed word for word within two days of the interviews. To ensure the validity of the data and present it most accurately, I emailed the principals a copy of the transcripts from their interviews for review to be sure they were accurate and reflected the true experiences of the principals. I allowed them one week to respond with any changes needed. I told them if they did not respond within one week from the day I sent the email with the transcript, I would accept the transcripts as written. Three responded with approval, two principals did not respond. No corrections were needed due to inaccuracies, but one principal requested I leave off the name of a specific program that might reveal the identity of her school. I honored her request. This member checking is described by Stake (2010) as being vital to qualitative research for validation. After I was sure the transcripts were accurate, I began analyzing the data, which Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe as a “search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes” (p. 207).

The transcribed interview data was used to highlighting quotes, statements, or sentences that were important for understanding the participants’ experiences. This process is known as coding. “Coding data is the formal representation of analytic thinking” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 212). “Coding is sorting all data sets according to topics, themes, and issues important to the study” (Stake, 2010, p. 151). Because using the literature to develop “prefigured” categories prior to data analysis limits the analysis rather than “opening up the codes to reflect the views of participants in a traditional qualitative way” (Creswell, 2007, p. 152), I developed codes as I read the transcripts and reflected on the meaning of what the principals said. I used codes that best described the information presented (Creswell, 2007) by the principals writing the codes in the margins for a quick reference. The statements indicative

of each code were highlighted or underlined with different colors of ink. I noticed patterns developing with each interview.

As I continued reading, reflecting, and re-reading the interviews, more codes emerged, and the codes began to fall into more general categories or themes. I wrote an outline of the themes as I coded the interviews, and reordered the outline several times. The codes and statements were categorized more uniformly as I finished reading the interviews and their placement under the themes was finalized. Some of the codes and statements were very similar, some held opposing views or experiences, yet they stayed within the same theme. I made a final outline of each theme with the codes jotted beneath the themes.

The statements and codes of each interview were then used to write a “textural” and “structural description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) which is a general description of what each subject experienced and the context or setting in which it was experienced. I then made a Xerox copy of the underlined and coded interview transcripts to refer back to if needed, and I cut the statements from the interview text and organized them by code and grouped the codes by theme. This way the principals’ experiences were joined under each theme. From the combined descriptions and the statements under each theme, I wrote a composite that presents the “essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62) of the experiences and perceptions of the principals.

Peer review or debriefing (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of the data, descriptions, and themes was used to further ensure accuracy of the findings and to serve as an “external check” of my research process (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). One of my heterosexual cohort members served as a peer reviewer in an effort to control my bias due to my sexual orientation. I gave her a copy of the transcripts with no identifying information of the principals in order to maintain confidentiality. I also gave her a copy of the codes, statements that were underlined as examples of the codes, and themes I had developed. She read the transcripts and reviewed my codes and themes to check for bias. She needed clarification on how I defined resistance, and had difficulty seeing how student dress codes were viewed as resistance,

particularly from a principal who wanted LGBTQ students to blend in for their own protection. I referred her to Lugg's (2006) work to familiarize her with heteronormativity and how it occurs in schools. After some consideration, she agreed that enforcing a restrictive dress code was a form of resistance. Having a heterosexual peer reviewer of my codes and themes from the transcripts reduces the impact of personal bias and makes my research more trustworthy.

3.3.6 Artifacts and Textual Analysis

After the interviews, I used the internet to research the schools and districts where the principals I had interviewed worked. I did this seeking artifacts for textual analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) produced by the schools that might indicate welcoming environments for all students. I looked at school mission statements when available, student handbooks, and student codes of conduct focusing on non-discrimination statements, anti-bullying policies, and dress codes. I recorded all the data I found for each school on a notepad. In the non-discrimination statements and anti-bullying policies, I was looking for wording that indicated protection is in place against bullying or discrimination based on sexual orientation. I researched the dress codes to see if there was language in the dress codes of what is appropriate for males to wear and what is appropriate for females to wear. I also looked for any other policies I could find including school goals and/or campus improvement plans when available to see if any wording about the school climate was included and/or if any wording about anti-bullying and/or protection for marginalized groups was included. I also researched the types of clubs available to students to see if any of the schools had any clubs dedicated to diversity. The principals all said their schools had no Gay-Straight Alliances, but I wanted to know if they had other types of clubs that might promote diversity. I did not find any clubs dedicated to diversity on the websites. No Gay-Straight Alliances or indicators of such were found either, which supports the principals in their statements that their schools do not have Gay-Straight Alliances.

The student hand books often contained the schools' mission statements and non-discrimination statements along with school policies. All five schools also posted their codes of

conduct and dress codes on-line as well. I also found various information, such as cheerleader tryout rules and lists of clubs I could peruse, that might be indicators of an open and accepting campus for all students. I used a notepad to write down all language I could find indicating a welcoming school campus, particularly for LGBTQ students, as well as language that was inclusive of all students in general. Data from each school were recorded separately in a notepad. Using the data from the tablet, I wrote descriptions of the findings for each principal's school.

In addition to the internet search of the schools, while at the three schools where the campus interviews took place, I looked for posters or displays that might indicate a welcome environment for diversity, and I looked for student diversity within the schools. At two of the schools, I did not get to see very much of the schools or students other than the entrances and front offices. One interview was right at the end of the school day, so students were leaving. At the second interview, I got to see a little more of the school, but only two hallways and few students. The third on-campus interview was right after lunch, and the principal had time to give me a tour of the campus. He showed me the cafeteria and explained how the kids sit during lunch, quietly pointed out one of the gay students as we walked through the hall, and explained how well the boy fit in with the other students. He also took me into a classroom, let me peek into other classrooms, and showed me the posters the counselors were in the process of hanging about dating violence and abuse. I looked for posters and displays at all three schools near the entrance, in the office, and in the hallways when available that would demonstrate a welcoming campus for LGBTQ students. I did not see any specific posters or displays at any of the schools showing inclusion of LGBTQ students, but some of the posters in two of the schools showed students of different ethnicities.

The purpose of the internet search and campus observations were to address the research question asking what artifacts within the schools showed evidence of a socially just school culture for all students, and to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman,

2011). I looked for evidence of a socially just school climate for all students at the schools where each principal I interviewed worked to corroborate what the principals said with the school policies and other school artifacts. I included my findings in Chapter 4 and a discussion in Chapter 5.

3.4 Instrumentation

The survey sent out initially to the principals who worked in rural high schools in east Texas was used as a participant screen to find principals who were willing to be interviewed and most closely met the research criteria and therefore best able to answer my research questions. The questions on the survey were a series of check boxes and short answer demographic questions. The survey was designed with general categories in order to be easy and quick to fill out to get the most responses. (See Appendix A for the letter of introduction and survey questions.)

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) included questions pertaining to background information from the principals including the reason(s) they decided to become administrators. I asked about the origins of their interests in social justice and who/what inspired them to be leaders for social justice. Since some of them ranked social justice leadership as a reason they became a principal and others did not, I had to phrase the question differently for different principals. For those who did not include social justice leadership as a reason for becoming a principal, I asked what caused them to feel social justice leadership was important since becoming a principal. I also asked them to describe diversity at their schools. This is a repeat of the open-ended question from the participant screen, but it was asked again to check for consistency. If they did not mention LGBTQ students, I reminded them they had included those students in their surveys and probed into how those students fit in with the others. I asked them to describe their schools' climates. From this point, I asked if and how they had or were working to change this climate. I queried which students at their schools they perceive to be marginalized, if any, and what they were doing to rectify this, if anything.

After asking about marginalization at the schools, I probed about LGBTQ students as well as religious minorities including Muslim students or other minorities that might have a more challenging time blending in. I included Muslims and other religious minorities because I wanted the dialogue to remain open about all forms of discrimination in hopes of probing deeper about LGBTQ students here and there without the principals possibly putting up “politically correct” barriers. After these questions, I moved on to questions about the communities in which the principals worked. I asked them their perceptions of their communities and of the parents of students particularly. I asked if they had or were facing any difficulties or resistance to social justice leadership. Again, I specifically mentioned LGBTQ students and religious minority students. If resistances were described, I asked what strategies they used to address these forms of resistance. I also asked what supports the principals had in leading for social justice.

If we had not discussed LGBTQ students or had discussed them very little, I asked their perceptions of Asher’s Law specifically protecting all students from bullying and requiring school districts to report bullying annually to the TEA and to develop suicide prevention programs (Coleman, n.d.). The two principals I asked about this had never heard of it, so I explained the law and the reason for it. I asked their perceptions about the language in the bill alluding to LGBTQ students as being particularly vulnerable to such bullying yet without using specific identifying terms (Coleman, n.d.), and how/if they work to protect that student group.

To learn more about what the principals did as leaders on their campuses, I asked what types of professional development they had provided or would provide their faculties regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation, if any. I also asked how they perceived their community’s view or might view their efforts as principals to protect the LGBTQ student population. I asked if they felt they were/would be supported or face resistance when working to protect these students. I asked if any of their students had established or tried to establish a Gay-Straight Alliance on campus. After this line of questioning, I asked if/what strategies they

have used or might use if/when they encounter resistance. Finally, I asked if they had any other comments about their roles as leaders for social justice at their schools.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are those that focus on the people involved (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). According to Theoharis (2004), “it is both arrogant and shortsighted to assume that any research endeavor does not have ethical considerations” (p. 92). Marshall and Rossman (2011) tell us, “for any inquiry project, ethical research practice is grounded in the moral principles of *respect for persons, beneficence, and justice*” (p. 47). Before and throughout this study, I have strived to keep ethical considerations at the forefront of planning the study, executing the research, and writing the findings.

3.5.1 Respect for Persons

This IRB at the University of Texas at Arlington demands a respect for persons in any study using humans as subjects of the study. All participants in this study were required to sign an informed consent document approved and stamped by the IRB. The informed consent document included a description of the study, number of participants, procedures, possible benefits, possible risks or discomforts, an explanation of the strictly voluntary nature of the study, an explanation of how confidentiality was and will be maintained, and contact information of me, my faculty advisor, and the Office of Research Administration – Regulatory Services in case the participant had questions. The participants were reminded they could choose to answer only the questions they felt comfortable with, they could end the interview at any time, and they could have anything they said omitted if they wanted.

As a researcher, I sought to maintain strict confidentiality. Neither the names of the principals, the schools or districts where they teach, or any other identifying information is included in this dissertation or any other publications in the future. All documents with identifying information are confidential with access only to me, and in the event of an audit, the Secretary

of the Department of Health and Human Services, the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board, and possibly my dissertation advisor.

The informed consent document approved by the IRB was and should only be the starting point of ethical considerations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Even though all documents I have both composed and collected are secure, inaccessible to unauthorized persons, and confidential, to further safeguard my documents, I have intentionally scratched through names and schools specifically tied to specific interviews. No interview is specifically linked to any identifying information. Survey data containing identifying information were all maintained electronically on a password protected computer with access to no one other than me. While transcribing the interview data, I typed a blank line when principals disclosed identifying information. All principals and schools were assigned aliases for further privacy and confidentiality protection. All confidential data will be destroyed in three years.

3.5.2 Beneficence

Beneficence is defined by Marshall and Rossman (2011) as doing whatever a researcher can do reasonably to “ensure that participants are not harmed by participating in the study” or “first, do no harm” (p. 47). Principals in the state of Texas are at-will hires, meaning they can lose their jobs if they bring any negative publicity to their campuses, or if their views contradict those of the school board, the superintendent, or even the communities in which they serve. In this study, the principals shared their own views of their schools and communities and how they lead for social justice. Because of this personal viewpoint that could potentially be controversial and harmful to the careers of the participants, it was crucial that their privacy be strictly maintained in every aspect of the study and in future publication. Each principal was assigned a pseudonym, and each high school a number. Any identifying characteristics of the principals, their schools, or their communities were changed or omitted. Protecting the identity of the principals and their schools was of high priority.

3.5.3 Justice

Although I have been using the term “social justice” throughout this dissertation, “justice” referred to here and which must be considered is justice to the participants and society. Considering justice for the principals, I wanted to do them justice by accurately and honestly representing their lived experiences, their thoughts and considerations, and the work they do as leaders to promote social justice for all students. To ensure the accuracy of their statements, I conducted member checks (Stake, 2010) and allowed time for the principals to respond to any inaccuracies. Additionally, but ensuring complete confidentiality, the principals were given the freedom to express their views and describe their experiences in a way that would help me do justice to them in relaying their stories and thoughts.

One of the concerns Creswell (2007) mentions is avoiding deception or covert activities. For the interviews, I tried to conceal my identity as a lesbian in order to prevent the principals from being politically correct rather than honest if they suspected my sexuality. I was a little concerned that by not revealing my true identity as a lesbian, I might be participating in what could be considered deceptive activities. Upon further study and consideration, I realized I was not trying to deceive the principals, but rather remain neutral. Remaining neutral was crucial to gleaning honest information from the principals. In no way was I trying to make them believe anything about my sexuality other than it was not obvious either way. This, I felt, was not deception, but rather removing any influence I, as the researcher, might have on the honesty and reliability of the information presented by the participants.

Another consideration in this study is “who benefits and who does not from the study, with special attention to the redress of past societal injustices” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 47). In this study, I did not want to cause harm or any type of societal injustice to anyone or any of the schools or communities involved. Some of the experiences the principals described might cast their communities or schools in a negative light. Because of this, and with the intention of doing no harm, the districts, schools, and communities remain anonymous. Any identifying

characteristics were omitted from this dissertation and will be from any future publications regarding this study.

Conversely to only doing justice to the principals and justice to the schools, districts, and communities, I wanted those involved to benefit in some way. Creswell (2007) says the benefits of the research to the participants should outweigh the risks. The benefits the participants might have received included the time to reflect on their leadership for social justice as well as the intrinsic benefit of knowing the sharing of their experiences might help other principals become better leaders for social justice. The societal benefits include possible improved open-mindedness on school campuses. This could certainly affect LGBTQ students, but as evidenced by the literature, all students might benefit from improvements to campus climates at the schools they attend (Birkett et al., 2009; Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2002; MacNeil et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2005; Ruus et al., 2007). The findings from this study will add to the body of literature in social justice leadership and hopefully help principals in their endeavors for this type of leadership on their campuses.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe trustworthiness as the “goodness of qualitative research” (p. 39) noting it is historically referred to as validity, and modernized by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability” (p. 41). Creswell (2007) describes trustworthiness using the term validation as, “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 206-207). Creswell (2007) acknowledges “any report of research is a representation by the author” (p. 207). To try to distance myself from the topic of this research is absurd as I am a passionate educator who cares about all students, a lesbian who is very familiar with rural schools and communities in east Texas, and a researcher who wants to find meaning in the lived experiences of the principals who are working as social justice leaders in these rural schools and communities. Because of this passion for this particular research, I found using qualitative

research validation strategies particularly useful in documenting the accuracy of my study (Creswell, 2007).

3.6.1 Triangulation

Triangulation was a method I used to validate my findings. Triangulation is a method of looking at the evidence from more than one vantage point (Stake, 2010). It lends credibility to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Creswell (2007) describes the process as involving “corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 208). I conducted a textual analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) of documents found for each school. I investigated their student handbooks, codes of conduct, dress codes, and all other information I could find to see if there was language that would in any way be indicative of the school’s climate and inclusiveness. While on the campuses for the interviews, I studied the entryway, offices, and hallways of the schools I had access to hoping to find any indications of the school climate as well. Gleaning information from various sources adds to the validity of this study (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

3.6.2 Peer Review

In an effort to both set up a valid study and to control for my personal bias, I had another doctoral student serve as a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer was given copies of all interview transcripts with identifying information removed. The copies showed my underlines and codes in the margins. Along with these, she was given my outline of themes with the codes listed under each theme. She read the materials looking for both any points I might have missed as well as any information I might have taken out of context, misrepresented with the code, or coded in a biased way. Her input authenticated my analysis of the data.

3.6.3 Reflexivity

Self-disclosure was particularly important in this study because my own “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208) were influential on my interpretations of the data. I explained my background in an effort to keep my position as a

researcher open in how my assumptions and biases may impact the study. I had to keep my perspective at the forefront of my thoughts as I interpreted and analyzed the data, and constantly reminded myself not to make assumptions about the data I had collected, nor to misinterpret the data by reading more into what the principals had said rather than what was actually recorded.

3.6.4 Member Checking

Stake (2010) defines member checking as “asking a data source to confirm your reporting” (p. 220). He recommends presenting the participants with a draft copy of the interview and allow them time to make corrections or comments (Stake, 2010). After each interview, and as quickly as possible, I transcribed each interview, word for word. I then emailed each principal a copy of the transcript. I asked them to read it and let me know if there were any mistakes or if they would like to clarify anything that had been said. I gave them one week to respond. I told them if I had not heard back from them during that time, I would assume they had read it and had no further comments. Three of the principals confirmed via email, two never responded indicating they had no further comments. One principal requested I omit the title of an event in order to maintain anonymity of the school. The title was omitted immediately. Having each principal verify the transcripts reduced errors and is crucial for qualitative research (Stake, 2010).

3.6.5 Thick, Rich Description

Thick, rich description allow “readers to make decisions regarding transferability” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). I made every effort to describe the principals, schools, and communities using as much description as possible while maintaining confidentiality, in hopes that readers will be able to transfer information to other, similar settings based on shared characteristics (Creswell, 2007).

3.6.6 External Audits

This study is my dissertation; therefore, it has subject to extreme scrutiny by my dissertation advisor to ensure the data support my findings, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions as is described by Creswell (2007) in his description of the purpose of an external auditor. While Creswell (2007) says the “auditor should have no connection to the study” (p. 209), the reputations of my professor, the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department, and The University of Texas at Arlington make it imperative that my processes and product are accurate and completed in a manner representative of quality qualitative research.

These six methods served to help ensure the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2007) and therefore make the study trustworthy. While my own biases and experiences play a role in my perception of the data, I made every effort both internally and externally to be true to the lived experiences of the principals as well as their views of their communities and leadership for social justice.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has provided a thorough description of the design for the study, the positioning of the researcher, a detailed description of the procedures, the instrumentation, the ethical considerations of this study, and descriptions of methods to make this study trustworthy. Chapter 4 will describe the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter details the findings of the study. Survey findings are discussed first, followed by textural and structural descriptions of each principal. The textural and structural descriptions include findings about the principals' backgrounds, the schools' demographics, the survey findings, details and quotes from the interviews, and findings from the textual analysis of the artifacts found on the schools' websites.

4.1 Survey Findings

There were two groups of participants in this study. The first group included the principals who responded to the survey ($N = 18$), which served as a participant screen to find the second group of participants. All principals in this study were high school principals in public schools in rural districts in east Texas. Seventeen of the 18 survey respondents were white males, one was a white female. Three of the respondents had PhD degrees. Of the 18 respondents, one chose not to answer the survey questions.

Of the respondents to the survey who answered the questions, the average years of experience as principals was 7.7 with a range of one to 23 years. The respondents had been at the schools where they were principals at the time of the survey for an average of 6.1 years with a range of one to 11 years. Nine of the principals had served as principals of the schools where they worked at the time of the survey for the entire time they had been principals. Five of those were working at the same school prior to becoming principal and had been at that school since they became principal. None of the respondents ranked social justice leadership as first or second as reasons they became principals. Seven ranked social justice leadership as third, four ranked it fourth, two ranked it last, and two did not include it as a reason they became principals. Six respondents did not include LGBTQ students as part of their school's diversity;

11 did include LGBTQ students. Six declined to be interviewed, six said maybe initially, and five agreed to be interviewed initially. One who agreed to be interviewed and two who said maybe did not include LGBTQ students in their description of diversity, so they were not asked to be interviewed. Of the remaining eight, three who said yes initially, and two who said maybe initially responded to follow-up email requesting interviews. One who said he was willing to be interviewed and two who said maybe to being interviewed did not respond to two follow-up emails requesting interviews.

Of those interviewed, four were white males, one was a white female. The principals who were interviewed were assigned the following pseudonyms: Principal Perkins, Principal Dawson, Principal Colton, Principal Stanley, and Principal Adams. They had served as principals for an average of 10.6 years with a range of eight to 13 years. They had served in the schools they were principal of at the time of the survey for an average of 6.8 years with a range of five to 11 years. Their ages ranged from mid-30's to early 50's. Two held Ph.D. degrees. One of these principals ranked social justice leadership as third for reasons for becoming a principal. Two ranked social justice leadership fourth, one ranked it last, and one did not include it at all as a reason for becoming a principal. However, all five indicated they felt improving acceptance of diversity was important, and/or they had helped improve diversity acceptance, reduced bullying, improved school climate, and/or improved school safety during their time as principal. All five of the principals who were interviewed included LGBTQ students as part of the diversity on their school campuses (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Survey Findings for Principals Who Were Interviewed

Survey Participant	Ethnicity/Gender	Years Principal Experience?	Years at current school?	SJ Ranking*	Improve diversity acceptance	LGBTQ students?	Improved acceptance as principal?	Improved amount of bullying?	Improved school climate?	Improved safety?
Colton	W/M	8	5	6 of 6	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Perkins	W/F	13	6	3 of 5	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adams	W/M	10	5	4 of 6	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Dawson	W/M	11	11	4 of 5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stanley	W/M	11	7	0 of 3	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Some ranked only the five choices given as reasons for entering the profession, while others included “other” in their ranking giving them six options. Others only ranked those that applied to them.

The survey data also provided information about the diversity of the campuses where each principal who was interviewed worked. During the interviews, the principals did not list all the areas of student diversity on their campuses, so the data from the interviews about this diversity is important in answering the first research question, “How do social justice motivated principals in rural communities describe student diversity at their schools?” The survey data pertaining to this question can be found on Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Diversity at Schools Indicated by Survey Data

	Perkins	Adams	Dawson	Colton	Stanley
African American	X		X	X	X
American Indian			X		
Asian/Pacific Islander	X	X	X	X	X
Caucasian/European	X	X	X	X	X
Hispanic/Latino/a	X	X	X	X	X
Multi-Race	X	X	X	X	X
First Generation American		X	X		
Emotionally Disturbed	X	X	X	X	X
English as a Second Language		X	X	X	X
Gay/Lesbian	X	X	X	X	X
Homeless	X		X	X	X
Low Socio-Economic	X	X	X	X	X
Mentally Disabled		X	X	X	X
Physically Disabled			X	X	X

All five of these principals were raised in Texas. Four were raised and still live in rural east Texas, one was raised in a suburb of a major city in Texas. They all indicated in the interviews that they were raised with conservative values. Detailed descriptions of each principal who completed an interview ($N = 5$) are described in the next section.

4.2 Textural and Structural Descriptions of Principals

The interviews provided information specific to each individual's lived experiences, yet the information contributes to the understanding of social justice leadership for LGBTQ students in rural areas that might be particularly resistant to acceptance of LGBTQ people, and therefore

resistant to social justice leadership for those students. The principals discussed diversity at their schools, their perceptions of their communities, their thoughts on social justice leadership for all students, their beliefs about LGBTQ students, and their roles as leaders for social justice for LGBTQ students. I included the demographics of the schools where each principal worked, which is compiled in Table 4.3, and data from the artifacts found at each school relevant to this study. I included this data in the descriptions of each principal in order to understand the community and school in which each principal lives and works. The textural and structural descriptions of the lived experiences of these principals provide insight into their roles as social justice leaders, particularly for LGBTQ students.

Table 4.3 School Demographics and Dropout Rates

School #	Principal	Number of Students (approx.)	White Students (%)	Hispanic Students (%)	African American Students (%)	Econ. Dis-advantaged (%)	Dropout Rate (%) (2009)
1	Perkins	200	92	4	3	53	0
2	Adams	350	86	13	0	52	0
3	Dawson	750	75	19	5	56	6.7
4	Stanley	1100	85	6	7	36	5.0
5	Colton	450	63	15	19	56	11.8
Region 7		N/A	57	23	20	59.9	7.7
State of Texas		N/A	34	48	14	58.7	8.3

Note: The demographics and dropout rates for the school districts were researched through the TEA's (2011b) Snapshot School District Profiles webpage. The demographics were reported for 2010, while the dropout rate was reported for 2009. The Region 7 and State of Texas demographics were researched through the TEA (2012a).

4.2.1 Principal Perkins

Principal Perkins seemed to be a very cheerful individual by the way she smiled and laughed often. She is a white female who appeared to be in her mid-40's to early 50's. Principal Perkins had 13 years of experience as a principal with six years at her location at the time of the interview. She told me after the interview she was born and raised in east Texas and had

attended a university in east Texas. She enjoyed the school where she worked and loved the community.

According to TEA's (2011b) Snapshot School District Profiles webpage, the school where she worked had approximately 200 students in 2010. At that time, 92% were white, 4% were Hispanic, and 3% were African-American. Ten percent of the students were reported to have disabilities, and 53% were economically disadvantaged. This school had a 0% longitudinal dropout rate for the class of 2009 (the most current statistics available by TEA). (See Table 4.3 for a comparison of the demographics and dropout rates.) This school was about 10 miles outside a larger town in a very rural area. As I drove up to the school, I noticed mostly pastures surrounding the school, with only a few small businesses and homes within one mile of the school.

4.2.1.1 Background

Principal Perkins was a teacher prior to becoming a principal, and decided to get her master's degree in mid-management because she was a single mother and needed a higher salary. She felt she had only three options: principal, counselor, or librarian. She chose principal mainly through a process of elimination because she felt counselors were "paper pushers" and she was not at all interested in being a "paper pusher." She thought being a librarian would be very boring and would reduce her interactions with the students. This left becoming a principal. She felt like becoming a principal was the right decision because she has discovered being a "disciplinarian" fits her personality much better than the other two options. She said she does have to "wear several hats" and act like a counselor sometimes, but she prefers her role as principal.

Principal Perkins was the only female who participated in the survey and therefore also the only female participant in the interviews. She was one of only 11 female high school principals in Region 7 of east Texas according to TEA (2008). After I expressed my surprise

about how few females were high school principals in that area, she shared with me how difficult it was to get an administrative job in east Texas:

My biggest obstacle to overcome was getting my first administrative job as a female. And I see that a lot with females in this area trying to get an administrative job. And I had a professor at (university) that told me I would not get one until I moved [out of the area]. And he was 100% right. And I had to go to [another] county to get my first administrative position.... I see it over and over – where women can't break into that.

She described one instance in a meeting where, because she is a female administrator and single, a parent accused her of being a lesbian. She said, "It infuriated me because I'm not, but if I were, it would be none of their business...I think a lot of times as a female that's strong willed, that's the perception of some."

4.2.1.2 Survey

According the Principal Perkins' survey responses, her campus included African-American students, Asian/Pacific islander students, Caucasian/European students, Hispanic/Latino/a students, multi-race students, emotionally disturbed students, gay/lesbian students, homeless students, and students from low socio-economic families (see Table 4.2). She ranked social justice leadership as three out of five choices. She indicated improving acceptance of diversity was an important part of her job but that it had not improved at her campus since she had been principal. She indicated she had, however, made improvements in the amount of bullying, the school climate, and safety as principal of her campus (see Table 4.1).

4.2.1.3 Interview

In describing her school's diversity, Principal Perkins said, "We really do not have a minority at all, unfortunately....We probably have like, oh, five to eight kids, 10 at the most that are not white....We have no minority teachers at all," but then included bisexual, homosexual,

and special needs students in her descriptions of diversity in the interview. She indicated more diverse groups on the survey than in the interview (see Table 4.2).

Although Principal Perkins expressed that she had no training about social justice during graduate school, she had an interest in social justice because she had always found herself drawn to the kids who “aren’t understood.” She had worked in a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement (DAEP) and grew to love the “underdogs.”

As far as acceptance of diversity on her campus, her experience with kids had been that they were “amazingly accepting of everyone.” She included special needs students, bisexual, and homosexual students in her description of the acceptance of the student body at her campus, and, as mentioned previously, acknowledged a lack of racial diversity on her campus. In her experience, she found the parents “weren’t as accepting as our students are.” Additionally, when asked if she perceived any students to be marginalized at all on her campus, she said, “No.” She went on to say, “We have different cliques of kids, but they all get along.”

Principal Perkins was particularly adamant about following the law. When I asked her what the response would be if any of the students wanted to start a Gay-Straight Alliance, she responded with, “Oh, it would have to be allowed.” She followed this statement with, “Well, if you have a sponsor, which is how it works, you know, then you don’t have an option...We’re going to go by what the law says.”

In describing her current school climate, Principal Perkins, said, “We’ve had a really good climate.” Regarding LGBTQ students, she said,

We’ve had kids here that were professed to be bisexual or to be homosexual. The kids loved them. It doesn’t matter....They would tell them, ‘I don’t agree with your lifestyle.’ Some of them didn’t mind, but some of them would say, ‘I don’t agree with your lifestyle, but I love you and we’re going to be friends anyway....We have a different climate than you do at a lot of schools. It’s strange.

She said the teachers and counselors were “fine” with the LGBTQ students as well. The only extra protection LGBTQ students might need at her school might be “from their parents,” Principal Perkins said with a chuckle. She said the community has never shown any resistance to the LGBTQ students. She said, “They really don’t seem to care. They take the kid at the kid’s face value – what’s inside the kid – not worry about their sexual preference.” The only resistance to her leadership from the community stemmed from instances where she “had disciplined their kid and they disagreed with the discipline,” and those instances did not pertain to her leadership for social justice for any groups of students.

As previously mentioned, Principal Perkins said none of the teachers at her school were minorities. She said they had “some coaches in the past that probably were (LGBTQ), but they were not open. The kids suspected and would ask, but she said they would say, “My personal life’s my personal life,’ and wouldn’t share that.” I asked her if she had had any complaints about the coaches who were perceived to be gay, and she said, “No.” She said, “They (parents) would make snide comments occasionally, but never try to force an issue.”

Principal Perkins described one instance where a guest speaker at a banquet was a lesbian and mentioned her “life partner” during her speech twice. Principal Perkins described the aftermath of that as follows:

When it was over with, my superintendent called...and he says, “Okay, is she gay?” And I said, “Uh, yeah, obviously!” (laughs). And he said, well, one of the board members had questioned him and he said, “Well, does it matter? You know, we’re not going to discriminate – does it matter?” And they [*sic*] said, “No, not really. We’re not going to discriminate.” And then I had one of the girls that was a senior came the next day, and she said, “I got in the car and I asked my parents, ‘Was she gay?’ and my dad said, ‘Well, I’m glad you can recognized it since I’m sending you off to college.’”... But she said, “I hope if people realized it, they got past that and listened to her message,

because she had a wonderful message.”...And...she did. She had a wonderful message...but if they were hung up on that fact, then they missed out on a good night.

When asked how being a leader for social justice had affected her personally, she responded,

I just think it makes...me be a better person. I don't always agree with the situation based on *my* morals and values, and you know, my upbringing, but I can do what's right and what's fair. And I have told people that I may not agree with your lifestyle, but it doesn't, I'm not going to treat you any differently because of it. And, um, they understood where I stand....I think it makes people realize that I'm going to be fair and just in punishment....I'm going to do what works or what's best for each individual child, and I think they realize that because of the history I've had doing that.

Principal Perkins was a principal for the “underdog” type students, and according to her experiences, led for social justice on her campus.

4.2.1.4 Artifacts

When researching the artifacts for the school where Principal Perkins worked, I found the code of conduct and student handbook posted online. In the code of conduct, I did not find a non-discrimination policy. The student dress code was listed. It stated clothing “extreme enough to cause a distraction or disturb the normal routine of the school” was inappropriate. Boys were not allowed to wear earrings and their hair had to be short. It could not touch their collar in the back, be longer than their eyebrows in the front, and could not be longer than the middle of their ears on the sides. The code of conduct also prohibited students from engaging in bullying, harassment, or “making hit lists.”

The student handbook allowed students who were being bullied to transfer to another class or another campus. The student handbook did include a non-discrimination statement stating “any conduct directed at a student on the basis of color, race, religion, gender, nation of origin, disability, or any other basis prohibited by law that negatively affects a student” was

prohibited. I made campus observations at the entryway and office areas, but did not see any posters or displays that were specifically directed at diversity or diversity inclusion. One of the posters advertising a college included racial diversity in the picture, however.

4.2.2 Principal Adams

Principal Adams was interviewed via telephone. He had a soft, east Texas accent and was very friendly and talking with him was easy. From his photograph on his high school's webpage, he is a white male who appeared to be in his early to mid-40's. He seemed thoughtful in his responses, and seemed to give what I perceived to be the most politically correct answers of all those interviewed. I did not build as good a rapport with him at the beginning of the interview as I had with the others, so there may have been some skepticism or hesitation on his part, though I can only speculate about that.

4.2.2.1 Background

Principal Adams had been an administrator for 10 years and had been at the school where he served at the time of the interview for five years. He became an administrator "sort of by accident." He had been a coach and wanted to become an athletic director. He thought having a mid-management degree would help him achieve that goal, but he ended up getting an assistant principal job, and then he became principal.

Principal Adams had 10 years of experience and had been at the school where he served at the time of the interview for five years. This school, with approximately 350 students, was about 10 miles outside a larger town in a very rural area. The student body was composed of 86% white students, 13% Hispanic students, 0% African-American students, and 2% other. Eight percent were special needs students and 52% were economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011b) (see Table 4.3). He described diversity at his school as, "We don't have just a whole lot of diversity in any aspect other than probably economically disadvantaged type situations." His school had a 0% dropout rate for the class of 2009.

4.2.2.2 Survey

On the survey, Principal Adams included Asian/Pacific islanders, Caucasian/Europeans, Hispanics/Latinos/as, multi-race students, first generation Americans, emotionally disturbed students, students for whom English is a second language, gay/lesbian students, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and mentally disabled students as the diverse student populations at his school (see Table 4.2). He ranked social justice leadership fourth of six choices for becoming an administrator. He indicated that social justice leadership is an important part of his job, yet indicated acceptance of diverse groups had not improved under his leadership. He did indicate on the survey, however that the school climate had improved since he became principal.

4.2.2.3 Interview

Principal Adams said his inspiration for being a social justice leader came from his love for the kids. He said, "I love kids in general and want everybody to have a fair opportunity to get an education." He described his school's climate as "very good" and said he does not perceive any marginalization of any students on his campus. He attributed the good climate to the "faculty." He continued by indicating the importance of "a very low turn-over rate [of faculty and staff]." He said the "average years of experience is about 18 years...the stability helps." As far as his leadership in making the school climate a positive one, he said he worked to "be a good role model and...accessible to the kids and to the faculty." He said, "I go out of my way to make sure that if any kid wants to speak to me, they can. I make myself visible at all times in the hallways and at lunch." He also conducted a book study with his faculty to improve the school climate.

When asked about the LGBTQ students on his campus, Principal Adams said he tried to "make them feel like they are just as important as anybody else. And they are!" He added that the "kids adapt a whole lot better to it than the adults," although even if "our parents don't agree with it, (they) still believe that...kids should be protected and no one should be bullied. They

expect me to see that that's carried out." He said protection from bullying is "a necessity." He explained,

I would think there would be more of it than there is because we're rural, country, pretty close-minded thinking people. But we have a couple of students that are, and they don't, uh, they carry on as any of the other students do.

He said the staff at his school was "very open-minded...They keep their...own views to themselves." He said there "hasn't been an issue" with the LGBTQ students.

Principal Adams said being a leader for social justice made him "a little more open-minded" and "different from the way [he] was raised." He remarked, "I realized I couldn't let my own personal views be dominant to my decision making. I had to be more open-minded, and taking into account all facts and everybody's opinions and rights and so forth."

4.2.2.4 Artifacts

There were several artifacts found for Principal Adams' school that were indicative of a positive school climate. The school's mission statement included the objective for "each student to develop to their [sic] full potential." The student handbook included a dress code that prohibited clothing that "may reasonably be expected to cause a disruption or interference with normal school operations." The student handbook also included a freedom from discrimination policy that stated "bullying or discrimination based on a person's race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sex, age, or disability" was prohibited. Additionally, there was information about cheerleader tryouts in the student handbook that contained language indicating non-discrimination based on gender for cheerleader tryouts. The policy stated, "In order to try out for a cheerleader position, he/she..." Finally, the code of conduct for Principal Adams' school stated, "A student whose behavior shows disrespect for others, including interference with their access to a public education and a safe environment, will be subject to disciplinary action."

4.2.3 *Principal Dawson*

Principal Dawson is a white male who appeared to be in his late 30's to early 40's. He seemed very excited about participating in the interview because he was very welcoming, smiled a lot, and was eager to show me around his campus. He showed extreme pride in his school and seemed to have a genuine love and compassion for his students. One of the things he reiterated was the importance of showing respect to the students and loving them as if they were "my very own flesh and blood."

4.2.3.1 Background

Principal Dawson grew up in an even more rural school district in deep east Texas than where he was working at the time of the interview. He and his wife had always lived and worked in east Texas and had always been part of rural communities. He had been a high school principal for 11 years, and all 11 of those years were spent at this high school. The school had approximately 750 students. The student body was composed of 75% white students, 19% Hispanic students, 5% African-American students, and 1% other. Seven percent were special needs students and 56% were economically disadvantaged. This school had a 6.7% dropout rate for the class of 2009 (TEA, 2011b) (see Table 4.3). His school was about 5 miles outside a larger town in an area that was more developed than the other two schools where interviews took place on campus, yet was still listed as a rural school according to the NCES (n.d.a).

Boredom in the classroom is what led Principal Dawson to become an administrator. He had taught math for five years and "was getting a little bit bored teaching the same subject." He "wanted a little variety." Things were starting to get redundant constantly." He had friends who "got into administration and every day was different for them." He "got into it for a change...doing something different and working with people in a little different atmosphere." He considered becoming a counselor, but he was "going to have to get a master's in counseling and [he] was going to be stuck counseling..." He realized that if he went into mid-management, there were more career options, so he chose that route. He found as a principal there was

“something new going on every day,” which was what he had hoped for by becoming an administrator.

4.2.3.2 Survey

On the survey, Principal Dawson ranked social justice fourth out of five choices for becoming an administrator. He indicated improving diversity acceptance on his campus was an important part of his job, and the acceptance of diversity had improved on his campus since he became principal. He also indicated that since becoming principal, there had been a reduction in bullying, improved the school climate, and improved school safety (see Table 4.1). Principal Dawson marked every type of diverse student on the survey as being a part of his student body. This list included African Americans, American Indians, Asian/Pacific islanders, Caucasian/Europeans, Hispanics/Latinos/as, multi-race, first generation Americans, emotionally disturbed students, students for whom English is a second language, gay/lesbian students, homeless students, students from low socioeconomic families, mentally disabled students, and physically disabled students (see Table 4.2).

4.2.3.3 Interview

Although Principal Dawson had indicated all types of diverse student groups on the survey, during the interview, his description of diversity on his campus only included gender and race until prompted to discuss the LGBTQ students. He had indicated on the survey that his school had many diverse student groups (see Table 4.2), including LGBTQ students, but he tended to view social justice leadership as mainly referring to race during the interview. He commented on the way the students segregate themselves by saying,

I think that part of it is something that you just accept....Our kids for the most part get along very well....You still see....I don't know what I'd call it for a name. I'm sure it's got a name, you know, where the kids are voluntarily segregating each other. You know, in the cafeteria, you'll have...black students sitting with white students, but you'll still have one table that's going to be predominantly black, and I mean, people, they'll do that

socially and naturally...without just dispersing completely...but there's not any problems between that or whatever.

He said they had a "zero tolerance policy when it comes to drugs, alcohol, gangs, and racism." He added, "We work really hard to make sure people get along with everybody." He told about a situation where students were assigned to detention for even saying the "n word" even though "it wasn't necessarily calling someone that. It was just words we don't say. We just do not say anything at all if it sounds racial." He said his students "get along good."

Principal Dawson said, "This is my 11th year, and it's a different culture now than what it was 11 years ago." He gives credit to the positive change to "some really great faculty members and staff members that have made these changes all along." He acknowledged that "it is under my direction, but I couldn't do it without having good people." He said they had placed "a lot of emphasis on safety." He reiterated the zero tolerance policy by saying, "We have a zero tolerance for several things...anything that's gang related, that's going to fall under your safety issues...any kind of racial issues at all... absolutely zero tolerance." He said those changes along with "just kind of walking the walk and making sure that we as leaders and teachers...do the right thing....We treat everybody respectfully regardless." He mentioned the dropout rate (see Table 4.3) which was the highest of the five principals interviewed. He said, "We would take a hit on dropouts before we're going to take a hit on a violent situation that could potentially hit our campus. That's just a call we have to make sometimes."

Concerning school climate, Principal Dawson said,

It's this attitude of treating every kid like they're your very own kid. And it doesn't matter about the color they are, where they came from, what kind of home they live in. It doesn't matter....It's treating every kid like they're my very own flesh and blood, and that's what you've got to do.

He emphasized the importance of longevity in developing a positive school climate. He said, "We've had an administrative team on this campus that's been very consistent over the last 10-

12 years....Having that consistency makes a world of difference.” He said he’s built “trust” with the parents and students through the years by “being here for a while.” He said, “I believe that I have, I would say, 95% trust of anybody in this district.”

Principal Dawson discussed his frustration with racism by saying, “I wish that people wouldn’t always blame things on racial issues.” He said, “I can get into a long story about what happened in Jasper (a small town in east Texas where a black man was dragged to death by white men).... Sure, yeah, there’s going to be some racism there, but that wasn’t a racist case. That’s not how it happened.” He said because of that, the town of Jasper had gone “bad downhill.” He said, “They have much more serious racial issues there now than they ever, ever have.” He said, “I do get tired of people...everywhere always blaming stuff on racism and stuff and that’s not the case at all.” He said, “You just do the right thing and treat people with respect and that’s just what you do.” Concerning racism at his school, he said, “You will get a few that are prejudice here and there, but they’re not vocal about it.” He went on to say, “I wish we had the ability to go in and change everybody’s minds and make them a little more open...and make them where they weren’t quite ...so things aren’t engrained in them the way they were raised.”

At this point, I brought up the fact that Principal Dawson had included gay and lesbian students as a part of his school’s diversity on the survey. When asked how these students fit in, he first described his community as a “very conservative school district.” He went on to remark that the district “has been for the most part, pretty, pretty darn conservative.” He chuckled and asked if I was editing what he said, and I reassured him everything would remain confidential. He told me there were a few openly gay students on campus and said, “We don’t have any situations that come out of that, which is a good thing.” He said the students may not agree, he said, “You may have kids that don’t agree with that. I may not agree with their lifestyle, but I’m not going to bully them or pick on them, or harass them, you know, that kind of thing.” He described a male student who was a “cross-dresser” and who he expected “to cause us all kinds of headache.” Principal Dawson continued:

And you'd be surprised at the number of friends that he had.... I didn't think that would happen....I thought I was going to see some problems out of my student body, to see that there might be some bullying going on and we didn't see that. We did a little bitty bit at first, but it was just because the kid was different....But once the kid was here for a year or two, no problems at all.

Although the students seemed to have little problem accepting the student who was a cross-dresser, when I asked about the parent and/or community response to this student, Principal Dawson said the following:

I had issues with the community.... It wasn't because of how the kid was. It would be an issue where the kid would come to school with maybe a little bit of make-up on, you know, I mean a little bit, I mean. And a parent might complain and say, "Well wait a minute. You got on to *my* child because *my* child came to school with shorts that are too short but yet you allow a *boy* to come to school with make-up." And, and, and we were, you know, we were definitely in a situation like this because uh, I mean the student, uh, you know, was obviously um, had some gender identity disorder I would say that, um and uh, we were definitely communicating with our counsel, our legal attorneys and folks to try to find out where do we, where do you draw the line when it comes to gender identity disorders. You know, as far as, you know, whether it's a 504 (special services for students with disabilities) situation or what have you, you know.

Concerning bullying and harassment of LGBTQ students, Principal Dawson said,

I have a population of students that are openly gay, and we are not seeing any kind of issues. I haven't dealt with any at all this year or last year, with any kind of hazing, um, picking on, any harassment, anything at all of those students.

He said the faculty had a little harder time with the LGBTQ students because "the faculty is probably a little more conservative about it." He said, "Obviously they're not going to

do anything to show any impartiality or anything like that. Obviously they're going to get in some pretty serious trouble if that happens." He said,

Whether they approve or disapprove of it, bottom line is we have those kids and we've got to teach them...They (teachers) might vent a little bit...but...not treat the kid any differently or anything like that. They know they can't do that, so they act very professional when it comes to that.

Principal Dawson said the dress code had been modified since they had the cross-dressing student at school. He said boys are not allowed to wear make-up now. He said, "You've got to draw the line somewhere" when it comes to student dress. He said,

Now, if somebody is obviously violating a rule, and they're doing it with the intention to draw attention to however they are, you know, then you're getting on to them for the rule issue, not because how they - you know, it's just how you handle it. And it's just a matter of treating people with respect and dignity regardless.

Concerning his leadership in social justice for the LGBTQ students, the leadership style Principal Dawson emphasized throughout the interview was "doing the right thing for the right reason and treating every kid with respect and with love just like they were my very own." He had an "open door policy" and made it a point to know his students and speak to them in the hallways or at afterschool activities. He also believed in leading by example and even picked up the students' trash in the cafeteria sometimes so they could see that he did not see himself as being "too good to pick up trash". He was adamant about treating every kid with respect and with love "just like they were my very own." He said with that kind of treatment, "things just fall into place." Principal Dawson said the following:

I think it all comes back to just how you act around them, you know. If, I mean, and the kids are going to see you. I mean we see people all the time and if I walk next to a kid who's obviously openly gay, and I flat tell everybody around "good morning" and don't say anything to that student, I mean it's going to send a message. If don't speak to that

student, it's going to send a message. If I roll my eyes or if I look the other way, or think oh my gosh, I mean, you know, that sends a certain kind of message. And I have to be, we all have to be cautious about everything we do and know that everything we do, somebody's looking and um, I think the main thing is just treating everybody with respect. And, uh, it doesn't matter who they are or what their beliefs are I'm still going to treat them with respect. I may not agree! I don't have to agree! But I have to treat them in a way that's respectful.

Although he included diversity training for his faculty, it focused primarily on curriculum differences for different races for academic success. He did not have any training specifically about the LGBTQ students other than to remind his faculty about laws protecting their rights when some faculty members questioned the student who was cross-dressing. He said, "It's about educating them and letting them know what you're doing without violating any kind of confidentiality." As the campus leader, he had implemented training for faculty, students, and parents on bullying and harassment, particularly with the use of technology.

The community had "no resistance to what we're doing to try to teach and all that," Principal Dawson said. "The only issues we've had at all from the community are some...parents trying to keep their kid from getting in trouble." He said some parents "hear a rumor" and wonder if you're "promoting this" just to "stir you up." He said, in these instances, "I took it as a good opportunity to teach them and show them what's really going on."

Concerning how social justice leadership had affected him, Principal Dawson said, "This is a learning process, and we're learning all the time. And hopefully what we're doing is making us a better person in the long run." He later said the following:

It's not my job to be judgmental. I can have my opinions, but not be judgmental, and... not force my thoughts and beliefs on other people....I believe that regardless of, regardless of race, you know, sexual, you know orientation, you know, doesn't matter. It's about treating people with respect....I'm known openly, I'm um, I'm against certain

life styles or certain things or what have you, and I don't have a problem with that, but I'm not going to force my beliefs on anybody, you know, and I'm not going to sit around trying to coerce them into changing the way their thoughts are or whatever you know. But, you know, my thing is to treat everyone with love and respect and I think that's just what you've got to do is just, you know. I believe in loving the unlovable. Even if that's, the uh, you know. I mean that because we've got kids that get into trouble and even if they get in trouble, you've still got to love them – they're still our kids.

4.2.3.4 Artifacts

Principal Dawson's school had the least amount of information online regarding the school climate. The only artifact found was the student handbook. The handbook contained the student dress code, which prohibited boys from wearing earrings or makeup. The student handbook also prohibited harassment based on "race, color, religion, gender, national origin, and disability."

Principal Dawson was excited to show me around his campus. During the tour of his school, Principal Dawson took me into the cafeteria to show me how the students tended to sit in clusters according to race. We also went into a culinary arts classroom and observed a diverse group of students cooking together. He pointed out the posters the counselors were hanging up in the hallways about date rape and explained they did similar posters about bullying and cyber-bullying earlier in the year. He pointed out one of the openly gay male students who crossed our path twice and explained how well this student fit in well with the rest of the students. Principal Dawson spoke with many students during our tour and they all seemed to have a good relationship with him. The campus seemed to me to be a vibrant and pleasant place to learn.

4.2.4 *Principal Stanley*

Principal Stanley is a white male in his late 30's. (His age was determined by a discussion after the interview where we discovered he and I are the same age.) He was very

engaged in the conversation even though the interview was conducted over the telephone. He had been an administrator for 11 years and had been at the school district where he served at the time of the interview for seven years. His high school was the largest of the five (see Table 4.3) and was in a small town itself approximately six miles from a larger town. This high school had been consolidated from several smaller districts. The school had approximately 1100 students. There were 85% white students, 6% Hispanic students, 7% African-American students, and 2% other. Twelve percent were listed as being special needs students and 36% were economically disadvantaged. This school had a 5% dropout rate for the class of 2009 (TEA, 2011b) (see Table 4.3).

4.2.4.1 Background

Unlike the other four principals, Principal Stanley was not raised in rural east Texas. While he did attend college in east Texas, he was raised in a suburb of Houston. He said he did not like the community where he worked because “it’s very cliquish.” He said he was “shocked at how racially divided” his community was and later said, “You know, our school definitely reflects the community.” He said, “There’s not any - there’s nothing here, uh for the kids. There’s nothing....To me, it’s just not a fun place. But, like I said, I’d rather be back in the Houston area.” He also described many of the boys in the area as “red-neck country boys,” but he described the campus climate as being good.

Principal Stanley entered the profession because he was bored in the classroom and felt like he could “make a bigger difference as an administrator.” He felt like he had more of an impact on decisions that were made for the school as an administrator than as a teacher.

4.2.4.2 Survey

On the survey, Principal Stanley did not rank social justice as a reason for becoming an administrator. He did indicate, however, that improving diversity acceptance on his campus was an important part of his job, but indicated there had not been an improvement in the acceptance of diversity on his campus since he became principal. He indicated that since becoming

principal, there had been a reduction in bullying, improved the school climate, and improved school safety, however (see Table 4.1). Principal Stanley marked the following diverse student groups on his campus as being a part of his student body: African Americans, Asian/Pacific islanders, Caucasian/Europeans, Hispanics/Latinos/as, multi-race, emotionally disturbed students, students for whom English is a second language, gay/lesbian students, homeless students, students from low socioeconomic families, mentally disabled students, and physically disabled students (see Table 4.2).

4.2.4.3 Interview

While Principal Stanley did not include social justice leadership as a reason for becoming a principal, but he did include religion, race, and sexual orientation in his description of the diversity on his campus during the interview. He said if administrators are not looking at these differences when making policy, and “if your policies aren’t allowing for that freedom, then you’re in violation of their civil rights.” He went on to say he has to keep in the back of his mind at all times, “are we making everybody equal?” Because of this, I expressed to Principal Stanley that even though he did not get into the profession to be a social justice leader, some of the things he had said throughout the interview indicated social justice was important to him as a leader. He responded with the following:

Yeah, and I may be, you know, but I’ve always been that person. I guess because I see it as I’ve always been that person that would go out of my way to help...it didn’t matter who you were, I just saw it as it’s just another part of the...job as a teacher, that’s my job as a principal... so I guess I never saw myself being that way, you know, as a social justice leader.

As a leader at his school, Principal Stanley found stability to be important in establishing a positive school climate. He said

It’s just building up the relationships with the kids – getting to know the kids, getting to know the parents. And now, I’m on the brothers and sisters that are coming through, so

a lot of these kids will come up and go, "Oh, you know my brother, you know my sister," and I think just having that reputation has allowed me to be able to help out in different situations. It's allowed me to calm the fight issues because sometimes I'll have two kids that are fighting and I'll know both parents and I can speak very honestly to those kids because parents trust me enough to work with those kids.

Similarly to the experience shared by Principal Dawson, Principal Stanley noted the segregation of the students at his school. When asked about diversity on his campus, Principal Stanley said the following:

I think it is segregated. Um, I mean as much as we push, um, kids to be equal, and kids to work together and kids to, um, respect one another, I think they do that, but I also think, you know, your white groups are going to stay with whites, your Hispanic are staying with Hispanics, your blacks are going to stay with blacks.

Principal Stanley said, "Our school definitely reflects the community. And I don't know how you get away from that." He said even with programs and non-discrimination policies and such, "at the end of the day, they're still going to associate with their group of friends and their group of kids."

He noticed marginalization of a group of students he referred to as the "Emo" group. He described them as "the odd birds out...the ones that are dressed in black...the ones that are putting on makeup and nail polish...They just walk to a different beat." He said he has had to "step in" to protect that group of students particularly with "our red-neck country boys." He said the boys were "throwing bottles and things" at the "Emo" students and he had to "discipline them". He said there are also about 10 gay and lesbian students who other students "like to make fun of them...for whatever reason." He had disciplined the offenders in that situation also.

When questioned about the discipline measures taken to protect marginalized groups on his campus, Principal Stanley said,

We tell them...we're only going to talk to them so many times. The next thing we're going to do is call it harassment and put them in our alternative school. And that usually works. We bring the parents in, talk to them, let them know what their kid's doing, and let them know that it's just not going to be tolerated, that we will file charges on them for disorderly conduct. We will put them in the alternative school, uh, for bullying and harassment, and we build up the case. I mean, we start documenting and we've got a file, and when we feel like enough is enough, we move them to the alternative school. And luckily, we haven't had to go that far. You know, they realize we mean business. That we're not going to tolerate this.

Principal Stanley and his administrative team had recently developed their bullying plan. He said they developed forms for students or parents to report bullying and harassment. The incidences will then be investigated, documented, and discipline taken as necessary. He said, "We've always done it informally, but we've just now gotten the documents to where it's now formal."

Concerning community resistance to protection of LGBTQ students, he said he had not had issues with the community or parents. He said, "It's more probable when it's been a black and white issue." He elaborated by saying the following:

I have, when I call a parent and say, "They're [his or her child] calling a black kid a nigger," or "They're making fun of his race," that's when, sometimes the parents are feeding that at home. And they're like, "Well, there's nothing wrong with that." You know. "They are niggers. They are second class citizens," or "They are lower class."... I deal with it from that end.

I asked how he handled parents with that type of attitude. He said he reiterates that "kids are equal." He tells the parents,

What your beliefs are at home, that's your business, but when they come to school...rules of society are going to apply, and...whether you like it or not, if your kid doesn't conform, then they're going to be reprimanded; they're going to be disciplined.

We will call it harassment, and we will call it bullying.....Those are the buzz words now, so the parents really get defensive when you start using those words...They're hearing that in the news and they don't want to accept the fact that their kid's doing exactly what the news report's saying.

Principal Stanley found it complicated when a gay student dressed flamboyantly. He told the student to "tone it down" because the student would be causing himself "grief." He told the student to stay within the boundaries of the dress code because that stated in the dress code that drawing undue attention to one's self was prohibited. He said the administrative team "kind of use that clause at times." He said, "You've got to look out for that kid's safety, too. Sometimes they don't realize that, yes, we're supposed to protect them. Yes, we're supposed to work with them, but they also sometimes have to blend in a little bit."

To educate his faculty about bullying and harassment and policies protecting students, he required staff development at the beginning of the year. He said, "It's just the general, if you see kids being picked on, harassed, you need to report it," type of training. His school participated in Rachel's Challenge and they were doing a "big, campus-wide push, for seeing the goodness, the good in others and creating a chain reaction." He said as a leader he has to model that. He said, "We're going out of our way at times...to show, this is what you need to be doing. This is how you need to be treating people."

Being a leader for social justice had changed Principal Stanley somewhat. He said he had "always tried to see the good in other people," but he said, in the past, he felt like some groups of people needed to "conform." He thought, "They need to quit drawing attention to themselves." Through his experiences, he said he had changed. He said, "I've taken a step

back and looked at it and gone, you know what, maybe I need to go out of my way to help that group a little bit more.” Further, he said,

It’s easy to deal with the bottle throwing....As a high school administrator, sometimes we don’t deal with just the little yen-yen stuff...Sometimes the name calling...the inappropriate language....The more I’ve been involved with this, I’ve gotten to where, you know what it is, those small things that can cause the big problems....I’ve changed a little bit of my attitude with that.

At the end of the interview, he wanted me to know that while he did not care to live there, the school and community were good, they just had a lot of “issues.” He praised the parent involvement and the longevity and stability of the administrative team and the teaching staff.

4.2.4.4 Artifacts

The artifacts found at the school where Principal Stanley worked at the time of the interview included the school’s mission statement, goals, the student handbook with the non-discrimination policy, an anti-harassment policy, and the student dress code. The mission statement stated the school’s mission is to “graduate young adults with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in an ever-changing technological society by guaranteeing each student an individualized and well-rounded education.” The goals included building a “quality instructional program that meets the needs of all students and ensures continuous improvement.” In the student handbook, there was a statement titled, “We believe” followed by several belief statements including “each person is valuable.” The non-discrimination policy stated there would be no discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, disability, or any other basis prohibited by law.” The anti-harassment policy included the prohibition of printed material promoting racial, ethnic, or other negative stereotypes. Finally, the student dress code stated the students’ “appearance should not interfere with instruction or

attract undue attention.” It also prohibited any garments “that insult race, religion, gender, or ethnicity.” There were no specific boy or girl delineations.

4.2.5 Principal Colton

Principal Colton is a somewhat reserved white male who appeared to be in his late 30’s. He was careful in his responses to the interview questions and paused in thought for each one before answering. He appeared to be a quiet, thoughtful man who probably did not make quick, rash decisions. He seemed a little guarded at the beginning of the interview, but appeared to relax as the interview progressed. He participated in the interview because he had a Ph.D. and said he understood how difficult it can be to find willing participants.

The high school where Principal Colton worked at the time of the interview was about five miles from a larger town. It was in a semi-developed area adjacent to the larger town. This school had approximately 450 students. The student body was composed of 63% white students, 15% Hispanic students, 19% African-American students, and 2% other. Ten percent were special needs students and 56% were economically disadvantaged. This school had an 11.8% dropout rate for the class of 2009 (2011b) (see Table 4.3).

4.2.5.1 Background

Principal Colton had been an administrator for eight years. He had been at the school where he was principal at the time of the interview for five years. He became an administrator because he wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps. His father had been a principal and later moved up to interim superintendent. Principal Colton said he grew up “watching the best mentor any son could have and it be their father.” His career path had always been to become a school administrator. He started his administrative career in the rural east Texas school where he grew up. He said moving back home had been a mistake, but he was able to learn quite a bit during that time. He had made the community where he worked his home and believed it to be “a great area” and the place he wanted to raise his own children.

4.2.5.2 Survey

On the survey, Principal Colton indicated that he entered the profession for reasons other than to be a social justice leader. However, he did indicate that improving diversity acceptance was an important part of his job. He also indicated the school climate had improved and the school had made improvements concerning bullying since he became principal at that school (see Table 4.1). These indicators coupled with his willingness to participate in the interview was why he was selected rather than others who ranked leadership for social justice higher on the list of reasons for entering the profession or marked social justice leadership as an important part of their jobs yet were not willing to be interviewed.

Principal Colton marked the following diverse student groups on his campus as being a part of his student body: African Americans, Asian/Pacific islanders, Caucasian/Europeans, Hispanics/Latinos/as, multi-race, emotionally disturbed students, students for whom English is a second language, gay/lesbian students, homeless students, students from low socioeconomic families, mentally disabled students, and physically disabled students (see Table 4.2).

4.2.5.3 Interview

In his description of diversity during the interview, Principal Colton included only race. He, like the others, commented about the way the students segregate themselves into “social pockets,” but described the school climate as positive. He said the kids all got along for the most part and there was not much “anxiety” between the kids. He commented that “my teachers do a good job just integrating a wide variety here,” referring to diversity training for the students. He said, “Have we done anything in particular, no. But I believe that we do a good job of just presenting diversity of the, I guess, ethnicities, races, to our students.” He told me they include students of different races in the English classes particularly, and do so throughout the year.

When asked about bullying, Principal Colton said, “You can’t say that you don’t have issues with bullying. I believe all schools have issues with bullying.” He said cyber bullying on social media such as Facebook caused the only fight they had had that semester. He said,

“We’ve done programs regarding that (cyber bullying) more than other things.” He also planned to bring Rachel’s Challenge to his school the next year.

When prompted to discuss LGBTQ students, he said the gay students that were on his campus at the time “fit in pretty well.” He said,

If they are flamboyant about their, um, choices, then, that makes it more difficult on them and on myself and on my assistant principal at times. But if they go about what they’re doing here at school on a day to day basis, it is not an issue.

He used the phrase “open about their *choices*” referring to gay students “that are in the top ten of our senior class.” He said, “Those students are just like any other kid. And they get along just fine with the rest of the kids. They are very well integrated into the mainstream of the school.” He said the only LGBTQ student who was on campus at the time who had issues with his orientation was a freshman. He said the problems originated at the junior high where the student came out. He said,

Once they get to be juniors or seniors as long as... the kids go about their business in a way that is not openly just flamboyant, in your face, which I will say is no different than a right-wing, Bible-thumping Christian in your face. As long as you’re not in your face or in somebody else’s face about it, most people are just going to leave (pause) and let everybody be as they are.

Principal Colton said he had dealt with flamboyant students on campus when he first became principal at the school he served at the time of the interview. He explained the following regarding those students:

There were two that were very flamboyant. Uh, and they had major struggles. Um, it was a counseling issue. We had a very strong counselor at that time. Um, and there were some disciplinary struggles with some other students regarding the fact that we had to work with them. They were, uh, cross dressers, and it was a major problem here at the school. And that’s just something that you, I, I don’t know. Here in rural east

Texas, that is a major, that's just something that we had a strong counselor to work with them and I as an administrator, there was some disciplinary issues we had to work with the other students that, "I know that you see that, you think it's not appropriate, but at the same time, you cannot harass or cause them any issues either." And that's just what we had to deal with.

He said he had no parent or community resistance to his protection of these students. Similarly with the students who were openly gay on his campus at the time of the interview, he said, "I've had zero parent or community problems."

When asked how he, as principal, leads his school to be a welcoming environment for all students, he emphasized the importance of knowing his students. He said, "I know every one of the kids, uh, I know their parents, I know at least something about them that I can talk to them about, and then, they get to where they're comfortable talking to myself." He said the students know he will listen to them even if he does not agree with them. He said, "They want to be heard; they want to know that you're listening to them and give them the chance to voice what needs to be said....You don't have to always give them what they want, but they want to be heard." He said the students always know he will at least "give them an ear." He said the freshman that was being bullied came to him for help. Principal Colton said, "Now his and my rapport after that has been great. And it's just something you work hard to develop with the kids....You just really work hard to get to know your kids."

However, Principal Colton expressed his own difficulties in working with LGBTQ students. He said,

When he's picked on, when he's messed with, when he's having issues, he's another kid. When he's doing something that's just doing it to get attention at me, then that's when I kind of have, I can't, I still have a blinder to that. But, if somebody's doing something that was bothering him, then he's another kid, if that makes sense.

Referring to LGBTQ students, he said, "That's still a wall for me. And I still just uh, I think that's a cultural, religious issue I guess, maybe for me, I don't know." He recognized the importance of treating all students fairly regardless of personal beliefs. He said the following:

My job as the principal is to try to help the kids and make sure they have the most successful educational opportunity that they can have. And I think that as long as you are giving them the access and the protection, I hate to use that word, but...to limit the picking, the messing with and all that, then I think that you can, I think that you're trying to give them the opportunities.

As the interview progressed, Principal Colton expressed his care and compassion for all his students. He said, "It's when you actually end up having your heart toward the kids get a little hard toward them that you need to go find something else to go do." He did say he wished the teachers on his campus "were able to be fair with everybody" possibly indicating some issues with social justice for all students. Principal Colton stressed the differences between rural schools and inner-city schools. He said,

Between inner-city schools, suburban schools, and rural schools, the atmospheres are very different. At a rural school, um, you don't really (pause). Being open and welcoming to everybody – I think people are willing to – I think the word I said earlier is tolerate. They're very willing to tolerate a lot, but being open and welcoming and uh, willing to ingratiate themselves with everybody is a lot harder to do. They're not as willing to DO that in the rural setting. There's a lawyer that likes to call this area the "Pine-cone Curtain" because we still do things a very different way here in deep east Texas. And, you know, you drawn it down. We are very, very conservative. It's a very conservative community, and you have to, they're willing to tolerate as long as it's not, I think I said it earlier – in their face. It'd be nice if they were a little bit more open and willing to accept more, but, some things just take time to change I guess.

Toward the end of the interview, although he said he had not had any resistance from the community, he reiterated the role of the community pertaining to student appearance. He said,

It is hard here. As opposed to, in a place where dress code is not cared about, I mean, when you have 3000 or 2500 students and you could care less what students wear, then nobody cares about dress code, then who cares if it's a guy or a girl really wearing that particular clothing. But when you're in deep east Texas, and you have a very specific dress code, then it really is an issue here as far as those type of issues.

Then, he told me his dress code would be stricter the next school year. He seemed to be very proud of his decision as he explained it. He said,

And next year, my dress code becomes even more strict here in this community, which, if I have a student that decides to cross that line, uh, and um, become a cross-dresser at that point, then we'll have to address that issue further because I even have rules starting next year saying that girls have to wear this and guys have to wear this. It's like we're taking a step backwards I guess.

Again, he referred to the community's values when determining the dress code. He said, "Community issues say that boys are going to wear this now and girls are going to wear (pause). I mean, it is basically, we have a very black and white dress code now." He continued:

I really could care less. I mean it's a dress code battle we have to fight here, which I really could care less. It doesn't distract from learning, but it's a battle we fight because it's part of our job to teach them how to dress – no it's not, it's their parents' job, but, yeah, it's, according to our community, it's, uh, the school's job to teach them appropriate ways to dress, so it's my job.

4.2.5.4 Artifacts

The artifacts at Principal Colton's school included a mission statement and non-discrimination clause in the student handbook, a list of clubs, and a student code of conduct that

included the dress code. The school's mission statement at the beginning of the student handbook stated, "We strive for excellence in all areas, and we want each student to fulfill his/her potential and make wise decisions that are in the best interest of their future." The non-discrimination clause stated the school would not discriminate based on "race, religion, color, national origin, sex, or disability." The code of conduct prohibited students from "bullying, name-calling, ethnic or racial slurs, or derogatory statements that school officials have reasonable cause to believe will disrupt the school program or incite violence." The dress code prohibited boys from wearing earrings. When I arrived for the interview, I noticed inspirational posters displayed in the hallways and office, but there was nothing specifically about diversity or acceptance. The new dress code Principal Colton discussed had not been posted.

4.3 Summary

This chapter includes the findings from the participant screen surveys, the findings from the interviews, and the findings from the textual analysis of the artifacts for each school. Textural and structural descriptions of the principals who were interviewed were presented. The descriptions included interview findings as well as the demographics of the schools, and the artifacts found for their campuses that were indicative of a positive school climate. Data provided from the interviews included the principals' backgrounds, perceptions of their communities, their perceptions of diversity on their campuses, their roles as social justice leaders for all students, particularly LGBTQ students, their experiences as leaders for social justice for LGBTQ students, and their reflections on how social justice leadership has affected them. Further discussion about the data follows in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

This chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the findings from this study. I will first provide an analysis of the data and how it answers the research questions. I will then suggest modifications to Theoharis' (2007) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance based on the findings from this study.

5.1 Analysis of the Research Questions

This section will examine the data as it answers the research questions. I was unable to find any principals that met the same criteria as those in Theoharis' (2004, 2007) study, primarily because the principals in this study did not enter the profession specifically with the intent of social justice leadership. However, social justice leadership was important to the principals. They indicated on the surveys that improving acceptance of diverse student groups was an important part of their jobs, and/or they indicated acceptance of diverse student groups had improved since they became principals at their schools. Additionally, all indicated an improvement in school climate during their tenure, and some also indicated improvements to safety or bullying during their time as school principal at the school where they worked at the time of the interviews.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "How do social justice motivated principals in rural communities describe student diversity at their schools?"

In order to answer this research question, a comparison of the demographics of the schools where the principals who were interviewed for this study worked (see Table 4.3) compared with the demographics of the schools where the principals in Theoharis' (2004, 2007) study worked is relevant to understand social justice leadership in the different settings. The

principals who were interviewed for this study all worked in rural high schools that had a higher percentage of white students than found in Region 7, the State of Texas (TEA, 2011b), and Theoharis' study. The percentages of students of color at the schools in this study ranged from 7% to 34% with a mean of 16.2% (TEA, 2011b). Conversely, Theoharis' (2004, 2007) principals worked in urban schools with high rates of minorities in their schools. The urban schools where the principals in his study worked had large percentages of students of color ranging from 34% to 99% with a mean percentage of 48.9%.

The poverty rate was a little lower in all the schools where the principals in this study worked than in Region 7 or the State of Texas as a whole (TEA, 2011b), yet was a little higher than the poverty levels in Theoharis' study. The schools of the principals who were interviewed in this study had rates of economically disadvantaged students with a range of 36% to 56% with a mean of 50.6% (TEA, 2011b), while the principals in Theoharis' (2004, 2007) study worked in schools with percentages of students in poverty which ranged from 8% to 90% with a mean of 40.7%. Whether the demographics of the schools played a specific role in how these particular principals viewed or worked for social justice is unknown, but, according to the survey data, the principals in this study did not enter the profession to be social justice leaders primarily, and did not work at school with high levels of minorities.

To answer how rural principals describe diversity, I first look at their view of diversity acceptance and then their inclusion of LGBTQ students. The survey data of all the principals revealed that six of the 17 (35%) participants who answered the survey questions did not include improving acceptance of diverse student groups as being important to them in their role as principal (see Table 4.1). Six of the 17 (35%) did not include gay and lesbian students among the diverse student groups that could be found on their campuses. One principal did not include improving acceptance as being important and did not include gay and lesbians as being part of their student body. Tooms and Alston (2006) conducted research on 174 aspiring school administrators and found 30% to be intolerant and non-supportive of the LGBTQ community,

25% were not supportive of equity for LGBTQ people, and 35% were found to be neutral concerning equity based on sexual orientation. While the survey in this study does not reveal any particular bias or negativity among the principals about LGBTQ students, the data is similar to that of Tooms and Alston in the percentages of principals who did not feel improving acceptance of diverse groups was important, and who did not acknowledge the presence of LGBTQ students on their campuses. It is possible the principals did not know of specific LGBTQ students and therefore did not include them, and it is possible the principals were unaware of the presence of LGBTQ students on their campus. It is also possible there were no LGBTQ students on some campuses, although this is highly unlikely since research has found 20.8% of males and 17.8% of females in the U.S. report either homosexual behavior or attraction from the age of 15 (Sell, Wells, & Wypij, 1995).

According to the survey data, all five principals who were interviewed checked a variety of races and differences from a list of those available. (See Table 4.2 for the different groups each principal checked.) During the interviews, however, the principals did not indicate as much diversity as indicated by the survey. Principal Perkins included students with special needs, bisexual, and homosexual students in her description of diversity on her campus, while Principal Adams only mentioned economically disadvantaged students on his campus. Principal Dawson included only race and gender as the type of diversity found on his campus, and Principal Colton only listed race. Principal Stanley listed religion, race, and sexual orientation as types of diversity found at his school. Since LGBTQ students were the focus of this study, it was interesting to me that only two of the principals who were interviewed included LGBTQ students as part of their diversity on campus without being reminded that they had included them in the survey. I was also surprised at how limited the principals seemed to be in listing diversity on their campus during the interviews considering how many different groups each principal had indicated on the surveys.

The findings from this study were supportive of Lugg's (2006) statement, "Public school administrators and teachers have a dismal record of embracing their queer students....At best, some will embrace an ethic of protection, viewing queer students as at risk or in need of rescuing" (p. 49). While all the principals worked to protect LGBTQ students, when describing and discussing LGBTQ students on their campuses, four of the principals told me they did not agree with the life-styles of the LGBTQ students or that it went against the way they were raised even though I never once asked their opinion of LGBTQ students. This finding reminded again me of Tooms and Alston's (2006) study where they found 25% of the future principals in their study were not supportive of equity for LGBTQ people. These statements happened near the end of the interviews after some rapport had been established between me as the researcher and the principals.

There was some apparent discomfort from some of the principals in discussing LGBTQ students, particularly when these students were first mentioned. Principal Dawson seemed extremely nervous when I first mentioned gay and lesbian students. He stammered quite a bit as evidenced when he said, "Our district has been very, uh, has been very conservative. And, uh, we have kids that go to school here who are openly gay, okay. And we, that, uh, we, and I, uh, we know who these students are..." His discomfort was further evident when he described a gay male student who wore make-up. He said, "I mean the student, uh, you know, was obviously, um, had some gender identity disorder I would say..." He said they had to consult their attorneys because, when he classified it as a disorder, he was concerned that it should fall under the school's special education umbrella. He did not know "where do you draw the line when it comes to gender identity disorders?" He later spoke about his beliefs and how he was against "certain life styles." He said, "I'm known openly, I'm um, I'm against certain life styles or certain things or what have you, and I don't have a problem with that, but I'm not going to force my beliefs on anybody." He also said, "I may not agree! I don't have to agree! But I have to treat them in a way that's respectful."

Principal Colton felt like the flamboyant students on his campus needed counseling and referred to homosexuality as a choice. Regarding cross-dressing, he also said, "It was a counseling issue." Principal Colton seemed to have the biggest struggle with the LGBTQ students. He was protective of those students if they were being picked on, but he said very honestly, "That's (homosexuality) still a wall for me. And I still, just, uh, I think that's a cultural, religious issue I guess. Maybe for me, I don't know." A little later in the interview, when discussing one of the students who had been a cross-dresser when he began as principal at the school where he served at the time of the interview, he got a little quiet and said slowly, "But that student actually came back here earlier this year to pick up a copy of his transcript...and, I mean, I'll be honest, (sigh), (slowly) it was a female. He was a female..." This seemed disconcerting to the principal based on his demeanor and expressions as he said it. He later used this student as an example of why he had decided to make the student dress code more stringent on his campus.

Principal Adams shared his milder feelings the most mildly when he said, "It's probably different from the way I was raised I guess." Principal Perkins, who seemed very open about discussing LGBTQ students said, "I don't always agree with the situation based on *my* (emphasis hers) morals and values, and you know, my up-bringing, but I can do what's right and what's fair." She added, "And I have told people that 'I may not agree with your life-style, but it doesn't, I'm not going to treat you any differently because of it.'" When Principal Perkins made that statement, I wanted to tell her, "You just did." Lugg (2006) points out, "The sociology of education is full of examples of children learning 'their place' in the U.S. political and social order through their public school experiences" (p. 49). I argue, these principals, while willing protectors of LGBTQ students, were also unknowingly putting the LGBTQ students "in their place" by making it known they disagreed with the LGBTQ students' identities. Lugg (2006) furthers, "For public school administrators committed to a social justice ethos, this is a troubling institutional phenomenon they must constantly monitor" (p. 49).

Principals have a right to disagree with the life-style of LGBTQ students, but while principals are performing their duties as representatives of the state, their own beliefs cannot be expressed (Gey, 2000). I argue that telling others of one's disapproval of another's identity is in essence a method of teaching others "who and what social groups are to be celebrated and what individuals and social groups are to be denigrated" (Lugg, 2006, p. 49), and is therefore resistance to social justice for all students. Additionally, invalidating a student's identity is not treating a student fairly or justly, which, as a representative of the state, is how the principals must treat these students regardless of personal beliefs, perceptions, or culture (Biegel, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Henze et al., 2002; Lugg & Tabbaa-Rida, 2006).

5.1.2 Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "How do they (the social justice principals in rural schools) generate a school climate demonstrating a valuing of diverse student identity that is inclusive of all students, including LGBTQ students?"

All of the principals shared ways they led for social justice to make their schools welcoming for students in general, including LGBTQ students. They discussed the importance of their roles as leaders in following the law, by knowing and respecting the students individually, by building community, by promoting safety and maintaining discipline on campus, by offering staff development to help train the staff about diversity, and by having a low turnover of faculty and staff.

5.1.2.1. Leadership by Following the Law

When it came to protecting LGBTQ students, following the law was of utmost importance to some of the principals. What the law states mattered to the principals, which indicates the laws are making strides toward protection and possibly social justice for LGBTQ students. The principals were aware of all students' rights and worked to ensure no one's rights were violated. Principal Dawson, when dealing with a male student who was a cross-dresser, said, "We were definitely communicating with our counsel, our legal attorneys." When asked

whether students at her campus could establish a Gay-Straight Alliance, Principal Perkins said, “We’re going to go by what the law says.” Concerning the establishment of school policies, Principal Stanley said they consider religion, race, and sexual orientation when making policies to be sure to allow for “that freedom” and to avoid being in “violation of their civil rights.” These principals seemed to understand the importance of protecting the legal rights of all students, but they also worked to establish a positive climate for all students.

5.1.2.2 Leadership by Setting the Climate

The principals cited the importance of knowing their students and being accessible to them as crucial in being a campus leader and establishing a positive school climate. Leading with an attitude of advocacy, care, and concern for the individual students is one of the aspects of leading for social justice (Dillard, 1995) found in the literature. Principal Adams described his role in establishing a positive climate as “being a good role model and being accessible to the kids.” Principal Colton said, “I know every one of the kids.” He also made a point to know a little about each student so he could talk with them easily and the students would be comfortable talking to him. He stressed the importance of listening to the students. He attributed the fact that one of the gay students came to him when being bullied because of the rapport he had established with that student. He said that rapport is “just something that you just work to develop with the kids....You just really work hard to get to know your kids and do that....We try very hard to know all of our kids.” Similarly, Principal Perkins said she is often “put in the role of counselor” because her school is so small they do not have a full-time counselor. Principal Dawson described his relationships with the students as being part of an “open-door policy”. He said, “They’ll see me in the hallway and say, ‘Hey, you got a minute?’ or whatever.” He said he spoke to them one-on-one as often as he could and he said, “My kids know that I’m there for them.”

The principals also believed in treating all students, including LGBTQ students, fairly and being an example or role model for the student body. This aspect of social justice

leadership is described as valuing human rights and individual dignity (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). Theoharis (2009) describes a social justice leader as one who “places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect” (p. 160). The principals show respect to all students and, by modeling respect, hope students will do the same. Principal Adams said he tried to make the LGBTQ students feel like they were “just as important as anybody else.” Principal Dawson said, “The main thing is just treating everybody with respect....it doesn’t matter who they are or what their beliefs are.” He said he also worked to “intentionally do things to make people’s day get better.” He said, “We just have to do that with all of our kids.” Principal Dawson was particularly concerned with how he treated the LGBTQ students because he felt, in his role as principal, he was always being watched and had to set a good example of acceptance. Principal Stanley also seemed to value the importance of modeling to the students how they should treat each other.

5.1.2.3 Leadership by Building Community

Another way the principals worked to improve the school climate and “build community,” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 252) was through school programs that promoted kindness to everyone. Principal Stanley said his school brought representatives from Rachel’s Challenge to come speak to the student body as well as to the parents and community. This program promoted the compassionate treatment of everyone in an effort to start a chain reaction of kindness. Concerning the program, Principal Stanley said, “It brought some things to light that people may have been doing.” He said his campus was seeing improvement in finding the “good in others”. Principal Colton sent a group of teachers to watch a Rachel’s Challenge presentation in another district and planned to use the program at his school the next school year. Bringing in such programs that teach fairness and equality may lead to a more positive campus climate, as well as demonstrate the social justice leadership characteristics of the principals such as purposefully leading for equality (Theoharis, 2007), networking with others to stop injustice (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006), and consciously working to promote equity and justice (Marshall & Young, 2006).

5.1.2.4 Leadership for Safety and Discipline

The principals also led for social justice by making their campuses safe and by maintaining the discipline necessary to ensure a safe, welcoming environment free of bullying and harassment for everyone. As far as protecting LGBTQ students from bullying, Principal Adams said, “It’s (protection) a necessity.” Principal Perkins said her students were welcoming to all students, so she really did not have to offer discipline in that regard, while Principal Colton argued, “You can’t say that you don’t have issues with bullying. I believe all schools have issues with bullying.” Regarding bullying, Principal Stanley said they had just finished developing their new anti-bullying plan with formal documentation. Principal Dawson stressed the “zero tolerance” policy for violence or racism on their campus. He said they “don’t tolerate any kind of violence or anything.” He said, “We place a lot of emphasis on safety on this campus.”

5.1.2.5 Leadership for Staff Development and Programs

Social justice leaders provide professional development for their staff covering issues related to social class, race, language, ability levels, and sexual orientation (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006), educate their staff about marginalization and how to recognize it (Kose, 2009), “embed professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160), and institute changes to make their schools more inclusive (Shields, 2010). In addition to following the law, setting the school climate, and providing safety and discipline on campus, three of the principals provided some opportunities for their faculty and staff to learn about diversity or anti-bullying. Principal Stanley said they provide anti-bullying training in their in-service staff development at the beginning of each school year to help teachers work to prevent bullying and harassment. Principal Dawson said most of their training was about educational strategies for different racial minority groups, but he said they had also included some information about gay and lesbian rights, especially during the years when the student who cross-dressed was on their campus. Principal Dawson had training each year for the students specifically aimed at bullying, cyber-

bullying, harassment, and suicide prevention. Principal Adams did not mention offering his staff specific diversity training for an in-service, but he did lead an informal book study for the teachers to promote diversity acceptance. Some of the students also read the book and it became their motto and slogan for the year, so his leadership had an effect on students and faculty alike.

5.1.2.6 Leadership for Stability

An important quality of a social justice leader is becoming “intertwined with the school’s success and life” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). Part of this is achieved by remaining in a school long enough to become “intertwined.” The principals who were interviewed had been at their campuses a minimum of five years. When explaining why their climate is positive, three mentioned the stability of the faculty and administration as being important in a positive environment. Principal Adams said, the average years of experience was about 18 years. He said, “I think, you know, the stability helps.” Principal Stanley said, “Our administrative staff’s been together four years now, our teaching staff, uh we’ve really got some good teachers on board, and I think that, that just contributes to it all.” Principal Dawson said, “The longer you’re in a school, the longer of that (treating every kid as if they are your very own) you have.” He said they had “had an administrative team on this campus that’s been very consistent over the last 10-12 years for the most part.... having that consistency makes a world of difference.”

Not only being at a school for a long time as an administrator, but leading in such a way that retained teachers was also important to Principal Dawson. I asked him what he, as a principal and school leader had done to bring about positive changes on his campus. He attributed much of the change to them. He said, “We’ve got some really great faculty members and staff members that have made these changes all along.” He worked as a social justice leader to promote his vision to the stakeholders (Kose, 2009), in this case, the teachers. He continued, “It is under my direction, but, I mean, I couldn’t do it without having good people.”

The other principals discussed the importance of knowing their students and community, which comes from being at the same school for a number years. This leadership is described by Theoharis (2007) as building networks of support in the community. Principal Dawson talked about shaking parent's hands at ball games and building trust within the community during his 11 years as principal of the local high school. Principal Stanley reflected on how knowing parents and siblings of students who get into trouble help him in disciplinary situations. Principals Perkins, Colton, and Adams all provided data indicating the importance of knowing the students and parents on a personal level. The actions the principals took to lead their campuses to abide by the law, to have a positive climate, to be safe, and to have an informed, stable faculty have positive outcomes for the students, according to the principals. Additionally, the principals' roles as leaders of their campus and, as leaders for social justice, affected them on a personal level.

5.1.2.7 Principals' Reflections on Social Justice Leadership

Social justice leaders are open-minded, willing to explore their own values, experiences, and values (Brown, 2004), are willing to learn, are self-reflective, and believe social justice ensures a better quality of life for everyone (Marshall & Young, 2006). Theoharis (2007) describes these traits together as having "a reflective-consciousness centered on social justice" (p. 250). While the principals may not have had a "reflective-consciousness" about their own resistances toward LGBTQ students, the principals all agreed they had changed over the years due to their experiences as leaders, and particularly leading for social justice. Principal Dawson said, "I've absolutely grown a lot. I think the message we send when we interact with kids is extremely important in our relationships with them....I mean, like a parenting type relationship." Later in the interview, Principal Dawson had this to say about his leadership for social justice: "Heck, we're learning. This is a learning process, and we're learning all the time. And hopefully what we're doing is making us a better person in the long run."

Principal Perkins echoed this when she said her years of leadership had made people realize that she was “going to be fair and just in punishments” based on “what works or what’s best for each individual child.” She said, “I think they realize that because of the history I’ve had doing that.” She said social justice leadership made her “be a better person.” Principal Adams said leadership for social justice had made him “be a little more open-minded” than the way he was raised. He learned to consider other people’s belief and rights rather than only his own. Principal Colton said he used to worry too much about what others thought of his leadership. He said he used to “always worry” about if he was “doing the right thing.” Now, he said, he can apologize if he makes mistakes when he is trying to do what is best for his students and his school.

Principal Stanley seemed to have the most inward reflection about social justice leadership of all the principals. He talked about his own transformation in wanting others to conform and follow the rules and “quit drawing attention to themselves.” He said he had learned to try to help those students more and pay more attention to the “small things that can cause the big problems,” like the name calling and inappropriate language. He said his attitude had changed through his experiences as a leader for social justice.

5.1.3 Research Question 2a

Research Question 2a asked, “What types of resistance and support have principals encountered from the community?”

Research shows principals who are social justice leaders often meet resistance to social justice leadership from within the schools, districts, and communities in which they serve (Theoharis, 2004, 2007). Part of the purpose of this study was to investigate how the context of the schools, specifically the communities, may affect the principals’ perceptions and implementation of the climate they are working to establish. This research question begins to address this purpose. The rural, east Texas schools were chosen because they fit the demographics found in the literature of schools likely to be resistant to social justice leadership,

particularly regarding equity and justice for LGBTQ students (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2009; Rosik et al., 2007). The perceptions of the principals of the communities were revealed by their descriptions of the communities. The principals' perceptions of community resistance and support their leadership toward a positive climate for all students, including LGBTQ students, follows their descriptions of the communities.

5.1.3.1 Descriptions of Communities

The principals in Theoharis' (2004, 2007) study worked in urban schools, some of which were in what the principals described as "ghetto" (2007, p. 236) communities. The principals talked about "reaching out to the community and to marginalized families" (p. 236) as well as facing constant resistance to social justice leadership from the communities, from within the schools, and from higher administrators. Conversely to the principals in Theoharis' study, the principals in this study lived and worked in rural areas. According to the principals, leading for social justice affected them in positive ways. Unlike Theoharis' (2004, 2007) principals who encountered and suffered due to resistance from others, none seemed to suffer any ill effects of social justice leadership, such as resistance and having to resist the resistance at cost to self. The schools where the principals in this study worked, however, had low numbers of minority groups (TEA, 2011b) (see Table 4.3), and the principals included themselves as part of the communities. They also faced little to no resistance in their leadership for social justice for LGBTQ students, although some of the principals had to contend with resistance to racial equality at times.

Four of the five principals were from rural east Texas working in areas similar to where they had grown up. (Principal Stanley was from a suburb of Houston.) Two of the principals included themselves as part of the communities by using the pronoun "we". Principal Colton said, "We are a very, very conservative, it's a very conservative community" and "we still do things a very different way here in deep east Texas (*italics mine*)."

 Additionally, Principal Adams

included himself in the community when he said, "...we're rural, country, pretty close-minded thinking people (*italics mine*)."

Principal Dawson told me his wife grew up in the district where he worked, which was why he moved there. Principal Colton explained how he moved his family to the district where he worked to become part of the community and made it his home. He said where he works "has to be a...great area to put your kids and want to raise your kids."

In describing the communities, the principals were fairly frank with their comments. Principal Dawson described his community as "a very conservative school district...for the most part, pretty darn conservative." Principal Adams described his community as "rural, country, pretty close-minded thinking people." Principal Stanley focused much of his discussion on racial issues he faced on his campus between the "white country boys and...black students." He described the community as "a very racial area" and "was shocked at how racially divided" the community was as well as how much segregation there was between socio-economic groups. He had resistance to leading for racial equality from some of the students and some of the parents, but said he did not have any resistance to protecting LGBTQ students. He described the terms bullying and harassment as terms that were the "buzz words" at the time that got parents' attention because they did not want their children to be accused of being a bully. He used the term "red-neck" more than once referring to some of the white male students. This could indicate some negative bias on his part toward that group of students.

Three of the principals described intentional segregation on the students' part in their schools that reflected that of their communities. Principal Stanley said that even "as much as (they) push kids to be equal and kids to work together and kids to respect one another," the students still segregated themselves by race. He said, "It's almost like a neighborhood." Principal Colton said, "You look at the cafeteria though. The kids for the most part, they sit around in their social pockets." He added that "there's not a lot of anxiety between the kids." Similarly, Principal Dawson said the "kids are voluntarily segregating each other....They'll do

that socially and naturally...but there's not any problems..." Principal Stanley summed it up by saying, "The school reflects the community. And I don't know how you get away from that."

Principals Perkins and Adams worked at schools that are 92% and 86% white, with the majority of their minorities being Hispanic. Principal Adams' school had no African American students, and Principal Perkins' school only had 3% African Americans. Neither mentioned any segregation, but with so few minority students, segregation may not have been noticeable. Principal Perkins did mention differences in student groups by saying, "We have all different cliques of kids, but they all get along."

Regarding racism, Principal Dawson's campus had a zero tolerance for racist language on campus. He said he had sent students to detention for simply yelling out that someone else had said "the n-word." Regarding that matter, he said, "We just do not say anything at all if it sounds racial." Having this extreme policy and teaching this could deny race as part of student identity. Prohibiting offensive language is a different matter than excluding any language referencing a students' race. Similarly to the resistance faced by Principal Stanley regarding social justice leadership for all races, Principal Dawson indicated he did see some racism in the community. "You're always going to have people... they may not admit it or anything, but you're going to have people that are somewhat racist or somewhat prejudiced in some form or fashion." He did mention he got tired of people "always blaming stuff on racism." His story about the dragging death of a black man in Jasper, Texas, by white men as not being racially motivated coupled with a no tolerance policy of anything that sounded racial was indicative of a mindset I have encountered often among white people in east Texas. There seems to be an understandable resentment to the stereotype of the area of east Texas being a "red-neck", racist place, as described by Principal Stanley who was not raised in east Texas, in that they work hard to prove they are not racist (i.e. the zero tolerance policy for anything that "sounds racial"). Yet many of the white people seem unaware of the white privilege (Jensen, 2005) that seems to be perpetuated in that area. An example of this white privilege is supported by the

data from the surveys. One hundred percent of the principals in this study are white (see Table 4.1).

In addition to racism, Principal Perkins described the area where she worked as being sexist. Although she did not specifically use the term “sexist,” she described the difficulties in finding a job as a female administrator as one of her professors had told her to expect. Her description was similar to one of the first observations I made as I was using TEA’s (2008) *AskTED* website to find all the principals in high schools in rural areas of Region 7 in east Texas. I noticed only 11 of the initial 74 names I wrote down who had email addresses had names generally belonging to females. This would indicate only 15% of those principals were females, if, indeed, those names represented females and the others were indeed male. Of the surveys returned, 17 indicated they were white males, and one was from a white female. No minorities responded, and only one female responded. According to the TEA (2012b) website, in 2010, the percentage of minority administrators in the Texas was 35%, and the percentage of females was 60%. The demographics for principals in the rural schools of Region 7 in east Texas was not consistent with the demographics of principals in the state of Texas as a whole, yet was consistent with Principal Perkins’ descriptions of her difficulties finding a high school principal job as a female in east Texas. It should be noted, however, the data for the state of Texas combined elementary and secondary principals, while only high school principals were included in this study. That could explain the differences, particularly in the gender differences since, although the number of females principals at all school levels is on the rise, approximately 30% more females were found leading elementary schools than high schools. In 2008, 59% of elementary principals in the U.S. were women, but only 29% were working at the high school level (NCES, n.d.b).

Another example of an issue with sexism described by Principal Perkins was when she said she was “infuriated” once during a meeting because a parent accused her of being “gay.” She said this brought on such a reaction from her because “a lot of times, as a female that’s

strong willed, that's the perception of some." The literature agrees with her on this point. Historically, school administration "became by definition masculinist, a career for married males with academic credentials" (Lugg, 2003, p. 106), and this seemed to still be the case when Principal Perkins first became a principal 13 years prior to this study. Her anger at being perceived as being gay is to be noted because could be indicative of her resistance to LGBTQ identity.

Principal Colton described the rural schools as being "very conservative" and less willing to be open and welcoming to everyone than might be the case in other areas. He was specific about this regarding LGBTQ student acceptance particularly. He focused on males who had attended his school and who were cross dressers. He said, "When you're in deep east Texas...you have a very specific dress code." He planned to enforce a stricter dress code the following year to delineate how boys should dress and how girls should dress because of his perceptions of the expectations of the community where he worked.

5.1.3.2 Communities and LGBTQ Students

To address Research Question 2a, "What types of resistance and support have principals encountered from the community," a large portion of the interviews centered around the topic of LGBTQ students to gain the best possible information from the perspectives of the principals.

When asked about how LGBTQ students were treated at school or if there were any issues with them, the principals all found the other students, for the most part, treated them just like everyone else. Principal Colton said the LGBTQ students "fit in pretty well." He said the LGBTQ students who were on campus at the time of the interview were "just like any other kids." He said, "They get along just fine with the rest of the kids. They are very well integrated into the mainstream of the school." Principal Perkins said, "We've had kids here that were professed to be bisexual or to be homosexual. The kids loved them. It doesn't matter." Principal

Dawson said, "I have a population of students that are openly gay, and we are not seeing any kind of issues."

Principal Dawson discussed a cross-dressing male student. He said he had expected to see more problems from his students than he had. He said, "We thought at first it was going to cause all kinds of headaches. And you'd be surprised at the number of friends that he had!" He added, "Um, you know, honestly, I didn't think that would happen." He said he was surprised he did not see much bullying going on from the student body. He said, "We did a little bitty bit at first, but it was just because the kid was different, you know, but once the kid was here *a year or two* (italics mine), no problems at all." Principal Adams said the LGBTQ students on his campus "carry on as any of the other students do." He went on to say "the kids adapt a whole lot better to it than the adults."

Principal Perkins also found the students to be more willing to accept LGBTQ students than adults. She said, "The kids are amazingly accepting of everyone," and then, with some hesitation, "Our parents weren't as accepting as our students are." Although the parents seemed to be less accepting of the LGBTQ students, Principal Perkins said she had only had problems from parents of students whom she had disciplined and "they disagreed with the discipline."

Principal Perkins demonstrated the openness of some people in her school district when she told of having a lesbian speaker at a banquet who referred to her "life partner" twice during her speech. Principal Perkins said the superintendent called her immediately after the banquet and asked if the speaker was gay. Principal Perkins said she knew she was gay when she read her biography prior to introducing her and said to her principal, "Uh, yeah. Obviously!" The superintendent told her one of the board members had questioned him about it and he asked the board member, "Well, does it matter? You know, we're not going to discriminate – does it matter?" To which the board member replied, "No, not really. We're not going to discriminate." Principal Perkins said one of her students told her the next day, "I hope if people

realized it (that the speaker was gay), they got past that and listened to her message, because she had a wonderful message.” Principal Perkins noted that she felt her district was unusual in its acceptance of LGBTQ people.

There seemed to be a fine line between tolerance and acceptance in the rural, east Texas schools. Principal Colton summarized this best when he said used the term “tolerate” to describe how LGBTQ students are viewed. Tolerance is quite different than acceptance. He reiterated the importance of LGBTQ students blending in so the other students did not have the life-style “choice” “in their face” and could therefore “tolerate” it. He attributed this attitude of tolerance instead of acceptance to the conservative nature of the rural community.

All in all, the principals tended to find that the LGBTQ students often got along well with others, particularly if they were not too flamboyant or obvious about it. Principal Perkins proudly described this when referring to student interactions where the heterosexual students told the LGBTQ students, “I don’t agree with your life-style, but I love you and we’re going to be friends anyway.” She said her school had “a different climate than you do at a lot of schools. It’s strange.” However, I argue that telling someone that they don’t agree with their life-style is a judgment against another’s identity. It seems to be an attempt to mask resistance to acceptance of a person who is different.

There were some more blatant instances of students’ resistance to acceptance of LGBTQ students than disagreeing with their life-styles, however. Principal Stanley said he had recently been dealing with two or three students who he said “like to make fun of them (the gay and lesbian students)” and “pick at them.” He disciplined those who were harassing the LGBTQ students in those instances. Principal Colton found the harassment to be primarily with younger, less mature students. He told of one student who came out at the junior high, and when he moved up to the high school, some of the boys who were also ninth graders “were still causing him some issues.” He indicated that goes away as they become juniors and seniors. This reminds me of Principal Dawson saying that once the LGBTQ student who was picked on had

been at the school “a year or two,” there were no more problems. To me, this was painful to hear because it meant students must endure two years of harassment before the other students were confident enough and secure enough in their own sexuality to leave the LGBTQ students alone.

There was consistency in agreement that the adults had a more challenging time than students when it came to acceptance of LGBTQ students. As mentioned earlier, Principal Perkins said, “The parents weren’t as accepting as our students are.” However, she could not think of any examples of parents or the community causing any trouble regarding the LGBTQ students. Further in the interview she said about the parent’s regarding the LGBTQ students, “They really don’t seem to care. They take the kid at the kid’s face value – what’s inside the kid – not worry about their sexual preference.”

Principal Dawson had a little trouble with parents, but it was mainly caused by parents trying to get their own kids out of trouble. He said, “A parent might complain and say, ‘Well, wait a minute, you got on to my child because my child came to school with shorts that are too short, yet you allow a boy to come to school with make-up.’” He said some parents liked to “stir” things up by questioning some of his decisions, but he said he “took it as a good opportunity to teach them and show them what’s really going on.”

When it came to the LGBTQ students and bullying, Principal Adams found that even if parents disagree with a student’s life-style, they still wanted all students to be protected from bullying and harassment. He said, “I believe, even our parents that don’t agree with it, still believe that, you know, kids should be protected and no one should be bullied. They expect me to see that that’s carried out.”

Although in most of the principals’ experiences, the faculty was either accepting or kept their thoughts to themselves about LGBTQ students, in some cases, the principals shared concerns about the conservativeness of the faculty. Principal Colton said, “I wish that all the teachers...were able to be fair with everybody....It’d be nice if they were a little bit more open

and willing to accept more, but, some things just take time to change I guess.” Principal Dawson described his faculty as conservative, but said they knew there would be serious consequences if they showed any impartiality or acted on their beliefs. He said, “Obviously they’re going to get in some pretty serious trouble if that happens, so they won’t do that.” He said, “They act very professionally when it comes to that.” This is another example of how the law helps to protect LGBTQ students. Because the teachers know they could be fired or lose their certification for treating students unfairly, they follow the law and treat all students equitably.

The data shows the communities to be very conservative and somewhat close-minded according to the principals, yet, the principals had not had much resistance concerning their protection of LGBTQ students other than parents trying to get their children out of trouble by comparing their children’s violations with allowing a male student to dress in a feminine manner. Principal Colton described a general “tolerance” found in rural schools, but explained that is not the same as acceptance. The principals all agreed that it was more difficult for the adults in the community to accept the LGBTQ students than the students in the school, yet none could think of specific incidences where the community had tried to step in when one of them was leading for a more open-minded, positive climate for all students or when they protected the LGBTQ students. In fact, Principal Adams said the parents in the community expect him to protect those students regardless of their own personal beliefs.

When discussing the communities’ support and resistance, I would be remiss were I not to include my findings that the principals were typically part of the community resistance. This was particularly evident by the resistance to acceptance by the principals themselves. They all “tolerated” the LGBTQ students and were willing to protect them from bullying, which fit their descriptions of the communities in which they worked. But, as the data shows, four of the principals, without ever being asked about their own beliefs or thoughts about the LGBTQ students, told me they did not agree with the “choice” of being LGBTQ. Two of the principals also said they were known and open about not agreeing with the LGBTQ students’ life-styles.

Additionally, Principal Dawson considered the student who cross-dressed to have a “gender-identity disorder” that might fall under the special education spectrum and told how he believed in “loving the *unlovable* (italics mine)” when referring to LGBTQ students. Similarly, Principal Colton felt a male student who wanted to wear feminine clothing needed to spend time with the school counselor.

The idea of the principals as part of the community resistance was also evident in their promotion of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the idea that being heterosexual is normal and anything else is not normal and therefore inferior (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). The silencing of anything other than heterosexual behavior is common in schools (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Lugg, 1998, 2003), and I found evidence of the promotion of heteronormativity, particularly in the dress codes, in all five of the schools where the principals I interviewed worked at the time of the interviews. According to the interview data, the principals tended to feel like there was not a problem as long as the LGBTQ students blended in and looked like the heterosexual students; it was when the LGBTQ students looked gay that problems arose. Research has found this to be a common belief among school administrators (Lugg, 2006). Even LGBTQ administrators have been found to blame LGBTQ students for not blending in enough and therefore creating problems for themselves (Fraynd & Capper, 2003). Principal Colton said if LGBTQ students were “not openly just flamboyant, in your face,” they were left alone. He said the ones who were “just like any other kid (got) along just fine with the rest of the kids.” The ones who were flamboyant about their “*choices*” (italics mine) made it “more difficult on them” and on Principal Colton and his assistant principal.

None of the principals expressed any real concerns or problems with the community regarding their leadership for social justice for LGBTQ students, yet one of them had previously changed the dress code to eliminate wearing make-up for boys, and the other planned to make drastic changes to the dress code for the following school year to insure gender differences according to dress. Using school policies to monitor sexuality and gender behavior of students

has historically been conducted by school administrators in public schools (Lugg, 2006). Lugg states, "Educational administrators have long policed both gender performance and sexual orientation...this power has been reflected in...student discipline codes" (p. 43). The dress code was the primary way some of the principals enforced heteronormativity. Even though Principal Colton said he had had "zero parent or community problems" (*italics mine*) with any of the LGBTQ students or his leadership for them, he had decided to change the dress code the next year to dictate what boys were allowed to wear versus what girls were allowed to wear. This way, if a student were to "become a cross-dresser", then he could "address that issue further." He said it was "a step backwards," and said it was due to "cultural issues." He added that the community and parents expected him to "teach them (students) appropriate ways to dress," even though he said he "could care less [*sic*]" about the dress code and that "it doesn't distract from learning." Here Principal Colton clearly blames the culture and community for his own heteronormative policies.

Similarly, the dress code at Principal Dawson's school had become more stringent after a male student on his campus wore make-up to school. The new dress code prohibited boys from wearing make-up. He said, "You gotta draw the line some place." Principal Dawson seemed to view the dress code as a way to keep students from drawing attention to "however they are." He said if the students violate a dress code rule, "then you're getting on to them for the rule issue, not because of how they – you know, it's just how you handle it." My interpretation of his statement was, he could discipline the students for breaking an actual rule directed specifically at them to force conformity rather than discipline them based on their identity.

Principal Stanley also found the blending in to be in both his best interest as well as the LGBTQ students' best interests. He told of a flamboyant student who needed to "tone it down" because he was causing himself grief and drawing undue attention himself, which was a violation of the student dress code. Principal Stanley seemed to promote heteronormativity, not

as a way to simply silence the identity of LGBTQ students, but as a means of protecting students who might be mistreated if it was obvious they were gay. He said he had to “look out for that kid’s safety, too.” He said to protect them and work with them, they needed to “blend in a little bit.” Principal Adams also mentioned the blending in when he was telling me that the LGBTQ students got along well on his campus and “carry on as any of the other students do.”

The dress codes at the schools where Principals Perkins, Adams, Stanley, and Colton worked included language prohibited any dress that was distracting, drew attention to a student, and/or disrupted the learning environment. Such language in the dress code could be used to promote heteronormativity. Principals Colton, Dawson, and Stanley specifically used the dress code to coerce LGBTQ students conceal their identities. These principals seem to be in agreement that if the LGBTQ students blended in with the other students, then they were better accepted; it was best for them and for everyone. Their identity was less of an issue if they appeared to be just like the other students. Lugg (2003) acknowledged this phenomenon stating, “Queer people, in particular, are repeatedly told they must pass as non-queer...not to be bullied and harassed in school” (p. 104). Dress code, in this case, is an example of how heteronormativity “is simply, *in place*” (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). Such use of the dress codes to keep the LGBTQ students from drawing undue attention to themselves, and citing the need to do so as being for the LGBTQ students’ own protection, is noted in the literature by Lugg (2003) as being “inherently discriminatory, undermining personal integrity and autonomy” (p. 104). This promotion of heteronormativity seemed to stem from the influence of the culture and communities of which the principals were a part.

In his study, Theoharis (2007) described community resistance principals faced to social justice leadership. Based on the data in this study, I contend, when principals are of the same culture and are part of the community, resistance to social justice leadership stems from the principals themselves and is unrecognizable to them. This non-consciousness (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991) results in the maintenance of the established culture.

Principals are chosen by the a select group from the communities in which they serve and must therefore match a certain “fit” determined by this group of community leaders (Tooms et al., 2010). In this way, the values of the community are perpetuated in the schools by the school leadership (Tooms et al., 2010) resulting in the historical maintenance of the status quo (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). I theorize that the principals were so much a product of the local culture and community or were hired due to their “fit” with the school in that particular community that they did not perceive resistance from the community because it was a resistance that was their own, as part of the community.

5.1.4 Research Question 2b

Research Question 2b asked, “What specific strategies do principals use to overcome any perceived resistance from the communities that may affect establishing a socially just school climate for LGBTQ students?”

The principals did not perceive any resistance from the communities regarding the LGBTQ students other than a few parents trying to counter discipline of their own children. Although the communities had not been resistant specifically to the principals’ leadership for social justice for LGBTQ students, two of the principals, rather than placing “significant value on diversity” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160), had enforced or were going to enforce stricter dress codes. Instead of developing strategies to lead for social justice in the face of perceived resistance of the community as was the case of the social justice leaders in Theoharis’ (2007) study, the principals in this study were the root of the resistance themselves because of their beliefs and values as part of the community.

Like the teachers, however, the principals understood the importance of professionalism and following the law. In every case, the principals indicated they were openly willing to protect the LGBTQ students and treat them “fairly” regardless of their own beliefs. Principal Perkins said she had never had any issues where she needed to protect the LGBTQ students, other than, she said jokingly, “Maybe from their parents!” Principal Adams described

protecting LGBTQ students from bullying as “a necessity.” Principal Colton said, “When he’s (gay student) picked on, when he’s messed with, when he’s having issues, he’s another kid.” Principal Dawson said the students and community knew he was “going to treat everyone respectfully.” He said, “It doesn’t matter who they are or what their beliefs are, I’m still going to treat them with respect.” Principal Stanley stressed to his students and parents that bullying and harassment of anyone was “just not going to be tolerated. He said, “We will file charges on them for disorderly conduct, we will put them in alternative school for bullying and harassment.” He furthered, “They realize we mean business, that we are not going to tolerate this.” It should be noted here that protection is not social justice (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Theoharis, 2004), nor is “protector” a quality of a social justice leader (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2) according to scholars. However, following the law and policies to protect students could result in less threatening learning environments for LGBTQ students, which is necessary for optimal learning to occur (Henze et al., 2002).

5.1.5 Research Question 2c

Research Question 2c asked, “What artifacts within the schools show evidence of a socially just school climate for all students?” The mission statements for the schools of Principals Adams, Stanley, and Colton stressed the importance and value of every individual student. Principal Stanley’s school included language stating “each person is valuable” and included in their campus goals the goal to provide “quality instructional programs that meet the needs of all students and ensure continuous improvement.”

Non-discrimination policies at the schools also indicated positive school climates. Principal Adams’ school’s non-discrimination policy included discrimination based on sex and gender, so it is possible that could include a person’s self-perceived gender. Principal Adams’ school’s “Freedom from Discrimination” policy included the phrase, “to avoid any behaviors known to be offensive.” This would certainly indicate harassment based on sexual orientation. All of the schools except Principal Colton’s school specifically prohibited bullying and did not list

specific reasons why a person might be bullied. This makes the policy completely inclusive of every student, including LGBTQ students. Principal Colton's school's anti-bullying policy was open-ended enough that it could protect LGBTQ students from bullying or harassment based on the language protecting students from "bullying, name-calling, ethnic or racial slurs, or derogatory statements that school officials have reasonable cause to believe will disrupt the school program or incite violence." This, of course, is subjective and determined by the school officials.

The dress codes were a little more diverse with Principals Perkins', Dawson's, and Colton's schools differentiating between what boys could wear and what girls could wear. Principal Dawson's school prohibited boys from wearing make-up as he had stated during the interview, and it also prohibited boys from wearing earrings. Principal Perkins' school and Principals Colton's school also prohibited boys from wearing earrings, and Principal Perkins' school also had specific requirements for boys' hair length. Additionally, most of the schools included a phrase prohibiting any clothes that might be a distraction or draw attention to a student. This could be used to prevent a student from displaying an identity outside of the heteronormative boundaries of acceptability if that student went against the heterosexual norms. However, none of the schools dictated certain types of clothes for males and certain types for females other than make-up and earrings. Dress codes do not necessarily affect LGBTQ student identity because many LGBTQ students choose to dress according to their gender. Dress codes do, however, limit some LGBTQ students who prefer to express their identity in a way that goes against traditional gender dress.

An additional piece of evidence of a welcoming school climate was found in the artifacts at Principal Adams' school. The student handbook revealed that both males and females were allowed to try out for cheerleader.

Based on the artifacts, there was evidence of socially just school climates on all of the campuses. This data found in the artifacts also supported the data provided by the principals.

5.1.6 Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asks, “How does Theoharis’ (2004, 2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance explain the findings?”

One of the things I noticed as early as when the responses from the surveys were being emailed back, and then, more pointedly during the interviews, was that the principals Theoharis interviewed held a different set of philosophies than the principals in my study. The principals in this study did not initially claim to be social justice leaders, nor could I find any principals via the survey who claimed to be a leader for social justice. The principals in my study were all willing to protect all students from bullying and harassment, but they did not question the assumptions behind their school policies or traditional school practices as a social justice leader would (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005) to eliminate marginalization of the LGBTQ students. In fact, by changing the dress code and/or encouraging the LGBTQ students to look just like the other students and blend in, some worked to maintain the status quo rather than seeking opportunities to lead for diversity as would a social justice leader (Brown, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). This made me wonder if the principals in this study could be considered social justice leaders.

I turned to the literature to further compare the principals in this study with the characteristics of social justice leaders. I used Table 2.1 as a check-list to see if the characteristics of the principals who were interviewed for my study matched the characteristics of social justice leaders found in the literature. When viewed collectively, the principals in this study exhibited most of the attributes of social justice leaders. They were open-minded in some aspects (Brown, 2006), such as viewing LGBTQ students as needing to be treated with respect and with fairness. Principals Stanley seemed to be the most open-minded about LGBTQ students because he never indicated any personal bias against them and considered their rights when developing policy. Principal Colton, who seemed to have the most personal bias against LGBTQ students, viewed LGBTQ students who were being picked on or harassed as “just

another kid.” The principals explored their own views, experiences and values (Brown, 2006) and were self-reflective (Marshall & Young, 2006). This was evident in the ways they perceived they had changed through the years as they led for social justice on their campuses. The principals were willing to take risks (Marshall & Young, 2006) as demonstrated by Principal Perkins when she knowingly had a guest speaker who was lesbian and Principal Stanley when he stood up to parents whose children bullied other students or who were racist. The principals were willing to learn, believed social justice was necessary to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, and consciously worked to promote equity and justice for their students (Marshall & Young, 2006). The principals had a reflective consciousness about leading for social justice according to what social justice is for them, and they also worked to build networks of support in the community (Theoharis, 2007) via building trust with the community and relationships with students and parents. Principal Perkins also worked closely with her superintendent who countered a school board member’s response to the lesbian guest speaker with the reminder that sexual orientation should not matter since they were not going to discriminate.

The principals worked to lead for equity for all (Theoharis 2007) as evidenced by Principal Dawson’s efforts to treat all students equally, Principal Stanley’s anti-discrimination policies, and Principal Adams’ remarks about all students having the right to the same educational experiences. They met Karpinski and Lugg’s (2006) descriptions of social justice leaders by networking with others, mainly assistant principals, counselors, or central administrators to rectify injustice, by valuing human rights and individual dignity, and by providing some professional development based on marginalizing differences among students. The principals all had an attitude of advocacy, care, and concern for all of their individual students (Dillard, 1995), but, according to the interviews, they did not work politically on behalf of minority groups in their schools (Dillard, 1995).

I would not describe the principals in this study as visionaries because they did not seem to have farsighted plans for leading for social justice for any of the marginalized groups on

their campuses. They did however, envision equitable education for all and promoted this vision to stakeholders (Kose, 2009) such as teachers and other administrators. Some did have programs to train faculty to recognize marginalization in their schools, to promote kindness, and some allowed the teachers to learn from each other to cultivate an atmosphere of education for social justice (Kose, 2009), but primarily for racial diversity instruction. The artifacts and interviews revealed efforts to make the schools inclusive to everyone with the goal of each student reaching his or her highest potential (Shields, 2010). The principals, however, did not work to help teachers recognized how their own assumptions might create barriers against equity (Shields, 2010), nor did the principals seem to recognize these barriers in themselves. Table 5.1 shows the attributes the principals in this study had that were those of social justice leaders found in the literature. An “X” indicates the principals in this study demonstrated the attribute adjacent to the “X”. Based on the literature, the principals in this study were social justice leaders.

Table 5.1 Attributes of Social Justice Leaders and Principals in this Study

Author(s)/Year	Attributes of Social Justice Leaders	Attributes of principals in this study (indicated by an X)
Brown, 2006	Are open-minded Are willing to explore their own views, experiences, and values	X X
Marshall & Young, 2006	Are self-reflective Are willing to take risks Are willing to learn Have a strong belief that social justice is necessary to ensure a better quality of life for everyone Consciously work to promote equity and justice	X X X X X
Theoharis, 2007	Have “a reflective consciousness centered on social justice and a broader knowledge and skill base” (p. 250) Build networks of support in the larger community Purposefully lead for equality for all	X X X
Karpinski & Lugg, 2006	Network with others to work to rectify injustices Value human rights and individual dignity Provide on-going professional development for every staff member around issues of class, race, language, abilities, language, and sexual orientation	X X X
Dillard, 1995	Have an attitude of advocacy, care, and concern for individuals Work politically on behalf of minority groups in their schools	X
Kose, 2009	Are visionaries Promote their vision to stakeholders Train faculty to recognize marginalization in every aspect of school Allow teachers to learn from each other and cultivate an atmosphere of education for social justice	X X X
Shields, 2010	Institute changes at their schools to make them more inclusive with the goal of each student reaching their highest potential Help teachers recognize how their own assumptions can create barriers	X

Theoharis' (2004, 2007) developed a theory of social justice leadership that included 10 characteristics shared by social justice leaders, which he compiled into a chart. He updated the chart to 12 characteristics in his book in 2009 (see Table 2.2). The characteristics described the principals in this study in most instances, but were not always inclusive of social justice

leadership specifically for LGBTQ students. Theoharis (2009) found that a social justice leader “places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity” (p. 160). I found the rural principals in my study indicated a value of diversity in general, particularly racial or ethnic diversity, yet did not deeply learn about nor seek to understand LGBTQ students. The wording used by Theoharis, particularly the use of the phrase “cultural respect,” excludes LGBTQ students because they originate from all cultures and subpopulations of people. I found Theoharis’ next two social justice leadership qualities apply specifically to other marginalized groups than LGBTQ students. Theoharis found a social justice leader “ends segregated and pull-out programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized children” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). He also found a social justice leader “strengthens core teaching and curriculum and insures that diverse students have access to that core” (p. 160). Neither of these two characteristics would apply to social justice leadership specifically for LGBTQ students because LGBTQ students are not placed in segregated or pull-out programs based on sexual orientation, nor are they denied core curriculum. Theoharis found that a social justice leader “embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability” (p. 160). Some of the rural principals in my study did provide professional development that would help protect LGBTQ students from bullying, and some brought in inclusive programs such as Rachel’s Challenge to promote kindness to others, but they did not work to help the staff understand or make sense of the students’ sexuality, nor did they seek to understand these differences themselves. An unwillingness to “make sense of ...sexuality” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160) on the part of the principals seemed to stem from their own cultural and religious values shared with the communities as discussed earlier. The other characteristics of a social justice leader described by Theoharis seemed to fit the principals in this study.

Theoharis (2009) found a social justice leader “knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich academic, extracurricular, and

social opportunities as those enjoyed by their more privileged peers” (p. 160). The principals in this study wanted all students, including LGBTQ students, to be treated fairly and given the same academic and social opportunities as other students. Theoharis found a social justice leader “demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success” (p. 160). The principals in this study wanted success from the LGBTQ students as well as all students, and collaborated with counselors and assistant principals in some cases to achieve that success, but mainly to protect those students from bullying. In some cases, the LGBTQ students excelled both academically and athletically. Principal Colton said some of the LGBTQ students on his campus were in the top 10% of the senior class. Principal Perkins had LGBTQ students who were good athletes. Principals Adams, Perkins, Colton, and Dawson all talked about how well many of the LGBTQ students interacted socially with other students.

Theoharis (2009) found a social justice leader “builds and leads coalitions by bringing together various groups of people to further agenda (families, community organizations, staff, students) and seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her/him” (p. 160). The rural principals in this study did not see issues or problems with LGBTQ students on their campuses, so they did not see a need to lead coalitions or to find activist administrators to sustain them. They did, however, work with the counselors and assistant principals to develop policies and plans to address bullying and protection for LGBTQ students. Theoharis found a social justice leader builds a climate in which families, staff, and students belong and feel welcome. The principals in this study wanted all students to feel welcome in their schools. They worked to build a welcoming climate for all students. Some also had programs welcoming parent and community participation, such as Rachel’s Challenge. They also worked to have a low turn-over of staff by developing positive work climates for the staff. Theoharis described a social justice leader as one who “sees all data through a lens of equity” (p. 160). Among the rural principals in this study, I noticed that, regarding academics, the principals seemed to see

no distinction between LGBTQ students and heterosexual students. As mentioned previously, some of the LGBTQ students were ranked in the top of their class academically.

Theoharis (2009) found that a social justice leader “knows that building community, collaboration, and differentiation are tools for ensuring that all students achieve success together” (p. 160). The principals in this study were part of a strong community working for a successful school and wanting success for all students. They discussed the importance of the students getting along with each other, even though many segregated themselves by race and socio-economic groups. The principals worked to build community both within their schools and in the communities at large. They worked to know students, their families, and community members by attending ball games and being out in the community speaking with stakeholders. They also valued differentiation and diversity in the curriculum and in special programs in their schools and collaborated with teachers and central administrators to promote both.

Theoharis found a social justice leader “combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging” (p. 160). The LGBTQ students were not excluded from any classes, so that part does not apply. The students themselves were not interviewed to know if they felt a sense of belonging, but the principals worked for all students to feel welcome and valued. Principal Dawson went out of his way to speak to the students and be an example of acceptance, at least outwardly. Principals Perkins and Adams spoke of how well received LGBTQ students were on their campuses. Principal Stanley worked to end harassment against student groups and promote kindness to everyone at his school. Additionally, the artifacts from the schools seemed to indicate welcoming climates other than students who would prefer to dress differently than allowed by student dress codes.

Finally, Theoharis found a social justice leader goes “beyond working hard” by becoming “intertwined with the school’s success and life” (p. 160). The principals in this study were very intertwined with the life of the school, the community itself, and the success of both, so much so that they were actually a part of the community. The success and life of the school

was more than just their job; their own success and life were intertwined with the school. Table 5.2 shows Theoharis' (2009) descriptions of social justice leaders compared to descriptions of the principals in this study as leaders for social justice specifically for LGBTQ students.

Table 5.2 Theoharis' Social Justice Leader Qualities Found in this Study

Social Justice Leader according to Theoharis*	Social Justice Leader for LGBTQ Students
Places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity	Valued diversity yet did not seek to understand LGBTQ students. "Cultural respect" is not applicable.
Ends segregated and pull-out programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized children	This would not apply to LGBTQ students.
Strengthens core teaching and curriculum and insures that diverse students have access to that core	This would not apply to LGBTQ students.
Embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability	Provided professional development to protect LGBTQ students from bullying, but not to help staff understand them.
Knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich academic, extracurricular, and social opportunities as those enjoyed by their more privileged peers	Promoted fair treatment and equal academic and social opportunities for LGBTQ students
Demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success	Demanded success from the LGBTQ students and collaborated with counselors and assistant principals
Builds and leads coalitions by bringing together various groups of people to further agenda (families, community organizations, staff, students) and seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her/him	Did not see issues or problems with LGBTQ students on their campuses, so did not see a need to lead coalitions or to find activist administrators to sustain them.
Builds a climate in which families, staff, and students belong and feel welcome	Worked to build a welcoming climate for all students and staff; some provided programs for the community.
Sees all data through a lens of equity	Viewed LGBTQ and heterosexual students equally academically.
Knows that building community, collaboration, and differentiation are tools for ensuring that all students achieve success together	Were part of a strong community working for a successful school and wanted success for all students.
Combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging	LGBTQ students were not excluded from any classes, and a climate of belonging for LGBTQ students was promoted.
Beyond working hard, becomes intertwined with the school's success and life	Were intertwined with the life of the school, the community, and the success of both.

(Theoharis, 2009, p. 160)

Not all of Theoharis' (2007, 2009) qualities of social justice leaders were applicable to social justice leadership for LGBTQ students. The principals in Theoharis' study did not include sexual orientation as part of their discussion or examples of their leadership, yet Theoharis included sexual orientation as a marginalized group encompassed by his theory. His study and theory seemed to focus mainly on racial diversity, socio-economic differences, and academic ability differences. His study also focused on social justice leaders in urban schools. The rural principals in this study might have fit his criteria for social justice leadership of the minority groups his study focused on, yet they were such a part of the communities and shared the culture of the area that their own values promoted heteronormativity in their schools, and for some, led to resistance of acceptance of LGBTQ student identity.

In addition to his descriptions of social justice leaders, Theoharis (2007) described a "three-pronged framework of resistance" (p. 248) his principals faced as social justice leaders. The principals resisted the injustices and marginalization of students, they faced resistance from others in leading for social justice, and they developed resistance to the obstacles they faced in leading for social justice. The resistance the rural principals in this study faced that affected their ability to lead for social justice for LGBTQ students was their own resistance to understanding and accepting these students. The term "choice" was used by Principal Colton in reference to LGBTQ students. All principals except Principal Stanley indicated they did not agree with the LGBTQ students' life-style as if it were something to be debated. Principal Dawson even referred to a students' sexual identity expression as a "disorder." None of these terms seemed to be used in malice, but rather a lack of knowledge, understanding or reflective consciousness due to a resistance to accept the identity of these students as described by Principal Colton as being a religious and cultural "wall".

The principals claimed the parents and community had more of a problem with the LGBTQ students than the student body, yet none of the principals had actually faced resistance from the community. Even with no resistance from the community, the principals' perceptions of

the communities' values seemed to play a major role in two principals' decisions to make the dress code more heteronormative. The idea of the LGBTQ students blending in with the other students seemed important to the principals. The reasons they gave for promoting heteronormativity included protecting the LGBTQ students more easily, causing less work for the principals because they said there were less discipline problems when the LGBTQ students looked and/or acted like the other students, and because of their own resistance to LGBTQ students looking opposite gendered to their actual sex. This resistance was not noted by Theoharis (2004, 2007) in his study of social justice leadership for other marginalized groups and in urban schools, yet it was significant in this study.

5.2 Modifications to Social Justice Leadership Theory

Theoharis' social justice leadership theory, while proposed to be all-encompassing of marginalized student groups, including LGBTQ students, applies mainly to racial or ethnic minority groups, economically disadvantaged students, and students with diverse ability levels. Two of Theoharis' descriptors of social justice leaders do not apply to LGBTQ students at all. These are a social justice leader "ends segregated and pull-out programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized children" and "strengthens core teaching and curriculum and insures that diverse students have access to that core" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). Segregated and pull-out programs are not based on sexual orientation, and students of all sexual orientations have access to core teaching and curriculum. Because they do not apply to all marginalized student groups, I would propose these two descriptors be modified or removed from social justice leadership theory.

In addition to the two descriptors that do not apply to all marginalized groups, particularly to LGBTQ students, Theoharis (2009) describes a social justice leader as one who "places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity" (p. 160). Using the phrase "individual identity" rather than "cultural respect" would be more fitting for all student groups. Another modification I would suggest is in the description of a

social justice leader as one who “combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). The phrase “promoting access to improved teaching and curriculum” does not apply to LGBTQ students because class schedules are not based on sexual orientation as they might be for students with learning differences. I would suggest this might be modified to read, “combines structures that promote inclusion and acceptance of all students with diverse classes within a climate of belonging.” I offer the suggestion of these two modifications, as well as the removal of the two descriptors that do not apply to social justice leadership for all students, in order to modify social justice leadership theory to fit all marginalized groups.

Theoharis (2007) also discussed the resistance social justice leaders face as part of his social justice theory. Theoharis’ “three-pronged framework of resistance” (p. 248) included the principals’ own resistance to the injustices and marginalization of students, the resistance they faced from others in leading for social justice, and the resistance they developed to the obstacles they faced in leading for social justice. I would further principals who are a part of the community in which their school is situated may also encounter a fourth resistance; that is a resistance to acceptance of student groups that is deeply rooted within themselves. Although the principals may be social justice leaders for some minority groups, may feel they are social justice leaders for all students, and may even fit the definition of a social justice leaders based on the literature, it is possible they are unaware of their own biases toward some student groups, particularly, as in this case, LGBTQ students. Thus, I suggest a fourth resistance experienced by social justice leaders; a self-resistance to acceptance and critical self-consciousness of some marginalized groups based on a leaders’ own background, culture, and values.

5.3 Summary

This chapter provided an analysis and discussion of how the data answer the research questions and how these findings fit in with the literature. The demographics of the schools

where the principals that were interviewed worked were compared to the principals in Theoharis' study (2004, 2007), and a discussion of how the rural principals describe diversity follows. To generate a positive school climate for all students, the principals stressed the importance of following the law, building relationships with the students as well as building community on campus and with the community at large, making their campuses safe, providing staff development and/or programs to reduce bullying, and remaining at their school for a number of years. The principals described their communities as being very conservative, yet the data revealed the culture and values of the communities were also those of the principals because the principals were part of the communities. Because of this oneness with the communities, the principals did not recognize the heteronormativity that was instilled primarily through student dress code. This impact of the community was discussed in detail. A comparison of the attributes of social justice leadership qualities described by scholars was discussed along with a discussion and comparison of the principals in this study with Theoharis' (2004, 2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance. Finally, suggested modifications to Theoharis' (2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and "three-pronged framework of resistance" (2007, p. 248) were discussed. Chapter 6 will include an overall summary of this study, the conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Current events show educational institutions are not places of safety and belonging for all students (FBI, 2010), particularly LGBTQ students. This lack of safety has an abundance of negative consequences on all students (Berk, 1999; Craig & Dunn, 2010; Henze et al., 2002; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Juvonen et al., 2010; Rivers & Noret, 2008) including the inability to fully develop identities (Berk, 1999), which could affect students' development into mentally healthy adults (Craig & Dunn, 2010). Bullying and fear not only affect those who are victims of abuse at school, but also those who witness the abuse and who alter their own identities to conform to what is perceived to be normal (Craig & Dunn, 2010), often limiting students in reaching their full potentials as individuals (Berk, 1999). LGBTQ students are especially vulnerable to identity change or concealment because schools tend to be heterosexist environments (Blackburn & Smith, 2010) where sexuality other than heterosexuality is not only silenced (Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Lugg, 1998, 2003), but can be subject to victimization. This is particularly true of LGBTQ students (Birkett et al., 2009; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Hershberger et al., 1997).

Socially just school climates have been shown to have positive impacts on LGBTQ students (Birkett et al., 2009) as well as on all students (Flanagan & Stout, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2002; MacNeil et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2005; Ruus et al., 2007). Additionally, principals have a large influence on the development of a positive school climate (Brown, 2006; Kose, 2009; Moolenaar et al., 2010; Szalacha, 2003). An understanding and promotion of social justice theory and social justice leadership theory help principals be successful in leading a socially just school climate (Brown, 2006; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007) resulting in a positive school climate for all students. Yet, the current events,

including suicides of LGBTQ students (McKinley, 2010) indicate such social justice leadership is not occurring at all schools.

The dichotomous phenomenon of the benefits to all students through social justice leadership, yet a lack research of the LGBTQ experiences in social justice leadership theory and a lack of such leadership for all students in many schools is explored. This study investigates how social justice-driven rural principals perceive student diversity at their schools, especially the LGBTQ student population, how the principals work to develop positive school climates for all students, and how their schools' communities influence the principals' own thinking and reaction to student diversity, particularly LGBTQ students. This study also seeks to explain how the communities in which principals serve affect their shaping of school climate and, in turn, the development of student identities. Social justice leadership theory (Theoharis, 2007, 2009) is examined for modifications to the theory are suggested to make it inclusive of social justice leadership for LGBTQ students. Theoharis' (2007) model of resistance is also discussed and modifications based on the findings from this study of rural principals are suggested.

6.1 Summary

6.1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how principals who are leaders for social justice in rural areas perceive student diversity, specifically LGBTQ students, and if, how, and why they support all students through the establishment of a socially just school climate. Additionally, the study investigated how the context of the schools, specifically rural communities, affected the principals' perceptions and implementation of a positive climate for all students. This study also explored how the theoretical framework of social justice leadership and Theoharis' (2004, 2007) model of resistance explain the study's findings.

6.1.2 Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. How do social justice motivated principals in rural communities describe student diversity at their schools?

2. How do they generate a school climate demonstrating a valuing of diverse student identity that is inclusive of all students, including LGBTQ students?

a. What types of resistance and support have principals encountered from the community?

b. What specific strategies do principals use to overcome any perceived resistance from the communities that may affect establishing a socially just school climate for LGBTQ students?

c. What artifacts within the schools show evidence of a socially just school climate for all students?

3. How does Theoharis' (2004, 2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance explain this study's findings?

6.1.3 Orienting Theoretical Framework

The orienting theoretical frame for this study was social justice leadership theory. Findings of this study were examined from a social justice leadership lens to help explain the principals' perceptions of diversity at their schools. Theoharis' (2007) characteristics of a social justice leader were used as a comparison to better define the leadership of the principals as they describe their attempts to generate a socially just school climate for all students. Theoharis' (2007) model of resistance was used to analyze and understand the resistance these principals faced and help us better understand the role of resistance and the strategies used to overcome resistance in the communities in which the principals serve.

6.1.4 Positioning the Researcher

This study is very personal to me, and because of that, I disclosed my identity as a lesbian throughout this dissertation so my biases and perspectives are not hidden. I have close ties to the region of the study having worked in two school districts in Region 7 of east Texas, attended a university in that region, and have family in that region. I was raised with similar conservative, evangelical Christian beliefs as many in east Texas, and was steeped in homophobia throughout my childhood and early adult life. Much of my family still has these beliefs and values. While I understand these viewpoints and value a freedom of religious beliefs, as an educator, I have a passion for equity for all students, including LGBTQ students. Because of my passion for equity and justice, I want this study to be reliable. Throughout this study, I have worked to ensure trustworthiness and reliability by curbing bias as much as possible, by utilizing a heterosexual peer for peer review, by member checking with the principals to ensure the transcripts were accurate, and by representing the principals as accurately and honestly as possible.

6.1.5 Setting

In order to find and gather data from principals serving in areas where the community may be resistant to social justice leadership for LGBTQ students, I turned to the literature to determine demographics where such resistance was most likely found. Based on the research, I selected the rural high schools in Region 7 of east Texas as the setting for my study because this area is in the Southern region of the U.S., has high poverty rates, few college-educated residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and has conservative values with high numbers of evangelic protestant Christians (The Pew Forum on Religions and Public Life, 2010). These demographics, according to the literature, are found in areas that tend to have high levels of bullying and harassment and/or resistance to the acceptance of LGBTQ students (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2009; Rosik et al., 2007). Although Theoharis (2004, 2007)

included principals in all levels of education, high schools were selected for this study because high school is often when students realize their sexual orientation (Lopez & Chism, 1993).

6.1.6 Participants

A participant screen survey (see Appendix A) was emailed to high school principals who worked at rural schools in Region 7 of east Texas ($N = 74$). Of the surveys successfully sent ($N = 69$) to the principals, 18 responded to the survey. Of the returned surveys, one principal did not answer the survey questions.

Of those surveyed, five principals who most closely met Theoharis' (2004, 2007) criteria as leaders for social justice were selected for interviews. In his study of social justice leaders in schools, Theoharis sought principals that met the following four criteria for further data collection: the principals had to (a) work in public schools, (b) believe fostering social justice is the main reason they entered the profession, (c) work to keep issues of injustice and marginalization of groups of students at the forefront of their practice and vision, and (d) have evidence to show their school is more socially just due to their leadership. The final criterion used for this study but not used by Theoharis was: the principals must have (e) included LGBTQ students in their description of diversity at their schools. The principals also had to be willing to be interviewed (which was not often the case) in order to answer the research questions. (See Table 4.1 for survey data.)

The principals who were interviewed included four were white males and one a white female. They were assigned the following pseudonyms: Principal Perkins, Principal Dawson, Principal Colton, Principal Stanley, and Principal Adams. They had served as principals for an average of 10.6 years with a range of eight to 13 years. They had served in the schools they were principal of at the time of the survey for an average of 6.8 years with a range of five to 11 years. Their ages ranged from mid-thirties to late forties. Two held Ph.D. degrees. One of these principals ranked social justice leadership as third for reasons for becoming a principal. Two ranked social justice leadership fourth, one ranked it last, and one did not include it at all as a

reason for becoming a principal. However, all five indicated they felt improving acceptance of diversity was important, and/or they believed there was improvement in diversity acceptance, reduction in bullying, improved school climate, and/or improved school safety during their time as principal. All five of the principals who were interviewed included LGBTQ students as part of the diversity on their school campuses.

The five principals participated in the interviews were raised in Texas. Four were raised and still live in rural east Texas, and one, Principal Stanley was raised in a suburb of a major city in Texas. They all indicated in the interviews that they were raised with conservative values.

6.1.7 Methods

After sending the participant screen surveys and selecting the participants for the interviews ($N = 5$), arrangements were made with the principals to conduct interviews. Three of the interviews took at place the campuses of the selected principals, and two were conducted over the telephone as requested by the participants. Data was collected via qualitative semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007) with each principal (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). The interview questions were semi-structured in order for the principals to share their own lived experiences, goals, successes and possible road-blocks in establishing a socially just school climate for all students while still maintaining a focus on the research questions.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each principal was emailed a copy of the transcript from his or her interview for review to be sure each transcription was accurate and reflected his or her true experiences. No corrections were requested by the principals although possible revealing information was asked to be omitted from one transcript to ensure the confidentiality of one of the principals.

Data analysis of the interview transcripts was guided by Creswell's (2007) procedures which included highlighting quotes, statements, or sentences that were important for understanding how the participants experienced social justice leadership for all students and to answer the research questions. The statements were organized by themes and were used to

write a “textural” and “structural description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) of what each subject experienced and the context or setting in which it was experienced. Peer review or debriefing (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) of the data, descriptions, and themes was used to further validate the findings and serve as an external check of the research process (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). I requested one of my heterosexual doctoral cohort members to serve as a peer reviewer in an effort to control my bias due to my sexual orientation.

In addition to survey data and the interviews, I researched the websites of the schools in which the principals being interviewed worked. I looked for artifacts that showed evidence of the school climate, particularly evidence of a socially just school climate for all students. Such artifacts came from school policy documents, school goals, codes of conduct, anti-discrimination statements, lists of student organizations, student dress codes and student handbooks. While at the schools where three of the interviews took place, I looked for posters or displays with inclusive language or images. The participant screen survey data, interview data, and data from the artifacts were analyzed to triangulate the data (Stake, 2010) and answer the research questions. Findings were composed, presented, and discussed based on the emergent themes from data.

6.1.8 Findings

Research Question 1 asked, “How do social justice motivated principals in rural communities describe student diversity at their schools?” All five principals checked a variety of races and differences from a list of those available on the survey (see Table 4.2.). During the interviews, however, the principals did not indicate as much diversity indicated by the survey. Principal Perkins included students with special needs, bisexual, and homosexual students in her description of diversity on her campus, while Principal Adams only mentioned economically disadvantaged students on his campus. Principal Dawson included only race and gender as the type of diversity found on his campus, and Principal Colton only listed race. Principal Stanley listed religion, race, and sexual orientation as types of diversity found at his school. Only two of

the principals included LGBTQ students as part of their diversity on campus without being reminded that they had included them in the survey.

Research Question 2 consisted of a core question and three sub-questions. The core question asked, “How do they (the social justice principals in rural schools) generate a school climate demonstrating a valuing of diverse student identity that is inclusive of all students, including LGBTQ students?” The principals led by following the law to protect all students and to uphold their rights. They worked to establish a positive climate by working to know their students and being accessible to them. They treated all students fairly, and served as examples or role models for their students and staff. The principals worked to make their campuses safe and enforced discipline to maintain a safe, welcoming environment for all students. They provided some training, particularly anti-bullying training, for faculty and students, as well as other programs such as Rachel’s Challenge to promote kindness and a positive school climate for all students. One principal had his staff read a book about diversity. Another also included suicide prevention training. Finally, the principals led a faculty and/or group of administrators who were stable and had low turn-over in order to promote a stable, consistent vision.

Sub-question 2a asked, “What types of resistance and support have principals encountered from the community?” The communities were perceived by the principals to be very conservative and somewhat close-minded. The female principal described the region as sexist, and one principal referred to the community as racist. Even in the conservative, close-minded communities, the principals had not had much resistance concerning their protection of LGBTQ students other than parents trying to get their children out of trouble by comparing their children’s violations to gay students who were violating the dress code. Principal Colton described a general “tolerance” toward LGBTQ students found in rural schools as long as the students were not “in your face” about their sexuality, but explained that is not the same as acceptance. He described acceptance as being “open and welcoming” something those in rural districts were “not as willing to do”. The principals all agreed that it was more difficult for the

adults in the community to accept the LGBTQ students than the students in the school, yet none could think of specific incidences where the community had tried to step in when one of them was leading for a more open-minded, positive climate for all students or when they protected the LGBTQ students. In fact, Principal Adams said the parents in the community expect him to protect those students regardless of their own personal beliefs.

Four of the principals were a part of the culture and community in which they served. They were raised in east Texas and had made the area home. Two used the term “we” in describing the communities. Being part of the culture resulted in resistance to acceptance by the principals themselves and promotion of heteronormativity via the push to force or encourage LGBTQ students to blend in. Two of the principals had or were going to alter the dress codes to ensure gender differences in dress between male and female students. All of the principals tolerated the LGBTQ students and were willing to protect them from bullying, which fit their descriptions of the communities in which they worked, yet similar to their descriptions of adults in their communities, there was resistance to acceptance of the LGBTQ student identity for most of the principals. Four of the principals told me they did not agree with the choice of being LGBTQ by the students. Two of the principals also said they were known and open about not agreeing with the LGBTQ students’ life-styles. Additionally, Principal Dawson considered homosexuality to be a “gender-identity disorder” that might fall under the special education spectrum while Principal Colton felt a male student who wanted to wear feminine clothing needed to spend time with the school counselor. The main resistance to acceptance of the LGBTQ students was the resistance of the principals themselves.

The supports for LGBTQ students rested mainly with other students and with the protections offered by the principals. All five principals indicated the students were accepting of the LGBTQ students and the LGBTQ students were well-liked by the student body for the most part. Some had had difficulty, particularly as freshmen, but as the students matured, there were less and less problems. Principal Stanley had some problems with “red-neck country boys”

picking on some of the LGBTQ students, and Principals Dawson and Colton had instances of bullying with former students who wore-make up or dressed in feminine clothing. All of the principals worked to end bullying and disciplined students who bullied or harassed any students, but particularly LGBTQ students. The principals worked to establish positive climates for all students, and artifacts from the schools indicated value of each individual student and an intolerance for bullying and harassment.

Sub-question 2b asked, "What specific strategies do principals use to overcome any perceived resistance from the communities that may affect establishing a socially just school culture for LGBTQ students?" The principals did not perceive any resistance from the communities regarding the LGBTQ students other than a few parents trying to counter discipline of their own children. Although the communities had not been resistant specifically to the principals' leadership for social justice for LGBTQ students, two of the principals had enforced or were going to enforce stricter dress codes in order to make the flamboyant gay students blend in more with the other students. Rather than developing strategies to lead for social justice in the face of perceived resistance of the community as was the case of the social justice leaders in Theoharis' (2007) study, the principals in this study were the root of the resistance themselves because of their beliefs and values as part of the community.

Sub-question 2c asked, "What artifacts within the schools show evidence of a socially just school climate for all students?" The mission statements for the schools of Principals Adams, Stanley, and Colton stressed the importance of every individual student. Principal Adams' school's non-discrimination policy included discrimination based on sex and gender, so it is possible that could include a person's self-perceived gender. Principal Adams' school's "Freedom from Discrimination" policy included the phrase, "to avoid any behaviors known to be offensive". This would certainly indicate harassment based on sexual orientation. The schools prohibited bullying, and none of the schools except Principal Colton's school listed specific reasons why a person might be bullied. This makes the policy completely inclusive of every

student, including LGBTQ students. Principal Colton's school's anti-bullying policy was open-ended enough that it could protect LGBTQ students from bullying in harassment based on the language protecting students from "bullying, name-calling, ethnic or racial slurs, or derogatory statements that school officials have reasonable cause to believe will disrupt the school program or incite violence." Additionally, Principal Adams' school allowed males and females to try out for cheerleader, and Principal Stanley's school included language stating "each person is valuable" and included in their campus goals the goal to provide "quality instructional programs that meet the needs of all students and ensures continuous improvement."

Research Question 3 asks, "How does Theoharis' (2004, 2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and model of resistance explain the findings?" The principals Theoharis interviewed held a different set of philosophies than the principals in this study. The principals in this study did not claim to be social justice leaders, nor could I find any principals via the survey who claimed to be a leader for social justice. However, the literature describing social justice leaders also described many of the characteristics of the principals in this study (see Table 5.1), and Theoharis' (2009) descriptions of social justice leaders also described the principals in my study for the most part (see Table 5.2).

Not all of Theoharis' descriptors apply to social justice leadership for LGBTQ students. Theoharis' study of urban principals and his theory of social justice leadership seem to mainly focus on racial diversity, socio-economic differences, and academic ability differences. The principals in Theoharis' study did not include sexual orientation as part of their discussion or examples of their leadership, yet Theoharis included sexual orientation as a marginalized group encompassed by his theory. Two of Theoharis' descriptors of social justice leaders do not apply to LGBTQ students at all. These are a social justice leader "ends segregated and pull-out programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized children" and "strengthens core teaching and curriculum and insures that diverse students have access to that core" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). Segregated and pull-out programs are not based on sexual

orientation, and students of all sexual orientations have access to core teaching and curriculum. Because they do not apply to all marginalized student groups, I would propose these two descriptors be modified or removed from social justice leadership theory.

Theoharis (2009) describes a social justice leader as one who “places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity” (p. 160). Using the phrase “individual identity” rather than “cultural respect” would be more fitting for all student groups. Theoharis also uses the description of a social justice leader as one who “combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging” (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). The phrase “promoting access to improved teaching and curriculum” does not apply to LGBTQ students because class schedules are not based on sexual orientation as they might be for students with learning differences. I would suggest this might be modified to read, “combines structures that promote inclusion and acceptance of all students with diverse classes within a climate of belonging.” I make these suggestions in order to modify social justice leadership theory to fit all marginalized groups.

Theoharis’ “three-pronged framework of resistance” (p. 248) included the principals’ own resistance to the injustices and marginalization of students, the resistance they faced from others in leading for social justice, and the resistance they developed to the obstacles they faced in leading for social justice. The findings from this study indicate principals who are a part of the community in which their school is situated may also encounter a fourth resistance; that is a resistance of a reflective consciousness of student groups that is deeply rooted within themselves. Although the principals may be social justice leaders for some minority groups, may feel they are social justice leaders for all students, and may even fit the definition of a social justice leaders based on the literature, it is possible they are unaware of their own biases toward some student groups, particularly, as in this case, LGBTQ students. I therefore suggest a fourth resistance experienced by social justice leaders; a self-resistance to acceptance of some marginalized groups based on the leaders’ own background, culture, and values. This

resistance was not noted by Theoharis (2004, 2007) in his study of social justice leadership for other marginalized groups and in urban schools, yet it was significant in this study. Even social justice leaders have limitations and the need for reflective consciousness and a broadening of acceptance.

6.2 Conclusions

While the principals in this study did not enter the profession to be social justice leaders, they exemplified many of the attributes for social justice leadership according to the literature (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). All of the principals who were interviewed described their efforts to make their campuses safe, fair, and welcoming to all students, and these efforts were supported by the artifacts found on the schools' websites. However, some of the rural principals had difficulty in their own acceptance of LGBTQ students.

Discussing LGBTQ students seemed to have a different effect on principals than discussion racial, socio-economic, or learning differences. For example, discussing LGBTQ students brought about stammering and apparent nervousness from one principal and deliberate thought about how to answer questions and careful choices of words from another, whereas discussing racial issues or different religions produced no similar effect. One principal admitted homosexuality is "a wall" for him for "cultural" and "religious" reasons. Even with his own feelings, however, he still sought to protect LGBTQ students and wanted them to be treated fairly on his campus. Similarly, another principal found acceptance to homosexuality different from the way he "was raised", but said leading for all students, particularly LGBTQ students had made him "little more open-minded." Another principal admitted to disagreeing with LGBTQ students' lifestyles because it was against her morals, values, and "upbringing", yet still felt compelled to be fair to all students.

The descriptions the principals gave of their communities being conservative and even close-minded, particularly toward the acceptance of LGBTQ students, support the data from the literature for regions that may be particularly resistant to the acceptance of LGBTQ people

(Finlay & Walther, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2009; Rosik et al., 2007). This resistance was reflected not only in the descriptions the principals gave of their communities, but also in the principals themselves through their promotion of heteronormativity in their schools. Some enacted dress codes to enforce their perceptions of appropriate gender identity on students, thus perpetuating heteronormativity. Some were also open about their opposing views to LGBTQ student identity. The principals' own consistency with their perceived community resistance blinded them to the heteronormativity on their campuses which they perpetuated.

6.2.1 Implications for Theory

The principals seemed to want to be social justice leaders for LGBTQ students, but struggled with their own resistance resulting from the culture of which they were a part. I theorize some principals, particularly in rural districts, may be so much a product of the local culture and community that they do not perceive resistance from the community because it is a resistance they share. They may have a non-conscious (Bourdieu et al., 1991) bias that could lead to heteronormativity and resistance to acceptance of LGBTQ students on high school campuses, as was evidenced by the principals in this study. This inward resistance was not noted by Theoharis (2007) and adds to the body of knowledge for social justice leadership theory. His "three-pronged framework of resistance" (2007, p. 248) might be modified to include the struggle of culturally induced personal resistance some social justice leaders face, particularly those in rural communities. While Theoharis described how the principals in his study faced resistance to social justice from the community, I add, when principals are of the same culture and are part of the community in which they work, resistance to social justice leadership may stem from the principals themselves. This form of resistance was not included in Theoharis' (2007) "three-pronged framework of resistance" (p. 248) because it was not a type of resistance the urban principals in his study faced as social justice leaders. The principals in his study, however, did not include LGBTQ students specifically in their descriptions of their

leadership for social justice, so their perceptions of leadership for LGBTQ students remain unknown.

When further considering Theoharis' (2007, 2009) social justice leadership theory and descriptions of social justice leaders, this study reveals that not all of Theoharis' qualities described by his theory for social justice leadership are applicable to social justice leadership for all marginalized groups, particularly LGBTQ students. Two qualities described by Theoharis that are not applicable to social justice leadership for LGBTQ students are a social justice leader "ends segregated and pull-out programs that block both emotional and academic success for marginalized children" and "strengthens core teaching and curriculum and insures that diverse students have access to that core" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160). Students of all sexual orientations have access to all classes, so these characteristics of a social justice leader would not apply to social justice leadership for LGBTQ students. Further, Theoharis (2009) describes a social justice leader as one who "places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity" (p. 160). Using the phrase "individual identity" rather than "cultural respect" would be more inclusive for all student groups. Modification of the description of a social justice leader as one who "combines structures that promote inclusion and access to improved teaching and curriculum within a climate of belonging" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 160) to read, "combines structures that promote inclusion and acceptance of all students with diverse classes within a climate of belonging," might also be considered because the phrase "promoting access to improved teaching and curriculum" does not apply to LGBTQ students. The removal of the two descriptors that do not apply to social justice leadership for all students and modification of the other two as previously discussed might be considered in order for social justice leadership theory to be inclusive for leadership for all marginalized groups.

6.2.2 Implications for Research

Lugg (2006) states, "Public school administrators and teachers have a dismal record of embracing their queer students....At best, some will embrace an ethic of protection, viewing

queer students as at risk or in need of rescuing” (p. 49). The principals in this study did indicate a need to protect the LGBTQ students, but they struggled with their own abilities to accept those students’ identities. Principals must maintain the separation of church and state while performing their duties as representatives of the state, and therefore their own religious beliefs cannot be expressed while at work (Gey, 2000). Invalidating a student’s identity is not treating a student fairly or justly, which, as a representative of the state, is how the principals must treat these students (Biegel, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Henze et al., 2002; Lugg & Tabbaa-Rida, 2006) regardless of personal beliefs, perceptions, or culture. The resistance some school administrators struggle with while attempting to lead for social justice for LGBTQ students speaks to the need for research and education regarding sexual orientation and social justice leadership for future educational leaders.

6.2.3 Implications for Practice

According to the literature, many school leaders lack knowledge regarding diversity, do not see developing cultural competency as necessary, or have negative views toward issues of diversity and equity (Bustamante et al., 2009; Tooms & Alston, 2006). Educational leadership certification and degree programs are a major factor in preparing school leaders for social justice (Tooms & Alston, 2006), and therefore are crucial in improving schools for all students. When perspective school leaders explore their own mindsets, views, and values while being engaged in assignments requiring them to examine the values and beliefs of others, they can become better able to work with others toward social change through transformative learning processes (Brown, 2005). Educating school leaders about social justice will improve awareness of biases and prejudices in order to improve or eradicate such discrimination (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006) and will help them realize that “nonoppression is hardly social justice” (Lugg, 2006, p. 49). By providing research-based strategies for future educational leaders that focus on empathy toward LGBTQ people and promote an understanding of the heterosexist school culture, educational leadership programs will help school leaders build a social conscience to empower

them to create a positive school climate promoting tolerance and understanding in their own schools (Tooms & Alston, 2006). Education in social justice may help principals, particularly rural principals, learn to recognize and overcome their own possible resistance to acceptance of marginalized student groups, particularly LGBTQ students.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Study

Theoharis (2007) recommended further study of principals' leadership for social justice including those in rural and suburban areas as well as more racially diverse leaders. This study involved principals in rural areas and their leadership for social justice, particularly for LGBTQ students. Further study needs to be conducted of rural principals leading for other marginalized groups. An expansion of this study is also needed to include social justice leadership for LGBTQ students by urban and suburban principals to learn if, how, and why they lead for social justice for all students, and if they face the same types of resistance described by Theoharis and/or found in this study. LGBTQ students or recent high school graduates from rural schools, urban schools, and suburban schools should be studied and compared to learn their perceptions of their high school experiences and social justice leadership by their principals. Future administrators at universities that serve primarily rural schools should be studied to gather their perspectives of leading for all students, particularly LGBTQ students. The perceptions of those prospective principals should be compared with prospective principals attending universities in major metropolitan areas which serve the urban and suburban schools. These and expansions of these studies will further our understanding of social justice leadership for all students in a variety of communities.

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT SCREEN SURVEY

Hello Dr./Mrs./Mr. _____,

I'm a graduate student at the University of Texas Arlington in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department. My dissertation research involves principals who place value in social justice leadership in rural schools in east Texas and their role as campus leaders for social justice. As a principal serving in this rural area, you could lend a valuable voice to the study. Would you please consent to participate by completing the following survey and emailing it back to me? (Your emailed response will serve as your implied consent to participate.)

The following survey only consists of 12 questions and should take a minimal amount of your time. The questions help me gain background information as well as insight into your attitudes towards social justice leadership.

All survey data will remain confidential. No identifying information including real names of principals or schools will be used in the reporting of data at any time. All electronically returned email surveys will be stored behind password protected software and will be erased after three years. Any printed copies will have identifying information deleted and will remain in a locked file cabinet at the University of Texas at Arlington in Trimble Hall and will also be destroyed after three years. You can choose not to participate or to only answer the questions you want to answer. If you choose not to participate, please reply to the first question so I won't follow-up with you.

Based upon the responses, I will conduct a limited number of follow-up interviews. Please let me know at the end of the survey if you would be willing to participate in a 45 minute, follow-up interview, conducted in your town and at your convenience. The data from this survey will not be linked to the interview data in any way if you participate in an interview. If you have any questions about the interview process or this survey, please call me at (214) 263-0518, or email me at hnb73@hotmail.com, and I'll be happy to answer any questions you have and discuss any concerns with confidentiality.

I sincerely appreciate your help and time in answering these questions. It is my hope that this study and your participation in it will contribute to the practice and research of educational leaders. Please take time to lend your valuable voice.

Thanks again,
Holly Bishop
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
The University of Texas at Arlington
(214) 263-0518

Survey:

Please put an X for the appropriate response. I choose to _____/ choose not to _____ participate in this survey.

If you choose to participate in the survey, please respond to the following questions. If you do not want to reply to any question, please leave it blank.

1. Name:
2. School:
3. Number of years of principal experience:
4. Number of years at this high school:
5. Male/Female:
6. Ethnicity:

II. Please rank the following reasons you chose to be a principal (1, being the most important; 2, being the next to the most important; and the rest (3-5/6) in descending order of importance. If not important in your decision at all, please leave that selection blank):

_____ To earn a higher salary

_____ To have a prominent community role

_____ To influence student success

_____ To improve social justice for students

_____ To lead your campus to prepare students for success in the 21st Century global economy

_____ Other (please list) _____

III. Please put an X beside each of the following that are important **to you** in your current role as principal:

_____ Improve academic performance

_____ Improve acceptance of diverse student groups

_____ Improve college readiness

_____ Improve student attendance

____ Improve student involvement in extra-curricular activities

____ Prepare students for the 21st Century global economy

____ Reduce dropout rates

____ Other (please list) _____

IV. Please place an X beside the ethnic groups that can currently be found on your campus.

____ African American

____ American Indian

____ Asian/Pacific Islander

____ Caucasian/European

____ Hispanic/Latino

____ Multi-racial

____ Other (please list) _____

V. Please place an X beside the following student groups that can currently be found on your campus.

____ First-generation Americans

____ Emotionally Disturbed

____ English as a Second Language

____ Gay/Lesbian

____ Gifted/Talented

____ Homeless

____ Low socio-economic

____ Mentally disabled

____ Physically disabled

_____ Other prominent student groups not mentioned (please list) _____

VI. Please place an X beside all of the following campus aspects that have improved or changed since you became principal at your school.

_____ Acceptance of diverse student populations

_____ AP test scores

_____ Attendance

_____ College readiness

_____ Extra-curricular participation

_____ Global connections

_____ Inclusion of special needs students

_____ Parent Involvement

_____ Reduction in bullying

_____ Reduction in drop outs

_____ School climate

_____ School safety

_____ State standardized- test scores

_____ Technology on campus

12. Although I will only be conducting a limited number of interviews, would you be willing to be interviewed? Yes _____ No _____ Maybe _____

Comments?

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. What led you to become an administrator?
2. Who/what inspired you to be a leader for social justice?
3. How would you describe your school's climate?
 - a. (if negative) What will you do to change the climate to what you want it to be?OR
 - a. (if positive) What/who do you credit for the school climate being so positive?
 - b. What has been your role in establishing a positive climate?
 - c. Are there any aspects you'd like to (further) change?
4. How would you describe diversity at your school? (if not answered by previous question)
5. Do you perceive that any type of students are marginalized? (if yes) Which students do you perceive to be marginalized (if any)?

If there is marginalization:

 - a. What leads you to believe these student groups are marginalized?
 - b. How is this being addressed?
 - c. What is your perception of how parents and the community at large respond to your leadership to end marginalization of these students? (Ask for examples or elaboration as needed.)

d. (if they describe resistance to social justice, I will probe further) What strategies have you used to address the resistance?

e. What supports have you had?

6. (If no mention of LGBTQ students) What are your perceptions of Asher's Law? (I will describe it if they are unfamiliar with it - It specifically protects all students from bullying and requires districts to report bullying annually to the TEA and to develop suicide prevention programs.)

a. What is your perception about the language of the law protecting students of "a certain sexual orientation"?

b. What do you do as campus leader to support this student population?

c. What do you expect of your teachers?

(If not mentioned, I'll ask what types (if any) of professional development will be provided for their faculties regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation.)

d. How do you think protecting this student population would be received by parents of students at your school? Community? (if not answered already)

e. (If resistance is mentioned) What strategies have you used or might use if you encounter resistance while protecting these students (if they have intentions of doing so and if not mentioned previously).

f. (If support is mentioned) Please elaborate on the support you've mentioned (if needed).

7. How has being a leader for social justice affected you?

8. Do you have any other comments about your role as a leader for social justice?

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

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Informed Consent Document

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Holly Bishop
Graduate Student
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
(214) 263-0518
holly.bishop@mavs.uta.edu

FACULTY ADVISOR

Dr. Rhonda McClellan
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
(817) 272-2841
rmcclellan@uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT

Social Justice Leadership Experiences of Principals in Rural High Schools

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study about the experiences of principals in rural high schools who are social justice leaders. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE

The specific purpose of this research is to learn from principals who work in rural schools and place value in social justice leadership about their role as campus leaders for social justice.

DURATION

Participation in this study will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

The number of anticipated participants in this research study is 10.

PROCEDURES

The procedure which will involve you as a research participant will be an interview. The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed, which means the dialogue will be typed exactly as it was recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. Electronic copies (the digital recording and computer documents) will be kept on a computer that is password protected and only accessible by the principal investigator. Any hard-copies of transcripts will be locked in a file cabinet and stored at

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the University of Texas at Arlington in Trimble Hall. The recording and transcription will be kept for three years and then both will be destroyed. Survey data from the participant screen used to determine those to be interviewed will not be linked to the interview in any way and will be stored separately.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

Knowledge from you about social justice leadership may help other principals learn to lead their schools to becoming more socially just in the future.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you have the right to not answer the question(s) or to discontinue the interview with no penalty and no consequences. No personal information including your name, the name or identifying characteristics of your school or the identity of your district will be used or revealed to anyone or available to anyone other than the principal researcher.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation offered for participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the University of Texas at Arlington in Trimble Hall. Electronic data including email and audio recordings from this study will be stored in electronic format on a password protected computer belonging to the principal investigator. Data will be stored for at three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current

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legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study may be directed to Holly Bishop, (214) 263-0518 or her faculty advisor Dr. Rhonda McClellan, (817) 272-2841. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent Date

CONSENT

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER **DATE**

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Holly Bishop is a science teacher who has taught all levels of secondary education, including junior high school, high school, community college, and university. She is passionate about the education system, student learning, and equity for all students. Her research interests include social justice leadership, educational leadership preparation, teacher preparation, and science education. Her Bachelor of Science degree from Stephen F. Austin State University is in biology with a kinesiology minor. Her Master of Science degree from Texas A&M University is in zoology with an emphasis in aquatic ecology. Her Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Arlington is in Educational Leadership and Policy studies. Her publications cover topics in social justice leadership for LGBTQ students and teachers. She plans to become a professor in educational leadership and continue research in social justice leadership adding to social justice leadership theory.