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## **Private vs. Public: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Experiences and the Influence of Anti-discrimination Policies With Respect to Religion**

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PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC: LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER  
STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND THE INFLUENCE OF ANTI-  
DISCRIMINATION POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO RELIGION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Counseling

by  
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You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do. ~

Eleanor Roosevelt

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## **ABSTRACT**

For a vast majority of Americans, religion is an integral part of life. In fact, 10:30am on Sundays is considered the most holy time in the United States as most persons have just left, are currently attending, or are on their way to their various places of worship. Believing in organized religion comes with challenges, as religion has often been the basis and justification for discriminatory practices. These challenges can cause emotional tension, especially to those who identify with teachings that religions have traditionally condemned. This document sought to determine if religion matters to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student collegiate experiences at private, faith-based institutions and, if it did, was it more prevalent than at public, liberal arts institutions. Using the phenomenological approach and narrative interviews along with a document analysis as data collection methods, eight (8) participants from two southern Louisiana institutions gave insight into their collegiate experiences as LGBT and identifying with an organized religion. Interviews were transcribed and categorized thematically and then compared to school anti-discrimination policies to determine if the policy was relevant in context to, and functional with, the LGBT student experience. Final analysis and results and implications for collegiate leaders are presented as suggestions for more inclusive campus environment.

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

All people want to be supported in their journey to understand their various identities in the world. When thinking of the common negative experiences that lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual (LGBT) persons face with familial and community acceptance, we often overlook the growing number of college students who consider themselves LGBT. These students have an interesting plight in higher education and accessing resources that can help them while in school and when others may not accept their lifestyle. In regards to higher education, the self-worth and self-esteem of LGBT students are frequently diminished by the attitudes that exist within many of their heterosexual school leaders (Miller, 2000).

Further exacerbating this phenomenon is the hypersensitive culture regarding sexuality combined with religious beliefs or standards concerning sexuality. Religion can be a source of both comfort and suffering for many LGBT persons. While many LGBT Americans have been raised in an organized religion and continue to cherish their faith community, too many have been forced to leave those communities behind or to live their lives “closeted” because of condemnation by heterosexual peers. Many major religious institutions actively oppose the social acceptance of LGBT identities, and students who identify as LGBT often have negative experiences at private, faith-based colleges or university campuses due to their sexual orientation. Even though the broader American perception regarding LGBT issues and rights is shifting to a more liberal thought, LGBT adolescents often find themselves marginalized and rejected by those upon whom they rely the most (family members, friends, clergy) when they publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation (Strayhorn & Tillman, 2013).

Consider that LGBT persons often have to choose between what is permissible and what is desirable within their social/community settings and the appropriate ways that their perception



of what it means to be LGBT are expressed within those settings (Wong, 2015). How is that expressed, especially within religious contexts?

The likelihood of conflicting life experiences due to the intersection of religion and sexuality occurs in part because of the battle between ethical and religious beliefs. Cass (1979) presented 6 stages that LGBT persons can experience when dealing with their sexual orientation. Stage 5, Identity Pride, is when they begin to embrace their lifestyle and explore their sexuality, but it also generally involves anger towards their religion and other aspects of their culture that tell them that they are bad, wrong, immoral, or ill because they are LGBT. In many instances, the religious culture exerts a stronger influence on individual behaviors than other social and cultural institutions, therefore not allowing many LGBT persons to fully admit who they are, as well as their having to lead double lives with competing identities (Fisher & DeBord, 2007). Barton (2012) stated, “When one’s feelings conflict with one’s eternal soul the stakes are high. Fear of hell is a powerful motivator and terrifies those who have a nontraditional sexual attraction” (p.72). This can lead to a withdrawal from family, social circles, schools, extracurricular activities, and a questioning of their faith.

According to Conver and Mamisseishvili (2012), there are 110 Christian higher education member institutions that operate as members of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU). For an institution to be considered a member of the CCCC, they must have a board-approved institutional mission or statement that is Christ centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith, in addition to having and administrators who profess faith in Jesus Christ. For those LGBT persons who choose to attend these institutions, their self-worth and self-esteem are oftentimes diminished by the attitudes that exist within many of their heterosexual school leaders, which leads to poor retention of LGBT persons (Tetreault, Fette, Meldinger, & Hope

2013). A strong correlation exists between religion and homophobia, with conservative Christian ideology promoting negative attitudes towards LGBT people. LGBT students are usually met with resistance while they challenge the dominant and traditional ideology of gender, gender roles, and sexuality at CCCU campuses. The main challenge for LGBT students who attend CCCU schools is feeling that they belong, due to the lack of acceptance and diversity arising from their sexuality. Many times, campus climate is the difference between LGBT students being successful in college or leaving the institution to find a more inclusive environment.

Transgender students have an altogether uncommon experience on college and university campuses than those of heterosexual students. Newhouse (2013) explained that transgender students face alienation and rejection from roommates and other peers and that it is not uncommon to be alienated by adults as well. Acceptance of peers while in college is vital to creating and developing friendships and networking opportunities for plans after college. It all begins with the college application, which can be subject to extra scrutiny, especially at same-sex or religiously affiliated institutions. Some institutions request a court order or medical records to confirm or deny sexual reassignment. After admission, denial and discrimination of appropriate housing, non-gender specific restrooms, or even denial of treatment at the student health center can make progressing within a higher education institution difficult for a transgender student. Housing officials usually give room assignments based on whether one is male or female, but this can be problematic for students who are going through the sexual reassignment process and do not identify as predominantly either gender. Often, transgender students who choose to share their experiences face discrimination from roommates who may not be willing to accept the sexual orientation of the transgender student. Tetrealt, Fette, Meidlinger, and Hope (2013) described that transgender students are often the subjects of verbal and physical assaults when

they use gender specific facilities such as restrooms or locker rooms. Transgender students are often left out of athletic opportunities due to the fear of being “outed” when using locker rooms and other recreational facilities. In a nationwide study of 75 transgender students, only four denoted that they had experienced a positive interaction with their institutions’ health center or campus counselors. “Blatant disrespect” and “failure to provide adequate services” were the complaints that most participants selected when taking the survey regarding their experiences with campus staff affiliated with student services (Newhouse, 2013). Tetreault et al. (2013) mentioned that every time transgender students are reminded that their gender nonconformity is not widely accepted it can cause depression, a disorder that is further intensified if they do not have support from family.

Many liberal arts college campuses have groups of LGBT students who meet privately and have official LGBT student groups, policies, and safe spaces that protect members of the LGBT community. Having designated safe spaces and competent counselors available for LGBT students is beneficial because it provides a safe space where students can go to comfortably to describe their feelings and work out any other mental health issues regarding their sexuality. They are more likely to seek help in times of stress, leading to forming alliances, and the likelihood that LGBT students will report any hate crimes or a breach in anti-discrimination policies. Additionally, inclusion is supported at the institution, which promotes retention amongst LGBT students.

To the contrary, private-faith based institutions are less likely to have university-approved LGBT groups, sound anti-discrimination policies, or huge social movements or campus activism that support LGBT students. While conditions have changed significantly within the United States regarding LGBT persons, these students still experience negativity and

inequality on college campuses. These students look at the conditions and overall climate of how the college campus will handle their sexual orientation. They look for places with social support and same-sex tolerance where they will not be victimized. Lacking resources specifically for these students proves disadvantageous for both the student and the institution, especially in terms of students' persistence and belongingness.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Belongingness is a basic human need, and having a sense of belongingness on campus is crucial to social and academic student development. Institutions of higher education have health, counseling, and cultural centers physical establishments on their campus, as well as student organizations to assist those who may suffer from belongingness during their collegiate experience. The resistance between religious entities and sexuality can dampen the experience of the LGBT student, and LGBT students of strong faith may find themselves left out of the conversation and void of that belongingness from their institution.

Even without considering religion, LGBT high school students may have experienced discrimination in their high schools and may fear for themselves in a larger, more open college campus. LGBT students often experience harsh and unequal treatment because schools do not have sensitivity training for their students, faculty, or staff. LGBT students are left feeling isolated and at risk of violence and harassment from their peers (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2011) suggested that 28% of LGBT students were threatened with or suffered from bodily injury on school property. As many as 92% of LGBT students reported that they have been the target of some type of verbal abuse due to their sexuality (Herek, 1989).

These issues of harassment, threats, abuse, and violence have paved the way for nondiscrimination LGBT policies and non-discriminatory mission statements that are intended to curtail the emotional, verbal, and physical violence against LGBT students. Even though higher education institutions are mandated by Title IX to prevent discrimination against all students, Dirks (2016) informed us that the first higher education institution to establish a nondiscriminatory policy specifically for LGBT students was the University of Iowa. Now, 998 colleges and universities have written nondiscrimination policies that include gender or identity expression (College Pride, 2015). These policies, drafted by school administrators, with the expectation they will be supported and enforced by the institution, are ordinarily viewed as masked, veiled, or too vague.

When a student is brave enough to report discrimination, the process is often lengthy with many hoops through which to jump, as the LGBT student must complete paperwork, await review from a board, and then provide proof that the policy was violated. Such an investigation could take weeks, sometimes even months, with the LGBT student left to deal with the emotional and sometimes physical scars and no support, as well as losing the sense of belongingness within the institution.

A significant educational issue of this research is that of the experience of LGBT students within private-faith based institutions. As a researcher, I investigated the shared and disproportionate experiences between those who attend a private-faith based institution and LGBT students at a public liberal arts institution. Anti-discrimination policies or inclusion mission statements are often drawn up to appease state and federal standards without serious input or regard for LGBT students. Significant research has not yet been done on whether these inclusion policies or mission statements are truly useful to the students whom they are supposed

to serve. A study of the commonalities and disparities of LGBT student experiences also sheds light on the functionality of documented LGBT anti-discrimination policies in place by higher education institutions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this research was to highlight the LGBT experience at a private faith-based institution, and to determine whether the experiences of those students mirrored the experiences of LGBT students at a public institution. An analysis of the written nondiscriminatory policy that was in place at the institution was conducted to see if the policy was relevant in context to, and functional with, the LGBT student experience.

The intolerance of LGBT college students by homophobic heterosexual peers can create copious difficulties on school campuses. High rates of suicide, hate crimes, verbal insults, physical threats, physical violence, and fear of rejection are issues that LGBT students deal with in regards to an intolerant and negative college culture (Crisp & McCave, 2007). Intolerance from heterosexuals can escalate into poor school performance, substance abuse, mental health concerns, and suicide attempts by LGBT students. Higher education officials nationwide have begun to address these barriers to eliminate the subculture of fear and denial across college and university campuses, and to market themselves as more inclusive and multicultural institutions.

The fear of rejection for LGBT college students most often comes from those institutions whose founding is based on religion. Since being LGBT has been conceptualized as inconsistent with most religious traditions (Miller, 2007), LGBT students who choose to attend private, faith-based institutions are likely to hide their sexual orientation for fear of resistance because other students think that they have gone against their faith and are considered sinners. Private, faith-based institutions may also be less likely to embrace LGBT students due to the perception of

alumni who donate substantially to the institution and for conservative political reasons. Instead of LGBT students using their religion as a source of affirmation to be in touch with their faith and to stay connected to their religious tradition, they may not always feel welcome or safe at religious institutions or places of worship.

### **Research Questions and Objectives**

The following questions guided the research objectives:

- 1) What, if any, hardships (physical, emotional, or mental) do LGBT students who believe in an organized faith or religion that attend higher education institutions face?
- 2) How is the experience of an LGBT student at a private faith-based higher education institution both similar and different from that of a LGBT student who attends a public liberal arts institution?
- 3) Does institutional policy regarding LGBT students have an influence on student experience?

The research was conducted to provide accurate descriptions of:

- 1) The experiences of being an LGBT student who identifies with an organized religion and how they respond to religious experiences within their private, faith-based university campus.
- 2) Commonalities and disparities between the experiences of LGBT students who attend a private, faith-based campus and those who attend a liberal arts institution in relation to various school conditions (i.e. housing, extracurricular activities, athletics, and student organizations).
- 3) Relevance and congruence between institutional policy and student experiences.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Since being a LGBT person and identifying with an organized religion is a multifaceted experience, several theoretical frameworks were used in examining this experience. Theoretical frameworks commonly associated with qualitative research were utilized as they related to the intent of this research topic.

Queer theory seeks to challenge the categorization of sexual identity (Watson, 2005) by challenging dominant theories relating to sexual identity as singular, fixed, or normal. Judith Butler (2007) informed us that gender works as a performance, and that society largely expects persons to perform in ways that justify and historically define their gender. We know that from the gender schema theory used by psychologists that what is described as normal to be male, female, or heterosexual is all socially constructed (Bem, 1993). On the other hand, queer theory breaks down the barriers associated with this normalness by challenging the performances and structure of what it means to be male or female. Gender and sexuality expressions are very diverse, but just how fluid are they? Gender and sexuality are intertwined into a relationship of power, and heterosexuals are more inclined to give power to those who act on the historically defined notions of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, this theory was used in the study to discover in what way the LGBT students within their societal context see institutions of power in regards to gender classification, expression, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, this theory was used to see how or if participants consciously or subconsciously destabilized the characteristics of what it means to be male or female. I also used queer theory to discover if and how real pain and rejection existed among LGBT students within the contexts of higher education.

Intersectionality was used as a theoretical framework to look at the various dimensions of identity (Crenshaw, 2001). Sexual identity, religious identity, racial identity, socioeconomic



identity, and institutional identity were factors in this study of the multiple oppressions that a LGBT person may experience. Considering only one dimension of identity can present a narrow view when investigating the total experience of the person. Identity is uniquely constructed, and contextual evidence, subjective experiences, and various environmental factors affect how a person presents his or her authentic self.

Intersectionality is not only a major concept within the LGBT community, but also within the higher education community; academics who specialize in social justice increasingly look at multidimensional socialization and realize that there is no singular experience with one's identity on college campuses. Specifically, the intersection of religion and sexuality was examined to investigate the behavior of the LGBT person within various situations or social settings/environments in a higher education setting.

While Critical Race Theory (CRT) may not usually be a major theoretical framework that one would consider in this study, I addressed how CRT focuses on how social institutions might stunt the empowerment of those who are racial, class, or gender minorities (Cresswell, 2013). In the context of this research, the social institution was the higher education institution and the elite majorities were the heterosexual students and faculty. Landon-Billings and Tate (1995) discussed the use of CRT in education as a means to "expose the socio-structural cultural significance placed on race and its application to educational systems and experiences" (p.39). While some LGBT persons may never face discrimination due to their race or socioeconomic status, the vast majority cannot go about their day in a "business-as-usual" façade.

Critical race theory came about because society constructs its social reality for the self-interest of the elite majority. Examining that statement, it is not difficult to see how and why LGBT persons are often shunned and experience discrimination. CRT promotes the need for

researchers and decision makers to recognize the systematic racial prejudices that exist within social, political, economic, and educational structures, and surpasses the experiences of the racial majority as the standard, placing an emphasis on the experiences of various people of color. It is important to note the CRT was relevant in the framework of this research not so much for the role of race and racism, but more in the role of power and privilege as discussed by Patton et al. (2007). Due to perverse racism in the LGBT community and a general lack of funds for programs focused on the recruitment and retention of these students and students of color, resources for LGBT students of color are virtually nonexistent at most higher education institutions (usstudents.org, 2011). CRT gives way for the emergence of narratives as the master storyteller for various social issues. The use of narratives allows for privileged discourse to be challenged, giving voice to a marginalized group (Andrews, 2004).

Counselors have an ethical responsibility to learn about diverse cultures. LGBT persons are not one homogenous group, but a diverse group with distinct needs and values. By introducing Cass (1979) and the 6 Step Sexual Identity Model, one finds two counseling techniques well equipped to move the LGBT person through the process. While many LGBT persons never seek therapy (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003), those who do stand to benefit greatly from LGBT affirming counselors. The Center for Disease Control (2014) stated that LGBT students are at an increased risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors, suicide attempts, and suicide. A nationally representative study of adults ages 18–21 found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth were more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide than their heterosexual peers. One study of 55 transgender persons aged 18-22 found that about 25% reported suicide attempts within the past year. Race and gender identity are major aspects of suicide rates, with 36% of African-American lesbians compared to 21% of white lesbians, and 32% of African-

American gay males compared to 27% of white gay males attempting suicide (Bell & Weinberg, 1998). Furthermore, LGBT students have the potential to feel more isolated in their relationships. Students who identify as LGBT and who are not open about their sexuality often suffer from sexual abuse, mental health issues, and school difficulties. As a result, they may not feel comfortable talking about mental health matters or violence in their relationships for fear of potential rejection if they share their sexuality.

Existential therapy is often used during the counseling of LGBT persons who seek help due to conflicts of sexuality or how to live their lives fully as a LGBT person. Existential therapy focuses on developing self-awareness and living an authentic life in the face of specific life concerns by finding out what is important and meaningful to the client. The intent of counseling is to understand and increase one's feelings of self-worth and reduce the level of incongruence between what one would ideally like to see themselves as and who they actually are (Chernin & Johnson, 2003).

Counselors in higher education centers have used existential therapy with LGBT persons to help them process verbal comments from others or other social meetings to find the true meaning of the verbal or social encounter. The goal of counseling is to increase awareness of the verbal experiences, whether good or bad, and to live a more fulfilled life. Counseling teaches these persons not to live in or hold onto habitual negative verbal or behavioral patterns from themselves or others, but to make clear choices about their words and behavior to live a more fulfilled life. With existential therapy, counselors teach LGBT persons to let go of negative self-talk and to live in the present so that they can foster accurate feelings about life experiences. Therapy focuses on the clients finding personalized solutions for themselves, with the clients leading and the counselor only offering support and structure. Once clients are able to view

themselves as full participants in their lives, without thinking about their sexuality or religion as a negative quality, they can live a more balanced life (Carroll, 2010). Essentially, these therapeutic techniques help the LGBT person move through Cass' sixth stage of the identity model, Identity Synthesis. Here the LGBT person seeks to integrate his or her sexual identity with all the other aspects of him or herself, thereby developing a heightened sense of self-awareness to live a meaningful life, the primary goal of both existential and person-centered therapy.

### **Significance of the Study**

The rationale for investigating this issue was to gain a better understanding of the plight between religion and sexuality among college-aged students within their higher education institutions, and to advocate for the unbiased treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students on college and university campuses. This study can be used to:

- 1) Explore the religious undertones and hindrance of religion among LGBT persons.
- 2) Highlight the commonalities between LGBT students across various college campuses, and whether the type of college campus alleviates or exacerbates students' higher education experience.
- 3) Indicate whether a need exists for leaders within all higher education institutions to revamp or incorporate new policies, programs, and services to create a more inclusive and diverse campus or communal environment for LGBT students.
- 4) Provide information to counselors associated specifically with LGBT students relative to mental health concerns that may arise due to stressors experienced within higher education institutions.

The study specifically appeals to campus leaders and campus counselors. The information can be useful in emphasizing the benefits of mandatory training for counselors and therapists to ensure their competency in working with LGBT persons. Preparing counselors to be LGBT allies creates and provides a safe space where students are able to comfortably describe their feelings and work out any other mental health issues regarding their sexual identity. In turn, those LGBT persons are more likely to seek help in times of stress and be less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts. Campus leaders may find the need to provide sensitivity training, safe-sex education, and to promote LGBT-heterosexual alliances. This supports inclusion at the institution and within the community, allowing the higher education institution to be known as a tolerant, safe place for persons of all sexual orientations. This appeal can increase applicants and aid in retention amongst LGBT students, be a resource in reporting hate crimes or a breach in anti-discrimination policies, and aid in networking and career opportunities for LGBT students.

College campuses that already have university-approved LGBT groups, sound anti-discrimination policies, and huge social movements or campus activism are appealing to LGBT students (Alvarez & Schneider, 2008). LGBT students need to look beyond whether the college has their major, its proximity to home, and admissions requirements; these students also need to look at the conditions and overall climate of how the college campus handles their sexual orientation. They need to look for places with social support and same-sex tolerance where they will not be victimized. A counselor specified for these students proves advantageous for both the student and the institution, especially in terms of student persistence and degree completion.

Higher education has seen a trend in the collegial leadership model Chief Diversity Officers' (CDOs) by helping colleges institute diversity programs within change-resistant

cultures. Harvey (2014) described the key actions that CDOs can do with senior-level administration to go beyond what is required for engaging a systematic process and towards becoming more inclusive at private faith-based institutions; the actions include instituting campus policies, programs, and practices that will allow for LGBT leadership, recruitment, and retention. Harvey wrote that culturally sensitive and concerned presidents and chancellors are critical in furthering diversity with no resistance. American students influenced by the liberal social media age are more open-minded, and either higher education leaders must conform to the changing landscape of their student body, or they will be met with protests from the very people whom they were chosen to serve.

Previous research on LGBT persons who identify with an organized religion has been sparse, brief, and generally derogatory; however, the purpose of the study was not to prove that religion was a hindrance to being LGBT but rather to highlight the problems of being associated with an organized religion that LGBT persons may face throughout common school activities. Also, even when religion is not a factor, this study sought to assess the commonalities that LGBT persons faced throughout various social constructs as a means to end sexual inequalities for all persons.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I remember feeling so alone, so vulnerable after the verbal abuse. It was like here I was finally comfortable in my own skin and this happens. And where was I to go? An adult verbally assaulted me! I just sunk into a deep depressive state. I didn't tell anyone what happened. My grades went down, my self-esteem was shot, and overall friendships and relationships suffered because some adult was uncomfortable with whom I was as a transgender female. It's a shame, I'm ashamed, and I haven't fully shaken back from that to this day.  
(Personal communication, October 25, 2015)

This quote is from a 21-year old transgender student who experienced verbal abuse from her college professor who called her a “gay fag” because she disclosed her transgender status during a public speaking assignment. The discrimination and harsh treatment of not only transsexuals but also other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and gay persons have been acknowledged in academic literature. While there is a plethora of documented studies about what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, a review of the literature has scant information for transgender persons regarding other forms of sexual orientation. Studies have indicated that populations with a high percentage of LGBT individuals have a low level of violent crime and low levels of racial, economic, religious, and ethnic prejudice (Klawitter, 2006) that has yet to be duplicated among heterosexual communities. Researchers studies have shed light on what it means to be LGBT, allowing for advocacy among the group and giving way for institutions to offer academic majors and minors in LGBT or queer studies.

Underlying theoretical perspectives show that there is a need for the LGBT population to be studied, but the focus has usually been on what campuses should look like and what administrations can do for LGBT students. Few researchers first consulted with the LGBT community to gain their insight on what their experiences were like on campus. For the purpose of this study, the literature is presented within three arenas where studies incorporated the theoretical frameworks presented to the proposed research question. A review of the literature

consists of: 1) Previous LGBT studies highlighting the LGBT experience within a higher education setting; 2) LGBT and the intersection of religion; 3) Counseling LGBT religious persons; and 4) Inclusion policies in higher education. The conclusion is based on how the study, which was formulated from the research question, adds to the literature of LGBT studies.

### **Literature of Theoretical Framework**

When first delving into LGBT studies the theme of family and belongingness often came up, mostly due to how parents perceived their LGBT children, and how extended family members and the community viewed LGBT persons. However, a few studies detailed the stories of the children of lesbian or gay parents. Bornsetien (2005) described the makeup of lesbian and gay families as “families of choice” to signify the diversification of family and a shift from what a traditional family looks like. He used social constructivism and personal narratives to study how the children of gay and lesbian families look at gender, sexuality, and the social structure of family. Their perceived reality showed that even within same sex-families, gender and sexuality are still used within the family constructs as parents take on either motherly or fatherly roles. Also, they valued friendship within the family and still thought they experienced the same problems as children born biologically to heterosexual couples. They considered their family as normal, operating under a nontraditional form.

D’Augelli, Grossman, and Starks (2005) presented information that familial connections oftentimes become strained when someone discloses their sexual identity (“comes out”) as LGBT or decides that they want to embark on the sexual transitioning process. This rejection can lead to the use of illegal drugs, depression, suicide, and risky sexual behavior. However, once parents become sensitized to the needs and feelings of their LGBT children, family relationships can improve and it is easier for others to accept the LGBT person. For example, if community



members, extended family, or familial friends see that the parent(s) of the LGBT child is/are accepting of their child's sexual orientation, they are 85% more likely to be accepting as well (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003). LGBT individuals with supportive families report higher self-esteem and better mental health.

Huffer (2001) cited an ethical approach to being LGBT, describing how individual queer expression is open to judgment from the larger normative culture and that moral tension versus the desire for pleasure between same-sex persons is the reason for angst among LGBT persons. His research detailed the centuries of homophobic violence, and also described the baggage that comes with being labeled queer. Huffer (2001) described the binaries that exist when one labels him/herself as queer and offered a queer-feminist viewpoint that encompassed both sides in regards to feminists and those who consider themselves to be queer. Queer-feminists, she proposed, can tackle problems of identity, understand the role of sexuality in relation to gender, the importance of language, the concept of community, and the connection between representation and politics. Huffer (2001) critiqued gender and gender expression that did not fall under masculine regulations.

Regarding a shift in intersectionality, the fear of rejection further exacerbates LGBT students' need to hide their sexual identity. Students often "pass" as heterosexual so that they can become a part of the larger college campus. LGBT students fear rejection from fraternities and sororities due to the traditional values set forth by Greek organizations. LGBT students who want to join Greek organizations rarely discuss their gender preferences and may participate in sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex without any real attraction (Kirby, 2009). Reasons cited by students who chose this method of coping on college campuses were notably a fear of alienation from new college friends and fear of being unable to join certain organizations,

or to gain acceptance in the overall campus society. In a study conducted by Case, Hesp, & Charles (2005), lesbian, gay, and bisexual students joined the organizations for the same social activities and community service that heterosexual students did, but they were rarely given leadership roles and 70% of the persons studied indicated having experienced homophobic attitudes or discrimination within their school chapter. The study also mentioned how Greek organizations were often reluctant to offer membership to openly lesbian or gay persons, giving them a high score of LGBT intolerance. This information correlates with several of Newhouses's (2013) studies concerning fraternities and the fact that members look for pledges who fit typical male behavior; therefore, members see LGBT persons as a direct threat to "hegemonic masculinities" and the familial behavior of brotherliness that is associated with fraternities.

Porter and Maddox (2014) employed Critical Race Theory and intersectionality in their narrative study of a black lesbian female student who attended a predominately white institution. The authors introduced how educational spaces were constructed around whiteness and that students of color had to learn how to successfully negotiate these spaces to form their own identities and how they should act within collegiate institutions (Banks, 2009). Regarding sexuality, Porter and Maddox (2014) expressed that it can be fluid or rigid, depending upon what stage a person is in his or her life, and that identity is socially constructed and shaped by circumstances and environment. Racial identity is looked at as developing across a lifespan that changes over the course of one's life. For example, black people make meaning of being black when they are immersed in a predominately white institution; college is different for black people making meaning of being black when they have settled into a predominately black neighborhood after graduation and finding employment (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). CRT was used as a means to challenge the existing social construction of race through narrative so

that the participant could create an experience for her audience. The participant's counter-narrative provided a voice that challenged the dominant views of others and was formed by her multiple positioning. The participant viewed her experience in college as a favorable one because it was where she worked through her sexual identity. Race factored in the religious identity of the participant, as her adoptive parents were older and highly influential black Baptists within the church and did not speak to her for two months after she came out to them. The participant used intersectionality as she developed her lesbian identity status. LGBT students of color are often forced to select a primary identity that invalidates the intersection of other identities and may not have anything to do with their sexual identity (Warner & Shields 2013). The participant thought she did not embrace her multiple identities as a black, Christian, and lesbian until she was open about her lesbianism with her black Greek sorority sisters. She did, however, still feel the need to question which identity she should present depending upon the context of interaction outside of the safe space of her institution and social circle. As the participant grew more confident in her identities she wanted to be more visible and serve as an advocate for others. She also gave high praise to her campus Office of Multicultural Affairs for supporting of her multiple identities and providing a space where she could attend meetings with other lesbian and gay persons who had recently come out. The study concluded with what Patton and Simmons (2008) described as triple consciousness that is directly related to CRT and intersectionality. The authors of this study suggested that the participant's triple consciousness came from her ability to juggle three oppressive states: her race, sexual orientation, and religion.

Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, and Tubbs (2005) offered insight into transgender issues on college campuses which detailed housing, access to healthcare, counseling, records/documentation, and non-inclusive policy issues on college campuses. Transgender

students may feel marginalized if no effort is made to acknowledge their presence or to meet their needs, and many campuses do not offer opportunities for others to learn about transgender experiences. The purpose of Beemyn et al.'s (2005) literature was to establish support services throughout campuses to effectively address these students' needs where there were unique concerns. The writers described concerns within campus housing that included policies where students had to identify as either male or female on their housing intake forms, failing to ask if they had any special needs. They offered a solution of having the term "self-identify as \_\_\_\_" on housing intake forms and assessing hygienic needs such as showers, as transgender students may need private or gender-neutral restrooms and shower facilities for safety and confidentiality. The writers concluded that inclusive policies that cover gender identity and expression are needed to ensure the safety and diversification of transgender students.

Access to counseling and health care can also be regarded as a social and economic stressors (Dean, 2000) as some students are denied hormones even with proper medical documentation, or they are treated as if they have a mental illness because they do not identify with the gender they were assigned to at birth. Also, these students live in fear that if they complain about their treatment by campus professionals that their status would be disclosed. College records and documents are also affected, especially if the student undergoes sexual reassignment surgery while in school. Name and gender changing is important to these students to validate their identities (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2016). Name and gender changing occurs on a plethora of documents within the school system from ID cards, preventing students from having to explain why their name doesn't match their gender or why they don't look the same way they did when they first took the picture, to electronic directories such as email, and the updating of financial aid documents. The legal implication for updating records

and documents must ensure that a transition will be smooth and that transsexual students do not suffer from discrimination when they apply for jobs or apply to graduate schools. A system in which one person ensures that all records are changed with the proper documentation creates a comfortable, stress free, and confidential procedure for the student. It is also important to note that the use of pronouns and the use of the correct name are also paramount to the successful inclusion of transsexual students.

Title IX under the Civil Rights Act protects students against sexual discrimination and the Department of Education and the Department of Justice have stated that private or religious institutions cannot discriminate against persons because they are LGBT. Some private and private faith-based institutions welcome and encourage LGBT students. Agnes Scott College, an all female college in Georgia and the first established as a female seminary, first allowed the admittance of transgender students in 2010. In 2014, Mount Holyoke President Dr. Lynn Pasquerella instituted a formal policy, the first of its kind, “that would articulate our commitment to core values of individual freedom, social justice and diversity and inclusion” (p. 2) and that would welcome male to female transgender students (Alvarez & Schneider 2008). Since then, Dr. Pasquerella has instituted classes regarding LGBT studies and supported the forming of a transgender social group to “raise consciousness and ensure that Mount Holyoke is a welcoming and supportive community” (p. 2). Dr. Pasquerella has been praised for her visibility in transgender student policy and for encouraging other private all female or male institutions to do the same.

Purdue University ranks 10<sup>th</sup> as the best school for LGBT students with five student organization dedicated to LGBT students’ needs, an LGBT studies minor, campus-wide LGBT trainings, a nondiscrimination statement that is inclusive of LGBT students, and an on campus

LGBT center. Leaders there enacted change due to the overwhelming reports of LGBT harassment on campus. Manning (2013) describes this as transformational leadership as Dr. Pasquerella and administrators at Purdue University acted in mutual ways with followers while appealing to higher needs inspiring and motivating the students and supporters for a particular purpose. Due to her leadership of raising awareness, Dr. Pasquerella has been seen as a transformational leader who recognized the changing views of her faculty and students and led the way to change admissions policies.

David Kessler (2011), a researcher who specializes in LGBT concerns within academic administration in higher education, conducted work that aimed to create social transformation as a means for homo- and hetero-sexual students to foster gender diversity. He believed that academics was a great approach that built from the necessary subject matter and included current and emerging interdisciplinary content that relates to sexual and gender minority concerns. Also, he wrote that institutions have a responsibility to serve students through their student affairs programs and to improve awareness and tolerance. If there is a LGBT program or group on campus, Kessler (2011) believed that it should operate in conjunction with student affairs. Morrish and O'Mara (2011) examined why LGBT students are poorly recognized within US institutions and how diversity is often looked upon as a race or cultural thing and that "queerness is rendered invisible" (p. 5). The researchers stated that administration viewed LGBT students as having a private lifestyle choice that should be left alone instead of recognizing that this population of their student body was indeed a part of the diversity dialogue. These researchers challenged administrators to show genuine concern and to include LGBT students when speaking of diversity, and recognizing a new factor of difference instead of just tolerating.

Windmeyer (2015) compiled a comprehensive list of actions to improve higher education institutions' commitment to success. He suggested that leadership and institutional policies focus on all gender identities, administrative team leadership approach, recruitment, and tracking, for retention purposes are ways to foster an inclusive environment and show the LBGT community that they are worthy of being included as students.

### **Religion**

People are born into various religions in practice today, and over three quarters of them are affiliated with one of the five major systems of faith. Edward A. Walsh (1997) postulated that there is not now, nor has there ever been, an effort, or even an inclination, to merge the basic principles of their ideologies. In fact, violence and discrimination among people have often been motivated by religion. This thought of a one and only higher being from various religions means that religious conservatives find themselves operating under different motives and objectives. Some people have moved away from religion and into spirituality, focusing more on consciousness rather than a particular system of worship (Ecklund, 2010). He further stated that religion is purely social, a “largely invariant phenomenon that follows cultural norms” (p.19).

The literature often lends itself to the world's four largest religions that focus on one higher being: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism. It is important to recognize that indigenous and folk religions, those that are largely based on nature and ancestor worship, are handed down through generations and have no formal doctrine or religious texts. When incorporating indigenous practices, the lack of universal values shows diversity among different cultures. Questions that are of importance to Christianity are not equal to those Buddhists and not even considered by traditional African religions.

Similarly, the overall rejection of a religious belief, deemed atheism, irreligious, or non-religious, has increased 16% over the past 10 years (Pew Research Center, 2012). Non-denominational believers do not fall under this category as they traditionally believe in a higher being but do not want to identify with any particular religious group. Often we seek to answer and address social problems using religion without recognizing its complexity. Still, persons who reject religious beliefs still participate in activities influenced by religious events, i.e. the birth of Christ (Christmas) and the resurrection of Christ (Easter).

It is no secret that LGBT persons have contested being rejected the rights of marriage, housing, and employment for years. Many LGBT individuals feel rejected by organized religion, since homophobia has generally been associated with the world's largest religions- Christianity and Islam. Whether the person wants to feel a spiritual connection to a higher being or simply to feel welcome at a formal place of worship, the literature surrounding the study of religion and sexuality provides a clear, predominantly negative picture of the internal turmoil that a LGBT person who identifies with an organized religion would experience. Here the literature is reviewed as an exploration of the history and components of the intersection of LGBT and religion.

A push for religion to be inclusive to LGBT persons began in the 1970s with clergy in the religious realm seeking to incorporate fair rights on the terms of norms, nature, and reality. This unified push, dominated by white gay men, saw a deviation from heterosexuality as normal, and that other forms of prejudice and oppression would be stifled under the unity of the gay and lesbian community. According to Schneider and Roncolato (2012), male theologians who identified as gay sought to create a "queer" theology for themselves in the 1970s. During this tense time in American society, these theologians saw the positive effects of the Civil Rights Act



of 1964; they grew tired of the disdain towards LGBTs and began a movement to challenge Christian homophobia. This theology rejected all religious discourse that stated LGBTs were sinful, sick, and dangerous. Instead, they believed that queerness and same-sex relations should be celebrated as a bodily experience that was approved by God since God loves all his children. John McNeill's (1996) series of literary works were aimed at the Catholic Church and he stated that the Catholic doctrine was erroneous regarding homosexuality. McNeil (1996) insisted that LGBTs were the subjects of Christian theology because they are the outsiders whose love-oriented status was natural because it was formed within them by the will of God. Since Christianity is focused on loving thy neighbor, he stated that accepting LGBTs into communion would essentially bring Catholics closer to God and that the church should embrace these individuals.

Gary Comstock (1992) pitched this again in his book *Gay Theology Without Apology*, arguing that Christian life is about building a community where the oppressed can be heard. Comstock postulated that God is a relational power that calls us to be in the right relationship with others to build mutuality. Shortly thereafter, Richard Cleaver (1995) adopted the same stance, arguing that God is the one who saves through the creation of new types of people and that LGBTs are a new type of people whose community "will emerge as free as those who followed Moses during the exodus"(p. 4).

Gay and lesbian clergy and their allies have faced exclusion, discrimination, and sometimes violence due to their stance on LGBT acceptance in the church. Many have rejected being LGBT and claimed it is unnatural to regain their status in the church. Those who have been steadfast and have not given up on their work through the church have been labeled "queer theologians". These persons seek not to attack the biblical texts and traditions that reject being

LGBT, but to argue that sexuality and religion are not separate and that both are not stable categories (Stuart, 2003).

Kornegay's 2006 essay "Queering Black Homophobia" was a basis for how the black church has traditionally responded to homophobia. While incorporating CRT, Kornegay commenced with the black church struggling to rid itself of LGBTs in order to fit into a dominant culture. The essay described the negative teachings of homosexuality within the black church that were supposed to be built on the accepting, healing, and liberating message of Jesus. This in turn created internal conflict and fear within the parishioners as they have been deemed sexually deviant; as a result many leave the church while those who remain continue to be silent about their sexuality.

Young, Shipley, and Trothen (2015) presented the viewpoint of religion and sexuality more liberally. These scholars stood against the assumption that those who are religious should stand against same-sex relations and sexual diversity; they challenged that religion and sexuality should not be the core components of how individuals identify themselves. The debate between religion and sexuality is an emotional one and played out in multiple arenas in an effort to change public policy and opinion. The academic study of the relationship between religion and sexuality is relatively new, as the regulation of sexuality has been strongly influenced by religious groups. Sexuality discussion continues to divide religious groups, even more so than birth control, abortion, and violence against women. Young et al. (2015) suggested that we stop looking at religious and sexual identities as being in opposition of each other, and recognize that identity is fluid and based on personal experience and understanding, not dogma or doctrine.

Colage is a nonprofit organization that supports children of LGBT parents. When the organization posed the online question, "What impact does having a LGBT parent have on your

relationship to religion, faith, or spirituality?”, the responses were vastly negative. One child commented that she had adopted an atheist lifestyle after a woman at the Methodist church where she used to attend said that she wanted to pray her mother’s lesbian lifestyle away. Another weighed in on how he found it hard to escape the “hateful rhetoric” directed towards his lesbian mother and that he had been exposed to the negative side of religion. Yet another youth expressed disdain at people calling being gay a sin and feeling as if they have to pick a side. When children are on the back end of LGBT discrimination they feel as if they are mistreated for something over which they have no control. These children often look for allies of their own age for support and whom they can see as family; however, as one child in the Colage online question and answer responded, friends within her Jewish community are few due to their parents not allowing them to be friends with her because they think she will be a lesbian because she has “two moms”.

Joshua Lee’s (2013) research indicated that the growing acceptance of LGBT people in American culture is seen as a threat to Christians and that they view it as a sign of the country turning away from God; the more that laws are enacted to protect LGBT people, the greater they are perceived as threat, especially towards the traditional view of family. Lee (2013) described a problem that arose in that many LGBT Christians were left struggling not only with their sexual identity but also in finding a church with a welcoming attitude towards being LGBT; with so many denominations and congregations through which to navigate, it is often difficult to find an accepting church. Research from Wood and Conely (2014) supported Lee’s stance on spiritual struggles and maintaining one’s sexual identity to save them within the church. The study maintained that when religious leaders teach LGBT individuals that their sexual identity is outside of the norm and will not be tolerated, those LGBT persons are at risk of experiencing

struggles within their religion that can result in a loss of faith and ultimately feelings of depression or grief. Wood and Conely's (2014) study also had therapeutic implications discussed in detail later.

While conducting research within various churches that were staunch opponents of being LGBT, Ward (2011) composed six types of abuse that happen within the church to deter or shame LGBT persons:

- 1) *Leadership representing God* is when the religious leader uses texts that negatively reference homosexuality and claims to speak the literal words of the deity; then the LGBT individuals feel as though if the deity condemns homosexuality and their sexuality is a sin.
- 2) *Spiritual bullying* is what occurs when the religious leader consistently harasses the LGBT individual to conform to the heterosexual community, sometimes threatening to out their sexuality.
- 3) *Acceptance via performance* is when an LGBT is pressured to become overly active in the church so that no one would expect his or her sexuality.
- 4) *Spiritual neglect* happens when religious leaders neglect LGBT individuals who are requesting prayer or other spiritual needs. The leaders cite that the source of the LGBT person's pain is due to his or her sin.
- 5) *Expanding external and internal tension* occurs when the LGBT individual is pressured not to express his or her sexual identity, and in turn is also suppressing it, which can lead to emotional distress.

6) *Manifestation of internal states* is a physical manifestation of pain due to the psychological repercussions of living incongruently with one's sexuality and one's religious beliefs. (p. 4-7).

LGBT persons can find belongingness within a religion. Buddhism is one religion that recognizes gender binaries and has no formal policies against LGBT persons. Reverend Cheryl Burke is an associate minister at the Plymouth United Church of Christ in Detroit, Michigan, where people of all sexual orientations and gender identities have been supported openly since 1998. She wrote that her congregation operates within the United Church of Christ to support legislation on all political levels and protests against laws that deny rights to LGBT persons. Their church represents a high tolerance for diversity and a low tolerance for prejudice. Furthermore, in 2008, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America conducted a study within its 10,000 congregations in which the question was posed as to what congregations would break away from the denomination if it began to openly accept LGBT persons (Strayhorn, 2010). Surprisingly, 93% of the congregation said they would remain, showing an enormous shift in the church and the reason cited for allowing LGBT persons as “erring on the side of compassion.” In 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church adopted a stance called “Human Sexuality, Gift and Trust,” which permitted congregations to recognize and support LGBT persons and partnerships within their congregations.

### **Counseling LGBT Persons Using The Theoretical Framework**

LGBT individuals, as a sexual minority, endure multiple stressors as they face discrimination, prejudice, and stigma. These stressors can manifest into psychological health problems that may result in the need for mental health services. The number of LGBT individuals who seek therapy cannot be ignored, and mental health professionals must be

prepared to do no harm to these individuals. The review of literature details the conduction of studies that allowed for the most appropriate and beneficial counseling for LGBT individuals. While counseling can often take a holistic approach, focus here is given to those techniques that fit within the theoretical framework.

Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes, and Walther (2008) interviewed 42 LGBT college-aged persons about the counseling that they received from trained professionals. The team identified 17 inadequate or inappropriate practices and 14 exemplary practices, one of which was person-centered therapy; person-centered therapy is that in which the therapist is perceived as respectful, trustworthy, knowledgeable, and caring, and in which the therapist helps clients gain insight on how to cope with their presenting problems until their concerns are resolved. As a result, 69% of the participants reported that they saw improvements in their quality of life, including increased self-acceptance.

The unhelpful practices described in the study (Israel et al., 2008) included viewing the therapist as cold, disengaged, and uncaring, and the therapist imposing personal values and judgment on the clients. These participants reported that they felt that they endured excessive bias regarding their sexual orientation, excessive self-disclosure, and even negative accusations against the participants' parents. These participants thought that they endured a diminished quality of life, decreased self-acceptance, and a feeling of not wanting to go to an alternate therapist for help. This study implied that basic counseling skills are only the groundwork in the treatment of LGBT persons, but that knowledge of LGBT issues and coordination of medical, legal, and financial services can elicit a positive counseling environment. It is important to note that many of the persons who sought therapy were seeking counseling for problems that were not related to their being LGBT, and that the therapists assumed their sexuality (Liddle, 1999).

Therapists must remain competent in all areas of basic counseling such as building rapport, maintaining confidentiality, and attentiveness, because they actually may not know if the person they are counseling is LGBT.

Owen-Pugh and Baines (2014) conducted a study among beginning counselors and the results showed that the participants thought that their training did not prepare them to be LGBT-affirmative therapists. Subsequently, these counselors began training that focused on finding strategies that work and that included helping the clients deal with oppression while using existential therapy. Since the counselors were able to acknowledge society's oppression against their LGBT clients, they were able to prevent their clients from becoming victims of the verbal and social disdain they had experienced.

Wood and Conely's (2014) study regarding the loss of religious identity among LGBT persons included a case study of a lesbian of the pseudonym Maggie, who had negative experiences within her Latter Day Saints Church. Maggie described abuse through interactions with her church members and microinvalidations when "trying to do the work of Christ". Maggie thus experienced a loss of religious identity because she could not integrate her sexuality. Maggie sought out a grief counselor who first treated her with family systems counseling techniques. The counselor realized that Maggie was grieving the departure from her church much like she was grieving the loss of a blood relative. The counselor did not condemn Maggie's religious beliefs, but instead allowed her to explore her loss and guided her into making meaning (Neimeyer, 2000) and interpreting what she would like to have in a more LGBT affirming religion. Next the counselor used existential therapy to help Maggie get through the making meaning phase. Presbury, Echterling, & McKee (2007) explained that meaning making can have a powerful effect in the lives of those suffering from loss; it is also used in existential therapy

due to the client's need to make sense of their worldview and how they want a positive social encounter within the religious realm. At the end of therapy, Maggie chose not to join another congregation but reported that by working through her grief and going through the meaning-making phase she eventually positioned herself as more spiritual than religious.

### **Inclusion Policies in Higher Education**

Inclusion policies are not new; however, incorporating documents adequately and using them resourcefully is a new discussion, as the students who make up the college campuses have become increasingly diverse. Policy initiatives are usually the result of backlash from discrimination or federal mandate, instead of being independently constructed as something that needs to be done for the common good by higher education leaders (Allan, 2008). Committees that address inclusion policies do not always include input from those for whom the policy is intended to help, and the discourse that is used to shape these people gets caught up in the language of the policy. Language used to describe LGBT people on university campuses can either be helpful, making them feel welcome and appreciated, or harmful, making them feel vulnerable or disabled. Words such as “people of all genders” rather than just “men and women”, and phrases that include “actual or perceived identities” instead of “gender identity or expression”, create language that encompasses greater diversity.

Campus climate studies provide baseline data on experiences and attitudes about LGBT people and are used by inclusion policy makers to provide evidence for creating, improving, or expanding LGBT policies (University of Michigan, 2004). Each campus is different and for an institution to base a policy on the campus climate study of another campus, without consideration for its own, may lead to bias and be unreasonable for the task that is to be accomplished. Policy discourse analysis calls for LGBT persons within the specific institution to



be consulted to further aide and define the discussion among gender and sexual minorities and can highlight the similarities and differences among the diverse college communities.

Further research from Windmeyer (2015) showed that policy is based on creating a document that focuses on tolerance and not one that focuses on acceptance. Universities conceptualize diversity narrowly, restricting it to race. Heterosexual college students often are not challenged to examine the social attitudes regarding human sexuality and discrimination within social groups. Policy should be geared not just for support of diversity but to confront bigoted behavior and stereotyping (Iverson, 2010). The most visible elements of any institution are its website and publications. With these venues displaying messages of diversity, it is imperative that people of all races, ethnicities, disabilities, gender identities, and expressions are included.

### **Adding to the Body of Literature**

This literature review sought to establish the current knowledge in academia, religion, and psychology regarding LGBT persons. Given the amount and the content of the reviewed literature, it is clear that the presenting problem has not been studied on a large scale with participants from various institutions, and specifically regarding asking questions about navigating religion and sexuality. Although this topic has been discussed in discourse on social media, it has not been well represented in formal literature. Also, storytelling methodologies including narratives as inquiry and counter-narratives have not been used substantially to add to this body of knowledge. The researcher was interested in shaping pedagogy, therapeutic practices, and building healthier familial and communal relationships through the advancement of knowledge within this body of research. By using the logic of the theoretical perspectives and sound methodological practices, a thorough research design can be developed to address the

presenting problem. I sought to make people uncomfortable and to change the binary of what society believes is the experience of LGBT college-aged persons and help them embrace a different perspective. Thus the study can be used in a broader area of research and its conclusions can provide new ideas and positive change for LGBT college-attending persons.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

When reviewing the literature regarding the inclusion of LGBT students in higher education, LGBT persons of practicing faith, and institutional policy, a plethora of information presented regarding each separately, but not in combination. Scholarly research warrants a closer examination of this student experience; as a result, it is important to speak with a targeted population to accurately present their perspective, and thus, further research is required.

Several studies have examined what it means to be LGBT especially among experiences of LGBT persons regarding their race or ethnicity, their mental health, and the conflicts of being LGBT and being accepted by the church. These studies spanned across age groups and ethnic backgrounds and various religions. Scholars used their work to bring attention to the growing field of queer studies, the discrimination of LGBT people, and the understanding of LGBT persons regarding sexuality and sexual identity.

Nevertheless, minimal research attention has been directed towards how being religious *and* being LGBT has affected the daily lives of those LGBT persons, especially among college-aged students ages 17-24. No study has yet sought to find how college students navigate several dimensions of their daily lives while dealing with the intersectionality of religion and sexual identity and the commonalities in which they do it. By examining these contexts, while involving LGBT students across various schools, we can better understand the commonalities and disproportionalities that these students experience. With this understanding, researchers, therapists/counselors, school leaders, clergymen, and families can better understand the common dilemmas of LGBT persons to become more accepting, be more socially aware during therapy, to understand the influence of the social structure of religion, and to help create and enforce anti-discrimination policies that cover sexual orientation and gender expression.

Creswell (2009) informed us that research interested in the “what”, “why”, or “when” between human interactions, educational patterns, and social sciences can benefit from qualitative research. This inquiry can be conducted using a myriad of methods including, but not limited to, focus groups, interviews, document analysis, observation, rubrics, surveys, and narratives via journal. Qualitative research also includes the involvement of specific participants by use of purposeful sampling (Daly, 2008). These participants must be functioning contributors and co-participants for as long as the study progresses. Choosing the correct method and participants requires that the researcher is knowledgeable about which method will yield the most information to answer their research question (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Methods**

Creswell (2009) determined that a major strength of qualitative research is that it can provide multifaceted textual descriptions of how people experience the given research issue. The methodological design best suited for this research was phenomenological, which required a combination of two data collection strategies- narrative interviews and document analysis. Phenomenology seeks to examine and describe the meaning of several individuals’ lived experiences and attempts to identify shared experiences or the lack thereof.

Narrative interviews were used as a data collection method within this phenomenological approach. Narrative interviews involve the interviewee telling the interviewer specific details about important experiences in his/her life within a specific situation, in this case, college and social context (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011); these interviews are either semi-structured or unstructured, and the influence of the interviewer is relatively minimal. These narratives are considered the representations and interpretations of the interviewee and should be regarded as their truth in the way they see their experience within a specific social context (Muylaert, 2014).

Document analysis involves coding content into themes that can be interpreted by the researcher to give meaning behind a topic. Rarely used alone, document analysis is often used as a means of “triangulation” to seek convergence through the use of different data sources (Bowen, 2009). This creates credibility and provides data on the context within which the research participants operate. These documents often provide background, context, and further data, resulting in additional questions to be asked of research participants.

### **Epistemological Approach**

Epistemology is defined as the study of how we come to know something or the study of how knowledge is gained (Davis, 2004). This study used a phenomenological framework and focused on how the reality of attending a private faith-based institution is constructed and shaped by the individual experiences of LGBT students and the influence of social structures and, conversely, how those experiences differ from other LGBT students at public institutions. The researcher was interested in the experiences of the participants and used their narrative interview data to illuminate the student experience and frame methods of improvement to anti-discrimination policies. Narrative interviews were transcribed to search for evidence of social and religious commonalities in terms of experience, whether it was conflicting, contradictory, harmonious, or compassionate. The study sought to discover what the participants did in their school related activities and relationships, while managing and perhaps solving problems related to being LGBT and being religious, that shaped their way of thinking about people, relationships, events, or activities.

Using the interview responses, the researcher reviewed and analyzed the experiences of how the participants acknowledged living in this world. By studying the individual, the researcher was able to get a broader sense of social and psychological aspects in a larger context,

whether it was among a particular subgroup or an entire culture (Clandinin, 2013). By thinking relationally within personal stories the concentration was on past experiences that in turn had the potential to shape the outlook of one's future. Narrative inquiry through interviewing is a way to understand experience and how experiences generate new revelations between humans and their environment. The researcher must understand that experiences are as continuous as the social and environmental influences that shape them, so each experience, with its social and environmental stimulus, has a past influence that leads to a new interpretation or outlook of the future.

The epistemological approach used in this study was social constructivism. Connecting with the constructivist view that reality is socially constructed by and between the people who experience it (Gergen, 1999), we can postulate that our reality is based on and shaped by the recurring factors of cultural, historical, political, and social norms that operate within circumstance and instance. Reality can and will be different from one person to another based upon our unique understanding of the world and our experiences in it. Social constructivists view each individual person as a sensemaker, and that individual seeks to understand or make sense of his or her world as it is seen and experienced (Ashworth, 2003). The social constructivist view posits that it would be erroneous to assume that a single universal reality exists for all, as this would negate the ability of individuals to make sense of and interpret his or her world. Furthermore, the sameness that unites human beings due to their social or cultural identities does not mean that there will not be different realities constructed among them, due to unique individual differences.

Throughout the study analysis, the importance and use of the participants' language was emphasized. How the participants described and referred to themselves within the contexts of the

research methods allowed the researcher to shape and adequately present the legitimate and self-evident reality to the audience. The researcher extracted details and moved past the “What” and into the “How” or “Why” to provide a deeper understanding within the exploration of experiences.

### **Research Design**

Dewalt & Dewalt (2002) stated “the degree of participation, membership role, and the amount of emotional involvement that researchers bring to the field will have an important impact on the kinds of data collected and the sort of analysis that is possible” (p. 36). Knowing that this research would include a level of trust building, rapport, confidentiality, and a desire to report the correct thing, it was important that the researcher chose the appropriate research design and methods to gain data worthy of reporting. Insufficient data does not yield coherent results, and the study was designed to add to the growing body of literature regarding LGBT students and institutional policymaking.

This study utilized methodology to answer the presented research questions in depth; semi-structured interview questions allowed for the participants to describe their experiences and allowed for the researcher to explore and understand the types of student experiences, the commonalities and disparities between experiences, the intersection between religion and sexuality, and the influence of a written anti-discrimination policy. The approach supported the language and discourse of the participants, thus allowing the participants to adequately express their experiences for the researcher to interpret.

To adequately study the proposed research question using several experiences, this research was designed as a phenomenological study with the use of narrative interviews and document analysis. I sought to highlight specific experiences and how these participants

perceived them. If one postulates that the experiences of LGBT students at a private faith-based institution is different from that of a student at a liberal arts institution, it is imperative that the stories and experiences of both are told. Merriam (2002) informed us that research guided by interview protocol is crucial when building a study that is aimed to understand how people see, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences.

Using the narrative interviews and document analysis collectively has the potential to add depth to the data set. Documents provide the background information prior to designing the research project and conducting the interviews and will corroborate or refute the interview data (Bardach 2009). I clarified and challenged what was recounted, thus adding lucidity to the findings. This research included experience and policy, since it included people and documents.

### **Participant Sampling**

The study called for four to eight voluntary participants. Purposive, criterion-based sample strategies were used to ensure the purposeful selection of willing participants. The willingness of the participant was paramount, as they were asked to provide accurate stories to the narrative. Criteria used as a determinant for participation in the study were:

- 1) College students aged 18-24
- 2) Classified as a sophomore or higher
- 3) Identified with an organized faith or religion
- 4) Identified as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, or is transgender
- 5) Attended one of the institutions assessed for the document analysis

Two different institutions were assessed for participants. Schools were chosen based on their comparable student population and their proximity to one another in the south Louisiana cluster to determine if student experience was regional.



- 1) Private, faith-based institution
- 2) Public, liberal arts institution
- 3) Institution MUST have a written anti-discrimination policy regarding “sexual minorities” or LGBT students.

Participant recruitment occurred in various ways:

- 1) The researcher wrote formal letters addressed to the counseling centers of the chosen schools, asking for permission to recruit and, if permission WAS granted, for referrals of eligible students interested in the study.
- 2) The researcher identified and contacted various social groups within the chosen schools, asking for permission to recruit and, if permission was granted, spoke with the members of the group regarding the research study and their willingness to participate in the study.
- 3) Chain sampling (also known as snowball sampling) was used as a means of identifying participants from those who already decided to participate in the study.

Participants were pre-screened in person, by phone, or email to communicate the purpose of the research, to determine their interest in participating, to present the consent form, and to schedule an interview time and location of the participants’ choice. School policies are printed publically and are readily accessible, and thus the policies were copied from school publications or downloaded from the school’s webpage. The researcher contacted the school to assure sure that the policy was up to date and correct.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was based upon engaging the participants in personal narratives through interviews. The goal of the interviews was to establish rapport and to gain storied responses that

were authentic, unique, and genuine. The data collection strategy of narrative interview was used in this study. The narrative was interview was important to gather personal reflections of specific events of the participants and to allow for not only vulnerability, but also to foster a relationship built on trust, as the interview participant was also involved in the final interpretation of the narrative. This led to another level of vulnerability as those persons described how they used their experiences to understand the world around them. Interviews are strongly connected to human interaction and trust and are self-reflective (Creswell, 2013). Phases of the narrative interview include: Preparation- formulating questions before the meeting with the interviewee; *Initialization*- asking the question to the interviewee; Main narration- letting the interviewee respond without the interviewer interrupting or being verbal until the end of the narration; Questioning phase- the only question or probing that can be asked is ‘what happened then’ or ‘tell me more about’, never ask ‘why’; and Small talk-wrapping up the interview.

The narrative interviews began with asking each participant the same interview questions; however, probing was used to elicit a coherent response from the participant if he or she responded ambiguously. Kim (2016) described narrative inquiry as important because the balance of power is in the researcher’s favor and allows the researcher to sort through the relevant information in to gather various accounts that lead to a coherent whole. Narrative interviews are meant to be open with little interruption, and focus on restorying as a technique for constructing a narrative account. During the interview process, the researcher was a complete participant (Angrosino, 2007) so as to be fully engaged and to establish rapport. Minimal writing was done in order to ensure that the participant knew the researcher gave full attention. Not only did the narrative interview detail the personal experience of the authors, it allowed for a greater

cultural meaning within the LGBT group. The researcher developed themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through the interviews with the participants.

### **Interview Protocol**

The researcher will meet with each participant twice over the course of six weeks to emphasize interaction and to gain clarity (if needed) about the participants' stories. All interviews were audio recorded and conducted face-to face in a quiet yet public setting of the participants' choice. The interview occurred during the first meeting and participants were asked the following semi-structured interview questions to allow the researcher to probe or pose follow-up questions:

- 1) How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity?  
In what ways would you describe problems that may exist as a whole within regarding LGBT students within your institution?
- 2) Describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.
- 3) Think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.
- 4) Here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.

Czarniawska (2004) supported using incidents of storytelling and eliciting stories through interviews for narrative studies. The interview questions require the interviewee to tell a story so that the participant can be in control and be an active part of the process. The interviewees provided pseudonyms for the persons whom they described in their narration to protect confidentiality. All interviews were audiotaped, allowing the interviewer to pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues.

During the second meeting approximately 4 weeks later, a transcript and analysis of the interview was given to the participants and they were asked to review the transcript for accuracy. This was done so that no assumptions were made on the part of the researcher and that the integrity and accuracy of the account of the participant's experience was not compromised. The time frame for review of the transcript was short to allow for the correction of any errors, the availability in the event of a necessary follow-up, and to keep the attention of the interview participant. The researcher encouraged the participant to ask questions about the coding and themes within the analysis to ensure that the participant agreed with the interpretation of the experience. Confidentiality was of the highest regard, and the interviewee was a complete and welcomed participant to help the researcher gain important understandings on personal data.

The second data collection strategy was document analysis. The first step in document analysis is recognizing the main purpose of the document and the reason it was first produced, including the target audience (Bowen, 2009). The second step is recognizing if the document was written out of necessity or out of appeasement; namely, is it representative of the target audience? Lastly, evaluating the document against other sources of information (here the narrative storytelling) lends an objective view of the documents. Since the documents in this study were selective and only covered one aspect of the topic, aligning the documents to just

compare and contrast the content was not sufficient. I intended to establish the meaning of the document and its contribution to the issue being explored, and to ascertain whether the voice of those purportedly protected by the document was being heard.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Analysis of the participants' experiences occurred after the interview. The following procedure was used for data analysis:

- 1) Transcription
- 2) Reading and re-reading the transcription
- 3) Identification of codes
- 4) Identification of themes from the codes
- 5) Comparison of codes/themes between participants

The transcripts of the interviews were read several times, with the researcher making memos to form initial codes, and to create an awareness of the writings as a whole before breaking them into parts for the restorying process. Attention was paid to each participant's language, the use of slang or other colloquial terms, and any disruptions within the story.

Codes were identified by looking for keywords in text, key cultural terms, word repetitions, and words and phrases that indicated relationships among things. The researcher must be careful here when analyzing the keywords in text and cultural terms and pay attention to code meshing. Unlike code switching, when words are interchanged based on setting and audience, code meshing is the use of blended language codes of a culture, regardless of the appropriateness of setting or audience (Young, Barrett, Young-Rivera, & Lovejoy, 2014). Specific terms of use within the LGBT community could fall under code meshing. Codes were classified as: prefigured, information that the researcher expects to find before the study;

emergent, surprising information that pops up during the analysis; or in vivo, exact words from the participant that may be unusual to the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Due to restorying the experiences (placing the experiences in chronological order, providing a detail of themes, giving clarity to the place, time, and participants within the experience), the participant checked the writings and interview responses for accuracy before they were compared to the responses of the other participants (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Researcher questions about the transcription were clarified at the second meeting.

Using Huberman and Miles' (1994) analysis framework, the researcher looked for common themes from the codes between the participants' experiences once all writings were deemed accurate. Themes are the formation of several codes into a central idea. The frequency of the themes was highlighted to note relations among the participants, and thus the researcher built a logical chain of evidence. Themes that the researcher expected to emerge from the study included emotional pain and rejection, safety (including physical pain), and authenticity (the genuine acceptance of self in regards to the participant).

Lastly, data interpretation took the forms of the comparisons (commonalities) and contrasts (disproportionalities) between each of the participants' themes. The researcher forced a common theme when one was not present, as disparities between the experiences could be highlighted as well.

Gubrium and Holstein (1995) coined the phrase narrative linkages which describes what researchers should look for in terms of how experiences are linked together to "specify the subjective meaning of a certain time and context, offering a biographical pattern" (p.28). Using narrative linkages within this study, the researcher found a basis by which the participants understood, organized, and represented their experiences. Once again, the focus was on the

common experiences among these LGBT college students, not necessarily the number of times or in which instances that the experiences occurred.

The document analysis was completed by content and thematic breakdown. Content analysis was done to look for common and uncommon words, length, and language. The absence or incompleteness of the wording of one document to the other was also noted. Thematic breakdown of the documents from the codes that were identified from the narrative stories within the interview included searching for predetermined themes and emerging themes. The documents were then compared to the narrative interviews to see if a similarity or difference in the policy had any bearing or congruence with student experience.

### **Subjectivity**

This study was approached collectively to reduce researcher bias. A formal process was presented and applied throughout each interview and for the document analysis. Due to the personal nature of each experience, verification was based solely on personal views, though it is important to note that an individual's identity is not defined by one instance. To minimize subjectivity, I relied on quotes and personal information from each participant as evidence and spent time with each participant to build rapport and trust. The arrangement of the study played an important role as I sought to uncover and understand the LGBT participants' views, experiences, and understandings of their institutional experience relative to their religious beliefs.

As a professional school counselor who comes into contact with students of various identities daily, I recognize the importance of not making generalizations regarding the students' experiences. I acknowledge my lack of understanding of what it means not to be LGBT and not to be a practicing member of the faith-based institutions represented in the study.

The researcher's drive to study this phenomenon evolved from an experience of a LGBT student of the Catholic faith, who expressed that only he and his mother knew of his sexuality, and that he was conflicted about his desires since the church and his mother were not supportive. He had always been expected to attend the Catholic institution from which others before him had graduated to continue the family legacy, but expressed severe anxiety about not being able to "be who I really am" while on campus.

Interpretive data collection methods were used in this research and formed the link between the language, experience, and culture of the participants. Essentially, the interpretation was two-fold; the participants interpreted their experience and the researcher assured that their interpretation was accurate. The research was based on a social constructivist epistemological approach as the researcher believed that one's act of knowing lies in the formation of one's own reality, and that seeing something from someone else's perspective is not only possible but essential, especially when understanding the plight of marginalized groups.

The interpretation of this study should not be clouded by the researcher's biases, perceived prejudices, and stereotypes. One who is homophobic or believes rigidly in one religion should not advance in this study.

In accordance with the theory of social constructivism tenant, that reality is created out of each participant's subjective view of the world, objective analysis or scrutiny is difficult because not everyone sees the world as the participants do. Each participant brings a separate and unique reality to the research process. It is critical that the worldview of the researcher is independent of the interpretation of the reality of the participant. Understanding that inherent bias is within us all, the researcher must respect the highly diverse experiences of the participants.



### **Ethical Considerations and Limitations**

The basis for this research study was contingent upon the richness of the data and gaining access to the data was paramount to the analysis. Potential limitations to the study could have been locating at least one participant from each type of educational institution, combating shyness or non-willingness to discuss information from the participants during the interview, finding participants who remained truthful and honest about their experiences during the journaling exercises, and the time constraints of journaling. Creswell (2013) described that even with the assurance of confidentiality, participants may be fearful of their experiences and identity exposure and will drop out of the study. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, it is important to note that the phrasing of the questions can be a concern, as the interviewer does not want to elicit erroneous, prompted responses from the interviewee. Also, if the interviewees feel that the recollection of their experience might bring negative exposure to another participant within their story, they may choose to conceal certain aspects of their responses.

In terms of ethics, the researcher communicated to the participants that they were voluntarily participating in a study, explained that the purpose of the study was to shed light on how LGBT persons actively navigate social structures within the confines of religion and sexual identity, and ensured that the researcher would share any analysis of the final product with participants to eliminate concerns of deception. Since anonymity of the participants was paramount, the storing and deleting of data was such as to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

This study included only two universities within the southern United States and should be recreated on a larger scale to gain more insight into whether the experiences of LGBT students are similar or vary from state to state or across the nation.

## **Conceptualization**

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the intersectionality of religion and sexual identity based on various experiences of college students across two college campuses. Information from Watson (2005) suggested that about 9 million adults (roughly 3.8% of the adult population) identify as LGBT. A large-scale study from the Pew Research Center (2012) suggested that in adults 18 and older, about seven in ten describe themselves as a person practicing an organized faith or religion. Based on this information, it can be concluded that there are LGBT persons who also consider themselves to be affiliated with a religious group. While Americans may have their own beliefs regarding the acceptance of a person who is LGBT, many major religions do not accept any deviation of sexual behavior besides that between a man and a woman, and many LGBT persons find themselves in a struggle between the acceptance of their religion and sexual identity.

Research has amassed how institutional and communal leaders should institute programs and organizations that will be inclusive of or an ally to LGBT persons. The Multicultural Organizational Development Model by Wall & Obear (2008) sought to explore best practices to create inclusive programs within various urban communities where there was a large LGBT population. This model stated that a true multicultural organization: had a mission and operation of services that reflect the interests and social identity of the group; contained leaders and members that eradicate all forms of oppression; had members across all identity groups making decisions; and actively worked in larger communities to eliminate oppression. The purpose was to create social justice and inclusion within communities and between families. The model was designed to move beyond awareness and tolerance to appreciation and action. While leaders of religious institutions may feel that religion and social justice for LGBT students is not always

compatible, the model called for social justice to assure that everyone in the community feels connected and important. LGBT allies and advocates wholeheartedly accept responsibility for implementing policy enhancements that ensure equity for LGBT persons. Multicultural Organizational Development Model would require communal leaders and activists to act within the collegial model as a means to reduce status differences to view everyone as equals and personifying the values of the group (Birnbaum, 1988). This would allow students to become more conscious of ways in which leaders enact initiatives to support sexual and gender minority inclusion. Inclusion from the perspective of LGBT persons includes more than just tolerance; inclusion seeks to undo inequality and create equity among LGBT persons along with LGBT allies (Wall & Obear, 2008).

The researcher conceptualized this study with theoretical and epistemological approaches. Results of this narrative study and document analysis can be applied from the frameworks of critical race theory, queer theory, and intersectionality. Furthermore, by engaging the participants in questions related to their experiences, the social constructivists can use this study to shed light on the psyche relative to existential counseling theory.

Consider how the study related to engaging critical race theory and how the social institution of the university stunts the sexual minority. Many major religions actively oppose the social acceptance of LGBT identities. For those institutions that do not operate within the confines of a religious nature, many African-American students are raised within the church and bring those religious beliefs with them to college campuses. For instance, within Christianity, Baptist and Methodist denominations have the most African-American participants, and they both actively oppose LGBTity. With a growing population of LGBT students entering higher education it is common to see these students serving as leaders throughout HBCU campuses and

as members of campus organizations that enhance the campus environment of the host institution. HBCU leaders can use this study to understand the need for providing an atmosphere of safety and acceptance where students can network with others who share the same life commonalities.

Regarding queer theory and breaking down barriers of normalness, consider the following in regards to discovering the ways religious powers are seen by transsexual students within the context of the church. Many LGBT persons who actively attend religious services may choose to hide or “closet” their identity and do not outwardly use the community or mental health resources available to them. This happens often in situations where students know that their identity will be met with homophobia, leaving them out of the diversity conversation (Morrish & O’Mara, 2011). For example, Gavino, Eber, & Bell (2010) described how a lesbian young adult attended a Baptist retreat and the youth director spoke to students and staff about struggles of self-acceptance. The director then asked the attendees whether or not they thought it was OK for people to be gay. Everyone who answered said “no” before the lesbian attendee answered. The lesbian, who had not yet come out, told the group it was not the lifestyle she chose, but she did not see anything wrong with it. "The youth director was so enraged and terrified," she said. “It was after that experience that I decided that I would hide the fact that I was a lesbian” (p.5).

Regarding queer theory and higher education, the estimated 2% of American students who identify as transgender face another set of barriers. Transgender students who are “out” at private faith-based schools encounter resistance with residence hall assignments fitting their chosen identity, the appropriate usage of pronouns or name (changed after sexual reassignment surgery) to refer to their chosen identity, appropriate medical care to prescribed hormone

treatment, and abundant male/female separation (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015). These challenges among LGBT students often drive them away from institutions where they could possibly serve as an asset to the school as student leaders and in academics.

Let us conceptualize this study in regards to counseling theories and its implications for those religious LGBT persons who seek counseling. As described in the literature review, experiences of LGBT students can be traumatic and the rejection and alienation of friends and family can cause depression; it is necessary to give some thought to counseling when dealing with this marginalized group. Many college campuses have groups of LGBT students who meet privately, and many have official LGBT student groups and policies that protect members of the LGBT community. Many higher education institutions have LGBT student organizations that provide support to their peers and anti-discrimination policies that cover sexual orientation and gender expression, but only about 40% have institutionalized, full-time centers that provide resources and support to LGBT students. Having a designated counselor who specializes in LGBT issues and uses therapeutic techniques within the center can provide greater opportunities that will benefit both LGBT students and also the school campus in general in terms of inclusion, protection, personal growth, and, most of all, retention.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented information supportive of narrative interviews and document analysis being best suited for this study. Background information regarding narrative interviews, document analysis, and the epistemological framework of social constructivism that supported this study were also presented to show the researcher's intention to elicit the best information regarding the outcome of the study. Participant selection and data collection methods and strategies were also detailed to show that a formal process was used to successfully conduct the

study. It was important to “tie-it-all-together” so a brief yet thorough conceptualization was presented to show that the theoretical frameworks chosen were intentional when deciding upon this research topic.

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

The intent of the college experience is not only to dispense knowledge and to prepare students for careers, but also to help them gain social knowledge. Collegiate faculties' purpose is to ensure that students have the best experience possible. A near perfect experience cannot be ensured for every student, however there are safeguards, specifically in the form of school policies, to help those who may encounter issues. As stated in Chapter 1, the intent of this research was to highlight the LGBT experience at both private faith-based and public institutions and connect the relevance of the school's anti-discrimination policy to a favorable student experience. Research was conducted as a means to explore possible religious undertones and the hindrance of religion among LGBT persons, and if the type of campus climate mattered regarding student experiences. Also, this research sought to identify whether anti-discrimination policies that incorporate inclusiveness and diversity help satisfy student experience.

This chapter presents the data in support of or rebuttal of the three (3) research questions. To answer question one, the significance of the themes, both predetermined themes presented in chapter three and any significant emergent themes in participant responses are presented. Next, insight into the similarities and differences of the respondents' answers to question two compares experience to experience, while also looking at themes. Lastly, document analysis, policy parallels and variations, relative to each other and student experience, are described.

Two instruments were used in this study-interview questions and an observation guide for the document analysis. Interview questions were developed to encourage the participant to tell their story about their experiences, and for the researcher to pose follow-up questions where clarity was needed. Utilizing an observation guide, a document analysis using the anti-discrimination policies from both institutions was completed. This document analysis also

revealed the predetermined themes that were also sought in the participant interviews and common language between the two.

### **Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents**

The study called for interviews of 4-8 students; 11 participants answered the call for the study. The 8 who were chosen were due to their availability to be interviewed, willingness to participate throughout the duration of the study for the follow up meeting after transcription and coding, and diversity.

The research was completed with eight students- four from the public institution and four from the private institution; five males (including one transgender male) and three females participated. Participant one (P1) was an African-American male who identified as gay and Baptist; he was a senior at the private institution. Participant two (P2) was a white, Catholic, bisexual female from the public institution who was classified as a junior. Participant three (P3) was a white transgender male who completed full sexual reassignment and was a graduating senior at the public institution. Participant four (P4), an African-American gay male who identified as Baptist, attended the public institution and also was a graduating senior. Participant five (P5) was a practicing Buddhist, a Vietnamese lesbian, and was a sophomore at the private institution. The sixth participant (P6) was an African-American female lesbian who was a junior at the private institution. Participant seven (P7) was a white gay male of the Catholic faith and a sophomore at the public institution. Finally, participant eight (P8) was an African-American junior at the private institution who identified as Baptist and bisexual. Table 4.1 shows the demographics of the participants in the order that they were interviewed.



Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Race	Black	White	White	Black	Viet- namese	Black	White	Black
Sex	Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male
Religion	Baptist	Cath- olic	Catholic	Baptist	Buddhist	Cath- olic	Catholic	Baptist
Sexual Identity	Gay	Bisex- ual	Trans male	Gay	Lesbian	Lesbian	Gay	Bisex- ual
Academic Classifica- tion	Senior	Junior	Senior	Senior	Sopho- more	Junior	Sopho- more	Junior
Institution	Private	Public	Public	Public	Private	Private	Public	Private

### Research Questions and Associated Hypotheses

Research Question I- What, if any, hardships (physical, emotional, or mental) do LGBT students who identify with an organized faith or religion who attend college face? Hypothesis I- Hardships faced by LGBT students on college campuses will include physical and emotional pain, issues with safety, and questioning of their authentic self.

Research Question II- How is the experience of an LGBT student at a private faith-based higher education institution both similar and different from that of an LGBT student who attends a public liberal arts institution? Hypothesis II- It can be expected that all students experience hardships, regardless of campus type; however, it can be suggested that those LGBT students who attend private faith-based schools will experience more adversity due to the emphasis of religion and the negative undertones regarding the intersection of religion and sexuality.

Research Question III- Does institutional policy regarding LGBT students have an influence on student experience? Hypothesis III- Institutional policy will have bearing on student

experience. The purpose of policy is to govern behavior; therefore, spelling out the appropriate rules to govern behavior and negative consequences can curb negative intentions when improper behavior is displayed. It can be assumed that effective policies will influence a student's experience.

### **Analysis of Data for Research Question I**

To provide the data to adequately disprove or approve the hypotheses of research questions one and two, a systematic and effective breakdown of interview responses was needed. Interview transcriptions were coded and then discussed with participants. To ensure accuracy, participants and the researcher engaged in conversation; to ensure that the researcher was on point she asked the question, "Is what I think you are saying what you really mean?" Once the codes were deemed accurate, centralized themes were designated. Themes that were expected to emerge during the research process were clearly prominent, such as emotional pain and rejection, physical safety, and authentic self; however, the two themes of perception and faith beliefs emerged within student responses. Each theme was addressed to show how it emerged from each respondent; therefore, respondents who gave insight into the themes, and some direct quotes, were listed throughout the analysis.

#### Emotional pain and rejection

Every participant's interview transcript provided some insight into emotional pain caused at his or her institution. P1, P5, P6, and P8 stated that their emotional pain came from an adult or other administrator on campus, while P2, P4, and P7, stated that their emotional pain had come or could have been perceived to come from their peers. Only P3 indicated that he had experienced emotional pain from both an administrator/faculty member on campus and other students. Of all of the students from the private institution who experienced emotional pain from

an administrator, all but one believed the act to be one of coincidence. P6 stated that she was forced to leave a convocation after she refused to change her attire from pants to a skirt or a dress, while P8 believed that he was discriminated against for a leadership role because he was openly bisexual. Only P1 stated this his emotional pain was the indirect action of a faculty member making a comment to another gay male, unaware that there were others who identified as gay in the room.

Regarding rejection, students who attended the private institution responded that school administration did not specifically call attention to their sexuality, but that they would not hesitate to do so. Acting in accordance with school expectations of being LGBT, such as the dress code, caused administrators to stop support of a student according to P1, P6, and P8. Conformity within the private school sector was prevalent; students thought that they were generally accepted by their parents and peers, but thought that school personal only tolerated them. With the public institution participants, similar experiences were shared such as rejection among adult family members, especially regarding students' attending church (P4 and P3). All respondents believed that students were expected to behave in accordance within religious realms, specifically within the church. P4 stated, "Do you think I can walk in a church like this?... they make me dress right. Like a whole deacon." The participant referred to how his style of clothing was not acceptable to wear to his Baptist church. Queer theory, as discussed in the theoretical framework in Chapter 1, surfaced here with regards to his family's feelings. The "they" to whom he referred were the matriarchs of his family, who did not want him to call further attention to himself due to his attire. Queer theory seeks to disrupt what is seen as stable within traditional sex and gender roles. The participant made the connection that his everyday attire would be considered deviant and too risqué for his church.

## Safety

The threat to physical safety surfaced in one out of seven participants. P2 had a physical experience regarding what could be considered as a minor assault: “I tried to walk out of the locker room and she smacked my but and licked her tongue out at me”. Four participants made mention of harassment or the threat of harassment (P1, P4, P8 and P7). It is important to point out that participants P3 and P5 mentioned safety in regards to staying out of harm's way; these students tried to be proactive rather than reactive to the campus climate.

Three participants from the public school (P4, P7, and P8) mentioned how social media exacerbated issues between heterosexuals and those who identified as LGBT with social media users sometimes threatening violence. In each case the threat of physical harm came from their other students on campus and was based on the notion that their peers were angry about their sexual identity. The framework of queer theory is reintroduced here in regards to relationships of power; heterosexual peers were more inclined to remove power from those who did not fit the traditional roles of masculinity or femininity.

The experiences with social media were prevalent among the participants from the public institution; the harassment came solely from a social media platform that allowed users to remain anonymous. Participant P4 threatened physical harm to a peer who used social media to call him a derogatory term, and he described a classroom disagreement between the two.

## Authentic Self

A person is a compilation of varied experiences, especially on a college campus where there are opportunities for various social experiences. Keeping with the theoretical framework of queer theory, the data from the interview responses showed that, in many instances, participants consciously destabilized the characteristics of what it means to be male or female. Authentic self

was prevalent among seven of the eight participants, with P7 being the only person who still had trouble coming to terms with his sexuality. The seven participants were unapologetic about the intersection of their religion and sexuality, and were not afraid to be who they were on campus.

It is important however, to revisit P7's statement about not only queer theory, but also intersectionality: "I'm gay and I'm Catholic. End of story. One doesn't have to be tied to the other, does it? Honestly I have more anxiety about being gay in life itself than I do about being gay and Catholic." This sentiment of wanting to just be one or the other was evident throughout the interview with P7, as he struggled with how being gay has stopped him from joining a fraternity and his perception of what he assumed his friends and family thought about his future. The theoretical framework of intersectionality in higher education is not positive or negative; however, this participant thought that there was no neutrality and that the intersection of his religion and sexuality was largely negative.

While the previously mentioned themes related to hardships of LGBT students, the emergent themes showed similarities with the participants' shared feelings. The placement of these themes within the chapter was intentional, as the data can be used in relation to Research Questions I (description of hardships) and Question II (shared experiences).

### Perception

While the majority of respondents can be categorized as self-actualized, they all had negative perceptions of how they thought people responded to them. For example, P3 stated, "People tell me that God does not love me", while P4 stated, "You know you and other people have looked at somebody and from their clothing have been like 'he gay'". P5 stated, "I just don't think people expect me to be a lesbian because I am Vietnamese", and P8 said, "They just would not let an openly gay or well bisexual student be president of the junior class." Perhaps P7

gave the best glimpse into the perceived thoughts of others when stating, “And because I’m gay what I don’t like is people think I have a certain set of morals and political beliefs that are absolutely contrary to what is true to me.”

P7’s statement was striking relative to queer theory framework mentioned in the physical safety theme. The “normal” of heterosexuals should be challenged to take away the power that has traditionally been used to victimize LGBT persons. We see how the participants generalized negative perceptions from heterosexuals towards LGBT persons. This is substantiated by negative thoughts of belongingness described by the participants and how the participants recognized a growing need for self-reliance within the LGBT community. This negative notion of belonging was validated by some of the participants’ statements: P1 stated, “If you go around being all flamboyant nobody is going to support you...they don’t want administration or anybody telling them to tone it down”; P2 said, “Who was going to take me seriously?”; P3 stated, “...people tell me God does not love me.”; P5 said, “I wanted it to be more, but I knew she wouldn’t accept me.”; and P8, “...everyone is all friendly friendly in my face but they talk about me behind my back.”

Two participants encountered situations and took social justice stances for themselves, although neither followed the formal student grievance policy. P3, the transgender male, and P8, the bisexual male, advocated for themselves in the face of discrimination. P3 threatened to call the American Civil Liberties Union to seek justice when a peer reported him due to a housing issue. When P8 felt as if he was discriminated against for a leadership position at school, he challenged the administrators by contesting the final results of the election and demanded a recount of the votes. While conversing with participants to gain clarity of their perceptions, I

noted that while they believed family and friends love them, they also believed that these perceptions were true for those who were not directly associated with a LGBT person.

### Reflections on Faith

If respondents thought that people in general responded to them negatively, it would be easy to understand that their reflections on how their faith perceived them would also be negative. Examples included: P3, who said, “Catholics much prefer you to be gay than trans and they are such hypocrites, rapists who like boys and the other priests refuse to condemn them”; P5, “I follow the Dalai Lama and he says being a lesbian isn’t right”; and P6, “They may be quietly accepting, or quietly not accepting it. That is the question I would like answered.”

The most striking faith revelations came from the LGBT Baptist students: P1, “I know my religion and sexual identity contrast. I think I am who I am and it’s hard to be that way”; P4, “And you a woman, you know you can’t wear tight (expletive) to them southern Baptist churches. They will throw one of them prayer cloths over you quick...it’s any church they don’t want you to come in their holy place looking gay”; and P8 “...back home in Texas I go to a megachurch and I’m in the choir and everyone is all friendly in my face but talk about me behind my back...I would say here (the school) is no different from a church...love the sinner hate the sin.”

It is important to note that the participants only mentioned religion when the initial research question or the follow up questions mentioned it. None made a positive statement regarding how their religion viewed them, although six of the eight stated that they still participated in religious activities and holidays, and attended church on a regular basis.

## **Analysis of Data for Research Question II**

Commonalities and differences between student experiences can also be explained by the theme of school culture. Of interest was that in many instances, the participants said the exact words and phrases regarding student acceptance and school perception. Words such as love, respect, and tolerance appeared a total of twenty-two (22) times throughout the interview process.

Participants from the public institution reported problems with a specific social media platform at their school, but social media was never brought up among private school participants. Only one participant said he/she experienced discrimination from faculty/staff at the public institution, while three students from the private institution reported some type of faculty/staff discrimination, either direct or indirect. All of the students from the private institution spoke about the culture of sexual identity at the school and mentioned that being gay was something that was never discussed from peer-to-peer or by faculty. Participants described the feeling as “something that is known but never discussed” as there were openly LGB persons but several students who were “still in the closet.” Participants from the public institutions did not report the same culture, stating that the LGBT persons were open about their sexuality on campus and that several faculty members considered themselves as allies.

Student concerns from the public institution mainly were concerned with how other students treated them, while student concerns from the private sector focused on how they felt the institution quietly viewed their sexuality. At the public institution, only one participant reported discriminatory claims by the school faculty/ staff. P3 stated that he encountered issues with housing when he requested and was granted a private room, was given a roommate later on, and then was reprimanded when the roommate made false claims about him. P3 also encountered



a worker at the health center who questioned him about the hormone therapy he was undergoing and subsequently refused to treat him. P5 stated that her advisor tried to offer unsolicited counseling regarding faith when she asked to be removed from a class that contained another student in whom she was interested. All but one of the private institution participants mentioned having active social lives, and only three reported emotional or verbal conflicts, but no physical conflicts. There was one physical altercation at the public institution, but all other conflicts were either emotional or verbal.

### **Analysis of Data for Research Question III**

Higher education institutional policies that are directly related to the student body are put in place to establish collegial relationships and to govern student behavior. Anti-discrimination policies seek to establish equality for all students and prevent discrimination and harassment, but do they work? To effectively test the hypothesis of Research Question III, a document analysis process was employed and then a comparison was made of the data from the analysis to the data of the interview responses. A breakdown of information from document to document is presented (source and content) and followed by an analysis of the document to student experience (themes and connections). Each subheading was used as a heading when completing the document analysis worksheet.

#### Source

The anti-discrimination policies of both institutions can be found online on each school's website; the public institution's document is on the general school website and its safe space page and the private institution's document is in the online student handbook. The "safe space" refers to those persons who have attended a voluntary sensitivity training conducted by the university and identify as allies to the LGBT community. The intention is that each student

would sign a print version of the private institution policy and that the signed copy would be kept on file. There is no named author or draft/revision date on either document.

### Content

The policy from the private institution was 3 printed pages while that of the public institution was 1 ½ printed pages. The introductions of the documents differed in that the private institution provided information about Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sexual discrimination by any school receiving federal funding, while the public institution's three-sentence introduction made no mention of Title IX, although the school received federal funding. Both introductions stated that their mission was to free the institution of discrimination. The language of the introductions differed in how the policy was used. The private institution included broad statements regarding whom the policy protected: The school seeks to maintain a learning environment free of discriminatory conduct based on gender. The public institution used more specific terms: ...to make (school name) a safe and inclusive place for all students regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Both policies used the same language, stating, discrimination is prohibited and will not be tolerated and gave grievance procedures for filing a report should discrimination happen. In the event of discrimination or harassment, the private institution provided six contact people and their phone, email, and office location information. The public institution listed the names of 41 people on a "safe space location directory", although with no phone numbers were included. The procedure indicated that a complainant should go to the department where the grievance originated but provided no further instruction, a possible deterrent for those who experienced the discrimination. The report filing process was more detailed for the private institution, including a detailed step-by-step guide that included counseling and sexual assault resources. Also included in the discrimination

policy for the private institution was information about cyberbullying and online attacks. The public institution document included online links for the campus student LGBT organization, and other local advocacy groups. Both documents defined acronyms and the language was relatively easy to understand for any college student. Neither the private nor the public institution made any reference to religion in their documents.

### Themes

The theme of safety was prevalent in the private institution's policy. The document stated that the school engaged in full reporting of sexual violence, and reports of stalking, dating or domestic violence. This provided valuable information not only for LGBT students, but also for heterosexual students. Safety at the public institution was denoted by the safe space and by the allies who were listed at the end of the document. The theme of belongingness was present in both policies but was not present in participant interviews. LGBT persons did not think they belonged, but both policies painted a demand for an inclusive environment. Both documents wanted to make the LGBT student feel welcome, with the public institution using the word "ally" and suggesting that LGBT students would find refuge with those who displayed an ally sticker. The private school's document showcased belongingness by explicitly stating that persons were welcome in both educational programs and activities and that it was extended to students and faculty or staff as well.

### Connections

The researcher's first connection was that of the cyberbullying and online attacks that were addressed in the policy of the private institution. While participants from the public schools mentioned a problem with social media bullying, no one from the private institutions reported

any issues with social media. It would be naive to think that social media bullying did not occur at all on the private institution campus; one could postulate that this policy curtailed bullying.

Another connection was the mention of the allies and safe space in the public institution's document. Three of the four participants stated that they belonged to an advocacy group that was represented on the document's list. All participants who belonged to an advocacy group reported at least one advantage of being a member of the group.

Several concerns need to be addressed in response to Research Question III and the complexity of the document analysis and the participants' interviews. First, all participants from the private institution who had some knowledge of the policy only knew that it existed because they were required to sign it; conversely, three participants from the public institution who knew about the policy only knew of it because of the advocacy group to which they belonged. The participant from the public institution who did not belong to the advocacy group had no knowledge of the policy.

Second, students tried to be resourceful when dealing with some issues that were covered under the anti-discrimination policy. In reviewing the interview data, students indicated that they reported experiences that dealt with school campus issues, with both peers and faculty, and that could have, and should have, been reported using the grievance policy. Three participants stated that they were reluctant to make a report when dealing with a faculty or staff member, and three said that they would not make a report if discrimination or assault involved a peer.

Third, determining whether or not the policy is effective is twofold and highly subjective due to the limited number of students who used the policy's grievance procedure. Only one student (P3) reported using the grievance procedure and only did so when he was forced to because a complaint had been filed against him.

The lifeline of this research was the narrative interviews of the participants. Without knowledge of participant experiences, analyzing anti-discrimination documents to find effectiveness would be null and void. The research was entered not only to get answers but also to tell the stories of the participants with fidelity. The chart and diagram in this chapter provides insight into only who the participants were but also what they felt and thought. Direct quotes pulled from the interviews supported the prevalent themes and were integral in the comparisons and interpretations of the document analysis.

## **CHAPTER V: INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Morality in religion seeks to regulate behavior. When a person deviates from regulated behavior, angst can cause a dissonance between the person's spiritual beliefs and their personal desires. This study had several layers, the first of which was to discover if this personal angst translated to public and private higher education faith-based institutions among LGBT persons; the second layer sought to discover if the experiences of LGBT persons were the same across campuses, and the third sought to identify if school anti-discrimination policies somehow lessened negative behavior towards LGBT students. By highlighting the experiences of students using their own words, coupled with the content of schools' anti-discrimination written policies, the researcher identified problematic trends regarding the sexuality and religion of LGBT students, and if the policies created by the schools had any bearing on students' experiences.

The literature review gave insight into what it means to be religious and LGBT, without the phenomenon of attending college. In reality, simply identifying problems with the treatment of LGBT persons in college is not enough. Factors such as housing, extracurricular activities, athletics, and student organizations must be considered. Little literature addresses the emergence and use of anti-discrimination policies within school systems, although they exist at various institutions. In reviewing the literature, a plethora of policies surfaced that regard the workplace which would work for LGBT faculty members, but not for students. The review of literature was a basis for the development of the document analysis worksheet.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

Using the data collected and described in Chapter 4, findings and interpretations of correlating theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 1 are presented thematically. Table 5.1 shows the themes that were present in the participant interviews.

Table 5.1 Themes From Participant Responses

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Emotional pain and rejection	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical safety/harassment		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Authentic self	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Perception		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reflection of faith		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
School Culture	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓

### Emotional pain and rejection

All participants experienced some emotional pain or rejection that was directly linked to being LGBT. At the private institution the emotional pain or rejection in each instance involved faculty or staff. Students described that the major problem at the school was their needing to “put up a front”; for example, when behaviors or attire was thought to bring shame to the school as a whole, there were consequences; however, when those same behaviors were done peer to peer, there was no fallout. Participants explained in depth the issues regarding proper attire (dresses instead of pants at a convocation) and public perception from administrators who deemed their sexuality inappropriate to serve in a leadership position. For example, in regards to leadership positions; P8 stated, “They would not let an openly bisexual student be president...I wanted to contest the votes.” When students from the public institution described their situations there were instances regarding staff and peers. P7 described his reluctance to join the fraternity because, “I knew I wasn’t going to fit in when they stated talking to girls”, while P3 stated, “Someone in the infirmary told me she wouldn’t help me because I might have a gay disease”, and P4 regarded a trip to an on-campus function as, “They didn’t want fags at their party.” There was no mention of religious undertones in any of the public institution participants’ responses; therefore, religion

was not a factor regarding student experience at the public institution in terms of faculty or peer interaction.

Only one participant from the private faith-based institution described emotional pain regarding a peer; however, it was due to the participant's feelings toward her peer and the fact that she did not think she would accept her advancements if she let her know of her sexuality. P5 mentioned, "I wanted it to be more but I knew she wasn't attracted to women." In that case, there was no evidence of a religious undertone. Regarding faculty and staff at the private institution, there was always a religious implication present.

The theme of rejection was prevalent and concerning. Meyer's (2003) research showed that LGBT persons who experience high levels of rejection are eight times more likely to attempt suicide, six times more likely to report high levels of depression, and three times more likely to use illegal drugs. This emotional pain can have detrimental effects on students, and having specified counselors to address the needs of LGBT students could prove beneficial to their mental health. Operating under the counseling theory of existential therapy, students will know that life has meaning even under painful situations and that life can be faced directly without anxiety or worry (Wong, 2015). Counselors trained to handle depression and suicide could prove beneficial to LGBT students on college campuses. If students felt comfortable going to counseling centers, the trained professionals could help them find resources to cope with their situations.

### Physical safety

In this study, physical safety was not a significant concern for participants at either institution; only one student mentioning a physical assault of any type. The assault on P2 in the locker room during one of her physical education classes left her feeling as if she could no longer



return to her class: "...as I walk by she grabs my left but cheek...I was so uncomfortable...I would only go back to the class like every other week...I ended up finishing with a B in aerobics."

Harassment was prevalent, especially at the public institution. No one from the private institution mentioned social media harassment but face-to-face and harassment via social media was prevalent among students from the public institution. Students stated that Yik-Yak was the preferred method of hate speech that incited the harassment. P4 stated, "They get on something called Yik-Yak and talk about you. They talk about all the gays and the black people and the Mexicans on there." P7 mentioned, "Yik Yak internet trolls make everything worse" and P2 said, "Problems exist because the same people get on social media and talk about the blacks, gays, queers..."; during the follow-up session when asked to what social media she was referring P2 responded, "Yik-Yak." Students who committed the online harassment offenses used the anonymous platform where they would not be caught bullying, therefore hindering those who would report them from using the grievance policy. From the statements given by the students and the platform where the bullying took place, it can be concluded that students who harassed their peers did so of their own free will, yet whether or not it was motivated by religion is inconclusive.

Students thought they could harass the LGBT students because they thought they were powerless. Power relationships are often conceptualized by sexuality due to homophobia. For example, heterosexual men most often think of gay men as feminine, inferior, or overly emotional (Strayhorn & Tillman, 2013). In many heterosexual relationships, the man is believed to have power in the relationship. LGBT persons are often seen as minorities, people of an optional lifestyle who are easy targets, but queer theory seeks to disrupt heterosexuality as

normal or natural (Escoffier, 1992). By using queer theory we can agitate this power to eliminate maltreatment towards LGBT persons that is defined by gender categories or sexual identities. Hegemonic masculinity is the common or dominant practice of males within a social context. According to Connel and Messerschmidt (2005), the study of hegemonic masculinity has been used within feminist accounts of patriarchy and sociological models of gender regarding men. This idea of different classes of masculinity can be perceived as a direct link to homophobia and heterosexual men's violence/prejudice toward gay and transgender men.

### Authentic self

All participants except one were fully conscious and embraced their sexuality and mentioned its challenges. P7 mentioned, "I'm still struggling with the notion of being gay" while other students said: "I like who I like"; "I don't hide who I am and I do consider myself to be flamboyant and sexy"; "I can't tell you the last time I wore a dress...I keep my hair in a fade...so yeah people know about me"; "I finally feel like I know who I am since the gender reassignment"; "I'm very much religious and I'm very much gay." These participants embodied that being authentic in everyday life was described by student dress, social activism on campus, and personal social lives. Religiously speaking, all but two of the participants regularly attended their places of worship. While students were asked to explore and share two parts of their identity, all of the participants had a unique set of identities and value sets through which they have worked.

LGBT students can have a difficult time sharing their sexual orientation with others. Strayhorn & Tillman's (2013) "Queering Masculinity: Manhood and the Black Gay Men in College" supported this understanding by reminding us that African-American men find themselves marginalized and rejected by those upon whom they rely the most (family members,

friends, clergy) when they publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation. However, this is not a phenomenon that is limited to black gay males. Moore (2006) addressed the plight of black lesbians who do not dress or behave in a culturally feminine manner. Moore (2006) described how even within the black community the harshest and most hostile language (“bulldagger”, “stud”, or “funny”) is reserved for those lesbians who present themselves less than feminine. LGBT students may feel more isolated in their personal and familial relationships and, as a result, they may not feel comfortable talking about mental health matters or violence in their relationships for fear of potential rejection if they share their sexuality.

### Perception

Negative thoughts of belongingness and how people from the outside viewed the participants were consistently mentioned in response to the first interview question. Responses included: (P3) “They all say the Bible says it is wrong”; (P8) “If I tell a female I’ve been with dudes too they call me gay, they don’t call me bisexual and they tell me I’ll be following my religion if I just liked boys but never slept with any”; (P2) “Just as much as people are open about who they are, there are people who are just as open about hating them, people will always tell you it is a sin”; and (P7) “They would suspect something when I didn’t engage with girls at the frat house...I figure eventually they would find out and put me out of the frat house.”

Belongingness was always associated with the church and negative views were always associated with people whom they felt did not know them well. What was perplexing was that although participants spoke of the negative thoughts of belongingness within church, seventy-five percent of them still participated in religious activities or gatherings. Walsh (1997) described this as response to religious indoctrination. He takes that stance since families promote religion through tradition, and as these get passed down inadvertently from generation to generation,

children adopt their religious beliefs before they fully gain critical thinking skills. Then that fear of rejection from going against those beliefs can lead to alienation from and stress on family bonds. The expectancy of discrimination can lead to higher levels of stress and a decrease in mental health (Almeida et al., 2009) and employing existential therapy could allow one to delve into the perceived discrimination. Existential therapy can be used as a way to work through negative expectations that are perceived from others rather than a way to establish specific expectations (Langdridge, 2008).

### Reflections on faith

Employing critical race theory was important, as neither the white nor Vietnamese respondents mentioned negativity toward them from people within their churches. Race and gender are often interlocked when discussing intersectionality and the notion of religion and sexuality is often lost. Christianity is a part of American culture although historically Christian groups have denied access and respect to various groups of people. Persons often follow the religion of their parents, rather than determining if their personal beliefs fit their inherited faith. Religion seems to function differently than class, race, or gender, making the intersectional analysis seem more difficult than the other sectors relative to being one's authentic self. CRT focuses on how social institutions (in this case, the black church) may stunt the empowerment of various minorities (LGBT persons, gender minorities). Black churches are the cornerstone of African-American communities and they have historically opposed same-sex marriage and LGBT activism. Pastors have tried to deter LGBT persons from the wrath of God by teaching that He punishes those who are unfaithful to his teachings. But here lies the worst kept secret within the black church; the commonality of persons within the church who identify as gay, openly or not, is high (Schneider & Roncolato, 2012). Pastors speak negatively about and

advocate against LGBT persons, yet “don’t ask don’t tell” is prominent within the black church, and allows parishioners to attend church and participate musically for entertainment and for tithing. LGBT persons who are musicians often feel that hypocrisy and exploitation lives within the black church, and they are torn between believing that their sexuality is a sin while wanting to fellowship with those who share their faith and the intolerance of other homophobic church parishioners. From P8: “So I know according to the word I’m wrong. And it is hard to be that way and want to be faithful to the Lord. I’m very much religious and I’m very much gay...”

Although she stated that no one within her church community had done anything to make her feel ashamed or hurt, one Catholic participant mentioned the scandal of priests engaging in sexual acts with children, specifically male alter boys, and called out their hypocrisy. The issue of acceptance varies widely across Catholic parishes and dioceses. Some are welcoming of LGBT parishioners; however, those tied to Catholic schools for educational purposes are more likely to be conservative (Roden, 2013). These parishes may have a no tolerance policy for being LGBT and will not hire LGBT staff. Michele Dillon (1999) wrote that the intolerance of LGBT persons is due in part to traditional Roman Catholic teaching that the purpose of marriage is to multiply the earth (bear children) and that can only happen naturally between a man and a woman.

### School Culture

Downing (2013) mentioned that an important factor in college culture is that of support services helping those who initiate the need. The data shows that hardships were common between LGBT persons at both schools, yet those who experienced the hardships were different. As mentioned in Chapter 4, love, (dis)respect, or (in)tolerance occurred numerous times in conversation with all of the participants. In each instance the participant was mentioning what

was lacking at their school. Examples included: (P7) “Oh absolutely, it’s the older folks who are keeping it up and teaching the intolerance”; (P1) “We are at a Catholic school and they teach you about love and respect but the faculty doesn’t do that”; and (P3) “I’m open about who I am and what I’m going through, but there isn’t a need for the disrespect.” Public institution students used the words love and tolerance 12 times, while the word respect was used 10 times and was used more often among private school participants. Public institution students only felt loved within their LGBT organization and did not feel as though their peers outside of the group respected them. These students credited their LGBT alliance group as the place where they felt safe and to which they first would report any discrimination instance.

The tight-lipped culture regarding LGBT students at the private institution was evident in student feelings and experiences. Private institution LGBT students knew that they lived freely with their sexuality, as long as it did not bring negative attention to the school or the school’s religious teachings- henceforth the tolerance piece. The faculty and staff members of the private school showed intolerance when they believed that their religious convictions were being tested.

Guiterrez et al. (2012) mentioned “administrators should demonstrate their commitment to cultural competence and faculty diversity by modeling skills and behaviors that can be emulated”(p. 217). The text was referring to female faculty of color, but why cannot the same be done for LGBT students? The work of inclusion must be done from the top down where school culture is established.

### Document analysis

The anti-discrimination policy at the private institution was more extensive than that of the public institution. Its length, language, and access to those who can enforce the policy, were explained in greater depth than the policy of public institution. The general public institution

campus community did not know that the policy existed. Those participants who were familiar with an advocacy group where the anti-discrimination policy directly benefited them were the only ones who were knowledgeable about the policy. Only one person made a complaint using the grievance procedure outlined in the anti-discrimination policy, with favorable results, so we can assert that the grievance procedure positively served students.

At the private institution, the students were mandated to sign a statement that they had read and understood the anti-discrimination policy, even if they had not actually read it. The private institution included a subsection regarding social media, which contributed to and supported the fact that none of the participants from the private institution reported harassment via social media, unlike numerous reports from the public institution. No one from the private institution used the grievance procedure, and therefore its effectiveness was inconclusive.

The public institution lacked when providing contact information as to where students could report discrimination. A list of names and locations is not adequate and can cause undue stress to a person who is undergoing a disturbing experience. The policy indicated that the claim should be made with the department where the complaint originated, but begs the question of what to do if the allies on the list are not associated with the department. Or, what if the occurrence did not clearly happen in a particular department? Additionally, nothing indicated that the anti-discrimination policy was for students and could not be applied to faculty and staff as well; however, faculty members were in clear violation of the policy at both institutions.

## **Conclusions**

### Research Question I

LGBT students on private-faith based campuses are more likely to face emotional hardships from the faculty and staff specifically related to religion and theology, rather than from peers. LGBT students at public, liberal arts institutions face hardships; however, religious undertones are not prevalent among the faculty and staff or peers.

Religion factored into student experiences at the private institution regarding faculty interaction only. All participants from the private institution described the veiled silence regarding the presence of LGBT persons on campus; however, the unwritten rules of religion and sexuality governed the treatment of LGBT persons by faculty members at the institution. Considering peer-to-peer interaction, religion was not a factor regarding harassment or discrimination. In fact, harassment and discrimination among peers at the private institution was minimal in instances where it could be proven.

### Research Question II

Discriminatory practices occurred at both the public and private institutions; however the practices were more prominent with the faculty and staff at the private faith-based institution and more abundant with peers at the public institution. This behavior was attributed to the students at the private institution operating under the veiled silence regarding sexuality that often is seen in religious practices, and specifically the Catholic and Baptist religions. As long as institutional policies were not challenged, LGBT students were left alone. While experiences from students between the two campuses were dissimilar, feelings that emanated from different situations were similar.



### Research Question III

The data presented two circumstances where institutional policy had bearing on student experiences: 1) student harassment via social media and 2) knowledge of the policy means that students understand there are consequences to their actions. The private institution had a specific policy regarding discriminatory posts and harassment via social media that students were required to sign, so every student knew of the possible ramifications of violating that policy. At the public institution, there was no mention of a social media policy, and online student harassment was rampant. Thus such a policy only works when students have knowledge of it. Since every student was required to sign the policy at the private institution, they knew that processes were in place for reporting student-to-student conflict and conflicts due to sexuality diminished significantly.

### **Implications**

Results from this study imply several points to school leaders to consider. First, policy only works when people are knowledgeable of it. Disseminating information to students can curb discrimination on campus. Furthermore, the anti-discrimination policies should not only be examined, but the mission statement of the school should be also. These two elements should complement each other in regards to inclusiveness of the school setting.

Second, language should indicate that the policy is inclusive of the students and faculty and staff. Students who were victims of faculty discrimination did not think that they could file a grievance against an employee of the school. Grievance procedures must be in place and be accessible to students when they are victims of discrimination. Grievance procedures should follow the anti-discrimination policy and include modes of contact for the person who should take the complaint and file the report for investigation by the appropriate board. Programs and

services should be in place to teach tolerance but also to move towards acceptance and understanding of LGBT persons. Many colleges have religious institutions on or in close proximity to their campuses. Assuring that the religious leaders and parishioners accept LGBT persons will assist them in cultivating their faith journeys.

Lastly, collegiate counselors should be adequately trained to handle LGBT persons' emotional needs and should have an arsenal of resources available if a student discloses that he or she is a victim of discrimination. This policy would extend to other minorities and groups on the school campus. Counselors should work with Student Affairs, Chief Diversity Officers, multicultural centers, and campus advocacy groups to disseminate information regarding the mental health of students and should be proactive for victims of discrimination.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Often when we discuss intersectionality in academia, it includes race, gender, and socioeconomic status. While conducting this study and recognizing the various identities of the participants, future research questions arose relative to supporting the needs of LGBT students. White participants from the public institution mentioned that they knew it was harder for the African-American students on their campus who were gay, and that they tried to get them to join the school advocacy group; they would attend a meeting and would come back sporadically, but why? It would be beneficial to explore undertones of racism in the gay community among collegiate LGBT groups and what motive makes them join, stay, and participate in the groups. One participant mentioned that he felt he could no longer join a fraternal group due to his sexuality and another mentioned being harassed by fraternity members; however, the openly lesbian participant who was in the sorority stated she did not have any issues with discrimination within her chapter.

Another research project to consider is understanding differences in LGBT acceptance in Greek letter organizations. Lastly, the transgender male discussed his financial hardships and the affordability of his sexual reassignment surgery, prompting questions of socioeconomic status. What price do people really pay to become who they really are? And how does being a college student hinder that process? What support services, under legal ramifications, are offered to students at the health center regarding hormones and other physical treatment during a reassignment journey?

### **Summary**

Often we seek to answer and address social problems by using religion without fully recognizing religion's complexity. For example, lawmakers and other elected officials often create policy based on religious practice (i.e. conservative values that are rooted in religion) without fully investigating its impact on their constituents. Laws are often drawn up with religious undertones without recognizing that religion may play one role for the law's drafter that does not apply to the larger population. Many religions are guided by a set of rules that govern good or bad behavior, when conceptually, religion and morality should be thought of separately. Research showed that persons who identify with an organized religion are more likely to be charitable, even when they have lower income levels than their non-religious counterparts; however, just because one person who is religious gives more than someone who does not does not make the non-religious less moral than the religious person (Childress & McQuarrie, 1986).

The actions and philosophies of institutional leaders directly influence students. The campus climate has an impact on LGBT students' decisions to stay on a campus and comply or take their tuition dollars elsewhere. Although the American regard for LGBT issues and rights has shifted to more liberal thought, when leadership and administration at private-faith based

institutions transitions, new leaders and administrators must guarantee that they will keep the values of the institution intact during the transition in leadership. If there is no leader within the institution who sees the need to enact LGBT friendly policies and gets supportive people behind them, change takes longer to occur (Bottom, Gutierrez, & Ferrari, 2010). Administrators at religious institutions feel that their religious identity should remain and that organizational sustainability is important in understanding their commitment to their faith.

Students in high school look for places where they can flourish socially and academically without being judged. The actions and philosophies of institutional leaders have a direct influence on the students. A campus that does not have LGBT supportive policies, programs, and services and is not backed by its campus leaders, is not an inclusive environment for LGBT students. The research of this paper suggests that policies that do not support LGBT friendly environments are not truly diverse or inclusive. Leaders must look at their campuses to see what solutions fit the needs of LGBT students. LGBT students must feel comfortable at private-faith based institutions because, as members of the faith and tuition-paying students, they have a right to feel safe at the institution they are attending. This is essential to the overall mental-health of the student and it helps with recruitment of LGBT students who could be assets to the institution.

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## **APPENDIX A COPY OF CONSENT FORM**

- 1. Study Title:** Private vs. Public: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Experiences and the Congruence of Anti-Discrimination Policies
- 2. Performance Site:** Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College
- 3. Investigators:** The following investigators are available for questions about this study daily from 8:30-5:30 Shalonda Skidmore at 225-921-7413 or [sskidm3@lsu.edu](mailto:sskidm3@lsu.edu) OR Dr. Kenny Varner at [varner@lsu.edu](mailto:varner@lsu.edu).
- 4. Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of LGBT students who identify with an organized religion at a private, faith-based institution and a public, liberal arts institution. Campus experiences will then be compared to see if there are commonalities or any dissimilarity.
- 5. Subject Inclusion:** College individuals who are at 18-23 years of age, are classified as a sophomore or greater, who identify with an organized faith or religion, identify as LGBT, and attend one of the two institution of higher learning that are assessed for participants.
- 6. Number of subjects:** 4-8
- 7. Study Procedures:** The study will be conducted in three phases with the first two phases directly involving the participant. During the first phase there is an interview and the researcher codes a transcript of the interview. During the second phase, the coded transcript is brought back to the participant in order to ensure accuracy and that no assumptions regarding the codes were made on the part of the researcher. The third phase includes a document analysis of the institutions' anti-discrimination policy.
- 8. Benefits:** Participation is voluntary and subjects will not be compensated.

**9. Risks:** The only study risk is the inadvertent release of sensitive information found in the answers to the interview. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access. No information will be shared with your school, friends, family, or co-workers.

**10. Right to Refuse:** Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time.

**11. Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**12. Signatures:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb). I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

#### PARTICIPANT 1

***How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity?***

What is juxtaposition?

***The fact that your religion and sexual identity may contrast.***

I don't think my religion and sexual identity contrast, I think I am who I am and believe in what I believe in and that is it. The Lord said come as you are. This is me.

***In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?***

Well here, nobody really talks about being gay. It is just one of those things where you know that there are people who are but nobody openly goes around saying it. Nah. Cuz if you do go around being all flamboyant and shit, nobody is going to support you. You know how many gay people here are in leadership positions? They don't want administration or anybody telling them to tone it down or be like some other shit.

***So has that happened before? Where administration has confronted someone in a leadership position about being gay?***

Well not in my face but I don't doubt that it has or can't happen.

***Describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

Well I don't find being gay difficult really. I mean I have females all the time who I know are openly flirting with me or are overly friendly but I keep it platonic. Well there was this one time, it was me, my cousin who knows I'm gay or whatever who was visiting from the hometown who came down for Mardi Gras and we were hanging out.

***Female or male cousin and when did this happen?***

Female. And freshman year maybe my second semester.

*Gotcha, continue I'm sorry.*

Well yeah, so we were out and this chick who I knew had been kinda feeling me came over and was like trying to introduce herself or whatever. Basically she was just trying to see who my cousin was an if she was a threat. So I introduced my cousin and invited ol girl who likes me out. She declined, I guess after I introduced Jill\* as my cousin she wasn't worried about it anymore. But then Jill proceeds to tell her "Girl I'm not the threat he wants what we do." I could have slapped her. But you know then ol girl is really looking crazy and tripped out.

***So you would describe that experience as difficult and school related?***

Well it is school related because it happened on campus at the rec and ol girl asked like three of my friends if I was gay. So of course they told me she asked and of course they told her no. So I decided just to try something one day when I saw her at this Greek event and was acting like I was trying to holler at her. She was just like real hesitant and standoffish and downright rude. I mean I don't really care because I'm obviously not attracted to her but still, even when she was trying to be friendly and was all over me trying to get to know me I was never rude to her.

What's difficult is that no lie it hurt my feelings that she was so rude to me afterwards. To this day she was look at me in a very impolite way. Just straight awkwardness. And I don't like to be like that with people you never know who you might need in life.

***Have you tried just setting the record straight with her?***



Man and say what? I'm sorry for not telling you I was gay when you were acting like you liked me? Me being gay isn't her business. What should have been her business was just that I wasn't interested.

***Okay, fair. So think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.***

Well let me think...skip this question and come back. You have more?

***Well yes, so here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

Well shit where did you find this?

***It is online in your electronic student handbook.***

No way, they make us sign something that says we read our handbook but of course...

***Take a minute and review it.***

(Reads)

Man I've never had to file a complaint or nothing but I wonder if my friend knows about this. He could benefit.

***I would encourage you to share that with him.***

I will, I mean yeah what happened to him was foul. But I wasn't there I only heard about it. But yeah thinking about his situation I experienced something similar, not nearly as bad as his cuz I think they knew I would pop off but I did experience something.

***Tell me about it.***

So one day we had this opportunity to hear a guest speaker from Tulane. Black woman who worked there I guess she was a professor. She was speaking in our chemistry class about research opportunities. One of my classmates, man I can't stand rude people, said "Oh I didn't think they hired black people at Tulane" and our teacher, a nun can you believe it, said "Oh I don't think they allow gays in Heaven." Man its like you can hear the air being sucked out the room. Cuz like I said earlier there are people who are gay on campus but its like one of those don't acknowledge don't say things. But she went there. And I know besides myself and my rude ass classmate there were at least two other gay people in there. Man, I was so glad the speaker had already left. But still, we are at a Catholic school and they teach you about love and you tell a student that. Ridiculous.

***So when I asked earlier about administration confronting someone about being gay...***

I mean similar but not exactly the same but yeah she wasn't really confronting him but just calling him out but yeah still not cool at all. I can't stand rude people bruh. I will not be rude I will treat you with respect. I mean him and her were wrong that whole situation could have occurred differently.

***So when did this happen and about how many other students were in the room?***

Junior year for sure, cuz I remember it was for research as rising seniors and bout 20 maybe 25 of us in there.

***Okay, well do you have any questions for me or any other situations you want to add?***

Man nah I mean I'm cool you know, I haven't even had a relationship while being in college I just keep to myself and keep it pushing. I'll deal with that later. I mean but for the most part (school name) is a cool school. We don't really have too much going on around here although it

is Catholic. But I'm not Catholic but you know moms wanted me to go to a school close to home with a good reputation and so here I am.

***Okay, well I appreciate your time. I'll come back to you with a transcript of your answers that will have come codes written on them. We are going to go through those so that everything I code is what you really mean.***

Yeah ma'am I understand.

## PARTICIPANT 2

***How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity? In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?***

Well, here, people are pretty open. I think problems exist because people, the same people, get on social media and talk about blacks, gays, queers, and now with the political climate liberals, and Mexicans, I'm sorry Hispanics. So just as much as people are open about who they are, there are people who are just as open about hating them. But in regards to your first question, I think, as always, people will tell you oh its a sin, its a sin. I believe in God creating me like this and if he didn't think it was right he wouldn't let me be. And I've lived a pretty good life. I'm not hurting for anything outside of how I've sometimes been treated. So oh well. I believe in God and I like who I like.

***Describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

Whew, how much time do you have (laughs).

***Lots, as long as it takes***

Well, sophomore year, I had to take a damn physical education class. So I settled on aerobics. How hard could it be? Once a week class on Monday's get in get out. So, look at me, how I'm dressed I dress like this all the time. People call me "emo" before they say I'm a lesbian. But I'm there, in all black, and there is a femme who constantly licked her tongue out at me. Just would do it when nobody was watching. So it is good that we got to just go to the class in our workout gear and didn't have to use the locker room before or after. But one day I go in there to use the restroom. I use it, go back out the locker room and as soon as I open the stall there she is. I'm trying to avoid eye contact and as I walk by she grabs my left butcheek. Please tell me I'm not being to graphic.

***Oh no, carry on, please. But you use the word femme, tell me what that means.***

Femme is like a really pretty lesbian. So pretty people wouldn't consider her to be a lesbian.

***Okay...so I have questions about that but I want you to finish your story first.***

Yeah so after she grabs me I like don't even react besides just trying to get out of the locker room quicker. I never told anybody outside my immediate group of friends that story. But I was so uncomfortable. And it's so weird because that was the only place I've ever seen her. I've never seen her again since that class. But anyway I would only go back to the class like every other week. I finished an aerobics class with a B. How ridiculous. But I never wanted to be around her again, and she was always there when I went too, licking her tongue out.

So did you continue to go to the class, did you ever think to make a report? I'm getting ahead of myself here I have another question later on related to making reports.

Well I wasn't going to be the bisexual who made a report against a lesbian. Who was going to take me seriously. They probably would have thought I liked it.

***And when she would lick her tongue out to you, how many people would you say were in the class and was the instructor present?***

About 30 of us in the class and yeah but it's the gym and people are doing Tae-bo and taking the class really serious, nobody is paying attention to me in all black with black hair. I'm the weirdo. I'm just trying to get it over. And really I'm sure people did see but obviously nobody said anything and if they did, nobody did anything.

***So yes the instructor was present.***

Yes

***So you said that a femme was a person who is so cute that someone wouldn't think they were a lesbian. Some people would hear that and think that you think lesbians have a certain, what's the word I want to use...unfavorable look.***

Well, no. Just those pretty blondes who are traditionally seen as the sorority girls with the boyfriends. I mean don't get me wrong she was beautiful and there are lots of beautiful lesbians and bis but there are certain people who if you saw them you would automatically assume that they were not lesbian. It is just a generalization that is used in our community. No harm by it.

***Think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.***

Hmmm...religion and being bi has caused a problem at school? I don't think that has happened. I know I haven't even gone to church since like after confirmation when I came out to my parents. Yeah my dad wouldn't let me go to church after I told him I was bisexual. Then he tried to be like but you still like boys so maybe you will get married and everything still. I don't care. I still believe in God and the Holy Trinity and such but I'm not going to church. But I do think I'm going to Heaven.

***So it has caused problems at home?***

I wouldn't necessarily say problems, I would say conversation (laughs). Like you know I am a lesbian I have been with both men and women and my family, like all of my cousins are so close in age. They always ask me about it and my parents, especially my dad, hates to hear it. Says it is not something my younger sister needs to know is going on. I could give you lots of stories about what goes on in my house because I'm bi.

***Here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

So I do know about this policy because the group I go to they told me I could file a complaint but I wasn't going to. I got a lot of heat from the people in the group too because they said it didn't matter who did it. But the school is really big on gender discrimination. I don't know if I really consider this gender discrimination as much it is is assault.

***So you don't think you would know about the policy if it weren't for the group?***

Not at all.

***And you don't think your school would do anything if someone knew you had been assaulted?***

I don't think we are on their radar to worry about. Like I said earlier, all of the social media that is posted about us and blacks, and hispanics, and immigrants. They are trying to cool the tensions between us last! Its like its zero tolerance for racism and sexism but not for the gays.

***I really want to know more about why you would say that.***

We talk about it all the time in our group. People who go to the safe space and nothing happens but some vague reassurance and very few things go before the board for reprimand. The last thing I know of personally was when a transitioning male was assaulted at an off campus party. It was like the next semester when he finally completed the whole processes and went before the board. He got beat up, somebody grabbed my but and licked out their tongue at me. It is not worth it.

***Okay, fair enough. So I'm going to type up everything that was said since the interview questions and code this. Then I'll come back to you to see if you agree with the codes. I just want to make sure that what I'm thinking you meant you actually mean.***

Yeah

### PARTICIPANT 3

***How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity? In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?***

So I've had to deal with for so long people telling me that God does not love me and the people in my family praying for me because they want me to go to Heaven. So I mean they all say the Bible says it is wrong, nobody has ever been able to specifically point it out to me. So I don't know how much to agree or disagree. All I do is believe. I think at the end of the day though Catholics much prefer you to be gay than trans and they are such hypocrites, rapists who like boys and the other priests refuse to condemn them"

***Tell me what you mean by "you do not know how much to agree or disagree"***

Like since I have done the hormonal transition and the gender reassignment surgery I'm a man and I like females. I like females. So to me, that doesn't make me gay. I'm a normal man who likes women. I finally feel like I know who I am after the reassignment surgery.

***And you said "all you do is believe" do you mean that as in believe that you are not gay or-***  
No believe in God and in my religion and life after death, all of that.

***Describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

I don't know if I have a single most difficult experience. I've had several.

***So think of one that isn't related to religion because we will get to that later. And the one you remember most vividly because I want you to tell a story.***

I do think that my most difficult experience is when I couldn't afford to live off campus anymore and had to move back on campus and they wouldn't let me live in the male dorm. They wanted me to live with the females although I was transitioning over the summer. Like I had already had my top surgery and I was doing my paperwork for my bottom surgery. And I had my paperwork from doctors and all and was actively living as a man. I had moved off campus when I started actively living as a male because I just knew something like this would happen. But I couldn't afford my apartment without a roommate. Which was hard enough to find the first one who had graduated in December. So my money had to be saved up for my surgery. So I had to move back on campus or whatever. So I asked for a private room, just not to have a roommate so I wouldn't have to worry about anything crazy. Well that worked for about one or two weeks. Then I get a roommate. Who when she came in she thought I was the boyfriend of the person who is supposed to be her roommate. So I tell her I'm her roommate and of course I'm older, a junior at that time, and now this freshman little white girl who just gotten a room assignment in is living

with an woman who wants to be a man. Now how do you think that went? She went and filed a complaint on me to housing like I was the one who asked her to be put in there! I have to go plead my case to housing and of course the people who I told not to put me in a room with anyone else are now denying that any of this happened. I had to threaten to call the ACLU before they would reassign me to another room. Right, I was reassigned even though I was there first and the new room was still in the girls dormitory. I promised myself I would work as hard as I could so that that would absolutely have to be my last time staying on campus. I was not going back there after my reassignment surgery.

***So what do you mean by little white girl? As in very petite?***

She was smaller and younger than me.

***So housing-in all whom would you say was involved in this whole ordeal as it pertains to them.***

So the two persons who I originally asked to have the private room, then the big housing people I had to talk to to about her claims and the fact that I asked for a private room and received a roommate so that was about 4 more people.

***Would you consider them as understanding about your situation?***

I'm telling you I had to say I would have ACLU file a lawsuit in order for them to meet me halfway with another room. And then I was the one who had to move and it still wasn't to the male dormitory.

***Think about another specific experience, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.***

So I did have someone in the student infirmary one time tell me that she wouldn't help me because it was against her beliefs. She said she was a Christian and I told her "me too"

***Start from the beginning, why were you at the infirmary, when did this occur?***

Well I caught the flu in March of my freshman year. And so I was living on campus and went to the infirmary because my doctor in my hometown is 2 hours away. Well while I was there I had to tell the nurse what other drugs I was on and I told her that I was taking low dose testosterone as a part of my hormone replacement therapy. She said she didn't have to treat me because she could catch a gay person's disease. I told her she was the nurse and she didn't in fact have to treat me and I wanted one of the practitioners to see me, and that I was religious and I was fine. She then proceeded to tell me that I should be ashamed. Elderly white lady, who definitely needed sensitivity training. You would think that working in a school infirmary she would have seen it all but obviously I was an outsider. Well anyway she left, another nurse came in with the nurse practitioner and prescribed me the Tamiflu and wrote me an excuse for classes. No mention of my hormones, just very professional! I'm sure old white nurse told them what happened but they were professional and didn't bother me.

***Here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

I actually had to follow the grievance procedure with the housing incident but I went and made a complaint on my own with the nurse. But I didn't even know of this policy with the nurse. I just wrote an email complaint to the head of the multicultural association and then I think I included the dean of student affairs.

***In that instance did anyone follow up?***

Yeah I got an email saying that they would investigate the incident and put procedures in place to make sure it didn't happen again.

***Anything after that?***

Nothing.

***So when did you find out that there was a formal grievance procedure?***

When they made me do it when I was in trouble for no reason with housing.

***Who is they?***

Oh by that time I had joined the student org on campus and told the president who told the faculty advisor what was going on and he let me know what to do.

***So even though you were in the organization you still didn't know that this policy existed?***

Nope

***Interesting, just a few clarification questions if you don't mind. What is your timeline of living on campus to living off campus?***

I lived on campus all of freshman year and the first semester of my sophomore year, then I moved off campus and then back on campus the second semester of my junior year and then back off campus by the time I was a senior that fall.

***Any other housing incidents other than that one?***

No. Other stuff happened but it was just like harassment and people saying dumb stuff on campus.

***Like what? Explain if you don't mind. Remember everything is completely confidential.***

Like one time we were leaving class and I was the first one out the door of the mail building and this girl was like "Dude you should be holding the door open for us" or people being like "so you got your dick yet" You know I'm open about who I am and what I'm going through, no need to hide. If you ask I'm telling it. I mean but I don't just broadcast it without any solicitation. It's only when someone asks. But of course people talk and word gets around, it's a small campus. And people who I don't even know call me a "pussy" or just other lowlife stuff. You know I have enough to deal with with my family. Only a few of them support me, which are really my cousins, and I guess that's prepared me to let talk roll off my shoulder when it happened at school. Even though it's easier it doesn't make me feel any better. And I still go to church and stuff. Just not the one at home, at another one about an hour away from school where it's nondenominational and people only know me as a who I am now and not before.

***It's crazy, you say all of that and I want to ask other questions, but want to keep everything within the realm of the study. So all of this talk happened on campus?***

Yes, just talk through the years, on campus from people.

***Do you have any questions for me? What is going to happen is I'll come back to you with a transcript of your answers that will have come codes written on them. We are going to go through those so that everything I code is what you really mean.***

Yeah no I don't have any questions right now. Thank you for listening.

***Thank you for your time. I think what you are saying is important and needs to be addressed.***

#### PARTICIPANT 4

**How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity? In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?**

The what?

***The intersection or contrast between your religion and your sexuality.***

Honey do you think I can walk in a church like this?

***Have you ever tried to?***

Not with my grandmother and my momma! I don't even go to church anymore. Well yeah I do for Easter but they make me dress right. Like a whole deacon.

***What do you mean by dress right? Right now you are dressed in what by all accounts is considered traditional male clothing.***

Yeah but look at my skinny jeans. And sometimes I'll wear middriff tops and really loud colors. I aint never wore a dress and don't want to wear a dress. But I don't sag and wear oversized stuff like most dudes. I wear tight stuff. And you a woman, you know you can't wear tight shit to them southern Baptist churches. They will throw one of them prayer clothes over you quick.

{Both laugh}

***Describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

Well really nobody has gotten out of line with me at school. As they say you know punks know how to fight (laughs). But they like to get online and talk about you. Internet thugs that hide behind a computer screen. I aint got time for that shit. Ol stupid ass people. But they get on something called Yik Yak and talk about you. They talk about all the gays and the black people and the Mexicans on there.

***I've heard of Yik Yak before. So do you think anyone has ever talked about you on Yik Yak?***

I feel like every time they use the word flaming they are talking about me. Cuz I don't hide who I am and I do consider myself to be flamboyant and sexy. And I don't wear dresses like I said before but I do wear makeup. And I'll wear a wig if I go out and makeup like I said before.

***So going back to what you said about how you dress for church, you don't wear the makeup when you go.***

Hell no.

***So tell me about a time you just knew they were talking about you on Yik Yak.***

One time on Yik Yak they mentioned how the flamer with hot pants on didn't respect their mind in class. I know they were talking about me because I did get into it with a classmate earlier that morning. We had had an argument in class about when a presentation should be. I think may the teacher had let us decide whether we wanted the presentations before or after spring break. And he and I argued about it and the class got quiet and all that. So later anyway people decided like I wanted to. And I'm not on that mess so my boy later on the next day like texted me and said I heard they was talking about you on Yik Yak. So he sent me the screenshot. But your real name isn't on there. But anyway I feel like I had my receipts so I went to our next class and checked him about it. Of course he said no, but I did make a scene. So if it was him I knew he would keep my name out his mouth again.

***Truthfully speaking...that statement is vague and could have been about anybody.***

It was me. He tried to joke about the screenshot before I really got into his face. It was me.

***Think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.***

Well really nothing on campus has happened in my face. Well no one time I was at an on campus party hosted by some fraternity and one of the people threatened to spit in my face cuz they

didn't want fags at their party. Only real women who they could slide their dick into the front and not the back.

***Can you be specific about the time and who all were involved?***

Me, my friend Brad\*, and all the fraternity people. About six of them. We went dressed up, cute with makeup and stuff. I didn't even have a wig on. Just overalls, I think and a cutoff top. Just looking to enjoy their music and drinks. Wasn't nobody checking to be with them. I don't want you if you straight.

***Here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

Girl what is this and why do they even have this at this school (laughs). People not about to follow this! These kids do what they want to do.

***So you do not think the policy is enforced and you don't think it has helped you at school?***

No and hell no. Like I said before Yik Yak doesn't have your name so what could they do? And other than the fraternity stuff I mean I didn't report that. So that policy is of no use to me. I don't think they would have done them anything anyway. It was their party.

***So do you mind if we can go back to the conversation about you and church? I have one, maybe two questions.***

Yeah

***So why is it that you do not go to church more? Is it because of how they want you do dress?***

Well that's mostly it. Well, basically my family doesn't want me to call any more attention to myself. Its like ok everyone already knows you are gay. Why do you have to broadcast it more with how you dress.

***So do you think that is a problem, specifically with the black church?***

Why does it have to just be about the black church. I think it's any church they don't want you to come in their holy place looking gay. Don't bullshit. You know you and other people have looked at somebody and from their clothing have been like he gay. So if I dress gay and they don't want me at the church I'm not going.

***So how do you feel about religion?***

I feel like the good man made me like this so he knows and when I die he will be like OK I already know who and how you are.

***Well I certainly appreciate how candid you have been with me. So what happens now is I'll come back to you with a transcript of your responses that will have come codes written on them. We are going to go through those so that everything I code is what you really mean.***

Cool ya welcome

## PARTICIPANT 5

***How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity? In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?***

Vietnamese people are not really religious but I consider myself to be Buddhist and I practice Buddhism. I follow the Dalai Lama and he says being a lesbian is not right. I have never had sex but I know I like other females. I've been in this country in Georgia since I was fourteen years old and I came to this school to fast track myself into pharmacy school. The instruction has been



wonderful. No one has asked me about being a lesbian but if they did I would tell them. I just don't think many people know or really expect me to be. I'm just the quiet person I do my work and don't go out and just do what I'm supposed to so what the school says.

***Interesting, I thought Buddhist were pretty progressive.***

Well Dalai Lama is Tibetan Buddhist. I know I'm not from Tibet but that is what I practice. Me and my family.

***Very interesting so describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

Well I can't really help you here. Nothing has really happened bad to me. I know that there are gay people on campus but we don't say anything to them. Just respect. I respect everyone.

***So you have never had an experience on campus that directly relates to your sexuality?***

Well one time I joined a women's rally on campus. And like the week before at the organizational meeting we talked about the rally and a guy asked me if I was a feminist. I said I believed in equal opportunity for everyone regardless of race, and nationality, and sexuality. He asked why I had to say sexuality. And I felt myself get red in the face. So then he said 'What you that strong of a feminist that you like girls?' and somebody else said 'does she look gay to you?' And I was just quiet. I think it was harmless. The meeting went on. I was embarrassed because nobody has ever asked me that.

***Earlier you mentioned that if anyone had ever asked you then you would tell them. How or why was this situation different.***

There was no way I was expecting that question to come out when and how that it did. I was just caught off guard.

***So you identify as lesbian, but how many people actually know that?***

Not many? If I had to give it a number maybe 6 people. My mother, my older sister, the counselor at the school, you know the lady where I got your information from, and then a few friends from home. My mother knows and she is supportive of me but not of being a lesbian. She told me if I never had sex with a girl then I was not really a lesbian. She says that I should focus on becoming a pharmacist.

***So how do you know my friend the counselor? I think that will help you answer my next question. Think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participant***

Well I see the counselor because one time I did become close to this girl I liked. She is not a lesbian like I am. We studied chemistry a lot and became good friends. I wanted to be more, but I knew she wasn't attracted to me. I started experiencing severe anxiety whenever I was with her and extreme depression when I was not. My grades started dropping so I went to see my academic advisor and told her I thought I was depressed and she sent me to the counselor. That is when it all came out. But the counselor was talking to me like, she was giving me unsolicited advice about thinking of my sexual desires and asking me if I was sure about how I felt and I was uncomfortable

***And when was this?***

Last semester.

***Have your issues been resolved? Are you able to comfortably be around this person?***

Well we are not in the same class anymore. So now we really only see each other at school or department events. I am glad because I do not think I would have continued to handle the feelings well even with counseling.

***Here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

Well yes I do know of this policy. We have to sign stating that we read it from our handbook but no I never have had to use it. Don't know of anyone else either.

***Do you think in general your school would help someone if they were to endure discrimination?***

I think to avoid someone getting sued or hurting themselves you have to . Schools have to take everything seriously.

***Well thank you for your time-***

I feel like I didn't help you at all.

***No, I think every experience is unique so no one interview is like the other. I'm going to come back to you with a transcript and codes and we will review them together and I want you to tell me if you think what I coded was what you actually meant.***

Ok, yes, thank you.

#### PARTICIPANT 6

***How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity? In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?***

Well juxtaposition. I'm going to act like I know what that means and roll with my answer (laughs). I mean here at (school name) we don't talk about being a lesbian or gay or any of that. You just are and people leave you alone. End of discussion. We don't tell the nuns, we don't put your business out there. We just try to be a family like a black college should. But anyway as a lesbian, I dress predominately like a male though, so like I said, people know I'm a lesbian, but they don't tell me anything. I would have liked to have been born a dude. But you know its cool.

***What is your religion?***

Oh I'm sorry Catholic.

***And you say you dress like a male, is that all the time?***

All the time. I can't tell you the last time I wore a dress. Even for convocation. I haven't worn a dress and I've been fined for it too. I keep my hair like this in a fade and everything. So yeah people know. My family knows and everything.

***Describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

Um I wasn't allowed to go see a guest speaker because it was convocation attire and I refused to put on a dress. The last time they let me go to a convocation in pants and it was dress pants I was extremely presentable, but this time they wouldn't even let me in. So I was hurt cuz going see that guest speaker was a part of my grade for a class. So I made a D on the assignment. I wouldn't say it was difficult, hurtful was more like the right term. We are supposed to be a people of the word and of God and loving. And I didn't feel loved.

***When did it happen?***

Um I was a freshman. In like that spring semester though.

***Think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.***

Well really mostly people like me. I have lots of friends, guys and girls and I'm active on campus. So I guess um like socially I'm good. I may look like a dude but I'm not into sports like that. I like music though. I play drums. I guess my problem with (school name) is they like to put on a front. So for convocation you make me dress a certain way but when I go to the chapel on Sunday's you don't make me wear a dress. That is pathetic.

***Understood, so here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

I do know about this we have to sign one every year. Nobody has done me anything here so I never had to do a report. And if I were to do a report it would have been with the whole attire thing, but I can't tell the school on the school can I? I'm sure it all comes from higher up on what they want us to be and look like around here. They may be quietly accepting, or quietly not accepting. That is the question I would like answered. You interviewing them?

***No I am not but that would be highly interesting to see as a follow up study. What I am going to do is take everything that you have said and transcribe it. Then I will bring it back to you and you will look at my notes to make sure what I'm thinking you mean is actually what you really mean.***

And if its not?

***Then we get some clarity.***

Ok thank you.

## PARTICIPANT 7

***How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity? In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?***

I don't necessarily know if there are problems with being gay at (school name). To me I just I don't know all of a sudden I am really uncomfortable.

***Okay, we can break if you want to. Just remember this is voluntary.***

I know, my other friend said you were very nice and didn't judge. I'm still struggling with the notion of being gay and what it is that goes along with how people think you are and how they expect you to be that is why I joined the group that Jared\* is in. I know you are not here to try to counsel me. Just give me the question again.

***Well one piece first-how would you describe the conflict or crossover between your religion and sexual identity?***

I wouldn't. I don't like to think of the two as common as together. I'm gay and I'm Catholic. End of story. One doesn't have to be tied to the other, does it?

***If you feel it doesn't it absolutely does not have to be. Remember this is about your experiences and your feelings towards things at your school.***

-silent-

***So with that being said, what problems do you think exist between being LGBT and being at (school name).***

I think there is harassment, I know there is harassment. Yik yak internet trolls make everything worse.

***So describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

Ummm -silent for twenty seconds- I came out to my family right after my freshman year.

Surprisingly they were supportive. I knew all along what was going on with me. I had even wanted to join a fraternity but I knew I couldn't do that. I saw freshman year how they treated gay people, especially black gay people. And freshman year went by and I did well and so when it was time for rush again right at the beginning of my sophomore year my dad asked me about it and that is when it all came out. He was disappointed and my mom cried but he told me I could still do everything I wanted to. Who I was attracted to didn't mean I couldn't be around other men. I mean I had played sports as a kid and in high school. But I went to the houses for rush and I met with the frat boys, I knew I wasn't going to fit in. I got an invite to a house but I never responded to anything and I know I can't now. They don't like it when you don't even politely decline their bid offer. So being gay stopped me from joining a fraternity, that was difficult.

***So what I hear you saying is, you did not join the fraternity because you were afraid that you may become attracted to someone in the group?***

No I didn't join because I knew I wasn't going to fit in with the girls. Drinks, parties, and girls. I knew they would suspect something if I didn't engage with any girls for anything like the parties or the football games or the formals so I figure eventually they would find out and harass me like they did everyone else and put me out the frat house and the organization. And I didn't mean to be rude when I mentioned black gay people to you I just know they felt like those people just gay people in general are easy targets. And another thing even though I know I probably wasn't going to be attracted to anyone in the fraternity they would think I was. I just know it wasn't going to work out.

***Think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.***

Ahh, nothing really. I've managed to avoid any conflict on campus because besides being gay I do appear to be fairly normal on the outside. I joined the group and met Jared after I saw their booth during homecoming this past fall year. I haven't had any difficult experiences though directly relating to my religion and being gay. I still go to mass with my family. My extended family knows. I've never bought a guy home though to meet my parents. Honestly I have more anxiety about being gay in life than I have about being gay and Catholic. Does that make any sense? Like I said earlier to be that is separate.

***I could assume but I would rather you give me more detail if you don't mind.***

So -sigh- I feel like I'm supposed to be this person even though everyone who knows me, now, knows that's not who I'm going to be. Successful with a traditional family, and such. I can absolutely be successful but I won't have a traditional family. And because I'm gay what I don't like is people think I have a certain set of morals and political beliefs that are absolutely contrary to what is true to me. We are in no way all the same, I'm not one hundred percent like Jared and he isn't even fifty percent like me but we respect each other because we know how hard it is to

be how we are. And, honestly, even though I know people may look down on me for being gay I know they really look down on him for wanting to be female.

***So expounding on your last statement a bit, wouldn't you say the climate, especially with the younger generation, is changing in regards to LGBT acceptance?***

Oh absolutely, it's the older folks who are keeping it up and teaching the intolerance. I think by the time people who are in high school now have grandchildren the conversations regarding LGBT and rights and racism will be completely different.

***Excellent point, do you feel better about the interview now? We are almost done.***

I'm fine.

***Here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

I know about it from our group but never have had to use it.

***If you hadn't joined the school group would you know about it?***

Nope, absolutely not.

***Okay, well I want you to know that I do appreciate you and your time and I'm glad we were able to continue with the interview. I'm going to transcribe and do some coding. Then I'm going to bring all of this back to you and let you review it to see if you agree with what I think you said, like in terms of the codes. Ok?***

Ok

## PARTICIPANT 8

***How would you describe the juxtaposition between your religion and sexual identity? In what ways would you describe the problems that may exist as a whole regarding LGBT students within your institution?***

I know my religion widely doesn't support being gay. I know I told you I was bisexual but I mean, gay is gay. I guess so whatever I feel like even with the Pope now, he is very progressive and a lot of people are changing the way they think in terms of his leadership. So I know according to the word I'm wrong. And it is hard to be that way and want to be faithful to the Lord. I'm very much religious and I'm very much gay so it is hard for me to want to be the person I am. And I don't hide that here or anywhere else. What is crazy to me is, because like back home in Texas I go to a megachurch and I'm in the choir when I'm there and like everyone is all friendly friendly in my face but they talk about me behind my back and here at (school name) they are the same way! They will not call you out to your face but are so friendly and don't say anything to you but I know several of my classmates and just people in general who talk about me behind my back and I am a good person. I came out in high school as a freshman so there is no reason to hide. So I would say here is no different from a church like they follow the rule love the sinner and hate the sin. But if you are going to do that don't talk about the sinner behind their back.

***Describe to me the single most difficult experience that you have had being LGBT on your school's campus. Include details of the setting and the participants.***

That is definitely when I ran for a leadership position that I should have gotten. I should have won, and honestly I know that I did win and administration named the other person because they just would not let an openly gay or well bisexual student be president of the junior class. So I'm

not going to even run for student body president as a senior. And man, that's tough, I was going to transfer after that.

***So when were elections, why do you feel something underhanded happened?***

Elections were the end of my sophomore year. I ran a clean campaign, it was only me and another student. She is well liked but not nearly as popular as I am. I've been active in any and everything that I can get into. I love (school name) and I want this school to continue to be a school where students who are interested in the medical field can come to. Everyone in my family has gone either here or Dillard. So it's a tradition for my family I knew what I wanted to do when I got here and how I wanted to do it. I have all these goals for myself. And I ran a campaign that was basically the means of creating a group to more diversify the school in terms of undergraduate representation. We have a lot of people who come to the pharmacy school who aren't black but we need that diversity in undergrad as well. So the person who I was running against her slogan her campaign was pointless. It was basically vote for me because I'm not him. So there was early voting up until a Wednesday and initial numbers were released and I was in the lead by like 180 votes and more than half the rising sophomores had voted. It's a small school there aren't but 600 juniors in the class. How does she end up winning by 154 votes. Statistically it's highly unlikely more like impossible. That means that I would have only gotten 20 or 30 votes from Wednesday to Friday. Seriously? Get real. And I wanted to contest the voting, but then all of a sudden there isn't a way to contest the votes. So you mean to tell me in all of (school name) existence nobody has ever wanted to investigate the process?

***Wow***

My thoughts exactly. At the end of the day they just didn't want an openly gay male in a leadership position at their Catholic school.

***Think about other specific experiences, in any context, when your religion and sexual identity has caused conflicts within your school setting. Examples include housing, social or sporting events, student health center, counseling, or others. Tell me a story about what happened again including details of the setting and all participants.***

Well directly on campus. Nothing really that was a conflict as far as religion and sexuality are concerned, not anything else like what I described before. I guess I should have saved that answer for this question. But uh... I have had alienation in relationships. Well from like being in relationships.

***I wonder why you interchange yourself from being gay to bisexual and vice versa.***

Well I know I'm attracted to and have been with males and females, but I'm supposed to be with females. So it's like this. If I tell a female I've been with dudes too they don't say oh he bi-they look at you as straight up gay and my religion will accept me if I just like boys but don't act on it. And females don't like that really a lot of exclusively gay guys don't like it either. I find the most meaningful relationships I've been in are the ones with other bisexual females and males. So I don't know I feel like gay is just the term to use because the only part that people frown upon is male-on-male not if I'm with a woman.

***Okay. So tell me about your alienation and relationships on campus.***

Well like I said, it's just this one is jealous that I'm seeing this person exclusively now. Because I don't like sleep around all willy nilly I do try to have an emotional relationship with whomever I'm physical with. So freshman year I had an instance where there was tension between myself and the last person I was dating and it was tension and this one girl she was like super crazy acting like I didn't tell her that I liked males and females. So we were together for a while and very heavy on social media. Well we break up over the summer. She is gone back home and I

stayed and did summer school. Well we come back during the fall semester and I'm seeing someone else. Not necessarily in a relationship but I'm moving on. She made a scene outside of my dormitory because people were saying she made me go back to men, but you know in a derogatory manner. What other people were saying about you isn't my fault. That has nothing to do with me. But you mad because of what? Like I don't get it. I don't know I just feel like from then on she would go out of her way to give me death stares (laughs) like mugging me all the time man. But when I asked her about it like look lets just be cordial she says she can't get into another relationship with anyone else at the school because no other dude wants to be with a girl who was with a gay dude. So I ask her you have had men tell you that and she is like no I just know that is how it is. I can't say that I know what to do with hearing that but she knew who I was in the beginning and although things may not have turned out the way she wanted them to, I mean, I don't know I don't know what I'm supposed to do with that.

***Here is a copy of your school's anti-discrimination policy, it's obvious, what you think happened to you in regards to the voting is discriminatory, think about your experiences and tell me in what ways do you feel this policy is enforced and has helped you within the institution. If you have ever had to file a claim due to a breach in this policy tell me about that situation.***

I know this policy but yeah I guess I just forgot about it. I never thought to file anything, at least not in this avenue. I was only thinking on the basis of voter fraud and recalculating the votes. I didn't think to make a claim based on discrimination! I'm going to use this! I wonder if it's too late

***Do you feel as if your school is inclusive of this policy?***

I feel like our school is like don't ask don't tell and if you do tell, we are going to respect you in your face but behind your back is another story.

***I understand. Okay so what is going to happen is I'm going to write our whole interview out and then I'm going to code it. I want to bring that back to you and converse with you about the codes so that everything I thought you were saying is what you actually meant before I actually put the research into words. Fair?***

Fair, okay, yeah.

# **APPENDIX C** **DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET**

<p><b>Source</b> <i>Who wrote it? When? Where would one find it in print or electronically?</i></p>	<p><b>Content</b> <i>What is the purpose of the document?</i> <i>How long is the document?</i></p>	<p><b>Content</b> <i>Does the document contain:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Introduction</i></li>   <li>• <i>Contact information</i></li>   <li>• <i>Grievance procedures</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Vocabulary</b> <i>What language is easy to understand? What language can be seen as ambiguous?</i></p>	<p><b>Connection</b> <i>List any concerns stated by the participant that were addressed in the document.</i></p>	<p><b>Theme</b> <i>Does the document reflect any of the pre-identified themes? Which ones?</i></p>



## APPENDIX D IRB APPROVAL

### ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.5983  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

**TO:** Kenneth Fasching-Varner  
ELRC

**FROM:** Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** January 18, 2017

**RE:** IRB# 3822

**TITLE:** Public vs. Private: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Student Experience and the Influence of Anti-Discrimination Policies

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** New Protocol

**Review type:** Full ☐ Expedited ☒ **Review date:** 1/18/2017

**Risk Factor:** Minimal ☒ Uncertain ☐ Greater Than Minimal ☐

**Approved** ☒ **Disapproved** ☐

**Approval Date:** 1/18/2017 **Approval Expiration Date:** 1/17/2018

**Re-review frequency:** (annual unless otherwise stated)

**Number of subjects approved:** 4-8

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable):

**Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal:** (if applicable)

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –  
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc.**

*\*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

## **VITA**

Shalonda Skidmore is a professional school counselor certified in the state of Louisiana. She has served as an educator for five years, and is currently in her fifth year as a school counselor in Iberville Parish. Shalonda's higher education interests include non-traditional counseling within traditional spaces, college experiences for the minority within the majority, diversity, and intersectionality.

Shalonda is a graduate of Grambling State University with a B.S. degree in Speech-Pathology and a graduate of Southern University with a M.S. in Counselor Education. In her spare time she is active in various community service events with her sorority and is a varsity cheerleading coach.