STARS

2018

A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender + Student Support Group Within A Central Florida State College: A Qualitative Study

Remy Ansiello

University of Central Florida

STARS
Showcase of Text, Archives, Research & Scholarship

A LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER + STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP
WITHIN A CENTRAL FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

REMY CHRISTOPHER ANSIELLO
B.A., Rollins College, 2006
M.L.S., Rollins College, 2011

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education
in the College of Community Innovation and Education
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term
2018

Major Professor: Kathleen King

ABSTRACT

For decades, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) + students attending institutions of higher education have been marginalized and have experienced hostility and outright discrimination, causing the need for student support groups for this population on college campuses. Recent laws passed at a national level have brought a greater level of equality to this minority group; however, feelings of marginalization, homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormative culture persist. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to ask how students participating in an LGBT + support group within a Central Florida public state college perceive their experiences in college. The researcher also asked students participating in an LGBT + support group within a Central Florida public state college what issues or challenges have most significantly impacted them. This qualitative study focused on an LGBT + student support group at a public state college in the Central Florida area. The researcher conducted ethnographic interviews with seven student participants and selected these students through a volunteer sample. A focus group with four of the seven participants was also conducted. Data were collected through recording of the interviews and focus group, observations and other documents. The researcher sought permission from the participants to record the interviews, ensured them access to the written and auditory transcript of their own specific interview, as well as guaranteed that the recordings would be destroyed after the conclusion of the dissertation and publication.

Keywords: heteronormative, heterosexism, homophobia, LGBT +

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Juliet Elizabeth Ansiello, who passed away on August 17, 2018. I know how proud you were of me. Thank you for always accepting me and for having that simple – but life-changing – talk with me on a random day 22 years ago. You were simply driving me to the mall and all you said was that you and dad loved me for who I am, and would never care who I loved as long as that person loved me back. You made that 16-year-old's life infinitely better that day. I will never forget how lucky I am that you were my mom. I love and miss you forever.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank several individuals who have contributed toward my successful conclusion of this educational milestone.

To Dr. Kathleen King, thank you for being my chair. This topic is so profoundly important in higher education today. The guidance you afforded me to complete this dissertation has helped expand the body of knowledge and hopefully will act as a guide for institutions, specifically community and other two-year colleges, to assist this specific student population with reaching its full potential. Your assistance over the past few years is sincerely appreciated.

To Dr. Marshall, Dr. Hopp, and Dr. Cox, thank you for serving on my committee and for your support and direction throughout this entire process. Your advice has helped me write a better dissertation, and for that I am grateful.

To Joseph Raditch, thank you for being my analysis partner. You enthusiastically volunteered to review the data, and I could not have completed this dissertation without you.

To Dr. Rosa Cintron, you were there for me at the beginning of my doctoral program and encouraged me to dive into this topic and "make a difference!" Thank you for your love and support.

And finally, I would like to especially acknowledge and thank the seven students who volunteered their time and contributed their stories. Without these courageous voices this dissertation would not have been possible.

Thank you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACPA – American College Personnel Association

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

APA – American Psychological Association

ATLG – Attitude Toward Lesbian and Gay Scale

ATLG-S - Attitude Toward Lesbian and Gay Scale (Short Form)

DOMA – Defense Of Marriage Act

DSM – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

FLIC – Florida Legislative Investigative Committee

GLAAD – Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

GLADE – Gay and Lesbian Association of District Employees

GLSEN – Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network

GSA – Gay/Straight Alliance

HRC – Human Rights Campaign

HSD – Honest Significant Difference

IRB – Institutional Review Board

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

LGBTA – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Asexual

LGBTQ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning

LGBTQI - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex

LGBTQIA – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual

LGBT + - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender + (Plus)

MANOVA – Multivariate Analysis of Variance

NASPA – National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

RWA – Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale

SCLGBTA – Standing Committee for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Awareness

SRE – Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale

UCLGBTA – University of California Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Association

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND NEED

Despite recent legislative victories affording more equal rights to members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) + community, feelings of isolation and alienation among LGBT + college students are still high. This student population has a greater chance of victimization, and many of these students face barriers that heterosexual students do not face (Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger, & Hope, 2013). Despite the progress that has been made, feelings of marginalization among LGBT + students in institutions of higher education are a continuing problem. For LGBT + students attending two-year community and state colleges and other types of commuter campuses, it is difficult to feel part of any kind of community. Those students not living on campus and without direct access to support services can be particularly negatively affected (Leider, 2000).

The 2015 Supreme Court case, *Obergefell v Hodges*, which ensured marriage equality (Frost, 2015), was a watershed moment for members of the LGBT + community in the United States. For the first time in this nation's history, all 50 states legally recognized marriage between either two men or two women. For too many decades, LGBT + citizens were marginalized by society, with few to no legal rights or protections. Grosz (2013) argued that the oppression experienced by lesbians and gays – both societal and legal – throughout the history of the United States differed from the oppression experienced by other minority groups, such as racial minorities (as cited in Hall, Jagose, Bebell, & Potter, 2013). Grosz (2013) explained that laws and societal norms forced millions of LGBT + Americans to publicly act heterosexual to avoid persecution (as cited in Hall et al., 2013).

There are historical examples dating back to the 1940s of college students punished for their sexuality (Nash & Silverman, 2015). Punishment for lesbian and gay behavior was not

limited to students in higher education. During the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s numerous instances

of legal punishments were placed on both students and faculty and staff in higher education for

their sexuality. Specific examples of these legal punishments are described in Chapter Two.

Starting in the late 1960s, however, student support resources began to appear in various colleges

and universities for LGBT + students (Fine, 2012). The push for broader civil rights in society

during the 1960s may have contributed to this gradual increase in student support for LGBT +

resources in higher education. The 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City ignited the modern

gay Civil Rights movement (Mallory, as cited in Ivory, 2005, p. 61) and are also explained in

detail in Chapter Two. In 1967, two years before the Stonewall riots in New York, "Columbia

University became the first campus to recognize a student organization for gay and lesbian

students" (as cited in Ivory, 2005, p. 61). The Stonewall riots were a pivotal event in the 20th

and 21st century struggle for LGBT rights in the United States.

Beemyn (2012) reported that this support gradually increased within higher education to

include not only student associations, but also LGBT + centers, queer study classes, and majors.

Beemyn (2012) contended that within the United States' largest and most diverse four-year

colleges and universities, homosexuality has slowly transitioned from a mostly taboo subject in

the middle to end of the 20th century to a more generally accepted way of life in the early 21st

(Beemyn, 2012). Despite this progress, however, Beemyn (2012) suggested "the community

college has lagged in offering this type of support" (p. 507).

In many parts of the United States these higher educational institutions are referred to as

community colleges; however, many of these institutions are now classified in Florida as "state

colleges" ("State College," 2017). Within community and state colleges, specifically, Beemyn

(2012) stated that transgender students received the least amount of attention and support

compared to lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. Throughout the push for more LGBT + integration and equality over the past fifty years, transgendered individuals have received the least amount of equal benefits or protections nationwide (Beemyn, 2012). There are still no protections for students of under-represented sexual and gender orientations in most U.S. community and state colleges (Beemyn, 2012).

Beemyn (2012) stated that only 22 U.S. community and state colleges have included "gender identity and expression" in their nondiscrimination policies (p. 506). This lack of universal policy protection nationwide presents a variety of challenges for transgendered students when navigating the college environment. These challenges include having to navigate issues such as what name these students can choose to be called by their professor to which bathroom they can use on campus. When college campuses do not have protections clearly written within their policies the result is often confusion and uncertainty.

This study focused on students attending an LGBT + support group within a public state college in Central Florida, and the name of the student participants and the institution remained confidential. A review of the literature in Chapter Two outlines the history of oppression, marginalization, and alienation that LGBT + American citizens have had to endure. An overview of historical progress toward equal rights for this population is also detailed. Beginning in the late 1970s, several LGBT +-related identity models were created, contributing toward identity development within the LGBT + community. These LGBT +-related identity models were also used by higher education administrators in the development of LGBT + resources in colleges and universities. A review of that literature takes place in Chapter Two. The 1996 passage of the Federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) by Congress, signed by President Clinton, was one of the last large-scale national laws restricting LGBT + American

citizens from the same rights as heterosexual American citizens (GLAAD, 2017a). From 1996

to the present, however, there has been marked cultural and political progress toward LGBT +

equality in the United States, culminating with the decision to legalize marriage equality by the

Supreme Court in 2015.

Frost (2015) reported that in *Obergefell v Hodges*, the Supreme Court ruled by a 5-4

margin that there "was a constitutional right to same-sex marriage, and that individual states

must recognize lawful same-sex marriages performed in other states" (p. 171). Prior to the

Obergefell v Hodges ruling, marriage equality was decided on a state-by-state basis.

Massachusetts was the first state in the nation to pass a marriage-equality law in 2004. Ten years

prior, however, the Hawaii Supreme Court had ruled that that state's constitution – which denied

marriage licenses to same-sex couples – could be violating the national constitution's guarantee

of equal protection (Frost, 2015). This ruling was ultimately not validated, and same-sex

marriage remained illegal in Hawaii. Although Hawaii's attempt to legalize same-sex marriage

was not successful in 1993, it prompted the U.S. Congress to pass and enact DOMA three years

later. Anthony Kennedy, the Supreme Court justice who was the deciding vote for the passage

of marriage equality in 2015, concluded that "the right to marry is a fundamental right inherent

in the liberty of the person, and under due process and equal protection clauses of the fourteenth

amendment couples of the same-sex may not be deprived of that right and that liberty" (Frost,

2015, p. 177).

Murray (2017) suggested that the current political climate may suggest a pause, or

reversal, of the progress LGBT + American citizens have made toward passing national

legislation that has been ending discriminatory practices against this population. Although that

reversal ultimately may not be fully realized, Murray (2017) contended that appointees of the

current administration "have long records of opposition to basic rights for LGBTQ people and will bring their views and missions to aspects of government ranging from the Justice Department to the Department of Health and Human Services" (p. 301). These records of opposition to basic rights for LGBTQ people could potentially negatively affect this population in the form of discriminatory laws passed or a relaxing of existing protections that could reverse LGBT + progress toward equality nationwide.

Statement of the Problem

Experiences of heteronormative culture and heterosexism are still rampant within American institutions of higher education (Burn, Kadlec, & Rexer, 2005), all of which are detailed in the conceptual framework section. These terms "imply the devaluing of sexual orientations other than heterosexuality. Heterosexism generally refers to rendering LGBT + individuals as invisible. Homophobia, however, connotes more fear, prejudice, and discrimination" than heterosexism does (Ottenritter, 1998, p. 2). Most institutions of education in the United States are heteronormative environments, where there is an assumption that students naturally identify as heterosexual. This institutional assumption greatly contributes to the vulnerability of LGBT + students (Dinkins & Englert, 2015). Paraphrasing from Woodford, Howell, Kulick, and Silverschanz (2013), among the majority student population, i.e., heterosexual students, examples of heterosexist language, such as "that's so gay" is common, leading to further marginalization of LGBT + students.

External homophobia connotes fear by heterosexual individuals which can often lead to discrimination, bias, and even violence directed toward LGBT + individuals (Ottenritter, 1998). Internal homophobia represents an LGBT + "person's direction of negative social attitudes toward the self" (Meyer & Dean, 1998, p. 161). The negative self-image that internal

5

homophobia projects can often lead to internal conflict between recognizing same-sex feelings or

desires with an urge to act or feel heterosexual to others. To Grosz (2013), homophobia is an

attempt "to separate being from doing, existence from action" (as cited in Hall et al., 2013, p.

207). A homophobic thinker not only believes that being part of the LGBT + community is

wrong, but also believes that actual homosexual *acts* are wrong as well, and homosexuality is

somehow inferior to heterosexuality. Within a heteronormative society, homophobia is still a

barrier when it comes to normalization of LGBT + citizens in U.S. society.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher analyzed heteronormativity and heterosexism, forming a conceptual

framework, to have a better understanding of the experiences of student members of a Central

Florida public state college LGBT + support group. The central tenant of heteronormativity

relies on the normalization of heterosexual practices in society (Dinkins & Englert, 2015).

Within institutions of higher education in the United States, examples of heteronormativity are

pervasive. LGBT + college students, navigating through heteronormative college environments,

often contend with issues related to inclusion, alienation, and self-identity. Addressing this

research study through a heteronormative lens aided the researcher in gathering a more accurate

and holistic understanding of the day-to-day experiences of college students attending a

community and state college, or a two-year institution. Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri (2011)

emphasized the lack of research regarding LGBT + students attending community and state

colleges and how they navigate heteronormative environments, underscoring the need for this

qualitative study to be conducted.

Heteronormativity

According to Butler (1990), heteronormativity "rests on the assumption that everyone is straight and that those who are not are deviating from the norm. This in turn *others* LGBT + sexual identities, by restricting the meaning of gender" (p. viii). Chambers (2007) stated that "heterosexuality is the median point on the normal curve: not only that which is statistically dominant, but also that which is expected, demanded and always presupposed in society" (p. 663). From this perspective, any attempt to challenge the heterosexual norm is a deviance of normalcy. Such a mindset uses heteronormativity as "a regulatory practice" (Chambers, 2007, p. 663) that shapes how society views itself and how to act.

This framework is supported by numerous societal examples that promote heterosexual relationships over other types of relationships, from advertisements emphasizing heterosexual relationships to laws regulating which bathrooms citizens can use in public spaces. Moreover, this concept encapsulates society's continued discrimination against the LGBT + community in housing and employment. Heteronormativity also invites feelings and acts of aggressive superiority such as school bullying of children perceived to be members of the LGBT + community (GLSEN, 2015). Chambers (2007) argued that heteronormativity's effect on the LGBT + community is all-encompassing due "to the way that it operates through institutions, laws and daily life" (p. 666). When LGBT + persons are repeatedly "conforming to ideas as to how men or women are supposed to look, talk and behave" (Hubbard, 2008, p. 650), all within a heterosexual society, the risk for feelings of alienation and abnormality increases. Hubbard (2008) stated that heteronormativity creates the impression that LGBT + persons are one distinct group, different from heterosexuals, and therefore inferior. This binary viewpoint of sexuality is doubly unfair toward lesbians because, as Ericsson (2011) stated, this population has "historically been deprived of a political existence through *inclusion* as female versions of male

homosexuality. To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is

stigmatized is to erase female reality once again" (p. 28).

However, Jackson (2006) cautioned that heteronormativity needs to be analyzed and

"rethought in terms of *what* is subject to regulation on both sides of the normatively prescribed

boundaries of heterosexuality: both sexuality *and* gender" (p. 105). Jackson (2006) stated that

heteronormativity can be understood only through the prism of "what it governs, both gender and

sexuality, and how each of these is interwoven with the institutionalization, meaning and practice

of heterosexuality and the production of sexual and gendered subjects or selves" (pp. 109-110).

In what ways do the intersection of gender, sexuality and heterosexuality in our society

contribute to heteronormativity? Jackson (2006) attempted to explain how this concept has been

"woven into the fabric of social life, pervasively and insidiously ordering everyday existence" (p.

108) even to an unconscious level. American society has built norms designed specifically for

heterosexuals who are generally understood as having specific values, beliefs, and assumptions

(Jackson, 2006). This normalization of heterosexuality has created a hierarchical societal

mindset, not only in terms of gender and sexual orientation, but also in terms of what is

considered appropriate or deviant (or queer). Even as laws are passed granting members of the

LGBT + community additional rights, heteronormative culture still dictates how LGBT +

citizens should behave. Seidman (2002) suggested that the "normalization of gay characters in

US *[sic]* cinema requires that they be gender conventional, committed to romantic-companionate

and family values, uncritically patriotic and detached from a subculture" (p. 160). In other

words, even as LGBT + citizens gain broader societal acceptance, it is only if they do not

unsettle heteronormative ideals of what is appropriate. Rather than *all* LGBT + citizens' being

bad, or deviant, heteronormative society now casts this group into two categories: good LGBT +

citizens or bad/unhealthy LGBT + citizens (Seidman, 2002).

Heterosexism

Warner (1991) insisted that one of the most "pervasive, deeply felt, and distinctive

structures of the modern world is the opposition between hetero- and homosexualities" (p. 7).

Warner (1991) also argued that the "heterosexualization of society was such a fundamental

imperative" (p. 7) as the modern world was forming approximately 500 years ago that there was

a "notion that our lives are somehow made more meaningful by being embedded in a narrative of

generational succession" (p. 7). The interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction,

cultural reproduction and personal identity have all been synthesized over the centuries and have

contributed to a heteronormative ideal: if the *normal* members of society were not heterosexual,

somehow human reproduction would cease and humanity would die out (Warner, 1991). This

narrow view of sex and personal relationships completely excludes LGBT + parents and people

who identify as LGBT + but who also have opposite-sex intimate relations.

Within a higher education setting, such as a community or state college, a

heteronormative culture and mindset is easy to create, even unconsciously, because most

students and staff identify as heterosexual. Without being deliberate, many institutions of higher

education make it difficult for LGBT + students to persist to graduation because they feel they

have no place within that culture. Dinkins and Englert (2015) stressed that an institution of

higher education that lacks support groups for LGBT + students or fail to include LGBT +

historical context and data within curriculum are contributing to a heteronormative culture that

can be damaging for this student population.

Historically, the heterosexual majority has used its privilege to marginalize LGBT +

American citizens throughout multiple facets of society. This marginalization is encapsulated

through the various laws and statutes among many states that discriminate against LGBT +

citizens regarding housing and employment. But this marginalization of LGBT + citizens does

not have to take the form of a discriminatory law. Society projects a heteronormative-dominant

image through television, music, and social media that celebrates heterosexuality. Meem,

Gibson, and Alexander (2010) explained that many LGBT + activists, in their quest to attain

equal rights, have often had to adopt positions equating homosexuality with race or gender.

More specifically, because the LGBT + community is a minority group with a history of being

marginalized and oppressed, to gain recognition from the heterosexual majority, activists have

had to demand recognition of the right to equal treatment. Therefore, a *queer* identity formed,

uniting a group with the shared experiences of alienation, marginalization and oppression.

Members of the LGBT + community in the United States must constantly navigate through a

heteronormative majority environment. Their day-to-day experiences and struggles clash

directly with heteronormative privilege (Dinkins & Englert, 2015). This description also applies

to LGBT + students in higher education because they experience the same challenges within this

specific context.

Feeling excluded is a common perception among LGBT + college students. Taylor

(2015) stated that data on LGBT + students attending community and state colleges are very

minimal. Campus Pride's (2014) release of the 50 best LGBT +-friendly colleges and

universities in the nation, however, does not include a single community college. The report also

highlighted that "of 427 colleges and universities that have demonstrated an active interest in

LGBT issues and ongoing commitment to LGBT & Ally people" (Campus Pride, 2014), only 37

community and state colleges are listed, representing only 9% of the listed institutions, even though community and state colleges enroll approximately 45% of all undergraduates in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). With these statistics in mind, the concept of inclusion is vital to gain a better understanding of the experiences of student members of an LGBT + support group within a Central Florida public state college.

Herek (1996) argued that heterosexism operates at two levels: individual and cultural. The individual level can include "personal disgust, hostility, or condemnation of homosexuality" (p. 102). At the cultural level, this concept is pervasive through our laws, customs, and norms, which are the opposite of inclusive (Herek, 1996). Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) focused on the risk that LGBT + centers on college campuses face in being separate from the rest of the college community. They specified that in American colleges and universities, especially, these types of centers risk maintaining "practices and policies that separate students and reproduce inequitable structures in ways that ensure" their existence (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014, p. 264). The authors also noted that even the name of the center itself may impact whether a student feels included or excluded. For example, if a center is named Gay and Lesbian Center, that could potentially make bisexual and transgender students, and even questioning (Q) students, feel excluded and potentially even more marginalized.

Based on the research conducted by Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) on transgendered students, this population felt especially left out of many college support centers. Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) contended that typically their needs, experiences, and "narratives" are often silenced and ignored (p. 266). Many people in the transgender community argue that they may need to separate from the LGB movement. Individuals who identify as transgender may not necessarily identify as gay. A man who transitions to a woman does not automatically become

attracted to men. Sexual orientation and gender identity are separate issues and may take

different forms (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). The authors sought to understand how language

"functions in LGBTQ centers to amplify or obscure trans* visibility" (Marine & Nicolazzo,

2014, p. 267). They sought to determine whether language itself plays a part in contributing to

the sense of isolation, inclusion, or exclusion experienced by transgender students.

Because of this sense of marginalization, resources for LGBT + students and a safe space

are key. Hernandez and Hernandez (2011) referred to resources that administrators of

community colleges can utilize to assist marginalized students. LGBT + students are part of this

category. Recent instances of suicide among LGBT + students in high schools and colleges have

increased the need for administrators to be sensitive to the needs of this specific population.

They reflected on the need for a "call to action to shed light on the marginalized intersection of

oppressed identities of gay students in American society" (Hernandez & Hernandez, 2011, p.

85).

Hernandez and Hernandez (2011) called for universities and colleges to create climates

where differences are valued as a contribution toward diversity. They have advocated for

postsecondary institutions to support LGBT + communities. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight

Education Network (GLSEN) supports this philosophy, and encourages any individual,

regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, to adopt and promote this inclusive and

welcoming mindset among institutions of higher education. The higher education organization

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) also promotes a culture and

climate in which professionals and administrators can obtain resources and information that will

empower the LGBT + community in higher education and help them to become more

academically successful (Hernandez & Hernandez, 2011). Lastly, the Standing Committee for

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Awareness (SCLGBTA) seeks to educate members of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) on the "social, psychological, health-related, political, economic, professional, legal, and spiritual realities" (p. 86).

Research Questions

The inspiration for this qualitative, ethnographic study was to seek a better understanding of how students participating within an LGBT + support group within a Central Florida public state college perceive their levels of inclusion, acceptance, and success. Despite a general increase in societal acceptance of the LGBT + community, LGBT + Americans – and LGBT + college students especially – often feel a sense of alienation and isolation (Burn et al., 2005). Recent legislative, political, and social circumstances have all contributed to either a positive or negative environment for LGBT + citizens – with marriage equality, the Pulse nightclub massacre, and the current administration being three examples. The specific research questions listed were examined through a conceptual framework of heteronormativity and heterosexism:

- As students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community, what are their perceptions of their experiences?

- What issues or challenges have most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community?

Of the 26 public colleges in Florida, some offer only two-year associate degrees, while others offer those degrees as well as four-year bachelor degrees. 12 of these public colleges have the word "state" in their official name, while four have the word "community" in their official name. The remaining 10 institutions have only their designated name followed by the word "college". The institution used for the purposes of this study fell within the 10 institutions with

neither the words "community" or "state" in its title, and it awards both associate and bachelor degrees (Colleges & Universities, 2018).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this topic is embedded in the fact that members of the LGBT + community are an at-risk student population. Graves (2007) contended that, for decades, members of the LGBT + community were forced to leave their institutions of higher education because of their sexual orientation. Over time, as attitudes slowly changed throughout higher education, the idea of the need for student support groups for this population on college campuses gained traction. The judicial ruling of *Obergefell v Hodges* legalizing same-sex marriage at a national level have brought a greater level of equality to this minority group, hopefully decreasing that marginalization. It is important to determine all the ways that LGBT + student support groups are still relevant to student members.

This topic is important for another reason. Groups such as those dedicated to supporting the LGBT + community within state colleges act as more than just extracurricular activities for students. These student groups work in a transformative way by placing "the student's reflective processes at the core of the learning experience" (American College Personnel Association (ACPA) & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), 2004, p. 10). These groups help guide their student members through a heteronormative learning environment and equip them with the tools to "adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources and continue learning throughout their lives" (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 11). This guidance and navigation will help all student members of an LGBT + support group. But especially for student members who identify as LGBT +, the skills, experience and lessons

14

learned from these types of support groups will help them navigate challenges and barriers in the broader heteronormative world.

<p style="text-align:center;">Definitions of Terms</p>

Asexual – A person who does not experience sexual attraction to others (GLAAD, 2017b).

Bisexual – A person who is attracted to members of both sexes (GLAAD, 2017b).

Closeted – Describes people who have not made public their sexual orientation. Some individuals who are closeted may have revealed their sexual orientation to some people, but not to others. This decision could often be due to fear of negative consequences (GLAAD, 2017b).

Coming Out – A lifelong process of self-acceptance and revealing of one's sexual orientation or sexual identity. It may or may not involve informing other people as the coming out process is an internal journey of self-acceptance and reflection (GLAAD, 2017b).

Community College – An institution of higher education in the United States that primarily awards two-year associate degrees ("Community College," 2017).

External Homophobia – Fear of people who are attracted to the same sex. With this fear, there is a risk for LGBTQ persons to experience intolerance, bias, or prejudice from individuals with negative feelings toward that population (GLAAD, 2017b).

Gay – A person who is attracted to a person of the same sex (GLAAD, 2017b).

Gay Liberation – Term used to describe the LGBT + demand for equality. The term and movement resulted after the New York City Stonewall Inn riots in 1969 in which LGBT + patrons protested police abuse and demanded fair treatment and justice. (Morris, 2017).

Gender Identity – An individual's personal sense of his or her own gender. (GLAAD, 2017b).

Heteronormative – "The idea and practice that heterosexual relationships and heterosexuality are the preferred and normal sexual orientation that members of society should follow" (Hall et al, 2013, p. 77).

Heterosexism – An ideological system that stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community (Herek, 1990). Such stigmatization may include abuse, discrimination, micro-aggressions, intimidation, privilege, and more which is embedded into society.

Heterosexual – A term which describes people who are attracted to members of the opposite sex (GLAAD, 2017b).

Heterosexual Privilege – The norms that emphasize heterosexuality and deems automatic benefits upon that specific sexual orientation in society that sexual minorities would not otherwise also enjoy (Blumer, Green, Thomte, & Green, 2013).

Homonegativity – Negative attitude or opinion toward homosexuality in general (Andrinopoulos & Hembling, 2014).

Homophobia – Fear of people who are attracted to the same sex. With this fear, there is a risk for LGBTQ persons to experience intolerance, bias, or prejudice from individuals with negative feelings toward that population (GLAAD, 2017b).

Homosexual – A term used to describe gay and lesbian individuals. To some, this is considered an outdated and derogatory term (GLAAD, 2017b).

Internal Homophobia – A negative self-image that an LGBT + individual can experience related to his or her sexual orientation (Meyer & Dean, 1998).

Intersex – A term used to describe individuals born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that cannot be limited to strictly male or female (GLAAD, 2017b).

Lesbian – A term that describes a woman who is attracted to other women (GLAAD, 2017b).

Marriage Equality – A term to describe the 2015 Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage throughout the entire United States (GLAAD, 2017b).

Out – A person who self-identifies as being a member of the LGBT + community (GLAAD, 2017b).

Outed/Outing – The act of revealing someone's sexual orientation or gender identity without their explicit permission (GLAAD, 2017b).

Passing – Successfully being perceived as a member of a preferred gender regardless of actual birth sex. Some transsexual people object to the term "passing" because it implies that one is being mistaken for something he or she is not. A preferable phrasing is being "read as a man" or being "read as a woman" (University of Southern California, 2017).

Queer – Once used as a derogatory term in the LGBT + community, it has since been adopted by members of the LGBT + community as a source of pride. Often symbolizes the "Q" in LGBTQ (GLAAD, 2017b).

Questioning – A term used to describe people who are exploring their own sexuality (Human Rights Campaign, 2017a).

Safe Zone – A term used ubiquitously by schools and workplaces to indicate both the learning opportunity (Safe Zone workshops) and the people who have completed those (Safe Zone-trained individuals). And even more broadly, the term "safe zone" is used to refer to LGBTQ awareness workshops. LGBTQ folks sometimes question whether they will feel safe, welcomed, or supported in a new environment. Displaying "Safe Zone" stickers can help

organizations communicate to others a commitment to creating LGBTQ-inclusive environments (Safe Zone Project, 2017).

Sexual Orientation – A term to describe the gender to which an individual is attracted (GLAAD, 2017b).

State College – A term often used to describe a two-year institution supported by a state government ("State College," 2017).

Straight – A slang term sometimes used in place of Heterosexual which describes people who are attracted to members of the opposite sex (GLAAD, 2017b).

Support Group – A group of people with shared experiences who provide emotional and support for one another ("Support Group," 2017).

Transgender – A term used to describe individuals who identify with a gender identity different from the gender in which they were born (GLAAD, 2017b).

Transsexual – A term still preferred by some individuals who identity with a gender identity different from the gender in which they were born, often used as an adjective (GLAAD, 2017b).

Limitations and Delimitations

According to Simon (2011), limitations are possible weaknesses within a research study that are not controllable. Examples of limitations include time restraints, participant follow-through, or not using a random sample, which prevent the researcher from applying the study to a larger population.

Limitations of this research study included the following:

1) Time restraints or availability of student volunteers in the semester the interview took

   place (Spring 2018 semester).

2) Risk of low levels of student volunteers for study resulted in not achieving the

   minimum seven-10 student-level goal for interviews (seven students participated).

3) The assumption that all participants answered truthfully.

Simon (2011) stated that delimitations, alternatively, are limitations *within* the control of

the researcher. Examples of delimitations include theoretical perspectives the researcher

chooses, the population, as well as the research questions, among others.

Delimitations of this research study included the following:

1) Interviewed a relatively small number of students *purposefully* by focusing on the

   experiences of a small sample of students to achieve a more deliberative, personal,

   and honest set of responses from the interview questions that are all derived from the

   researcher's original research questions.

2) Owing to a small body of knowledge in the field on this research study's topic in the

   region, the researcher deliberately chose to focus on the gay/straight alliance of one

   public Florida state college rather than multiple colleges to ascertain the experiences

   of student participants in a gay/straight alliance.

3) The researcher elected to focus the research study on a conceptual framework of

   heteronormativity and heterosexism.

Summary

There is an urgent need to expand the literature on the needs of LGBT + community and

state college students in the United States. As mentioned earlier, although the number of

students attending two-year schools of higher education was 45% as of 2014 (Campus Pride, 2014), only 37 community and state colleges were recognized as demonstrating "an active interest in LGBT issues and an ongoing commitment to LGBT & Ally people" (Campus Pride, 2014). Despite legislative victories, such as the *Obergefell v Hodges* (Frost, 2015) Supreme Court case in 2015 legalizing marriage equality and contributing to the normalization of LGBT + culture into society, events such as the massacre of 49 individuals at an LGBT + nightclub and the election of the current administration, both in occurring in 2016, underscored the reality that this population is still a targeted minority within the United States.

Despite some legislative victories, feelings of alienation, isolation, and marginalization among LGBT + college students persist at a higher rate than heterosexual students (Leider, 2000). By utilizing a conceptual framework through the lenses of heteronormativity and heterosexism, the researcher investigated the experiences of student members of an LGBT + support group within a Central Florida public state college to increase the level of understanding of if, and how participation in this type of student group contributes to students' sense of inclusion, acceptance, and success. Chapter Two provides an overview of the literature that exists regarding the history of the LGBT + struggle for equality, as well as the LGBT + student experience in higher education. The evolution of LGBT + -related identity development models, the assessment of campus climate for this student population, student development theory, heterosexism and homophobia, as well as student involvement theory, are all discussed in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Literature documenting the alienation and marginalization felt by LGBT + students attending institutions of higher education in the United States makes this research study especially relevant in our changing socio-political context. Furthermore, this population of students is at risk because of the persecution and discrimination LGBT + individuals have experienced in this nation's history. Despite legislative victories increasing equality for LGBT + individuals in the U.S. and reducing the stigmatization of homosexuality in general, alienation, marginalization, and discrimination still exist.

This chapter provides a review of the literature related to the history of the LGBT + struggle for equality in the United States, as well as a study of LGBT + college student support groups, including at Florida institutions of higher education. The chapter is divided into the following sections: History of the LGBT + Struggle for Equality & LGBT + Student Experiences in Higher Education (with sub-headings LGBT + Identity Development and Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Identity Development Model); Assessing Campus Climate for LGBT + Students (with sub-heading Student Development Theory); Heterosexism and Homophobia; and Creating Space for LGBT + (with sub-heading Student Involvement Theory).

History of LGBT + Struggle for Equality & LGBT + Student Experiences in Higher Education

The struggle for equality among LGBT + Americans has been a decades-long civil rights issue. With the 2015 decision to legalize marriage equality by the Supreme Court, requiring all 50 states to allow gays and lesbians the right to marry, this quest for equal status progressed

significantly. However, as the 2016 presidential campaign and election revealed, barriers still

exist for this population, with varying degrees of alienation and discrimination still rampant.

Gandara, Jackson, and Discont (2017) explained that during the current administration's

campaign, statements were repeatedly made in favor of signing Senate Bill 1598 (2015) or

House Bill 2802 (2015) – Republican Party-led bills that would allow businesses that do work

with the government to be classified as *people*, at which point these businesses would be allowed

to invoke freedom of religion protections to justify discriminatory practices against LGBT +

American citizens, which currently the federal government does not allow because of executive

orders by the Obama administration.

There is a historical context of anti-gay behavior in the country. Crandell (1997)

described that, during the Puritan period, "the mere concept of homosexuality struck horror into

the hearts of good, God-fearing men" (p. 20) and that during this time the punishment for

homosexual acts was death. For most of the nation's history, gays and lesbians have had to

remain silent about their sexual orientation for fear of negative repercussions. Even presently,

discrimination in housing and employment is still a reality in most states. According to research

by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), only 21 of 50 states have laws and policies prohibiting

housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Human Rights

Campaign, 2017b).

According to Meem et al. (2010), religious and historical persecution and demonizing of

homosexuality permeated through society over the years since the Colonial period, with

Christian leaders often calling that lifestyle a "crime of Sodom" (p. 17). Such vilification caused

the oppression, alienation, and marginalization of this population, for which often the only

answer was to remain silent and hide one's true sexual orientation. This strategy to hide one's homosexual identity is often called being *in the closet*.

Meem et al. (2010) also explained that by World War II, the U.S. military began to use psychiatrists' standards as justification to exclude homosexuals. During this time, homosexuality was considered a mental disorder according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), so it was easy to justify excluding this population from joining the military. In Nazi Germany, homosexuals were arrested along with Jews and other groups and put into concentration camps. The pink triangle that is a contemporary symbol of "gay liberation" (Meem et al., 2010, p. 71) was the identifier for homosexuals in the concentration campus used by the Nazis.

The year 1969 proved to be a pivotal year for the push toward equality for the LGBT + community in the United States. The Stonewall Riots, as explained by Meem et al. (2010) was sparked by continuing and numerous arrests and harassment of gay patrons of the Stonewall Inn bar by New York City police. This persistent practice inadvertently caused a groundswell of organizing and protesting from members of the LGBT + community nationwide. This group called "specifically for job protection for gay employees, [and] an end to police harassment, and the decriminalization of sodomy" (p. 93).

Since the 1970s, attitudes among professionals and the general population regarding rights for the LGBT + community have been evolving. Drescher (2015) noted that in 1973 the APA "removed the diagnosis of 'homosexuality' from the second edition of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM)" (p. 565). This action was the official declassification of homosexuality and was no longer considered a disease or mental illness requiring "correction." The 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 case is a landmark decision by the United States

Supreme Court that struck down Texas's sodomy law (Gonzalez, 2004). With that decision, the sodomy laws in 13 other states that still had them on their books were also struck down, granting privacy for same-sex sexual activity in the nation (Gonzalez, 2004).

Avery et al. (2007) touched upon the fact that in 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize marriage equality. This ground-breaking legislative act began a new wave of progress for LGBT + rights. Prior to the national legalization of marriage equality in 2015 it was up to individual states whether to recognize same-sex marriage. While attitudes toward gays and lesbians have changed dramatically since the 1970s, there remains a sense of hostility toward this minority population. Avery et al. (2007) stated that authoritarianism "plays a key role in negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men" (p. 73).

The traumatic event of the Pulse nightclub massacre in 2016 underscored this continued hostility toward the LGBT + community in the United States. While the motive for the murders remains not completely known, Viefhues-Bailey (2016) stated that the shooter "expressed the wish to kill gays, blacks or Jews" (p. 314) to previous coworkers and implied a homophobic hatred toward the LGBT + community among other minority groups. The author also suggested that, regardless of whether the shooter's motivations were religiously based or not, there is an undeniable problem with many religious organizations and an anti-LGBT + rhetoric, ranging from evangelical Christians to fundamentalist Muslims and other religions. Viefhues-Bailey (2016) argued that to increase anger, resentment, and hatred and to sow division, religious leaders, along with politicians, still use the LGBT + community as a foil, pitting that community against broader society.

Attitudinal surveys were conducted over four decades to measure any changes in perceptions toward homosexuality and rights for members of the LGBT + community. Avery et

al. (2007) documented that positive attitudes toward same-sex relationships between 1977 and 2002 increased from 43% to 52% (p. 75). When asked about the legal recognition of marriage equality, the opposition rate dropped from 68% in 1996 to 61% in 2004. Avery et al. (2007) stated the opposition continued to drop dramatically since Massachusetts passed marriage equality in 2004 and when it became legal nationwide 2015.

Oppressive experiences have also been documented for LGBT + students enrolled in higher education. One example of persecution experienced by LGBT + college students occurred in 1948 at the University of Wisconsin. Several male students were punished for "participating in abnormal sexual activities" (Nash & Silverman, 2015, p. 443). Even though they were given relatively mild punishments and probation, they were warned that repeat offenses of this nature would leave an indelible mark on each of their educational futures. Furthermore, they were told that any other instances of this behavior would not only result in being expelled from the university, but also in arrest (Nash & Silverman, 2015). This action was not restricted to just gay and lesbian students, but also to gay and lesbian college employees.

Nash and Silverman (2015) provided historical context for the oppression, marginalization, and alienation that gay and lesbian college students and employees have had to endure in this country over the past 70 years, and for decades before that. They built upon a "small amount of existing literature on homosexuality and campus life" (p. 442). The types of punishments described help explain why so many gays and lesbians remained in the closet in the past. It is historically relevant to understand that throughout the history of the United States, and within institutions of American higher education, a sustained pattern of discrimination, abuse, and hatred was directed toward members of this minority group. Per Nash and Silverman (2015), the view of homosexuality as a mental illness began to shift from the military after World War II

to include college campuses and all aspects of society. In fact, by 1949, "several states and the District of Columbia had passed 'sexual psychopath' laws" (p. 444), which meant homosexuality could result in institutionalization.

The state of Florida has had its own history of purging gays and lesbians from teaching positions. Graves (2007) reported that in 1956 the Florida state legislature established the "Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (FLIC)" (p. 7) with the initial intent of fighting the *Brown v Board of Education* decision, but quickly also used that committee to root out "the problem of homosexuality" (p. 8) within Florida schools. By 1959, an investigation at the University of Florida led to the dismissal of "professors and students and eventually encompassed teachers throughout the state" (p. 8). By 1964, Graves (2007) reported, the Florida State Board of Education had revoked 64 teachers' licenses – 54 on morals charges – and filed "an additional 83 cases" (p. 8).

LGBT + Identity Development

In 1979, Australian psychiatrist Vivian Cass introduced a six-stage model of sexual identity entitled Homosexual Identity Formation. Published only 10 years after Stonewall, Cass's model is considered "particularly useful for college students and other young people," (Meem et al., 2010, p. 128). Cass's model is also considered ground-breaking because at the time of its publication few resources existed to assist LGBT + persons with coming to terms with their own identities. When describing the process of homosexual identity formation, Cass (1984) stated that there are six stages of development, or "points of growth along the developmental continuum" (p. 147) at which gays and lesbians cross.

Cass (1984) described the stages as:

1. Stage 1: Identity Confusion – the stage in which one feels separate, or different, from most individuals around him or her. Same-sex feelings begin to emerge, along with a growing sense of alienation.

2. Stage 2: Identity Comparison – the stage in which one attempts to negotiate with oneself that these new feelings are temporary, or perhaps limited to just one person, moment, or experience. This sense of alienation developed in Stage 1 continues to increase.

3. Stage 3: Identity Tolerance – the stage in which an individual may seek out other LGBT + individuals. There is not a full sense of inclusion with this community, but the individual does not feel much of a sense of belonging with heterosexuals either.

4. Stage 4: Identity Acceptance – the stage in which contact with other LGBT + individuals is at a point where friendships may form. Feelings of alienation and isolation begin to decrease.

5. Stage 5: Identity Pride – the stage in which an individual actively feels proud to be gay or lesbian. Feelings of resentment toward heterosexuals and heteronormative institutions increase. With this combination of pride and anger the possibility of activism increases.

6. Stage 6: Identity Synthesis – a cathartic moment in which anger and resentment toward heterosexuals and heteronormative institutions decrease. At this stage, individuals recognize that their sexual identity plays a profound role in their existence.

Since the publication of Cass's development of the Homosexual Identity Formation model in 1979, critics have noted that one of its limitations is that it addresses only gay and lesbian individuals, excluding bisexual and transgendered individuals (Meem et al., 2010). To account for additional influences, including cultural and contextual, within sexual identity development, Ruth Fassinger originally developed a lesbian identity model, and validated it for men the following year. Fassinger and McCarn's (1996) identity development model consists of four phases or common sequences of development. These include:

1. Phase 1: Awareness – the phase in which an individual has a new awareness "that heterosexuality is not a universal norm and that people exist who have different sexual orientations" (p. 524).

2. Phase 2: Exploration – the phase in which an individual pursues active engagement with other members of the LGBT + community.

3. Phase 3: Deepening/Commitment – the phase in which the individual has a "deepening awareness of both the unique value and oppression of the lesbian/gay community" (p. 525).

4. Phase 4: Internalization/Synthesis – the final phase of development, in which the individual has transcended conflict, identified oneself as a part of a minority group, internalized this, and has a renewed sense of self.

Like the criticism of Cass's (1984) model, Fassinger and McCarn's (1996) model, although important, is generally limited to gay and lesbian individuals as well. Renn and Bilodeau (2005a) stated that bisexual and transgender experiences, "with their emphasis on identities existing outside traditional binary constructions of gender and sexuality," (p. 28) pose unique challenges that the Cass and Fassinger/McCarn models do not address.

In comparison, Renn and Bilodeau (2005a) explained that the "life span" (p. 28) model, developed by D'Augelli (1994), takes social contexts into account and includes bisexuality within its stages. Encompassing six stages of development, D'Augelli's (1994) development model suggested that sexual orientation can be fluid, with multiple paths that include relationships with not only one's self but also with family members, along with connections to peers and elements of the community.

The stages in D'Augelli's development include:

1. Stage 1: Exiting heterosexual identity – the stage in which an individual recognizes that he or she is not heterosexual.

2. Stage 2: Developing a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status – the stage in which individuals "cannot confirm their sexual orientation status with contact with others" (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 325).

3. Stage 3: Developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual social identity – the stage in which an individual has a network of other individuals who know his or her sexual orientation and who also can provide/offer support.

4. Stage 4: Becoming a lesbian-gay-bisexual offspring – the stage in which an individual either maintains a positive relationship with his or her family of origin, or, if after time has passed, a reconnection can be established.

5. Stage 5: Developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual intimacy status – the stage in which the stereotype that lesbian and gay couples cannot maintain enduring, positive, long-term relationships is debunked. This stereotype helps perpetuate a mindset in heteronormative society that LGBT + persons are not capable of enduring, intimate relationships.

6. Stage 6: Entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community – the stage in which individuals commit to political and/or social action on behalf of his or her identity and community.

Addressing the developmental experiences of transgendered individuals, Bockting and Coleman (2007) described five stages for their coming-out process (as cited in Board on the Health of Select Populations, 2011). These stages include:

1. Stage 1: Pre-Coming Out – the stage in which an individual has transgender or cross-gender feelings. Depending on the early development of the individual, he or she may proceed to next stage at a younger or older age.

2. Stage 2: Coming Out – the stage in which an individual acknowledges to oneself and to others his or her transgender feelings. An increase in sense of isolation may occur.

3. Stage 3: Exploration – the stage in which an individual learns as much as possible about being transgender, as well learning about the transgender community.

4. Stage 4: Intimacy – the stage in which an individual, depending on how his or her childhood development occurred, develops intimate relations with others. This stage may be easier or more difficult depending on the individual's overall development.

5. Stage 5: Identity Integration – the stage in development in which an individual is one's true self both in public and private life. At this point in the developmental journey, being transgender is no longer the most important aspect of one's identity at this stage.

Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Identity Development Model

Arthur Chickering researched identity development in college students in the late 1950s, although his original research was not conducted with LGBT + college students in mind. Decades later, Chickering, along with Linda Reisser, developed the Seven Vectors of Identity Development model. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model involves seven areas, one of which includes language on sexual orientation. These vectors are:

1. Vector 1: Developing Competence – in which an individual develops intellectual, physical and interpersonal competence.

2. Vector 2: Managing Emotions – in which an individual becomes more able to control his or her emotions.

3. Vector 3: Moving through Autonomy Toward Interdependence – in which an individual can think independently and realize that successful relations with others require interdependence.

4. Vector 4: Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships – in which an individual develops meaningful relationships with others.

5. Vector 5: Establishing Identity – in which an individual determines his or her own identity, including gender, ethnic background, or sexual orientation.

6. Vector 6: Developing Purpose – in which an individual can articulate and develop his or her own interests and set goals and means to achieve them.

7. Vector 7: Developing Integrity – in which an individual can demonstrate his or her own values within daily interactions with others.

Upon reviewing the various stages, phases, and vectors of the models discussed in this section, it is possible to understand the struggle LGBT + college students face regarding identity development. Understanding the identity development of student members of a Central Florida

public state college LGBT + support group will help the researcher understand the complex struggles of some of these members. The development models outlined also help shape a picture of how society operates in a heteronormative paradigm.

Assessing Campus Climate for LGBT + Students

D'Emilio (1990) described the emergence of an LGBT + civil rights movement in the late 1960s and 1970s and how it eventually contributed to creating a campus climate for LGBT + students in institutions of higher education across the country. The author mentioned that "those of us associated with institutions of higher education have contributed to this movement and have benefited from it as well" (p. 16). D'Emilio (1990) explained how the LGBT + movement in the latter half of the 20th century was tied to other political and social movements happening across the country at the time.

The LGBT + movement and the "birth of gay liberation was so closely tied to the social movements of the 1960s" (D'Emilio, 1990, p. 16), that, as a result, student groups have been part of the gay political movement since the beginning. Not only have gay student groups formed, but also LGBT + faculty groups within colleges and universities were created. One of the objectives of these faculty-led groups include using political persuasion and influence to enact meaningful change.

Tetreault et al. (2013) conducted a study of 77 "LGBTQ-identified students at a predominately white, large, land-grant research university" (p. 951) in which they sent an online survey to assess students' perceptions of the climate on their college campus. The study included questions about their experiences confronting bias, support of family members and friends, and whether they ever considered leaving college. The authors noted that the "experiences of LGBTQ students have indicated that many students' experiences within college

32

campus climates are neither positive nor inclusive" (p. 949). This research demonstrated that, despite improvements within campus climates such as the creation of LGBTQ centers or advisors who are LGBTQ allies, negative experiences are still commonplace.

The main negative theme resulting from the study of 77 LGBTQ-identified students included a feeling of isolation. LGBTQ students are often made to feel separate from heterosexual students. This stems from name calling, bullying, and outright physical abuse. The authors of the study also indicated 38% of participants "experienced harassment (verbal or physical)" (Tetreault et al., 2013, p. 954), and 35% felt they were treated unfairly by a student between one and two times (p. 954).

One group of higher education institutions where the LGBT + student population has received relatively little attention is community and state colleges. Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri (2011) highlighted that little is known about the LGBT + students in community or state colleges; even though large percentages of college students begin their postsecondary studies in community or state colleges, "what is known about LGBTQ students at community colleges is virtually nonexistent" (p. 36). The authors recounted qualitative stories of students' encountering barriers within the community college system, particularly from employees. One example that Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri (2011) discussed involved an advisor who shared an office space with another advisor, who overheard a conversation with a student in which the student disclosed that after coming out to his parents, he was disowned and kicked out of his house. His studies were negatively affected by this crisis. The advisor who overheard the conversation recalled her colleague telling the student "I can assist you if you want out of this gayness. Otherwise, I can refer you to someone else who can assist you, given that homosexuality contradicts my religious beliefs" (p. 37).

Conversely, Harrington, Jacob, Harbert, and Saiid (2014) compared the coming-out process for non-religious undergraduate students to the coming-out process of LGBT + students. A study focused on the marginalization and isolation non-religious undergraduates felt and noted how similar it was for LGBT + college students. They noted that about "15% of college students consider themselves to be non-religious and are not interested in religious and spiritual matters" (p. 165). These students revealed the difficulty of acclimating in a college climate among most students who identified themselves with various religious affiliations.

These non-religious students found themselves sharing some of the same qualities as LGBT + students in terms of feeling alienated and isolated from most college students. This study is significant because it not only supported the heteronormative mindset within colleges and universities, but it also highlighted the similar struggles and feelings of marginalization other minority groups experienced.

Student Development Theory

Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) advised that "program planning and policy development are both enhanced when student development concepts are used as a guide" (p. 2). Since the middle of the 20th century, myriad theories related to student development have formed. Chickering's focus on developmental issues and Perry's theory examining intellectual development in the late 1960s are two examples (Evans et al., 2010). Over the years student development theories have evolved toward targeting specific populations. Evans and D'Augelli's (1996) work to detect oppressive environments that restrict certain student groups from reaching their full potential, i.e., LGBT + college students, is an example. Student development is about the "cognitive, psychosocial, moral, and spiritual development" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 360) of students, and how these aspects intersect with one another.

Heterosexism and Homophobia

Two major factors that directly affect LGBT + students in the college environment are issues related to heterosexism and homophobia. Several institutions of higher education have conducted quantitative and qualitative studies gauging awareness and attitudes of these two concepts. These institutions range from small, liberal arts colleges to large research universities. The following studies provide context for understanding the pervasiveness of heterosexism and homophobia within higher education and the struggle LGBT + college students face when navigating sometimes hostile learning environments.

Burn, Kadlec, and Rexer (2005) examined the concept of heterosexism that is "not specifically targeted at LGBT individuals but may be experienced as antigay harassment" (p. 23). The participants of their study included 175 LGBT + individuals who read examples of heterosexuals' either saying or assuming things that may be potentially offensive to gays and lesbians (Burn et al., 2005). In each scenario, the participant indicated a level of offense and whether he or she would be less open about his or her own sexuality. It was indicated that for each scenario the participants found high levels of offense.

This study adds a voice in the discussion regarding feelings of discrimination experienced by members of the LGBT + community. Some heterosexual individuals may not realize that what they say is anti-LGBT + or discriminatory. Burn et al. (2005) contended that the "pejorative words young heterosexuals use to deride on another frequently include remarks specific to LGB [sic] persons" (p. 24). The study indicated that a heterosexist climate contributed to a sense of internal homophobia, where members of the LGBT + community were always made to feel "less than" the majority or feel like "the other".

Case, Hensley, and Anderson (2014) underscored why this example of heterosexual privilege is still prevalent in contemporary society and documented this through a quantitative

35

study at the University of Houston – Clear Lake that involved a reflective survey and a video on heterosexual privilege given to 177 participants, 80% which identified as female. Of the participants who identified their sexual orientation, "94% identified as heterosexual and 4% identified as gay or lesbian" (p. 728). Some participants were given the reflective survey and others were given the video. For those participants who took the reflective survey, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) "revealed no Time 1 difference across conditions for heterosexual privilege awareness [F (2, 168) = 0.20, p = .82], internal motivation [F (2, 173) = 0.07, p = .94], or external motivation to respond without prejudice [F (2, 166) = 1.34, p = .27]" (p. 730). For those participants who received the video, but not the reflective survey, the results showed "significant increases in heterosexual privilege awareness compared to the controls [F (1, 109) Heterosexual and Male Privilege 731 = 5.86, p = .02, η2 = .051]" (p. 731). The results indicated that visual examples of heterosexual privilege may have a higher impact in raising awareness than a written survey sheet.

The authors underscored that "heterosexual and male privilege both connect to a gendered system of oppression and social norms and roles that restrict behaviors for women and men" (p. 724). They concluded that more studies needed to be conducted to increase knowledge of sexism, heterosexual privilege, and identity and how those contributed to a culture of oppression for LGBT + individuals.

The method used for their study involved questionnaires sent out to students describing subtle heterosexist scenarios. The procedure involved contacting leaders of campus clubs, communicating with other LGBT + -type club leaders via the internet, as well as through the University of California Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Association (UCLGBTA)

convention in 2001. Results included the significance level, or alpha for all analyses, at .05 (p. 31).

Engstrom and Sedlacek (1997) examined the attitudes of heterosexual students toward gay and lesbian students. They also studied whether there were any types of situations in which negative feelings were expressed toward gay men and lesbians. The sampling size for this quantitative study was 224 residence hall students at the University of Maryland College Park. The survey conducted was the Situational Attitude Scale Sexual Orientation Survey and included "questions based on 10 personal, social, and academically oriented situations" (p. 565) related to interacting with a member of the LGBT + community.

In the instrument design, 10 bipolar adjectives (e.g., happy/sad; approving/disapproving) followed each of the 10 personal, social, and academically oriented situations, with participants expressing their reaction on a Likert-type scale. Participants were given three different forms selected at random: a sexual orientation neutral form, a gay form, and a lesbian form. Participants were not aware there were other forms, and the validity of the results were verified by calculating the mean result differences of the three forms (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997). The design in this study was used to "measure attitudes toward groups that are targets of prejudice" (p. 567). A Tukey HSD post-hoc one-way comparison test was used to assist in analyzing different patterns.

Results showed an internal consistency reliability across all three forms was .85. For the gay male form, the median reliability estimate was .94. For the lesbian form, the median reliability estimate was .93, and for the neutral form the median reliability estimate was .81. Among women who took the neutral form, the mean scores among the 10 situations ranged from 34.89 at the lowest to 44.21 at the highest, with 50 equaling a positive attitude and 10 equaling a

37

negative attitude. Among women who took the gay form the range was from 25.73 to 44.29; and among women who took the lesbian form the range was from 24.29 to 43.39 (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997). Among men who took the neutral form, the mean range was from 33.53 to 41.62; among men who took the gay form the mean range was from 22.28 to 35.20; and among men who took the lesbian form the mean range was from 21.78 to 38.33 (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997). The mean scores of the three forms among men and women indicated deeper homophobic feelings held by male students than by female students. Heterosexual males reported negative feelings regarding gay males, but neutral feelings toward lesbians.

Comparatively, another quantitative study was conducted among nearly 700 heterosexual students across six liberal arts colleges located in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New England and ranged in size from 1,100 students to 2,000 students. Components of this study examined attitudes in relation to "students' Greek fraternity affiliation, sex role attitudes, religion and religiosity, and contact with and knowledge of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals" (Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002, p. 61). An anonymous survey was mailed to samples of 400 students on each campus, totaling 2,400, of which 692 students replied. Of the 692 respondents, 83% identified as heterosexual and formed the data set for the study. The racial composition of the participants consisted of 87% white, .6% black, 2.7% Latino, and 2.7% Asian/Pacific American, .3% Native American, and 5% non-U.S. citizens. Concerning socioeconomic status, "89.1% reported that their fathers had occupations such as managerial, technical, professional, or sales" (p. 66). The survey items measured standard demographic data, religiosity, and sex role attitudes, as well as contact with, knowledge of, and attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons (Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002).

The attitude of heterosexual males and females toward LGBT + students were assessed using Herek's (1988) Attitude Toward Lesbian & Gay Men Scale (ATLG) and showed a sizable amount of acceptance overall (Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002, p. 71). Using a scale from 1-5, with 5 being the highest level of acceptance, females demonstrated more positive attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons with a score range between 1.8-4.4 and an overall acceptability rate of 85% compared with males with a score range between 2.4-4.2 and an overall acceptability rate of 69% (Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002). Many of these students identified themselves as having more liberal sex-role attitudes, and this population tended "to be more accepting of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons" (p. 72).

Olive (2015) followed the experiences of six post-secondary students who identified as members of the LGBT + community at one large university. The purpose of this study was to "better understand the impact of friendship on the development of leadership identity" (p. 142). In comparison, a separate study created by Herek in 1994, called the Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay Men Short Form (ATLG-S) (Horne, Rice, & Israel, 2004, p. 765), sought to determine the opinion of heterosexual student leaders, specifically the attitudes of resident assistants, toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. Participants were gathered and recruited during a training session for student leaders at an urban research university in the southeast. Eighty-six students were sampled and eighty completed the sampling forms. Per Horne et al. (2004), Herek had been instrumental in studying positive and negative attitudes toward members of the LGBT + community in higher education. Herek updated his instrument with McLemore in 2011 (Herek & McLemore, 2011).

Woodford, Chonody, Scherrer, Silverschanz, and Kulick (2012) examined the opinions of heterosexual college students on the issue of same-sex marriage, often now referred to as

marriage equality. Data for this quantitative study was drawn from an online campus climate survey given to full- and part-time undergraduate and graduate students at a large public Research 1 university located in the Midwest. Woodford et al. (2012) specifically analyzed heterosexual college students who described themselves as undecided on the issue – often referred to as the persuadable middle – "those individuals who are neutral or unsure about their views" (p. 1). A background on the overall policy of same-sex marriage in the United States in 2012 was also provided. At that time, not all states legalized same-sex marriage, so different parts of the country had different laws.

Opinions on same-sex marriage differed too, with larger percentages of the younger generations accepting same-sex marriage and smaller percentages of older generations accepting it. Of 8,000 students who received the survey, 2,268 completed it. Per Woodford et al. (2012), approximately 10% of the respondents were neutral on same-sex marriage, with a majority favoring it. Additional descriptive statistics of the survey revealed that, when asked if they supported same-sex marriage, 45% of the students surveyed expressed that they "strongly agree"; 16.9% expressed that they "agree"; 6% expressed that they "slightly agree"; 10% expressed no opinion; 5.6% expressed that they "slightly disagree"; 7.6% expressed they "disagree"; and 8.9% expressed that they "strongly disagree" (Woodford, et al., 2012). Limitations of the study concluded that more research needed to be conducted to determine why some were neutral about the subject and what factors led these individuals to not have an opinion. The authors concluded that those who reported being neutral on this topic were more likely to be politically moderate in general on most other topics.

Some researchers have sought to determine whether sexuality education courses would change students' homophobic prejudices in a college environment. Serdahely and Ziemba

(1984) used a "Hudson/Ricketts Index of Homophobia" (p. 109) to measure homophobia. The study begins by clarifying that homosexuality is not a disease and had not been characterized as such for decades. Serdahely and Ziemba (1984) stressed, however, that homophobia is a severely disturbing mental state, resulting in an irrational fear from the majority (heterosexuals) of a minority of the population (homosexuals), often causing discrimination and alienation (p. 109).

In Basow and Johnson's (2000) study, students were divided into four categories: low grade homophobic, high grade homophobic, low grade non-homophobic, and high grade non-homophobic. The research revealed that those students who matched the non-homophobic category had little to no change to any of the treatment and resources provided in the course to combat homophobia. Those individuals who were in the homophobic grades did respond and had a decrease in homophobic perceptions and opinions. These findings indicated that a sexuality course may make a difference in overcoming homophobia among college students (Basow & Johnson, 2000).

Other studies have sought to examine predictors of homophobia among college students. One study sought predictors of homophobia specifically among female college students. Basow and Johnson (2000) noted that there was a need for this type of study as little research had been done on the predictors of this demographic specifically. The prevailing wisdom is that female homophobia may not be as prevalent as male homophobia. Basow and Johnson (2000) began by explaining why men may be more homophobic, relating it to "self-fears about one's own masculinity" (p. 393). To the authors, "homosexuality" challenges the traditional gender norms, and this challenge could be particularly threatening to a member of the dominant group, such as heterosexual men.

However, Basow and Johnson (2000) sought to determine whether these types of factors also coincided with females. One hypothesis Basow and Johnson (2000) suggested is that because women have traditionally had to fight for equal rights, there may not be as much of a need for women to assert their heterosexuality as much as males do. For those women who do hold some type of homophobia it may be tied to religious beliefs, as well as beliefs in traditional life-styles related to authoritarianism "but is not related to feelings of inadequacy about living up to society's expectations about one's femininity" (p. 394).

Basow and Johnson (2000) used a series of assessments among 71 undergraduate women at a private liberal arts college in the Northeast. These assessments included Spence and Helmreich's Texas Social Behavior Inventory Short Form A to assess each participant's self-esteem; the Theodore & Basow modified version of the Self Attribute Questionnaire (Pelham & Swann, 1989), called the Ought Self Questionnaire, was "used to measure actual versus ought self-discrepancy scores along both masculine and feminine traits" (Basow & Johnson, 2000, p. 395); the short form (Form BB) of the Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale (SRE) to measure gender role attitudes (Beere, King, Beere, & King, 1984); Altemeyer's (1996) Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale to assess the extent to which participants believed in authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism; and the short form of Herek's (1988) Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) scale. The results found that "negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were not significantly correlated with self-esteem, self-discrepancy along masculine or feminine traits, or attribute-importance along masculine traits. However, a significant correlation was found between homophobic attitudes and attribute-importance along feminine traits" (Basow & Johnson, 2000, p. 399).

Studies exploring the relationship of homonegativity to LGBT + students' and non-LGBT + students' perceptions of residence hall living have focused on the perception of negative feelings and opinions of members of the LGBT + community by both LGBT + and non-LGBT + students in residence halls on college campuses. Fanucce and Taub (2009) conducted a study seeking the relationship between "students' – both LGBT + and non-LGBT + – perceived levels of homonegativity and their perceptions of the climate and community in campus residence halls" (p. 28). There were 284 participants in the study, conducted at a large public Midwestern university. Of the respondents, 118 were male, 142 were female, and 1 was a transgender student, while 23 did not disclose their gender identities. The sexual orientation of the participants was as follows: 237 of the students identified as heterosexual, 28 gay/lesbian, 10 bisexual, and nine uncertain (p. 28).

The perceived level of homonegativity was measured using an adaptation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Residence Hall Climate Inventory (Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, 2004), and the results found that, despite increased acceptance, a strong sense of separation between straight students and LGBT + students in residence halls remained. Fanucce and Taub (2009) indicated that living on a college campus significantly increases the likelihood of a student graduating. They contended that living on campus contributed to "increases in students' likelihood to be involved and engaged in the social, cultural, and extracurricular realm of the institution" (p. 26). Unfortunately, Fanucce and Taub (2009) also contended that this type of positive result is not often true for LGBT + students living in residence halls on college campuses. Despite increases in social and cultural acceptance of the LGBT + community in the United States, instances of homophobia and heterosexism were still rampant.

The results of the survey found that "for the LGBT students, as levels of homonegativity increased, the perception of their residence hall climate became more negative" (p. 34). Similarly, Liddle et al. (2004) contended that heterosexual students exhibited the same type of negative relationship, albeit a weaker one, with "perceptions of residence hall climate becoming more negative as perceived levels of homonegativity increased" (p. 34).

Although often deliberate, it is possible for heterosexuals to make homophobic remarks without intentionally trying to harm gays and lesbians. Woodford et al. (2013) explored a campus climate survey distributed at a large urban university. It specifically targeted heterosexual males, aged 18-25, and the use of the phrase "that's so gay." After a multiple regression analysis was conducted it was concluded that "saying the phrase is positively associated with hearing peers say it and withholding negative perceptions of feminine men" (p. 416). The study began by describing the term "that's so gay" as a pejorative used by young people to describe something weird, wrong, or stupid in some way. Using the term "that's so gay" is an example of the mindset of a privileged population. It is also an example of heterosexist language, and indicative of a majority/minority mindset in which most of a population has little to no regard for a minority population, simply because they are dominant (Woodford et al., 2013).

This term also is an example of micro-aggressions with which heterosexuals negatively affect homosexuals verbally. Examples of the negative effects can include marginalization on college campuses, feelings of alienation, and outright discrimination (Woodford et al., 2013). The method for the study conducted was an anonymous online survey. The study sought to gauge the campus climate, but also inquired about witnessing heterosexist harassment on campus, as well as any other forms of interpersonal mistreatment on campus. Over 2,500

students completed the online survey. The results indicated that those individuals who used the term more often had a higher homophobic viewpoint than those who did not use the term "that's so gay" often.

One method for working toward eradicating homophobia and heterosexism on campus involved striving to educate all students within a campus climate. Draughn, Elkins, and Roy (2002) examined the campus environment for LGBT + students, as well as the types of available resources, such as ally's programs and other safe zone programs. A framework for how administrators and other college officials can help this student population was also discussed. They focused on the effects heterosexism has on the LGBT + community. For example, a college's student development office can exhibit examples of heterosexism inadvertently in its branding, such as displaying a poster of a male and female kissing to advertise its healthy dating program, but not offering a similar poster showing two males or two females kissing (Draughn et al., 2002).

Creating Space for LGBT +

Many institutions recognized the need for a dedicated space for LGBT + students, faculty, and/or staff. Many studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of such resources. Fine (2012) explained the catalyst for the establishment of LGBT + support centers in institutions of higher education in the United States. Many colleges and universities began opening LGBT + support centers to combat general homophobia, but also in the wake of violent acts against LGBT + citizens, such as Matthew Shepard, a college student murdered in 1998 in Wyoming because of his sexual orientation. After national attention following Shepard's murder, "the late 1990s and early 2000s saw a boom in the number of established on-campus spaces for LGBT students" (Fine, 2012, p. 285). Fine observed, that, although this boom is

45

encouraging, after nearly 30 years since the first LGBT + center opened on an American campus, as of 2012 fewer than 150 offices devoted to LGBT + services exist out of over 2,000 post-secondary colleges and universities.

Windmeyer (2017), executive director of Campus Pride, one of the leading national educational organizations dedicated to LGBT + students, reported that this number has increased since 2012 to 229 offices nationwide. However, Windmeyer (2017) stipulated that only 26% of campuses nationwide prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation, with less than 13% including gender identity and expression.

There is another question as to why some colleges and universities were innovative enough to open and offer such services, even before Shepard's murder, while others still would not offer them. Fine (2012) discussed a social-movement theory as one motive for why an institution chooses to offer or not to offer such a dedicated space to LGBT + students. Resource Mobilization theory is discussed as a tool to offer more resources to students to succeed in college. Fine (2012) discussed another theory, Political Opportunity, purported by Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg (2002), which described motives college campuses would use in the event of a tragic event (in this instance, the murder of Shepard) for empowering LGBT + students to feel more accepted in the overall culture of the college and campus. Those institutions that do not offer an LGBT + center may not do so because they 1) do not feel it is relevant to their own campus culture or the needs of their student population, or 2) simply because of homophobia or a culture of heterosexism.

Many institutions are responding to the LGBT + student population. For example, "Dartmouth College added LGBT community and/or gender identity to the possible interest's applicants can check off on its application" (Young, 2011, p. 39) as a way of demonstrating their

acceptance of this population. The University of Pennsylvania identifies students who write about the coming out process in their admissions essays and invites them to observe all the college support resources the institution has to offer LGBT + students.

Raiz (2006) investigated a sample of students from 12 colleges and universities across the nation. The author also drew from previous literature conducted by Herek on attitudes toward gays and lesbians. While there is a healthy amount of literature regarding individuals' attitudes toward homosexuality, only a few studies have "investigated the narrower question of individual attitudes toward or support of rights" (p. 59) for gay and lesbian Americans. The method used for this study was a cross-sectional one in which questionnaires were mailed out to students enrolled in social work courses across multiple colleges and universities. Professors distributed the surveys in class and left the room to give students the opportunity to freely express themselves. A Likert scale called the "Support for Equal Rights for Members of the Gay Community" was used. Predictor variables included gender-role beliefs, views on authoritarianism, perceived social support and contact with gay and lesbian students, religiosity, and fear of AIDS, or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Raiz, 2006).

Of 291 students who participated in the study, 271 were Caucasian (Raiz, 2006, p. 64). The mean age was 23, and less than half identified themselves as social work majors. Raiz (2006) indicated that the Likert scale results showed most of support for various forms of rights for members of the gay community, with 39.9% "strongly disapproving" of the idea that there should be laws against gay and lesbian and bisexual relationships (p. 64). Although 25.3% indicated they supported same-sex marriage, for that question a sizable number of respondents indicated they did not support same-sex marriage (p. 64). Students who stated they knew someone who was gay or lesbian expressed an increased support for rights; however, students

who indicated a roommate who was gay or lesbian expressed decreased support for rights (Raiz, 2006).

Alvarez and Schneider (2008) studied why colleges and universities decide to increase support resources for LGBT + students. The main support resource that they referenced is a safe zone resource. Unfortunately, even when institutions of higher education support such resources and provide financial backing, they are often compromised by the institutions' hidden agendas. Alvarez and Schneider (2008) found that, rather than acting fully as a support network for LGBT + students, often these resources are used as a "marketing opportunity designed to demonstrate the power of inclusion" (p. 72) at the institution.

While resources were provided, the advocates of this project still felt they were not fully supported by the institution. In fact, there were arguments over who originally decided that a safe zone project was needed, as well as arguments over the exact meaning of the letter "Q" in LGBTQ (Alvarez & Schneider, 2008). Both disagreements created further tension. Although some institutions may have expressed support for LGBT + student groups and resources, often there was little follow-through or real backing. Students and advocates were often left to operate the support resources on their own.

White, Greenhalgh, and Oja (2012) described the history and purpose of the North Orange County Community College District chapter of the Gay and Lesbian Association of District Employees (GLADE) in Anaheim, California. They argued that this organization was a model for the nation for the types of services community colleges and state college could offer to LGBT + students and staff earning degrees at higher education institutions. GLADE was originally created in the mid-1990s as the nation began recognizing domestic partner benefits in various parts of the United States, including Los Angeles. LGBT + faculty and staff working

with the North Orange County Community College District "requested that the district offer the same benefits to those in domestic partnerships as those in heterosexual marriages" (White et al., 2012, p. 526).

According to White et al. (2012), the two main populations GLADE sought to support are LGBT + employees of North Orange County Community College District and LGBT + students of the same district. The support for students came in the form of social groups on campuses, as well as activities for LGBT + students. The organization also provided monetary and moral support to events such as Coming Out Week and Day of Silence (p. 528). The GLADE organization allowed this district in southern California to provide additional support to the LGBT + population, thereby strengthening its members. The efforts by GLADE have changed the cultural landscape of this district from mere tolerance of LGBT + individuals to celebration and acceptance. As a result, this organization has been a model for the nation to follow.

Some studies have concentrated on whether students have utilized the resources offered to them, asking whether they are still relevant. Westbrook (2009) examined the patterns of groups under the LGBT + umbrella and their participation and access to LGBT + resources on college campuses. The author specifically examined participation at two college campuses, one where women wanted access to LGBT + resources but did not use them, and another campus with high levels of women in the LGBT + community participating. This research was a qualitative study in which the author interviewed 30 students and staff members. Factors shown from this study included "disparities in student group membership related to gender-blind organizing" (p. 369) and differential leadership development caused by a sense of sexism.

Westbrook (2009) included a description of what LGBT + campus resources were offered. The two most common resources were campus centers and student groups. The centers

were usually funded by the institution. LGBT + student groups were often run by and for LGBT + students and supported by the student development office. These groups usually served the purposes of providing "support, socializing, and activist work" (p. 371). Westbrook sought to determine why women and men of the LGBT + community utilized various sources. She used a qualitative analysis for her method as well as case-oriented comparative methodology (Westbrook, 2009). She conducted the study at UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz. At Berkeley, few women utilized the services, but at Santa Cruz a high proportion of women used the services. She found that a combination of motivation, sexism, and political climate played a part in the disparity between the two institutions and participation among women.

Schmidt, Miles, and Welsh (2011) sought to understand the experiences of LGBT + college students within the context of career development. They further sought to determine "how the perception of discrimination and social support related to career development and college adjustment in an LGBT undergraduate" (p. 293) student affected that perception. Research has shown that the unique experiences of LGBT + students may play a definitive role in their own personal career development (Schmidt et al., 2011).   Other indications revealed that LGBT + students often have greater instances of career indecision and confusion than heterosexual individuals. Reasons offered by the participants included experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Other factors included discovery and confusion over sexual identity.

Schmidt et al. (2011) stated that the availability of psychological resources and support centers for career exploration may "uniquely affect LGBT individuals' career development" (p. 294) in a college setting. Career specialists who take a social-cultural approach to advising LGBT + students may find higher levels of career development. Based on this research, creating

50

an environment where students felt they can relate their own self-identity with their career goals may help increase career development. Furthermore, creating opportunities for students to discuss fears of discrimination in the work-place due to their sexual orientations or gender identities will allow career development advisors and counselors opportunities to offer these students the tools and resources they need to combat that discrimination.

Renn and Bilodeau (2005c) sought to determine a correlation between leadership activities and those individuals who identify themselves within the LGBT + community and whether that identification has any impact in increased development of LGBT +-related activities on campus. They focused on two "intersecting bodies of knowledge: college student involvement and development of LGBT students" (p. 50). The authors also sought to understand the influence of campus involvement on student development. The participants for the studies were student organizers of the 2002 Midwest Bi-, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Allies College Conference. This conference was predominantly student-led, and the conference drew approximately 1,100 individuals and included multiple workshops and presentations (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005c).

Leadership identity among LGBT + student leaders was a specific topic that researchers have studied with interest. Renn and Bilodeau (2005b) sought to learn the perspectives of 15 LGBT + student leaders from three Midwestern institutions of higher education. The authors "analyzed data using an emerging model of Emerging Leadership Identity Development" (p. 342). The authors asked participants whether identity-based leadership contributed to the overall development of leadership among students within marginalized groups, such as the LGBT + community. They also asked what the implications were for students and the professionals at the college who worked with them.

Renn and Bilodeau (2005b) concluded that a leadership identity development model was key to answering these types of questions. This model included six stages: 1) Awareness, 2) Exploration/Engagement, 3) Leader Identified, 4) Leadership Differentiated, 5) Generativity and 6) Internalization/Synthesis. The awareness stage included "recognizing that leadership is happening around you" (p. 347). Exploration/Engagement required intentional involvement and accepting responsibilities. Leader Identified focused on seeing leadership as a potential role to be held by others and finding those leaders. The Leadership Differentiated stage involved moving away from a "positional leadership view" (p. 347). Generativity involved the active commitment to a passion of some type. And lastly, Internalization/Synthesis was the continued self-development and lifelong learning process.

One segment of the LGBT + community that was often overlooked – by both the heterosexual community, but also sometimes by the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community – was the transgender community. Some studies have sought to determine how this population can be better integrated into higher education settings. Beemyn (2005) focused on the barriers that exist in higher education for students who identify themselves as transgender. The author mentioned several areas within a college environment that transgender students must navigate that most students do not. These areas include "health care, residence halls, bathrooms, locker rooms, records and documents, public inclusion, and programing, training and support" (Beemyn, 2005, p. 78). In addition, access to adequate healthcare was a major concern for transgender students. To receive hormone treatments, transgender individuals often must undergo therapy sessions with licensed professionals. Many universities and colleges, and almost all community colleges, lack adequate medical professionals to provide this type of service, often forcing the student to

go off-campus for treatment (Beemyn, 2005). This lack of resource for transgender students often can present a barrier that non-transgender students have not had to endure.

As far as residence halls, many students faced hostile roommates who were not accustomed to interacting with someone who is transgender or transitioning. Many institutions of higher education have worked to resolve this issue by having gender-neutral housing policies. The same applied to offering gender-neutral bathrooms and locker rooms for individuals who do not identify themselves under traditional gender norms. This approach assisted in removing barriers and awkward moments for transgender students.

Institutions of higher education can also assist transgender students by offering an easy process for changing names and gender identity on all official documents and records. Many institutions around the country have begun implementing this process, including Ohio State University (Beemyn, 2005). Implementing policies such as these reduce the barriers that transgender students face in higher education and contribute toward creating a more equitable learning environment for this student population.

Student Involvement Theory

According to Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement, when students are more engaged within the college setting opportunities for increased learning can occur. Astin's research focused on the "broad concepts of engagement or involvement" (Elkins, Forrester, & Noël-Elkins, 2011, p. 106) and how those activities impacted students' lives within college. Examples of engagement ranged from joining support groups to tutoring on campus. From the perspective of social interaction, Thomas (2000) argued that students attending college who have created social networks had a higher likelihood of persisting over other students who limited themselves to their own peer groups. Cheng (2004) discovered that those students who felt involved, cared

for, and valued within their educational community experienced decreased feelings of loneliness. Cheng's (2004) discovery echoed Tinto's (1993) theory that a student's integration of social and academic interests contributed to a higher sense of commitment within higher education.

<center>Summary</center>

The discussion outlined in this chapter underscored the deeply complex, painful, and on-going struggle LGBT + citizens in the United States have had to endure. This population has been fighting a civil rights battle for decades, with many victories and setbacks. Even to this current time, full equality between LGBT + and heterosexual American citizens has not been fully realized. The data showing the disparity in non-discriminatory laws and statutes per state toward the LGBT + community described attest to that (Human Rights Campaign, 2017b). A history of the struggle for equality by LGBT + citizens includes working toward equality in higher education. At one point in U.S. history it was acceptable to be expelled from higher education due to being part of this minority group (Nash & Silverman, 2015). While that no longer is acceptable, the contemporary LGBT + college student must contend with a heteronormative campus culture, in which heterosexist privilege is the norm, and feelings of alienation, bullying, marginalization, and oppression are still realities for many.

In this chapter, clear assessment of the campus climate across the United States for LGBT + college students were discussed, underscoring several studies on the opinion of homosexuality among heterosexual students, as well as the comfort-level of LGBT + students on campuses. Glaringly absent from these studies, however, was clear literature on the student experience of students attending community or state colleges, especially those students part of LGBT + student support groups. While the studies detailed in this chapter suggested that heterosexism and homophobia were still a continuing problem in United States higher education,

<center>54</center>

they also confirmed the positive effects dedicated programs and spaces for LGBT + students have on this minority population. This qualitative study continues that research on student perceptions of an LGBT + student support group at a public Florida state college and in what ways these groups may still be relevant during a rapidly changing political and social landscape in the United States.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

Within this chapter the research design, method, rationale, as well as data gathering tools and procedures are discussed. The researcher asked in what ways student members of an LGBT + student support group within a Central Florida state college perceive their own levels of inclusion, acceptance, and success. The researcher also asked students participating within an LGBT + student support group within a Central Florida public state college what they recognize as barriers to their success.

Research Method and Rationale

Empirical ethnographical research was the method used to determine how gay/straight alliance support groups within the Florida State College system are still relevant to the success of student members. Anderson-Levitt (2006) described ethnography as a "study of people in everyday settings, with particular attention to culture" (p. 279). Anderson-Levitt (2006) also stated that ethnographic research is particularly appropriate in educational research that involves "participant observation and open-ended interviewing" (p. 279). Garfinkel (1967) referred to ethnomethodology as "the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life" (p. 11). Powdermaker (1966) described ethnographic research as "tapping" (p. 300) into linguistic expressions of participants of specific cultures.

Given the discrimination and stigmatization that LGBT + students of higher education have endured in the United States, it is crucial to understand the struggles and experiences of the participants. Aspers (2004) insisted that for researchers to grasp their participants' experiences,

they must delve deeper than simply writing descriptions of the participants' states of mind. Researchers must also seek to understand why and how these experiences and struggles exist for these participants in a socially constructed way. In this study, empirical ethnographic research allowed that understanding to take place through a combination of personal interviews with the participants and a focus group with four participants.

Geertz (1983) described ethnographic research as an attempt "somehow to understand how it is we understand understandings not our own" (p. 5). Geertz (1983) also stated that ethnographic research applied to cultural understanding of individuals different from himself aided "the practical difficulties in seeing things as others see them" (p. 5). Wolcott (1999) reported that ethnographic research contributed in the 20th century to the reduction of derogatory terms as *primitive* or *savage* when referring to other cultures. Yin (2016) wrote the objective of focus groups within qualitative studies was to convene individuals with similar attributes and "surface the perspectives of the people in the group with as minimal influence by the researcher as possible" (p. 336). Ethnographic research qualifies as the most appropriate for focus groups within qualitative studies, and especially this specific research. Individuals who are not part of the LGBT + community and who have not experienced similar struggles have an opportunity to reach greater understanding through ethnographic research. Echoing Wolcott's reporting, ethnographic research provides the opportunity to dispel derogatory attitudes and language specifically targeted toward the LGBT + community.

Research Questions

The interview questions were derived from the following research questions:

- As students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community, what are their perceptions of their experiences?

- What issues or challenges have most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community?

<u>Participants/Sample</u>

The participants in this research study were student members of an LGBT + support group of a public Florida State College within the Central Florida region. Through a combination of outreach methods, in-depth interviews with seven student participants were conducted. For confidentiality purposes, the institution is not named, and each student selected a pseudonym.

A purposeful sample of participants was sought. Purposeful sampling is a technique often used in qualitative research. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) confirmed this by "identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (as cited in Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 538). The importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner are crucial in addition to knowledge and experience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). LGBT + individuals' willingness to share and express their experiences clearly to non-LGBT + individuals may help increase understanding and reduce instances of alienation, exclusion, and hostility toward the LGBT + community in society.

Kumar (2011) explained that, within qualitative research, sample size and sampling "do not play a significant role in the selection of a sample" (p. 212). In fact, Kumar (2011) underscored that qualitative researchers are guided more by their judgment as to who is likely to

provide the best information, regardless of sample size. In this study, using both face-to-face

meetings as well as email communication, 22 students from the institution's gay/straight alliance

support group were contacted to seek their participation in interviews. Table 1 reveals the

distribution of participants by their self-identified sexual orientation. This distribution provided

a breadth of perspectives and experiences from among the LGBT + group.

Table 1: Actual Distribution of Participants by Sexual Orientation

Student Group	Number of Participants (of 7)
Lesbian (L)	0
Gay (G)	3
Bisexual (B)	2
Asexual (A)	2
Heterosexual (H)	0
Questioning (Q)	0

Role of the Researcher

The researcher followed a series of processes and steps, outlined in the "Research Data Gathering Procedures" and "Trustworthiness and Validity" sections, to ensure the highest accuracy, reliability, and clarity possible.

Regarding qualitative research, Janesick (1994) stated "there is no value-free or bias-free design" (p. 212). Qualitative researchers are involved in research gathering and must identify their biases. This identification is not intended to uphold objectivity, but to acknowledge the reality that some biases can exist and to develop steps and procedures within the research method to ensure trustworthiness and validity. These steps involve member checking, triangulation, and inter-coder analysis with an additional researcher.

Janesick (2014) contended that by identifying one's own biases, "one can easily see where the questions that guide the study are crafted" (p. 212). The researcher recognized personal assumptions that participant reactions would include high levels of alienation and exclusion based on the researcher's own college experience. However, the researcher never participated in LGBT + - related student groups while in college, and acknowledged that the researcher's experience could be different from the participants'. The researcher's recognition of this assumption is a significant factor that helped minimize any potential biases regarding the research study.

Through a review of existing literature, the researcher discovered a gap in knowledge related to LGBT + student support groups within community and/or state colleges in Florida. Also lacking in the literature was information pertaining to LGBT + student groups' contributions to student success. As such, the researcher sought to expand on that limited body of knowledge with potential solutions.

Newman (2010) argued that the use of bracketing within qualitative research is vital to "mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (p. 80). Bracketing involves the identification of the researcher's biases and assumptions (Newman, 2010), and is a method to protect the researcher from effects or consequences of engaging with relatable or personal material. The researcher used this section to bracket the researcher's assumptions regarding the study. Later in this chapter, a discussion of trustworthiness, validity, and reliability delineates research design which further structures this study and supports its empirical value. Based on Newman's (2010) work regarding consequences of relatable or personal material, the researcher did not share any potentially related experiences with the student participants regarding research implementation. Because the researcher was also a member of the LGBT + community, utilizing the bracketing method discussed by Newman (2010) helped to mitigate any of the researcher's biases or assumptions.

Data Gathering Procedures

Participant Recruitment

The recruitment process began with the researcher seeking permission from specific individuals who had access to the intended population for this study. These individuals consisted of the mentors and advisors of the LGBT + student support group of a public Florida state college. The researcher contacted the LGBT + student support group advisor(s) and sought permission to contact the student members to recruit participants for the research study (see Appendix A).

Another strategy for participant recruitment was utilized when the researcher attended a monthly support meeting of the LGBT + student support group. In an effort to recruit

volunteers, the researcher introduced the study and the need for participants. Participant

confidentiality was assured, and arrangements were made to meet volunteers in a location that

was convenient and comfortable for them. Disclosure was made that the interview and focus

group session would be audio recorded, and once the interviews were completed, participants

were provided access to the audio and written transcript. Participants were assured the

recordings would be destroyed after the successful dissertation defense and publication.

Once students' contact information was received by the advisors, Creswell (2016)

suggested that the researcher send "invitation letters" (p. 128) to proposed participants. The

researcher contacted each student via email (see Appendix B). In the event there was no initial

response to schedule an interview, a second email was sent inviting the students to participate

(see Appendix C). Within the first and second email, a reminder of the importance of their

participation was emphasized, and a $5 gift card to a local shop as an incentive for participation

was offered.

Participant Interviews Implementation

Before the interview began, a consent form was provided for each participant to review

and sign (see Appendix D). The participant interviews occurred over three weeks in January of

2018. Five of the seven interviews averaged between 11 and 17 minutes in length, while one

interview lasted just over 29 minutes and another interview lasted 55 minutes. Although all the

participants expressed an interest and eagerness to participate in the study, the five volunteers

who completed the interviews in the shortest length of time appeared shy, perhaps accounting for

their swift and short responses. During the participant interviews, data were collected through

audio recording and note-taking. The interview included multiple questions based on the

research study questions (see Appendix E). The researcher met with the student participants at

locations of their choice to conduct the interviews. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, participants completed a confidential questionnaire for demographic data gathering purposes (see Appendix F).

<div align="center">Focus Groups</div>

Rosenthal (2016) emphasized that within focus groups "interviewers should be unobtrusive, draw all interviewees into the discussion by encouraging interaction, and use strategic summarizations of the discussion to help the group refine its thoughts or explanations" (p. 512). The focus group session was recorded and comprised of multiple questions based on the research study questions (see Appendix G). The researcher reserved a small conference room for the four focus group volunteers, rather than a larger space. The researcher intentionally conducted the focus group in a smaller space to increase the opportunity for intimate discussion among the participants. The researcher encouraged conversation and debate, and the four volunteers discussed among themselves their unique perspectives to the researcher's questions.

<div align="center">Observation</div>

To assist with the analysis of the interview and focus group session data, the researcher conducted observations of some of the LGBT + student support group's meetings (see Appendix H). The purpose of these observations was to develop a better understanding of the mission and purpose of the support group and how it benefited the student members. The researcher also observed meetings of the college's Peace and Justice Institute. This group included as part of its platform the equalization and normalization of LGBT + culture in mainstream society. Together, these observations provided opportunities for the researcher to witness, firsthand, the benefits

and contributions these student support groups provided to members and how the group members interacted.

Research Journal

The document gathering portion of the analysis of this research study involved a research journal (Janesick, 2014) that the researcher utilized when the participant recruitment began. Annink (2017) wrote of the significant contribution research journals bring to qualitative research, specifically cultural research, such as the study of a specific group of individuals. Research journals provided the researcher with the opportunity for reflexivity, in which the researcher's "positionality, his identity, conceptions, origin, and gender have been considered factors" (p. 3) within the research.

The date the researcher sent the communication to the LGBT + support group advisor (see Appendix A) was December 4, 2017. This was the first entry in the research journal. The researcher wrote similar summaries whenever he communicated with individuals pertaining to the study, whenever an appointment was made, whenever an interview was scheduled, and when there were face-to-face interactions with individuals pertaining to the study. These entries were comprised mostly of logistical information, communications with students, the setting of appointments, and progress of the study. The researcher found the research journal helpful as it provided a written guide of the progress made toward the study and helped the researcher stay on track. Appendix R contains sample entries of this research journal.

Document Gathering

The researcher also searched and gathered public documents related to the Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage (also referred to as marriage equality) in the

United States (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2018), along with documents and notes from some of the

LGBT + student support group meeting sessions and the college's Peace and Justice Institute's

initiatives. These documents aided the researcher in developing a holistic reference and

framework for the context in which student participants' experiences occurred. Therefore, the

documents assisted the researcher in analyzing interview and focus group data.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness and Validity</div>

Amankwaa (2016) stated that reliability and validity are not always the appropriate terms

to use to explain the usefulness of qualitative research. Instead, the author cited that establishing

trustworthiness is the appropriate method of qualitative research, and to achieve that required a

different approach. Creswell (2016) argued that he will typically "use two or three validation

procedures to establish the accuracy" (p. 153) of the research. This method will help increase

trustworthiness. Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted that to ensure that trustworthiness within

qualitative research is achieved, four criteria must be involved:

1. Credibility (having confidence in the truth of the findings).

2. Transferability (confirming applicability in other contexts).

3. Dependability (confirming consistency and repetition is possible).

4. Confirmability (ensuring a degree of neutrality with minimal researcher bias) (p. 121).

By applying these four steps, the researcher helped reduce questions regarding the

academic soundness of this qualitative research. Unlike quantitative research, in which the

establishment of objectivity was often the researcher's goal where strict parameters within the

research method are established, the qualitative researcher's responsibility was to establish

trustworthiness and validity. Guba and Lincoln's (1981) four criteria guided the qualitative

researcher in establishing those essential elements.

Patton (2002) stressed that within qualitative research to ensure authenticity and

trustworthiness, it was important to use the speaking voice as required through interviewing.

The author contended that the researcher acted as a data instrument through the spoken voice.

The powerful emotion which participants conveyed through actual words cannot be

underestimated, and it was the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to capture the full

intent of the words of those participants in order for their words to be heard. Therefore, during

the participant interviews and focus group, the researcher encouraged the volunteers to speak

their truth and to use that time as an opportunity to illuminate their unique perspectives and

experiences for others to understand. Although the researcher asked specific questions, he

encouraged the volunteers not to limit or rush their responses, but to speak from their hearts.

The researcher followed multiple steps to ensure trustworthiness within this qualitative

research study through the analysis procedure, which included member checking, inter-coder

reliability, and triangulation.

Member Checking

Smith and McGannon (2018) stated that member checking, "or what is sometimes termed

'respondent or participant validation', involves the participants of a project assessing the

trustworthiness of research in terms of validating the credibility of qualitative data and results"

(p. 103). The researcher used this strategy and provided the participants complete transcripts of

their interviews to confirm accuracy of their own words. They had the opportunity to edit or

delete their responses prior to returning the document. None of the participants reported

discrepancies with what the researcher had transcribed, and no adjustments were made.

Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, and Marteau (1997) implied that qualitative

methodologies "are keen on stressing the transparency of their technique, for example, in

carefully documenting all steps, presumably so that they can be 'checked' by another researcher"

(p. 598). To ensure a "reliability check in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2016, p. 196) and the

accuracy and reliability of the interpretation of interview data, the researcher used an inter-coder

agreement. The researcher achieved inter-coder agreement through the following steps:

1. The researcher identified a colleague in the doctoral and dissertation process
   who was also conducting qualitative research through interviews.

2. The researcher followed Creswell's (2016) steps and created a codebook of
   codes with an "agreed-upon set of codes and their definitions" (p. 197).

3. The researcher agreed with the second colleague on a method of conducting
   the inter-coder agreement.

4. Both researchers conducted independent analyses of the transcripts.

5. Both researchers determined if inter-coder agreement existed and resolved any
   discrepancies.

Inter-coder reliability helped ensure the dependability criteria listed were present in the research.

Prior to the independent analyses, the researcher provided the second researcher with a list of

heteronormative characteristics (Table 6) to aid in the coding process.

Triangulation

In this research study, triangulation helped ensure that credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability criteria were present. The researcher used triangulation, or

multiple data-collection methods, in "an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the

phenomenon" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 209). The researcher increased the trustworthiness of this study by gaining student perspectives through individual interviews and a focus group session, along with observations of institutional programs and activities and associated documents. The researcher used these multiple sources of data for corroboration and converged information to form a holistic narrative of the experiences of the participants.

<div align="center">Analysis</div>

This section discussed how the multiple data sets were analyzed. Audio recordings were transcribed to provide word-for-word accuracy. The analysis of the interview data included the following procedures:

1. After participants were interviewed individually and in the focus group session, the researcher listened to the recording of the interview and transcribed every utterance word for word.

2. Once the transcript was completed, the researcher reviewed the work to ensure every word was accurate.

3. The researcher reviewed, carefully and critically, the extensive notes that were recorded during each interview.

4. After the researcher listened to and transcribed each interview, he listened to each recording a third time to ensure no important information had been overlooked.

Once the researcher reviewed and corrected any errors in the transcripts, an electronic version of the transcript was sent to each respective participant for member checking (Janesick, 1994). In this member checking procedure, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interview, determine accuracy, and identify corrections or deletions desired. Once transcripts were finalized, coding began.

The method of coding that was utilized to analyze these data was open coding. The rationale for this decision was to "form categories of information" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 118) based on the student interviews to develop a better understanding of the varied and diverse experiences LGBT + students have. Kumar (2011) detailed that this open coding process involved four specific steps:

1. Identify the main themes of the interview,

2. Assign codes to the main themes,

3. Classify responses under the main themes, and

4. Integrate themes and responses into the overall results (p. 215).

The interview questions were created based on the literature as well as from the study's conceptual framework lenses of heteronormativity and heterosexism. Tables 2 and 3 detail each interview question, areas of inquiry from the literature complementing each question, along with supporting source(s). Table 2 addresses Research Question 1 while Table 3 provides the same information for Research Question 2.

Table 2: Alignment of Research Question 1 with Interview and Focus Group Questions, Area(s) of Inquiry, and Source(s)

Interview/Focus Group Question Number	Area(s) of Inquiry	Source(s)
Interview Question 1 Interview Question 1a	• Self-identity • Self-worth • Confidence • Support structure in place	Bockting & Coleman (2007) Cass (1984) Chickering & Reisser (1993) D'Augelli (1994) Fassinger & McCarn (1996) Renn & Bilodeau (2005a)
Interview Question 2 Interview Question 2a	• Self-identity • Self-worth • Confidence • Support structure in place	Bockting & Coleman (2007) Cass (1984) Chickering & Reisser (1993)

Interview/Focus Group Question Number	Area(s) of Inquiry	Source(s)
	• Inclusion • Socialization	D'Augelli (1994) Fassinger & McCarn (1996) Herek (1996) Hernandez & Hernandez (2011) Marine & Nicolazzo (2014) Renn & Bilodeau (2005a)

Interview Question 3
Interview Question 4
Focus Group Question 1
Focus Group Question 2
	• Inclusion
	• Support structure in place
	• Normalization
	  ▪ Lack of LGBT + stigma
	  ▪ Common perceptions
	• Heteronormativity
	  ▪ Oppression
	  ▪ Microaggressions
	  ▪ Exclusion
	• LGBT + stigma
		Chambers (2007)
		Dinkins & Englert (2015)
		Ericsson (2011)
		Herek (1996)
		Hernandez & Hernandez (2011)
		Hubbard (2008)
		Jackson (2006)
		Marine & Nicolazzo (2014)
		Meem et al (2010)
		Seidman (2002)
		Warner (1991)

Table 3: Alignment of Research Question 2 with Interview and Focus Group Questions, Area(s) of Inquiry, and Source(s)

Interview Question Number	Area(s) of Inquiry	Source(s)

Interview Question 5
Focus Group Question 3
	• Inclusion
	• Support structure in place
	• Normalization
	  ▪ Lack of LGBT + stigma
	  ▪ Common perceptions
	• Heteronormativity
	  ▪ Oppression
	  ▪ Microaggressions
	  ▪ Exclusion
	  ▪ LGBT + stigma
		Herek (1996)
		Hernandez & Hernandez (2011)
		Hubbard (2008)
		Jackson (2006)
		Marine & Nicolazzo (2014)
		Meem et al (2010)
		Seidman (2002)
		Warner (1991)

Interview Question 6 Interview Question 6a Interview Question 7 Focus Group Question 4	• Self-identity • Self-worth • Inclusion • Confidence	Bockting & Coleman (2007) Cass (1984) Chambers (2007)

Interview Question Number	Area(s) of Inquiry	Source(s)

Focus Group Question 4a
Focus Group Question 5
	• Support structure in place
	• Normalization
	  ▪ Lack of LGBT + stigma
	  ▪ Common perceptions
	• Heteronormativity
	  ▪ Oppression
	  ▪ Microaggressions
	  ▪ Exclusion
	  ▪ LGBT + stigma
		Chickering & Reisser (1993)
		D'Augelli (1994)
		Fassinger & McCarn (1996)
		Herek (1996)
		Hernandez & Hernandez (2011)
		Hubbard (2008)
		Jackson (2006)
		Marine & Nicolazzo (2014)
		Meem et al (2010)
		Renn & Bilodeau (2005a)
		Seidman (2002)
		Tinto (1993)
		Warner (1991)

Interview Question 8
Focus Group Question 6
	• Self-identity
	• Self-worth
	• Inclusion
	• Support structure in place
	• Confidence
	• Normalization
	  ▪ Lack of LGBT + stigma
	  ▪ Common perceptions
		Bockting & Coleman (2007)
		Cass (1984)
		Chambers (2007)
		Chickering & Reisser (1993)
		D'Augelli (1994)
		Fassinger & McCarn (1996)
		Herek (1996)
		Hernandez & Hernandez (2011)
		Marine & Nicolazzo (2014)
		Seidman (2002)
		Renn & Bilodeau (2005a)
		Tinto (1993)

For qualitative research, Kirk and Miller (1986) stated that observations allowed researchers to verify what they think is occurring. In this study, the researcher analyzed the gathered documents and notes of observations from some of the LGBT + student support group meeting sessions and the college's Peace and Justice Institute's initiatives.

Table 4 details how the data from documents, as well as observational notes, of these two areas of the public Florida state college aided the researcher in two ways:

1. They provided documentation to determine whether a pervasive heteronormative culture existed at this American institution of higher education, as well as detailed LGBT + identities and reported examples of feelings of inclusion.

2. They may have contributed valuable information toward the research questions.

Table 4: Alignment of Observations and Documentation with Area(s) of Inquiry and Source(s)

Observations and Documentation	Area(s) of Inquiry	Source(s)
LGBT + student support group meeting sessions	- Inclusion - Support structure in place - Normalization - Lack of LGBT + stigma - Common perceptions - Socialization	Meeting notes; researcher's written notes from observations; handouts from student support group advisor
Peace and Justice Institute initiatives	- Inclusion - Support structure in place - Normalization - Lack of LGBT + stigma - Common perceptions - Socialization	Meeting notes; researcher's written notes from observations; handouts from student support group advisor

Table 5 details the alignment of the research questions, their data sources (interview and focus group questions, documents, and observations) and analyses. The analysis procedures that correlated with each research question demonstrated alignment and synthesis of the interviews and focus group of this research study.

Table 5: Alignment of Research Questions, Data Source(s) and Analyses

Research Questions	Data Source(s)	Analyses
Research Question 1: As students enrolled in a Central Florida public state	Interview Focus Group	Conceptual Framework Open Coding

Research Questions	Data Source(s)	Analyses
college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community, what are their perceptions of their experiences?		
Research Question 2: What issues or challenges have most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community?	Interview Focus Group	Conceptual Framework Open Coding
	Observations	Analysis ▪ Non-participant ▪ Direct ▪ Undisguised ▪ Unstructured
	Documents	Document Analysis ▪ Thematic coding ▪ Frequencies

Inter-coder Process

Toward the end of the spring 2018 semester, the researcher met with an additional researcher who is pursuing the same terminal degree and who agreed to conduct the inter-coder reliability analysis. Prior to our scheduled meeting, the researcher sent the additional researcher copies of each individual transcript along with the focus group transcript. He also sent the additional researcher a list of heteronormative characteristics he had created to guide in the analysis. These characteristics are listed in Table 6.

Table 6: Heteronormativity Characteristics

Heteronormativity Characteristics
1. Heterosexual-centric public environments
2. Normalization of heterosexual practices in society
3. LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual) is considered *other*, not the norm
4. Invites feelings and acts of aggressive superiority
5. Suggests LGBTQIA individuals are inferior
6. Laws created to work against LGBTQIA citizens
7. LGBTQIA citizens have reduced levels of self-worth, confidence, or support structures in place

Both researchers spent approximately four weeks independently analyzing the transcripts. They then met in person to compare and discuss results. Between the two researchers, of a total of 38 codes independently derived from the analyses, agreement was found on 35, making an inter-coder reliability rate of 92.1%. Table 7 details the codes developed by the two researchers.

Table 7: Inter-Coder Reliability Comparison

Researcher's Codes	**Additional Researcher's Codes**
1. Unique perspective	1. Different ideas
2. Looking for safe space 3. Finding contentment 4. No judgment	2. Needs inclusion
5. Yearning for social connection 6. Few resources/options for LGBT + students	3. Isolated from others
7. GSA makes students feel part of something	4. Inclusive
8. GSA provides social connection 9. GSA provides support 10. GSA provides a safe space	5. GSA creates community
11. Accomplishing goals/success	6. Achieving goals
12. Heterosexual-centric environment	7. LGBT is different/not normal/looked at differently

Researcher's Codes	Additional Researcher's Codes
13. LGBT + students have to defend who they are	8. Treated differently due to beliefs, transgendered rights 9. Lack of same ideas
14. Reduced levels of self-worth/value/feel inferior	10. Trouble with friends/family/identity
15. LGBT + students are allowed to be made fun of 16. No support from classmates. Laws are created to treat LGBT + unequally	11. Self-identity causes issues with family/peers/authority 12. Broad issues, focused on administrative problems
17. Need voice to be heard	13. No voice
18. GSA combats idea that LGBT + students are inferior 19. GSA spreads awareness	14. GSA encourages growth/knowledge 15. GSA impacts lives 16. Friendship/open minds
20. GSA combats heterosexual-centric environment	
	17. LGBT is not something to be understood
	18. Let the GSA be student-run

Through these 38 codes, the two researchers discovered six common themes were present among all seven participants. These common themes will be detailed further in Chapter Five.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

There are limitations to all research. Simon (2011) cautioned possible limitations include time restraints, guarantee of participant follow-through, and population. This particular research study included seven participants. One limitation involved time restraints of the student participants. Time restraints included availability of the participant to interview, class scheduling, work, and family responsibilities. The researcher relied on the availability and willingness of participants to complete this study. Another limitation was the assumption that all participants answered truthfully. The researcher was aware of the possibility that participants may have answered what they believed was the ideal response regardless of whether it was the truth. Based on this situation, the researcher repeatedly assured the volunteers that they should

feel free to answer as truthfully as possible, and that their responses would have no negative repercussions.

Delimitations, which are limits within the control of the researcher (Simon, 2011), are also expected. The research literature does not substantially discuss the experience of student members of an LGBT + student support group at a state or community college in the United States. Because of this, the researcher chose to focus the research study on these specific type of college students to gain a better understanding of that population. The researcher also elected to analyze the conceptual framework through the lenses of heteronormativity and heterosexism to gain a broader understanding of how these concepts intersected with the lives of student members of an LGBT + student support group at a state or community college. A study which uses other delimitations could obtain different results.

<u>Summary</u>

To complete an accurate and valid qualitative research study, the researcher designed multiple steps to ensure trustworthy data and conclusions. Due to the ethnographical nature of the research study, interviews were conducted among voluntary participants who are members of an LGBT + student support group at a public Florida state college. These interviews were intended to capture the unique experiences of these members in a manner that the gathered documents and observations would not be able to. A focus group with four participants together was also conducted. The role of the researcher was to seek the most reliable and trustworthy answers to a problem (Creswell, 2016). To ensure trustworthiness throughout the entire research process, multiple steps were conducted, from member checking to inter-coder reliability and triangulation.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter provides the reader an opportunity to develop a more descriptive, meaningful, and complete picture of the students who participated in this study. The information provided was gathered through direct quotes from the individual interviews and focus group interviews, as well as through demographic data collected, along with specific perceptions from the interviewer. The researcher's desire is to properly convey the rich nature of each of the participants, whose individual experiences contributed to the diversity of the LGBT + community.

The seven participants were each interviewed within a three-week time span in January 2018. Each student responded to the researcher's email invitation, and a date and location for the individual interview were swiftly established. Of the seven students who participated in the individual interviews, four also participated in the focus group session, which took place in March 2018. Each participant chose a pseudonym for both the individual interviews and focus group session.

Participants

A total of seven students participated in this study. Table 8 contains demographic data for each participant. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 38, with five of the participants disclosing their ages to be between 18 and 24. Since these students attended a traditional two-year, public institution with an open-admissions policy, it was not unexpected for there to be a wide variance in the age-range of the participants. Each of the participants attended the same campus, stated that they regularly attended the GSA, and self-identified as a member of the LGBT + community.

Regarding specific sexual orientations, three of the participants identified as gay, two identified as bisexual, and two identified as asexual. When asked about gender identity, four identified as male, two identified as female, and one identified as a transgendered male. Five participants identified as Caucasian, one as Latino, and one as Asian. All seven participants stated that they were single and not currently in a relationship. When asked if there was someone on campus they could go to for help, three of the seven students stated affirmatively, while the other four either did not respond or answered no. They all disclosed different career goals.

Table 8 provides specific profile descriptions for each participant. The cameos of each participant are presented in alphabetical order in this table and chapter.

Table 8: Student Participant Profiles

Participant's Pseudonym	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Racial Identity	Age Range	Career Goal
Camryn	Bisexual	Female	Asian	18-24	Entertainment
Chad	Gay	Male	Caucasian	18-24	Film Editor
Enrico	Gay	Male	Latino	18-24	Forensic Psychologist
Fauna	Asexual	Female	Caucasian	18-24	Wildlife Rescue and Conservation
Rivera	Asexual	Transgendered Male	Caucasian	25-31	Art Education
Seraph	Bisexual	Male	Caucasian	18-24	Archeologist
Zack	Gay	Male	Caucasian	32-38	Criminal Justice

With the exception of Rivera and Enrico, all of the participants indicated they still live with their families. For Camryn, Seraph, and Zack, specifically, living with family presented challenges and struggles. While all the participants indicated certain levels of alienation at their

institution, Camryn, Seraph, and Zack also discussed challenges of acceptance in their households as well.

Camryn

The researcher interviewed Camryn on January 25, 2018. She was the fourth student to participate in the study, and was on time, was attentive, and spoke clearly. The researcher had no communication or relationship with Camryn prior to establishing the interview. Camryn also participated in the focus group that took place on March 29, 2018.

On the day of the individual interview, the researcher greeted Camryn in the waiting room outside the office in which the interview took place. She was polite, cheerful, and appeared enthusiastic to participate in the study. Before the recording took place, the researcher explained the importance of this study and thanked her again for participating. She seemed excited to contribute to a study related to the LGBT + community. The interview lasted 15 minutes and 30 seconds. Camryn answered each question and all follow-up questions, although some responses were briefer than others.

The single biggest reason why Camryn chose to join the gay/straight alliance was to find acceptance.

> I had been planning on joining either the Gay/Straight Alliance or something like the LGBTQ+ community for a very long time, like since I was in high school. But it's a more accepting space, and a safe space, that I can talk, especially for people who aren't out of the closet; it's pretty tough to talk to about it (Individual Interview Transcript).

The term *out of the closet* Camryn used refers to an individual who publicly reveals his or her sexual orientation. Camryn, who identified as a bisexual, Asian female, explained the alienation she felt at home with her family because the LGBT + community was not celebrated or accepted there. She also expressed frustration with some of her friends who were not part of

79

the LGBT + community, and who have not always shown support for her bisexuality. The fact that she felt she had to act in a certain manner around her family or some of her friends so that they would not be offended or uncomfortable bothered her.

Camryn explained that her workplace environment had many LGBT + individuals, which she felt was a good thing. However, even in the workplace, some of those individuals faced taunting and disrespectful comments from others. Camryn described multiple occurrences of mis-gendering, which occurs when an individual's gender identity is incorrectly identified by someone else.

> There's a lot, as in the struggles that LGBTQ + people face, it's kind of like every day, at their job, at school, even outside of school. Honestly, it comes down to the smallest thing as mis-gendering someone. That happens a lot at my job (Focus Group Transcript).

> There's one trans person at my job. He gets mis-gendered quite a lot. And every single time it will be the same people who absolutely refuse to refer to him as the correct gender. Yeah, even when they know, even if we go back and be like 'Hey, you're making them really uncomfortable!'" (Focus Group Transcript).

Camryn explained that, overall, she felt her institution supported her and LGBT + students. One caveat that Camryn mentioned, however, was that she felt the need for greater awareness and understanding of the LGBT + community and its struggle among heterosexual students and employees. She elaborated that in some classes she had been made to feel that the struggles of the LGBT + community in the United States were not considered as significant or real as the struggles of other minority groups, and she expressed a wish to change that mindset.

> I had one experience where a guy in my Humanities class had a big meltdown, and I kind of wish he would understand the oppression of gay people and trans people. I don't know, I just hoped he would understand more about the LGBT community and be more understanding (Focus Group Transcript).

Camryn expressed frustration and dismay when telling of this encounter with the student in her class. She explained that her frustration came from feeling alone and unsupported by her

classmates, which also increased her sense of alienation and exclusion. Although she said she

was grateful that her professor created a platform in the class in which students could discuss

issues such as these, and even suggested to the other student to step out of the room to calm

down, Camryn wished more students would have interjected into the conversation to at least call

for civility. She stated only one other student voiced support for her and for civil discussion.

That lack of interjection from most of her classmates, Camryn stated, led her to feel more

isolated as a member of the LGBT + community.

Camryn's response to the researcher's question of what challenges or issues, nationally,

faced the LGBT + community, highlighted a feeling that more progress was still needed.

> There's a lot. Let's just start with that. I mean, with the recent political climate, it's
> pretty obvious [that] health care [will] not cover a trans person, transition, and just like,
> all kinds of discrimination, like people, when they see someone discriminating, they are
> going to start going on board with it, and they're gonna think it's ok, and it's gonna start
> spreading. So that's one of the social challenges. We don't have enough safe spaces,
> people don't talk enough about the LGBTQ+ community, so a lot of times the people
> who are in the LGBTQ+ community don't know who to turn to when they're in need of
> help (Individual Interview Transcript).

When asked what the institution could do, as well as what more she could do, to help

LGBT + students at her institution, Camryn advocated for more engagement and promotion.

> They [the institution] can organize more activities that are inclusive. Maybe something
> that, because I know one of the things that can really help is to get the school to more
> LGBTQ+ events in our community, like Pride (annual parade). And, just make it a safe
> space, post resources where LGBTQ+ students can go to when they need help
> (Individual Interview Transcript).

> What could I do differently? Well, what I just said, and also promote the GSA more to
> get more people and just really try to push the GSA, or just the school, to go out to a lot
> of the LGBTQ+ events in the community to get us out there, to have connections beyond
> the students from our school (Individual Interview Transcript).

Camryn explained her desire for the GSA to collaborate with the local community's city-wide

LGBT + support center and network regarding outreach, communication, networking, and

planning toward the annual LGBT + pride parade. Camryn expressed a commitment toward expanding that collaboration between her institution and the LGBT + support resources in her immediate area.

Chad

The researcher interviewed Chad on January 24, 2018. He was the third student to participate in the study. Chad, who identified as a gay, Caucasian male, arrived on time and seemed interested and eager to contribute his experience. The researcher had no communication with him prior to the arrangement of the interview. Chad did not participate in the focus group that took place on March 29, 2018.

After greeting Chad in the waiting room of the interview space, the researcher discussed with him the significance of the study and thanked him for his participation. The interview lasted 11 minutes and 33 seconds, with Chad giving brief and direct responses to each question asked. The researcher attempted to gather further details from Chad but was also respectful of how much the participant wanted to share. Chad chose to join his institution's gay/straight alliance to have his voice heard. As a gay male he felt he had a lot to contribute and the gay/straight alliance was a platform through which he felt he could be heard.

> I joined the GSA to have my voice spoken for the Gay/Straight Alliance. I am gay, and I want to have my voice heard (Individual Interview Transcript).

Chad attributed his joining the GSA to expanding the number of diverse friends in his life. He knew some GSA members through shared courses, and it was through those individuals that he felt comfortable to attend one of the support group's meetings.

> Upon joining the GSA I've actually made a lot of diverse friends. In fact, it was through my diverse friends that got me to the GSA. They were the ones who informed 'hey, we have a support group. Why don't you join it?' (Individual Interview Transcript).

When asked to define the terms *inclusion, acceptance,* and *success*, Chad conflated those terms within a concept of friendship and togetherness. His response indicated Chad's appreciation for the importance of fellowship and participation with others.

> When I think inclusion? I think participation. I think being part of a team. I think of a willingness to work together (Individual Interview Transcript).

> Acceptance. When I think of that word I think [just] the ability to make friendships with somebody. It takes a lot of acceptance [by] both parties to become friends with somebody (Individual Interview Transcript).

> Success comes in multiple different ways. For me, just personal success, personality success. Getting to understand that other person, and the success of making our friendship (Individual Interview Transcript).

Chad expressed a great comfort with his experience at his institution, having not felt marginalized or alienated by anyone there because of his sexual orientation. However, Chad lamented the difficulties other LGBT + individuals typically faced in society. Although he acknowledged not experiencing challenges with his family over his sexual identity, Chad empathized with those individuals who had.

> Just merely leaving out of the house [or] not [can be challenging]. Just [our] relationships with close ones and family members [can be challenging]. I know for me, personally, I have never had an issue with family members or close ones, but I have had [LGBT +] friends in the past [who have] and I have heard [their] stories (Individual Interview Transcript).

This response from Chad led to further discussion of the complexities of being an LGBT + individual in today's society. Chad expressed gratitude for his own personal experience with his family but acknowledged those individuals who did not have that same support at home. When asked how his institution could remove barriers for LGBT + students, Chad inferred his institution was already making a positive impact for the population.

> They're doing a really good job of this right now. By being extremely inclusive, being aware of everybody and everybody's opinion (Individual Interview Transcript).

Honestly, I can't think of really any situation; the only thing that I want to add is that this institution is doing a great job as far as inclusion, not just with the GSA alone, but outside the GSA. So, I feel as though this institution is making an impact not only for the students that are [in] the institution, but for the community as well (Individual Interview Transcript).

Enrico

The researcher interviewed Enrico on January 29, 2018. He was the seventh and final student to participate in the individual interviews. Enrico, who identified himself as a gay, Latino male, arrived on time, was polite, and seemed eager to share his personal story and experience for this study. Enrico also participated in the focus group that took place on March 29, 2018.

On the day of the individual interview, the researcher greeted Enrico in the waiting room of the interview location and spent time explaining the significance of the study. The researcher thanked Enrico for his participation and began the recorded interview, which lasted 29 minutes and 22 seconds. Enrico gave descriptive, detailed responses to each of the questions, often referencing specific conversations he had had with people in his past who have shaped his experiences as a gay person while living both in Puerto Rico and in Florida. He explained that these experiences had a direct impact on his life.

When asked why he joined the gay/straight alliance, Enrico answered it was due to a need to make "gay" friends, and because he did not know anyone.

I didn't know anybody, because we were, basically, in the states they have a culture, like, everybody is like on their own, and stuff like that. It kind of sucks, but at the same time I [needed] to do something to at least have one friend this semester or whatever. So, that's why I decided to go to the gay/straight alliance. And I told myself I needed more gay friends. So, I went and everything went well. It was not a bad idea… (Individual Interview Transcript).

Enrico explained the type of environment the GSA provided for him on campus was one of acceptance and inclusion. He compared his experience with his current institution and the

GSA to his experience while attending college in Puerto Rico, where resources were more

limited and where he felt more isolated.

> The GSA at [this institution] supports like every other club. We also have collaborations
> with other clubs to do stuff. For me, I don't see judgment. Basically, [this institution] is
> so diverse, and it's so multicultural that basically they don't care [about] your race or
> your religion or who you're going to like. And that's why I like it. In Puerto Rico, there
> was a GSA at my previous college, but I was gone within two weeks. Because there
> were no activities and stuff like that. Basically, in Puerto Rico they don't care if you're
> gay/straight or something like that. But there are only Puerto Ricans, seriously. Here [it]
> is more than diverse than that (Individual Interview Transcript).

Enrico described the struggles he experienced growing up in Puerto Rico, and within a

devout Catholic household. He explained that when he came out of the closet at 14 to his family,

his mother responded negatively and asked him what she did to have caused him to become gay.

He described the confusion he felt internally against the homophobia he experienced in his

household, church, and overall community.

> Well, where do I start? I came out when I was fourteen, and I was at a Catholic private
> school. I was in ninth grade when I came out. I came out because that weekend
> something happened with a guy and I didn't know [much], I was curious at the time
> (Individual Interview Transcript).

> When I was in tenth grade I changed friends, and everything, everybody, were gay-
> bashing. In Puerto, at one time, they were talking about gay couples adopting people and
> getting married. It got so controversial the father of the church of my school did a
> meeting to talk about why it is bad, and all the looks were [at] me because I was the only
> gay guy (Individual Interview Transcript).

As Enrico reached adulthood and began to meet other gay individuals, he said he

encountered a new struggle, in which some members of the LGBT + community exhibited

judgment against his physical appearance, as well as his masculinity. He explained the struggles

of having to deal with exclusion, not just from society overall, but also the irony of experiencing

exclusion by other members of the LGBT + community as well.

> I came to a [point] one time that they mostly think about their physiques. Their physical
> appearance because a lot of guys were at first like 'Yeah, six-pack, chest, need to get

their hair cut, brand of clothes, always looking good, having that torso on the Grindr profile.' Looking for no fats, no femmes. I don't deal with that shit. It was like another judgmental part. But I don't really care because I just don't tolerate people like that (Individual Interview Transcript).

Another struggle that Enrico shared was his experiences from heterosexual individuals who had made what could be considered stereotypically homophobic comments to him because he was gay.

People just love giving mixed signals any time and my friends will be asking me 'Oh are you the girl in the relationship?' I kind of hate that. 'Do you know how to do my hair?' I don't know nothing [about doing someone's hair]. 'Oh, I didn't know you listened to hip hop.' I'm like 'What? Um, ok' (Individual Interview Transcript).

During the Focus Group, Enrico expanded on his frustrations about homophobic comments made by individuals.

Once a girl straight up comes to another girl and the other girl was wearing a flannel shirt and the other girl said, 'Oh you look like a lesbian.' Straight up, and she said it so loud and I got pissed off. I was like 'Oh so if I wear a flannel shirt [that means] I'm gay?' Because I'm hella gay, and she said, 'No it's not like that'. You can't define people with their choices in fashion. And then she got pissed off and I said 'Honey, you can't judge people by how they look. If you're all for that you're going to be wrong in your life, so don't do that ever again' (Focus Group Transcript).

It's like, I have straight friends and they will say 'Oh are you going to be my gay best friend? Yes Queen!' and I'll be like 'Stop. Don't talk to me. Bye. Have a great day' (Focus Group Transcript).

One way Enrico channeled his frustration was to attempt to educate some of his heterosexual acquaintances with LGBT + terminology and culture with the hope that this would change their opinions regarding this community.

I told her this and this and this and I showed her how the drag community is, because I watch a lot of Ru Paul, and she [was] like 'Oh my god!' and I told her about the trans community, stuff like that, and the lesbian community (Focus Group Transcript).

Upon entering his present institution, Enrico stated that he had not experienced any barriers that had hindered his success. One suggestion, however, was a desire for more

education on the LGBT + community for all students at the institution, such as a "Gay 101"

class, which would provide a cultural and historical foundation of the LGBT + community,

similar to other classes focused on Latin America, the Middle East, African and Asian cultures,

and Women's Studies.

> More programs, more people knowing [about] gay culture. What's this? A Gay 101
> class, Gay History or something, or just [how] being a homosexual comes from the Greek
> Gods, and it goes way back, past time, religion, politics, people have gotten to where
> being gay is taboo (Individual Interview Transcript).

> But we don't have a class on gay culture, and we don't have a class on LGBT culture
> (Individual Interview Transcript).

> At the conclusion of the Focus Group session, the researcher asked Enrico if he had

anything related to the session that he would like to add. He spoke of the importance of being

proud of one's self, and to embrace one's essence and to find happiness.

> What can I say, just be yourself and be proud of yourself and that's it. There's nothing
> wrong with being who you are and just be you. Even though there is a lot of bad stuff
> that is happening around us, and a lot of things that [are] preventing us from being who
> we are, you just need to embrace it and just be you and be happy. There's nothing wrong
> with that (Focus Group Transcript).

<center>Fauna</center>

The researcher interviewed Fauna on January 25, 2018. She was the fifth student to

participate in this study. Fauna, who identified as an asexual, Caucasian female, arrived early,

and provided prompt, but brief, responses to each of the questions and follow up questions.

Fauna also advised that she had a diagnosis of autism which she said contributed to her sense of

self every bit as much as her asexuality.

Prior to the interview and the organizing of the interview the researcher had no contact or

relationship with Fauna. The interview lasted 11 minutes and 37 seconds. Fauna also

participated in the focus group that took place on March 29, 2018. Prior to the interview, the

<center>87</center>

researcher explained to Fauna the importance of the study and thanked her for her participation.

Fauna appeared shy, and although she was brief with her responses, expressed a desire to get her

perspective and experience on the record. As an asexual person, Fauna expressed frustration

regarding the lack of acknowledgement of asexual persons by many in the heterosexual

community and LGBT + communities.

> Most of the exclusion I've experienced in my life relate more to me being autistic than to
> me being asexual. But I have experienced asexual exclusion on campus. It's never
> anything big, it's usually little things like the inclusion signs, forgetting to put the "A" or
> when I go home after college and seeing a report on media visibility dealing with the
> LGBT community that doesn't even mention the asexual community, even though media
> representation for us is pretty lacking (Individual Interview Transcript).

> When asked how she defined inclusion, Fauna equated it to her asexuality and explained

that part of inclusion involved understanding what makes individuals different.

> Inclusion. Understanding that not every human being fits into the same body type, or
> mind type, or life experiences and making an effort to make sure human beings deviating
> from what society considers the norm are safe and welcome (Individual Interview
> Transcript).

Fauna explained that she lived in a very supportive household where family members embraced

her autism and asexuality.

> I was really lucky. I have a very accepting family, and I've spent most of my life in a
> fairly accepting region, so in many respects I've been shielded from the worst of it
> (Individual Interview Transcript).

While she was grateful for this support, Fauna expressed frustration that many in her family had

suggested that her asexuality may simply be a phase, something that she would grow out of once

she met the right person.

> One incident that comes to mind is, I was talking to my dad's girlfriend, she's cool, I like
> her, she's very liberal and well-educated and I casually mentioned to her that I don't want
> to have kids, and she said, 'Well what if you met the right person someday?' (Focus
> Group Transcript)…So in this case I told her 'Fat chance of that happening. I'm
> asexual.' And she was like 'Well if that's your choice.' And I know she meant well. But

she's conflating asexuality with celibacy. The two are different. (Focus Group Transcript).

When asked how her institution could remove barriers for LGBT + students, Fauna lamented that asexual individuals – both within and outside of the college environment – still faced enormous challenges when it came to acceptance and even whether it was considered a mental disorder.

> I have heard stories from other asexual people who say they've experienced misunderstanding and outright discrimination at the hands of even supposedly queer-friendly healthcare providers. It's still acceptable for asexual people to be told that they are damaged, that they're broken, or that their asexuality is a symptom of trauma or a disease. I haven't been diagnosed yet, but for a few months now I've been suspecting I might have depression since among other things I have a pretty latent family history of depression and other mental health issues and since I'm told that some people experience decreased sexual desires [as a] result of depression that if I approached a mental health provider about that they'd assume my asexuality was a disease even though, looking back, I've always been asexual (Individual Interview Transcript).

Fauna stated that, overall, she felt supported at the institution, and expressed enjoyment at participating in the gay/straight alliance. Her biggest wish was the acknowledgement by the heterosexual community – as well as the LGBT*A* + community – that asexuality existed.

> I have experienced micro-aggressions in regard to my asexuality here. In regard to actual barriers, as we discussed, most of the barriers I [have] experienced most around school are linked to my disability rather than my sexuality (Focus Group Transcript).

<div align="center">Rivera</div>

The researcher interviewed Rivera on January 25, 2018. He was the sixth student to participate in the study. Rivera identified as a transgendered, asexual, Caucasian male, and preferred the pronoun "he." Prior to the interview the researcher had no previous communication with Rivera. He arrived for his interview on time. He was polite, courteous, and enthusiastic to participate in this study. Rivera's individual interview was 55 minutes and 6 seconds long, nearly three times longer than many of the other participants and twice the length

one other participant. Rivera also participated in the focus group that took place on March 29,

2018.

Rivera responded to the questions and follow-up questions in a descriptive, narrative-like

fashion. He acknowledged that, for him, explaining his experience as a transgendered male was

deeply complex, personal, and emotional. He also explained that he was a natural teacher at

heart, and wanted to be as precise, clear, and descriptive as possible. Throughout much of the

interview, Rivera explained the highs and lows of living as a transgendered male both in college

as well as in society in general. When asked about how he navigated through society as a

transgendered male, Rivera responded that one way to cope was to lean on friends.

> But I was dressed in a way that was – in my top was showing I was still flat, on my chest,
> and my legs were a forest, and it was great, and I felt powerful, just because I felt I
> looked great. But I got stared left and right and people were making comments
> (Individual Transcript).

> And it's good when you have connections too, because if I felt like I was almost being
> too mocked at, I'd have a friend come over and make jokes, make me laugh, we are just
> so distracted (Individual Transcript).

When asked what his experience at his institution was like prior to joining the GSA,

Rivera responded with excitement at the diversity of college and his hope for a positive

experience.

> I'm in a way proud of [this institution] for seeming so accepting and so open in the
> diversity that we have here. Because, whether it comes to things like gender and sexual
> orientation that can be visible to the human eye, it's the type of the way that people either
> represent themselves in the way that they have faith, or the way that they dress. People
> are very comfortable here. That was my first impression by coming here. I felt included.
> Even before the GSA, I knew that I had like-minded students, like myself, around me, but
> I wasn't sure how to identify that without such a club. So that's why joining the GSA
> afterward, after being aware of its presence, helped me to hone in this specific circle, the
> community in the LGBT community, because it's not something that you're always able
> to tell from face value walking the campus, although it does seem very accepting as a
> school (Individual Interview Transcript).

Rivera acknowledged the benefit of the institution's diversity and size. The researcher asked Rivera to explain further why he decided to join the GSA, considering he acknowledged that he already felt his institution was accepting and welcoming.

> I've actually been included in clubs similar to the GSA since I was in middle and high school. Because I've always been aware of my own identity since I was a kid. Not only do I like to participate in clubs to help empower them, but I also lead them myself and I am somebody who starts these types of clubs. So, once I found out about its existence I knew immediately that I wanted to participate to either help with my own thoughts and opinions or to help possibly be part of its counsel in case they needed help with organization or subject matter for their meetings. But more so, also, it's a social connection (Individual Interview Transcript).

Although he acknowledged he felt safe and accepted at his institution, Rivera underscored the profound importance of having the opportunity to interact with individuals similar to himself. He explained the GSA afforded that opportunity more than other clubs could because the GSA specifically existed for Rivera, and other LGBT + students and allies, to celebrate this community.

> At the core of it all, at your identity, and possibly problems of your life, you've got that common string together, that common connection, so if I walk in, and I see a stranger, but I know they're in that room of the GSA, I know we share the same experiences. Though not basing on what we look like at all and it might be surprising. You may walk in and see somebody and you never expect that [person is LGBT +] and that almost proves a point of people. You never know by how somebody looks, their body, their attractiveness, the way that they dress themselves, [whether] they might be in the LGBTQ + community (Individual Interview Transcript).

When asked what kind of environment the institution provided for him, Rivera likened his experience to those of other students who are minorities. With the institution being an open-admission, public state institution, serving students with various GPAs and from multiple backgrounds, Rivera explained that in a sense all the students are underdogs, and through that status, common understanding could be achieved.

> We're all just as successful and intelligent as the people going to university, there's that, again, that common ground. So, for someone who does face whether its racial injustice,

91

they can look at someone who has, you know, sexual, sexual identity injustice, and they [can understand both], there's a connection (Individual Interview Transcript).

You have to slowly, but surely, sweep each individual in their beliefs to be more progressive. Also, to take action [to make them more compassionate], because if someone is not compassionate and there's an issue that they don't relate to, it takes compassion for them to have action. Because if they're not involved then why care? It's unrelated to LGBT, again, when I think minority, even the racial issue, for someone who is privileged, white, a lot of times action is not done because it's like 'Well, I'm not part of that so I don't really care,' but you're lacking that compassion, that empathy, to [take] your shoes off, walk a mile in theirs, the horrible rocky road they go through, and you're just not learn [-ing], taking that extra step, so when you choose not to participate in something like that because it's not your business, sometimes playing the neutral party is still playing part of the negative party, it's part of the problem (Individual Interview Transcript).

Rivera repeated how accepting his institution was toward him and other LGBT + students. The researcher asked Rivera if he could recall an experience in which he felt marginalized, alienated, or excluded. Rivera recounted experiences related to when he decided to transition from female to male.

I've been making the transition of my life to move across the gender spectrum and have been making the attempts to fully expose my identity as trans-male. The only issue with that was between 2012 and 2014 I was undercover for the most part. People didn't really seem to care, and if they had questions they asked, but they weren't offended by it. But because of the boom in the media and the press [regarding trans issues], now it is one big old joke for all of society, it's a big inside joke, everybody gets it, and it's hilarious to them now. So, when people [say] 'Oh I identify as a helicopter' jokes, or the bathroom debacle, it has gotten so much worse. And, you know, in the past, when I presented as male, and I've gone the whole ten yards of using extremities to, whether it be binding my chest or lowering my voice or go about my daily life representing myself as male, it has had its troubles (Individual Interview Transcript).

But then again that's the kind of thing that is easy [for people to make fun of]. Some student can be like 'Hey guys look at this, they have a, what will some kind of tranny walk in there!' It leaves so much space for harassment and bullying, and when it comes to, regressing back to middle-school tactics, like I said before, the sensitive hearts of pubescent children, bullying is such a part of in the early stages of adolescence, and we're doing the same as adults (Individual Interview Transcript).

Although Rivera would not name a specific instance of feeling prejudice or discrimination within his institution, his statements indicated that he had experienced it

elsewhere and was disturbed by its prevalence in society. Rivera felt a very strong need to explain the vital importance of the gay/straight alliance and what that meant for LGBT + students. He likened the student group to a beacon for students to find solace, safety, and connection. He also stated that these types of clubs helped reveal a college institution's priority toward student inclusion.

> So GSA can provide – whether it be emotional services, it can provide activities for them to feel like they can do something when they're done with their studies; and also give them a chance to broaden their relationships as they can feel more comfortable [speaking and being] with someone included in that group versus a random student walking across campus (Focus Group Transcript).

Rivera's celebration of services the GSA provides to students revealed how important LGBT + support groups are within the college setting. The testimonials from Rivera and the other participants demonstrated how college students have embraced these clubs for emotional well-being, support, and connection.

Seraph

The researcher interviewed Seraph on January 12, 2018. He was the first student to participate in the study and appeared eager to share his perspectives and experiences. Prior to the interview and organizing the interview the researcher had no interaction with the student. Seraph identified as a bisexual, Caucasian male. He arrived on time, was courteous and respectful, and answered each question and follow-up question in a brief and concise manner. Seraph did not participate in the focus group that took place on March 29, 2018.

The interview with Seraph lasted 12 minutes and 54 seconds. Although Seraph answered each question, he did not provide detail or elaborate when prompted by the questions or follow-up questions. When asked why he joined the gay/straight alliance, Seraph responded that he wanted to see "what it was all about" (Individual Interview Transcript). When asked about the

institution as a whole, Seraph responded that he felt the institution provided a welcoming

environment for LGBT + students, that he felt no alienation or exclusion, and that the GSA was

"very open to discussion and it's a fair exchange of ideas" (Individual Interview Transcript).

Seraph stated that his mother struggled with accepting his bisexuality, but had recently come

around, and even asked him if she could share his sexual orientation with other people.

> Like, she just, she has more conservative beliefs, and she was just, I don't think she was
> ready to accept something like that, even though like she kind of knew it was coming
> eventually (Individual Interview Transcript)…Yeah, like, yeah cause, things have
> definitely gotten better. She has, recently, she has asked me, like, 'so, is it okay if I tell
> other people?' I'm like, yeah, it's absolutely okay (Individual Interview Transcript).

Seraph concluded the interview by stating that he recognized that he has had it much

easier that many others. He stated he recognized this reality after hearing of other GSA student

members' experiences either at home or in the public sphere.

> I don't know. [There's] this unfortunate notion that some people still feel [toward
> LGBT + individuals] they're just one of those groups that it's okay to discriminate
> against. They are like 'You don't understand, I have a deeply rooted belief that being gay
> is just wrong' (Individual Interview Transcript).

Seraph acknowledged that his institution did not impose any real barriers on student members of

the LGBT + community.

> I have to honestly say I don't really think there are any barriers in this institution in
> particular, I mean, they haven't really done anything that would irk me or rub met he
> wrong way, as being anti-LGBT, they seem pretty friendly to that (Individual Interview
> Transcript).

Zack

The researcher interviewed Zack on January 23, 2018. He was the second student to

participate in the study. Zack identified as a gay, Caucasian male, appeared for his interview on

time, and provided prompt and clear responses to the interview questions and follow-up

questions. Prior to the interview with Zack the researcher had no communication with the student other than to organize the interview date and location. Zack did not participate in the focus group session that took place on March 29, 2018.

The interview with Zack lasted 17 minutes and 38 seconds. Before the researcher began the recorded interview, the researcher explained the significance of the study and thanked the participant for his contribution. When asked why Zack decided to join the gay/straight alliance, he responded that he wanted to attend the club as soon as he learned of its existence because he was gay and when he was in high school he knew of a gay/straight alliance there but had been too nervous to join. He advised that he was hopeful this group could be helpful to him while he pursued his college education.

> I joined the support group because I recently had some problems in high school and I knew I had a GSA in high school that I never attended and I noticed that there was a GSA here at the college and I wanted to attend it and see how the college or the people that were in the group, what it was all about (Individual Interview Transcript).

Zack advised that it was very difficult to accept his homosexuality growing up. His parents were not accepting, and while in high school he witnessed other students continuously bullied and harassed for either being LGBT + or perceived as LGBT +. When asked if he had come out to his parents now that he was in college, Zack responded that he still had not discussed the matter with his parents.

> You know, I think my parents just have not grown up in this generation to understand. They may think about it but they don't want to talk to me about it. But I know they probably know what's going on (Individual Interview Transcript).

Zack acknowledged that he still struggled with the concept of accepting himself. When the researcher asked him to define the term *acceptance*, Zack responded he needed to start with accepting himself.

The first definition I'd give for acceptance is accepting myself before anybody else. I know that if I'm trying to talk to somebody, and I'm trying to get to know somebody, and if I'm liking somebody and I like spending time with them, I have to accept myself or who I am before I can explain to them [who I am]. Because they may not like what I do or how I act, or what I say, you know we might not have relatable identity, like hobbies, and interests, and spending time together (Individual Interview Transcript).

Zack expressed that he felt the institution, as a whole, provided a very safe and welcoming environment for LGBT + students, and he was grateful the GSA existed. He emphasized in the interview how important it was for him to be comfortable with himself. When asked how he defined acceptance, Zack explained that acceptance must start with his accepting himself for who he was.

I gotta accept myself for what I have, and when I mean acceptance again I mean any problems that I have I have to take care of myself. I got a lot to do. You know (Individual Interview Transcript).

<u>Summary</u>

This chapter has provided an introduction to the background and experiences of each of the seven participants interviewed in this study. Chapter Five will present the research data findings and analyses.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter Five presents the findings and analysis of the research study. This information included findings represented by aligning the research questions by interview and focus group questions and exploring how the emergent themes corresponded with the conceptual framework of the dissertation. Saldana (2009) described holistic coding as an appropriate method for beginning qualitative researchers "learning how to code data, and studies with a wide variety of data forms (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes, journals, documents, diaries, correspondence, artifacts, video)" (p. 118). Bazeley (2007) stated that holistic coding was applicable "when the researcher already has a general idea of what to investigate in the data" (p. 67).

Creswell (2014) stated "the traditional approach in the social sciences is to allow the codes to emerge during the data analysis" (p. 199). Although each of the participants revealed unique perspectives and experiences, similar responses among each of them resulted in meaningful themes. Creswell also stressed that the researcher should "use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis" (p. 199). The findings of these themes are detailed in several tables within this chapter, along with quotes from the participants' interview transcripts and the focus group transcript. Figure 1 illustrates the six themes and relationships which emerged from the individual interviews and the focus group and were representative of the experiences detailed by the participants. The figure also provides a summary of the concepts associated with each theme.
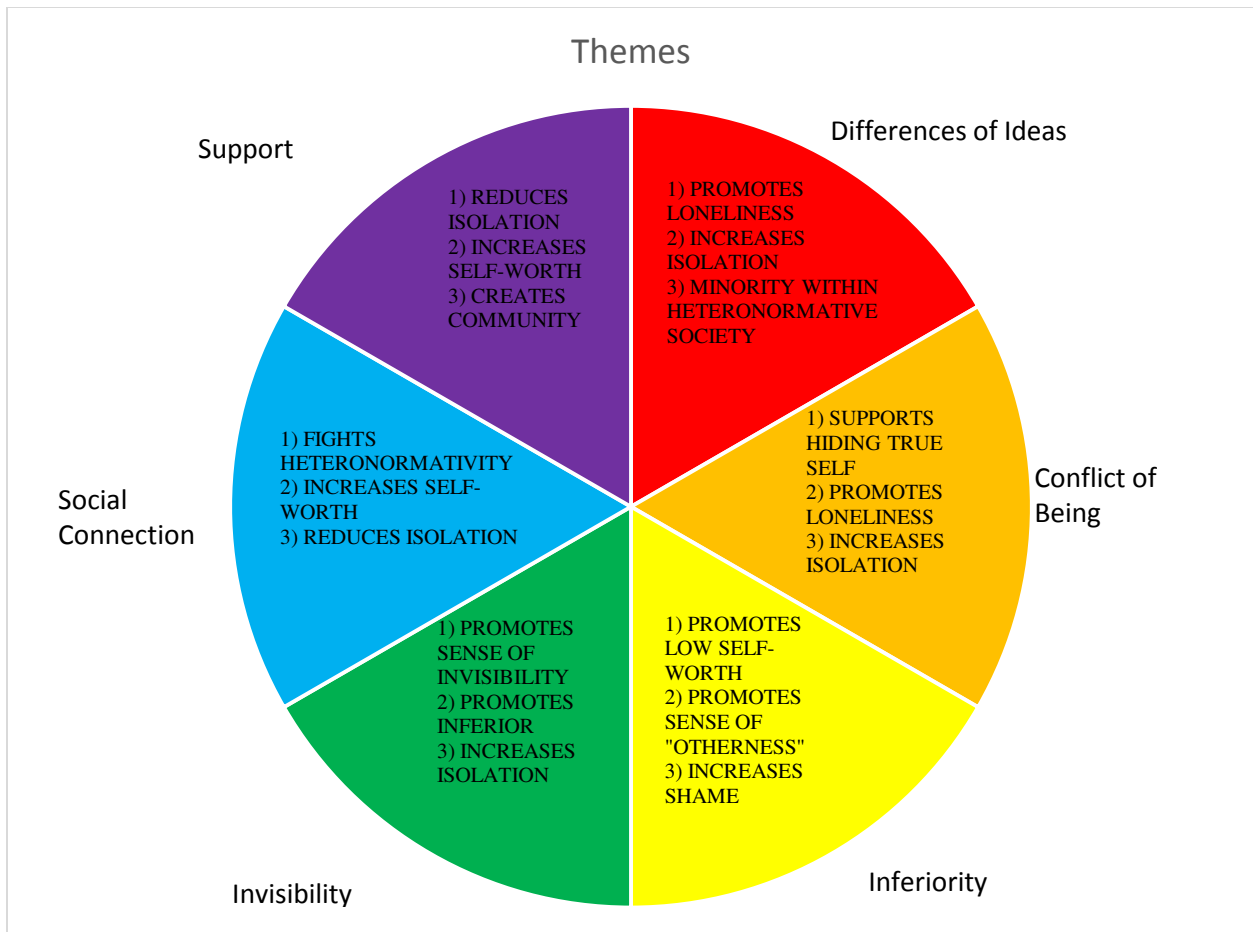
Themes

Figure 1: Six Emerged Themes

Themes

Prior to the details of the findings, this section provides an overview of the six major themes that emerged from this research study. Each one is introduced, and related literature identified.

Conflict of Being: Conflict of Being was a theme shared by most of the participants. This theme was found within the interview and focus group responses related to having to maintain two personas: an authentic self in private and a non-authentic self for classmates/professors while on campus. This conflict of being suggested that among the student participants there were an experience and a sense that one could not be one's true, authentic self

within the academic institution. This finding also suggested that in the institution a heteronormative culture was pervasive and created an environment in which LGBT + students felt the need to create dual personas.

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors of Identity Development model included language on sexual orientation. Bockting and Coleman (2007) described the coming-out process for transgendered individuals. These identity theories, listed in Chapter Two, support the Conflict of Being theme as it relates to the struggle LGBT + student participants described regarding navigating a heteronormative college environment.

Differences of Ideas: Differences of Ideas was a theme relayed by all the participants in one form or another. Belonging to a minority population – in this instance the LGBT + community – gave each of these participants a unique perspective on identity, acceptance, and inclusion over heterosexual students within a large, public, state institution of higher education. These unique perspectives on equality, inclusion, and acceptance were forged from society's heteronormative norms. Most of the participants indicated that, as members of this minority population, their differing ideas could contribute in a positive way to the overall community of their academic institution.

Schmidt et al.'s (2011) study supported the Differences of Ideas theme. They sought to gain the perspective of LGBT + college students through the context of career development. Through that process, the authors gathered an increased understanding of how LGBT + students may perceive the college experience differently than heterosexual students.

Inferiority: The theme of inferiority was evident through the responses of all the student participants. Examples of reduced levels of self-worth, a sense that one is an "other" and heterosexual aggressions and micro-aggressions were indicated by the participants. Other

examples of an inferior theme included 1) having to defend the rights of LGBT + individuals as equal to the civil rights of other minority groups and 2) incurring laughter from students about the existence of the GSA. Case et al. (2014) underscored the concept of heterosexual privilege in their study on male dominance and stressed the need to increase awareness of LGBT + individuals on college campuses.

Invisibility: Feeling invisible was indicated by most of the participants. Examples of this sense of invisibility included feelings of having no voice, negligible representation on campus in the forms of signage and other visual resources, and an overall sense of helplessness. This feeling of invisibility perpetuated a sense of heteronormativity, and increased senses of isolation, alienation and exclusion among LGBT + students. Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri's (2011) research indicated that what is known about the struggles of LGBT + students is "virtually nonexistent" (p. 36), supporting the theme that LGBT + students often experience invisibility on campus.

Social Connection: Another theme that emerged from the interviews and the focus group was the universal agreement that the GSA created a social connection. Each of the participants attributed building community among its members to the GSA. They also indicated that the GSA increased college involvement among its members and positively spread LGBT + awareness to non-GSA members within the institution. The participants explained that this social connection was vital and that the GSA positively combated the central idea of heteronormativity, as well as fought against homophobia through its spread of LGBT + awareness.

Based on the literature, the participants' descriptions of the GSA's providing social connection is especially important for students who are LGBT +. A study conducted by

Tetreault et al. (2013) emphasized one of the most frequent feelings experienced by LGBT + students was isolation.

Support: Another theme that was agreed upon by all the participants was that the GSA provided a safe, if temporary, space each week. The participants described how this support helped GSA members feel more included and accepted on campus. In addition, the participants indicated that the GSA afforded student members a sense of empowerment to feel equal to heterosexual students, to fight the idea of heteronormativity and homophobia, and to build awareness among all students on campus.

The importance of this support among the participants is affirmed in the literature. Alvarez and Schneider's (2008) study on colleges and universities increasing support resources for LGBT + students underscored attempts by various institutions of higher education to make LGBT + students feel more accepted, supported and included.

Emergent Themes Aligned with the Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this study were: 1) as students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community, what are their perceptions of their experiences and 2) What issues or challenges have most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community?

The findings from the individual interviews, focus group, and GSA observations along with other documentation all helped answer the research questions. A 92.1% inter-coder reliability match between the first and second researcher revealed the six emergent themes present within the data provided by the participants. Of the 38 codes derived from the

participants' interview and focus group dialogue and listed in Table 7 within Chapter Three, agreement was formed on 35 codes.

Table 9 details how the research questions aligned with the individual interview and focus group questions. Tables 2 and 3, found within Chapter Three, provide a complete record of the interview and focus group questions. Appendix E lists the individual interview questions and Appendix G lists the focus group questions.

Table 9: Alignment of Research Questions with Interview and Focus Group Questions

Research Question	Interview & Focus Group Questions
As students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community, what are their perceptions of their experiences?	Interview Question #: 1, 1a, 2, 2a, 3, 4 Focus Group Question #: 1, 2
What issues or challenges have most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community?	Interview Question #: 5, 6, 6a, 7, 8, 9 Focus Group Question #: 3, 4, 4a, 5, 6, 7

Research Question 1 – Perceptions

Table 10 illustrates how the concepts of heteronormativity and heterosexism were revealed in the individual interviews, focus group, and observations and how they intersected with the six emergent themes. Research Question 1 centered on asking what the perceptions of the participants' experiences are as they navigate a Central Florida public state college who also participated in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community. Most of the participants indicated that LGBT + students were not treated equally to heterosexual students.

Table 10: Research Question 1 Related to Conceptual Framework

Research Question 1	Heteronormativity	Heterosexism
As students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community, what are their perceptions of their experiences?	**Concept(s) from Individual Interviews and Focus Group:** • *Feel alone/like an "other"* • *Feel like there are few resources* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Invisibility* • *Social Connection* • *Support* **Concept(s) from Observations:** • *Motivated to get more involved with institutional culture* • *Yearning to increase LGBT + student awareness on campus* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Social Connection* • *Support*	**Concept(s) from Individual Interviews and Focus Group:** • *Feel inferior* • *Feel I must act straight* • *Feel I can't be my authentic self* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Conflict of Being* • *Differences of Ideas* • *Inferiority* **Concept(s) from Observations:** • *A drive to reduce heterosexist attitudes on campus* • *Inspired to act individually against heterosexism on campus* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Conflict of Being* • *Differences of Ideas* • *Inferiority*

One example of a heteronormative concept that participants expressed both through individual interviews and the focus group included feeling alone, like the "other," and unable to connect with the larger student population because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Another concept related to heteronormativity related to the consistent perception of a limited amount of resources for LGBT + students on campus. During the Focus Group session,

Rivera emphasized the need for a permanent LGBT + space on campus so that all students could

increase their understanding of this population.

> Having a center for people to go even if they're just curious. Even the guy who is being a
> bully, there could be a whole wall with pamphlets like 'What is non-binary? What is
> agender? What is demi-sexual?' This bully would laugh. He picks one up, taking the
> time to read it, three seconds, [it] gives him a sliver of concentration, and then he can take
> it home and learn about it and it's better that it exists rather than [it] non-existing.
> Because that boy is not going to go to the library and look stuff up. If it's readily
> available it's kind of like shopping in person and shopping online. If it's convenient it's
> easier to do (Focus Group Transcript).

Most of the participants felt there were not sufficient resources or information regarding

the LGBT + community available on campus. Camryn echoed this feeling during the Focus

Group session.

> I don't think GSA is promoted enough. I know we have fliers and stuff, but those are
> little papers people don't take the time to read. My professor, actually, promoted us in
> our class to join the GSA. But it would be cool to see GSA promoted. I know there are a
> lot of LGBTQ + people who don't know about the GSA, so it would be nice to promote it
> more (Focus Group Transcript).

Feeling alone, like the "other", and having an inability to connect with other students

because of one's gender identity were concepts that intersected with the emergent themes of

Invisibility, Social Connection, and Support. The participants' accounts of these feelings and

experiences underscored the heteronormative concept that still pervades college campuses.

When asked during her individual interview what she wished would occur to change this reality,

Fauna encapsulated her sense of feeling like "the other" with the following sentence.

> Seeing just basic acknowledgement that asexuals exist. Yes, that'd be nice (Individual
> Interview Transcript).

One example of a heterosexist concept that was expressed by participants was the feeling

of being inferior to heterosexual students. Some of the participants intimated there had been

instances when they felt they needed to act heterosexual in class because of the fear of being

mocked, or worse, if their association with the LGBT + community was known or discovered.

When asked what the institution could do to help remove barriers for LGBT + students on

campus, Zack recommended the institution work toward making LGBT + students feel more

welcome within the classroom.

> I would think they would work on some classes. [Provide] more information, [be] more
> informative. [Provide] classes for other students about [the LGBT +] community
> (Individual Interview Transcript).

Another example of a heterosexist concept participants expressed involved feeling one

could not fully speak one's thoughts on being part of the LGBT + community during discussions

in class for fear of negative repercussions from other students. During Camryn's individual

interview, she described feeling unsupported by most students while she attempted to educate a

classmate about sex and gender identity. The classmate's aggressive response and apparent

frustration about the topic pressured Camryn to end the discussion quickly out of fear that a

conflict would escalate. Although the professor supported this diverse debate, no calls for

civility and calm were made, resulting in Camryn's sense of isolation and conflict of being

increasing.

> We were talking about women's rights, and it digressed into LGBTQ + rights, and one of
> my classmates did not understand the difference between sex and gender identity and he
> got really upset and the atmosphere in the class got really tense, like it got super intense.
> And there were only two people, me and another person, who actually stood up and tried
> [to] explain it to the class, explaining to the classmate that there's a difference between
> your sex and your gender identity (Individual Interview Transcript).

Feeling inferior and the need to hide one's true self were concepts that intersected with the

emergent themes of Conflict of Being, Differences of Ideas, and Inferiority.

Feeling alone and/or like the "other" was a concept mentioned frequently among the participants. Fauna, specifically, expressed a feeling of ostracization, not just from the heterosexual majority, but also from members of the LGBT + community on campus, as well. Her frustration stemmed from a perception of being alone on campus and that her asexuality was not recognized.

> Well, as I discussed during the actual interview, I'm asexual and a-phobia doesn't seem as prevalent as homophobia or transphobia or biphobia, but it does exist. It's not big things, it's tons and tons of little things. Things like you've seen, a lot of teachers have these signs on their door saying this is a safe space for the LGBTQI community. Know what's missing? (Focus Group Transcript).

Fauna's perception of feeling alone and treated like the "other" aligned with the theme of Invisibility. While there were no instances of aggression or overt risk of safety to Fauna's situation, the sense of not being recognized for who one was could have devastating consequences for one's sense of self-worth. This ignorance of the asexual population promoted a heteronormative environment through a perpetuated notion that heterosexuality was the normal sexual identity.

Fauna's accounting of her step-mother's suggesting that her asexuality would end once she found the right person illustrated heteronormative thinking. This way of thinking invalidated asexuality as a sexual identity and promoted the idea that one needed only to find the right sexual mate for attraction to occur. This situation also strengthened the argument for all student populations to have a sense of Support and a Social Connection – two of the six common themes to emerge out of the individual interviews and focus group.

Feeling that there were too few resources available for students regarding the LGBT + community was another concept connected with heteronormativity. This sense perpetuated the idea that the LGBT + community was not as relevant as the heterosexual community; therefore,

resources and information on the LGBT + community did not need to be made widely available.

Many of the participants expressed a feeling that there were not enough resources and

information available regarding the LGBT + community. Enrico expressed a desire for more

visible resources not just for LGBT + students, but also for heterosexual students.

> Like, maybe the GSA get more promoted. Maybe more promoted, more activities
> (inaudible) more visible…maybe even a class on Gay History or something, or just being
> a homosexual like comes from the Greek gods, and it goes way back, past time, like
> religion, politics… (Individual Interview Transcript).

Enrico's concern about limited resources supported the themes of Invisibility and

Support. He argued that the more students knew about the LGBT + community, the more

normalized that population would become on campus, and not seen as something different. With

increased resources and attention, LGBT + students on campus would not be as invisible, and the

effects of heteronormativity could be minimized.

Heterosexist Concepts with Intersected Themes

Participants expressed feelings of inferiority in both the individual interviews and focus

group. Heteronormativity promoted heterosexuality as the normal sexual identity. This

promotion contributed to a sense of inferiority among LGBT + individuals on college campuses.

Zack described the struggle he experienced growing up gay, the bullying he saw at school, and

his inability to speak about his identity with his parents. His parents made it clear that they did

not accept homosexuality. This inability to speak about his sexual identity made him feel

inferior.

> I was growing up as a homosexual, and um, um, I couldn't tell my parents. I saw other
> students being harassed [for the same thing]. Call them faggot, and gay, and you know,
> being physical with these people, beating them up, hurting them. And, and, I, myself,
> had nowhere to go and no one to talk to, and this was in high school. I can't go to my
> parents (Individual Interview Transcript).

Enrico recalled his childhood in Puerto Rico before moving to Florida and the challenges that came with discovering his homosexuality. Enrico shared that before he came out to his family he felt pressure to act heterosexual, and to pretend to be someone he was not. When he finally gathered the courage to come out to his mother, her reaction was negative.

> My mom was like 'Oh why you did this? What was wrong that I did because I never saw you play with barbies' and stupid comments and I'm like 'I don't need to play with barbies to be gay' like I don't even like barbies to begin with (Individual Interview Transcript).

Enrico shared that before he entered college, he endured a tremendous amount of pressure from his family and from his church that homosexuality was wrong, and he felt he had to pretend to be heterosexual. It was not until he began attending college that he had the courage to be his authentic self, which was another concept raised by some of the participants related to heterosexism. The concept of hiding one's authentic-self reinforced the emergent themes of Conflict of Being and Differences of Ideas. Many of the participants expressed sadness that many of their friends and family members did not initially – or in some instances still did not – accept and embrace who they were. When asked to describe any specific experiences in which he felt marginalized, alienated, or excluded, Seraph mentioned such experiences with his mother.

> She has more conservative beliefs. I don't think she was ready to accept something like that, even though [I think] she kind of knew it was coming eventually (Individual Interview Transcript).

Camryn echoed similar sentiments on feeling marginalized, alienated, or excluded from her family during her individual interview.

> One of the biggest ones is going to be with my family. I know they're not very supportive with the LGBTQ+ community. So, I don't really talk about it, I can't even show support for the LGBTQ+ community, as an ally, so that's definitely one of the times I felt alienated. (Individual Interview Transcript).

This Differences of Ideas could often lead to thoughts of inferiority. Many of the participants also shared that they have felt pressure to present themselves as two different people: one who was part of the heterosexual world and one who was part of the LGBT + world. Rivera shared that for four years he hid the fact that he was living as a trans-male, denying himself, because of societal pressure, the opportunity to be his authentic self.

> More so than the sexuality issue whatever that may be, that's never really been a problem so much as gender, and they're kind of correlated in the sense that I've been in the past when I've presented fully as male, and it depends who (inaudible) pre- or post-surgery. It's all very situation-based. But I have been in situations where I've entered the male's bathroom, and I'm just to use it, I'm not there to peep. I'm there to do the same business that everybody else is doing and I've been threatened to get the shit beat out of me (Individual Interview Transcript).

Research Question 1 – Perceptions Summary

Through several representative quotes from the individual interviews and focus group sessions, this section described multiple examples of how heteronormativity and heterosexism have negatively affected the perceptions of the participants. Feelings of inferiority, invisibility, loneliness, and even pressure to present to the world as someone other than one's authentic self were all examples of the corrosive impact these concepts have had on these individuals who are LGBT +.

Research Question 2 – Issues or Challenges

Table 11 reveals how Research Question 2 and the concepts of heteronormativity and heterosexism were revealed in the individual interviews, focus group, and observations and how they intersected with any of the six emergent themes. Research Question 2 centered on asking what issues or challenges most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida

public state college and who participated in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community.

Table 11: Research Question 2 Related to Conceptual Framework

Research Question 2	Heteronormativity	Heterosexism
What issues or challenges have most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community?	**Concept(s) from Individual Interviews and Focus Group:** • *Wanting to have my voice heard* • *Needing to have a safe space for my community* • *Feeling acknowledged and validated* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Invisibility* • *Social Connection* • *Support* **Concept(s) from Observations:** • *A yearning for more institutional acknowledgement* • *Greater student body awareness of GSA* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Support* • *Social Connection*	**Concept(s) from Individual Interviews and Focus Group:** • *Feeling inferior* • *Feeling I must act straight* • *Feeling I can't be my authentic self* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Conflict of Being* • *Differences of Ideas* • *Inferiority* **Concept(s) from Observations:** • *Reduce pressure to act straight* • *Celebrate one's authentic self without fear* **Intersected Theme(s):** • *Conflict of Being* • *Inferiority*

Most participants described experiences in which they felt they were treated as less equal than heterosexual students. During Rivera's individual interview, he discussed the importance of

institution's having gender-neutral bathrooms. He acknowledged that his institution provided

gender-neutral bathrooms, but also lamented that he and other transgendered students still faced

scrutiny for using those facilities when heterosexual students did not face the same scrutiny.

> We have a gender-neutral bathroom in [institution building number] and I utilize that, it makes me feel comfortable. But then again that's the kind of thing that is easy [for people to make fun of]. Some student can be like 'Hey guys look at this, they have a [space where a] tranny [can] walk in there!' It leaves so much space for harassment and bullying, and when it comes to, regressing back to middle-school tactics, like I said before, the sensitive hearts of pubescent children, bullying is such a part of in the early stages of adolescence, and we're doing the same as adults (Individual Interview Transcript).

One example of a heteronormative concept expressed either through individual

interviews or through the focus group involved participants who are LGBT + wanting to have

their voices heard.

> I joined the GSA to have my voice spoken for the Gay/Straight Alliance. I am gay, and I want to have my voice heard (Individual Interview Transcript).

Chad's desire to have his voice heard as a gay man underscored heteronormativity's

influence in society. Typically, a heterosexual student would usually feel his or her voice was

being heard in society based on his or her sexual orientation and/or gender identity because that

orientation and identity was already considered normal, and heard, by society. Chad's voice still

was not.

Rivera expressed a second example of how heteronormative concepts pervaded society

when he responded to Enrico's comment about heterosexual individuals asking LGBT +

members who was the *man* and *woman* in the relationship.

> I think people are just insecure about themselves and that's why they're pointing fingers. But besides that, when you said [people asked who is the] man and woman in the relationship, that's just a good old, smack-dab of heteronormativity of society (Focus Group Transcript).

Another common concept related to heteronormativity involved the desire and need for a permanent safe space set aside for the LGBT + community on campus. Rivera lamented that his institution did not have a center dedicated to LGBT + students on campus but expressed excitement that the institution he planned to transfer to did.

> I'm hoping maybe one day [this institution] will have something similar to [the transfer institution] because right now it's only a club. And while there is funding for it, and it's under the umbrella of the Student Government Association, it's just that [the transfer institution], from what I understand, there's a whole center for it [LGBT + students]. And that, for me, I'm going in the fall, I'm so excited, I'm vibrating (Focus Group Transcript).

Rivera expressed that a permanent safe space would increase a sense of safety for LGBT + students, promote awareness to the larger campus, and hopefully minimize heteronormativity. These concepts intersected with the emergent themes of Invisibility, Social Connection, and Support.

One example of a heterosexist concept expressed by Camryn was the difficulty of adjusting her sexual identity around her friends to minimize their discomfort and the lack of support among friends and work colleagues. This struggle underscored, for Camryn, the importance of the GSA.

> Just in general, my groups of friends from, say high school, or just at work or something, not a lot of them understand, I mean, they would accept me for who I am, but they would not support me for who I am, if that makes any sense. Yeah, they're fine with it, but they're not gonna try to give me the extra push. (Individual Interview Transcript).

These concepts intersected with the emergent themes of Conflict of Being, Differences of Ideas, and Inferiority.

Heteronormative Concepts with Intersected Themes

Some of the participants explained that a primary reason for joining the GSA was to have their voices heard, as Chad revealed during his interview and was documented in Chapter Four.

In many instances LGBT + students may not be in a position – whether at school, home, or at

work – in which they could safely share their opinions and viewpoints. Being part of the GSA

allowed that opportunity without fear of retribution. Camryn celebrated the benefit the GSA

affords participants to having their voices heard.

> It's basically a more accepting space, and a safe space, that I can talk, especially for
> people who aren't out of the closet, it's pretty tough to talk to about it…definitely a place
> where I can find people like me, who, we can have like discussions, like even like
> political discussions that we can all agree on (Individual Interview Transcript).

A consistent concept some participants mentioned was the need to have a safe space for

the LGBT + community on campus, and how the GSA helped contribute to that need. Seraph

discussed the benefits he imagined the GSA brought many of its members.

> I myself, particularly didn't go through any real hardships, but I know, just because I
> didn't, doesn't mean that there aren't other people who certainly have, and for someone
> like that person, um, oh my goodness, for someone like that the GSA would no doubt be
> very important in their life, so I do think it's important something like the GSA exists,
> because, not everyone is going to be like me (Individual Interview Transcript).

The heteronormative concepts discussed supported the themes of Invisibility, Social

Connection and Support.

Heterosexist Concepts with Intersected Themes

When reflecting on the challenges he experienced at work, Chad expressed dismay

toward colleagues who were openly not supportive of the LGBT + community and described

how he had been passed over for promotions specifically because of his homosexuality.

> So, I know at my job, there tends to be a lot of [talk about inclusion]. However, there are
> a lot of people who are not open to [celebrating] inclusion, who still have a, I'm gonna
> say for example, an old way of thinking. So, it's really hard to connect with a lot of the
> people that I work with. And um, because of that I felt a bit challenged. It even
> prevented me from getting a promotion at one point (Individual Interview Transcript).

Chad's challenge supported the themes of Conflict of Being, Differences of Ideas, and Inferiority. Although some of his colleagues expressed support of inclusion, others did not. Chad's unease to fully express an authentic identity in the workplace confirmed Conflict of Being. Resulting experiences included feeling inferior and an aversion to sharing specific points of view for fear of rejection and further alienation.

Research Question 2 – Issues or Challenges Summary

Challenges and issues captured through several quotes from the individual interviews and focus group sessions underscored how heteronormativity and heterosexism had negatively affected the participants. Whether it was pressure from friends to act a certain way or knowingly being discriminated against at work for being part of the LGBT + community, feelings of inferiority, invisibility, loneliness, and even pressure to present to the world as someone other than one's authentic self were all examples of the corrosive impact these concepts had on the participants.

Analysis through Observation and other Documentation

In addition to the individual interviews and focus group session, the researcher observed two GSA meetings and a film/discussion forum hosted by the [institution] College Peace and Justice Institute. The GSA observations provided invaluable information and a better understanding of the mission and purpose of the support group and how it benefited the student members. The Peace and Justice Institute provided a platform to discuss the equalization and normalization of LGBT + culture in mainstream society and worked to combat heteronormativity and heterosexism. Together, these observations provided opportunities for the researcher to witness, firsthand, the benefits and contributions these student support groups provided to

114

members. Appendices N and O summarize the purpose and type of the two GSA meetings and Appendix P summarize the Peace and Justice Institute film/discussion forum.

After confirming permission to attend and observe a GSA club meeting, the researcher attended a session on December 5, 2017. The meeting was held in a campus classroom, with tables and chairs arranged in a square shape for student members to face one another during discussions. After the club president and vice-president announced the agenda of topics for the session, the meeting begun. The students' passionate dialogue toward LGBT + equality was a truly inspiring session to observe. There were approximately 20 students who attended this session, and many student members engaged in active discussions on a range of topics, from heterosexual privilege on campus and in society, in general, to the need to increase campus awareness of the GSA. Some student members discussed feeling inferior to heterosexual students on campus and wished their voices could be heard by the general student population. Other members voiced opinions that the GSA needed to be more vocal and involved with other elements of the college to increase influence.

Overall, the observation of this GSA club session was productive. The student members seemed interested and inspired by my study. All seven participants of this study were present at this club session. At the club session's conclusion, the researcher sought permission from the students to observe their club a second time. Permission was granted unanimously. Appendix N contains further details of the first GSA club observation.

The researcher observed the GSA club meeting a second time on February 6, 2018. Several weeks had passed since the first observation, and the researcher had already concluded the seven individual interviews with the student volunteers by this date. This second club meeting was held in the same classroom as the December 5, 2017 meeting, and the tables and

chairs were arranged in a similar pattern. The entire meeting's agenda centered on the panel

discussion "Breaking Down the Walls" that was to take place the next day on February 7, 2018.

This panel discussion was presented by the Hispanic Federation at the Orlando Museum of Art

and focused on barriers and threats faced by the Latin-American LGBT + communities.

Approximately 20 students attended this club session as well, including the seven student

volunteers of this study. Concepts such as invisibility, inferiority, and fear of safety were

discussed among several students. Appendix O contains further details of the second GSA club

observation.

Prior to the second observation of the GSA club session, the researcher attended and

observed a film and discussion forum hosted by the institution's Peace and Justice Institute on

January 30, 2018. The film and discussion forum focused on the short documentary *Love the*

Sinner, which explored the connection between Christianity and homophobia in the wake of the

shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. The film was shown first, followed by a

panel conversation. This panel was an open forum as part of a series centered on Peace and

Justice. Approximately 30 individuals attended the forum and comprised students, faculty, staff,

and other members of the public. Concepts such as heteronormativity and homophobia were

discussed among the participants. Other concepts such as evangelism, personal biases, personal

shame, and inferiority were also discussed. Appendix P contains further details of the

observation of this Peace and Justice forum.

Appendix Q details the various documents gathered during the observation sessions.

Included is information discovered from public documents on the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme

Court case, resulting in same-sex marriage becoming legal in the entire United States in 2015.

These documents, along with the observations of the GSA sessions and the Peace and Justice

Institute film/discussion forum, have helped the researcher to not only gain a better

understanding of the struggles and barriers still faced by members of the LGBT + community,

but also how this institution provides forums related to these topics.

Summary

Through a comprehensive analysis (Moustakas, 1994) that involved member-checking,

triangulation, observation, document analysis, and an inter-coder reliability relationship with an

additional researcher detailed in Chapter Three, six common themes emerged from the analysis

shared by all the participants in one way or another. This analysis included studying the

interrelation of the research questions with the interview and focus group questions and how

these six common themes corresponded with the conceptual framework of the dissertation.

In addition, the knowledge gathered through the GSA club and Peace and Justice Forum

observations, along with the document analysis, strongly supported the evidence that

heterosexuality and heterosexist attitudes still pervade the college environment. Although many

of the student participants acknowledged feeling safe at their institution, they all expressed

experiences of feeling inferior and invisible on their campus based on their sexual identity.

The seven participants provided unique perspectives of their own experiences. Although

all the participants described instances of hardship – some more severe than others – each of

them provided a profound gratitude for the existence of the GSA and expressed hope that it

would continue to be a beacon for good on their campus. More details about these positive

aspirations and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to ask students participating in an LGBT + support group within a Central Florida public state college to share their experiences in college and to identify any issues or challenges impacting them the most. This qualitative study focused on an LGBT + student support group at a public state college in the Central Florida area. Data gathering procedures included recruitment of student participants, interviews, a focus group, observation of GSA club meetings and a Peace and Justice Institute event, keeping a research journal, and document gathering. Ethnographic interviews with seven student participants, along with a focus group involving four of the seven participants, were conducted. Moustakas (1994) stated that ethnography allows for "direct observations of the activities of the group being studied" (p. 1). Research trustworthiness and validity were accomplished using multiple methods, including member-checking, inter-coder reliability, and triangulation.

Two research questions were the foundation of this study: 1) gaining greater understanding of the student participants' perceptions of their experiences and 2) discovering what issues or challenges have most significantly impacted them. While formulating the research questions, the researcher analyzed heteronormativity and heterosexism, forming a conceptual framework, to gain a better understanding of the experiences of student members of a Central Florida public state college LGBT + support group. Chambers (2007) detailed how society used heterosexuality as the basis for *normal* behavior and highlighted the corrosive effects that mindset has had on the LGBT + community. Examples of these corrosive effects included all the themes discussed in Chapter 5 (Conflict of Being, Differences of Ideas, Inferiority, Invisibility, Social Connection, and Support) that contributed to feelings of marginalization,

alienation, and exclusion experienced by LGBT + individuals. The following research questions

guided the researcher's study:

- As students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community, what are their perceptions of their experiences?

- What issues or challenges have most significantly impacted students enrolled in a Central Florida public state college and who participate in a student support group focused on the LGBT + community?

Discussion of Research Questions

Research Question 1

The themes that emerged from the inter-coder reliability analysis, along with the

observations and participants' own words gathered from the interviews and focus group, helped

to answer Research Question 1. Overall, the perceptions of the seven participants' experiences

in college as they related to their involvement with a student support group focused on the LGBT

+ community were mostly positive. All seven participants confirmed that the existence of the

GSA at their institution provided a generally welcoming environment for them. Rivera

explained that the GSA helped reduce potentially anti-LGBT + biases. He attributed the

opportunities the GSA provided its members for changing the minds of non-members who may

have anti-LGBT + biases. Those opportunities started with educating non-members.

> And it's up to that other party to truly absorb it all, and see if it affects their core as a person, because you can't change the way they were brought up, the things held, you know, the things that affect their behavior in the way that they act, and think and judge, and function every day. You may not be able to change that, but by planting the seed of thought in someone's heart and soul, that will grow over time, and that can possibly change the way that they think and act on a daily basis. So, for someone like me, even though I don't have faith, I will gladly listen to the ways and the teaching and the opinion of someone who does. It's not going to change me, but the thought is there, and I feel more educated, because now I can empathize with them, while not agreeing with them (Individual Interview Transcript).

Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement underscored the increased opportunities for learning with students who are engaged in the college environment. Rivera's comments that the GSA helped reduce anti-LGBT + biases on campus supported that theory. The seven interview participants also universally agreed that they generally felt safe at their institution and did not fear for their physical well-being. Rivera specifically cited his institution's open-admission policy – along with its location in a large, diverse and urban setting – as positive contributions to the welcoming environment which he felt existed as he attended his classes on campus.

One negative perception relayed by many of the participants, however, was a lack of GSA visibility among the general student population on campus. Many of the participants voiced concern that the institution was not adequately attempting to increase LGBT + awareness to other students. There was a genuine desire among some of the participants to increase that awareness through various methods. Enrico proposed that the institution provided "Gay History 101" courses so that other students could learn about LGBT + culture.

Camryn suggested that members of the GSA expand their network to other LGBT + organizations in the broader community to increase awareness of LGBT + issues. She also suggested the GSA become more involved with other student development clubs and organizations on campus. Evans et al. (2010) discussed the cognitive and spiritual effects student development organizations in higher education could have on students. By collaborating with other student organizations, GSA members could increase awareness opportunities on campus, while simultaneously reducing feelings of alienation and exclusion.

Research Question 2

Several issues and challenges impacting the student participants were revealed through the data gathering (interviews and focus group) and analysis (inter-coder reliability). One of

those challenges involved the feeling, among some of the participants, of invisibility. Tetreault et al.'s (2013) study assessing LGBTQ students' perceptions of climate on their college campus reported most of the respondents feeling neither positive about or included on their campus. In fact, the main theme resulting from Tetreault et al.'s (2013) study was the participants' profound sense of isolation.

Fauna lamented that her institution's lack of recognition of her sexual identity. Her frustration was not limited to the institution, but also to the members of the GSA who often lacked literature or even mentioning asexuality as part of the LGBT + community. Camryn's tense interaction with a hostile classmate underscored the heteronormative culture LGBT + students still often navigate on this college campus. Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri's (2011) study regarding the community college experience reported that when LGBT + students have sought help from institution officials often that help is ignored due to lack of resources for this student population.

Camryn explained through her interview – as well as during the focus group – that her attempt to explain the difference between sex and gender identity to the classmate was demoralizing. The classmate's dismissal of Camryn's attempt to defend and equate the struggles and hardships of those in the LGBT + community with the struggles of other minorities during the United States' Civil Rights era during the mid-20th century was equally humiliating for Camryn. The classmate rejected that comparison and insinuated that LGBT + and race struggles were not on the same level. To Camryn, this dismissal by that student exemplified the heteronormative culture pervasive on the campus. Heterosexual students did not find themselves defending their sexual identity in that classroom.

Camryn's encounter with the classmate underscored the alienation bisexual students faced on college campuses. This encounter with the classmate also validated Chambers' (2007) writings on society's view that heterosexuality was the "median point on the normal curve" (p. 663) and that LGBT + sexual orientations were deviants of that normalcy. Camryn's encounter also confirmed Jackson's (2006) work on gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality. Jackson's (2006) portrayal of how heteronormativity had been so tightly "woven into the fabric of social life" (p. 108) supported Camryn's encounter with the classmate whose ideas on sex and gender, based on the encounter, appeared heteronormative. Meem et al.'s (2010) study on LGBT + activists declared that homosexuality had to be equated with race and gender for heterosexual recognition to be considered.

Rivera lamented the lack of a permanent space for LGBT + students as a challenge and theorized that if the institution provided a permanent space, heteronormativity would be reduced. He argued that with a constant LGBT + presence on campus, the general student population could potentially see this population as just as normal as heterosexual students, reducing this sense of "otherness" and truly creating a sense of equality, inclusion, and acceptance. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explained that an individual's sexual identity development was often influenced by environment. A prominent LGBT + presence on a college environment could potentially impact a student's sexual identity in a positive way. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also stated there is "evidence suggesting that low-density, diverse friendship networks may have a positive impact on what might be considered other ethically oriented behaviors" (p. 361). Institutions of higher education that promote LGBT + awareness may reduce heteronormative attitudes among the general student population.

Based on Rivera's insights, as important as the GSA is, a student-led group that meets in random classrooms intermittently was just not visible enough to make a significant impact with the general student population. With the GSA's relatively low public profile and presence on campus, the institution had risked marginalizing GSA members, and the club's mission was devalued in the eyes of the larger campus community.

<div align="center">Interrelation of Six Themes with the Research Questions</div>

The data gathered from the individual interviews, focus group, and observations confirmed an interrelation of the six themes with the research questions. Overall, in reference to Research Question 1, the seven participants perceived genuine support from their institution. Membership in the GSA increased that sense of support. That membership fostered a sense of genuine social connection among one another. However, there was also consensus among the participants that the GSA visibility was lacking on campus, and that the institution was not doing enough to address this, confirming the themes of Invisibility and Inferiority.

Regarding Research Question 2, several of the participants bemoaned the extent of heteronormativity on campus and wondered why they had to adjust their authentic selves. This sense of anguish supported the themes of Conflict of Being and Differences of Ideas. GSA membership helped to quell these feelings among the student participants, but a yearning for greater awareness and acknowledgement remained. Figure 2 illustrates the interrelated pattern of the six themes which emerged from this study. While all the participants acknowledged feeling forms of social connection and support from the GSA and the institution, they also expressed negative feelings of inferiority, invisibility, and having to hide their authentic selves. To help combat those feelings, these students relied on the GSA for comfort, yet the negative themes

remain. This pattern suggested a continuing cycle that institutions of higher education need to address to meet the needs of LGBT + student population.
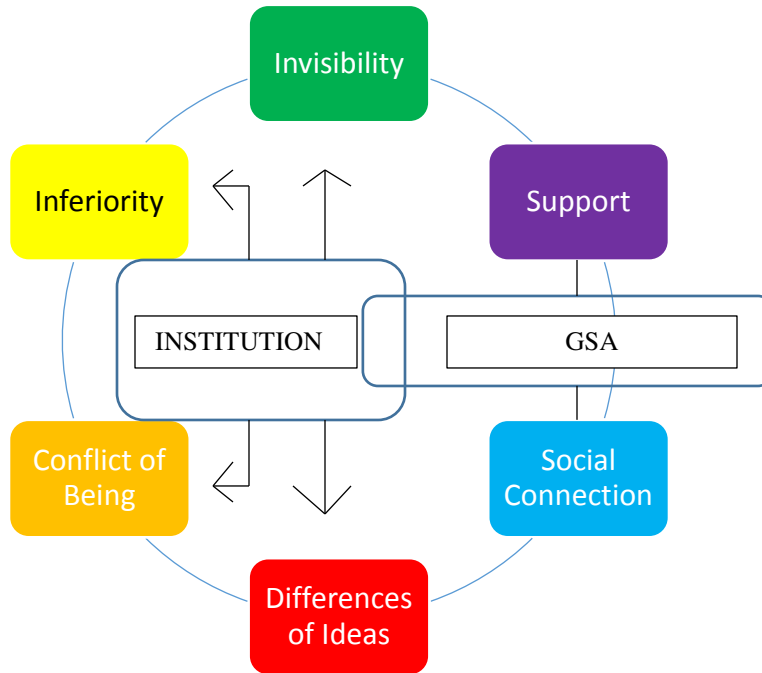

Figure 2: Interrelation of Six Themes

<u>Limitations and Delimitations of the Study</u>

Limitations

There were several limitations to this research study that were beyond the researcher's control. One limitation involved the number of participants for the interviews and the focus group. Of approximately 20 to 30 students who were offered the opportunity to participate in the study, only seven responded and followed through with the individual interview. Of the seven students who participated with the individual interview, only four participated in the focus group.

Time restraints contributed greatly to the relatively low number of student participants. It was the goal of the researcher to conduct the interviews and focus group during the spring 2018

semester; however, due to IRB delays, invitations to participate in the study were delivered in December 2017.

Another limitation included the researcher's assumption that the seven students who participated in the individual interviews – along with the four students who participated in the focus group – answered each question truthfully. Every effort was made through document gathering and analysis to ensure trustworthiness and validity, but the results were largely based on the answers provided by the participants.

A final limitation involved the knowledge and experience of the participants related to the LGBT + struggle. Most of the participants indicated they were between the ages of 18 and 24. The young ages and inexperience's of many of the participants might answer, in part, for the short length of time of most of the participants' interviews. Rivera was an exceptional case, with an interview time of almost one hour in length. Rivera indicated an age of between 25 and 31 and had a knowledge of LGBT + vocabulary and history that appeared to surpass that of the other participants.

Delimitations

Despite the limitations listed, several delimitations were within the researcher's control. Simon (2011) recommended delimitations as an effective way to structure the study toward a specific population. One delimitation was the researcher's deliberate choice to interview only between seven and 10 students, despite the relatively large number of invitations delivered. The researcher chose this small sample of students to achieve a more deliberative, personal, and intimate set of responses. Another delimitation involved the purposeful choice to focus on the gay/straight alliance of just one public, Florida state college rather than multiple colleges to ascertain the experiences of student participants within a large, diverse, urban setting (Simon,

2011). This decision allowed the researcher to develop a better understanding of what the experiences, perceptions, issues, and challenges were of a single group of students in one setting. Another delimitation was the researcher's decision to focus the research study through the conceptual framework of heteronormativity and heterosexism. By intersecting the research questions through this conceptual framework, the researcher was able to gain a greater understanding of the experiences, perceptions, issues, and challenges of these student participants.

Researcher Reflection

Prior to conducting the participant interviews and focus group, the researcher recognized an assumption that the participants may describe higher instances of alienation and exclusion on campus than what would actually be described. The researcher mitigated that assumption to avoid any potential biases by remembering a number of factors. These factors included the researcher remembering the fact that the researcher never participated in an LGBT +-student support group while in college, as well as the acknowledgement that in the United States there has been a general increase of societal acceptance of the LGBT + community since the researcher pursued an undergraduate degree.

After the participant interviews and focus group, the researcher discovered that, despite some levels of feeling alienation and exclusion on campus by the participants, all the participants also praised their institution for creating a supportive environment for LGBT + students. The participants' responses helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of how those individuals perceived acceptance from their institution.

<u>Recommendations</u>

Through the data gathering and analysis, the researcher has provided recommendations for the following groups:

1. The GSA

2. Institutions of Higher Education – Specifically State and Other Two-Year/Community Colleges

3. Future Research

For the GSA

Based on the responses from the individual interviews and focus group, the researcher recommends for the GSA students and facilitators to continue advocating for increased awareness of LGBT + issues on their campus. Many of the student participants explained they felt more empowered as members of the GSA. As a group, student members of the GSA could seek opportunities within their institution to find a permanent meeting location on campus, as well as consistent methods of communicating literature to the general student population on matters important to the LGBT + community. GSA student members should only do this in a manner that does not put any person in danger of physical harm.

The GSA student members should also listen and respect one another. Fauna disliked that her asexuality was often not even recognized by other members of the LGBT + community. Advocacy for more recognition from the institution is important but recognizing all GSA members is equally vital. LGBT + history recorded several instances of discrimination, marginalization, and alienation inflicted on members of that community. The seven participants of this study have all confirmed experiencing those feelings on campus as well. Students need to be mindful not to inflict those experiences on other students within their community.

To combat heteronormativity and heterosexism on campus and to spread LGBT +

awareness, GSA student members must continue holding regular sessions and develop strategies

to advocate against homophobia in a safe and civil manner. The researcher stresses that GSA

student members should advocate against homophobia only if they are able to do so safely. GSA

leadership should also consider collaborating with the institution's Peace and Justice Institute,

which operates on a year-round basis, to create programming and other educational materials to

increase LGBT + awareness on campus. Continual forums, workshops, and educational

seminars addressing such diverse topics as sexual and gender identity, LGBT + bullying,

heteronormativity, and homophobia are all options to be considered.

For Institutions of Higher Education – Specifically State and other Two-Year/Community
Colleges

There are several recommendations for state and other two-year/community colleges that

may decrease instances of heteronormativity and heterosexism. Based on the themes that

emerged from the inter-coder reliability process, the first recommendation by the researcher is

for institutions of higher education –specifically for state and other two-year/community colleges

– to create a permanent, safe space, on campuses for student members of GSA. Alvarez and

Schneider (2008) concluded that institutions that provided dedicated safe spaces to student

members of the LGBT + community (and heterosexual allies) demonstrated a more meaningful

commitment to inclusion and acceptance. The emergent themes all underscored the yearning for

inclusion and acceptance held by the participating student members.

With perceptions of invisibility, inferiority, conflict of being, a differences of ideas, and

needs for social connection and support, student members of the LGBT + community may feel

more accepted with a permanent, dedicated safe space that recognized who they are as

legitimate. By providing a permanent, dedicated space for LGBT + students on campus, the institution would demonstrate an enduring commitment of support and validation for student members of this population. Heterosexuality would no longer be considered the normal sexual identity in absolution, because the presence of an LGBT + space would help invalidate that premise. LGBT + students are still a persecuted population on college campuses. Institutions have an obligation to ensure LGBT + students are able to expresses views and advocate for equal treatment without fear of physical harm.

Figure 3 details the eight factors contributing to an LGBT +-friendly college environment (Campus Pride Index, 2018). Campus Pride's mission is to foster leadership among LGBT + college students and to promote resources that contribute toward safe, more LGBT +-friendly colleges and universities in the United States. Campus Pride's index tool includes 50+ self-assessment questions that correspond to the eight LGBT +-friendly factors.

Figure 3: 8 Factors for an LGBT +-Friendly College Environment

Source: Campus Pride Index, 2018. Reprinted with Permission of Campus Pride

Based on the Campus Pride data, the researcher's second recommendation is for the institution to review its policies and procedures to determine alignment with Campus Pride's list of factors. The researcher's themes are listed in parentheses that relate to each factor.

1. Policy Inclusion: The institution includes language and policies supporting the rights of LGBT + students, faculty, and/or staff (Conflict of Being, Inferiority, and Invisibility).

2. Support & Institutional Commitment: The institution provides LGBT + resources and training to increase awareness of the LGBT + community (Support).

3. Campus Safety: The institution provides adequate safety for students (including LGBT + students) (Support).

4. Counseling & Health: The institution provides counseling and/or health services for students (including LGBT + students) (Conflict of Being, Support, Social Connection).

5. Academic Life: The institution incorporates LGBT + culture and history within the academic curriculum (Differences of Ideas, Invisibility).

6. Student Life: The institution includes LGBT + support resources within its student development department (Social Connection, Support).

7. Housing: The institution provides housing for students (including LGBT + students) (Support).

8. Recruitment and Retention Efforts: The institution provides incentives for students to attend and remain (including LGBT + students) (Social Connection, Support).

Although most state and other two-year/community colleges typically do not offer housing (dormitories) to students, to accommodate Factor 7, the institution could maintain and provide a robust listing of housing resources and accommodations, including those specifically for LGBT + students.

A third recommendation for state and other two-year/community colleges is to offer workshops dedicated to increasing awareness of the LGBT + community and that could potentially lead to a form of certification. The suggestion of an LGBT + curriculum was specifically recommended by Enrico and echoed by many of the other participants of this study. By offering a workshop dedicated to increasing awareness of the LGBT + community, heteronormativity and heterosexism may be diminished. Alvarez and Schneider (2008) contended as more students learn about this community, the less alien, different, and "other" it becomes. Workshops for the institution's faculty and staff should also be offered.

A fourth recommendation is a commitment from institutions of higher education – specifically state and other two-year/community colleges – to create a campus environment dedicated to eliminating heteronormativity. Institutions could achieve this recommendation by committing to, and following, all three recommendations discussed. It is the researcher's hope that this study will act as a guide to assist in the diminishment of heteronormativity and heterosexism on college campuses.

But it will be the student participants of the GSA whose voices are the most important. Recommendations from a doctoral study provides context and data to support a position, but the students are active participants in their institution. Their daily experiences on campus contribute to the institution's culture. To make their institution a more inclusive, welcoming, and embracing one for LGBT + students, ultimately those students, themselves, must advocate for such standards.

It is the researcher's fifth recommendation that leaders of institutions of higher education – specifically state and other two-year/community colleges – conduct regular listening sessions and forums with student members of the GSA on their campuses to learn of the needs of this

unique student population. White et al. (2012) advocated that institutions of education listen to

the voices of its students and faculty/staff for reflection. For the LGBT + community on

campuses, this step could help reduce and hopefully fully eliminate heteronormativity on campus

and elevate tolerance of the LGBT + community to celebration and acceptance. Acts of

aggression and feelings of superiority which could lead to bullying are symptoms of

heteronormativity which LGBT + awareness can combat.

To specifically address Fauna's concern, it is the researcher's final recommendation that

institutions of higher education should deliberately acknowledge asexuality by including that

sexual identity in campus-related literature and by including the letter *A* in acronyms like

LGBT*A* +. The researcher purposefully elected to omit the letter *A* when the term LGBT + was

discussed in this study to emphasize its absence and advocate for its inclusion in this

recommendation.

For Future Research

The results of this dissertation offer opportunities for future research on students who are

members of a GSA student support group. Findings from this study indicated the participants

feel a genuine sense of support from their institution and the GSA provides social connection.

But despite those positive findings, all of the participants indicated also experiencing feelings of

invisibility, inferiority, a conflict with their authentic self in front of others in the college

environment, and a nervousness about expressing their unique ideas with heterosexual students.

Research on how effective these student support groups are in reducing some of those

negative experiences listed should be considered. Future research on how GSA support groups

contribute to reducing suicide rates and improving retention, recruitment, and graduation rates

among its members should also be considered. Institutions of higher education could conduct

this research in a variety of ways, including sending surveys to student members and conducting focus groups.

Conclusion

The researcher conducted this study because of the relative lack of literature and knowledge about the perceptions and experiences of student members of an LGBTA + support group specifically situated in a Florida state and other two-year/community college settings. Through the courageous voices of the seven participants, their perceptions and experiences have expanded the body of knowledge and literature about the importance of student support groups such as the GSA mentioned in this study. The researcher hopes that their contributions will assist and guide institutions of higher education – specifically state and other two-year/community colleges – to continue to develop programs dedicated to ending heteronormativity and heterosexism.

The seven participants all concluded that their institution works toward creating a safe environment for them. But at the same time, all the participants validated the vital importance and need for groups such as the GSA because of the continuing feelings and experiences of marginalization, alienation, and exclusion LGBTA + college students encounter. While tremendous strides have been made over the past half-century in LGBTA + awareness and rights, this study revealed that more work needs to occur to create college environments in which LGBTA + students no longer feel marginalized, alienated, or excluded, but instead feel involved, included, and celebrated.

APPENDIX A – EMAIL TO SUPPORT GROUP ADVISER

Dear _____,

My name is Remy Ansiello. I attend the University of Central Florida and am conducting a research study to increase my understanding of whether being part of the Gay/Straight Alliance at this college contributes to students' sense of inclusion, acceptance, and success. I am also seeking to better understand the personal perspective of what it is like being a member of this student group at a public Florida state college, and members' feelings on why student clubs like the Gay/Straight Alliance are still relevant. Recently many legislative victories nationwide have expanded rights for LGBT + Americans. However, studies have shown that LGBT + college students have an increased level of alienation, marginalization, and fear compared to heterosexual students. This research study seeks the perspective of students in this support group to help answer what factors still exist that may account for these feelings.

May I send an email to the student members of the Gay/Straight Alliance group and ask for their participation in my research study? Participation will include an individual interview and a focus group session. There are only two requirements for participation:

1. Student must be a member of the Gay/Straight Alliance
2. Student must be 18 years of age or older

The entire process will be COMPLETELY confidential. The students' real names will not be mentioned in my report. A pseudonym will be assigned to each participant. I will be happy to meet students at a time/day and location that is convenient for them.

Would you also please inform your students of this email and consider asking them to participate in this research study? As an incentive, participants will be given a coupon to the campus Dunkin Donuts worth $5.00. Their insight is pivotal to expanding the level of knowledge of this topic within higher education. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. You may also contact my doctoral chair, Dr. Kathleen King, at Kathleen.King@ucf.edu if you prefer.

Sincerely,

Remy Christopher Ansiello

ransiello@knights.ucf.edu
407-234-4113

APPENDIX B – EMAIL TO STUDENT

Dear _____,

My name is Remy Ansiello. I attend the University of Central Florida and am conducting a research study to increase my understanding of whether being part of the Gay/Straight Alliance at this college contributes to students' sense of inclusion, acceptance, and success. I also want to get to know your personal perspective of what it is like being a member of this student group at a public Florida state college, and your feelings on why student clubs like the Gay/Straight Alliance are still relevant. Recently many legislative victories nationwide have expanded rights for LGBT + Americans. However, studies have shown that LGBT + college students have an increased level of alienation, marginalization, and fear over heterosexual students. This research study seeks the perspective of students like you to help answer what factors still exist that may account for these feelings.

Your Gay/Straight Alliance advisor informed me that you may be open to participating in a confidential interview and focus group session. The interview will not take longer than 30 minutes, and the focus group session will be between one and two hours. Your name will not appear anywhere in my study. Your identity will be kept confidential, as will the name of the college you are attending. There are only two requirements for participation:

1. You must be a member of the Gay/Straight Alliance
2. You must be 18 years of age or older

Would you please consider participating in this study? Your insight as a member of the Gay/Straight Alliance is pivotal toward expanding the body of knowledge of the importance of student support groups such as this, and your contributions may help institutions of higher education continue to develop programs to combat these feelings of marginalization and alienation LGBT + college students continue to experience at a higher rate than heterosexual students do. As an incentive, you will be given a coupon to the campus Dunkin Donuts worth $5.00 for your participation with this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. You may also contact my doctoral chair, Dr. Kathleen King, at Kathleen.King@ucf.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Remy Christopher Ansiello

ransiello@knights.ucf.edu
407-234-4113

APPENDIX C – REMINDER EMAIL TO STUDENT

Dear _____,

Recently I sent you a request to participate in an important interview and focus group session based on your membership with your campus Gay/Straight Alliance. The purpose of this research study is to increase my understanding of whether being part of the Gay/Straight Alliance at this college contributes to your sense of inclusion, acceptance, and success. Studies have shown that, despite recent legislative victories that have expanded some rights for LGBT + Americans, there is still an increased level of alienation, marginalization, and fear felt by LGBT + college students compared to heterosexual students. This research study seeks the perspective of students like you to help answer what factors still exist that may account for these feelings. There are only two requirements for participation:

1. You must be a member of the Gay/Straight Alliance
2. You must be 18 years of age or older

Would you please consider participating in this interview? It will take only a half-hour, and the focus group session will be between one and two hours. Your identity will remain completely confidential. As an incentive, you will be given a coupon to the campus Dunkin Donuts worth $5.00 for your participation with this study.

Please contact me anytime to schedule a time and location that is convenient for you for this short, but important, interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you wish, you may also contact my dissertation chair at the University of Central Florida, Dr. Kathy King at Kathleen.King@ucf.edu.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Remy Christopher Ansiello

ransiello@knights.ucf.edu
407-234-4113

APPENDIX D – CONSENT FORM

University of
**Central
Florida**

**A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Student Support Group within a Central
Florida State College: A Qualitative Study**

Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: Remy Christopher Ansiello (doctoral candidate)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kathleen King, Ed.D.

Investigational Site(s):   Valencia College

Introduction: Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study which will include about seven to 10 people at your institution. You have been asked to take part in this research study because you are a student and a member of the Gay/Straight Alliance student support group. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

The person conducting this research is Remy Christopher Ansiello of UCF's Department of Child, Family, and Community Services. Because the researcher is a graduate student, he is being guided by Dr. Kathleen King, a UCF faculty advisor in the Department of Child, Family, and Community Services.

What you should know about a research study:

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.

- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to ask how students participating in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) + student support group within a Central Florida public state college define their levels of inclusion, acceptance, and success. Another purpose is to ask students to recognize and define any barriers they experience to that success. For decades, LGBT + students attending institutions of higher education have been marginalized and have experienced hostility and outright discrimination, causing the need for student support groups for this population on college campuses. Recent laws passed at a national level have brought a greater level of equality to this minority group, however, feelings of marginalization, homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormative culture persists. Gaining the insight of student participants is pivotal toward expanding the body of knowledge of the importance of student support groups such as this, and student contributions may help institutions of higher education continue to develop programs to combat these feelings of marginalization and alienation LGBT + college students continue to experience at a higher rate than heterosexual students do.

What you will be asked to do in the study: For this research study you will be asked to attend two interview sessions: the first will be with the principal investigator, Remy Christopher Ansiello, at a location and date that is convenient for you and set up between the principal investigator and yourself. Your identity will be kept confidential in this interview, and you will have the opportunity to give yourself a pseudonym in place of your real name. The interview will be recorded, and the principal investigator will provide you with a transcript of your interview for review to check for accuracy. You will have every opportunity to request certain sections of the interview be omitted from the final report.

The second interview will take the form of a focus group and will involve other members of the Gay/Straight Alliance. You will recognize the other members, and all of you will be asked to participate in a group discussion, with questions that are similar to the ones you will get from the first individual interview. Like with the first interview, the focus group will also be recorded, and the principal investigator will provide you with a transcript of your interview for review to check for accuracy. You will have every opportunity to request certain sections of the interview be omitted from the final report. Two faculty members from the University of Central Florida with expertise in this type of research will be in attendance of the focus group session. Their names are Dr. Kathy King and Dr. Carolyn Hopp.

The individual interview and focus group interview will take place during spring, 2018 semester and the date/location are still to be determined.

If you agree to participate, your only responsibility is to follow-through with both the individual interview and focus group session, and answer the questions given to the best of their ability or comfort level. You do not have to answer every question or complete every task. You will not lose any benefits if you skip questions or tasks.

Location: The location of the individual interview will be at your choice of convenience. The location of the focus group interview session will take place at a location at your institution, and the specific building/room number will be given once determined.

Time required: We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 30 minutes for the individual interview. We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 1-2 hours for the focus group interview session.

Audio or video taping: You will be audio taped during this study. If you do not want to be audio taped, you will be unable to participate in the study. Discuss this with the researcher or a research team member. If you are audio taped, the tape will be kept in a locked, safe place. The tape will be erased or destroyed when the research study is completed and published.

Risks: There are no physical risks with participation in this research study. However, the individual interview and focus group process involve discussing issues that may be considered sensitive, including your definition of ideas related to marginalization, alienation, and success in college. You will also be asked directly why you are a member of this specific student support group.

This research study is completely confidential and safe, however, because of the sensitive nature of interview questions, the principal investigator is including the name and contact information of free resource counseling should you feel it necessary to speak with someone:

Resource Agency: BayCare Services, 1-800-877-5470, baycare.org/sap

Although your identity will be kept confidential, if, during the course of the interview or focus group process, you reveal current cases of abuse or neglect, this information may be disclosed to appropriate parties per Florida law.

Participation with this research study will be of no cost to you.

Benefits: A direct benefit from participation in this research study involve learning more about why you are a member of this student support group. The individual interview and focus group interview process will give you an opportunity to reflect and discuss what you find most important in your life, and what priorities are to you. Another benefit from participation in this research study involves a contribution to a body of knowledge that is very small in society at the moment. Currently there is very little information and knowledge, within higher education, on why students join student support groups such as the one you are a member of, within Central Florida state colleges. Your insight as a member of the Gay/Straight Alliance is pivotal toward expanding the body of knowledge of the importance of student support groups such as this, and your contributions may help institutions of higher education continue to develop programs to combat these feelings of marginalization and alienation LGBT + college students continue to experience at a higher rate than heterosexual students do.

Compensation or payment: Compensation for participation will include a $5.00 coupon to the college Dunkin' Donuts.

Confidentiality: We will limit your personal data collected in this study to people who have a need to review this information. We can promise confidentiality, but we cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of UCF.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to Remy Christopher Ansiello, Graduate Student, Department of Child, Family, and Community Sciences, (407) 234-4113 or by email at ransiello@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. Kathleen King, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Child, Family, and Community Sciences at (407) 823-4751 or by email at Kathleen.king@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Results of the research: Results of the research study will be made available to all participants when concluded. The principal investigator will make available the results to any participants who request them

APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction to be read to students at time of interview:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in interview. Your responses are integral to the research of this topic and will contribute to increasing knowledge and awareness of the needs of student members of gay/straight alliances.

Before we get started with the interview, please fill out this confidential questionnaire.

Okay, I'm going to turn on the recorder and we'll get started. Before I do, do you have any questions?

Begin the interview…

1. Tell me about your experience in college prior to joining a support group.

1a. Why did you join the support group?

2. What kind of environment does this institution create for you?

2a. Can you describe an example of this?

3. Could you define these terms as you understand them?

   a) Inclusion
   b) Acceptance
   c) Success

4. Describe any specific experiences in which you have felt marginalized, alienated, or excluded?

5. More broadly speaking, please share any challenges or issues in society you feel impact the LGBT + community today.

6. Have you experienced any barriers in college that have hindered your success?

6a. Explain what might have been better?

7. Describe how this institution could remove barriers for LGBT + students.

8. Would you have done anything differently?

9. Do you have anything else related to our interview that you would like to add?

Conclusion:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The amount of research and

knowledge of student members of gay/straight alliances within Florida state colleges is really

inadequate. Your participation will contribute toward increasing that knowledge, and I am very appreciative. I will be following up with you in the near future through email with a transcript of your interview. This is to give you an opportunity to confirm that I have accurately recorded and described your experiences accurately. Will you please confirm your email address?

APPENDIX F – DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your major? _____
2. What is your career goal? _____
3. Please circle the age range you are part of:

   18-24   25-31   32-38   39-45   46-51   52+

4. Please circle your marital status:

   Married   Partnered   Widow   Single

5. If you work, where do you work and how many hours?

   _____
6. What is your sexual orientation? _____
7. What is your gender identity? _____
8. What is your racial identity? _____
9. What other groups in college are you part of? _____
10. Is there someone on campus you go to for help? _____

APPENDIX G – FOCUS GROUP SESSION PROTOCOL

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study on how student members of the Gay/Straight Alliance define their levels of inclusion, alienation and success and whether there are any barriers to that success. The focus group process will take approximately one to two hours, and it will be audio-recorded.

The group process questions will focus on different aspects of your lives and experiences that have shaped who you are. The focus will be on challenges you have faced, and why you have chosen to be a member of the Gay/Straight Alliance. I encourage you to be as honest as possible and consider this an opportunity to tell your story among others who identify similarly to you.

Your identity will not be revealed in any of my reports. Details about the study, confidentiality, etc. are outlined in this explanation of the research.

Before we get started with the group process, do any of you have any questions?

I'm going to turn on the recorder and we'll get started.

1. It was very interesting to hear your individual definitions of Inclusion, Acceptance, and Success. As a group, how would you define these terms?

2. Describe a significant experience you have had as part of the group in which you felt marginalized, alienated, or excluded at this institution.

3. More broadly speaking, please share any challenges or issues in society you feel impact the LGBT + community today.

4. Have you experienced any barriers in college that have hindered your success?

4a. Explain what might have been better?

5. Describe how this institution could remove barriers for LGBT + students.

6. Would you have done anything differently?

7. Do you have anything else related to our interview that you would like to add?

Conclusion:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this group discussion. The amount of research and knowledge of student members of gay/straight alliances within Florida state colleges is really inadequate. Your participation will contribute toward increasing that knowledge, and I am very appreciative. I will be following up with each of you in the near future through email with a

transcript of this group discussion. This is to give you an opportunity to confirm that I have

accurately recorded and described your experiences accurately. Will you please confirm your

email addresses?

APPENDIX H – OBSERVATION FORM

Date	Type of Meeting	Organization/Group
Purpose of Meeting	**Type of Meeting**	
Number of Participants	**Elements of Heteronormativity**	**Examples**

Researcher	Participants

154

APPENDIX I – DOCUMENT ANALYSIS FORM

Type of Document	Date	Organization/Group	Purpose	Elements of Heteronormativity	Excerpts

APPENDIX J – INTERVIEW THANK YOU EMAIL

Date

Dear _____,

Thank you for participating in interviews for my research study on how student members of the Gay/Straight Alliance define their levels of inclusion, alienation and success and whether there are any barriers to that success. I am grateful for your willingness to contribute to the research efforts, and kindly send this follow-up message in recognition of you as a participant.

Your responses have provided me with a wealth of information, and have contributed toward a body of literature on Gay/Straight alliance support groups within Florida state colleges.

As a reminder, your identity will be kept confidential when this information is shared. If you would like a copy of the findings from the study, or a full copy of the dissertation, a copy will be made available to you.

Please let me know if you have any questions by emailing me at ransiello@knights.ucf.edu.

With sincere thanks,

Remy Ansiello

Doctoral Student- College of Education, UCF

APPENDIX K – FOCUS GROUP THANK YOU EMAIL

Date

Dear _____,

Thank you for participating in the focus group for my research study on how student members of the Gay/Straight Alliance define their levels of inclusion, alienation and success and whether there are any barriers to that success. I am grateful for your willingness to contribute to the research efforts, and kindly send this follow-up message in recognition of you as a participant.

Your responses have provided me with a wealth of information, and have contributed toward a body of literature on Gay/Straight alliance support groups within Florida state colleges.

As a reminder, your identity will be kept confidential when this information is shared. If you would like a copy of the findings from the study, or a full copy of the dissertation, a copy will be made available to you.

Please let me know if you have any questions by emailing me at ransiello@knights.ucf.edu.

With sincere thanks,

Remy Ansiello

Doctoral Student- College of Education, UCF

APPENDIX L – APPROVAL OF EXEMPT HUMAN RESEARCH

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
            FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Remy C. Ansiello**

Date: **October 12, 2017**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/12/2017, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Support Group Within a Central Florida State College: A Qualitative Study
Investigator:	Remy C. Ansiello
IRB Number:	SBE-17-13415
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

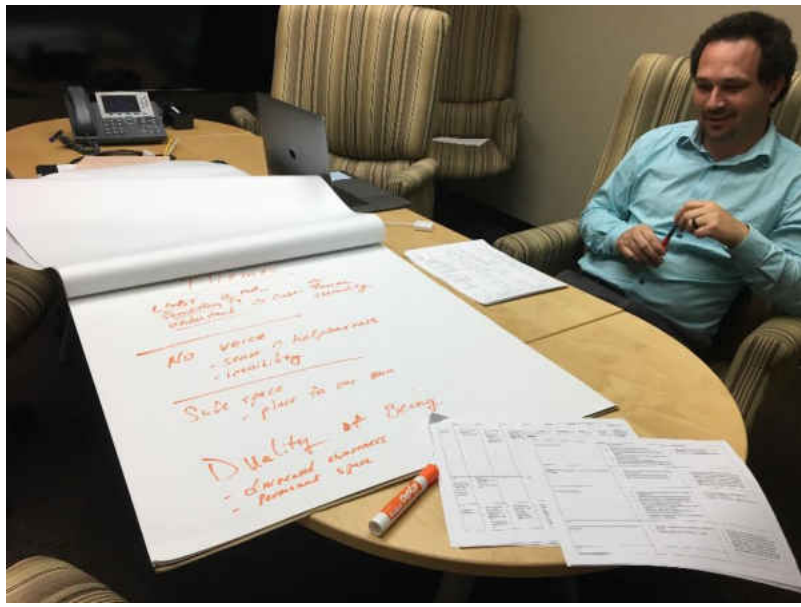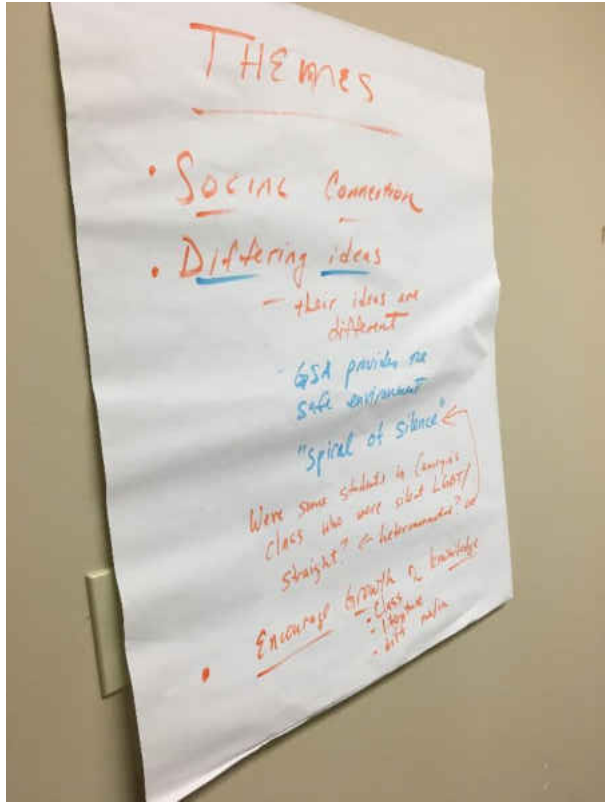Signature applied by Gillian Amy Mary Morien on 10/12/2017 02:39:38 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX M – PHOTOS OF THE INTER-CODER RELIABILITY SESSION WITH ADDITIONAL RESEARCHER

APPENDIX N – GSA CLUB MEETING 1 OBSERVATION FORM

Date	Type of Meeting	Organization/Group
December 5, 2017	GSA Student Club Meeting	GSA of [Institution]

Purpose of Meeting	Type of Meeting
Monthly meeting of student members of the GSA. Discussions were led by student members on the following topics: • On-going struggle of LGBT + acceptance • Heterosexual privilege • Spreading GSA awareness	The meeting took place on campus in a typical classroom. The tables were set up in a square so that the student members faced each other while speaking. The club president and vice-president announced the agenda of topics to be discussed and the meeting lasted one hour.

Number of Participants	Elements of Heteronormativity	Examples
Approximately 20 participants	• Ongoing struggle of LGBT + acceptance • Heterosexual privilege • Spreading GSA awareness	• Feeling inferior to straight students • Wanting voices to be heard • Wanting greater awareness

Researcher	Participants
Remy Ansiello	Student members of the GSA

APPENDIX O – GSA CLUB MEETING 2 OBSERVATION FORM

Date	Type of Meeting	Organization/Group
February 6, 2018	GSA Student Club Meeting	GSA of [Institution]

Purpose of Meeting	Type of Meeting
Monthly meeting of student members of the GSA. Discussions were led by student members on the following topic: • Upcoming panel discussion presented by Hispanic Federation at the Orlando Museum of Art on barriers/threats faced by Latinx LGBTQ communities	The meeting took place on campus in a typical classroom. The tables were set up in a square so that the student members faced each other while speaking. The entire meeting's agenda centered on the panel discussion "Breaking Down Walls" that took place February 7, 2018.

Number of Participants	Elements of Heteronormativity	Examples
Approximately 20 participants	• Latinx LGBT + community issues/barriers/challenges • Struggle for equality	• Invisibility • Inferiority • Fear for safety

Researcher	Participants
Remy Ansiello	Student members of the GSA

APPENDIX P – PEACE AND JUSTICE INSTITUTION OBSERVATION FORM

Date	Type of Meeting	Organization/Group
January 30, 2018	Film and Discussion Forum	[Institution] Peace and Justice Institute

Purpose of Meeting	Type of Meeting
Love the Sinner, a short documentary film that explores the connection between Christianity and homophobia in the wake of the shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, shown ahead of a panel conversation. This documentary was directed by Jessica Devaney and Geeta Gandbhir and premiers at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York this month.	Film and Workshop – 12:00 – 12:45pm. This was an open forum as part of a series of forums centered on Peace and Justice initiatives. It took place on a college campus, in an over-sized room with a projector for the film, and the configuration of the room allowed for discussion following the conclusion of the film.

Number of Participants	Elements of Heteronormativity	Examples
Approximately 30 participants	Film and conversation centered on how heteronormativity pervades religion and society, and how that can invite feelings of homophobia.	• Evangelism • Biases • Personal responsibility • Shame

Researcher	Participants
Remy Ansiello	Various students, faculty, staff, and other members of the public

APPENDIX Q – COMPLETED DOCUMENT ANALYSIS FORM

Type of Document and Date	Organization or Group	Purpose	Elements of Heteronormativity	Excerpts
Case Brief March 31, 2018	Oyez – Cornell Legal Information Institute	Provides facts of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, resulting in same-sex marriage becoming legal in entire United States	Dissenting arguments from Justices Roberts, Scalia, Thomas, and Alito	Equal Protection Clause of 14th Amendment guarantees right of same-sex couples to marry
Flyer February 6, 2018	GSA	Flyer to promote "Breaking Down the Walls" panel discussion about barriers/threats faced by Latinx LGBT + members	Injustice Discrimination Inferiority Invisibility	Organized by various members of the Orlando community, including Orlando Museum of Art, Hispanic Federation, and the City of Orlando
Flyer/Schedule of Forums January 30, 2018	Peace and Justice Institute	Flyer to promote the week-long "Conversation with Justice" forum along with a schedule of the forums	Injustice Discrimination Inferiority Invisibility	These forums were organized by the Peace and Justice Institute and presented by various faculty members and other community leaders

APPENDIX R – RESEARCH JOURNAL SAMPLE ENTRIES

2017.12.04 at 9:14 am:

Sent email to Dr. Angela Blewitt, faculty mentor of the Gay/Straight Alliance. Contained in email was Appendix A form (Email to Support Group Advisor), along with attached copies of my IRB approval confirmation letter from UCF, the IRB approval confirmation from the institution I plan to conduct the student volunteer interviews and focus group session, along with additional details and background information of the purpose of my research study. Awaiting word from Dr. Blewitt.

2017.12.04 at 10:35 am:

Dr. Blewitt emailed me back inviting me to the next Gay/Straight Alliance group meeting taking place Tuesday, December 5 from 1-2 pm to give me an opportunity to discuss my research study with the students and to seek volunteers. I responded and accepted the invitation.

2017.12.05 from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm:

Attended scheduled Gay/Straight Alliance club meeting. I sat in the back as the president of the club spoke, and other club officers spoke. There were 22 students in attendance. They used a power-point presentation to discuss mental health issues in the LGBTQ+ community. Several students spoke up, discussing the on-going struggle of acceptance in society as a contributing factor to mental health issues within the LGBTQ+ community. Heterosexual privilege was also brought up. I was then invited to introduce myself to the group and discuss the purpose of my research study and my need for volunteers to interview individually and participate in a focus group. I provided each student with Appendix B form (Email to Student), as well as left a sign-in sheet for students interested in participating, to put their name and email address. By the conclusion of the club meeting, all of the students in attendance wrote their names and email addresses on the sign-in sheet. This is encouraging because my goal is to interview between seven and ten students.

2018.01.09 from 9:30 am to 10:00 am

Emailed 22 students who expressed interest in participating in interviews. Email to students contained Appendix B (Email to Student) form. Also included were a variety of days/times for students to choose an appointment time of their convenience.

2018.01.12 from 1:30 pm to 2:00 pm

Conducted first interview with a student participant who responded to my January 9 email requesting volunteers. The student chose the pseudonym "Seraph", and is referred by that name in the audio recording of the interview. Prior to the interview I gathered a $5.00 gift certificate for Dunkin Donuts as outlined in my report as direct compensation for participating in the study. Prior to the interview I also emailed Seraph a copy of Appendix D (Consent Form) and asked him to review it prior to the scheduled interview. When Seraph arrived I had him fill out

175

Appendix F (Demographic Questionnaire) before discussing the nature of the interview with him. Once he completed the form, I went over Appendix D (Consent Form) again and asked if he had any questions. He said he did not. I asked him if he was comfortable being audio recorded. He answered affirmatively. I started the recording and began the interview.

At the conclusion of the interview I thanked Seraph and advised him that I would be emailing him a transcript-copy of the audio interview and asked him to please let me know if there is anything he wanted to add, or if there was anything he wanted me to edit/omit. I gave him the compensation gift certificate and Seraph left.

I emailed Seraph the content of Appendix J in the body of the email.

REFERENCES

Altemeyer, B. (1996). *The authoritarian specter*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

Alvarez, S. S., & Schneider, J. (2008). One college campus' need for a safe zone: A case study. *Journal of Gender Studies, 17*(1), 71-74.

Amankwaa, L. (2016). Creating protocols for trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 23*(3)*,* 121-127.

American Association of Community Colleges. (2014). *2014 fact sheet.* Retrieved from http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/Facts14_Data_R3.pdf

American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (ACPA and NASPA). (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience.* American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Anderson-Levitt, K. M. (2006). Ethnography. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed., pp. 279-295). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Andrinopoulos, K., & Hembling, J. (2014). *Internalized homonegativity and its health-related consequences for MSM in San Salvador*. Chapel Hill, NC: MEASURE Evaluation.

Annink, A. (2017). Using the research journal during qualitative data collection in a cross-cultural context. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal, 7*(1), 1-17. doi:10.1515/erj-2015-0063

Armstrong, D., Gosling, A., Weinman, J., & Martaeu, T. (1997). The place of inter-rater reliability in qualitative research: An empirical study. *Sociology*, 3, 597-606.

Aspers, P. (2004). Empirical phenomenology: An approach for qualitative research. *Papers in*

 Social Research Methods. Qualitative Series No. 9. Retrieved from

 http://www.lse.ac.uk/methodology/pdf/qualpapers/aspers-patrik-phenomenology04.pdf

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal*

 of College Student Personnel, *25*(4), 297-308.

Avery, A., Chase, J., Johansson, L., Litvak, S., Montero, D., & Wydra, M. (2007). America's

 changing attitudes toward homosexuality, civil unions, and same-gender marriage: 1977-

 2004. *Social Work, 52*(1), 71-79. doi:sw/52.1.71

Basow, S. A., & Johnson, K. (2000). Predictors of homophobia in female college students. *Sex*

 Roles: *A Journal of Research, 42*(5-6), 391-404.

Bazeley, P. (2007). Computerized data analysis for mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori &

 C. Teddlie (Eds.). *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (pp. 385-

 422). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Beemyn, B. G. (2005). Making campuses more inclusive of transgender students. *Journal of Gay*

 & Lesbian Issues in Education, 3(1), 77-87.

Beemyn, B. G. (2012). The experiences and needs of transgender community college students.

 Community College Journal of Research & Practice, 36(7), 504-510.

 doi:10.1080/10668926.2012.664089

Beere, C. A., King, D. W., Beere, D. B. & King. L. A. (1984). The Sex-Role Egalitarianism

 Scale: A measure of attitudes toward equality between the sexes. *Sex Roles*, *10*, 563-576.

Blumer, M. L. C., Green, M. S., Thomte, N. L., & Green, P. (2013). Are we queer yet?

 Addressing heterosexual and gender-conforming privilege. In K. A. Case (Ed.),

Deconstructing privilege: Teaching and learning as allies in the classroom (pp. 151-168). New York, NY: Routledge.

Board on the Health of Select Populations (2011). The health of lesbian, gay bisexual, and transgender people: Building a foundation for better understanding. *Institute of Medicine of the National Academies.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Bockting, W., & Coleman, E. (2007). Developmental stages of the transgender coming out process: Toward an integrated identity. In R. Ettner, S. Monstrey, & E. Eyler, (Eds.), *Principles of transgender medicine and surgery* (pp. 185-208). New York, NY: The Haworth Press.

Burn, S. M., Kadlec, K., & Rexer, R. (2005). Effects of subtle heterosexism on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. *Journal of Homosexuality, 49*(2), 23-38. Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J082v49n02_02

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Campus Pride. (2014). *LGBT-friendly campus pride index.* Retrieved from http://www.campusprideindex.com

Campus Pride Index. (2018). *Eight factors contributing to an overall LGBTQ-friendly college environment.* Retrieved from https://www.campusprideindex.org/menu/aboutus

Case, K., Hensley, R., & Anderson, A. (2014). Reflecting on heterosexual and male privilege: Interventions to raise awareness. *Journal of Social Issues, 70*(4), 722-740.

Cass, V. C. (1984). Homosexual identity formation: Testing a theoretical model. *Journal of Sex Research, 20*(2), 143-167. doi:10.1080/00224498409551214

Chambers, S. (2007). An incalculable effect: Subversions of heteronormativity. *Political Studies*,

    55(3), 656-679.

Cheng, D. X. (2004). Students' sense of campus community: What it means, and what to do

    about it. *NASPA Journal, 41*(2). Retrieved from

    http://publications.naspa.org/naspajournal/vol41/iss2/art2

Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. W. (1993). *Education and identity*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco,

    CA: Jossey-Bass.

Colleges and universities. (2018). *State of Florida*. Retrieved on October 19, 2018 from

    https://www.stateofflorida.com/colleges-in-florida.aspx

Community college. (2017). *Merriam-Webster.com.* Retrieved on March 7, 2017 from

    https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community%20college

Crandell, B. (1997). Homosexuality in Puritan New England. *Amaranthus, 1*(16), 19-23.

    Retrieved from http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1997/iss1/16

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method*

    approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2016). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA:

    Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V.L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research*.

    (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

D'Augelli, A. R. (1994). Identity development and sexual orientation: Toward a model of

    lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts, & D. Birman

    (Eds.), *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in context* (pp. 312-333). San Francisco,

    CA: Jossey-Bass.

D'Emilio, J. (1990). The campus environment for gay and lesbian life. *Academe*, *76*(1), 16-19. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40249658

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dinkins, E., & Englert, P. (2015). LGBTQ literature in middle school classrooms: Possibilities for challenging heteronormative environments. *Sex Education-Sexuality, Society, and Learning*, *15*(4), 392-405.

Draughn, T., Elkins, B., & Roy, R. (2002). Allies in the struggle: Eradicating homophobia and heterosexism on campus. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 6*(3/4), 9.

Drescher, J. (2015). Out of DSM: Depathologizing homosexuality. *Behavioral Sciences, 5*(4), 565-575. doi:10.3390/bs5040565

Edmonds, W. A., & Kennedy, T. D. (2013). *An applied reference guide to research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Elkins, D. J., Forrester, S. A., & Noël-Elkins, A. V. (2011). Students' perceived sense of campus community: The influence of out-of-class experiences. *College Student Journal, 45*(1)*, 105-121.

Engstrom, C. M., & Sedlacek, W. (1997). Attitudes of heterosexual students toward their gay male and lesbian peers. *Journal of College Student Development, 38*(6), 565-576. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.180.1670&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Ericsson, S. (2011). Heteronormativity in first encounters: An interactional analysis. *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, (19)*2, 87-104.

Evans, N. J., & D'Augelli, A. R. (1996). Lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people in college. In

    R. C. Savin-Williams & K. M. Cohen (Eds.), *The lives of lesbians, gays and bisexuals:*

    Children to adults (pp. 201-226). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student*

    development in college: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA:

    Jossey-Bass.

Fanucce, M. M., & Taub, D. D. (2009). The relationship of homonegativity to LGBT students'

    and non-LGBT students' perceptions of residence hall climate. *Journal of College &*

    University Student Housing, 36(2), 24-41.

Fassinger, R. E., & McCarn, S. R. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A

    new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The*

    Counseling Psychologist, 24(3), 508-534.

Fine, L. E. (2012). The context of creating space: Assessing the likelihood of college LGBT

    center presence. *Journal of College Student Development, 53*(2), 285-299.

Frost, T. T. (2015). The promise of liberty to all: The long march to marriage equality. *Liverpool*

    Law Review, 36(2), 171-182.

Gandara, D. A., Jackson, M. L., & Discont, S. (2017). Concerns for LGBT workers after the

    2016 presidential election and what I-O professionals can do about it. *TIP: The*

    Industrial-Organizational Psychologist, *54*(3), 85-89.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge: Further essays on interpretive anthropology.* New York,

    NY: Basic Books.

GLAAD. (2017a). Frequently asked questions: Defense of marriage act (DOMA). Retrieved

from http://www.glaad.org/marriage/doma

GLAAD. (2017b). GLAAD media reference guide – Lesbian/gay/bisexual glossary of terms.

Retrieved from http://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq

GLSEN. (2015). 2015 National School Climate Survey. Retrieved from

https://www.glsen.org/article/2015-national-school-climate-survey

Gonzalez, J. A. (2004). Decriminalizing sexual conduct: The Supreme Court ruling in *Lawrence*

v. Texas. St. Mary's Law Journal, 3, 685.

Graves, K. (2007). Doing the public's business: Florida's purge of gay and lesbian teachers,

1959-1964. *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies*

Association, 41(1), 7-32.

Grosz, E. (2013). Experimental desire: Rethinking queer subjectivity. In D. Hall, A. Jagose, A.

Bebell, & S. Potter (Eds.), *The Routledge queer studies reader* (pp. 194-211). New York,

NY: Routledge.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1981). *Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of evaluation*

results through responsive and naturalistic approaches. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hall, D., Jagose, A., Bebell, A., & Potter, S. (Eds.). (2013). *The Routledge queer studies reader.*

New York, NY: Routledge.

Harrington, M., Jacob, S., Harbert, A., & Saiid, L. (2014). The coming out process among non-

religious undergraduate students: Implications for residence life professionals. *Journal of*

College & University Student Housing, 41(1), 164-177.

Herek, G. M. (1988). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men; Correlates and

gender differences. *Journal of Sex Research*, *25*, 451-477.

Herek, G. M. (1990). The context of anti-gay violence: Notes on cultural and psychological

    heterosexism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *5*, 316-333.

Herek, G. M. (1996). Heterosexism and homophobia. In R. P. Cabaj & T. S. Stein (Eds.),

    Textbook of homosexuality and mental health (pp. 101-113). Washington, DC: American

    Psychiatric Press.

Herek, G. M., & McLemore, K. A. (2011). The Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay men (ATLG)

    Scale. In T. Fisher, C. M. Davis, W. L. Yarber, & S. L. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of*

    sexuality-related measures (3rd ed.), pp. 415-417. Oxford, England: Taylor & Francis.

Hernandez, S., & Hernandez, I. (2011). Key resources on marginalized students. In E. M. Cox &

    J. S. Watson (Eds.), *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 155, 85-89.

    doi:10.1002/cc.460

Hinrichs, D., & Rosenberg, P. (2002). Attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons among

    heterosexual liberal arts college students. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *43*(1), 61-84.

Horne, S., Rice, N. D., & Israel, T. (2004). Heterosexual student leader attitudes regarding

    lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. *NASPA Journal, 41*(4), 760-772. Retrieved from

    http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2202/1949-6605.1398#.Vreot1grK00

Hubbard, P. (2008). Here, there, everywhere: The ubiquitous geographies of heteronormativity.

    Geography Compass, 2*,* 640-658.

Human Rights Campaign. (2017a). Glossary of terms. Retrieved from

    http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms

Human Rights Campaign. (2017b). Map of state laws and policies. Retrieved from

    http://www.hrc.org/state_maps

Ivory, B. T. (Ed). (2005). LGBT students in community college: Characteristics, challenges, and recommendations. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *New Directions for Student Services,* 111, 61-69. doi:10.1002/ss.174

Jackson, S. (2006). Gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: The complexity (and limits) of heteronormativity. *Feminist Theory, 7*(1), 105-121. doi:10.1177/1464700106061462

Janesick, V. J. (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.), pp. 209-219. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kirk, J., & Miller, M. L. (1986). *Reliability and validity in qualitative research.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners.* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Leider, S. (2000). Sexual minorities on community college campuses. *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED447841.pdf

Liddle, B. J., Luzzo, D. A., Hauenstein, A. L, & Schuck, K. (2004). Construction and validation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Climate Inventory. *Journal of Career Assessment, 12*, 33-50.

Mallory, S. (1998). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student organizations: An overview. In B. T. Ivory (Ed.) LGBT students in community college: Characteristics, challenges, and recommendations. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *New Directions for Student Services*, 111, 61-69. doi:10.1002/ss.174

Marine, S. B., & Nicolazzo, Z. (2014). Names that matter: Exploring the tensions of campus

LGBTQ centers and trans* inclusion. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 7*(4),

265-281.

Meem, D., Gibson, M., & Alexander, J. (2010). *Finding out: An introduction to LGBT studies*.

Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Meyer I., & Dean L. (1998). Internalized homophobia, intimacy, and sexual behavior among

gay and bisexual men. In G. M. Herek (Ed.) *Stigma and sexual orientation:*

Understanding prejudice against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, pp. 160-186.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Morris, B. J. (2017). History of lesbian, gay, and bisexual social movements. *American*

Psychological Association Online. Retrieved from

http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/history.aspx

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Murray, M. (2017). Intimate choices, public threats: Reproductive and LGBTQ rights under a

Trump administration. *New England Journal of Medicine, 376*(4), 301-303.

Nash, M. A., & Silverman, J. R. (2015). 'An indelible mark': Gay purges in higher education in

the 1940s. *History of Education Quarterly, 55*(4), 441-459. doi:10.1111/hoeq.12135

Newman, L. T. P. (2010). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work, 1*(1)*,* 80-

96.

Obergefell v. Hodges. (n.d.). *Oyez*. Retrieved March 31, 2018, from

https://www.oyez.org/cases/2014/14-556

Olive, J. L. (2015). The impact of friendship on the leadership identity development of lesbian,

gay, bisexual, and queer students. *Journal of Leadership Education, 14*(1), 142-159.

Retrieved from

http://www.journalofleadershiped.org/attachments/article/268/JOLEv14i1_olive.pdf

Ottenritter, N. (1998). The courage to care: Addressing sexual minority issues on campus. *Removing Vestiges, 1*, 13-20.

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, *42*(5), 533–544. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005) *How college affects students: A third decade of research. 2.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pelham, B. W., & Swann, W. B., Jr. (1989). From self-conceptions to self-worth: On the sources of global self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *57*, 672-680.

Powdermaker, H. (1966). *Stranger and friend: The way of an anthropologist.* New York, NY: Norton.

Raiz, L. (2006). College students' support of rights for members of the gay community. *Journal of Poverty, 10*(2), 53-75. doi:10.1300/J134v10n0204

Renn, K. A., & Bilodeau, B. L. (2005a). Analysis of LGBT identity development models and implications for practice. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *New Directions for Student Services,* 111, 25-39.

Renn, K. A., & Bilodeau, B. L. (2005b). Leadership identity development among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student leaders. *NASPA Journal, 42*(3), 342-367.

Renn, K. A., & Bilodeau, B. (2005c). Queer student leaders: An exploratory case study of

    identity development and LGBT student involvement at a Midwestern research

    university. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education, 2*(4), 49-71.

Rosenthal, M. (2016). Qualitative research methods: Why, when, and how to conduct interviews

    and focus groups in pharmacy research. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning* 8,

    509-516.

Safe Zone Project. (2017). What is safe zone? Retrieved from

    http://thesafezoneproject.com/about/what-is-safe-zone/

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sanlo, R., Rankin, S., & Schoenberg, R. (2002). *Our place on campus: Lesbian, gay, bisexual,*

    transgender services and programs in higher education. Westport, CT: Greenwood

    Press.

Schmidt, C. K., Miles, J. R., & Welsh, A. C. (2011). Perceived discrimination and social support:

    The influences on career development and college adjustment of LGBT college students.

    Journal of Career Development, 38(4), 293-309.

Seidman, S. (2002). *Beyond the closet*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Serdahely, W. J., & Ziemba, G. J. (1984). Changing homophobic attitudes through college

    sexuality education. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *10*(1/2), 109-116.

Simon, M. K. (2011). *Dissertation and scholarly research: Recipes for success* (2011

    ed.). Seattle, WA: Dissertation Success, LLC.

Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and

    opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and*

    Exercise Psychology, *11*(1), 101-121. doi:10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357

State college. (2017). *Merriam-Webster.com.* Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/state%20college

Support group. (2017). *Merriam-Webster.com.* Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/support%20group

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Taylor, J. L. (2015). Call to action: Embracing an inclusive LGBTQ culture on community college campuses. In E. L. Castro (Ed.), *New Directions for Community Colleges,* 172, 57-66.

Tetreault, P. A., Fette, R., Meidlinger, P. C., & Hope, D. (2013). Perceptions of campus climate by sexual minorities. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *60*(7), 947-964. doi:10.1080/00918369.2013.774874

Thomas, S. (2000). Ties that bind: A social network approach to understanding student integration and persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 71*(5), 591-615.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

University of Southern California. (2017). LGBT resource center – LGBT terminology. Retrieved from https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/education/terminology/

Viefhues-Bailey, L. (2016). The American terrorist. *Political Theology*, *17*(4), 313-315. doi:10.1080/1462317X.2016.1208508

Warner, M. (1991). Fear of a queer planet. *Social Text, 29,* 3-17. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/466295

Westbrook, L. (2009). Where the women aren't: Gender differences in the use of LGBT

    resources on college campuses. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 6*(4), 369-394.

White, V., Greenhalgh, M., & Oja, M. (2012). GLADE: Supporting LGBT staff and students in a

    community college district. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 36*(7),

    526-530.

Windmeyer, S. (2017). Finding your campus roadmap for LGBT progress. *Insight into Diversity*.

    Retrieved from http://www.insightintodiversity.com/finding-your-campus-roadmap-for-

    lgbt-progress/

Wolcott, H. F. (1999). *Ethnography: A way of seeing.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Woodford, M., Chonody, J., Scherrer, K., Silverschanz, P., & Kulick, A. (2012). The

    'persuadable middle' on same-sex marriage: Formative research to build support among

    heterosexual college students. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy: Journal of National*

    Student Research Group, 9(1), 1-14. doi:10.1007/s13178-011-0073-y

Woodford, M. R., Howell, M. L., Kulick, A., & Silverschanz, P. (2013). "That's so gay":

    Heterosexual male undergraduates and the perpetuation of sexual orientation

    microagressions on campus. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 28*(2), 416-435.

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The

    Guilford Press.

Young, A. (2011). Gay students: The latest outreach target at many colleges. *Journal of College*

    Admission, 210, 39-40.

Zamani-Gallaher, E. M., & Choudhuri, D. D. (2011). A primer on LGBTQ students at

    community colleges: Considerations for research and practice. In E. M. Cox & J. S.

    Watson (Eds.). *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 155, 35-49. doi:10.1002/cc.456