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Narratives from Appalachia: The Current Stories of LGBTQ Community College Students

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NARRATIVES FROM APPALACHIA: THE CURRENT STORIES OF LGBTQ COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

NARRATIVES FROM APPALACHIA: THE CURRENT STORIES OF LGBTQ COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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LGBTQ students are ubiquitous on community college campuses across the United States. The exact number of LGBTQ students is unknown and often their needs are ignored. LGBTQ students face harassment and discrimination at higher rates than other minority groups. This study was conducted to gather the current narratives of LGBTQ students attending community colleges in the Appalachian Region. This study aimed to determine what LGBTQ students are experiencing on community college campuses across Appalachia. Fifteen students took part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview for this qualitative study. All students were currently enrolled in a program of study when the interviews took place. The research paradigm utilized was social constructivism, and Queer Theory was the basis of the conceptual framework. This study used narrative coding with the Labovian Model of Analysis. Composite narratives were written, and pseudonyms used to create anonymity for the participants.

The findings of this study indicated students encounter microaggressions in the classroom and in other places around a community college. Nevertheless, the campus is often perceived to be a cultural bubble by students and is perceived as safer than the nearest town or city. Participants stated that the religious views of other students often impact the lives of LGBTQ students. Additionally, participants mentioned politics and how it affected their lives as community college students.

There were several implications for action which resulted from the findings of this study. Recommendations include creating campus policies toward inclusivity, offering on-campus Safe Zone training for all faculty and staff, offering students an LGBTQ club or organization to provide students with a safe space and a sense of belonging at the college, providing more LGBTQ resources for faculty and staff, and asking faculty to include LGBTQ individuals in course readings and other materials.

Keywords: LGBTQ, community college, Appalachia, Queer Theory, Safe Zone

This dissertation is dedicated to those who never had a chance to live their full lives as an out LGBTQ+ person. Some of their names are Matthew Shepard, Tyler Clemnti, Angie Zapata, Jamey Rodemeyer, and Steen Fenrich. Also, the victims of the 2016 Pulse Nightclub massacre and hundreds of transgender victims that are killed every year. You are never forgotten.

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It takes a village to accomplish anything in this world. Whether we know it or not, we cannot accomplish significant feats without the help and guidance of those around us, including family, friends, and even strangers. My biggest supporter is my husband, Tony. He has been there for me through this whole process. There have been many days and nights he had without me, but he supported and cheered me on. I owe him more than I could ever repay for the support he has shown me during these past couple of years.

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Thank you to each of the interviewees who took time away from their day to interview with me. It can be challenging to share stories about being LGBTQ. Each person was brave enough to answer my survey and give me honest answers.

My family and friends have not seen much of me since I started this journey. Thank each of you for sticking by me and know that it means a lot to me for your support and words of encouragement during this time.

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I ask my gay brothers and sisters to make the commitment to fight. For themselves, for their freedom, and for this country. We will not win our rights by staying in the closets. We are coming out to fight the lies, the myths, the distortions. We are coming out to tell the truth about gays, for I am tired of the conspiracy of silence.

–Harvey Milk, The Right Side of History: 100 Years of LGBTQ Activism

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges are considered places where everyone is welcome to attend. The students who attend community colleges are from varied backgrounds and include many nontraditional and minority students (Chen, 2017; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011). The community college is regarded as the "people's college" or "democracy's college" (Cohen et al., 2014) because it is open to everyone while enrolling 40% of undergraduate students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). The community college is also considered a microcosm of the surrounding culture (McGuigan, 2018). However, not every person who steps on a community college campus will feel welcomed or even feel seen (Alessi et al., 2017). One such marginalized group is those who identify as LGBTQ (McGarrity, 2014).

For this research, LGBTQ is an acronym that identifies lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. Although other sexual and gender minorities are not explicitly mentioned, such as intersex, pansexual, asexual, genderqueer, and non-binary, the term LGBTQ here represents these individuals. Some research lists LGBTQ+ to identify all the groups captured under the umbrella term. Queer is sometimes used to identify LGBTQ or LGBTQ+. In this study, the acronym LGBTQ is used to identify all sexual and gender marginalized individuals.

Not only are LGBTQ students marginalized on campus, but this group is also difficult to find in the research literature. Leider (1999) wrote, "Given the state of current research in the field, it is not overstating the case to say that we know virtually nothing about LGBT students on

community college campuses" (p. 15). Whitehead and Gulley (2020), twenty-one years later, suggested, "While many conceptual works have called for increased scholarly attention to this population, only a handful of empirical works have been published" (p. 121). The absence of LGBTQ literature on community college students is stated by many researchers from Leider in 1999 until today.

The current study recorded the experiences of LGBTQ community college students. The participants for this study were selected from community colleges located in the Appalachian region, as recognized by the federal Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The participants were enrolled in a program of study at the time of the interview. The participants self-identified as LGBTQ. It was not known prior to the interview if the participants were out to their family or friends or not out.

This topic is relevant to researchers because of the lack of knowledge about LGBTQ community college students. I have made significant efforts to find articles about LGBTQ community college students and have been limited. Research on LGBTQ students is minimal at the community college level but not at the four-year or high school levels, according to several researchers (Crisp et al., 2016; Leider, 2012; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011). The current study will help to fill this gap in the literature.

Background of the Study

A review of the current literature yielded knowledge about the extent of harassment and discrimination that exists on college and university campuses, both within the classroom and other parts of the campus (Garvey et al., 2016; Goldberg et al., 2019a; Iconis, 2010). It is harder to obtain information about the campus climate for students at the community college. Community college students frequently travel to campus for class then go home or to work. The

community college student, for the most part, does not stay on campus to study, eat, or participate in extracurriculars like their peers at four-year institutions (Ivory, 2012; Taylor et al., 2018). Data for the community college student are much more limited and difficult to find in the literature than students at four-year institutions, making obtaining this information more difficult.

Several factors about community college students have resulted in fewer studies of LGBTQ students at community colleges. The first is that community college students are transitory (Ivory, 2012). Most community college students come to class or take care of an issue with their classes or tuition and then leave campus. For the most part, the community college student does not linger on campus after classes and interact with peers the way students at four-year institutions do. The community college student sometimes does not even finish their degree before moving on to a four-year institution (Ivory, 2005; Ivory 2012). Secondly, LGBTQ students may not want to self-identify. Some LGBTQ students have not revealed their sexual orientation or come out to their family or friends (Leider, 2012; Magallenes, 2012). If LGBTQ students are not out to their family and friends, they will be less likely to identify at the college campus to faculty or peers. If an LGBTQ club, event, or safe space exists on campus, the students could be reluctant to utilize the opportunity (Hoffshire & Campbell, 2019). Homophobia has caused many LGBTQ students at four-year schools not to self-identify, and thus, it is not as easy to collect their experiences (Garvey et al., 2015).

According to some researchers, colleges are not doing enough to address their LGBTQ students. The number of safe spaces or Safe Zone training on community college campuses is abysmal, according to Taylor et al. (2018). Schools that acknowledge their LGBTQ populations see an increase in retention and decreased suicide attempts (Kane, 2013).

There is a unique challenge for college administrators to understand the LGBTQ community college students' needs. The current literature regarding LGBTQ students at community colleges does not offer enough information for either faculty or staff to understand these students' complete needs. For instance, community colleges need to know how to retain their minority populations (Trimble, 2019). With an impending and drastic decrease in the number of 18-year-old high school graduates expected around the year 2025 and for a few years after (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2017), community colleges will need to learn to attract, retain, and help students to be successful as much as possible. Secondly, the last comprehensive study on LGBTQ students was completed in 2010 (Rankin et al., 2019). There have been many events and changes in society since this time (Ayoub & Garreston, 2017). Third, the six-year degree completion rate at community colleges is low (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020b). Understanding the LGBTQ population fully and meeting their needs could increase access, enrollment, completion rates, and help retain this set of sexual and gender minority students.

Conceptual Framework

This study used Queer Theory as the conceptual framework. Queer Theory examines both gender and sexuality, and it challenges the gender binary and sexuality stereotypes that many in the heteronormative world mention today (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Foucault, 1978). Queer Theory does not just seek to theorize lesbian or gay behaviors. Instead, the theory focuses on any perceived deviant behavior in society regarding sex or gender (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Gammon & Isgro, 2012).

Queer Theory challenges society to look beyond sex and gender. Individuals in society should not be judged on whether they prescribe to heteronormative traits or not (Pinar, 2003).

Queer Theory formed the basis of this study by looking at how community college students are treated differently when they identify or are perceived to be LGBTQ on the community college campus.

The research question which guides this study was founded in Queer Theory. The literature review revealed many instances of microaggressions, discrimination, harassment, and bullying on college campuses. The research literature was paired with the central values of Queer Theory to inform the research question. This study sought to answer if students are experiencing microaggressions, discrimination, harassment, and bullying today because they identify as LGBTQ at Appalachian community colleges.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of LGBTQ college students at Appalachian community colleges. Schools located in the Appalachian region are defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). This study, using narrative inquiry, was intended to discover current experiences of the LGBTQ community college students at Appalachian community colleges. Individual interviews with self-identified LGBTQ students from community colleges were conducted using online virtual technology. It was unknown to me before the interviews if the individuals were out to their family, friends, or on the campus.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

1. What are the stories of self-identified LGBTQ students at rural Appalachian community colleges?

Significance of the Study

While there are studies of LGBTQ students who attend four-year schools, there is limited research on LGBTQ community college students. Published research currently available has not examined LGBTQ students experiences while attending community colleges like research available for four-year schools (Sanlo & Espinoza, 2012; Taylor, 2015). It is meaningful to understand LGBTQ community college students' experiences to help them succeed in the community college setting (Linley et al., 2016). Without knowing their experiences, community colleges could be losing a whole generation of students to other institutions or not enrolling them at all (Rankin et al., 2010).

The research conducted for this study will add to the small amount of literature on LGBTQ community college students. There is a gap in the research on LGBTQ community college students and minimal research using narrative inquiry. Narratives gives rich oral or written experiences from stories, whereas quantitative studies use numbers to tell a story (Bold, 2012). The data collected could be used by future scholarly researchers when examining LGBTQ community college students. Research about LGBTQ community college students could help community college administrators retain LGBTQ students by understanding their needs (Rankin et al., 2010). According to Kolbe and Baker (2019), community colleges need to focus on maintaining or increasing students as federal and state revenue shrinks. It is suggested that LGBTQ community college students' experiences could also help leaders find a way to retain LGBTQ students. This narrative highlighted how Appalachian community colleges either recognize or ignore their LGBTQ students.

According to Taylor, LGBTQ students enroll in higher numbers in community colleges than four-year institutions (2015). Nguyen et al. (2018) stated, given that the community college campuses enroll most LGBTQ students, administrators, and faculty must understand their students' needs. Providing shared experiences and support services, faculty, and staff at community colleges offers the students more than just lecture material (Hoffshire & Campbell, 2019). A community college is a place that mimics the culture in which the college resides (McGuigan, 2018). Individuals who run community colleges can use this research to take an inventory of their campus community to improve their retention efforts.

With an absence of literature on LGBTQ community college students' experiences, it is vitally important that these students' experiences are collected (Dessel et al., 2017). The literature appears to be missing a whole sexual and gender minority population of individuals and their experiences (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016). Much has changed concerning federal and state laws toward LGBTQ populations since the last significant articles published in 2010 (Ayoub & Garreston, 2017). This study will add to the writings on the experiences of community college students today. Finally, the information contained in this study may help campus leaders to connect with their LGBTQ populations, increase retention, and offer a more inclusive campus community.

Campus Climate

The students in this study discussed how the campus climate either helped or hindered them. Campus climate includes the deeply held beliefs and values among the members of a college or university that influence its atmosphere and operations (Chen et al., 2016; Shen & Tian, 2012). Studying the campus climate of a college is an essential component of studying the students and faculty. The campus climate influences how many students behave within the

campus (Giamos et al., 2017). Climate is a significant determinant of attitude, belonging, and student outcomes (Rankin et al., 2010).

Appalachian Community Colleges

Appalachia is an area known for citizens with low socioeconomic status (Gore et al., 2011). Appalachia includes some of the poorest counties in the United States (Hlinka, 2017). Students who attend community colleges in Appalachia often find competing cultural value focused on getting out of poverty, a need to earn income, and geographic isolation (Kannapel & Flory, 2017). Diversity in Appalachia is not as prevalent as in other areas of the United States. Those who live in the region can be fixed on traditional family roles (Kannapel & Flory, 2017), i.e., a man and a woman. The above-stated reasons could make Appalachia a difficult place to study the experiences of LGBTQ community college students. However, such research is needed to fill literature gaps, as noted previously.

Overview of Methodology

I used a qualitative, narrative inquiry study for data collection through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the participant to follow up in more detail after each question and offer information in rich detail. An interview protocol was used to enable uniformity between the interviews. Interviews were conducted using an online virtual meeting space with 15 students participating. The study continued until information saturation was reached.

A purposive sampling of LGBTQ students at community colleges located within the Appalachian Regional Zone was chosen as the subject selection mechanism. An anonymous short survey was used asking students to self-identify as LGBTQ. If the students identified as LGBTQ, they could then choose to either take part or not in a one-on-one interview. If the

students wanted to take part in the interview, I then collected information to contact them. Otherwise, no personal data was collected from the students.

After the approval from Human Subjects Review Board of Old Dominion University, I posted a paid advertisement on Facebook with a poster and link to the survey. The advertisement ran for five days. I then renewed it for an additional five days. Once I received enough responses, I sent out an email to participants that indicated on the survey that they were willing to take part. The data collection process consisted of individual interviews with 15 students which continued until I determined that information saturation occurred. The initial interview lasted no longer than an hour and, a follow-up interview lasted around 15 minutes. The follow-up interviews happened after the transcription was completed and chapter four was written and approved. I asked each interviewee their experience as a member of the LGBTQ population on a community college campus in Appalachia.

I allowed each of the students to speak until it seemed that they did not know what else to add, making sure I captured answers to the initial research questions. I prompted them with another question to gather more information based on something they touched on earlier, if necessary. I used an online audio recorder for each interview to collect data and a backup recorder. Each interview was then transcribed by me. There was not a second-cycle of coding for this research. Pseudonyms were used to protect each individual's identity and as well as the institutions where the students attend. Any information that could identify an individual or community college was removed before entering this research. A second 15-minute interview occurred after the first interview was transcribed. The second interview followed up on the first interview and triangulated any new information.

The themes that emerged from coding were a direct reflection of the interviews. I read the transcripts and coded accordingly. I used narrative coding, analyzing the data with the six-part Labovian Model of Analysis.

Researcher Positionality

I want to be transparent and honest with the reason for my choices in this study. The research areas were chosen to reflect my passions, interests, and a reflection of how I see myself. I was born and raised in West Virginia and, as such, identify as Appalachian. My dialect is remarked on whenever I leave the area where I grew up. I witnessed the culture of Appalachia first-hand, and is that culture is ingrained within me. I have seen poverty, substance abuse, a lack of valuing education, the over-reliance on religious dogma, the love of music as a story, suspicion of outsiders, and superstitions and folklore as truth throughout my childhood. I started researching my genealogy when I was fourteen and quickly found out that my European ancestors were in Appalachia before the United States of America existed. I currently teach West Virginia and Appalachian History and enjoy teaching students so much about forgotten history but proud history. I am proud to be Appalachian and want to tell the stories of others like myself.

The choice of researching LGBTQ students reflects the intersectionality of who I am as a person. I identify as Caucasian, gay, cisgender, and male. I came out of the closet at the age of 28. I struggled with the coming out process partly because of my situation at the time and because of my upbringing in Appalachia. I know what it is like to be conflicted with what is felt inside, whom one is attracted to, and the fear of not understanding why a person has to go through so much pain. It was not easy to find someone to talk to that understood what I felt and was experiencing. I felt no one in my family could understand what I was experiencing.

I have no idea what it must be like to struggle to come out on a college campus today. Coming out to anyone is not easy. There is a fear of judgment in the process, even if that is not reality. I chose LGBTQ students because I want to hear the stories they have to tell about their time on campus, what the campus culture is like today, and if there are still issues identifying as LGBTQ on a community college campus.

Appalachia's choice as the setting and LGBTQ students as the participants is because I want to understand my participants and relate to them. The two choices have kept my interest during the writing process and led to a better experience.

Delimitations

The choice of studying lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community college students was made because of the lack of research available and my interest. The current study used a qualitative method for analysis. The research was conducted with narrative inquiry to gather rich data from the participants. The interviews occurred in October 2020 and November 2020 with students from community colleges in Appalachia and stopped once information saturation was reached. A college in the Appalachian region is defined by schools located within the Appalachian Regional Zone, as defined by the federal Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). All schools were public community colleges. The participants were either part-time or full-time community college students still in their program of study. The participants could be out to their family or not out to their family and friends. The participants self-identified after responding to a survey that was posted on Facebook with a paid advertisement. Information from anyone who identified as heterosexual was not included.

Definition of Key Terms

A list of the definitions of key terms for this study is provided:

- Ally: Any person who empathizes with a marginalized group in opposing discrimination or harassment. The person is not normally a member of the marginalized group (Serano, 2020).
- Androgynous: A person who expresses characteristics of both male and female in dress, appearance, or behavior (Goldberg et al., 2019).
- Asexual: A person who does not have a sexual attraction to any gender and does not identify as heterosexual or homosexual. They can also have low or no sexual activity (Teut, 2019).
- Biphobia: Prejudice, fear, or hatred directed towards bisexual people (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).
- Bisexual: A term that captures the spectrum of attraction to those of the same sex and opposite sex or gender. Other terms that have been used in place of bisexual include pansexual, polysexual, multisexual, omnisexual, queer, or no label (Serano, 2020).
- Campus Climate: Current attitudes, behaviors and standards, and practices of employees and students of an institution (Jacobson et al., 2017).
- Cisgender: Any individual who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth (Yost & Gilmore, 2011).
- Cisnormative or Cisnormativity: The view that all people are the gender they were assigned at birth and that their gender identity is the same as their biological sex (Brown et al., 2020).
- Closeted: Describes any person who identifies as LGBTQ, and that person has not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).

- *Χομμ υνιτψ Χολλεγε ορ Τωο-Ψεαρ Χολλεγε*: "Any degree-granting institution that offers certificates, associate degrees, and noncredit courses. A regionally accredited institution of higher education that offers the associate degree as its highest degree" (Vaughan, 2006, p. 1)
- *Δεαδνομε*: the name a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses once they transition.
- *Δεμισεξυαλ*: Someone who only has sexual attraction to another individual after they have a deep relationship (Mollet & Lackman, 2018).
- *Δισχριμινατιον*: The perceived act of bias against one person based on a particular criterion.
- *Γαψ*: A male who is sexually attracted only to other males.
- *Γενδερ Δψσπηορια*: A clinical diagnosis causing destress in a person when a person's assigned gender at birth is not the same as the one in which they identify (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b)
- *Γενδερ Εξπρεσσιον*: The gender that a person decides to exhibit through dress, mannerisms, and behavior (Gedro & Mizzi, 2014).
- *Γενδερ*-fluid: A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).
- *Γενδερ Ιδεντιτψ*: The subjective sense of one's maleness or femaleness (Johnson & Wassersug, 2010).
- *Γενδερ νον-χονφορμινγ:* A person who does not conform to society's rule regarding dress or actions. The person could present as a male one day and female the next. Not associated with a person's sexuality (Garvey & Rankin, 2015a).

- *Γενδερθυεερ*: A relatively new term, sometimes known as non-binary, does not identify with the binary terms of masculine or feminine and is considered outside of the binary (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012).
- *Ηαρασσμεντ*: Verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of his/her race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, or disability, or that of his/her relatives, friends, or associates (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009).
- *Ηετερονορματιϖε ορ Ηετερονορματιϖιτψ*: A mindset that only heterosexual people, experiences, and desires are the norm in society (Choudhuri & Curley, 2019)
- *Ηετεροσεξισμ*: The belief that same-sex attraction and relationships are not typical in society. It can also include discrimination against homosexual and gender non-conforming individuals (Woodford et al., 2013).
- *Ηομοπηοβια*: Is described as the fear, hatred, or intolerance of sharing space with individuals who are homosexual (Weinberg, 1972).
- *Ηομοσεξυαλ*: A person who identifies as only having an attraction to someone of the same sex.
- *Ηοοκ-Υπ Χυλτυρε*: One in which participants have a sexual encounter without any form of attachment or romantic relationship (Lamont et al., 2018).
- *Ιντερσεχτιοναλιτψ*: The oppression and discrimination resulting from the overlap of various social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, or class (Case & Lewis, 2012).
- *Ιντερσεξ*: A person born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit strictly male or female characteristics (Choudhuri & Curley, 2019).

- *Lesbian*: A woman who is exclusively attracted to other women (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).
- *LGBTQ*: Those in a group who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. This group is often grouped because their experiences are similar. The acronym has increased over time as more marginalized groups are added. Sometimes it is listed as LGBTQ+ to include other sexual or gender minorities (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).
- *Microaggression*: A term used for brief and commonplace verbal or nonverbal insults, whether intentional or not, that is hostile, derogatory, or negative toward a marginalized group (Woodford et al., 2013).
- *Non-binary*: A person who does not identify exclusively as a man or woman. The person could identify as both a man and woman or somewhere in between, or neither. Non-binary is also used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer, or gender-fluid (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).
- *Nontraditional Student*: Students who are age 24 and over and could have one or more of the following: do not attend school full-time, have family obligations, work full-time, or do not live on a college campus (Warden & Myers, 2017).
- *Omnisexual*: When a person is attracted towards other people regardless of their sex or gender (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).
- *Out*: A term used to describe anyone open about their sexuality or gender identity. Sometimes referred to out of the closet.
- *Pansexual*: A person who can be sexually, romantically, or emotionally attracted to someone regardless of sex or gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, 2020b).

- Θυεερ: A term that, at one time, was considered slang towards individuals that are attracted to the same sex. Today, the term can mean anyone who does not conform to heteronormative sex or gender roles in society, a very fluid term (Choudhuri & Curley, 2019).
- Θυεερ-spectrum: A newer term used in place of LGBTQ+, or sexual minorities, by researchers to capture sexual identities and group memberships that have been targeted as lower status, low visibility, and little to no power (Garvey & Rankin, 2018).
- Θυεερ Τηεορψ: Defined generally as the lived experiences of those who do not identify with the traditional categories of sexuality and gender and identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (Abes & Kasch, 2007).
- Θυεστιονινγ: A person who questions their sexuality or assigned gender (Reis & McCarthy, 2016).
- ΣεξυολΙδεντιτψ: The way he or she understands his or her sexual propensity, and usually expresses it with a label such as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Diamond, 2003).
- ΣεξυολΜινοριτψ: A group of people whose sexual identity differs from those in the sexual majority. Usually refers to anyone that identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.
- Τρανσ-σπεχτρυμ : A newer term used in place of transgender or cisgender by researchers to capture gender identities and group memberships that have been targeted concerning their lower status, low visibility, and little to no power (Beemyn et al., 2005; Garvey et al., 2018).

- Transgender: Anyone born and labeled as one sex but does not feel that way inside. This person could transition their body structure to the sex that matches what they feel inside or dress the way they feel inside (Beemyn et al., 2005).
- Transphobia: Is defined as the degree to which an individual is uncomfortable or prejudiced toward a transgender individual (Hill & Willoughby, 2005).
- Two-spirit: A term used by Native American culture to refer to someone as a third gender or more commonly known either as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Foster, 2007).

Chapter Summary

Community colleges reflect the communities they reside within. Campuses consist of different minority students, including LGBTQ students. Colleges are perceived to be open to all (Cohen et al., 2014). This statement is not accurate. According to many researchers, those who belong to the LGBTQ population are marginalized and face stigma, including students, faculty, and staff (Alessi et al., 2017; Choudhuri & Curley, 2019). According to Young and McKibban (2014), students on college campuses require a safe space to feel welcome or to survive. The experiences of those who identify as LGBTQ are ignored while those at four-year schools and high schools are examined in earnest (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016).

Chapter one details the background of the issue regarding a lack of research into LGBTQ community college students. Chapter one also includes the research methods used and research question, the significance of the study, an overview of campus climate and Appalachian community colleges, the methods employed, researcher positionality, delimitations, and key terms.

Chapter two will review the relevant literature related to several areas explored. The areas of chapter two include a statistics of LGBTQ individuals, gaps in the literature on LGBTQ

community college students, historical perspective, first studies of LGBTQ college students and community college students, Queer Theory as a definition and the framework for this study, background on the Appalachian region, community colleges in Appalachia, the campus climate, the experiences of LGBTQ community college students', the overall campus classroom and non-classroom experiences of LGBTQ students, housing issues around LGBTQ students, safe spaces and resource centers, the health of LGBTQ students, and the impact of religion on LGBTQ individuals. Other issues examined include choice of major by LGBTQ students, first-generation, racial minority, undocumented LGBTQ students, special needs LGBTQ students, HBUC's, retention, activism, college sports, those missing from existing literature, and alumni relations. Chapter two also discusses the few articles that have been published on LGBTQ community college students in the last five years. Chapter three outlines the methodology used. Chapter four will present the findings of the narrative inquiry study. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research on this topic.

It is revolutionary for any trans person to choose to be seen and visible in a world that tells us we should not exist.

-Laverne Cox, Daring to Be Myself

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this narrative inquiry into LGBTQ Appalachian community college student's experiences is to find out what students are experiencing at this time. Students, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, discussed their experiences. Higher education institutions across the United States include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students in their enrollment. Studying sexuality and gender minority students, such as LGBTQ students, is significant for both the students and higher education faculty, staff, and administrators (Stewart & Kendrick, 2019). Students need to know more about the cultures they encounter and how this culture will accept or deny them. Faculty and staff need to know more about LGBTQ student's backgrounds, what obstacles they face, and how to help make their experience meaningful and successful at a community college (Denton, 2020). The peer-reviewed literature is missing studies of LGBTQ community college students (Trimble, 2019). The literature is essential to both LGBTQ students, heterosexual students, and faculty and staff at colleges (Coleman et al., 2020).

This chapter includes a summary of all relevant literature in the field discovered by me related to the topics discussed. First, I will describe the method of the literature review and provide a brief synopsis of the findings. I will include gaps noted in the literature, historical perspective, and a brief background on the first studies. Secondly, I will cover Queer Theory including the definition, background, and how it fits into this study. Thirdly, I will cover Appalachia background and community colleges and students located in the region. Next, I will review current research on LGBTQ community college students, what the overall campus

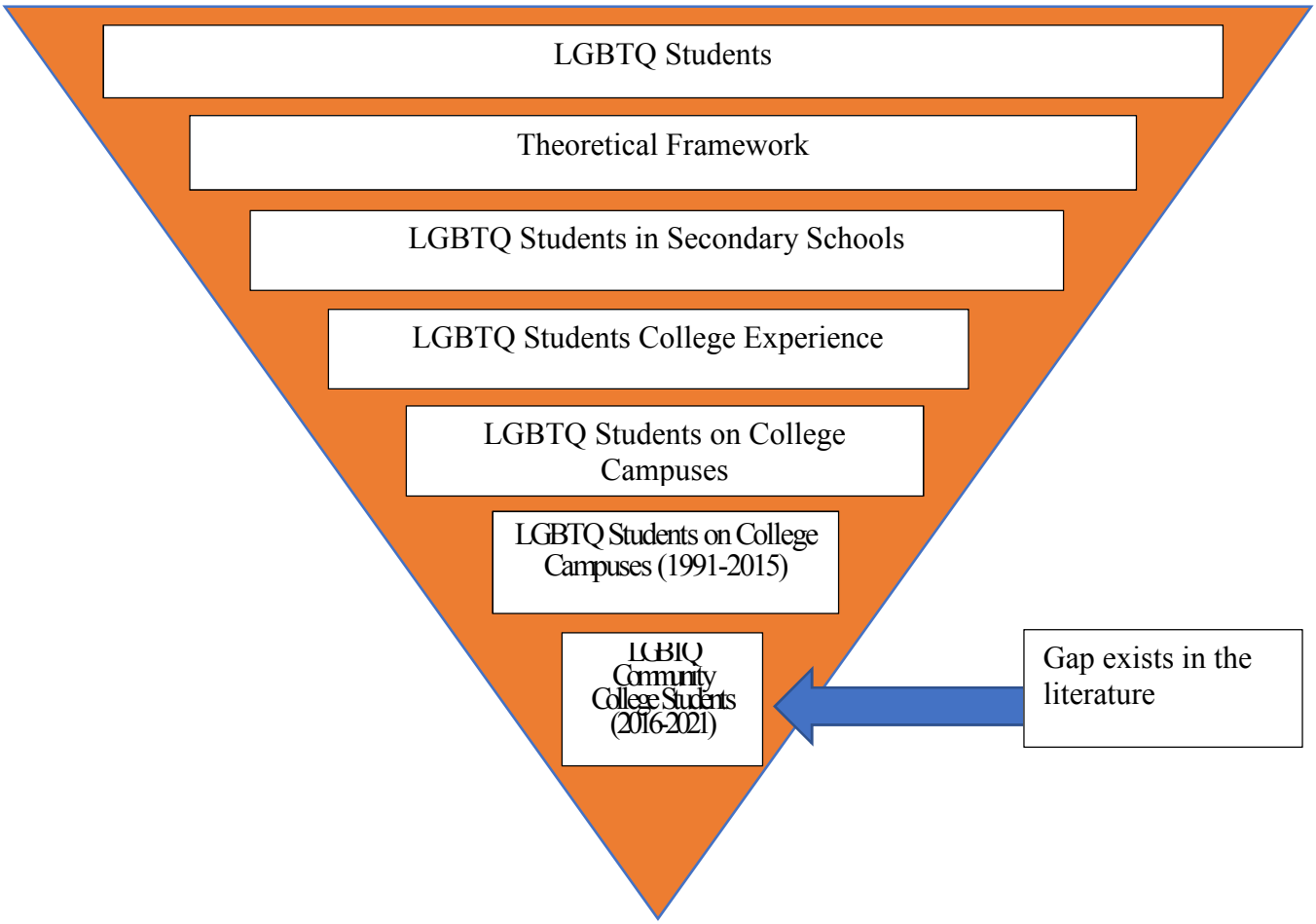
climate is like for LGBTQ students, housing issues facing LGBTQ student populations, non-classroom experiences, Safe Zones and resources for LGBTQ student's, the health and mental health of LGBTQ students, how religion has impacted community college students, and important experiences from various LGBTQ student populations. The last part of this chapter will focus on the current research found on LGBTQ community college students.

Method of the Literature Review

I scrutinized academic journals and textbooks collected through Old Dominion University's Perry Libraries. I also accessed online databases that included access to peer-reviewed articles. This study was focused on the following areas: LGBTQ community college students, LGBTQ college students, higher education, community colleges, Appalachian community colleges, and Safe Zones. This study used the following key terms when conducting article searches using the library databases: LGBTQ, LGBT, LGB, community college, transgender, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, intersex, gay, queer, Queer Theory, sexual identity, campus climate, campus culture, Appalachia, Appalachian, safe space, and Safe Zone.

Figure 1

Literature review topic funnel diagram



Statistics on LGBTQ Individuals

Without major studies of LGBTQ community college students, there is no way to conduct vast research and build upon that research, even though the community college population is large (Garvey, 2020). Zamani-Gallher and Choudhuri (2016) reported that more than two-fifths of undergraduates attend two-year institutions (p.47). Six million students enrolled in public, two-year colleges in the fall of 2016, according to the Community College Research Center (2020). That posits there are a significant number of students with their experiences unexplored at the community college level.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges, as of March 2019, 41% of all undergraduates attend community colleges. Forty percent were first-time freshmen, 56% Native American, 52% Hispanic, and 42% Black. Sixty-two percent of all full-time students at the community college worked, and 72% of all part-time students at community colleges worked. Thirty-seven percent of all community college students attend full time. Twenty-nine percent of community college students are first-generation students, while 12% of students have disabilities, 15% are single parents, and 9% are non-U.S. citizens (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). These figures tell a story of a community college system that is very diverse, multicultural, and significant. The fact sheet does not mention LGBTQ students, their needs, or success rates. LGBTQ students are included in the figures mentioned above but not highlighted. It is essential to know more about LGBTQ students that are overlooked.

In 27 states, LGBTQ individuals can be refused housing or denied services just for identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, including most states in the Appalachian region (Human Rights Campaign, 2020c). Until June 2020, LGBTQ individuals could be fired for identifying as LGBTQ (Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia, 2020). There are over 7,000-degree-granting institutions in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a), but only 1,055 include non-discrimination policies with both gender identity and expression included (Campus Pride, 2020). Campuses that have an LGBTQ resource center with at least one paid professional staff person in the United States number only 257 and all are located on a four-year campus (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2020).

Violence against LGBTQ individuals is not a new phenomenon. Until recently, statistics on violence against LGBTQ individuals was not kept separate to know these data. Kehoe (2020)

reported that LGBTQ individuals are 2.4 times more likely to be the victim of a hate crime than Jews, 2.6 times more likely than Blacks, 4.4 times more likely than Muslims, 13.8 time more likely than Latinos, and 41.5 times more likely than whites.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported hate crime statistics for the year 2018 nationwide. Law enforcement agencies reported that 1,404 hate crime offenses occurred based on sexual orientation. Of that 1,404, 59.8% were anti-gay, 25.1% were anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group) bias, 12.2% were anti-lesbian bias, and 1.5% were anti-bisexual bias or biphobia. One hundred eighty-four offenses were committed based on a person's gender identity. Of the 184 offenses, 157 were anti-transgender, and 27 were anti-gender non-conforming bias (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018). The Human Rights Campaign reported that in 2019, 22 transgender and gender non-conforming people were murdered in the United States. Of the 22 people, 91% were black women, 81% were under the age of 30, and 68% lived in the south (Human Rights Campaign, 2020a). In 2020, the Human Rights Campaign reported that 44 transgender and nonconforming individuals were murdered, the highest number ever reported since they started tracking this figure (Human Rights Campaign, 2021)

There is no definite way to know the number of LGBTQ students on community college campuses. Most colleges do not ask students when they apply for their sexual orientation and then continue to ask while enrolled (Legg et al., 2020). Stewart and Kendrick (2019) found that students are reluctant in some cases to identify as LGBTQ. The fact that students do not want to be identified does not allow for a complete understanding of how many LGBTQ students are attending community colleges. There are many reasons LGBTQ students do not want to self-identify. The feelings of bias and discrimination are found on campus and at home and in the workplace as well. Bias and discrimination keep LGBTQ students from being who they

undeniably are as a person (Haefele-Thomas & Hansen, 2019; Stewart & Kenrick, 2019; Taylor et al., 2018). Even though LGBTQ individuals' acceptance has increased, assaults on LGBTQ people have also increased (Stewart & Kendrick, 2019). LGBTQ students could understand the grim statistics and chose not to self-identify.

One report conducted by the Williams Institute, which is a part of UCLA, estimated that as of September 2020, youth age 13-17 in the United States number almost two-million or 9.5% of youth. The number of youth estimate was derived from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey and population estimates from the 2017 US Census Bureau (Conron, 2020).

In another report conducted by the Williams Institute the estimated percent of LGBT adults in the United States is 4.5% as of July 2020. The estimate is derived from the Gallup Daily Tracking Survey which randomly calls 350,000 adults each year (Conron & Goldberg, 2020).

A small snapshot released by the Census Bureau can help illuminate same-sex households. This is the first time that the survey captured relationship characteristics and categories for same-sex couples. In 2019, there were 980,276 same-sex households in the United States according to the American Community Survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau. Among those couples, 84.6% of those 16 to 64 were in the labor force as opposed to opposite sex couples which was 80.4%. For same-sex couples, 51.8% had one partner with a bachelor's degree and in 32.7% both had at least a bachelor's degree. The median household income for same-sex couples was $98,613, while male-male couples was $114,182 and female-female couples was $87,289 (Census Bureau, 2019).

Gaps in the Literature on LGBTQ Community College Students

Studies covering the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) experiences of students at community colleges are lacking (Trimble, 2019). Leider (1999) stated, "Given the

state of current research in the field, it is not overstating the case to say that we know virtually nothing about LGBT students on community college campuses" (p. 15). In 2011, Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri stated that no studies of LGBTQ community college students had appeared in the literature since Ivory in 2005. Garvey et al. (2015) held "there is an absence of literature examining the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community college students" (p.528). Then, in 2020, Whitehead and Gulley stated that there were "only a handful of empirical articles about LGBTQ community college students" (p. 121). This absence is evident when searching for information on this topic from Leider's experience until today and noted by multiple researchers.

Community colleges are often overlooked when exploring the topic of LGBTQ college students. There are various factors on why LGBTQ community college students are ignored (Ivory, 2005; Ivory, 2012). Community college students are transitory, LGBTQ students do not want to be identified, and the focus shifts toward secondary education or four-year schools (Ivory, 2012). In 2005, Ivory "found six articles discussing the topic of LGBTQ community college students" (p. 61). Since that time, no more than a dozen other articles about LGBTQ community college students have been researched. Sanlo and Espinoza (2012) identified, in 2012, about "eight other authors who made this same statement that literature on LGBTQ community college students, in general, was deficient" (p. 475). In 2016, Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri made a similar assessment as Sanlo and Espinoza. The trend of studies addressing LGBTQ community college students has not grown significantly over a decade of research.

Garvey et al. (2015) discussed how two-year colleges had enrolled a high percentage of marginalized students. The groups include racial or ethnic minorities, those with disabilities,

women, first-generation students, and LGBTQ students. Garvey et al. (2015) stated that it is vital to study these marginalized students to understand community colleges' impact.

Historical Perspective

The first studies conducted about LGBTQ college students did not appear until well after the Stonewall resistance in New York City in 1969. Police raided a bar frequented by lesbians, gays, prostitutes, and drag queens named the Stonewall Inn, located in the Greenwich Village district. When the police raided the bar to arrest men dressed in female clothes, and women dressed in men's clothing, patrons resisted, and soon six nights of rioting began (Bronski, 2020; Cervini, 2020). Stonewall is considered the beginning of the LGBTQ civil rights movement (Halkitis, 2019). Many civil disobedient actions occurred around the United States before Stonewall, but they had little impact (Bronski, 2020). The riots that occurred after police raided the Stonewall Inn created a unified need for change from the sexual and gender minority population that spread from coast to coast (Bronski, 2020; Carter, 2011). This breakpoint moment in history did not spill over into articles containing LGBTQ Junior, or known today as a community, college students immediately. Twenty-two years passed after Stonewall before the first article on LGBTQ community college students appeared in the literature.

First Studies of LGBTQ College Students

In 2004, one of the most extensive studies until that time of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students were conducted by Sanlo. This study did not include transgender students. The author explored the experiences faced by LGB students on a college campus at that time. Sanlo (2004) wanted to know more about students who identified as LGB and their ability to graduate while dealing with homophobia, bullying, microaggressions, and other campus

stressors. Sanlo presented that LGB students dealt with stress on the community college campus because of their sexual orientation and most persisted (Sanlo, 2004).

The most extensive empirical study of LGBTQ students was conducted in 2010 by Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer, titled *2010: State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*. This quantitative study documented the experiences and perceptions of 5,149 individuals who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) (Rankin et al., 2010). This study covered students, staff, faculty, and administrators from all 50 states. Rankin et al. (2010) stated that LGBTQQ populations were at higher risk of harassment, discrimination, bullying, and hate-crimes than their heterosexual peers. An environment filled with so much hate does not allow students to live and learn on campus like heterosexual students. There has not been another national study of LGBTQ attitude about campus climate conducted at the same magnitude since (Garvey et al., 2017; Rankin et al., 2019).

First Studies of LGBTQ Community College Students

The first-ever peer-reviewed article about LGBTQ community college students in the literature was in 1991 when Baker published *Gay Nineties: Addressing the Needs of the Homosexual Community and Junior College Students and Faculty*. Baker referred to this group as the invisible minority (Baker, 1991).

From 1991 until 2005, only seven articles were published about the LGBTQ community college student. The articles were conducted by Baker (1991), Ottenritter (1998), Franklin (2000), Leck (1998), Leider (1999), Leider (2000), and Ivory (2005). The early studies addressed only sexual minorities and anti-gay behavior on campus. Ivory (2005) was the first article that addressed the LGBTQ student climate on campus (Leider, 2012). Ivory found that there was

harassment, discrimination, assault, and intimidation on the community college campus. Ivory stated that the community college was not advantageous for LGBT students because of its lack of resources. Even though LGBTQ community college students existed, their stories, numbers, and issues were not addressed (Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2012). Once marriage equality, adoption by LGBTQ individuals, employment protections, and the ban on openly serving LGBTQ military members were forefront in the news, LGBTQ college students' studies increased slightly from 2010 until 2019 (Edwards & Grippe, 2019) but not LGBTQ community college students.

Queer Theory

Definition of Queer Theory

Queer Theory is the paradigm used in this study. Queer Theory's definition is a critical theory field that examines the lives of sexual and gender minorities and how sexual orientation and gender identity have influenced that experience (Rumens et al., 2019). Queer Theory is used to deconstruct the social norms in place today that categorize society into normal and deviant sexual and gender behaviors. Queer Theory challenges the binary of man or woman and gay or straight (Carr et al.,2017). Significant themes of oppression, power, discrimination, bias, and violence are generally written about when discussing Queer Theory (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Queer Theory as a Framework

This study contains Queer Theory as the theoretical framework. The power structure that is in place today across college campuses is an imbalanced binary (Pinar, 2003, p. 359). Queer Theory, "critically analyzes the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620). Applying Queer Theory to gender and sexuality posits that they are both social

constructs. Students who identify as LGBTQ do so as a society affects them, and they affect society. Abes and Kasch continue by saying, "heteronormativity creates a binary between identification as heterosexual and nonheterosexual in which nonheterosexuality is abnormal and measured differently from heterosexuality" (p. 621). The two groups separate into heterosexual and nonheterosexual in society, depending on how they identify themselves and if they want to be heteronormative (Abes & Kasch, 2007).

According to Queer Theory, heterosexuality has defined acceptable and unacceptable in society (Pinar, 2003, p. 359). Thus, nonheterosexual people are considered unnatural and unacceptable. Queer Theory explains why students may not want to identify as LGBTQ (Pinar, 2003). Students who identify as LGBTQ could perceive themselves as abnormal, unnatural, and not a part of the community. LGBTQ students may not want to be identified, join a group, or not start a group if one does not exist (Ivory, 2012).

Origins of Queer Theory

Queer Theory is not easily defined since its roots come from multiple sources and multiple disciplines such as feminism, post-structuralist theory, the gay rights movement, and activism around HIV/AIDS (Watson, 2005). Queer Theory is not a unified piece of literature but comprises many different sources and authors. There are several individuals credited with the philosophical underpinnings of Queer Theory (Watson, 2005). One individual is credited with creating a Queer Theory framework and inspiring the later creation, Michel Foucault (Rodemeyer, 2017). Foucault believed that sexuality and gender identity were merely historical roles and social constructs (Foucault, 1978).

The term Queer Theory was coined and defined in 1991 by Teresa de Lauretis' in her work on feminist cultural studies titled Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities that was

published in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* (de Lauretis, 1991). In her work, de Lauretis discusses three interrelated ideas: refusing heterosexuality as the benchmark for sexual formations, challenging the belief that lesbian and gay studies are one entity, and a strong focus on the multiple ways that race shapes sexual bias (de Lauretis, 1991).

Gayle Rubin influenced Queer Theory with her 1984 work *Thinking Sex*. Rubin continued to expand on Foucault's argument that biology does not explain sexuality and that sexual identities, and behavior, are organized hierarchically (Rubin, 1984).

Another figure in early Queer Theory was Eve Sedgewick. Sedgwick wrote *Epistemology of the Closet* in 1990. In this work, she stated that "the homo/heterosexual definition has become so tediously argued over because of a lasting incoherence "between seeing homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority ... [and] seeing it on the other hand as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 20).

The last major influencer of Queer Theory is Judith Butler. In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler (1990) argued that gender, like sexuality, is not obtained from society's idea of such but is acted out and portrayed by the individual. To Butler (1990), gender and sexuality are performative and not labeled by society. Butler stated that if society believes in one truth of sex, then heterosexuality would be the only outcome that creates the binary of male and female or masculine and feminine (Butler, 1990).

The work of Sedgwick (1990), Rubin (1984), and Butler (1990) form the primary literature of Queer Theory. The work of these three individuals challenges the binary and heteronormative belief systems that are in place.

Challenges to the Binary and Heteronormativity

Using Queer Theory in this research also challenges both the binary and heteronormativity. Sedgwick (1990) detailed how the binary was created to suppress homosexuality. Meanwhile, heteronormativity is seen as normal in society as heterosexuality is portrayed in all forms across the culture (Denton, 2020). Heteronormativity does not sanction LGBTQ individuals holding hands or kissing in public domains or within popular culture, and if so, they are ridiculed or bullied (Giffney, 2004). Lamont et al. (2018) found that even LGBTQ students on the college campus rejected the heteronormative hookup culture and created their own rules. These are just two challenges to the binary and heteronormativity but many more exist.

Appalachian Region

The Appalachian Region (see Figure 2) is the focus of this study. The Appalachian Region is not a single state or territory usually marked on a map. Instead, Appalachia is an area that shares a unique bond of a central highland of mountains set beside broad valleys (Drake, 2003) and is considered an area that shares a common culture. The federal Appalachia Regional Commission defined this area in 1964 stating,

> The Appalachian Region, as defined in ARC's authorizing legislation, is a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Forty-two percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population. (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020a).

The Appalachian Region is composed of many poverty-stricken and isolated areas. The focus has shifted to this area to highlight generational and persistent poverty in which education has been introduced to alleviate (Kannapel & Flory, 2017). There have been billions of dollars spent on the Appalachian region to alleviate persistent poverty and crippling drug abuse (Hall, 2013).

Income in Appalachia is less than that of the overall United States. In 2017, The Appalachian Regional Commission reported that the average per capita income was $41,155, while the United States average was $51,640 per capita. When looking at income by state, the situation gets worse. Appalachian Kentucky has a per capita income of $32,368, Appalachian Mississippi has a per capita income of $33,978, Appalachian Virginia has a per capita income of $36,382, and Appalachian West Virginia has a per capita income of $38,479. (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020b).

Unemployment is another area where Appalachia has suffered. In 2017, the national unemployment rate was 4.4%, while in Appalachian counties, it was 4.8%. Viewing the unemployment numbers by each state in Appalachia, a different picture emerges. In 2017, Appalachian Kentucky had an unemployment rate of 6.6%, Appalachian Ohio was 6.1%, Appalachian New York was 5.6%, and Appalachian West Virginia 5.2% (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020d).

Poverty has been a persistent issue in Appalachia. The poverty rate from 2013 to 2017 was 14.6% nationwide. In Appalachia, at the same time, the poverty rate was 16.3%. This number gets worse when expanding by state. Appalachian Kentucky had a poverty rate of 25.6%, Appalachian Mississippi was 21.5%, Appalachian Virginia was 18.4%, and Appalachian West Virginia was 17.8% (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020c). The worst poverty areas

in Appalachia are concentrated in the North Central, Central, and South-Central Appalachia or referred to as Central Appalachia. Central Appalachia has the most distressed areas in the nation consisting of 53 counties in eastern Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia (Kannapel & Flory, 2017).

Education statistics give another idea of how different Appalachia is from the rest of the country. Appalachia fared just as well compared to the United States in the number of high school graduates, age 25 and over in the years between 2013-2017, by having an 86.4% completion rate compared to 87.3% (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020b).

Where education shifts between the United States as a whole and Appalachia occur is in bachelor's degrees. For the years 2013-2017, those aged 25 years or older, the number of bachelor's degrees completion rate was 23.7% for the Appalachian region and 30.9% for the nation (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020b). When the numbers are expanded by state for the years 2013-2017, Appalachian Kentucky had only a 14.7% completion rate, Appalachia Ohio had a 17.5% completion rate, and Appalachian Mississippi had a completion rate of 18.3%. Students in Appalachia do not have the same type of college education as those in other areas of the United States (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020b).

Students in Appalachia aspiring to attend postsecondary education have a few obstacles to overcome. Parents of students are often not familiar with college and how to help their children through the process. Kannapel and Flory (2017) stated that less than one-third of 3,000 middle school students, participating in a college awareness event, in a West Virginia school was familiar with postsecondary institutions' entrance requirements. Kannapel and Flory (2017) highlighted that Appalachian students have a secure connection to community, place, and family. In their research, Kannapel and Flory found that students were less inclined to attend college

away from their homes and instead preferred to attend a local community college. Students could continue to work the same job by staying home while saving money on tuition and rent (Kannapel & Flory, 2017).

Appalachia is an area constructed by politicians, so not all of Appalachia is homogenous (Gore et al., 2011). Frequently, areas share a common cultural bond, and one bond that specific areas of Appalachian culture share are collectivism. This area is known as the Southern Highlands area of Appalachia, which consists of eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northern Georgia. Gore et al. (2011) found that Appalachian students from the Southern Highlands could perform better than the average Appalachian student by utilizing their cultural beliefs of collectivistic attitudes from home.

The Williams Institute released a report titled, *The Impact of Stigma and Discrimination Against LGBT People in West Virginia* in 2021. In the report, it was discovered that there are an estimated 57,800 LGBT adults and 10,300 LGBT youth living in West Virginia. The report noted that a Campus Quality of Life Survey of students at West Virginia University stated that they felt that 27% of people were unfriendly towards transgender people and 19% were unfriendly toward gay and lesbians. The Williams Institute reported that in a 2017 GLSEN National School Climate Survey of middle and high school students, 82% of LGBTQ students experienced verbal harassment based on sexual orientation, and 76% stated they experienced verbal harassment based on gender expression. In that same survey, 42% reported physical harassment for sexual orientation and 34% physical harassment for gender expression. The Williams Institute report concluded that stigma and discrimination led to economic instability, health disparities, and an overrepresentation in state systems and services for LGBTQ West Virginians (Mallory et al., 2021).

Community Colleges of Appalachia by the Numbers

There are 81 public community colleges located within the 420 counties of Appalachia. The number of community colleges within each state are as follows: 12 in Alabama, five in Georgia, five in Kentucky, three in Maryland, three in Mississippi, four in New York, 13 in North Carolina, six in Ohio, five in Pennsylvania, two in South Carolina, six in Tennessee, eight in Virginia, and nine in West Virginia (Appendix A).

As of 2016, IPEDS calculates there were 323,900 students enrolled in the 81 schools. Sixteen of the Appalachian community colleges have onsite housing for students. The largest school in terms of enrolled students is Eastern Gateway Community College in Steubenville, Ohio, with 25,648 students. The smallest school by enrolled students is Mayland Community College, located in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, with 399 students. Thirty-six of the 81 community colleges are a part of the National Junior College Athletic Association (Community Colleges of Appalachia, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020c).

The community colleges in Appalachia vary in the type of setting. Only one school is considered large and located in a city. Six schools are located in a city and considered midsize. There are eleven small schools in a city. Three schools are considered rural and distant, fifteen schools are rural and fringe, and two schools are considered rural and remote. There are eight schools in the suburbs and large, six in the suburbs and midsize, and three in the suburbs and small. Seventeen of the schools are in a town and distant, three are in a town and fringe, and five are in a town and remote (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020c).

The lowest graduation rate occurred at J.F. Drake State Community & Technical College in Huntsville, Alabama, at 14%. The highest graduation rate was 54% at Zane State College in Zanesville, Ohio. The lowest transfer rate of 1% belonged to Mountain Empire Community

College in Big Stone, Virginia. The highest transfer rate is Tri-County Technical in Pendleton, South Carolina, at 40% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020c).

In schools with a population of less than 5,000 enrolled students, it was found that 15% of these schools in Appalachia had an LGBTQ club or organization listed on their website. Schools with more than 5,000 enrolled students showed a 53% chance of having an LGBTQ club or organization listed on their website. Ten out of the 18 schools with LGBTQ groups listed on their websites were also members of the National Junior College Athletic Association. Four out of the 18 schools with LGBTQ groups listed on their website also had on-campus housing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020c).

have to contribute to their family's finances, deal with family issues, or work multiple jobs instead of focusing on college (Ivory, 2012). Community colleges in Appalachia can offer a way to break the cycle of generational poverty in underserved populations if students access the college (Williams et al., 2010).

In general, rural areas face many different obstacles that urban areas do not (Brisolara, 2019). Poor internet connectivity and internet speeds can create chaos for students who want to study in a rural area. Schools are moving more services online, such as applications, new student orientation, library services, and financial aid. Rural areas face transportation gaps and can be the difference between attending and not attending college (Brisolara, 2019). Wright (2012) found that not all students who earn a degree in Kentucky necessarily want to leave their community. Wright's findings are antithetical to what the whole of Appalachia is experiencing.

Significance of Coming Out of the Closet

Coming out, or disclosing a sexual or gender identity such as LGBTQ, can be traumatic, painful, and not the same for everyone (Pryor, 2015). Coming out can be liberating to the person, but can cause problems with those who do not understand, are homophobic or transphobic, have strong religious beliefs, or do not want to accept (Kosciw et al., 2014). Coming out occurs at different times in life and is impacted by age, location, religion, gender, race, and ability. Identity development is formed between the ages of 18-29 for most adults and at a time when adults could be attending college (Rios & Eaton, 2016). Coming out can happen while students are attending a college. College can be a liberating time for many students. During the time on a college campus, students could find peer support, interact with people like themselves, and develop a sense of self (Garvey & Rankin, 2015b). The coming-out process never stops for most people as the world is heteronormative (Nachman et al., 2020).

Campus Climate

The campus climate for LGBTQ students is significant. Students want to know how safe the campus is for them. Students also want to know what types of resources are available in general for LGBTQ students, if there are microaggressions and the faculty and staff's openness toward minorities (Szymanski & Bissonette, 2019) before they attend an orientation. A hostile campus climate exists for LGBTQ students at both two-year and four-year campuses (Pitcher et al., 2018; Rankin et al., 2010). Woodford et al. (2015) found that microaggressions impact the health, well-being, and grades of LGBTQ students. An adverse campus climate for LGBTQ students has caused both curriculum and health issues at schools of pharmacy (Jacobson et al., 2017) and Jesuit Schools (Barnhardt et al., 2017).

Not only does a harmful campus climate affect students, but also faculty members. Garvey and Rankin (2018) found that queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum faculty would leave a school in either an urban or rural environment based on a negative experience and or a negative perception of the campus climate. LGBTQ students and faculty can thrive at college when there are supports such as resource centers, supportive peer groups, supportive faculty, supportive staff, and an overall supporting community (Hill et al., 2020; Manning et al., 2014).

A campus climate cannot be changed overnight. It takes specific higher-level actions to address what is wrong and long-term strategies to change. A study conducted by Chonody et al. (2009) found that students taking a human sexuality course came away with more acceptance and positive affirmations of gays and lesbians. It takes the highest leadership levels to change the campus climate with long-term planning and deliberate attempts at change (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011).

Even when the macroclimate is heteronormative, LGBTQ students and faculty will create their microclimates to thrive. In one study, Vaccaro (2012) found that because of harassment, bias, and invisibility that groups of LGBTQ students and faculty created microclimates. The microclimate helped with persistence for all and completion for students. Even the microclimate that is created can be hostile (Vaccaro, 2012). Evans et al. (2017) found in one study that discrimination was found within the LGBTQ community at higher levels than from straight-identified peers. Not all discrimination or bullying might come from outside the LGBTQ group, which can be concerning. Evans found that some microaggression was reported by participants outside of the LGBTQ group and some from faculty members.

Campus climate is essential for minorities, especially LGBTQ students. One tool that undergraduate students can use is the Campus Pride Index, a part of the nonprofit Campus Pride. Since 2007, this tool has helped students assess colleges' campus climate around the country (Garvey et al., 2017). The tool can also be used by administrators to see how their campus is ranked and help change the campus climate for LGBTQ students.

Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students

LGBTQ students do not sit in the classroom and experience the same environment as their heterosexual peers (Alessi et al., 2017). LGBTQ students must continuously think about how individuals will accept them, rebuke them, or harass them. LGBTQ students worry about whom to associate with, and not know if other people will approve or deny them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Vaccaro, 2012). LGBTQ students must worry about acceptance at a much higher rate than their heterosexual peers (Woodford & Kulick, 2014).

LGBTQ College Students' Experiences

With an absence of LGBTQ community college research, some of the items listed discuss four-year LGBTQ students' experiences. The items can equally apply to community colleges but do not focus on them. The examples help others understand the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of LGBTQ students.

A study by Vaccaro (2012) used an ethnographic study of LGBT faculty, staff, and students to explore the intersections of social identity and campus roles. Vaccaro found that no matter where the students were on the college campus, there were either "overt or covert forms of heterosexism and homophobia" (p. 434). Vaccaro's study completed at one midsize institution, with an enrollment of 11,000, had only four-year and graduate students in attendance. Tetreault et al. (2013) stated, "campus climate appears to be variable for LGBTQ students depending on how open they are about who they are, and what their support system is like" (p. 961). The authors stated that this would impact their experience depending on where they are on campus, such as in the classroom, gym, Greek life, or student housing. The above studies conducted at four-year institutions cannot be compared to community college studies since the data does not exist. The researchers did, however, mention that college students encounter obstacles at community college campuses.

Since community colleges have a different atmosphere and climate from four-year institutions, students will encounter very different experiences, possibly such as no connection to other LGBTQ students. Students might encounter some of the same academic, extracurricular, or support, however. Ivory (2005) found that community college students' transitory nature makes it difficult for LGBT persons to connect with other sexual and gender minorities on campus. Also, Ivory stated that it could be difficult for LGBT students to identify other sexual and gender

minorities on community college campuses because community college students are transient, and students do not spend four years there. Ivory discussed the barriers to student engagement, such as "commuter campus syndrome" and that the students who attend community colleges work at least twenty hours a week while attending school full-time or work full-time and go to school part-time (p. 65). These barriers do not allow community college students time to form relationships or even encourages it.

Transgender Students' College Experiences

Transgender students experience a different set of issues than their LGBQ peers. Students who transition from one sex to another have the issue of not being identified by their correct name or pronouns. Depending on where the transgender student is in the process, the school could have their birth name on file. Without proper documentation, this is the name that the college will use for class rosters and their records (Haefele-Thomas & Hansen, 2019). Transgender students want to be referred to by their chosen name and not their birth name.

Transgender students might come out to faculty, staff, and possibly other students. Instructor interaction might be problematic because not all faculty understand transgender issues, such as name discrepancies (Garvey & Rankin, 2015b). Transgender individuals might also find that their peers do not understand nor support transgender individuals (Pryor, 2015). A 2015 United States Transgender Survey found that 24% of transgender individuals who were out to their peers or faculty reported being sexually, physically, or verbally harassed on a college campus (Goldberg et al., 2019). Students who identify as transgender must learn to survive being on a college campus or may leave.

Classroom Experiences for LGBTQ Students

Classroom experiences are valuable because, for some students, this is the only space they interact on campus. Garvey et al. (2015) found that about a third of LGBTQ students contemplated transferring to another college to find a campus climate that they felt was nurturing. In the same study by Garvey et al., the researchers found a strong relationship between campus climate and classroom experience for LGBTQ students at community colleges. The classroom environment can also not be welcoming because students are coming to class to learn and leave. Faculty might not connect with their students or take the time to get to know their students (Magallanes, 2012). Rankin et al. (2010) found that 42% of LGBTQ students identified the classroom as the area where they experience the most issues with bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Faculty can provide the bridge with students who identify as LGBTQ and their learning outcomes. Yost and Gilmore (2011) reported that faculty in one study indicated they had used LGBTQ-friendly teaching strategies in the classroom. Some faculty responded to the open questions that they did not need to highlight LGBTQ issues in their field because it was not relevant, i.e., business and accounting.

Faculty are not the only influence inside of a classroom. Peer interaction is another component of a student's experience. Rankins' 2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People offers the best glimpse into the classroom. In the report, 42% of those who responded stated they faced harassment within the classroom. In that same report, only 27% of heterosexual students reported harassment (Rankin, 2010). When students were asked how comfortable they felt in the classroom, 64% of LGBTQ students and 76% of heterosexual students stated they were comfortable. Students also reported that in-class

discussion commonly assumed that students were heterosexual. Those students who had previously disclosed their sexual orientation felt ignored or isolated during classroom discussions (Rankin, 2010).

Non-classroom Experiences on College Campuses for LGBTQ Students

Just about anything outside of the classroom is a non-classroom experience or could be considered co-curricular or extracurricular. LGBTQ students might have difficulty connecting with those who identify on a community college campus (Ivory, 2005). Students attending community colleges often leave immediately after classes are completed due to other life demands. Students who leave the campus environment do not participate in co-curricular or extracurricular activities, which is also referred to as community campus syndrome (Ivory, 2012). Students who stay on campus become a part of the culture (Bardhoshi et al., 2018). LGBTQ students might miss out on connecting with peers or allies because of their fears (Bardhoshi et al., 2018; Hughes & Hurtado, 2018).

Community college websites have been found not to include anything about LGBTQ students (Taylor et al., 2018). Hostile campus climate decreases the chance that an LGBTQ student will participate in co-curricular activities (Garvey et al., 2017). Heteronormative and cisnormative campus climates impact marginalized sexual and gender minorities, often withdrawing from the campus activities (Brown et al., 2020).

Cocurricular experiences help to form LGBTQ students' identities. Cocurricular experiences also bring together heterosexual and LGBTQ students. By the two groups interacting and working together, the campus climate for LGBTQ could become enhanced (Hughes & Hurtado, 2018). Experiences outside of the classroom could give LGBTQ a sense of belonging on the campus (Garvey et al., 2017; Lange et al., 2019).

LGBTQ students must negotiate the heteronormative campus. If a student is not out, they have to decide whom to disclose this information to and if it is safe. The classroom curriculum is mostly constructed of heteronormative themes and stories. LGBTQ students are putting their health, well-being, safety, and possible grades in danger by being on a college campus based on the research (Garvey et al., 2015; Taylor, 2015; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016).

Appalachian Region Community College Campus Experience

Rural colleges and community colleges serve 3.3 million students through around 800 rural and tribal colleges (Brisolara, 2019). Most community colleges in rural areas serve as the center of cultural life for residents (Hoffman, 2016). For LGBTQ students living in rural areas, it could be isolating. Rural colleges could expose LGBTQ students with their lack of privacy, social isolation, and negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals. Rural colleges are not located near large metropolitan areas where LGBTQ students could find support networks (Stroup et al., 2014). Support networks are critical for LGBTQ students to help them through the process of coming out and support afterward (Hughes, 2018).

The rural area could be surrounded by an aging population, which means a decline in the primary and secondary schools, drug abuse, high rates of poverty, lack of employers for everyone to have a job, and crumbling infrastructure (Friedel & Reed, 2019).

College students are considered a population in the United States that could have food insecurity issues (McArthur et al., 2018). At one Appalachian higher education campus that McArthur et al. (2018) researched, the freshmen students were three times higher to experience food insecurity than living at home.

On-Campus Housing Issues for LGBTQ Students

There is not much research on issues concerning LGBTQ students in residence halls (Kortegast, 2017). The residence halls on community colleges that do exist do not present a welcome and open environment for LGBTQ students. There are many microaggressions and a lack of support within residence halls. Lack of information does not provide a complete picture of the LGBTQ student experiences. This could mean more students could live off-campus, when possible (Kortegast, 2017).

Housing issues for LGBTQ students

Students attending a new setting on a college campus might be unaware of their roommate's sexual or gender orientation. LGBQ students could deal with rejection and stigma before entering the campus when thinking about making their roommates uncomfortable or being roomed with a homophobic roommate (Alessi et al., 2017). Mollet et al. (2020) found that on-campus housing that includes microaggressions or macro-aggressive behavior diminishes any positive effects for these students. Queer students also encountered a lack of activities where they felt they belonged and navigate a climate with a lack of privacy (Garvey & Rankin, 2015b).

Being transgender in college housing can be even more traumatic. Transgender individuals could be transitioning from one gender to another. Housing on campus is often separated by gender, causing issues for students who have or are transitioning. Not all campuses have transgender-inclusive housing policies (Kortegast, 2017; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015). Anderson-Long and Jeffries (2019) found that community colleges did not have gender-inclusive housing policies like four-year schools. Anderson-Long and Jeffries stated that administrators designing new college and housing buildings should consider LGBTQ students in their designs.

Despite rigorous research, I could not find any literature that dealt with housing for LGBTQ students within Appalachian region institutions. LGBTQ students' at Appalachian community colleges is lacking information in the literature to understand their experiences.

Safe Zones and Resource Centers for LGBTQ Students

A safe space provides LGBTQ and allies an area to express themselves among those who are accepting. Safe Zones are also known as Safe Spaces, Safe Harbors, Safe Space Ally, and SAFE on the college campus (Young & McKibban, 2014). Safe Zone training can be given to faculty, staff, students, and the community regarding LGBTQ issues, inclusivity, and support for sexual minority populations (Katz et al., 2016). Safe Zone training is tailored to the individual campus as this is not a program owned by any one organization, and there are no prepackaged kits available, which my research has found. To create a Safe Zone, faculty and administrative supports are necessary (Coleman, 2016). Without Safe Zone training, LGBTQ students could be exposed to harassment, discrimination, and bullying. Safe Zone training provides community members, students, faculty, and staff with information on LGBTQ individuals' needs by educating heterosexual and cisgender individuals.

Importance of Safe Zones for LGBTQ Students at Community Colleges

Safe Zones sometimes referred to as safe space, ally zones, or ally training, is an educational program that trains allies on how to help LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff and how to support those in need (Katz et al., 2016). There is no copyrighted Safe Zone training program. Instead, Safe Zone training is determined and created by each institution and can look differently on every campus. Typically, those who attend Safe Zone training receive a sticker to display in the office area that identifies them as a safe space or Safe Zone (Katz et al., 2016). The sticker typically has a rainbow image which is well-known in the LGBTQ community (Katz &

Federici, 2018). LGBTQ students know when they see a sticker, they are in the presence of an ally and can feel supported, welcomed, and free to be themselves (Katz et al., 2016; Safe Zone Project, n.d.).

Safe Zone training highlights the needs of LGBTQ students and their allies. Typical areas covered in Safe Zone training include LGBTQ concepts, microaggressions, heterosexual privilege, and how to support the community (Katz & Federici, 2018). Not all campuses require Safe Zone training, and typically the training is on a volunteer basis (Coleman, 2016; Young & McKibban, 2014). Students seeking to attend a college might find that the college has individuals who are Safe Zone trained just by searching online information (Wexelbaum, 2018). Students who identify as gender and sexual minorities face higher levels of depression, suicide ideation, substance abuse, lower grade point averages, and loneliness, and they should attend schools that are not hostile (Johnson et al., 2013; Katz et al., 2016).

College is a time and place where students improve their understanding of the world, learn tolerance and acceptance of other cultures, and socialize to prepare to navigate society (Coleman, 2016). Coulter et al. (2016) found that the use of Safe Zones decreased alcohol use among gender and sexual minorities. Trimble (2019) stated that Safe Zone training provides benefits to students by building allies among faculty, staff, and other students. Katz et al. (2018) found that exposure to a Safe Zone sticker or symbol promoted inclusive, accepting perceptions of the campus climate. The overall benefits of a Safe Zone are documented and profound.

Despite rigorous research, I was unable to find any literature that dealt with Safe Zones or resource centers for LGBTQ students within Appalachian region institutions. It is unknown at this time how many Safe Zones exist in Appalachia.

The Health of LGBTQ Students on Campus

Students who identify as LGBTQ face a higher likelihood of abusing substances to cope with the stress of homophobia, transphobia, microaggressions, discrimination or bullying (Woodford et al., 2018a; Woodford et al., 2018b). Being LGBTQ is not easy for a person trying to figure out the world and where they belong. The mental health of LGBTQ students should be a great concern to faculty and staff (Woodford et al., 2018a). Other issues of concern for LGBTQ students are depression and suicide. Whether the person is out to peers or faculty or not out can be stressful to an individual who identifies as LGBTQ (Kulick et al., 2017).

Substance Abuse Among LGBTQ Students

The National College Health Assessment conducted by the American College Health Association surveyed college students about health and well-being in 2019. This survey also asked about substance use. Out of the 43,140 students surveyed, the following are how they responded to using certain substances. In the three months prior to this study, 22% of students had used tobacco or nicotine products, 66.4% had used alcoholic beverages, 24.4% had used cannabis, 2.2% had used cocaine, coke, or crack, 3.5% had used prescription stimulants, 1.0% had inhaled substances, 3.1% had used hallucinogens, .2% had used heroin, and 1.1% had used prescription opioids (American College Health Association, 2020).

LGBTQ individuals use alcohol and illegal substance at higher rates than their heterosexual peers (Coulter et al., 2016; Kerr et al., 2014). Factors such as an unwelcome campus community toward LGBTQ students can exacerbate substance abuse. The prevalence of hearing microaggressions on campus could lead to higher use of alcohol and illicit drugs (Winberg et al., 2019). The stress of identifying as LGBTQ and attending an unknown community college can lead to higher levels of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drug abuse (Kirsch et

al., 2015). If the student is not out to their peers, there is a higher risk that the student could abuse legal and illegal substances at higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Another substance abused regularly by LGBTQ students is smoking cigarettes. Ylioja et al. (2018) found that frequent microaggressions on a college campus could lead to higher smoking rates among LGBTQ students.

Mental Health Issues Among LGBTQ Students

The National College Health Assessment conducted by the American College Health Association surveyed college students about their health and well-being. In their 2019 study, 18% of students reported severe psychological distress, and 21% reported moderate psychological distress. In the same study, 48.5% of students felt loneliness. Nine percent of students reported intentionally cutting, burning, bruising, or injuring themselves in the last 12 months (American College Health Association, 2020).

In the last 12 months, 14.5% of the students reported that they had issues with microaggressions, 6% bullying, 8.5% sexual harassment, and 10.3% discrimination. When asked about suicide, 2.4% of the students surveyed indicated they had attempted suicide in the last 12 months, but 23.7% were positive on a suicidal screening test. Students rating levels of stress as high was 27.1%, and 48.8% said moderate levels of stress (American College Health Association, 2020).

The numbers from the American College Health Association study are not broken down into sexuality and gender-identifying information. The total number of respondents was 43,140. Out of that number, .7% described themselves as asexual, 8.8% bisexual, 2% gay, 1.3% lesbian, 1.6% pansexual, 1.2% queer, 1.9% questioning, and .4% their identity was not listed. Regarding

gender, 2.9% were listed as non-binary. A note explains that respondents who replied that their sex today is different from birth or answered yes to transgender were listed as non-binary (American College Health Association, 2020).

The Trevor Project conducted a National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2020. The Trevor Project had 40,000 respondents age 13-24 across the United States. The results of their study found the following information on LGBTQ youth. Forty percent of LGBTQ respondents seriously considered suicide in the past twelve months, and more than half of transgender and non-binary youth considering suicide. Around 48% reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, including over 60% of transgender and non-binary youth. Even with a high percent of LGBTQ youth considering suicide or self-harm 46% of youth in this study wanted psychological or counseling and were unable to receive it. In this study, 10% of youth reported undergoing conversion therapy, and 78% of them reported it occurred when they were under the age of 18. Twenty-nine percent of LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away. One in three LGBTQ youth reported that they have been threatened physically or harmed for identifying as LGBTQ. Eighty-six percent of LGBTQ youth said that recent politics have negatively impacted their well-being in the year 2020 (The Trevor Project, 2020).

Sexual and gender minorities are more likely to have suicidal ideation and attempt to complete suicide than their heterosexual peers (Woodford et al., 2018b). Males are much more likely than females to have suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts (Silva et al., 2015). Sexual and gender minority students are more likely to be victims of sexual assault than their heterosexual peers (Coulter & Rankin, 2017).

Students who identify as LGBTQ are more likely to encounter chronic stress due to campus harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions (Newman et al., 2018; Seelman et al., 2017). Bullying is found on college campuses even after anti-bullying campaigns are in place. Woodford et al. (2018) found that covert and overt discrimination could lead to depression and suicide among LGBTQ students.

Kulick et al. (2017) conducted a study among LGBTQ students on a college campus. The authors found that white LGBTQ students engaging in student leadership positions were less likely to suffer from depression and encountered fewer microaggressions. For LGBTQ students of color, student leadership did not decrease the depression link or decrease microaggressions (Kulick et al., 2017). Kulick et al. found that for LGBTQ students of color, it was LGBTQ activism that lessened the link to depression.

The mental health of LGBTQ students is of great concern on a college campus. Mental health is an area where professionals should always be on campus, and faculty and staff are trained to handle LGBTQ mental health concerns. Oswalt and Wyatt (2011) found that LGTQ students reported higher levels of mental health issues that impact their academics but that bisexual students reported even higher mental health stressors.

Appalachian Region Health of LGBTQ Students

Rural youth who identify as LGBTQ face higher behavioral and emotional health issues than heterosexual peers (Ballard, 2017). Ballard et al., (2017) found that among two high schools in rural Appalachia, LGBQ youth are at a much higher risk for microaggressions, bullying, victimization, drug use, violence, and risky sexual behaviors than their heterosexual peers. These individuals could take those mental health issues into the college setting. Despite rigorous

attempts to find articles on the Appalachian region health of LGBTQ students in college, no articles were located.

The Impact of Religion on LGBTQ Individuals

Religion and religious organizations have impacted the lives of many LGBTQ people, including family and friends of LGBTQ people, regarding views on same-sex attraction and behavior and sexuality and gender identity. There is a belief that some world religions do not have a place for LGBTQ individuals and should not be treated the same and given the same rights as cisgender heterosexual individuals. LGBTQ individuals have been marginalized and oppressed in the name of religion (Newman et al., 2018). Some Christian churches quote Leviticus 18:22 to point to the reason for anti-gay beliefs, which states, "thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination" (Walker & Longmire-Avital, 2013, p. 1724).

An immensely harmful therapy used by some religions against those in the LGBTQ community is known as sexual reorientation therapy, conversion therapy, or sexual orientation change effort. Conservative religious organizations believe that being gay, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or queer is biblically wrong and immoral. Religious organizations have pushed members' treatment with conversion therapy (Cyphers, 2014; Flentje et al., 2014).

Individuals who have been through conversion therapy report high levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Reports of successfully converting someone's gender or sexuality with this type of therapy are rare (Dehlin et al., 2015).

Religion can be a unique identity for many people. Even when a religion rejects those in the LGBTQ community, some people still find a way to practice and define their existence. Kubicek (2009) found that those 18-25 accepted their religion and their homosexuality. In a study from 2017, Rockenbach et al. found that LGBTQ students who practiced religion on one

college campus found it less diverse, supportive, and tolerant. In the same study, heterosexual students found the same religious experiences as favorable (Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Not all students who encounter an intolerant religion will part ways with it. Some students stick by religion as it is a source of their strength and guidance. Means (2017) conducted a study of Black gay and bisexual men on higher education campuses and their spirituality and religious experiences. Means found that the students experienced racism, homophobia, internalized homophobia, and other forms of oppression during their time on campus. The students did not allow the negativity to derail them from their spiritual journey, creating spiritual counter space (Means, 2017).

Nkosi and Masson (2017) examined the experiences of ten gay and bisexual students at one campus location. The students were bible-believing Christians. Nkosi and Masson found that the students felt very unwelcome at the church and their fellow Christians were overly judgmental (Nkosi & Masson, 2017).

Summary of LGBTQ Students' Health

LGBTQ students face health issues and could be more likely to partake in substance abuse than their peers. Research has shown that having a strong social support network and taking part in regular exercise could combat heterosexism, mental health issues, and decrease substance abuse for LGBTQ college students (Woodford et al., 2015).

Important Experiences from Various LGBTQ Student Populations

The literature on LGBTQ students is vast, but not at the community college level. There are common themes in some of the literature but not with all of it. Listed are some of the articles found that add to the literature review. The article's authors provided details of what life is like

as an LGBTQ student for different student populations. The topics are essential for a discussion about LGBTQ college and community college students.

Choice of Major for LGBTQ Students

A study by Forbes (2020) found that students could choose majors that are considered queer-friendly while staying away from ones that appear to be queer-free. In Forbes study, it was found among 20 college students that they chose majors like sociology, political science, psychology, and theater. Students stayed away from STEM majors. Respondents in this study mentioned that in STEM majors there was no mention of LGBTQ subjects. Also, LGBTQ students did not feel welcome or accepting as identifying as queer, so they did not bring up the subject or they were shut down by faculty or other students when they did (Forbes, 2020).

A study by Cech and Rothwell (2018) found that among 1,729 engineering majors across the United States students faced adversity. Students in engineering majors faced marginalization, heard or read derogatory comments from within the program about LGBTQ people or themselves, and they did not feel their work was respected. Engineering students were also stressed, overwhelmed, sleep deprived, and dealt with anxiety in this study at high rates (Cech & Rothwell, 2018).

First-Generation, Racial Minority, and Undocumented LGBTQ Students

Community colleges serve a large population of underserved students. First-generation, or first in their families to attend, is one group (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016). Garvey et al., (2015a) found that first-generation LGBTQ community college students thought the campus climate was adverse. Kannapel and Flory (2017) noted that first-generation Appalachian students in one study reported separate identities at home and college to “hide conflicting behaviors and beliefs” (p. 8).

Hispanic and Undocumented LGBTQ Students

Another group of students that are considered first-generation is anyone who is born outside of the United States. This group can also be called first-generation immigrants. Rios and Eaton (2016) examined social supports for LGBTQ first-generation Hispanic men and women. The researchers found that LGBTQ Hispanic individuals have support networks with their existing family and friends. This support network helps when attending college settings.

Undocumented students face many obstacles other than being LGBTQ (Cisneros, 2019). Undocumented students do not have access to federal or state financial aid and typically do not qualify for in-state tuition (Cisneros, 2019). Cisneros (2019) found that undocumented LGBTQ students kept their sexual or gender preferences hidden while navigating their immigration status, which was costlier. The students in this study did highlight the benefits of being on campus for their sexual or gender preferences. The undocumented students were unable to explore their intersectional identity, though (Cisneros, 2019).

Gray et al. (2015) examined gay Latina/o immigrants. The study analyzed the stories of immigrants identifying as LGBTQ, an immigrant, and minority characteristics. Gray et al. found themes through their interviews that included disconnection from the LGBT community, disconnection from the Latina/o community, and their issues with intersectionality among these identities (Gray et al., 2015). Both Gray et al. and Cisneros found Latina/o students had issues with the intersectionality of their multiple identities both on and off the college campus.

Duran and Perez (2019) studied Latino college men using qualitative narratives. The researchers found that Latino men created family on the campus with faculty, staff, and other Latino students. The family they created helped them to navigate the college and could help them

to succeed in college. The students also discussed how they helped other Latino student navigate the campus culture as had been done for them.

Asian LGBTQ Students

Very few students exist examining LGBTQ Asian college students. In one study by Chan (2017) a qualitative study was conducted to see how gay, bisexual, and queer Filipino undergraduate men understood masculinity. The themes that emerged included complex and fluctuating definitions of masculinity, interactional influences of family, religion, and culture, and college as a catalyst of development (Chan, 2017).

Strayhorn (2014) conducted a study of Korean-American gay men in college to understand their lived experiences. Strayhorn used a phenomenological study. This particular study found that the Korean-American and Korean gay students went to college to come out of the closet and be themselves. Also, the other theme to emerge was all participants said they experienced racism within the gay community and racialized homophobia from within the Asian community both on and off the campus.

Special Needs LGBTQ Students

Not many research articles have been written on LGBTQ students' experiences with special needs in higher education (Miller, 2018). Studies that have been conducted show that LGBTQ students with special needs feel ignored when it comes to services and programming on the college campus (Bell, 2020). Miller (2018) conducted a study of queer students with special needs. In the study, Miller found that the students sometimes view their LGBTQ identity and special needs identity, either intersectionality, interactive, overlapping, parallel, or oppositional. The students in Miller's study adapted to the campus, resisted oppression, and built resilience and a sense of community despite their obstacles. LGBTQ students with special needs could

experience the same unfriendly environment as LGBTQ students from either disability services or their peers (Henry et al., 2010; Miller, 2015).

Autism spectrum students are more likely to identify as gay or lesbian in terms of sexual orientation and as transgender or genderqueer in their gender identity compared with non-autistic students (Nachman et al., 2020). Historically, the campus climate has not been welcoming to LGBTQ students, let alone one who also has special needs (Bell, 2020; Miller, 2018). Several studies have shown that LGBTQ students with special needs encountered more microaggressions than other LGBTQ students (Bell, 2020).

HBCUs and LGBTQ Students

Private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) have their founding with many religious affiliations. As such, HBCUs have a history of discrimination and homophobia (Mobley et al., 2020). HBCUs were forefront as a champion for Civil Rights in the 1950s and 1960s, the Black Power movement of the 1970s and 1980s, and against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Even though HBCUs have fought for many injustices, they have suppressed LGBTQ student groups and identity formation on their campuses (Ford 2015; Mobley & Johnson, 2015)

Ford (2015) conducted a study of self-identified gay Black men at HBCUs and found that they experienced homophobia and heterosexism from both peers and faculty. Ford noted that the HBCUs did not have institutional support systems but that the individuals created their friendships and allies. Despite their multiple identities, the men still felt a strong tie to their respective HBCUs that they believed strengthened their Black identity and provided them an opportunity (Ford, 2015).

Carter (2013) conducted a case study of four gay Black men in the marching band attending an HBCU in the south. Carter found that instead of being a community and support source, the band was not for these four individuals. The students did not rely on the band director for support or as an influencer. After interviewing the four individuals, one of the students died in a hazing incident. Carter's study reminds sexual and gender minorities that not every space on an HBCU is a safe space (Carter, 2013).

Alumni Giving from LGBTQ Students

If students have a bad college experience, they are less likely to give to the institution in the future (Drezner & Garvey, 2016). LGBTQ students are just one group of minority students who could refuse to give back to the alma mater due to their experiences on campus (Garvey & Drezner, 2013). Howard University, a Historically Black College and University, has created a fund targeting its LGBTQ alumni (Mobley & Hall, 2020). Garvey and Drezner (2013) researched LGBTQ alumni giving. The researchers found that having an LGBTQ staff member made connections to LGBTQ alumni necessary. Also, having LGBTQ staff demonstrated a commitment to diversity, including LGBTQ alumni. Garvey and Drezner believed that the following actions could help the college with LGBTQ alumni, inviting LGBTQ members to serve on the board, developing LGBTQ affinity groups, and making sure to include women, as "women volunteer and give back at much higher rates on college campuses" (p. 214).

College Sports and LGBTQ Students

Community colleges sports are not a prevalent as those at four-year schools. I could not locate any articles about community college sports concerning LGBTQ students. I did not locate any peer-reviewed articles about transgender students and college sports. LGBTQ student-athletes encounter harassment and discrimination in the locker room, on the field, and among

their peers and coaches (DeFoor et al., 2018). The National College Athletic Association reported that in the 2018-2019 school year around 500,000 students participated in college sports at four-year colleges (Schwarb, 2019). The National Junior College Athletic Association reported for the 2016-2017 school year, that 59,196 students participated on sports teams at community colleges across the country (National Junior College Athletic Association Participation Figures, n.d.).

Kroshus and Davoren (2018) stated evidence exists that LGBTQ students may be less likely to participate in sports because of heteronormativity, marginalization, and discrimination. Although sexual minority students experience more suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, report higher levels of anxiety and stress, and engage in riskier behaviors, Kroshus and Davoren's study did not find that athletics' participation led to a higher risk of mental health outcomes. The researchers looked at survey responses of 196,872 students who took the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment from 2008 to 2012. Their study did find that substance use was more significant among sexual minority students, both athlete and non-athlete, than heterosexual students. Veliz et al. (2016) used the same assessment and found the same result as Kroshus and Davoren just for substance use. The researchers noted that male athletes were at a greater risk of being diagnosed or treated for substance use disorder.

Worthen (2014) found that male student-athletes have less support toward LGBT individuals than their female peers. The study also found that those with more LGBTQ education on campus were more supportive of LGBTQ peers. Ally programs on campus helped student athletic programs raise awareness and instill tolerance for the LGBTQ community members. Bass et al. (2015) conducted a study of coaches at colleges and community colleges. The researchers wanted to examine how they felt about homosexuality. Their study found the

following: that coaches and administrators are not comfortable listing same-sex partners or spouses on websites, a Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy atmosphere is in place in most locker rooms where student-athletes are told not to disclose their sexual orientation, and there is reluctance of bringing a gay or lesbian coach into the locker room because funders could stop funding the program.

Activism of LGBTQ Students

Student activism is instrumental in creating lasting change on college campuses (Cole & Heinecke, 2018). Nevertheless, there was only one article found on the topic of LGBTQ student activists. Renn, in 2007 discussed LGBTQ student leaders and activists. Renn's study found that the more involved an LGBTQ student is in leadership and activism on the campus, the more merged their identity developed (2007). Kane (2013) stated that economically challenged students face barriers to activism that economically well-off students do not, such as jobs, a time constraint, and residing at home creating parental oversight. Renn demonstrated that activism could be important for LGBTQ students on a college campus.

Retention of LGBTQ Students

Community college administrators look for ways to retain students. Students are retained in several ways, such as faculty-student contact and involvement in extracurricular events such as clubs, sports, or campus groups (Tinto, 2015). Students who are supported, given opportunities, shown respect, and inclusiveness will come back to the campus (Ottenritter, 2012).

Campuses should have trained staff that know and understand the needs of the LGBTQ community. Students want to have faculty and staff that understand their issues and that they feel comfortable approaching. Faculty and staff should be trained to support their LGBTQ students (Trimble, 2019).

Pitcher and Simmons (2020) argued that LGBTQ students could persist and have persisted since they have mirrored their survival strategies. Pitcher and Simmons challenge administrators to collaborate with LGBTQ students and create inclusive and equitable institutions. Denton (2020) goes even further with his assessment that colleges can go beyond just creating a Safe Zone, offering an LGBTQ focused course, or academic advisement. Denton argues that the college campus retention is all about economic and racial justice by including LGBTQ individuals in all aspects of the campus community. Denton believed that LGBTQ students should be considered in every aspect of campus and given leadership roles.

Missing Identities in the Literature

There are certain LGBTQ groups that are missing in the literature represented in higher education research. The research gaps would help faculty and staff to understand these population better. Few studies are published that discuss bisexual, pansexual, demisexual students (Garvey et al. 2018) as well as asexual students (Mollet, 2018). It has been noted by researchers that the missing literature on these populations could mirror how they feel within the queer community (Mollet & Lackman, 2018). There is also a lack of transgender people of color regarding research and articles (Jourian, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016). These students navigate a world of racism and transphobia and their experiences are important to share.

The Current Research on LGBTQ Community College Students

When searching for articles on LGBTQ community college students, only a handful of articles were written within the last five years. The few articles found are discussed in detail in this section.

An Examination of Campus Climate for LGBTQ Community College Students

Garvey et al. (2015) used a mixed-methods study to examine the campus climate at two-year colleges. The researchers used data from Rankin et al.'s 2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender People. Out of the original 5,149 participants, only 102 were undergraduate community college students. The authors used non-probabilistic chain-referral sampling. In the end, 96 questions were chosen in the survey, mostly closed-ended questions, and some open-ended questions on campus climate (Garvey et al., 2015).

Garvey et al. (2015) found a strong relationship between campus climate and classroom climate on community college campuses. Students stated that what they experienced inside the classroom is what they experienced on other parts of campus, which determined their campus climate impression. In this study, the authors found that students believed that classroom spaces were hostile and anti-LGBTQ for students attending two-year colleges. Students in this study felt that faculty were indifferent or openly did not support LGBTQ issues and that LGBTQ topics made faculty feel uncomfortable in the classroom (Garvey et al., 2015).

Tracing LGBTQ Community College Students Experiences

Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri (2016) examined the coming out experience with students and faculty. Their study examined the campus climate and student support services on the community colleges. The researchers used a phenomenological qualitative approach by using narratives. Purposive sampling was used by sending emails to students and LGBTQ student organizations. The researchers also used snowball sampling to gather more participants. The researchers interviewed 11 students and seven faculty and staff. Three of the faculty were advisors for Gay-Straight Alliance student clubs. The participants came from five different community colleges (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016).

The student participants in this study were age ranges from 18 to 26. Only one student was over the age of 25. This is unusual and mentioned because students at a community college tend to be older than traditional college-going students. All of the participants wanted to earn a credential beyond the associate's degree. Several themes emerged from the research. The themes that emerged were "the coming-out process, the significance of family, importance of religious messages, friends and support systems, as well as the challenges and goals of building systematic support for LGBTQ issues on community college campuses" (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016, p. 51).

Students in this study stated that they choose the community college not because they expected to support their sexual or gender identity, but because of career plans and preparation. Students stated that they did want a connection to the campus and a community environment, but they did not have the time to devote to it. Students and faculty did note that it was important to advertise that LGBTQ services existed even if only a few students use them. Students and faculty also noted the lack of gender and sexuality courses and courses covering the LGBTQ curriculum (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016).

All of the students in this study discussed the coming out process. Most of the students identified as LGBTQ on the community college campus, but most did not when at home with their parents. For African American students and students whose parents are religious, it was especially hard to come out to them. The student's culture did not accept them for being LGBTQ. Many faculty and staff in this study identified with being lesbian or bisexual. Some were openly out, but many were not (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016).

The researchers in this study found a lack of two-year college resources, an absence of LGBTQ curriculum, and their sense of seeking social connections outside of a classroom (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016).

LGBTQ+ Student Service Resources and Student Success

Nguyen et al. (2018) examined the available LGBTQ specific resources on two-year colleges' campuses. Nguyen et al. used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and how microsystems could foster LGBTQ students' success by interacting with specific campus resources.

Nguyen et al. (2018) used a mixed-methods research design for their study. Data used was from the National Study of LGBTQ+ College Student Success. The researchers took a subset of the study, which initially had 936 survey responses and 12 semi-structured interviews. Only 49 of the original participants attended two-years colleges. The qualitative participants were recruited at a student conference focused on LGBTQ+ issues. Invites also were sent to LGBTQ listservs and networks (Nguyen et al., 2018).

Nguyen et al. (2018) found that resources for LGBTQ populations were scarce. Only 18% said that their community college had an LGBTQ+ resource center, 29% said that the campus had LGBTQ+ counseling services, and 4% said that their college had LGBTQ+ career planning services. Forty-two students, or 86%, did say that their campus had a gay-straight alliance or LGBTQ+ student organization. Several LGBTQ students noted how significant it was for their mental health to have these services on campus (Nguyen et al., 2018).

Decoding the Digital Campus

Taylor et al. (2018) researched nine community colleges' websites for a safe and welcoming climate for LGBTQ students. The authors chose purposive sampling from three

different states: Colorado, Iowa, and Washington. The researchers then used key search terms on each of the college websites to find information. Some of the key terms included LGBT, LGBTQ, queer, gay, sexual orientation, transgender, non-discrimination, and gender. The authors looked at the first 25 pages they found. The researchers then looked for additional key terms such as Safe Zone, Pride Week, gay-straight alliance, and LGBT resource center. If any of the key terms were found, the researchers noted it in a document summary form counting how many times the items were found (Taylor et al., 2018).

Taylor et al. (2018) found that most colleges were not welcoming to LGBTQ prospective students based on their websites alone. There were significant variations found between the community colleges in the three states. At all of the colleges was found non-discrimination policies, including sexual orientation. Gender identity was found in only some of the websites. Evidence of LGBTQ student clubs existing on campus was found. It was unclear to the researchers if the clubs were active, however. No evidence of LGBTQ resource center or staff support for LGBTQ students was found. Only in a few colleges was evidence of college courses that incorporated LGBTQ topics (Taylor et al., 2018).

The effort that four-year schools put into recruiting LGBTQ students is not found at community colleges. College students use websites to choose to attend a particular college (Taylor et al., 2018). The researchers found little evidence of an open and welcoming campus climate based on the sample of nine community colleges (Taylor et al., 2018).

Examining the Advisor Experience of Student-run LGBTQ+ Organizations

Hoffshire and Campbell (2019) examined community colleges in Louisiana for student-run LGBTQ+ organizations. The researchers examined college websites and spoke with constituents within the state to obtain the three community colleges they eventually settled on as

having student-run LGBTQ+ organizations for their study. The researchers limited their population between 18 to 65 and current advisors of student-run LGBTQ+ organizations.

Hoffshire and Campbell (2019) used a narrative research paradigm. The researchers found several themes in their coding process. The first theme was that the faculty advisors recognized that the student-run organizations needed to exist. All the advisors inherited the organization after a faculty member departed. All of the faculty members acknowledged that it was essential to have an LGBTQ community presence on campus and a support network. All three faculty members had not been advisors before, none of them received compensation, and all recognized that they needed to have a co-advisor or find their replacements to keep the organization going (Hoffshire & Campbell, 2019).

The second theme to emerge from the Hoffshire and Campbell (2019) was that all three advisors did much of the organization's administrative work. Since many faculty members understood the bureaucracy inside the community college, the advisors ended up filling out travel forms, copying agendas, and securing space to meet (Hoffshire & Campbell, 2019).

The last theme to emerge from the data was that the advisors did not feel they could help students with their personal lives or LGBTQ issues. The advisors felt ill-equipped to counsel students about sexuality or personal issues. The researchers posit that this could be problematic and send the wrong message about students who might want to join LGBTQ student-run organizations (Hoffshire & Campbell, 2019).

Hoffshire and Campbell (2019) found that community colleges' leaders should be advisors or faculty advisors. The advisors should either create or bring new life to LGBTQ organizations. The issues Hoffshire and Campbell found are that there is no additional pay for

advisors, community college students are commuter students, and thus it is hard to get them to organizations, and advisors do not create leaders but just maintain the organizations.

Student Retention and the Washington State LGBTQ Student Success Initiative

Trimble (2019) examined student success outcomes, retention, and academic success, at Washington State community colleges for LGBTQ students. The researcher used a quantitative study. Data was taken from the quarterly student enrollment form, which asks students to self-report and possibly change their gender or sexuality. These data are not stored along with sex, age, race, and other demographics. Differences between the retention rates and academic performance of LGBTQ students were evident and significant (Trimble, 2019).

The retention and success data used was from students who registered and started in fall 2013. The gender and sexuality information were gathered from their responses in spring 2015. Trimble (2019) found that retention rates were lower for gay, lesbian, queer, transgender, and androgynous students than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. In this study, the researchers found that gay and bisexual people performed at higher rates than heterosexual students regarding cumulative grade point average (Trimble, 2019).

The study by Trimble (2019) found that students who identified as bisexual had a 17% retention rate and those who identified as straight/heterosexual were 16%. The study began with 23 bisexual students and ended with four. The number of gay students at the beginning of the study was 15 and ended with zero. The number of lesbian students at the beginning of this study was six and it ended with zero. The number of straight/heterosexual students at the beginning of the study was 819 and by the end was only 133. Those students who identified as transgender numbered three at the beginning but zero was retained. Some students did not reply or preferred

not to answer questions about gender or sexuality. The cumulative GPA for straight/heterosexual students was 2.29, while that of the bisexual students was 2.55, and gay students was 2.69.

Trimble noted that more research needs to be completed on whether retention is due to something other than academics for gay students since they did have a higher cumulative grade point average. Those students who identified as gay were the least likely to be retained. In this study, all gay students had dropped out or transferred by the start of the second year. Bisexual students' retention was just about equivalent to heterosexual students in this study.

Trimble (2019) suggested that incorporating specific strategies for LGBTQ students could increase retention and student success. A specific retention strategy includes advisers who understand sexual identity development. Community colleges should consider equity and institutional transformation, development based advising, and specific retention strategies toward LGBTQ students (Trimble, 2019). The changes could help change the campus climate and retain LGBTQ students.

Chapter Summary

The college experience can be a place and time where students can be themselves and express themselves in different ways (Hong et al., 2016; Mollet et al., 2020). The fact that "95% of the United States population lives within commuting distance of at least one community college" (Bastedo et al., 2016, p. 463) gives hope that social and economic mobility is attainable for underserved LGBTQ students. Many students come out as LGBTQ during their undergraduate experience (Mollet et al., 2020; Rankin et al., 2010). Nevertheless, Alvarez and Schneider (2008) affirmed that students expressing their sexual or gender identity were ridiculed or treated differently (p.71). Likewise, Tetreault et al. (2013) found that "students who were out encountered much more bias than those who were not out to family, friends, or peers" (p.960).

Even though students who are out and identify as LGBTQ openly experience more bias, their self-esteem and depression rates were lower (Kosciw et al., 2014). Again, there are no community colleges studies on these very same issues to compare, as these studies relate only to four-year colleges.

The articles on the LGBTQ population in community colleges remain low (Trimble, 2019). The current study will add to the literature on LGBTQ students' experiences enrolled at community colleges in Appalachia. It is essential to add to the literature to give a voice to students who are ignored (Hoffshire & Campbell, 2019). Since the last significant study of LGBTQ students, the national landscape has drastically changed. In 2009, the Matthew Shepherd and James Byrd Jr Hate Crimes Prevention Act (18 U.S.C.§249) was passed by Congress which added gender, gender identity, disability, and sexual orientation to the list of Federal Hate Crimes Law, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, which did not allow individuals to serve in the military as openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, was removed from all military branches in 2011 (10 U.S.C.§ 654), Wisconsin elected Tammy Baldwin the first openly gay person to serve in the United States Senate (Grinberg, 2012), the Defense of Marriage Act was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013 (United States v. Windsor, 2013), marriage equality was extended to all fifty states in 2015 by the U.S. Supreme Court (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015), in 2016, the worst mass shooting on United States soil up to that point, occurred at Pulse, a gay nightclub, killing 49 people and wounding 53 others in Orlando, Florida (Rothaus, 2016), Gay Conversion Therapy was made illegal in twenty states between 2012 and 2020 (Conversion therapy act, 2016; Conversion therapy act, 2018; Conversion therapy act, 2018; Conversion therapy efforts for minors prohibited act, 2017; Conversion therapy for minors prohibited act, 2018; Conversion therapy prohibited; advertising prohibited act, 2018; Conversion therapy prohibited act, 2017;

Conversion therapy prohibited act, 2020; Findings, declarations relative to sexual orientation change efforts act, 2013; Licensing or registration under special conditions act, 2018; Prohibition on practice of conversion therapy act, 2015; Prohibiting conversion therapy on minors act, 2015; Prohibition on providing conversion therapy to minors act, 2019; Sexual orientation change efforts act, 2012, Youth mental health protection act, 2015), and in 2020 the Supreme Court extended employment discrimination to LGBTQ individuals (Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia, 2020), (Bronski, 2020), to name a few events. All these cultural changes could have an impact on community college campuses. Since there have not been any comprehensive studies of community colleges since Rankin in 2010, it is unknown how the LGBTQ population of students and the campus climate has changed as well at this time.

All of us who are openly gay are living and writing the history of our movement. We are no more – and no less – heroic than the suffragists and abolitionists of the 19th century; and the labor organizers, Freedom Riders, Stonewall demonstrators, and environmentalists of the 20th century. We are ordinary people, living our lives, and trying as civil-rights activist Dorothy Cotton said, to 'fix what ain't right' in our society.

-Senator Tammy S. Baldwin, Election Acceptance Speech

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Community colleges are institutions where everyone is welcome to attend (Shannon & Smith, 2006). However, not all students who enter the local community colleges' doors might feel welcome (Zamani-Gallaher et al., 2020). This study aims to better understand the experiences of Appalachian community college students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). A narrative qualitative systematic approach was used to report the findings by using semi-structured interviews. The current study could shed light on students at community colleges that seem to go unnoticed and or unrecognized. Administrators, faculty, and staff can find the information useful to know about sexuality and gender minority populations to help meet their needs and help them succeed (Kortegast, 2017).

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology and the reasons for the research choices. First, I will reexamine the research question. Then, I will explain the rationale for using a qualitative method to design and conduct this study. Next, I will explain the choice of narrative inquiry as to the research tradition and Queer Theory as the research paradigm for this study. Then, I will explain the instrumentation, data collection process, and data analysis procedures in detail. Finally, I will conclude with the limitations of the study and a chapter summary.

Purpose Statement

This study aims to understand the experiences of LGBTQ college students at Appalachian community colleges. The region known as Appalachia is defined by the federal

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The study discovered current experiences of LGBTQ community college students at Appalachian community colleges using narrative inquiry, which is a qualitative research design. Individual interviews with self-identified LGBTQ students from community colleges was conducted using virtual technology and recorded. Queer Theory was used as the theoretical framework.

Research Question

The question presented for this research illuminate the conversation about the LGBTQ students' experiences on a community college campus. The question is based on a literature review. During the literature review, it was noted by most researchers that there are only a few articles on LGBTQ community college students about any topic (Garvey et al., 2015; Leider, 1999; Whitehead & Gulley, 2020; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011). The following research question guided this study:

1. What are the stories of self-identified LGBTQ students at rural Appalachian community colleges?

Epistemology

An epistemological stance allows the researcher to understand and form a framework of "how do we know what we know?" (Patton, 2014). The epistemological position used for this research was social constructivism. Social constructivism is a belief system that assumes that "universal truth" cannot exist because there are multiple contextual perspectives and subjective voices that can label truth in scientific pursuit (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to social constructivism, a person's reality is shaped by culture, history, and experiences. Social constructivists enter the research knowing there are foreshadowed social problems (Andrews et al., 2013).

I examined this research from a social constructivism perspective. One person's truth can be another person's non-experience, and thus not their truth (Hays & Singh, 2012). Everyone grows up in a different culture and society, and these experiences shape the individual (Hays & Singh, 2012).

I most closely identify with this belief system and trust it is the best epistemology for this research. Narrative inquiry is not looking for a specific preconceived answer when conducted (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Truth in the form of themes emerged once the coding was completed. By using narrative inquiry, a researcher seeks to ask a question to find the story of experiences, which is the truth of the interviewee (Rosenthal, 2016).

Research Design

Choosing a research design depends on various factors. Those factors include what is or are the problem(s) that is/are being investigated, what is the purpose of the study, which type of theoretical framework is being used, and what kinds of data are collected (Hays & Singh, 2012). There is a choice of qualitative, quantitative, or a mix of the two designs. The chosen research design for this study was qualitative.

I wanted to know more about LGBTQ students' experiences on community college campuses located within Appalachia. A quantitative study possibly would not uncover deep emotional storytelling or profound verbal data. Quantitative data, for the most part, do not allow the researcher to ask more profound follow-up questions.

A qualitative design was appropriate for capturing the human story and understanding what stories reveal about individuals and their experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). The purpose of this study was to capture the stories of those who identify as LGBTQ. Storytelling requires a researcher-participant relationship. Thus, qualitative research using narrative inquiry was chosen.

The reason for narrative inquiry is to gather a rich source of data about LGBTQ students' experiences while attending a community college within the Appalachian regional zone. Personal and in-depth information cannot be collected from a quantitative study of the magnitude that is necessary. Narrative inquiry allows individuals to describe and understand the essential aspects of their world (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hones, 1998).

Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to gain more information from participants than from a quantitative study by allowing the person to express their story. The narrative allows the participants to give meaningful and deep answers that are complex. Narratives are the means of human sense-making (Andrews et al., 2013). Participants that tell their story through the narrative are making sense of their world. By studying the narrative, the researcher can look for gaps in the story, follow up, or include other participants (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative looks at a story across time and place and reconstructs events with a chronological storyline. Thus, the narrative is a deep form of research that takes time and patience to conduct (Bold, 2012).

A narrative inquiry does not offer overall specific rules or certain materials during the process and investigation (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Narrative inquiry allows the experienced researcher to look for gaps in the story and understand as the interview is happening. The researcher records the account and can make sense of it after the interview process (Bold, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Research Tradition

Narrative research is telling the human story (Freeman, 2017). A researcher can use narrative to describe, understand, and explain the world (Bold, 2012). Narrative is used because "by doing so we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to

bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change" (Andrews et al., 2013, p.1).

Bold (2012) explained that there are three criteria for identifying a narrative: "temporality, which is a sequence of events in time, causation, which is when one event causes another, inferred by readers or hearers, and human interest, without these there is no narrative" (p.19). The three key assumptions underlying narrative research are individuals speak in narrative form, connecting events over time through stories. Second, individuals' identities are shaped by the stories they recount and share with others. Finally, narratives change depending on the narrator, audience, and context (Hays & Singh, 2012). The narrative brought to life the stories of those who identified as LGBTQ and attended a community college in Appalachia.

Theoretical Perspective

The narrative inquiry design was implemented through a Queer Theory paradigm. Queer Theory focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity as individuals interact within society and create experiences. Queer Theory is broken into normative and deviant categories of sexuality and gender (Hays & Singh, 2012). The term Queer Theory was coined in 1991 by Teresa de Lauretis' in her work on lesbian and gay sexualities (Gedro & Mizzi, 2014). Queer theorists aim to challenge the notion of what is acceptable in society for both sexuality and gender (Nadal, 2016) and to undo the idea that heterosexuality and cisgenderism are the norms (Rumens et al., 2018). Queer Theory conveys that there is no binary regarding sexual orientation and gender, but both are fluid and much more diverse and follow along a spectrum (Few-Demo et al., 2016).

Research Setting and Context

This research took place at different public community colleges in the Appalachian region. The schools are located in the Appalachian Regional Zone. Each of the colleges has different size demographics. It was unknown to me where students attended in Appalachia prior to the survey being disseminated and receiving their responses. Students could have all been from one school or one state.

There is a total of 81 public community colleges in Appalachia. As of 2016, there were 323,900 students in those 81 schools. The average graduation rate of community colleges in Appalachia is 31% while the transfer out rate was 15%. The average net price for students was $6,159.65. Schools that are members of the National Junior College Athletic Association numbered 36 of the 81 schools. The smallest community college in terms of student population was Mayland Community College in Spruce Pine, North Carolina with 399 students. The largest community college in terms of student population was Eastern Gateway Community College in Steubenville, Ohio with 25,648 students. The lowest transfer out rate was Mountain Empire in Big Stone Virginia with 1% and the largest was Tri-County Technical in Pendleton, South Carolina with 40%. The lowest graduation rate belonged to J.F. Drake State Community and Technical College in Alabama with 14%. The highest graduation rate belongs to Zane State College in Ohio with 54% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020c).

The 81 schools in Appalachia are located in various campus settings. One community college is in a large city while six are in midsize cities. Eleven are considered to be in small cities. Three are located in rural areas and distant. Fifteen are in rural areas and fringe. Two are in rural areas and remote. Eight community colleges are in the suburbs and large, six are in suburbs and midsize, while three are in suburbs and small. Seventeen are in a town and distant,

three are in town and fringe, and five are in town and considered remote (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020c).

Appalachian Setting and Context

The Appalachian region consists of 420 counties in 13 states, 205,000 square miles, and 25.6 million residents (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020a). Those living in Appalachia are 81.4% white alone, not Hispanic, 9.7% Black alone, not Hispanic, 5.1% Hispanic, and 3.8% other (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2019). Appalachia is quickly increasing in higher numbers of older individuals, while younger generations move out for economic opportunities (Ludke et al., 2012). Forty-two percent of Appalachia is considered rural, while the national average is 20% (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020a).

Out of the 420 counties in Appalachia, 90 are considered distressed or extremely poor, and many individuals go without basic needs (Kannapel & Flory, 2017). In the last full United States Census in 2010, it was reported that the population inside of Appalachia earned bachelor's degrees at a lower rate (20.4%) than those outside of Appalachia (27.5%) (Ludke et al., 2012). Appalachia is known for its higher-than-average poverty, low educational attainment, rural isolation, and a limited economic base (Greenberg, 2016).

West Virginia is the only state entirely within the Appalachian Regional Zone. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has tried various economic models to alleviate persistent and generational poverty. West Virginians still suffer from structural unemployment and extreme poverty. More than half of West Virginia's children are considered low-income or poor (Nesbitt, 2019). Many causes surround the persistent poverty in Appalachia, including "an inadequate tax base, a low-wage economy, environmental abuse, civic fraud, political corruption, absentee landownership, and corporate irresponsibility" (Eller, 2013).

Participants

The sample for this study was derived from a heterogeneous purposive sampling procedure. Heterogenous purposive sampling uses pre-established criteria to find participants that are directly related to the research question (Hays & Singh, 2012). The only two criteria for this survey include if the community college student identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ), and the students were currently enrolled either part-time or full-time. Students under the age of 18 were not a part of this study.

After ODU Human Subjects approval (Appendix B) there were two recruitment strategies used for this study. I first created a page, which I titled Appalachian LGBTQ+ Community College Student Research on Facebook. I used that page to pay for an advertisement to run on Facebook for five days, Appendix C. I used certain criteria to target market the advertisement. I used the location of every community college in Appalachia (Appendix A) to target the advertisement and up to 50 miles away from each campus. The age range used was 18 to 65+.

I then added people who were interested in the following items: New Queer Cinema, human sexuality, community college, pansexuality, gay, bisexual, transgender, gay-friendly, homosexuality, gay life, Transgender Day of Remembrance, Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, Harvey Milk, straight alliance, genderqueer, intersex, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Campaign, transgender activism, National Center for Transgender Equality, bisexual pride flag, Appalachia, LGBTQ Nation, rainbow flag, LGBT movement, LGBT tourism, LGBT music, community issues, LGBT parenting, Queer studies, volunteering, sustainability, LGBT history, veterans, LGBT culture, LGBT community, religion, charity and causes, lesbian pride, politics, Law LGBTQ Nation, and LGBT social movements or Environmentalism. The behaviors I

entered were likely engagement with US political content as liberal and education level in college.

After the first advertisement ran for five days, I received some survey results. I did not receive as many I had hoped only receiving five people I could interview. I paid for a second advertisement using the same criteria as above and shared on various Facebook pages as well. In total, 68 people took the survey from the Facebook advertisement. Only 29 people were eligible to partake in the research study. Of the 29 people who responded, they represented ten states within Appalachia, while no one from three states took the survey.

The results of the first advertisement were 310 post engagements, 148 post reactions, 120 link clicks, 18 shares, and 14 post comments. It reached 7,584 individuals. The second advertisement had 318 post engagements, 243 link clicks, 48 post reactions, 14 post comments, and 8 post shares. The second advertisement reached 13,091 people. Both advertisements ran for five consecutive days each. The only difference was the days of the week in which they ran.

Students who took the survey found the first question, which was if the participant was 18 years of age or older. The second question asked which age range they identify with. The third question asked their race. I allowed the participant to write in their race to allow them to identify. The fourth question asked them to identify their LGBTQ identity. They had a choice from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, heterosexual, intersex, asexual, questioning, curious, two-spirit, genderqueer, or other which they can write in. The fifth question asked if they are currently enrolled in a community college for credit or non-credit courses. The sixth question asked if they would like to participate in a one-on-one research study that will be recorded. The last question asked for their name, name of community college, state, college email, and phone number (Appendix D). I am the only person with access to this information.

The next strategy involved Facebook Groups. I used Facebook Groups to recruit students. I located groups that included Appalachia, Appalachian, LGBTQ students, community colleges, queer, equality, safe space, student survey, survey exchange, research participation, higher education, or college research. I used the same advertisement (Appendix C) and posted on various groups that could possibly have community college students or someone with access to community college students. I did verify that the student did indeed attend a school in Appalachia by ensuring their community college is in the Appalachian Regional Zone in one of 420 counties (Appendix A). I verified the student email address by requesting that they enter their community college email and not a personal email. If a student submitted a personal email, that student was not contacted.

Students responding to this survey were or were not out to the family and friends. It was unknown to me prior to the interview. Only a small pool of participants is necessary for narrative research and analysis that results in advancing social changes (Bold, 2012). If, after 12 students, I did not achieve information saturation, I would continue to interview participants. If I received new information, I planned to collect additional data. I ended the study with 15 participants.

Instrumentation

For this study, I used one-on-one, in-depth interviews to gather participants' stories about their experience on a community college campus. The study is semi-structured, meaning that I came prepared with questions (Appendix E). I started the interview by asking the students simple interview questions to get them comfortable. I then moved into asking students to tell me a story on certain aspects about their time on campus. The students imparted a story that lasted a few minutes up until half of the time. With a narrative, the person being interviewed is in control of

how much information is shared (Hays & Singh, 2012). Each interviewee shared their personal stories about their time on campus.

Researcher Reflexivity

As a member of the LGBTQ community, I am keenly aware of the issues this group faces. I have been working at a community college for five years. I serve as the faculty advisor for the on-campus LGBTQ group. As a member of this sexual minority group, I understand that I could potentially bring bias into this study. There are several ways in which bias can be limited. I will discuss how I combated my bias in this study.

During this study, I kept a reflexive journal. The journal was used to record my thoughts about how the process impacted me. During the data collection and data analysis stage, I needed to ensure that my own bias was not seeping into the data. In this journal, I also kept a description of how data methods, sources, and analysis were chosen and possibly need to change (Hays & Singh, 2012). It was imperative to remove as much bias as possible from this study.

I kept an electronic reflexive journal where I engaged with the following questions while working with the data and research:

1. What did I learn new from the data that I did not know before conducting this research?
2. Has my perspective changed since I first engaged with the data?
3. What has shaped my perspective of LGBTQ students? Has my perspective changed?
4. Have I allowed my own bias or voice to enter into the data?
5. How do I perceive the LGBTQ community college student today after interviewing, coding, and reading data?

I started the journal once my data collection was completed. I stopped the journaling once the data had been thoroughly analyzed, and chapters four and five were completed.

Data Collection Procedures

The sample for this study used purposive sampling to locate participants at the community colleges using social media. Purposive sampling is developing a specific criterion for the study before entering the field (Hays & Singh, 2012). The criterion used was that the student must self-identify as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, currently be degree-seeking student, and be 18 years of age or older.

I gained approval from the Old Dominion University Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Committee (Appendix B) before collecting data. A survey was added to a poster and paid to advertise on Facebook (Appendix C). The advertisement ran for ten days total to gather enough respondents.

Upon receiving enough student participants, I worked with the students to schedule interviews via online technology. I needed to see the students through synchronous audio and video. Nonverbals can be just as important as verbal data when collecting data. I sent an email outlining our decided upon meeting time (Appendix F) and an informed consent form to each participant (Appendix G). The informed consent form detailed the study procedures and any risks and the rights of participants. Participants who were willing to participate in the study emailed the consent forms back to me before the interview with their signature. All forms are stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer. Participants had the option to ask any questions before the interview began and were allowed to opt-out before or anytime during the interview.

Interviews were conducted over a two-month time frame to ensure enough time for everyone to participate. Interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes and no more than one hour. This study used semi-structured interviews as part of the data collection process. The

questions (Appendix E) were open-ended and used as a prompt to start the conversation. All of the questions were asked or answered depending upon the participant and what they shared. Follow-up questions did occur during the interview. The interviewee guided how the conversation progressed with their answers by how much they were willing to share. I did ask questions during the process that are not listed in my questions based on something the interviewee said during the interview.

After each interview, I discussed the timeline for the study in detail. I explained that there would be follow up questions via another short one-on-one interview after the initial interview is transcribed. Interviews were audio-recorded, and the audio files were transcribed verbatim by me. Once I finished transcribing all 15 interviews, I sent out an email to the participants and included their interviews for review (Appendix H).

I continued to interview participants until saturation was reached. Saturation happens when no new ideas or themes are found from the data that has been collected (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to Guest et al. (2006), saturation for purposive sampling in a study that is finding common perceptions and experiences with a homogenous group could be around 12 interviews.

The initial idea was that if I failed to receive enough participants from purposive sampling, I would then use snowball sampling. I did ask students who responded and partook to suggest someone else who would want to participate in the study. Snowball sampling ensured that I had enough student responses in case I did not reach saturation with the original participants.

The survey was posted through a Facebook advertisement for ten days total. After that time, I ended the survey and started the selection process. If I did not have enough participants, I

was going to reach out again through the various channels. I was interested in interviewing a cross-section of the population. I wanted to interview various students by sexuality, gender, age, race, and location. The survey link collected all of this information before the interview.

Once I chose the participants for this study, I reached out and scheduled an interview with each one. I used a cross-section from the pool of respondents. The interviewee was allowed to choose the best day and time for the interview as I wanted to be flexible to meet them. I sent a consent form for them to review and send back to me signed. A day or two before the interviews, I reached out to the participants and asked them to start to think about stories around their time on the community college and to confirm their interview date, time, and virtual meeting invite (Appendix I). The prompt that asked them to think about stories helped them get ready for the semi-structured interview questions during the interview.

Electronic Document Review

Each community college that is a part of this study has a mission statement, a student handbook, and a website that was reviewed. I reviewed each of these electronic documents before the interviews. The purpose of reviewing the documents was to see how the community colleges ascribe to equity and inclusion of LGBTQ students. The interviews either verified or refuted what is in the documents. I noted what was found or not found for each of the documents. I used keywords to locate items on the website. Keywords that were used: gay, lesbian, LGBT, LGBTQ, inclusion, inclusive, queer, sexual orientation, anti-discrimination, non-discrimination, gender-inclusive, equity, Safe Zone, and safe space.

General Protection for Human Subjects

After the data are transcribed, each participant received a complete copy of their interview in a document. The participant could then read and give any feedback as to whether the

information was accurate. The audio files were destroyed after the study was completed. The audio files were kept secure behind a password-protected cloud storage system. All other documentation related to this study are stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer. After five years, all of this information will be destroyed.

To protect the privacy of the students who participated, I did not include any personally identifiable information. I used pseudonyms for all participants and the community colleges to maintain confidentiality. No students major or program of studies were included. Only the geographic area of north, east, central, or southeastern Appalachia were stated. A composite narrative was used in the results section. This process allows for another layer of anonymity. No other specific information about the school was identified within this study.

Data Analysis

The themes that emerged from coding are a direct reflection of the interviews. I used one coding method and one analytical approach for this study. Coding enhances accountability and brings depth to the findings (Saldaña, 2016). The coding mechanism I utilized is narrative coding using the six-part Labovian Model of Analysis.

Narrative coding explores "intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 154). The stories that come from the students were rich in detail. Narrative coding broke down the stories to bring out motifs. The motifs are the reason for narrative coding so that the rich part of the story emerges.

I used the six-part Labovian model to analyze the narrative. The motifs that came directly from the transcript were put into one of six elements of the Labovian model. The six elements are abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Labov & Waletzky,

1997). The abstract asks what the story is about. Orientation is the who, when, and where of the story. Complication tells what then happened. Evaluation asks the question, so what. Resolution tells the reader what finally happened. The coda is the signal for the end of the narrative. For one story, not all six elements could be used within the transcribed data depending on what the participant shares (Bailey, 2001; Labov & Waletzky, 1997). Because the coding mechanism use the participants' voices, second-cycle coding was not necessary.

I found the stories from each participant in the narratives. I then took parts of the story and placed into one of the six parts of the Labovian model. I then tried to find the common themes within the stories. Most of the motifs showed up in complication and resolution sections. Each story did not necessarily use one of the six parts of the analysis.

Once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, I used narrative coding to code the interviews. I used NVIVO research software to organize the data. A codebook was created during the coding process. The codebook summarized all the codes found in the interviews and allowed quick interpretation. The codebook included the description of the codes and brief examples for reference (Saldaña, 2016).

Composite narratives were used to tell the story of the participants in this study. Composite narratives combine data from three to five people and create one story (Willis, 2019). The data collected from LGBTQ students is personal, and the students prefer anonymity. Some of the students who participated in the research might not be out of the closet on campus or at home. Rather than break the data down into categories, a composite narrative allows the data to be combined into a story or stories. One area that a researcher has to watch is to make sure the information presented is accurate and anonymized accounts (Willis, 2019).

Trustworthiness

To enhance the quality of the research, trustworthiness and credibility must be addressed. Trustworthy qualitative research includes four key components of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). These items ensure that the information presented will be accurate, fair, unbiased, and reliable.

Every interviewee in this study will have their truth based on their experiences. According to social constructivism, human development and knowledge are learned from interacting in social situations (Hays & Singh, 2012). The stories that LGBTQ community college students share are the knowledge and development they have experienced in their lives. One person's story might not relate to another person's, and most likely, no two experiences will be the same. There could be overlap in coming out stories, harassment, bullying, discrimination, but no two stories will be exactly the same.

To have trustworthiness in this study, the participants told their stories, and their stories were accurately reflected.

Credibility

For the study to show credibility, it must show similar results as previous studies. If this study found something completely different from previous studies, credibility could be compromised, and this study would not be trustworthy (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The same questions were asked of all the study participants. Credibility is upheld when the same data is found from various participants and can be found in various answers.

Member checking

Member checking allowed participants to review their transcribed interviews before publishing. A factual interview increases the trustworthiness of the process (Hays & Singh,

2012). The researcher stayed engaged with the interviewee throughout the process. Any misrepresentations were corrected. A follow-up interview with the interviewee happened after the transcription was sent to the interviewee and reviewed and after chapter four was written.

Member checking allows the final story to be represented correctly. Once the interviewee gave their final review, the data within the interview was considered factual. The interviewee had the final rights of the transcript. If they read something in the transcript, they do not want disclosed that information was removed. The member checking process allowed the interviewee that right to privacy. The anonymity of the interviewee is paramount. The final member check took place after chapter four was written, but before the final publishing.

Transferability

Transferability can help provide another trustworthy check. Transferability is when the results of one study can be generalized to other situations or contexts. Researchers establish that the results establish that it is likely but not definite the data is transferable. In quantitative studies, this is much easier to prove. With purposive sampling, the results are transferable between subjects with the same characteristics, tied back to the research question.

Thick description/Dependability

This study provides thick descriptions within the research. Thick descriptions are a detailed account of the process and outcome, including evidence within the report and audit trail (Hays & Singh, 2012). Thick descriptions are essential by providing a detailed account of the process and outcomes found.

Audit trail/Confirmability

The researcher maintained an audit trail during and after the research. The audit trail includes how data were collected, how codes were derived, and how individual decisions came

throughout the process (Andrews et al., 2013). Confirmability allows for neutrality in the findings. The findings were based on the participants' responses and not bias. The audit trail serves as the confirmability of this study.

Limitations

Limitations include factors outside of the researcher's control that could potentially impact this study. There are a few limitations that were identified for this study.

One possible limitation is that participants were not wholly honest with their answers. The students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer may have lied to hide their true selves and stories. Understandably, they might not have been honest with the researcher because they believe there would be potential discrimination or judgment. LGBTQ individuals might not be out to their family or friends and could feel shame or guilt. There is the possibility that not everything was shared with the researcher regarding their time on the community college campus. The hope is that by sharing that I am a member of the LGBTQ community that the information was accurate and honest, and the students trusted me with their narrative.

Another limitation of this research could be the small sample size. Only using rural Appalachian community colleges limits the amount of information collected. It is unknown how many LGBTQ students are attending community colleges. Also, the colleges are rural, which limits the number of students on each campus. The anticipation was that the response rate would be low from the initial survey. If the responses were low, a follow-up email could be sent, or another incentive included. Neither one of these actions were necessary. Another possibility would have been to reach out to any campus organizations that focus on LGBTQ students. I could recruit students from this group.

A limitation that could impact research was COVID-19. The virus caused campuses to close on-site operations. Students could be unemployed and too busy to answer a survey. Students could have other important issues to deal with, such as childcare, seeking employment, suffering from the virus, or taking care of family or friends with the virus. This limitation is difficult to overcome since students were focused on their basic needs first.

The final limitation of this current study is that all participants identified as white or Caucasian. White or Caucasian students do not have the same experiences as students of color. A different experience was expected with students not considered white or Caucasian.

Chapter Summary

Community colleges should reflect the communities in which they reside (Cohen et al., 2014). Campuses consist of different types of minority students, including the group in this study, LGBTQ. Colleges are perceived to be open to all (Cummins, 2013). However, those who belong to the LGBTQ population are marginalized and face stigma, including students, faculty, and staff (Alessi et al., 2017). Students on college campuses require a safe space to feel welcome or to survive (Young & McKibban, 2014). According to some researchers, community colleges are not doing enough to retain LGBTQ students and focusing on student success (Whitehead & Gulley, 2020; Zamani-Gallher et al., 2020).

Prior research into LGBTQ community college students does not yield many articles (Whitehead & Gulley, 2020). The experiences of those who identify as LGBTQ community college students have not been thoroughly examined, while those at four-year schools and high schools have been explored much more often (Zamani-Gallher et al., 2020). The current research will add to the inadequate amount of literature that already exists. The information could be used

by administrators of community colleges to understand their LGBTQ populations already on their campus and act in many positive ways.

Chapter four highlight the findings of this study. I present the information that was found during the interviews from LGBTQ Appalachian community college students. The themes that emerged from the coding process was a direct result of the narrative interviews.

Equality means more than passing laws. The struggle is really won in the hearts and minds of the community, where it really counts.

– Barbara Gittings

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of LGBTQ students at Appalachian community colleges. Schools located in the Appalachian region are defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Using narrative inquiry, this study is intended to discover the recent experiences of the LGBTQ community college students at Appalachian community colleges. Individual interviews with self-identified LGBTQ students from community colleges were conducted using online technology. Before the interviews, it was unknown to me if the individuals were out to their family, friends, or on campus.

The chapter is organized into composite narratives addressing the research question: what are the stories of self-identified LGBTQ students at Appalachian community colleges? Participant composite profiles were developed based on data received from the one-on-one interviews. The profiles discuss the backstory of each participant. Pseudonyms were used throughout the analysis in place of any real names or places. Each profile is a summary of the participants' lived experiences on a community college campus. Each pseudonym used for a participant is a combination of three to five one-on-one interviews.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the study. I used the six-part Labovian Model of Analysis (Labov & Waletzky, 1997) to explore the stories that were shared with me. The stories were broken down into one of the six parts to find the themes: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). I then searched for the

themes found in the data and included them in this chapter. The themes found will be discussed in detail.

Research Question

This research attempted to answer the question of the stories of self-identified LGBTQ students at rural Appalachian community colleges. The question is addressed by the participants' stories and their experiences from the themes that emerged.

Participant Composite Demographics

A total of 15 participants were interviewed in the fall of 2020. All participants identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). All were currently enrolled students at a public community college, were a part of a degree program, and attended a community college in the Appalachian region. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 64. However, a majority of the participants were between 18-24. All of the participants self-identified as white or Caucasian. The average self-reported grade point average of all of the participants was 3.53. A majority of the participants reported that they worked either part-time or full-time. Of the respondents who worked, a majority of them worked full-time. All the participants with the exception of one was out to their family. All the participants stated they were out to their friends. Only 12 of the 15 students were out on campus.

The student profiles identified in this chapter include anywhere from three to five students. The students were grouped based on similarities, such as how they identified with gender and sexuality, circumstances, and backgrounds. Table 1 lists the age range, orientation, race, and pronouns participants reported. Information such as state or school were removed so that students could not be identified.

Table 1

Interview Participant Demographic Information

#	Age	Orientation	Race	Pronouns
1.	18-24	Bisexual, Questioning, Genderqueer	Caucasian	They/Them/Theirs
2.	18-24	Bisexual, Transgender, Queer	White	He/Him/His
3.	18-24	Transgender, Bisexual	White	He/Him/His
4.	18-24	Gay, Genderqueer	Caucasian	He/Him/His/ They/Them/Theirs
5.	18-24	Bisexual, Questioning	White	He/Him/His/ They/Them/Theirs
6.	18-24	Gay, Queer	Caucasian	He/Him/His
7.	25-34	Queer, Non-binary, Demisexual	White	They/Them/Theirs
8.	18-24	Lesbian	White	She/Her/Hers
9.	18-24	Lesbian	Caucasian	She/Her/Hers
10.	25-34	Transgender, Heterosexual	White	He/Him/His
11.	55-64	Transgender, Queer, Omnisexual	Caucasian	They/Them/Theirs
12.	18-24	Transgender, Bisexual, Genderqueer, Non-binary	White	They/Them/Theirs
13.	18-24	Gay, Queer	White	He/Him/His
14.	18-24	Bisexual, Pansexual	White	She/Her/Hers
15.	18-24	Bisexual, Queer, Non-binary	White	They/Them/Theirs

Participant Composite Profiles

Each person listed is a composite of between three and five participants. The data collected from LGBTQ students is personal, and the students prefer anonymity for various reasons. Some of the students who participated in the research might not be out of the closet on

campus or even at home. Rather than break the data down into categories, a composite narrative allows the data to be combined into a story or stories (Willis, 2018). I grouped the participants by similarity in their background and how they identify. The grade point average listed is an average of the three to five participants. The pronouns listed are the pronouns used by a majority of those in the same category.

Katherine (She/Her/Hers)

Katherine identifies as a cisgender lesbian. She considers her race to be white. Katherine is attending a community college in Central Appalachia. Katherine was not born in Appalachia, but in the Midwest. Katherine is out to her family and friends. Some of her extended family may or may not know, but she does not hide her sexual orientation. Since coming out, Katherine's younger brother has come out as asexual, or what is also known as ACE.

Katherine decided to attend this particular community college because of the stellar reputation of a particular program. There are closer community colleges to Katherine, but she wanted to attend a program that graduates some of the top students in her program within the state. Katherine plans to move to a large city outside of Appalachia and pursue her career after graduating. She currently commutes over an hour to attend in-person courses. Katherine's self-reported grade point average is 3.45. Katherine is not a part of any clubs or organizations on campus because of the demanding course work and commute.

Katherine attended a four-year school outside of Appalachia and obtained a bachelor's degree in a completely different field of study. Katherine did not find joy in the profession and is a career switcher. Katherine is also a non-traditional student. Katherine works full-time in the summer to earn money, so she does not have to work during the fall and spring semesters.

Joseph (He/Him/His)

Joseph identifies as a gay male and genderqueer. He considers his race to be Caucasian. Joseph is out to his family and friends. His family was not happy at first when he disclosed that he was gay. He vividly recalled a reaction his father had when he told him he was gay:

> I remember when I first came out, my dad wasn't too happy and he told me the story about, um, this one girl. She was transgender and she'd went to the bar one night while two guys ended up taking her and they just straight up like bashed her head in left her for dead in a ditch over by a bike trail. And he was like, he's like, that's why you shouldn't be gay. And I'm like, I don't think that's the same thing, but, ok.

Joseph is attending a community college in north-central Appalachia. Joseph wants to attend a university in another state to obtain his bachelor's and master's degrees in the same field he is studying at the community college. All the colleges he is looking to attend are out of the Appalachian region.

When Joseph started attending this particular community college, he saw someone from high school that he considered a bully. This triggered a memory from high school regarding that traumatic time. Joseph had known this individual from middle school and high school. During that time, this person bullied Joseph. When he saw his bully, he was immediately traumatized. He described the bully as "the most homophobic Christian you could think of." Joseph also used the term right-wing to describe his bully. Joseph's bully used to say things intentionally out loud so others could hear him. The comments he made were about something that Joseph posted on social media. That is part of Joseph's memories that came back once he saw this person on his community college campus.

The situation with his bully seemed to get worse as our conversation went further. I asked him about bullying or harassment on the community college campus in general. Joseph then mentioned the same person he went to high school with that he saw on campus when he first started attending as he mentioned earlier. This is how Joseph continued the story:

> In a way like nothing was ever a physical but like I mean like he made an Instagram account once dedicated posting pictures of me, just like with … hawkish captions. So, like I didn't know that kind of thing. So, I guess you could call him that, but not in like a traditional sense in a very like strange meme sense. I know this was in high school before like we started going to that same college. It was, it was funny, though, because I just emailed his mom screenshots and then the account was taken down like two days later. I'm like, ha, I told your mom on you, and you had to take it down. That's so embarrassing.

Joseph started at a community college because it is cheaper and close to his home. He felt he could get the same education at the local community college as a four-year university. Joseph works two, sometimes three, part-time jobs outside of campus. He also takes full-time courses. Joseph went to community college right after graduating high school.

Joseph was not born in Appalachia, but in the northeast. His parents moved around the country a lot until he was in middle school. The family then settled in Appalachia. Joseph's self-reported grade point average is currently 3.25. He is not a part of any clubs or organizations on campus. Joseph is considered a traditional-age college student.

Jackson (He/Him/His)

Jackson identifies as a bisexual, cisgender male. He considers his race to be white. He attends a community college in southern Appalachia. Jackson was born outside of Appalachia. He moved to the current city he now lives in when he was five years old. Jackson was born in a

Midwest state but frequently moved from birth until age five. Jackson will let anyone know he is bisexual, but it usually does not come up in conversations. His friends and family know his sexual orientation. Jackson said it had not been an issue with his family or friends that he is bisexual.

Jackson attended a large university right after high school but did not find joy there. He used the Campus Pride Index to see how individual schools were rated before attending. He decided to move back home and pursue a degree at the local community college after one semester.

Jackson is no longer in the same major or field of study, and he does not know what he wants to do once he graduates. The pathway he has chosen will allow him to finish his general education courses and transfer to a university. Jackson's self-reported grade point average is 3.75. Jackson works outside of the campus full-time. He wants to be involved more on the campus with clubs and organizations but has not found the time due to his work and school schedule.

Quinton (They/Them/Theirs)

Quinton identifies as a transgender heterosexual individual. They consider their race to be white. Quinton was born not far from where they are going to school, which is in Appalachia. Quinton is attending a community college in southwest Appalachia. Quinton was labeled female at birth but does not identify as such today. Quinton uses non-binary terms to self-identify such as they, them, and theirs. Quinton knew that they felt different at a young age and could not understand their internal conflict between gender expression, gender identity, and external genitalia.

Quinton has had a hard time with both the community and their family regarding issues around their transition and non-binary status. Quinton's family, mostly their mother, did not accept their gender dysphoria at first. It took them years, but they finally did accept Quinton's gender and sexuality preference:

> I mean, it was really rough for them at first, like they were not fans of it. I had to go back in the closet and then come out again. Four times before they accepted it, but then my therapist kind of bullied them into being really nice about it. So, it's been fine now. They even paid for my surgery. So, I can't complain.

Quinton's time in high school was not ideal. They recalled a time in high school that was one of their lowest. Quinton was a part of the GSA and an officer. Quinton remembers bullying through their time in high school. They were brave enough to work to change the policy for transgender bathroom use and found, from that one activity, that many of their peers were transphobic and homophobic. Once Quinton was at lunch in the cafeteria trying to get students to sign a petition to change the countywide policy. Quinton remembered, "But there were just several incidents like that like someone coming up to me and telling me that the only bathroom people like me belong in was a gas chamber and, you know, adults saw it, but they never really cared."

Even after all of the harassment Quinton has been through, there is still hope in their voice. Thoughts of suicide came to mind more than once, but they kept moving forward. Here is what Quinton said to me:

> It's gonna be fine. I honestly didn't expect to live this long when I was in high school. So, it's definitely interesting to have all these experiences open up to me that I never really thought I would live to see. I thought someone would get me or I get myself, you know.

Quinton decided to go to the local community college because of its proximity to their home. Quinton lives on campus in a dorm. They mentioned that the community college's cost is much cheaper than at a four-year school in Quinton's town. Quinton took an LGBTQ history course at this community college before enrolling. They did not know what the atmosphere was like for someone like them and wanted to test one course before enrolling in a degree-seeking program.

Quinton decided to study a program that helps the community, and other family members are in the same field. Quinton is a traditional-age college student. Quinton has attended other community colleges, including another in Appalachia. Quinton's self-reported grade point average is 3.85. They are the student body president and have participated in various clubs while attending this community college. Quinton plans to stay in the community where they live once they graduate. Quinton works part-time outside of campus while attending college full-time.

Sophie (She/Her/Hers)

Sophie identifies as queer and demisexual. She considers her race to be Caucasian. Sophie was born and raised in Appalachia and is attending a community college in Central Appalachia. She lives close to the community college and in the same town. Sophie's immediate family all live in the area and within walking distance of her house. Her extended family lives in the same county where she resides. Sophie's family and friends know that she identifies as queer and demisexual. She said that most of her family does not understand what that means. Her family struggles with understanding queer and demisexual but not her friends. Sophie was unaware of homosexuality and can remember when she first found out that same-sex attraction existed. In this story, she recalled what it was like to find out about same-sex attraction:

> It was never really brought up that girls could like girls and boys could like boys. It just never. My parents never told me; nobody in my family ever told me that that was like a thing because I didn't have any out people in my family. Or in like my parents immediate circle when I was a child. I remember the first time, the way I learned that I guess, you know, LGBT people existed. I was in the sixth grade. And one of my friends whose parents are friends with someone who my parents are also friends with and have worked with doing like community theater stuff. One of my friends told me that that he was, he was gay. And I'm like, but, but what does that mean, and what does, what is this? I had no, I had no idea. I was, I was the most lost and confused child in this moment.

Sophie, by chance, ended up finding friends like herself. She recalled what her friend group was like from middle school to high school. The same group of friends she found stayed together. Sophie said that, eventually, everyone in her friend group came out as LGBTQ. It was reassuring for Sophie to be a part of a group of people that could relate to her.

Sophie decided to attend the local community college because of the location near her house, and it offered a degree program she wanted to pursue. The program that Sophie enrolled in is competitive, and she had to interview to be accepted.

Sophie enrolled in community college right after high school. Sophie is looking at moving to a large metropolitan city once she graduates. Sophie's current self-reported grade point average is 3.50. She works on the campus part-time and temporary jobs off-campus. Sophie does participate in some clubs on campus, including the LGBTQ club.

Composite Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using narrative coding and the six-part Labovian Model of Analysis to explore the stories. Narrative coding found the themes that existed in the data. The

themes found in the data were a direct reflection of the interviews and what the participants had to say about their time on campus. The Labovian Model of Analysis breaks down stories into six elements: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). From that analysis, I found the themes listed. The following themes contain descriptions and meanings of the participants interviews. Throughout the analysis, the participant's voices allow the reader to read first-hand the emergent themes. The transcripts were analyzed to provide a composite description for each theme.

Theme 1: Microaggressions Experienced by Students on Campus

During the interviews, I asked the participants to freely discuss their time on the community college campus. I did not ask for any positive or negative experiences specifically, but only their experiences and stories. I wanted to see which story they discussed first, which stood out to them.

The theme discussed by every participant was something I labeled microaggressions experienced by students on campus. These are intentional or unintentional verbal or nonverbal behaviors that bring about a hostile environment toward marginalized groups. The participants said that they did not believe that the microaggressions were intentional. None used the term microaggression, but what they described was a microaggression. In any case, the interactions of faculty or peers caused frustration or negativity in the atmosphere for the participants. Here are the stories of those microaggressions as narrated to me.

Theme 1 as Experienced by Katherine

As a new student on campus, Katherine had a group of students from her program she was hanging out with at lunch one day. The group consisted of males and females, and different conversations were happening all at the same time. One conversation arose over a country music

singer and her support for LGBTQ people. Some of her peers told her that they do not support LGBTQ individuals and the vocal support of this country music singer. Katherine mentioned that the individuals were from small towns in Appalachia and saw that as why they did not support LGBTQ individuals. The students knew that Katherine identified as LGBTQ.

Katherine ended up telling the group that she was engaged to her partner. One of the members ended up saying, "I won't come to your wedding, because I can't agree with it." Katherine was taken aback that this individual, and those around her, assumed that they were invited. Katherine stated to me, "And that was kind of the first time in a very long time I had to deal with that dissonance that was happening right in front of me." From there, Katherine said the conversation died with the group.

Since the time of that interaction, there have been no hard feelings. Katherine still talks to the individual who stated they disagree with her lesbian sexuality. Most of the individuals in Katherine's program commonly ask her questions about being a lesbian and her relationship with another woman. The conversation topic that started the first interaction on campus has never been discussed again. Katherine did state that she is still not inviting them to her wedding.

Katherine recalled another time on campus where a microaggression occurred. She was talking to a peer about faculty members and was warned about a particular instructor to avoid. Here is the story Katherine told me about that interaction:

> There's this one girl who was in my math class at [name of school] and she was taking a history class and she was very out, right. And like you could just tell that she was definitely a member of the LGBTQ community. And I remember one time she was telling me in class not to take this professor because he was just mean in general, and he would deliberately not answer her questions; he would ignore her and not stay after class

with her. And she said she didn't know if he was like targeting her or if it was the whole class in general.

Katherine avoided that professor just in case and to avoid any potential issues. She did say she was sure the professor knew that the student identified as LGBTQ. Katherine had heard others complain about this particular instructor, so it was fairly well-known that the instructor had some bias toward the LGBTQ community, in her opinion. She does not know for sure, however.

Theme 1 as Experienced by Joseph

As an out gay man, Joseph experienced many more microaggression on his campus. My first question about his overall experience on the community college campus was his overall experience, not anything in particular. Joseph stated that he does not know why he is treated differently. Joseph notices that he is always treated differently in secondary education and now higher education. He does not know if it is because he identifies or something else. Joseph wants to believe that is not because he identifies as LGBTQ.

Joseph went on to say that he does think he is treated differently. He has asked others about their experiences, and they are never the same as his. Joseph sounded optimistic that things could change, and he would not be discriminated against for being gay in his profession like he had been in public school and now college.

The next experience Joseph mentioned concerned a specific instructor, who said things that he found offensive. This is how he described the overall atmosphere in her classroom:

My [name of subject] professor. I have her for multiple classes. I feel like sometimes she makes kind of off-color jokes, but I think it's just because she's from a different

generation. So, it's not too much, just a little bit on the nose like I don't think you should have said that.

Joseph has not said anything to her and does not think he will. Her remarks are directed not just at the LGBTQ community but also at other minorities. He does not intend taking it to an administrator and wants to let it go. Joseph does not anticipate having this instructor in the future. He did not want to talk to me about her exact comments, in any case.

Not all of the microaggressions have been directed at Joseph. He has a friend that has experienced incorrect pronoun usage. Joseph stated that many people misgender his friend. When his friend was early in transition, they would not use the correct pronouns. Joseph does not believe that it was done with malice but just their assumptive nature. He did say that his friend was upset when this happened.

I followed up by asking how Joseph's friend felt about the pronoun usage issue. He said that it bothers his friend, but he tries not to let it bother him. This was not his only friend to have issues on the campus. Joseph has another friend that identifies as a transgender female. His female friend has also encountered issues on the campus. Both of Joseph's friends have continued to encounter incorrect pronoun usage on campus, unwarranted comments, and roadblocks to their education.

Joseph mentioned that his friends seem to have these experiences, which troubles them but does not defeat them. They have been resilient even through challenging situations. Joseph mentioned his transgender friend again and the misgendered microaggression issue on campus by telling me this:

Um, I mean my one friend I mentioned earlier, who's trans. Like, I mean, I feel like when your identity doesn't match how people perceive you. I mean, it's a whole lot more

inevitable. Well, I mean, I've heard like it's they complain a lot about how like, you know, it's more prominent since like they like come out and started transitioning.

The two transgender friends he mentioned are no longer on the community college campus. He was unsure if they graduated, transferred, or dropped out. Joseph did not keep in touch with them since they no longer attend classes.

As the conversation went further into the interview, Joseph remembered another instance in the classroom with an older student who told a story about serving in the military. An older student in one of his courses related a story about his time on a military base. The student had to pick up any drunk soldiers at local bars. On this one occasion, they went to a bar to pick up a fellow soldier. The soldier had hit on someone who presented as a woman. It turns out the person had male genitalia, and when the soldier found out, he knocked the person out by punching them.

The worst part of this experience for Joseph was how the other students reacted. He noticed that all of them laughed, including the student who told the story. He told me, “I was kind of disturbed by like the laughter that was going on with this kind of story.”

I followed up on this story and asked him when everyone was laughing, how did that make him feel, and did he feel like he should say something? Joseph responded by telling me how he felt. He was worried about how others might react if he said something. Joseph was the only one not laughing and not enjoying the story, at least by the response he saw. Joseph was not comfortable confronting the microaggression he heard because he did not know how others might react. During this response, he seemed to be a little uncomfortable with the situation or how he approached the situation. I left the story and situation alone at this point.

Theme 1 as Experienced by Jackson

Jackson remembered only one instance of a microaggression in the classroom around a church camp discussion. He felt singled out because others knew he was bisexual, and he did not precisely conform to societal norms on dress code.

Jackson took a course where he befriended two individuals, one male and one female student. The male student was a religious study major and carried his bible everywhere in his hand. Jackson found out early in the semester that they both had been the same Christian denomination, which helped them form a bond. On the other side of the male student sat a female student. Jackson found out early in the semester she was also from the same Christian denomination. At this point, Jackson felt comfortable in the class and talking to these two individuals.

The comfort in the class and with these two students changed one day. Jackson had come into the classroom to find his two "friends" were talking about something with their faith. He overheard something that made him believe he knew what they were discussing. When Jackson asked the girl, she dismissed him. Jackson stated, "And the girl legit looks at me and said you wouldn't know. And I was like, what is it? And she was talking, and she was like talking about a church camp."

Jackson knew which church camp she was discussing. He had been to it multiple times. Jackson felt dismissed by the girl because he identified as LGBTQ and was no longer involved with the church.

I wanted to know more about the student he felt judged him. I asked him more about the experience, and he had this to say about the girl who dismissed him regarding church camp:

> It just, it really bugs me that she had assumed that I wasn't involved in church and had no idea what she was talking about twice. But I have legit been to that exact church camp she was talking about, twice.
>
> I just tried to avoid her after that. Like I wasn't mean to her, and she wasn't like rude to me or anything, but I just like tried to not talk to her anything. I still talk to the dude a lot because the dude was super nice.

Theme 1 as Experienced by Quinton

Quinton seems to have trouble with their name change and pronoun use on campus and with friends. Quinton told a couple of stories of their time on campus. Instructors have misgendered and used the wrong pronouns for Quinton, which they find frustrating. Quinton has tried to reach out to instructors before class to make sure it does not happen. Even when Quinton has reached out before class, instructors have used the wrong name or pronouns.

Quinton has reminded one instructor three or four times of their name and pronoun change. Quinton said that finally the instructor caught on and stopped using their deadname and incorrect pronouns. Quinton found it difficult and embarrassing to keep reminding the instructor. Quinton was nervous each time he approached the instructor and did not know if it was on purpose or just an oversight.

Even though Quinton wanted to be called a name other than what was on the roster, it took the instructor a few weeks to correct it. Then Quinton remembers another instance that they discussed with me. This time Quinton seemed more upset just in their demeanor. Quinton had emailed the instructor the name to use instead of their deadname. The instructor even prompted the students to email if the name on the roster did not match or they want to be called by another

name. The instructor continued to call Quinton by the wrong name and use the wrong pronoun. The wrong pronoun and name usage occurred through half the semester.

The above story prompted Quinton to remember a situation from last year in the fall. A student openly said that he did not believe gay people should be allowed to get married. The situation happened in a class, and no one said anything. Quinton did not remember the reason for the announcement.

That seemed to be all Quinton was going to tell me. I followed up to get more information. I asked, so when the person in the class stated that they did not believe gay people should get married, what happened at that point? Quinton said that the instructor was passing out papers. The instructor only said that this is why topics like marriage equality should not be discussed in the classroom. Quinton was not happy with that answer but did not want to challenge the other student.

Quinton started talking about their current semester. Quinton and others have run into pronoun use and correct name use by instructors' multiple times. Here is what Quinton said to me about the first day of the Fall 2020 semester:

> So, the very first day of this [subject] class. And the class, we are doing it remotely. We're doing it via Zoom like in real time. So, the instructor's, trying to figure out who's who and their name. The other trans person in there in the class, because listed on the roster is his deadname. What the instructor said was Abigail? And so, he was like, and are you, are you, Abigail? And it's like, oh my god, he just deadnamed you in this class. Which was like really not cool.

I then followed up to find out more about this story. Quinton did not know this student but felt the need to reach out since they were both transgender. I asked what the response was

from the student. Quinton responded by telling me that the student did answer that his name is now Daniel. Quinton private messaged the student and apologized that it happened. The student told Quinton that he had sent an email in advance, so that situation was avoided. The instructor had either ignored the email or forgot about it. In this case, the student was outed to the entire class whether he wanted to be or not. The student was embarrassed and unprepared since he had notified the instructor in advance.

Quinton not only has issues on campus but so do their friends. Quinton recalled how one of their friends seemed to have trouble in various college areas and not just with faculty. Quinton has an African American friend that related how tough it was to get specific paperwork through the administration office. The student had applied for scholarships and a work-study program. Quinton's friend's paperwork took longer than other people's for the same program.

I asked Quinton if the friend had legally changed his name. Quinton said that his friend changed his name after he was enrolled, so now the system has changed his name, but he continues to have issues. Quinton wondered if it was because he was transgender, African American, or both. Quinton also knows other students whose paperwork went through quickly, but not their transgender friend.

Quinton researched one of their instructors because she mentioned another school where she taught. Quinton knew the name was associated with an issue they had heard about before. The instructor mentioned two anti-LGBTQ colleges, which piqued their interest. Quinton had heard of one and remembered it being on the Do Not Attend list. The situation turned out all right for Quinton even after the instructor had taught at schools where living openly as an LGBTQ person is not allowed.

Because they identify as LGBTQ, Quinton had to know which schools to avoid. They knew the list of schools to avoid, which caused fear in them when the instructor mentioned her other teaching positions. Quinton thought about dropping the course, but there were no other sections. This situation worked out for Quinton but could have been much worse.

Sometimes the microaggressions come from other students. Quinton encountered a student that did not see them as non-binary and used female pronouns. Here is how Quinton started telling me the story:

> I know there was a guy in my [name of class] ... But he asked me out. And I said, no, because I did not like him. But he like very much refused to accept that I identified as, like he wasn't transphobic, but he kind of like treated me like, if I like I was a girl. Does that make sense?

I told Quinton that I did not understand and asked them to elaborate further on the situation. Quinton described the situation and what occurred to cause friction with another student. Here is how Quinton told me the story:

> Um, he like he wouldn't use pronouns around me, and he would call me [student name], but he like would also use like female connotated words like pretty or like, you know, like, stuff like that. Because like um I've seen I am I'm friends with him on Snapchat, and I've seen what he is like on his story, he has not spoken to me about this, but on his story. He has posted that he does not support the LGBT community. And so, I'm like, he doesn't go to the school anymore. He graduated last semester, but he was in my [name of course] class, which is how I knew him, and he was the [position within the school]. So, but he, um, he was like, I just tried to avoid interacting with him because when he made me uncomfortable because he like asked me out as a girl, which I am obviously not a girl.

> And as it's just like, he just made me so uncomfortable. Just in, a bunch of people liked him. And, like you, I mean he wasn't mean he was just kind of, in my opinion, passive aggressive I don't know if that was just me overthinking it or if it was like an actual thing. Like, I don't know what.

Quinton talked further about how the Snapchat stories were microaggressions against gay people. Quinton believed that they might have been directed at them. Quinton did not have proof but only that the Snapchat stories directed toward LGBTQ people showed up after Quinton rejected the student. Quinton noticed that the Snapchat stories went from random postings to not supporting LGBTQ individuals. Quinton also mentions that this person is a Trump supporter. The acquaintance's posts seem to center on religion, and that is the claim made for why he does not support LGBTQ individuals. The person Quinton is referring to recently reached out on Snapchat and told them congratulations for an accomplishment. The person is aware of Quinton's LGBTQ status.

Theme 1 as Experienced by Sophie

Sophie could only identify one microaggression while on campus. Her microaggression centered around a student that seemed to act differently when paired with anyone in her LGBTQ friend group. She mentioned that she knew the student who treated her and her friend group differently was deeply religious and Christian. She wondered if that had something to do with it but was unsure. Sophie related the general feeling here:

> I say that because I'm not entirely sure if it's actually a negative response specifically like to me or if it was just, just sort of the LGBT people on campus in general. Because there was, there were always a couple kids in my class who were like, it was, it was boys who were like physically. I'm saying affectionate, but it was like the play fighting thing that

> boys do all the time. They were always like punching on each other, not hard. But, you know, but then they would be like one of them would always get like unreasonably angry towards anything that had to do with like my little friend group. And most of us are LGBT. Like, we like, if one of us had to be partnered with him during class, he would almost like refuse to do work.

Sophie was unsure why the male student was always unreasonable when any LGBTQ student had to be partnered with him. She said she and her friends tried to avoid him in that class or be paired with him. Sophie has not had any other course with him since that one class.

Analysis of Theme 1

Reading through the transcripts, I noticed that every student I interviewed had at least one microaggression they encountered, but most of them had multiple. No one understood it as such, but every student discussed a situation in which they felt uncomfortable with something that was said aloud or how they were treated. It did not take me long to realize that a pattern occurred from the stories I was told.

Each of the five composite profiles identified includes the 15 student interviews. Katherine, Joseph, Jackson, Quinton, and Sophie all encountered at least one situation in which their sexuality or gender caused someone else to create a hostile environment. Not one of the individuals caused issues, but only was being themselves. None of the encounters were physical, only mentally challenging for the students I interviewed. The students learned to avoid either the people or situations which caused the microaggression to occur. None of the students seemed to harbor ill will towards the microaggressors.

Theme 2: The Community College Can Provide a Cultural Bubble

The next section discusses the theme of the community college cultural bubble. Students see the atmosphere between the community college campus differently from the town or city culture surrounding it. The interviewees mentioned how they felt free to be open and themselves inside the campus, with some small exceptions. Once I asked about the town or city nearest or the community college or located inside one, they did not feel the same anymore. There was a big difference between being themselves on campus and being reserved in the nearest town or city. In this section, I will discuss the themes in a composite narrative.

Theme 2 as Experienced by Katherine

Katherine strongly felt like the campus is a safe space for her. For Katherine, the program she is in is a safe space. She has found some most likely lifelong friends. Her instructors have not treated her differently because she identifies as a lesbian, and she is being asked to branch out and be a safe space for other students. Her instructor has also asked her to present LGBTQ topics in the classroom. Katherine's instructors have been supportive and open to discuss what is going on in the world or on campus. She does not know their political ideologies, and it does not seem to matter. She is content with how she has been treated.

I wanted more information on the campus from Katherine. I asked her about any other experiences or the campus in general and if she felt safe there. In one encounter in a financial aid meeting, the person had to process Katherine telling the employee she was a lesbian. She does not believe that the person was thinking anything negative only, processing something new. Here is what she told me about her campus, "We have a diversity equity inclusion center on campus, so the whole nine yards. So, I think they really tried to make sure that everybody, no matter your background really feels welcome on campus."

I then turned to the town in which the campus is located. Katherine remembered an event last June during a pride festival in town. The town threw its very first pride celebration. A group of Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan protested the celebration. The situation shook her up a little bit. Even though her college is in a small town, she did not expect such. Katherine also said that the community is conservative and does not feel comfortable out in town like she does on the campus.

Katherine was not comfortable walking down the street holding her girlfriends' hand, or other public displays of affection in the community college town. Katherine told me that she would be comfortable doing that where she lives in Appalachia, but not where she attends college.

Theme 2 as Experienced by Joseph

Joseph found his community at college. Before attending this community college, he did not have any LGBTQ friends. He believes that the major he chose attracts a higher percent of LGBTQ students. Joseph believes that the college campus helped him discover more about himself. While on campus, Joseph discovered his sexual identity and found others like himself. Before attending college, he thought he was straight, and that attraction to other guys was typical. Once he met with an LGBTQ group of students on campus, he realized that he was not straight with their help.

Joseph talked about the safety of the college and the campus. Not everyone knows Joseph is gay, but he does believe some people figure it out. Joseph is not flamboyant. He feels comfortable in his chosen degree program because he knew that it attracts many LGBTQ students. Joseph also feels safe on the campus among his peers and the faculty and staff. He does not foresee an issue with someone asking him if he identifies as LGBTQ.

Joseph had some bad experiences from when he was a child in the town his community college resides. He did not want to talk about it, but it has left him with a negative impression of the town. He did say he has justification for the way he feels. Here are his own words to describe what it is like for him:

> I kind of always feel like that town's, a little like gross or like really cracked out, so I'm like, I don't really want to get out the car here. I mean, I know it's not, but at the same time, it just makes me uncomfortable. But every time I do meet new people there, it's like, oh, this place isn't that bad. It's just, I'm still like getting over that because I have PTSD from a lot of stuff that happened in my past and so. I guess it's more like I'm getting over things just by exposure to old situations, but in the present. You know?

Joseph does not have a good impression of the town. For him, it is not a safe space to be himself. He recognized that the community college was a safe space where he could be himself.

Theme 2 as Experienced by Jackson

Jackson's experience with the community college campus and the town it resides in was different. He was not too worried about the town, although Jackson stated that he would not be openly out in the city or hold hands with another guy walking down the street. He did not know the town well enough to be open. Jackson used to frequent a local sandwich shop outside of the campus and in the town. He never heard about any harassment or discrimination, although he knows the town has passed ordinances banning discrimination in employment based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Jackson feels the campus is more open than the town, however. Even with discrimination laws in place in the town, Jackson is not comfortable being himself outside the community college campus.

Theme 2 as Experienced by Quinton

Quinton found friends in the community college too. Quinton's time on campus included being a part of the LGBTQ club and meeting new people. Quinton and the people they encountered found safety on the campus and others like themselves. Quinton quickly realized that the LGBTQ club was a safe space for many students. They had several students tell them what it was like for their situations. One student said "that she wasn't out to her parents or any of her friends. That was the only place she could be herself." Then there was another student who told Quinton, "another person came up to me and said that they didn't have any friends outside of school. So, it was really great to be in a club like that at the school."

I asked Quinton if they thought the campus was homophobic or transphobic. Quinton did not know the answer but only knew their experience. Here is how Quinton described their thought on that question and the town:

> Like, I definitely think there are more conservative students in [name of school], that would not agree with people all having equal rights, but overall, my experience has been pretty good at [same of school]. And I think it's, I think it's not only just at [Name of School], but also this community and [name of town] itself.

Quinton was required to take a freshman seminar type of course. They were unsure what the class was about and how others would accept them. Quinton was surprised to enter the class and realize by the end that almost everyone identified as LGBTQ. Quinton summarized the students in the course:

> And so, it's a very small class, but I've got a gay man as my instructor. I've got a trans guy in the class with me. There is a non-binary person in the class. A couple of other

people who haven't disclosed. But I have a pretty good inkling they are part of the community.

Quinton lives on the campus in a dorm. They have found a neighbor, Karen, and the two help and support each other. Quinton has not disclosed their gender identity, but that does not seem to matter. Quinton found a friend they can trust. Quinton has trust issues. When they found Karen, it was a safety net. They help protect each other from harassment and for safety. Karen encountered a resident assistant that harassed her, so she did not feel safe on campus. They both attend courses at night and walk to and from the dorms to the classrooms together. Quinton is not the best in social situations, but Karen is, however. So, Quinton said "they balance each other out around campus."

Theme 2 as Experienced by Sophie

Sophie, like some of the other participants I interviewed, found friends and other LGBTQ students on the community college campus. Sophie also finds the community college campus a safe space and different from its location. Sophie is pleased with the program's primary instructors and how inclusive they are of everyone.

Sophie is careful to whom she discloses her queer status. She does not just come out to anyone and everyone for safety reasons. Sophie is unsure of who is accepting until she knows them. Sophie does know that the town is conservative. Within her cohort of students on campus, she feels safe being herself on campus. There have not been any issues for Sophie and her friends.

Sophie overheard another student mention that she had a female fiancé. Sophie became friends with this person because she knew that she was safe to be open. One time, two people from her class told the group that they do not support marriage equality. Sophie said that that

comment had not caused further issues with the group of students. Everyone moved on from what was stated. She still feels safe in the space.

Sophie continued about her experience with her cohort. Since they take a lot of the same classes, they share a lot of time. Not every community college program has this type of offering. Sophie finds that the heterosexual students have lots of questions for her and her friends who are LGBTQ. Some of it is typical girl talk, but other times her cohort asks questions that cover specific LGBTQ topics.

Sophie talked about harassment and discrimination on the campus. Sophie mentioned that every syllabus and the student handbook had nondiscrimination language. Also, she mentioned how the campus made her feel safe enough to come out. Her college has a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination. The college will pursue any complaints about harassment or discrimination. Here is what Sophie said about the safety of the campus:

> Yeah, that was the surprisingly [*sic*], the campus like, around my friends and at school was one of the first places that I really actually felt safe to come out and to tell people, because I was finally finding other people who I guess felt the same way.

Analysis of Theme 2

All of the students interviewed discussed the campus environment with me. For most students, the community college campus is a safe space. Even after they encountered microaggressions, the students still find safety on the campus. A majority of the students I interviewed found friends and allies to trust, which was happenstance and not something they sought out.

Most of the students talked about how they trust their faculty members. Students did not have faculty issues or feel they were homophobic or transphobic. There are a few exceptions to this, however.

When I asked students about the town near the community college, they all had a different attitude. The students no longer felt the campus's safety extended to the town or city. Not one student felt confident to walk down the street holding hands with someone of the same gender or to kiss their partner in public. Some of the students I interviewed did not even frequent the town because they felt it was not safe enough to be LGBTQ.

Theme 3: Religion Both On and Off the Campus Impacted Students

Without being prompted or asked about religion, every student had something to say about religion. Religion has played a role in their past, either outside of the campus or on the campus concerning other students. Each student recognized that religion impacted their communities and how they perceive LGBTQ persons. There is an ongoing tension between LGBTQ people and religion, especially Christianity in this case. It is manifest either in their families' beliefs, their own coming out, their internalized homophobia, or with peers and faculty.

LGBTQ students in this study believe that Christians use a passage from the Bible to attack how they identify. The students that mentioned Christianity or the Bible felt that their religion created a hostile environment. Students associated Christianity with intolerance of LGBTQ people and did not want to associate with them.

Theme 3 as Experienced by Katherine

Katherine had to give a speech in a class after a male student discussed his religion. Katherine understood that religion LGBTQ do not always intersect in Appalachia. Katherine was nervous because her story discussed her coming out. She said the student who spoke before her

speech talked about being a Christian man and his love of Jesus and the Bible. Katherine knew that Appalachians could be closed-minded to LGBTQ individuals.

There was not a backlash to her coming out, to Katherine's surprise. She even wore a shirt one day that indicated her sexual orientation. Katherine received a few compliments but no harassment or discrimination. The class she gave her speech in went well with no issues. This made Katherine feel safer on campus. Katherine still worries about religion in the faculty members' beliefs or other students. She is navigating her way through the community college and trying to avoid discrimination or harassment.

Theme 3 as Experienced by Joseph

Joseph had a situation where he encountered a male from high school on his community college campus. Joseph surmised that this person said things about LGBTQ people because of his religion and how he was raised in an anti-LGBTQ culture. Joseph was shocked when he saw this person on his community college campus after graduating high school. Joseph thought that after high school, he would never see this student again. The male student even went out of his way to say something transphobic. He described the person as very homophobic and transphobic. He thinks the student even believed in conversion therapy. Joseph described the male student as the most hateful Christian you could think envision. It was a traumatic experience for Joseph. After seeing him once on campus, he never reencountered him. Joseph believed this was because they are in two different degree programs.

Theme 3 as Experienced by Jackson

Jackson had another experience with a guy he met on a dating app. The other male went to the same community college as Jackson. They met up at a coffee shop for a get to know each other date. He described the person as a conservative Christian. Somehow a conversation came

up around transgender individuals. The guy did not understand the do's and dont's when speaking about a transgender individual. Jackson had to explain to him why Donald Trump was not an ally of LGBTQ individuals. Jackson found the experience exhausting even though the person was open and willing to learn. This brought up many feelings for Jackson.

Before the date was over, the male pointed out another guy in the coffee shop to Jackson. He told Jackson that the guy is a super conservative Christian and to stay away from him. Jackson did not go out on any more dates with this guy, which was mutually agreed.

Theme 3 as Experienced by Quinton

Quinton encountered a homophobic person in one of their classes on campus. They overheard the student say a remark about gay people. Quinton did not tell me what the remark was but seemed hurt by it. Quinton did not confront the situation and did not know the male student. Quinton did say that the male student was conservative and Christian. He stated that this particular student has a group of students he hangs around all the time, and he knows most of them are anti-LGBTQ.

Quinton also talked about his parents and their reactions to their coming out. Quinton's dad accepted it sooner than his mom. Here is how Quinton described their experience:

> My mom took it a little harder. I think because she woke me up at like 7:30 the next morning by very aggressively flicking my light switch on and off and saying, get up, get dressed, going to church. And we went to church and she basically interrogated me on the ride to church and then it took from there. I think she just sort of pushed it to the back of her mind and just decided not to think about it, sort of, if I can't see it it's not real type of thing. And it took her about a year and a half to fully come around and be like, you know,

... And this is OK. But since it, since she's come around and really just, since I've come out. Um, my parents have been some of my strongest supporters and stuff.

Quinton started talking about the town they live in. Quinton does not feel safe where the community college is located since the state in which they live allows people to carry a gun and its conservative nature. Further, Quinton knows that most people in the surrounding town are Christian and do not believe in LGBTQ equality. Quinton mentioned that they know the churches are homophobic in the town in which they live.

Theme 3 as Experienced by Sophie

Sophie was a religious person before attending community college. Religion shaped her worldview and how she perceived many topics and issues. Sophie was discouraged from further education with her religion and was not exposed to different careers and pathways. Sophie found college a very different experience from the one in which she grew up. Her friends were all from her religion, so there was not much outside influence or differences. She decided to abandon the religion when she disagreed with their stance on LGBTQ individuals. Sophie knew she was different, and most likely identified as LGBTQ. Even though she was raised in a religion that did not tolerate being different she never felt the same.

Sophie still believes in God but not Christianity. She is comfortable with students on the campus who are Christian. Sophie has encountered different students who are Christian yet anti-LGBTQ. For the most part, she does not engage with their belief and leaves the situation alone.

Analysis of Theme 3

It is interesting to note that I did not initiate the conversations about religion, and none of my interview questions pertained to religion. Nevertheless, just about every student at some point mentioned religion in the interview. Almost all of the students were either impacted by

religion from their family upbringing or identified someone at community college considered a conservative Christian and who did not support LGBTQ people.

Students I interviewed are navigating the community college along with individuals that do not share the same religious viewpoints or disagree with being homosexual or transgender. Katherine, Joseph, Jackson, Quinton, and Sophie had encounters either inside the classroom or outside the classroom with intolerant Christians. For them, there was a moment of nervousness and later avoidance toward the individuals. Most of the students I interviewed were currently Christians or had been in the past.

Theme 4: No Campus Threats Were Identified

The next theme discusses no campus threats that were identified. Some of the students felt that the community college had no direct threats they could identify. The interviewees also acknowledged that they had not heard their immediate friends discuss campus threats such as open harassment or discrimination by faculty and staff or anti-LGBTQ campus policies. The microaggressions mentioned above are not considered a threat.

Theme 4 as Experienced by Katherine

Katherine received a bachelor's degree in another program from another institution. She compared this community college with the four-year institution she attended before. There were never any talk of LGBTQ issues or people she recognized on the four-year campus. That is different on the community college campus she is now attending. She hears her instructors talk openly and positively about LGBTQ issues: she has seen multiple emails for groups or meetings for LGBTQ students, and even some business acknowledgment in the town where the community college is located.

I asked if any of her instructors identify as LGBTQ, and she said no. The one she knows that advocates support of LGBTQ students is a straight heterosexual male. This fact did not seem to bother Katherine or strike her as odd, which was good.

Katherine talked about another course she has taken at her current community college. She observed someone open and willing to understand LGBTQ individuals in the course. She also saw a concentrated effort by one instructor to break down the stigma of LGBTQ people. She thought the student identified as heterosexual cisgender, and so did that instructor.

Katherine told me that she knows the college area is low-income, rural, and conservative. She noticed one male student take an interest within one class and shift his thinking about LGBTQ issues. Katherine attributed that change to the professor who was teaching the course. She did not talk to the student one-on-one but only heard his classroom comments.

Katherine had another experience while wearing a shirt that let everyone know she identified as LGBTQ. She did not hear anyone say anything negative to her and received a compliment. An instructor walked by and told her she liked her shirt. After one class, two students came up to her, complimented the shirt, and shared their stories. They both identified as LGBTQ and had similar shirts they had worn to campus. The whole experience was positive, and she did not encounter any negativity from that experience.

Katherine talked about not feeling threatened on the campus and her general experience. She sees support from the instructors and other students on her campus. Katherine is optimistic about her time on this particular campus.

Theme 4 as Experienced by Jackson

Jackson has not seen any threats on his campus. He identifies as bisexual but does not tell everyone. Also, Jackson has not seen or overheard anyone having issues. He stated that the

people in his classes "would be the type that would typically be, you know, like against the LGBTQ community." Jackson has not encountered any direct issues. For Jackson, he respects others' boundaries and does not push anything on them, and they do not push their beliefs on him.

I asked Jackson if he had heard anyone speak about LGBTQ issues on the campus, whether in the classroom or outside. Jackson remembered one time the subject of when the Don't Ask Don't Tell military ban came up within a course. The only thing he heard was that some people were surprised that so many people identified as LGBTQ. He did not hear any negative comments or microaggressions at that moment. Jackson also reminisced about the overall campus and faculty when it comes to LGBTQ issues:

> So, honestly, the closest thing I can think of is that many of the some of the staff actually are pretty open about, you know, trying to get people to know that we have the LGBTQ club. So, you know, I think that for them, since it is a small community college that they want people to feel accepted, no matter what they are, you know. Like from this area, and you know if especially if it's something that people might not be comfortable with, you know, having them in an area where they can kind of come and feel safe.

Jackson even remembered when he was assigned to a group to work on a project in one class. He said that everyone was pretty quiet and kept to themselves in the class. He later found out that everyone in his group identified as LGBTQ. This experience was helpful with his opinion of the community college. He ended up making friends with some of the group project members. Jackson was not looking for LGBTQ friends but found them by happenstance.

Theme 4 as Experienced by Quinton

Quinton worried about being misgendered or treated for being transgender and non-binary. They did have something positive to say about some experiences on the community college campus. Quinton frequents both the bookstore and cafeteria on campus. They have had positive experiences in both places that have helped to quell any threats. Quinton has encountered a campus staff member at the bookstore who has been nice to them. Also, Quinton goes to the cafeteria around the same time daily. A male student who has struck up a positive conversation with Quinton just about every time they are in the cafeteria. Quinton sees this as part of a welcoming and open campus environment without any threats.

Theme 4 as Experienced by Sophie

Sophie talked about the campus in general and did not see a threat. She had a few stories to tell about her time on campus. Sophie has not felt threatened and received some positive affirmations about her sexuality.

In one class, Sophie had to give a presentation about herself. She did not disclose her sexuality in the speech. She did witness others, though, who did. One particular male student mentioned his husband without issue. Sophie stated that everyone respected that disclosure and others who came out during their speeches without ill will.

Sophie discussed another professor who is also her advisor and who knew her sexual orientation. She felt comfortable openly discussing being LGBTQ with the advisor.

Sophie had another experience where she wrote her sexual orientation on her shirt. She was nervous but decided to wear it regardless. It was near National Coming Out Day in October. The interactions from that display on her shirt were all positive. She received praise for sharing and identifying within her friend group and outside her friend group.

Analysis of Theme 4

Katherine, Jackson, and Sophie did not identify any campus threats. These students did not see any issues from peers or faculty and staff to their mental or physical health. These students could not think of any discussions from anyone dealing with harassment or discrimination on campus. The students had positive encounters to report. Quinton had both no threats in certain areas but also threats. The threats they experienced are listed in the next section.

Theme 5: Threats as Encountered by Students

The next theme to emerge was that of threats encountered by students. Some of the students identified threats while attending community college. There were no physical threats, only the threat or possible threat of having someone discriminate, harass, or bullying them because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Theme 5 as Experienced by Jackson

Jackson was well aware of the connection between religion and anti-LGBTQ individuals. He knew to look out for any possible threats. Jackson had an instructor who stated that she also worked at two schools associated with LGBTQ harassment. Once the instructor mentioned the two schools, alarm bells went off inside Jackson. He thought that he should drop the class and find another. Jackson did stay in the course, and it worked out without any issues.

Theme 5 as Experienced by Quinton

Quinton had an encounter with an instructor in the men's room. Quinton is transitioning from female to non-binary but appears male. So, Quinton prefers to use the men's restroom. They have not had an issue on campus using the bathroom of their choice. Quinton panicked inside when they saw the instructor. The instructor nodded at Quinton and just went out the door.

Quinton was worried that someone would turn them in as a female in the men's bathroom. Instead, nothing happened.

Quinton has always used the men's room on campus. It took a semester to be utterly comfortable without fearing that someone would harass or report them. Quinton said they feel no one cares about who uses which bathroom on campus since everyone is there just to work or complete classes.

Quinton is in the midst of a transition. Quinton also uses they/them/their pronouns and is non-binary. Because Quinton does not feel comfortable on campus, they instead tell everyone they are transgender male and use he/him/his pronouns. Quinton does not feel safe anywhere, sometimes not even on the campus. Quinton does not want to explain non-binary to people who may not understand. Quinton is exploring how they feel about he/him/his pronoun usage. They stated that it feels like a lie, and it is weird to hear. Quinton does get called she in many situations.

I asked Quinton if they feel safe on campus. Quinton does feel safe sometimes, but not usually. Quinton made a friend of their neighbor. They look out for each other and walk to and from the campus to the dorm together. Quinton stays in their room most of the time. They have befriended their neighbor but not by hanging out and only walking to and from the dorms or class.

Analysis of Theme 5

The number of threats was low overall for the students I interviewed. Whether they are real or not, the students confront dangers while being on campus to their mental health and physical safety. The students discussed how they have to navigate the campus and be prepared for any threats. All of the students were cautious in coming out to others and whom they became

friends with on campus. These students are navigating a heteronormative world. They have to test and measure to see who will accept or reject them, even on the community college campus.

Theme 6: Politics Affected Students Lives on Campus

Another theme that was discovered in the data was politics. The students who mentioned politics did so with their understanding that Republicans, Trump, and conservatives are synonymous with not supporting LGBTQ people.

Theme 6 as Experienced by Joseph

Joseph said he is not afraid to speak up to anyone, whether on campus or not. He said that he has gotten into political discussions on campus but could not think of any particular conversation around politics that stood out. He said that he has had them on campus, though, and challenged people's beliefs. Joseph did remember a few conversations around Trump and his policies on campus. Over the four years Trump was in office, he has been vocal with others in and around the school.

Joseph was talking about the town and how it votes. He was leery of being out in the town and being as political since he is very liberal in his thinking. Here is what he said:

> It's a, it's very like Republican in the town that I live in or not that I live in, but that I go to college in. And it's just, I don't know, but it's pretty scary to not to know how people will react to things.

Theme 6 as Experienced by Jackson

Jackson met another student on a dating application from the same community college. Jackson was surprised by the support this student had for Donald Trump. The student turned out to be conservative and a Trump supporter. Jackson was surprised that the student thought Trump was creating good policies for LGBTQ people. Jackson gave him information that contradicted

what the student believed. Jackson believed the student learned from the encounter and hopefully changed his mind about Donald Trump.

Theme 6 as Experienced by Quinton

Quinton had a confrontation with a political opposite while on the community college campus. An elected conservative Republican politician came to the campus and spoke. Quinton decided to prewrite a speech and deliver it when the question session arose. Quinton did not know what to expect from the audience and peers. To Quinton's surprise, they received lots of praise. Quinton was nervous but said it was worth it. Here is the story:

> Probably the most profound story I have regarding that is probably our [elected political position] came and just spoke with us. And I made a little speech about how I did not like what was going on as far as the LGBT community not having equal rights in the state. And I had a lot of applause after that little speech, and it was pretty crazy to have that much support. I was not expecting that.

Theme 6 as Experienced by Sophie

Sophie recognized that the campus is conservative but mentioned a specific elected official when talking about campus support. Sophie recognized that her campus is conservative. She stated that there are not people flying Trump flags, at least from what she has seen. She does notice that people keep to themselves mostly.

When Sophie was discussing the town she attends for college, she also mentioned the voting patterns of those who live there and the general atmosphere. Here is what she said:

> It's a very Republican voting city, and I am not out just sort of to the general public. I've, I've posted about it on my social media, and nobody's really said anything ... A lot of

people are still decently homophobic. A lot of churches are still decently homophobic, and I'm pretty sure that the whole gay panic defense is still legal in [name of state].

Analysis of Theme 6

Many students mentioned conservative, Democrat, Republican, specific local politicians, and Donald Trump during the interviews. My questions did not ask anything about politics or the student's views or party affiliations, but the themes were found throughout interviews and heard from many of the students.

The students I interviewed believed being conservative, flying a Trump flag, wearing a Don't Tread on Me shirt, or being Republican as a non-supporter of them and LGBQT people. If the students encountered someone with a Trump flag, they immediately believed they were not an ally or were leery of interacting with this person. The students interviewed were looking for threats, and a part of that was any indication of political affiliation or support for particular candidates.

Electronic Document Review

I reviewed their website for the mission statement, student handbook, and the website at each participants' community college. The results of the review were disheartening. Not one of the participants' community college included equality, inclusion, or equity as part of the mission of the community college. In only six of the 15 participants' schools did an LGBTQ club or organization exist. Some of the participants did not know there was a club on campus and some said it was defunct. In seven of the 15 community colleges there was language in the student handbook about discrimination against students based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

The presence of a Safe Zone or Safe Zone training was not evident at any of the 15 community colleges from the website search. Students confirmed this when I asked about resources on campus by stating they did not know of any Safe Zone resources.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to discover the stories of LGBTQ community college students. This chapter includes participant composite demographics, participant composite profiles, a composite analysis, and the researcher's findings concerning the research question. The narratives collected from student interviews led to six themes found in the data. The themes were (1) microaggressions experienced by students on campus, (2) the community college can provide a cultural bubble, (3) religion both on and off the campus impacted students, (4) no campus threats were identified, (5) threats as encountered by students, and (6) politics affected students' lives on campus.

I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 15 LGBTQ community college students. The participants were purposefully selected from a survey instrument posted on a Facebook advertisement (Appendix C). Participants were interviewed in a majority of the states in Appalachia. The 15 interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. I used the six-part Labovian model to analyze the data. The motifs that came directly from the transcript were put into one of six elements of the Labovian Model. The six elements are abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Labov & Waletzky, 1997).

In the final chapter, I present a summary of the study, findings related to existing literature, and conclusions of the study. Finally, a discussion and implications, unanticipated findings, recommendations for practitioners and leaders, and recommendations for further research are discussed.

I'm not missing a minute of this. It's the revolution!

–Sylvia Rivera, Stonewall

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Context

There is a lack of empirical research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students at community colleges, and studies on LGBTQ students who attend Appalachian community colleges was almost nonexistent prior to this current study. LGBTQ people are marginalized, ostracized, and fighting for equal rights (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011) both on and off the campus. I have been reviewing LGBTQ community college students' experiences for years and have found a few studies that examine this group at the community college level. I have not located any studies that discuss Appalachian LGBTQ community college students. The current study could increase students' understanding at community colleges that often go unnoticed or unrecognized. Administrators, faculty, and staff should want to know about this population of students to meet their needs (Choudhuri & Curley, 2019; Garvey & Rankin, 2015b; Ivory, 2005; Sanlo & Espinoza, 2012). If students are not satisfied on campus academically or socially, they could drop out (Tinto, 2010), or their grades might suffer (Garvey & Kurotsuchi Inkelas, 2012).

This study is vital to both LGBTQ students and those who work in higher education. LGBTQ community college students' experiences are different from their heterosexual peers (Rankin et al., 2010; Woodford et al., 2013). According to Garvey et al. (2014), postsecondary institutions remain largely hostile environments for LGBTQ students due to homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism, and cisgenderism. Even after the strides made from 2005 to 2014, Garvey et al. (2014) still reported issues the LGBTQ community must deal with every day.

When students feel unwelcome or unwanted, they will not feel they belong to the community or clubs or organizations offered, drop out, or switch colleges. Garvey et al. (2014) reported that about a "third of the LGBTQ students seriously considered transferring to another college or university, hoping to locate a more nurturing climate" (p.530). Garvey et al. (2014) explained the hostile campus climate that can exist without proper supports from administration, faculty, and staff training. Colleges can lose students because of real or perceived disdain because of their sexual or gender identity (Swanbrow Becker et al., 2017).

There is a general lack of research examining LGBTQ community college students in Appalachia. A large segment of LGBTQ students attends community colleges in Appalachia. Community college leaders will want to understand the LGBTQ population experience for retention and enrollment. This current study presents information for community college leaders that can be put into practice.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of LGBTQ college students at Appalachian community colleges. Schools located in the Appalachian region are defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Using narrative inquiry, this study was intended to discover the LGBTQ community college students' current experiences at Appalachian community colleges. Individual interviews with self-identified LGBTQ students from community colleges were conducted using online technology. Before the interviews, it was unknown to me if the individuals were out to their families or on campus.

Research Question

There was only one research question that was answered for this study. What are the stories of self-identified LGBTQ students at rural Appalachian community colleges?

Review of Methodology

I used a qualitative, narrative inquiry study for data collection through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the participant to follow up in more detail after each question and offer information in rich detail. An interview protocol was created to enable uniformity between the interviews. The interview protocol and the interview questions are located in Appendix E. Interviews were conducted using an online virtual meeting space, with 15 students participating.

A purposive sampling of LGBTQ students at community colleges located within the Appalachian Regional Zone was chosen as the subject selection mechanism. An anonymous short survey was posted to Facebook, and an advertisement was paid to boost the post. If the students identified as LGBTQ, they could then choose to either take part or not in a one-on-one interview. If the students wanted to participate in the interview, I collected information to contact them. Otherwise, no personal data were collected from the students.

The interviews lasted no more than an hour and a follow-up interview lasted around 15 minutes. The follow-up interview happened after the transcription was completed and chapter four was written. I asked each interviewee about their experience as members of the LGBTQ population and as community college students.

I used an online audio recorder to collect data and a backup recorder for each interview, which was then transcribed. There was not a second cycle of coding for this research. Pseudonyms were used to protect each individual's identity and the students' institutions. Any information that could identify an individual or community college was removed before entering this research. A second 15-minute interview occurred after the first interview was transcribed.

The second interview followed up on the first interview and triangulated any new information. I used narrative coding, analyzing the data with the six-part Labovian model.

Summary of Major Findings

A thorough analysis of the data revealed six major themes: (1) microaggressions experienced by students on campus, (2) the community college can provide a cultural bubble, (3) religion both on and off the campus impacted students, (4) no threats were identified, (5) threats as encountered by students, and (6) politics affected students' lives on campus. At the time of this study, all participants in the one-on-one interviews were enrolled in an Appalachian community college.

All students interviewed had experienced microaggressions on the campus from either peers or faculty members. None of the students believed the microaggressions were malicious, however. The students identified the microaggressions and, in most cases, did not confront the person.

For the students interviewed, the community college campus is a cultural bubble. Students discussed how different the community college campus atmosphere was from the town or city the college was located in or nearest. Students were more likely to be themselves and express their LGBTQ status on campus than in a town or city. The students identified the town or city as a different atmosphere, and the culture was different from the community college.

Almost all of the students interviewed mentioned religion. Religion for most students was associated with anti-LGBTQ behavior. The interviewed students found students who invoked religion as people to be avoided. The students interviewed understood that to avoid harassment, discrimination, or microaggressions, students who invoked religion were perpetrators. Most

students interviewed mentioned growing up in a particular religion and that it impacted their coming out or their family's acceptance of their LGBTQ status.

Four students could not identify any direct threats on the campus. Direct threats would be harassment, discrimination, or bullying. These students did have issues at one time or another but not anything direct that they could tell me a story.

Two students did feel threatened on the campus. For them, navigating the campus was a hazard. These students did not feel as safe as the four that did not identify threats. The campus was full of threats, and the students needed to mitigate danger as much as possible.

The last theme that showed up was politics. All students mentioned a political party or elected person associated with anti-LGBTQ behavior. All of the students understood that politicians could threaten them. Many federal or state laws can impact their day-to-day lives. Even though the students range in age from 18 to 64, with a majority in the 18-24 age range, they live every day knowing that decisions could be made about their lives. They are fully aware of politics, who is being elected, and any threats to their rights.

Findings Related to the Literature

This study revealed most of what can be found in the literature regarding the LGBTQ students at community colleges. The students interviewed mimic some of the same experiences found before conducting the research. LGBTQ students are navigating a campus they are unsure about with people that they do not know. LGBTQ students are always on alert for threats to their life, education, or reputation. The following section presents the study's findings and describes how they relate to existing literature. The section is organized by the six themes found in chapter four.

Theme 1 Microaggressions Experienced by Students on Campus

In this study, all the participants had experienced at least one microaggression on the community college campus, but a majority experienced multiple microaggressions. The current study supported Alessi et al. (2017), Pitcher et al. (2018), and Renn et al. (2010). Alessi et al. (2017) conducted a study exploring the first-year experience of students at a four-year institution. Alessi et al. found that students experienced stigma and microaggressions on the campus. Pitcher et al. (2018) explored the campus climate for LGBTQ students and found a hostile campus climate including microaggressions. Renn et al. (2010) examined students from across the United States in both two-year and four-year schools. The authors found that students at both campuses encountered harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions. LGBTQ students must navigate a hostile climate and encounter peers, faculty, or staff that do not understand their needs. Not enough resources and training are available for instructors.

Transgender students face a vastly different atmosphere. Students in this study encountered microaggressions regarding their birth name and pronoun use. The studies conducted by Garvey and Rankin (2015b), Pryor (2015), and Haefele-Thomas and Hansen (2019) found the same issues as this study. Transgender students had many issues when preempting instructors on campus regarding their names or pronouns. Some instructors did not remember and used an incorrect name or pronoun. Even when one student tried to avoid the situation, they were still outed as transgender.

Ballard et al. (2017) found that rural Appalachian LGBQ youth experience a much higher risk for microaggressions. This study did not compare the risk for microaggressions with areas outside Appalachia, but all the students in this study experienced at least one microaggression on their campus. It was noted by the authors that students in rural areas are at a higher risk for

suicide ideation, bullying victimization, school violence, drug use, and risky sexual behavior. (Ballard et al., 2017)

The American College Health Association (2020) study was confirmed by this research when it relates to microaggressions. Every student interviewed identified at least one microaggression, while most identified more than one. The American College Health Association survey reported all students in their data. Their survey found that 1.6% of males, 2.5% of females, and 2.4% of all students reported microaggressions that negatively impacted academic performance (American College Health Association, 2020).

Students in this study noted that LGBTQ individuals were not mentioned and that instructors only discussed heterosexual individuals regarding course material. Yost and Gilmore (2011) confirmed this in a study they conducted that LGBTQ people are not readily found in course material.

Theme 2 The Community College Can Provide a Cultural Bubble

Students experienced a campus culture different from the town or city located inside or nearest. However, no studies addressed how students on a community college campus feel about their cultural bubble or if one exists. Every student interviewed for this study discussed how they felt safe on the community college campus, which does not extend to the town or community.

A study by Vaccaro (2012) found that because of harassment and bias that LGBTQ students created their own microclimates. This study found that LGBTQ students did not necessarily create their own microclimates and mingled among heterosexual students. Students in this study mentioned that LGBTQ-focused clubs did exist on campus and felt safer in that environment. There was not any other literature found that focused on the community college as a cultural bubble.

Theme 3 Religion Both On and Off the Campus Impacted Students

Religion was a source of tension for students in this study. The tension was between the student and their family or the student and other students. Kubicek (2009) found that students accepted both their homosexuality and their religion, which was confirmed by this study. Nkosi and Masson (2017) found that religious Christians found others of the same faith as unwelcome and judgmental. This study also confirmed their findings. Students felt alienated by others of the same faith because they identified as LGBTQ. Rockenbach et al. (2017) found the same from students in a study conducted about being LGBTQ and religious. The intersection of religion and identifying as LGBTQ was tough for some religious members to accept.

Even though some of the students encountered negativity in their religion not all participants in this study left that religion. Means (2017) found that students on a college campus who identified as LGBTQ experienced racism, homophobia, and other oppression and still continued their spiritual and religious journey.

Theme 4 No Campus Threats Were Identified

This study found students who did not encounter or know of any threats such as direct harassment, bullying, or discrimination. Garvey et al. (2015) found the opposite with classrooms and non-classroom spaces on community colleges as hostile for LGBTQ students. Pitcher et al. (2018) and Renn et al. (2010) found that LGBTQ students stated that both two-year and four-year campuses presented as hostile.

Vaccaro (2012) found that homophobia existed everywhere on the campus. This study did not find any homophobia. The students interviewed were asked if they or someone they knew encountered bullying, discrimination, or harassment, and not one student could remember any stories about it existing.

McGuigan (2018) found that the campus community mimicked the surrounding culture. The students who attended the community colleges in this study did not feel the same way. This study found the surrounding town, city, and culture to be not as open and safe as the community college campus culture.

Theme 5 Threats as Encountered by Students

As long as there are not clear bathroom policies, transgender students will feel threatened. Anderson-Long and Jeffries (2019), Kortegast (2017), and Nicolazzo and Marine (2015) both discussed inclusive policies around housing and bathroom use on campus. This study confirmed that issues exist even today for transgender students. The student in this study was afraid when a faculty member saw them in the bathroom. They were born female, transitioned to non-binary, and let others know they identify as male.

LGBTQ students have to worry about being accepted on the community college campus. Students in this study worried about the same thing. Vaccaro (2012) found in one study that students worried about whom to associate with and if they would be accepted or denied by peer groups. This study confirmed that feeling for some students. Woodford and Kulick (2014) found that LGBTQ students worry about acceptance at a much higher rate than their heterosexual peers. This study did not examine heterosexual students, but it can confirm that every student's fear of acceptance was evident.

In this study, many students stated that there was no Safe Zone or Safe Zone training on campus. Trimble (2019) noted that Safe Zone training provides a unique benefit to students by building allies among other students, staff, and faculty. This study confirmed what Coleman (2016) and Young and McKibban (2014) found: that not all campuses required Safe Zone training.

Nguyen et al. (2018) found that resources for LGBTQ students on community college campuses were lacking. There was a lack of safe spaces, information on LGBTQ health, and clubs to join for LGBTQ students. This study confirmed that LGBTQ students were unaware in almost every interview if their campus had resources or knew there were none.

Theme 6 Politics Affected Students Lives on Campus

A vast difference between this study and what was found in the literature was the theme of politics. No information was found in the literature on how politics affected LGBTQ community college students. Students in this study mentioned a local or national politician or political party and their views. Students were aware of how politicians affected their lives. No literature examining politics and LGBTQ community college students could be found to compare to this study. The year 2020 was a highly politicized year and could have contributed to the discussion or politics in the findings.

Nonthematic Findings

There were several examples found in the study that resonated with the literature. There were not enough connections between students to create a common theme. I noted the connection between the literature and what was found in the study.

Several students talked about wanting to take part in extracurricular events but not having the time. Ivory (2005), Ivory (2012), and Hughes and Hurtado (2018) noted this phenomenon in their studies on community college students. Ivory (2005) stated that because community college students are transitory it makes it difficult to form bonds and find other LGBTQ students. Ivory (2012) also labeled this type of issue community campus syndrome. Community college students work mostly part-time or full-time jobs which does not allow them extra time on campus which was the case for many students in this study (Ivory, 2005; Ivory 2012).

Some of the students in this study talked about their coming out to either family and friends or on campus. Kosciw et al. (2014), Nachman et al. (2020), Pryor (2015), and Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri (2016) all stated that the coming out process was difficult for community college students. The participants in this study who mentioned their coming out also mentioned it was difficult especially to their family members. Also, this studies participants talked about having to come out more than one time and that it was an ongoing process. The on-going coming out process was noted by Nachman et al. (2020).

The participants in this study that were planning to transfer after graduating from the community college discussed their bachelor degree options. Not all students were planning to obtain a bachelors. The ones who did discussed transferring to an LGBTQ friendly school. Garvey et al. (2015) found that about a third of LGBTQ students contemplated transferring to another college that was nurturing to their needs. The study by Garvey et al. mimics what the students related in this study.

There were a small group of students who discussed their major being a safe space. The students mentioned that they did not feel like there were threats from the other members of their cohort because the major was chosen by LGBTQ persons. Forbes (2020) conducted a study that found students choosing major that they considered queer friendly. In the Forbes study, students stayed away from STEM majors and also majors that did not mention LGBTQ individuals.

In this study, it was noted by several students that they did not know if their campus had any specific resources for LGBTQ students. Nguyen et al. (2018) found that not many community college campuses had resource centers, counseling, or career planning. Nguyen's study found that 86% of campuses had an LGBTQ club or organization while this study did not.

Unanticipated Findings

One unanticipated finding from this research was that not one of the 15 students encountered direct harassment, bullying, or discrimination while attending a community college. This does not mean that harassment, bullying, or discrimination does not exist in Appalachia but only that this group of individuals did not encounter it. The literature review conducted for this study noted that harassment, bullying, and discrimination occurred on both two-year and four-year campuses.

Another unanticipated finding was how much religion influenced each of the students interviewed. Either religion was a part of their lives or the lives of others they saw as anti-LGBTQ, homophobic, or transphobic. Religion, specifically Christianity, had a profound impact on why they believed their family did not accept them when they came out and for some even today.

The last unanticipated finding was the importance of politics in the interviews. All students in this study that mentioned an anti-LGBTQ student or faculty member also discussed anti-LGBTQ politician. They saw the anti-LGBTQ political party and politicians as an affront to their LGBTQ status. During the time of the interviews there was a presidential election which could have had an impact on the interviews.

Discussion

Queer theory is used to understand that heteronormativity and cisgenderism are perceived as society's norms (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Queer theory was used to understand the experiences of the participants in this current research. The students in the current research found themselves on a binary and heteronormative campus. Instructors assumed gender and sexuality based on how a student was dressed or acted in some instances. Students challenged gender and sexuality-

based binaries by being out, using the bathroom of their choice, defining their own gender or sexuality, using their preferred pronouns, and taking part in what is considered by some to be deviant behavior. Queer Theory was able to provide the understanding in the current study that biology does not explain sexuality (Rubin, 1984), sexuality is not what people see but by how an individual feels (Butler, 1990), and the binary of gender and sexuality is not correct and should be removed from vocabulary (Sedgwick, 1990).

Students from this study encountered prejudice against them because of other students religious views. Students did not know of any discrimination or harassment because they identified as LGBTQ and their peers religious belief systems. Students did encounter their own LGBTQ status intersecting with the religious students beliefs and causing friction in certain situations. In this study, LGBTQ students replied to religious students in a cordial way but avoidance. The one religion mentioned in this study was Christianity. Students from this study found other students who follow Christianity as intolerable and bigoted. Even some of the students who participated in the study identify as Christian or have identified.

This current study provided participants with an opportunity to tell their stories while being LGBTQ students on a community college campus in Appalachia. It was evident after conducting this study that more support is needed for LGBTQ students on community college campuses, including staff and faculty. Faculty and staff do not fully understand their lesbian, gay, transgender, non-binary, demisexual, pansexual, asexual, bisexual, and queer students. The community college campus is still heteronormative and binary regarding sexuality and gender. Queer theory was the correct conceptual framework for this study.

LGBTQ students most likely attend community colleges in larger numbers than four-year schools (Chen, 2017; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011). Administrators and faculty need to

understand their needs and interact with them to retain them. Microaggressions were reported by every student interviewed for this study. Faculty and staff need the tools to combat this type of harmful rhetoric. LGBTQ students will not stay at a community college if they do not feel welcome. The following section includes recommendations for practitioners and leaders and recommendations for further research. The recommendations are based on findings from this study.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Leaders

The current study allowed students to voice their experiences on the community college campus. Students mentioned various obstacles and issues they encountered on the community college campus. Students also mentioned certain situations on campus that helped them. These are recommendations for community college practitioners and leaders based on this study's findings. Leaders want tools for student retention. The recommendations are one way to keep more LGBTQ students enrolled, if implemented.

Institutional-Level Support of LGBTQ Students

Students interviewed for this study were mostly unaware if their institution did or did not support them with written policies. LGBTQ students need to know if their community college is supportive. Colleges can include equality or equity in either their mission, vision, or value statements. Not one school of the students from this study included equity or equality as a mission, vision, or value listed on their websites. When the organization as a whole is not focused on equity or equality then harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions can take place or increase. The community college culture is a direct reflection of the values that administration places into key policies and statements.

The students interviewed for this study did not know if discrimination and harassment policies applied to LGBTQ students. Community college must make sure that any campus policy on discrimination includes sexual orientation and gender identity. Without statements of support, students do not know if they are welcome on the campus. If there are not campus policies on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, then microaggressions will continue to pervade the campus.

The last institutional policy that should be established is the removal of bathroom use by gender. Transgender and non-binary students are discriminated against when bathrooms are separated by the binary rooms of male and female. It is also confusing for students who are transgender and for students who do not want to identify as either male or female. Community colleges can remove the barrier of separate bathrooms. Transgender and nonbinary students would feel welcome and not in fear of which bathroom is safe. The next four recommendations would follow after institutional support is established as part of the new culture of the community college.

Offer On-Campus Safe Zone Training

A Safe Zone is well-known by LGBTQ students. The training material is free and Safe Zone training would bring awareness of gender and sexuality and discuss prejudice, privilege, and awareness. As the literature review and the findings of this study indicate, higher education faculty, staff, and administrators need to be aware of their LGBTQ population. The Safe Zone training would allow these individuals to discuss what it means to be gay, lesbian, or transgender. The training would be a safe space to discuss pronoun usage and make sure a faculty member uses a student's correct name instead of their deadname.

Safe Zone training provides an opportunity for those not familiar with pronoun usage the tools to be successful. Correct pronoun usage is essential for transgender students. Not every student has had an opportunity to change their legal name or afford it. Those who work at the community college should use the correct pronouns as much as possible. Microaggressions experienced by students come from faculty or staff unaware of correct pronoun usage. Faculty can make sure to ask pronouns on the first day of class. They can also allow students to say their names without calling out from a roster. Any name discrepancies can be cleared up away from other students. Students who use a different name sometimes email the instructor before the first class. Instructors should make sure to use that name instead of what is found on a roster. Safe Zone training expands the cultural bubble that LGBTQ students feel on the campus.

Offer an LGBTQ Club or Organization

Students in this study stated whether there was an LGBTQ-focused club on campus. Many students did not know of any such safe space for students. For other students, an LGBTQ club was a welcome addition to their campus. Every campus should start or revive an LGBTQ-focused club. It might not seem important, but students know they can find a like-minded group of people and feel safer with this group. LGBTQ students need a sense of community and kinship. It is not easy to find other LGBTQ students on a community college campus without a common tie. Community college leaders can help LGBTQ students find allies, friends, and support systems by setting up a club or organization on campus. LGBTQ students continue to feel the cultural bubble mentioned in this study when they have a safe space to meet.

Offer Resources for LGBTQ Students, Faculty, and Staff

Community colleges need to have available resources for LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty. A majority of the students interviewed for this study could not answer if there were

resources on campus for LGBTQ students. Resources for LGBTQ students could look different at various community colleges. Resources include a place for students to meet one another, such as a club on campus. Students on community college campuses can find it impossible to find others like themselves without a mutual interest. Resources for students could include an instructor or student affairs staff member knowing where to find more information for a student. The best resource for LGBTQ students is a campus resource center. The resource center could include counseling, education, career advice, scholarship help, and advocacy.

Appendix J includes 60 resources for LGBTQ students or faculty members. These sources could form the foundations for a resource center for a college that did not have one. Students need to know where to turn for information. LGBTQ students have unique needs, and the list in Appendix J would help staff and faculty guide them.

Include LGBTQ Topics in Course Material

In this study, students noted several times that LGBTQ topics or individuals were not included in the course materials. Most course material assumes that students are heterosexual. Faculty members can change that by including LGBTQ contributors or topics in course materials, readings, lecture examples, or discussion topics. Just about every program of study should have LGBTQ items that can be included. Including even one LGBTQ item in the curriculum can reach LGBTQ students and make them feel included in the community college. The amount of microaggressions on campus could decrease with a focus on LGBTQ course material.

Recommendations for Further Research

LGBTQ students are a part of every community college in the United States. It is understood that they are largely ignored. Community colleges research often focuses on issues

related to student access, retention, and outcome initiatives, but there is a lack of empirical research on specific student populations, such as LGBTQ students.

I recommend replicating the study after the COVID-19 pandemic ends. The virus, I believe, caused many disruptions that impacted my study. Students are not focused on taking surveys and interviews but instead trying to navigate a disrupted world. Enrollments at all colleges are down right now due to the pandemic. Once COVID-19 is eradicated or is a greatly reduced threat, a similar study should be conducted. I believe more students would take part if they did not have to worry about food, housing, or job insecurity.

Second, a similar study focusing on LGBTQ students of color at community colleges should be implemented. All students interviewed for this study identified as either Caucasian or white. Black, Latino, Native American, or Asian students confront different challenges on a community college campus. The voices of these minorities are missing from this study and other studies in the literature review.

A third recommendation is LGBTQ community college students who have specific characteristics such as students of color, low income (Pell eligible) students, disability, or first-generation college students. The current study did not ask any information on these characteristics. The experiences of the mentioned populations could be very different from what was uncovered in the current study.

The fourth recommendation is to examine the role of religion and LGBTQ community college students. The current study participants discussed how religion affected them on the campus. A future study could examine how religion influences LGBTQ community college students on campus. Religion impacted students in this current study and it could be much deeper since this study did not examine religion.

A fifth recommendation is to continue using Queer Theory as a theoretical framework for research studies. Queer Theory is an important lens to look at LGBTQ experience. The community college campus is heteronormative and LGBTQ students can feel out of place. It is important to apply Queer Theory to multiple studies that examine LGBTQ experiences.

A final recommendation is to use a quantitative survey instead of a qualitative narrative. I received responses from students who did not want to sit for an interview. Students are sometimes willing to give a short amount of time to take an online survey. Rankin's *2010 Survey on Higher Education for LGBT Students* is a place to start. Rankin's survey received many responses from across the United States and collected vast amounts of rich information (Rankin et al., 2010). The proposed quantitative study should adapt Rankin's 2010 survey instrument which was revised from Rankin's 2003 survey. The survey had 96 questions and some open-ended questions. A quantitative study could help avoid traumatizing students when recounting a story around being LGBTQ.

Conclusion

Community college leaders must be aware of every subpopulation on their campus and their needs. There is a lack of focus on LGBTQ students at the community college level. As retention and recruitment continue to be important factors, LGBTQ students want to attend a community college that includes them and understands their needs. LGBTQ students want to know that the spaces they attend are safe from harm as they have navigated a world that is hostile and will not risk their wellbeing. The presence of institution-wide policies against discrimination, Safe Zones, correct pronoun usage, easy name changes, visible LGBTQ faculty and staff, and a curriculum that includes LGBTQ people, all speak to their needs and show that they are welcome on campus.

If community colleges are truly open access and represent the communities in which they are located, then community college leaders would strengthen access for minority students, belonging, and retention. LGBTQ community college students need a safe space, which should include the entire campus. Their needs are simple. Without a safe space to study, meet people, learn, and advance, LGBTQ students will not attend a particular community college. When LGBTQ students see that there are people like them on campus or feel welcomed on the campus by inclusivity, they will stay and be a part of the campus and complete their degree. Otherwise, they will drop out and find safe spaces elsewhere.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN APPALACHIA

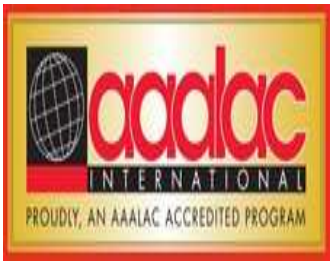
37	Lanier Technical College	Oakwood	GA
38	Lawson State Community College	Birmingham	AL
39	Luzerne County Community College	Nanticoke	PA
40	Mayland Community College	Spruce Pine	NC
41	McDowell Technical Community College	Marion	NC
42	Mountain Empire Community College	Big Stone Gap	VA
43	Mountwest Community & Technical College	Huntington	WV
44	New River Community & Technical College	Beaver	WV
45	New River Community College	Dublin	VA
46	North Georgia Technical College	Clarksville	GA
47	Northeast Alabama Community College	Rainsville	AL
48	Northeast MS Community College	Booneville	MS
49	Northeast State Community College	Blountville	TN
50	Northwest-Shoals Community College	Muscle Shoals	AL
51	Patrick Henry Community College	Martinsville	VA
52	Pellissippi State Tech. Comm. College	Knoxville	TN
53	Pennsylvania Highlands Community College	Johnstown	PA
54	Pierpont Community Technical College	Fairmont	WV
55	Roane State Community College	Harriman	TN
56	Shelton State Community College	Tuscaloosa	AL
57	Snead State Community College	Boaz	AL
58	Somerset Community College	Somerset	KY
59	Southeast KY CTC	Cumberland	KY
60	Southern State Community College	Hillsboro	OH
61	Southern WV Community & Technical College	Mt. Gay	WV
62	Southwest Virginia Community College	Richlands	VA
63	Southwestern Community College	Sylva	NC
64	Spartanburg Community College	Spartanburg	SC
65	SUNY Broome Community College	Binghamton	NY
66	SUNY Corning Community College	Corning	NY
67	Surry Community College	Dobson	NC
68	Tompkins Cortland Community College	Dryden	NY
69	Tri-County Community College	Murphy	NC
70	Tri-County Technical College	Pendleton	SC
71	Virginia Highlands Community College	Abingdon	VA
72	Walters State Community College	Morristown	TN
73	Washington State Community College	Marietta	OH
74	West Georgia Technical College	Waco	GA
75	West Virginia Northern Community College	Wheeling	WV
76	Western Piedmont Community College	Morganton	NC
77	Westmoreland County Community College	Youngwood	PA

78	Wilkes Community College	Wilkesboro	NC
79	WVU-Potomac State	Keyser	WV
80	Wytheville Community College	Wytheville	VA
81	Zane State College	Zanesville	OH

APPENDIX B

HUMAN SUBJECTS EXEMPTION LETTER

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH



Physical Address
4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508
Mailing Address
Office of
Research 1 Old
Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone (757) 683-3460
Fax (757) 683-5902

DATE:	**September 24, 2020**
TO:	Mitchell Williams
FROM:	Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee
PROJECT TITLE:	[1658318-1] A Narrative Inquiry of LGBTQ Students at Appalachian Community Colleges
REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	September 24, 2020
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Chezan at (757) 683-7055 or lchezan@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

Physical Address
4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508
Mailing Address
Office of
Research 1 Old
Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone (757) 683-3460
Fax (757) 683-5902

DATE:	October 7, 2020
TO:	Mitchell Williams
FROM:	Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee
PROJECT TITLE:	[1658318-2] A Narrative Inquiry of LGBTQ Students at Appalachian Community Colleges
REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	October 7, 2020
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Chezan at (757) 683-7055 or lchezan@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

APPENDIX C

ADVERTISEMENT SOLICITED ON FACEBOOK

APPENDIX D

INTAKE STUDENT SURVEY

LGBTQ Community College Survey

6. Would you want to take part in a one-on-one 30-60 minute interview? The interview would be recorded and transcribed. You will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. A second 10-15 minute interview would also happen a few weeks later. After the second interview, you will receive a $25 gift card.
Yes
No

7. If you said yes to an interview please provide the following:
Your Name
Name of Community College
State/Province
College Email Address Only
Phone Number

DONE

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

Hello. My name is Todd Cimino-Johnson, and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am interested in exploring the experiences of LGBTQ students at Appalachian Community Colleges. Thank you for taking part of your day to talk with me. This interview aims to learn more about your experiences while identifying as LGBTQ and being a community college student. I am not looking for any right or wrong answers, but only your experiences and stories. I want to let you know that I am a part of the LGBTQ community and identify as a cisgender gay male.

This interview will be recorded only to transcribe the data and look for common themes. Anything you say is confidential and will not be shared, and no personal identifying information will be used in my research. Before we begin, I want to note that I emailed you a copy of the informed consent form and you read and returned me a signed copy. The informed consent form provides an overview of this research and your rights as a participant. If at any time you want to stop the interview, you can do so. The interview will last anywhere up to an hour. It can end though when you are finished, either shorter or longer than that time frame. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? If not, I would like to start by asking the first question.

Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me why you decided to attend this community college.
2. What is your major or majors you are currently pursuing?
3. What are your future career plans?

4. Do you know your cumulative GPA?
5. Do you work either on the campus or outside of the campus? Full-time or part-time?
6. Is this the only college you have attended? If not, which others and why did you leave?
7. Are you a part of any clubs or organizations on campus?
8. Where were you born? Where were you raised?
9. Are you out to either your family or friends?
10. What pronouns do you prefer?

The next set of questions will ask for you to tell me a story. Do you have any questions at this point?

11. Tell me a story about your experience as a member of the LGBTQ community while attending this community college.
12. Tell me a story about a classroom experience, either positive or negative, regarding being LGBTQ on this campus.
13. Tell me a story about an experience with either campus faculty or staff and how they interacted with you or someone you know, knowing that you or they were a member of the LGBTQ community.
14. Tell me a story about a non-classroom experience, either positive or negative, that occurred on this campus.
15. Tell me about any campus services specifically for LGBTQ students on this campus.
16. Tell me about any harassment, bullying, or discrimination you or someone you know has experienced while attending this community college.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. The interview is now complete. There will be a follow-up interview based on the transcripts or new information is later discovered. The second interview will last no longer than ten to fifteen minutes. Once the interviews are transcribed, I will send you a complete copy to review. I ask that you let me know of any changes within one week. I want to make sure the information you presented was transcribed accurately. All the records for this research will be stored in a password-protected file on my computer and destroyed after five years. The transcript will be destroyed once I finish writing my research. Do you have any questions?

Again, thank you for your time with me today.

APPENDIX F

PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW EMAIL

Greetings (Name):
Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I look forward to meeting with you at (LOCATION OF MEETING or ZOOM LINK) on (DATE) at (TIME). In preparation for our interview, please review and sign the attached consent form. As a reminder, the interview should not last for more than an hour. You will be given a $25 gift card once the interview is complete, the transcription review is complete, and a second interview is complete.

I look forward to meeting you.

Thanks,

Todd Cimino-Johnson

Attachment: Informed Consent Form

Attachment: Interview Transcript

APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Old Dominion University

Dear Participant:

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who say YES. You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, convey that participation is voluntary, explain risks and benefits of participation, and empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Project Title: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF LGBTQ STUDENTS AT APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. **RESEARCHERS:**

Mitchell R. Williams, Ph.D., Responsible Project Investigator, Professor, College of Education, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Old Dominion University

Todd Cimino-Johnson, Investigator, Doctoral Candidate, Community College Leadership Program, College of Education, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Old Dominion University

2. **PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:**

As a community college student, you are being asked to participate in a research study exploring LGBTQ students' experiences. Your participation will contribute to the knowledge surrounding LGBTQ student populations and what they experience. This study, entitled A Narrative Inquiry of LGBTQ Students at Appalachian Community Colleges, is conducted by Dr. Mitchell Williams and Todd Cimino-Johnson. Please note that if you are under 18 years old, you cannot take part in this study.

3. **WHAT YOU WILL DO:**

You will be asked to take part in an interview that can last from 45 minutes to one hour, which will be both video and audio recorded. You will also be asked for a follow-up interview in a few weeks of no more than 15 minutes that will be video and audio recorded.

4. **RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified. You may experience some psychological discomfort as you recall past experiences reflecting on the interview, depending on your individual experiences.

While confidential, materials may be subject to federal subpoena, but every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of the participants. There are no direct benefits to participation in the study. The researchers may choose to retain those benefits described as potential or indirect.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Interview responses results are considered confidential and will not be linked to your name or other directly identifiable information. All research materials, including recordings, transcripts, and results, will be kept within a password protected electronic environment. Additionally, all data will be stored for at least five years after the project closes. Five years after the study's conclusion, the data (responses to the survey) will be destroyed.

6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:

Your participation is entirely voluntary. It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study. You may choose not to participate at all, or to answer some questions and not others. You may also change your mind and withdraw as a participant from this study with no negative consequences. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

You will receive a $25 gift card for your full participation in this study. Full participation includes sitting for the full first interview, member checking or reviewing your transcript for accuracy and confidentiality, and sitting for the final interview. Once those are completed an electronic gift card will be sent to your email.

8. COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY:

If you say YES, your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers can give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. If you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Mitchell R. Williams, Responsible Project Investigator at 757-683-4413 or Todd Cimino-Johnson, Investigator, at 304-279-2599, Dr. Laura Chezan, current Chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee at lchezan@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

9. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:

If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them, please contact the researchers' Todd Cimino-Johnson at tcimi001@odu.edu or Dr. Mitchell Williams, Responsible Project Investigator, at mrwillia@odu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Dr. Laura Chezan, current Chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee at lchezan@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

10. VOLUNTARY CONSENT PERMISSIONS:

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them: Todd Cimino-Johnson at tcimi001@odu.edu or Dr. Mitchell Williams, Responsible Project Investigator, at mrwillia@odu.edu.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should contact Dr. Laura Chezan, current Chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee at lchezan@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

Furthermore, by signing below, you tell the researcher, YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature **Date**

APPENDIX H

PARTICIPANT THANK YOU EMAIL AND INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT REVIEW

Good (morning, afternoon, evening) (NAME),
Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study, gathering LGBTQ community college students' narratives. The information you share with me is significant and beneficial to the overall research.

Attached to this email is a copy of the interview transcript. Please take a moment to review the document. I want to be sure I captured what you said correctly and that nothing was misheard or incorrectly transcribed.

Note that any identifiers, such as your name, institution, specific degree program, or location, will be omitted in my final report.

Please let me know by (DATE FOR A RESPONSE ONE WEEK) if any changes you feel should be made.

If you have any questions for me regarding the study, please contact me via email. I appreciate you taking the time to contribute to my research study by detailing your campus experiences.

Thanks,
Todd Cimino-Johnson

APPENDIX I

TWO DAY PRIOR TO INTERVIEW EMAIL

Good (morning, afternoon, evening) (NAME),
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, gathering LGBTQ community college students' narrative. The information you share with me is significant and beneficial to the overall research and will remain confidential and never shared.

I wanted to reach out help you prepare for the interview. You will be sharing information you know and have lived. My research is looking stories. If you could start to think about stories from your time in the classroom, outside of the classroom, and anywhere on campus that would help. Think about stories in the context of identifying as LGBTQ.

Please let me know if (DAY/DATE/TIME) is still an acceptable time to meet on Zoom. Also, the link to the Zoom meeting is listed below. If you could wear headphones or earbuds that would help my audio to pick up your voice much clearer.

If you have any questions for me regarding the study, please contact me via email. I appreciate you taking the time to contribute to my research study by detailing your campus experience.

Thanks,
Todd Cimino-Johnson

APPENDIX J

LIST OF LGBTQ RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS/FACULTY/STAFF

Name

Understanding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity		
Athlete Ally	https://www.athleteally.org/	Athlete Ally believes that everyone should have equal access, opportunity, and experience in sports — regardless of your sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Our mission is to end the rampant homophobia and transphobia in sport and to activate the athletic community to exercise their leadership to champion LGBTQI+ equality.
Bisexual Resource Center	https://biresource.org/	The Bisexual Resource Center works to connect the bi+ community and help its members thrive through resources, support, and celebration. We envision an empowered, visible, and inclusive global community for bi+ people.
Campus Pride	https://www.campuspride.org/	Campus Pride represents the leading national nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization for student leaders and campus groups working to create a safer college environment for LGBTQ students. The organization is a volunteer-driven network "for" and "by" student leaders. The primary objective of Campus Pride is to develop necessary resources, programs and services to support LGBTQ and ally students on college campuses across the United States.
Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals	https://www.lgbtcampus.org/	We envision higher education environments where LGBTQ people, inclusive of all of our intersecting identities, are fully

		liberated. Our Mission is that we are a "a member-based organization working towards the liberation of LGBTQ people in higher education. We support individuals who work on campuses to educate and support people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as advocate for more inclusive policies and practices through an intersectional and racial justice framework."
Gay and Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)	https://www.glad.org/	Through strategic litigation, public policy advocacy, and education, GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders works in New England and nationally to create a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation.
Gay and Lesbian Association of Retiring Persons (GLARP)	http://www.gaylesbianretiring.org/	GLARP is a nonprofit organization that was formed in 1996 by co-founders Mary Thorndal and Veronica St. Claire. We were established to call attention to the issues facing aging in the LGBT community, acting as true pioneers in the field. Positive feedback came pouring in behind our initial housing survey, and we have experienced great success as we went on to plan senior housing developments designed just for the LGBT community.
Gay and Lesbian Medical Association	http://glma.org/	GLMA is a national organization committed to ensuring health equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) and all sexual and gender

		minority (SGM) individuals, and equality for LGBTQ/SGM health professionals in their work and learning environments. To achieve this mission, GLMA utilizes the scientific expertise of its diverse multidisciplinary membership to inform and drive advocacy, education, and research.
Gay-Straight Alliances Network	https://gsanetwork.org/	GSA Network is a next-generation LGBTQ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.
Gill Foundation	https://gillfoundation.org/	The Gill Foundation believes people should be treated equally regardless of who they are or who they love. That's why we support efforts at the state and national level to better the lives of every American.
GLAAD	https://www.glaad.org/	GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.
Global Equality Fund	https://www.state.gov/global-equality-fund/	The Global Equality Fund (GEF) is a leading public-private partnership comprised of like-minded governments and private sector entities dedicated to protecting and defending the human rights

		and fundamental freedoms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons around the world.
GLSEN	https://www.glsen.org/	As GLSEN was founded by a group of teachers in 1990, we knew that educators play key roles in creating affirming learning environments for LGBTQ youth. But as well as activating supportive educators, we believe in centering and uplifting student-led movements, which have powered initiatives like the Day of Silence, Ally Week, and more. We conduct extensive and original research to inform our evidence-based solutions for K-12 education.
Human Rights Campaign	https://www.hrc.org/	By inspiring and engaging individuals and communities, the Human Rights Campaign strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ people and realize a world that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. HRC envisions a world where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people are ensured equality and embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community.
Immigration Equality	https://immigrationequality.org/	For over 25 years, we have worked to secure safe haven, freedom to live openly, and equality for individuals and families in our community. Through direct legal services, policy advocacy, and impact litigation, we advocate for immigrants and families facing discrimination based on their

		sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV status.
Intersex Society of North America	https://isna.org/	The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) is devoted to systemic change to end shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries for people born with an anatomy that someone decided is not standard for male or female.
It Gets Better Project	https://itgetsbetter.org/	The It Gets Better Project is a nonprofit organization with a mission to uplift, empower, and connect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth around the globe. Growing up isn't easy, especially when you are trying to affirm and assert your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can be a challenging and isolating process – but, the good news is, no one has to do it alone.
Keshet	https://www.keshetonline.org/	Keshet works for the full equality of all LGBTQ Jews and our families in Jewish life.
Lambda Legal	https://www.lambdalegal.org/	Founded in 1973, Lambda Legal is the oldest and largest national legal organization whose mission is to achieve full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and everyone living with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work.
Lambda Literary	https://www.lambdaliterary.org/	Lambda Literary has championed LGBTQ books and authors. No other organization in the world serves LGBTQ writers and readers more comprehensively than Lambda Literary. We believe that lesbian, gay,

		bisexual, transgender, and queer literature is fundamental to the preservation of our culture, and that LGBTQ lives are affirmed when our stories are written, published, and read.
LGBT Asylum Support Task Force	http://www.lgbtasylum.org/	The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Asylum Task Force is a ministry of Hadwen Park Church and a community-based organization dedicated to supporting and empowering LGBTQI individuals who are seeking asylum in the United States.
LGBTQ Victory Fund	https://victoryfund.org/	We are the only national organization dedicated to electing openly LGBTQ people who can further equality at all levels of government.
Matthew Shephard Foundation	https://www.matthewshepard.org/	We amplify the story of Matthew Shepard to inspire individuals, organizations and communities to embrace the dignity and equality of all people.
Modern Military Association of America	https://modernmilitary.org/	The Modern Military Association of America (MMAA) is the nation's largest organization of LGBTQ service members, military spouses, veterans, their families and allies. Formed through the merger of the American Military Partner Association and OutServe-SLDN, we are a united voice for the LBGTQ military and veteran community.
Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity	http://www.muslimalliance.org/	The Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD) works to support, empower and connect LGBTQ

		Muslims. We seek to challenge root causes of oppression, including misogyny and xenophobia. We aim to increase the acceptance of gender and sexual diversity within Muslim communities, and to promote a progressive understanding of Islam that is centered on inclusion, justice, and equality.
Muslims for Progressive Values	https://www.mpvusa.org/	As Muslims for Progressive Values, we advocate for human rights, social justice and inclusion in the United States and around the world.
National Alliance to End Homelessness	https://endhomelessness.org/	The Alliance is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States.
National Black Justice Coalition	http://new.nbjc.org/	The National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) is a civil rights organization dedicated to the empowerment of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and same gender loving (LGBTQ/SGL) people, including people living with HIV/AIDS. NBJC's mission is to end racism, homophobia, and LGBTQ/SGL bias and stigma. As America's leading national Black LGBTQ/SGL civil rights organization focused on federal public policy, NBJC has accepted the charge to lead Black families in strengthening the bonds and bridging the gaps between the movements for racial justice and LGBTQ/SGL equality.
National Center for Lesbian Rights	https://www.nclrights.org/	NCLR is a national legal organization committed to advancing the civil and human

		rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families through litigation, legislation, policy, and public education.
National Center for Transgender Equality	https://transequality.org/	The National Center for Transgender Equality advocates to change policies and society to increase understanding and acceptance of transgender people. In the nation's capital and throughout the country, NCTE works to replace disrespect, discrimination, and violence with empathy, opportunity, and justice.
National Coalition for LGBT Health	https://healthlgbt.org/	The Coalition is committed to improving the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals through federal and local advocacy, education, and research. The Coalition addresses the entire LGBT community, including individuals of every sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, and age regardless of disability, income, education, and geography.
National Gay Pilots Association (NGPA)	https://www.ngpa.org/	The NGPA is the largest organization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender aviation professionals and enthusiasts from around the world.
National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association	https://www.nlgja.org/	The Association of LGBTQ Journalists is an organization of journalists, media professionals, educators and students working from within the news industry to foster fair and accurate coverage of LGBTQ issues.

National LGBT Chamber of Commerce	https://www.nglcc.org/	The NGLCC is the business voice of the LGBT community, the largest advocacy organization dedicated to expanding economic opportunities and advancements for LGBT people, and the exclusive certifying body for LGBT-owned businesses.
National LGBTQ Task Force	https://www.thetaskforceactionfund.org/	The National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund is at the forefront of advancing the rights of all LGBTQ individuals and communities in America. Our mission is to conduct grassroots organizing and lobbying on legislation and ballot initiatives to achieve justice for LGBTQ people.
National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals, Inc (NOGLSTP)	https://www.noglstp.org	We empower lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics by providing education, advocacy, professional development, networking, and peer support.
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance	https://www.nqapia.org/wpp/	The National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA) is a federation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) organizations. We seek to build the organizational capacity of local LGBT AAPI groups, develop leadership, promote visibility, educate our community, enhance grassroots organizing, expand collaborations, and challenge anti-LGBTQ bias and racism.

National Stonewall Democrats	https://www.stonewalldemocrats.us/	There are LGBT Democratic groups across the US that work to elect pro-LGBT Democrats in federal, state, and local elections, serve as a bullhorn for LGBT governmental issues, and supply LGBT voters to ballot boxes.
National Transgender Advocacy Coalition	https://transequality.org/	The National Center for Transgender Equality advocates to change policies and society to increase understanding and acceptance of transgender people. In the nation's capital and throughout the country, NCTE works to replace disrespect, discrimination, and violence with empathy, opportunity, and justice.
NoH8 Campaign	http://www.noh8campaign.com/	The NOH8 Campaign is a charitable organization whose mission is to promote marriage, gender and human equality through education, advocacy, social media, and visual protest.
Out & Equal Workplace Advocates	https://outandequal.org/	Out & Equal is the premier organization working exclusively on LGBTQ workplace equality. Through our worldwide programs, Fortune 500 partnerships and our annual Workplace Summit conference, we help LGBTQ people thrive and support organizations creating a culture of belonging for all.
PFLAG	https://pflag.org/	PFLAG is the first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people, their parents and families, and allies.
Point Foundation	https://pointfoundation.org/	Point Foundation empowers promising lesbian, gay,

		bisexual, transgender, and queer students to achieve their full academic and leadership potential – despite the obstacles often put before them – to make a significant impact on society.
Pride at Work	https://www.prideatwork.org/	Pride at Work is a nonprofit organization that represents LGBTQ union members and their allies. We are an officially recognized constituency group of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations) that organizes mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the LGBTQ Community to further social and economic justice. From our national office in Washington, DC, we coordinate and support more than 20 Chapters across the country.
Q card project	http://www.qcardproject.com/	The Q Card project has always used an asset-based framework, which acknowledges that most queer and trans* youth are healthy and well-adjusted. They are not inherently broken, sick, or disordered. They are smart and resilient and strong and creative, and they deserve the best care in environments free from judgment and stigma. The history of healthcare in this country is unfortunately tied up in many forms of oppression (racism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, etc.) which carry through to today, and often make it harder for

		queer/trans* communities- and especially queer/trans* youth- to access and navigate healthcare systems and services.
Q Chat Space	https://www.qchatspace.org/	Q Chat Space provides online discussion groups for LGBTQ+ teens ages 13 to 19. It is not a forum. It is live and chat based; there is no video or audio. Everyone is chatting during the same pre-scheduled time.
Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders	https://www.sageusa.org/	We're a national advocacy and services organization that's been looking out for LGBT elders since 1978. We build welcoming communities and keep our issues in the national conversation to ensure a fulfilling future for all LGBT people.
Soulforce	https://www.soulforce.org/	Soulforce is a 20-year-old LGBTQI organization that works to sabotage Christian Supremacy and end the political and religious oppression of all marginalized people. With an ethic of relentless, nonviolent resistance, Soulforce sabotages Christian Supremacy through research and informed strategy; political and theological education; spiritual reclamation and community healing; and creative campaigns and direct action.
Stopbullying.gov	https://www.stopbullying.gov/	A federal government website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Sylvia Rivera Law Project	https://srlp.org/	The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine their gender identity

		and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination, or violence. SRLP is a collective organization founded on the understanding that gender self-determination is inextricably intertwined with racial, social and economic justice.
The Family Acceptance Project	https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/	The Family Acceptance Project® is a research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) children and youth, including suicide, homelessness, drug use and HIV – in the context of their families, cultures and faith communities. We use a research-based, culturally grounded approach to help ethnically, racially and religiously diverse families learn to support their LGBTQ children.
The National LGBT Bar Association	https://lgbtbar.org/	The National LGBT Bar Association is a national association of lawyers, judges and other legal professionals, law students, activists, and affiliated lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender legal organizations. The LGBT Bar promotes justice in and through the legal profession for the LGBTQ+ community in all its diversity.
The LGBT National Help Center	https://www.glbthotline.org/	The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) National Help Center, founded in 1996, is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization that

		provides vital peer-support, community connections and resource information to people with questions regarding sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Utilizing a diverse group of LGBT volunteers, we operate three national hotlines, the **LGBT National Hotline**, the **LGBT National Youth Talkline**, and the **LGBT National Senior Hotline** as well as private, volunteer one-to-one online chat, that helps both youth and adults with coming-out issues, safer-sex information, school bullying, family concerns, relationship problems and a lot more.
The Transgender Training Institute		

		live safely, authentically, and free from discrimination regardless of their gender identity or expression.
Trevor Project	https://www.thetrevorproject.org/	The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth.

VITA

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Education

Ph.D., 2021, Community College Leadership, Old Dominion University
M.A., 2017, History, American Public University/American Military University
M.B.A., 2006, Business Administration, Shepherd University
B.S., 2005, Economics, Shepherd University

Professional Experience

2016-Present	Program Coordinator of Business & Economics Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, Martinsburg, WV
2016-2016	Adjunct instructor Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, Martinsburg, WV
2012-2016	Controller Geostellar, Inc., Martinsburg, WV
2011-2012	Senior Staff Accountant AOL, Inc., Dulles, VA
2008-2011	Senior Staff Accountant Carey International, Frederick, MD

Publications

2019	West Virginia and the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, Self-Published
2019	Live Berkeley, Learn Berkeley, Read Berkeley, Arden-Nollville Magazine
2017	The Last Doughboy, Berkeley County Historical Magazine-Annual Publication

Presentations

2020	An Introduction to Gender, Sexuality, and Pronoun Usage, Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, Lunch and Learn, October 2020
2019	An Introduction to Creating Gender Inclusive Classrooms, Blue Ridge Community and Technical College, Faculty Council Meeting.
2019	Habit 1: Be Proactive, from the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen Covey, Women's Network Conference, Martinsburg-Berkeley County Chamber of Commerce.
2019	Fostering Global Learning and Engagement, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, United Kingdom.
2018	An Introduction to Appalachia, Rock Ridge Performing Arts, Ashburn, VA,
2018	How to Effectively Use Twitter in the Classroom, EdTech Conference, Martinsburg, WV.
2013	Moving our State: Business Organizing, Fairness WV Conference & Gala: Lifting Our Voices, Charleston, WV