VOICES UNHEARD: USING INTERSECTIONALITY TO UNDERSTAND IDENTITY AMONG SEXUALLY MARGINALIZED UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS OF COLOR

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ABSTRACT

This study used intersectionality as a framework and methodology to understand identity among sexually marginalized undergraduate college students of color. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of QLGBTSGL (Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Same Gender Loving) undergraduate students of color on a college campus? How do QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color perceive their college experiences to be different from and similar to other students in college?

2. How do environmental factors (e.g., spiritual community, society, family, student organizations, and support groups) affect identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college?

3. How do interpersonal relationships, such as those with friends, family, and romantic partners, influence identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college?

4. How do QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color make meaning of their identities? In what ways do identity consistency and coherence characterize their identity meaning-making?

The literature implied that while substantial research has been done in identity and identity development in student affairs, including in race, gender, sexuality, and environment, the intersections and interactions of those identities had been less explored in research, if at all. The
findings produced three emerging themes related to the unheard voices of the population at hand: defining self; intersections and interactions of identities and social group memberships; and defining ethics, morals, and values. The conclusions and implications both confirm previous findings on identity and identity development, while also acknowledging new areas of knowledge, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.
For Dusty and Danny, the two parents who made unconditional love and ultimate belief in a child the reality of my life. I love you more than I could ever express.
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“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” – Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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“If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.” – Harvey Milk
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

Background of the Problem

The identity development of students in colleges and universities has been a major area of research in the history of higher education and student affairs (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Indeed, over the last 60 years, significant advancements have been made in terms of our understanding of students and how they grow and develop during college (Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Despite these advances, higher education professionals do not have a complete picture of how students develop in college. Additionally, professionals do not know how various social identities, such as sexual orientation, gender, and race, may impact development in other areas of students’ lives, such as spirituality, morality, and cognition (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Researchers have only recently begun to examine the intersections of multiple identities and how those intersections impact multiple domains of development (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2002, 2008, 2009).

The college experiences and development of queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and same gender loving (QLGBTSGL) undergraduate students of color have not been widely researched in higher education. Some researchers have explored this group of people in one capacity or another (Adams & Phillips, 2006; Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, & Burkholder, 2003; Brooks, Inman, Malouf, Klinger, & Kaduvettoor, 2008; Chung & Szymanski, 2006; Greene, 2002; Jolly, 2000; Kimmel & Yi, 2004; Meyer, 2003; Narvaez, Meyer, Kertzner, Ouellette, & Gordon, 2008; Whitney, 2006). However, these researchers’ studies have not been conducted in a higher education setting or with college students as participants.
Recently, researchers have highlighted the importance of studying the influence of campus environments on identity development in a general sense (Abes & Jones, 2004; Enochs & Roland; Evans & Broido; Evans & Broido; Harris, Cook, & Kashuback-West; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Jourdan; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Renn, 2000, 2004; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Some scholars have studied the interaction of the college environment (such as in residence halls or student organizations) with queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and same gender loving students’ identity development (Enochs & Roland, 2006; Evans & Broido, 1999; Evans & Broido, 2002; Harris, Cook, & Kashuback-West, 2008; Jourdan, 2006; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Yet, many studies have not specifically included the measure of campus environment in terms of how students develop and make meaning of their identities.

Given the current state of research, it is difficult for higher education educators to understand how the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and race/ethnicity impact the identity development of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color on college campuses. Additionally, the question remains as to how the college and surrounding environments affect QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color. For example, researchers of other studies on QLGBTSGL people of color highlight family and spirituality as key environmental factors influencing development (Bowleg et al., 2003; Greene, 2002; Harris et al., 2008; Narvaez et al., 2008). In this sense, environment is defined as all surrounding factors external to an individual that may impact development, such as society, campus peer culture, and family influence (Renn, 2004). It is important to know how the college campus does or does not address these issues for students. Through this proposed study, I can effectively contribute to the college student development literature regarding QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color.
Statement of the Problem

As previously stated, research on the identity development and experiences of QLGBTSGI undergraduate students of color on college campuses has not been explicitly explored, with the exception of one study (see Patton & Simmons, 2008). This study seeks to contribute to the identity development literature concerning the QLGBTSGI undergraduate students of color in colleges and universities. Additionally, this study will provide an analysis of the effect that campus and other environmental factors have on the identity development of QLGBTSGI undergraduate students of color.

Finally, this study will utilize a methodology and method, intersectionality, which has not yet been used as a primary methodological approach in higher education research, but has been used prominently in other fields, especially feminist theory studies (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2008; Collins, 1998; Dhamoon, 2004, 2008; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Warner, 2008). This study can do the following: provide some insight as to the identity development of QLGBTSGI undergraduate students of color in college; explore the environmental impacts of college on the identity development of QLGBTSGI undergraduate students of color; and examine the pros and cons of an intersectionality approach to research in higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of QLGBTSGI undergraduate students of color and how their multiple and intersecting identities, as well as the college environment, influence their self-understanding. Specifically, this study will focus on the issues that may affect identity development and self-understanding for QLGBTSGI undergraduate students of color on a college campus. Previous research on this population indicated that influences such as family and spiritual community may affect their identity development.
(Bowleg et al., 2003; Greene, 2002; Harris et al., 2008; Narvaez et al., 2008). However, those studies were not conducted with college students or on a college campus. Thus, their transferability to the college environment is not necessarily appropriate. The data for this study were collected through a qualitative survey and personal interviews, using an intersectional methodological paradigm.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study investigate the issues that influence the identity development of QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how the intersections of identity impact holistic identity development in the following capacities:

1. What are the experiences of QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color on a college campus? How do QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color perceive their college experiences to be different from and similar to other students in college?

2. How do environmental factors (e.g., spiritual community, society, family, student organizations, and support groups) affect identity development for QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color in college?
   a. How does participation in identity-based social and/or activist groups on college campuses influence identity development for QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color?

3. How do interpersonal relationships, such as those with friends, family, and romantic partners, influence identity development for QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color in college?
4. How do QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color make meaning of their identities? In what ways do identity consistency and coherence characterize their identity meaning-making?

**Significance of and Rationale for the Study**

There are four fundamental reasons that this study should be undertaken. First, it adds to the understanding that we have concerning this population of students on our college campuses – QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color. As previously suggested, environment is an area that has the potential to dramatically impact student identity development (Strange & Banning, 2001; Renn, 2004). Additionally, research about how QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color make meaning of themselves and develop as a whole is currently just being explored (see Patton & Simmons, 2008). This represents a major gap in the literature about how this student group develops and how the campus environment may assist or detract from that development. This is a population of students that is growing on college campuses these days (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). As a result, they need support, programming, and services that can benefit them in their time in a college. Having greater knowledge of QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color can help higher education professionals establish appropriate services for them.

Next, this study assists in illuminating how multiple and intersecting identities impact all students’ lives. Many theorists have explored multiple and intersecting identities in college students (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2002, 2008, 2009). This research on QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color would add to the knowledge that we have concerning multiple and intersecting identities for college students.
Third, this research highlights how campus environments may influence identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color. Although scholars have begun to consider the overall environmental impact on student development (Abes & Jones, 2004; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Evans & Broido, 1999, 2002; Harris et al., 2003; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Jourdan, 2006; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Renn, 2000, 2004; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Strange & Banning, 2001), environmental impact has not been explored for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color. This study would give insight as to how environmental factors affect identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color, which enables higher education professionals to appropriately provide services for them.

Finally, this study employs intersectionality techniques in framework and approach to methods, and thus, provides some insights as to the challenges and benefits of its possible use in higher education research. Although many authors have used intersectionality as a paradigm and methods in other fields (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2008; Collins, 1998; Dhamoon, 2004, 2008; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Warner, 2008), it has yet to be used in higher education identity-based research widely. Recently though, theorists have begun to use intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and approach to methods in all types of research on development in students in college (see Abes, 2009; Jones, 2009; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Torres et al. (2009) revealed that intersectionality is only recently being used as a basis for research in identity and is both promising and complicated in its implementation. I believe that intersectionality could be an effective methodological approach for identity based research because it places strong ownership of defining meaning and identity with the participants. In a college environment where higher education professionals often preference individuality and expression, this approach to research may be highly effective. Moreover, intersectionality as an
approach to research requires that the researcher calls for social equality and change in the higher education system (Dill & Zambrana, 2009), which at its philosophical core, reflects the very best of what I have to offer participants as a researcher – a better system for them.

**Definition of Terms**

The following list provides the foundation for important terms in this study. This list of definitions was written from my own expertise in exploring and working with issues that surround sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. My understanding has been compiled from many sources over more than seven years of my work in LGBT programs and services. As such, there is no one reference for these definitions, but they are heavily influenced by Safe Zone/Safe Space trainings. Additionally, throughout this study, I will use gender neutral pronouns, includingze (instead of he or she) and hir (instead of his or her). This represents my own dedication to breaking the gender binary that is so restrictive and present in formal education.

Finally, some may debate my use of gay/straight to describe individuals’ sexualities instead of homosexual/heterosexual. I believe that the dichotomy of gay/straight tends to have more of a meaningful connection in terms of how college students actually identify themselves and each other. Moreover, gay/straight encompasses the whole picture of a person’s sexual orientation identification more often than homosexual/heterosexual does for college students. In other words, homosexual and heterosexual are often seen as more scientific and outdated terms in the LGBT community (see Safe Zone, Bowling Green State University) and tend to lead people to primarily define sexual orientation through sexual behavior. On the other hand, gay/straight tend to be more commonly used as identification terms currently that do not lend themselves as readily to defining sexual orientation as sexual behavior.
Androgyny

The qualities of gender expression (see definition below) that blend masculine and feminine characteristics.

Asexual

A person who does not have strong emotional, physical, sexual, or spiritual attractions to a person of any sex/gender identity.

Biological Sex

The physical characteristics, including genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes, that define a person’s sex at birth. Categories include male, female, and intersexed.

Bisexual

A person who has strong emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual attractions to both self-identified men and women.

Cisgender

A person whose gender identity aligns with the biological sex that ze was assigned at birth.

Femininity

The qualities of gender expression that refer to traits that are most commonly associated with women and being female.

Framework

The theoretical underpinnings that inform the intellectual approach that a researcher takes with a study. Frameworks typically inform the nature of reality, as well as how the participants are thought to interact with the world.
Gay

Usually refers to a self-identified man who has emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual attractions to another self-identified man. This term can also be used as an umbrella term to refer to anyone whose gender/sexuality is not straight or cisgendered.

Gender Expression

How people communicate their gender to other people. This can include style of dress, vocal tone and rate, body hair, how we interact with other people, etc. Some categories include masculine, feminine, and androgynous.

Gender Identity

How a person inwardly feels and defines hir gender. Some categories include man, woman, genderqueer, and transgender.

 Hir

A gender neutral pronoun that can be used instead of his or her.

Identity

Involves the tenets of who you are, what you value, and the directions you choose.

Identity Development

The transitions, exploration, meaning making, and identity crises that are involved with establishing identity and developing characteristics of self.

Lesbian

A self-identified woman who has emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual attractions to another self-identified woman.
Masculinity

The qualities of gender expression that refer to traits that are most commonly associated with men and being male.

Meaning Making

How a person knows what ze know about hir beliefs, self, and relationships with others.

Methodology/(Approach to) Methods

The specific manner and details in which the researcher collects and analyzes data in the study.

Pansexual/Omnisexual

A person who is attracted to other people regardless of gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

Person of Color

A person who does not solely identify as White or Caucasian.

Queer

An umbrella term to identify anyone who identifies as non-straight or non-cisgendered.

Same Gender Loving

A term primarily used within the African American community to identify anyone who is attracted to people of the same gender. This term has been created out of a feeling that lesbian and gay are terms that reflect the White queer community.

Sexual Orientation

The description of how a person is emotionally, physically, sexually, and spiritually attracted to other people. Some categories include lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and omnisexual.
Straight

A person who has primary attractions to a person of the opposite self-identified gender identity and biological sex in a binary (male/female) paradigm.

Transgender

An umbrella category related to gender identity and expression that may describe a person who breaks the traditional social norms for gender identity and/or gender expression. For example, a biological male who exhibits a feminine gender expression might identify as transgender.

Ze

A gender neutral pronoun that can be used instead of he or she.

Delimitations

There are two primary delimitations for this study. First, the research will focus on a particular group of students as labeled by identity categories. Next, this research project will employ an intersectionality approach to methodological paradigm and methods.

First, this study will focus on the experiences of QLGBT&GL undergraduate students of color in college in the United States. Additionally, I will not look to recruit students who are geographically located in colleges and universities outside the United States.

Additionally, the study will use an intersectionality approach to methodology and method (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2008; Collins, 1998; Dhamoon, 2004, 2008; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Warner, 2008). Although many other paradigms and methods could be used in this study, I feel that this approach most values the participants’ identities, as well as how they express the understanding of those identities. For example, intersectionality calls for participants to define the structures, language, and culture that drive the study. In addition, an
intersectionality approach to methodology seeks to use identity as a methodological tool for understanding and calls upon participants to intentionally explore many more aspects of diversity, identity, privilege, and oppression through all of their multiple and intersecting identities. In this capacity, I feel that intersectionality offers more access to the participant experience throughout the study.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher is extremely important in qualitative studies (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Specifically, a researcher must examine hir own identities, interest in the study, and relationship to the participants in order to achieve a satisfactory level of reflexivity (Jones et al., 2006). In this portion of the study, I will reflect on my own identities, my interest in this topic as a research project, and how I may relate to my participants.

First, I will disclose my own identities as a researcher. I identify as a working class, White, lesbian, woman. I am a Christian and have achieved a high level of education. I am a feminist and identify strongly with being a woman and loving other women. I am passionate about social justice and how to create positive social change. These passions drive me in my life and work. These are the identities that are closest and most important to me. All of these identities may influence this study and how I approach it as a researcher. As such, I must be aware of how my own identities influence my thinking and acknowledge my sources of subjectivity.

My interest in this research project was formed during my college career, when I learned about student affairs and higher education as professions. Almost simultaneously, I developed my passion for diversity issues and educating others about power, privilege, and oppression. These two pieces of my life history have melded together to bring me to an interest in studying
people who do not have privilege in social identity categories. Additionally, as a lesbian, I am very interested in the development of QLGBTSGL people. I have worked with issues of this nature since I came out at the age of 19.

Upon my arrival at Bowling Green State University, I noticed one of the groups of students on campus that seemed to need attention and services were QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color. This was evident when a student approached me about starting a support group in 2008. By the end of that school year, we had created a well-attended and founded group that began to assist such students in making meaning of their identities and making connections with other students who shared those identities. I continued to work with this group during my time at BGSU and that experience has further inflamed my passion to learn more about QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color. Moreover, when I did a research project in my course on qualitative methods required in my doctoral program, I chose a topic similar to this one. I conducted three interviews with a student, discussing these issues. Conducting that research excited me because I was able to garner what her experience had been and she felt better about herself at the end of the project. These experiences resulted in my desire to explore these issues in further detail.

Finally, as I mention in the limitations of the study in chapter five, I must be aware of how my own identities may influence participants. For example, I know that being a White person could affect my ability to build relationships with students of color. In order to bring my full self to the research process and allow participants to bring themselves as well, I must be honest with my participants concerning my own history, identities, and location in life (Jones et al., 2006). As such, I hope to be upfront with participants concerning my interest in the study and what I hope to gain by researching the topic. Additionally, I must continually work to
reinforce this relationship with participants throughout the research process. By doing so, I will continue to reflect on my own experiences, assumptions, relationships with participants, and learning throughout the research project.

**Summary**

This study will focus on the experiences and identity development of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color on college campuses. More specifically, it will also examine how campus and external environmental factors may mediate the multiple and intersecting identities of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color. Finally, the study will use a new approach for higher education research, intersectionality, as both methodological paradigm and methods.

The next chapter, review of literature, is a review of all relevant literature that applies to the experiences of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college settings. Specifically, identity development theories and environmental theory is explored. Following that, the third chapter, methodology, is a full review of the theoretical tenets, data collection and data analysis procedures that will drive this study. Chapter four, findings, is an overview of the findings from the study. Finally, chapter five, conclusions and discussion, offers answers to the research questions, as well as implications for practice and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the history of the development of institutions of higher education and student affairs, many scholars have focused on identity development of college students as a primary factor that contributes to those students’ experiences in college (Evans et al., 2010). Over time, the focus on identity development has only become more substantial and broad in its depth and scope (Evans et al., 2010). Thus, it is important that we consider the issues that surround the identity development of college students as we move forward in research in higher education (Evans et al., 2010).

Most recently, research on identity development in college students has begun to focus on two additional concepts: multiple identities and the intersections of identities (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2002, 2008, 2009). Prior to this new approach to research on identity development, a strong majority of the research had focused on singular dimensions of identity development, such as the experiences of women or people of color or gay and lesbian students (Carter, 2005; Cass, 1979; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; D’Augelli, 1994; Davis, 2002; Downing & Roush, 1985; Fassinger, 1998; Helms, 1990; Jones, 1997; Jordan, 1992; Kim, 2001; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Phinney, 1990; Root, 1990). Focusing on multiple facets of identity as well as the intersections of those identities has broadened the discussions surrounding identity development in college students.

The consideration of multiple dimensions of identity reflects a move toward understanding how all of the identities that encompass a single student may impact that student uniquely in his whole identity development (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2002, 2008,
For example, rather than singularly examining how women develop in college, a focus on multiple identities would examine how all aspects of a person’s identity, including but not limited to, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, social class, etc., impact their development in college. Moreover, research has also begun to focus on the intersections of those identities. Essentially, this new focus means that researchers consider not only multiple dimensions of identity, but also how the intersections of those identities have the capacity to create a unique experience for every individual student. For example, the identity development of a Black, lesbian, middle class college student from Detroit will differ from the identity development of a Black, lesbian, working class college student from rural Mississippi. Thus, research on the intersections of identities tends to focus on how every identity has the potential to impact not only identity development in a student, but also how that student makes meaning of themselves.

Ultimately, the push toward considering identity development in terms of multiplicity and intersectionality has led to a discussion regarding the development of the whole student, rather than singular aspects of a student’s identity (Worthington & Reynolds, 2009). As such, I assert that our singular approach to identity formation in higher education has devalued the development of the whole person in our students. Moreover, it has created an additive approach (Bowleg, 2008) to understanding our students’ identities, which does not create an accurate portrait of our students and their development. Finally, our traditional approach to research on identity has also resulted in the exclusion of groups who face multiple oppressions, as little to no research has been conducted on QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color on college campuses.

An additional consideration in terms of identity development of college students that has long been researched in higher education centers on how the college environment impacts
students (Evans et al., 2010; Strange & Banning, 2001). Although many scholars have noted that the college environment can uniquely impact students and even encourage identity development, most research has not integrated environmental factors with identity development. As a result, scholars have often disassociated environmental factors from identity formation and the environment may have more of an impact on identity development than researchers have previously considered in higher education (Renn, 2004).

This review of literature will explore the aforementioned claims through the following three distinct areas: identity formation theories and how they have developed over time, multiple and intersecting identity theories, and college environment theories and how environment may impact identity development. By reviewing these concepts, I will explore how scholars have researched identity as well as its influence on our understanding of college students.

**Identity and Identity Development Theories**

This portion of the review of literature recognizes identity and identity development theories as they have been constructed in higher education throughout the years. First, it is necessary to explore the roots of theories that surround identity development and how they have transformed over time. For the purpose of this portion of the review of literature, there are three categories of identity development theories that are important in my research focus. First, I will describe identity development theories that relate to issues of gender. Next, I will explore identity formation theory as it relates to race and ethnicity. Finally, I will examine identity development theories that cover sexual orientation.

There are a multitude of theories regarding the construction of various aspects of identity as distinct categories: gender (Bem, 1983; Beemyn, 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Carter, 2005; Davis, 2002; Downing & Roush, 1985; Jordan, 1992; Lev, 2004), race and ethnicity (Atkinson, Morten,
& Sue, 1998; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Helms, 1990; Kim, 2001; Phinney, 1990; Renn, 2000, 2004; Root, 1990; Torres, 2003), and sexuality (Brown, 2002; Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Paul & Frieden, 2008; Singh et al., 2006).

Although these studies have revealed a great deal about the construction of identity in terms of gender, race, and sexuality as singular aspects of identity development, they have not necessarily focused on the intersections of those identities. However, their findings are particularly important in terms of defining the experiences of college students along lines of identity development. Essentially, these theories begin to set the stage for understanding identity development concepts that may be at play in gender, race and ethnicity, and sexuality.

**Theoretical Foundations of Identity and Identity Development**

Research on identity and identity development in people and more particularly, college students, finds its foundations in two primary models, Erikson (1968) and Chickering and Reisser (1993). Erikson developed an eight-stage model of human development that described a person’s development from infancy to adulthood. Essentially, Erikson believed that people experienced psychosocial crises throughout their lives that represent each of the eight stages.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) focused their research on the development of college students and what happens to people while attending college. Chickering and Reisser ultimately developed seven vectors to describe the psychosocial issues that students in college face, including developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Erikson (1968) and Chickering and Reisser’s theories essentially became the foundation for all development theories that include identity development concerning college students.
Gender

In this section, I will explore research studies by Bem (1983), Beemyn (2005), Bilodeau (2009), Davis (2002), Downing and Roush (1985), and Lev (2004). These studies on the development of gender identity largely reveal that gender does have an impact on identity development and that men, women, and transgender identified people develop in significantly different capacities.

Bem (1983) advocated gender schema theory in her research, which focused on how a person approaches gender individually and based on societal expectations. For example, the gender roles and norms are reinforced through this gendered process that follows people throughout their lives. Bem was among the first to describe simultaneous development across different domains, such as cognitive and identity development. This was particularly important for this study because it focused on the societal expectations concerning gender, which is a primary focus of intersectionality, as discussed in chapter 3.

Beemyn (2005) discussed how college campuses can be more inclusive of transgender students. One of the most prominent issues that transgender students face on campus is harassment and alienation from the learning environment (Beemyn, 2005). Beemyn advocated for a break in the binary system of gender (male/female representations only) as a means to address these issues.

Bilodeau (2009) studied how “genderism” impacts college students. Bilodeau maintained that genderism forces students to participate in the man/woman gender binary and appropriately express gender characteristics of masculinity/femininity based on that binary system. Additionally, Bilodeau stated that students who challenge this traditional binary are often subject to harassment and violence on college campuses.
Davis (2002) explored the social construction of college men’s identity development. Davis found that although men did not often think about their gender roles and expression, they also felt constrained and unsupported by gender roles and expectations on the college campus. Davis maintained that higher education professionals should be focusing on men and provide opportunities for men, as well as women, to explore their gender.

Downing and Roush (1985) developed a model for feminist identity development that was loosely based on Cross and Fhagen-Smith’s (2001) work on Black identity development. Downing and Roush identified five stages that women go through in the pursuit of a feminist identity: passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment. Similarly to Cross and Fhagen-Smith, a woman in Downing and Roush’s model goes through a series that moves her from awareness to knowledge and finally, to action. This model represents the close connections between what characterizes development in many social identity categories, including the key themes that are present in establishing identity.

Lev (2004) explored three primary concepts in gender and related them to sexuality. The three concepts that Lev described were sex, gender identity, and gender role. According to Lev, all of these concepts overlap and influence each other in people’s development. Although Lev’s work focused on working with gender-variant people and describing their experience, the concepts are applicable to how all people relate sex, gender identity, gender roles, and sexuality. Finally, other work has established similar findings regarding the effect of gender on identity development (see Carter, 2005; Jones, 1997; Jordan, 1992). These studies further establish that gender is an area of identity development that impacts a person’s overall development.

In conclusion, there are four themes that can be drawn from this research. First, women tend to be more relational while men rely on objective rationality (Bem, 1983; Beemyn, 2005;
Bilodeau, 2009; Carter, 2005; Davis, 2002; Downing & Roush, 1985; Jones, 1997; Jordan, 1992; Lev, 2004). Next, as women and men move through their development, they gain a greater confidence about self and gender. Third, women, men, and transgender individuals all struggle with concepts of femininity and masculinity as it relates to self and others. Finally, the social constructions of gender are binding and present obstacles to development and internalization of gender identity and expression.

**Race**

In this section, I will explore research studies by Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1998), Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001), Helms (1990), Kim (2001), Phinney (1990), Renn (2000; 2004), Root (1990), and Torres (2003). These studies, on the impact of race on identity development, reveal that race does play a key role in the identity formation of an individual.

Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1998) developed the racial and cultural identity development model (RCID) to describe how people develop in racial capacities. There are five stages in the RCID model: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and synergistic articulation and awareness (Atkinson et al., 1998). The lower stages of the model reflect identification with the privileged culture and problems associated with that identification; middle stages of the model reflect identification with and internalization of one’s racial identity; upper stages of the model reflect a subsiding of racial superiority and a health engagement with racial issues. Ultimately, this model helps us understand what students of color experience in identity development. This model would serve as the basis for research on racial identity development for many future authors.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) developed a model to describe Black identity development, which was based upon years of work, initially started by Cross in the 1970s. In the
most recent version of their model, Cross and Fhagen-Smith identified six sectors of development: infancy and childhood in early Black identity development, preadolescence, adolescence, early adulthood, adult nigrescence, and nigrescence recycling. Within these sectors, there are four profiles that represent areas of development, including pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. In other words, the sectors represent the periods in life, while the profiles represent development in terms of “nigrescence” (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). These profiles are very similar to previously mentioned models, including Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1998). This model has served as a primary source for informing research on racial identity formation, including being a strong influence on the work of Atkinson, Morten, and Sue. Additionally, the updated model allowed for movement within the sectors and a whole life approach and view to racial identity development. It also departed from the assumption that being in any stage of the development model, such as the earlier stages, meant that people were less developed. Finally, it expanded on the concepts of identity salience and reference group orientation.

Helms (1990) developed a model of White identity development. Helms’ model was focused on assisting White people in identifying their own role in racial issues and how they can work to combat a racist society. There were two primary factors in Helms’ White identity development model: abandonment of racism and evolution of a nonracist identity. These two factors allowed for White people to move from awareness and understanding to action through six statuses: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy (Helms, 1990). These statuses reflect contact with status quo of current world, disintegration results in anxiety due to conflict, reintegration of racist ideology and idealization of Whiteness, intellectualized commitment to Whiteness, searching for understanding of
Whiteness, group solidarity and pride in being with people of color, and informed positive integration of Whiteness with interaction with people of color.

Kim (2001) developed a model of Asian American identity development based on a study with Japanese American women. Kim’s model incorporated five stages: ethnic awareness, White identification, social political consciousness, Asian American consciousness, and incorporation. In this model, Asian Americans move through the stages in recognition of their own racial identities and how they interact with the world around them.

Phinney (1990) believed that positive self-concept for young minorities is substantially related to ethnic identity development. Phinney developed a model that included the following three stages: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, and ethnic identity achievement. In these stages, people become aware and explore ethnic identity issues on their way to integrating a healthy sense of ethnic identity.

Renn (2000, 2004) explored the importance of space, peer culture, and the fluidity of identity for mixed-race college students. Ultimately, Renn found that there are five identity patterns that may define a mixed-race college student at any point in life: monoracial identity, multiple monoracial identity, multiracial identity, extraracial identity, and situational identity. These patterns reflect different identifications with racial identities. One of the key important factors in Renn’s model is the notion that the model is not linear in nature. These findings also suggested that external factors and systems influence students’ identity development significantly. Renn’s work indicated that research studies must focus more broadly on the fluidity of identity and its interaction with other aspects of identity.

Root (1990) explored what external factors influence racial and ethnic identity development for mixed-race people and her work has been developed over time since the 1990s.
Root found that there were ten primary factors that may influence identity, which include history of race within geographic location, generation, sexual orientation, gender, class, family functioning, family socialization, community, personal attributes, and physical appearance. These findings further support other models that integrate identities and factor in environmental influences on identity development. In other words, students do not develop in one aspect of identity without the influence of other factors. Root’s work impacted many other authors’ work in mixed-race identity development.

Torres (2003) explored ethnic identity development through the experiences of Latino students. Ultimately, Torres found that there were two primary areas of ethnic development, situating identity and influences on change. Within these two areas, there are three prominent influences on college students’ ethnic development in the first year: environment where they grew up, family influence and generational status, and self-perception and status in society (Torres, 2003). Additionally, there are two processes that can signal change in ethnic development, which are cultural dissonance and changes in relationships (Torres, 2003). Overall, Torres’ work illustrated that students’ environmental and contextual influences have a great deal to do with their ethnic identity development.

In conclusion, there are two ideas that these models share. First, these theories incorporate environment and group encounters as being a primary factor in development, in that a person’s development can be significantly altered by their experience of oppression or privilege as well as their perception of support. In addition, many of these models seem to agree on a basic format for developing a positive racial identity. Earlier stages of development indicate a confusion or lack of interest in regard to issues of race, as well as viewing race in similar capacities as those that surround individuals. Middle stages of development designate a struggle
with identifying what race means in relation to self and others and this is usually triggered by an encounter with other people or environments. Later stages of development reveal a positive, internalized racial identity that is aware of privilege and oppression and how they work and also includes a commitment to one’s racial identity.

**Sexuality**

In this section, I will explore of sexual identity development by Cass (1979), D’Augelli (1994), Fassinger (1998), McCarn and Fassinger (1996), and Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2002). Theories regarding sexuality (i.e., sexual orientation) all reveal that being lesbian, gay, or bisexual has a significant impact on sexual identity development (Brown, 2002; Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Paul & Frieden, 2008; Singh et al., 2006). Some of these identity development models consider environment and group connection as a crucial factor in identity formation (D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Cass (1979), Fassinger (1998), and McCarn and Fassinger (1996) share a model of lesbian or gay identity formation in a general sense. The earlier stages include an awareness of one’s sexuality as different than the heterosexual norm in some capacity. The middle stages show that individuals begin to explore their sexuality in the form of relationships with people of the same sex, as well as the lesbian, gay, bisexual community. The later stages reveal a deepening commitment and internalization toward one’s sexuality as ze defines it for self.

Cass (1979) developed a six stage model of LGB identity development, which incorporates both a cognitive (knowledge of self) and affective component (feelings toward self): identity confusion (who am I?), identity comparison (I am different), identity tolerance (I might be LGB), identity acceptance (yep, I’m queer!), and identity pride (queer is great; straight is
bad), and identity synthesis (I’m LGB, but we’re all good). Cass maintained that not all LGB people go through all stages and identity development takes on all forms by individuals; in fact, while others have applied Cass’ work broadly to LGB populations, Cass only did her research with gay men. Essentially, this model has come to represent that LGB people move from a place of confusion to exploration, knowledge, and finally, acceptance.

D’Augelli (1994) developed a non-linear model for LGB identity development that spans a lifetime. D’Augelli argued that LGB people develop over a lifetime and may, in fact, experience all of his six, interactive processes at different points in life. The six interactive processes that D’Augelli described are exiting heterosexual identity; developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status; developing a lesbian, gay, bisexual social identity; becoming a lesbian, gay, bisexual offspring; developing a lesbian, gay, bisexual intimacy status; and entering a lesbian, gay, bisexual community. Ultimately all of these processes affect LGB development throughout a person’s life.

Fassinger (1998) and McCarn and Fassinger (1996) developed a LGB identity development model that focused on two primary areas: individual sexual identity and group membership identity. Fassinger’s research, both alone and with her colleague McCarn, described four phases in each of these two processes of development: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis. Essentially, every individual goes through each of those four processes at different points and may recycle through them, as well (Fassinger, 1998; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Additionally, Fassinger’s is the first LGB model of development that does not require coming out to others as a necessary component of identity integration (the successful formation and integration of all aspects of identity), which is a departure from both Cass (1979) and D’Augelli (1994). As such, a person is simultaneously
dealing with individual and group membership development through building from awareness to
internalization.

Worthington et al. (2002) studied and developed a model for heterosexual identity
development. This model is important in that it identifies characteristics that affect how all
people sexually identify and develop. In particular, Worthington et al. discussed that there are
two contexts through which a heterosexual can develop identity: individually and socially. There
are five statuses through which a heterosexual develops, including unexplored commitment,
active exploration, diffusion, deepening and commitment, and synthesis. These statuses are
similar to previous models mentioned, wherein the heterosexuals do not have to move linearly
and may move through one status more than once. Additionally, Worthington et al. identified six
influences on heterosexual identity development, including sexual prejudice and privilege,
culture, microsocial context, religious orientation, gender norms and socialization, and biology.
These six influences essentially represent external or environmental factors that may be at play
for heterosexuals in their identity development.

In conclusion, there is a notable disagreement in the formation of these models that has
led to some researchers to work toward developing less restrictive models. As a result, other
theorists’ models are not so linear and prescribed in orientation as it relates to processes of
identity development (D’Augelli, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). D’Augelli’s model is not
meant to be linearly focused and as such, provides more room for movement during
development. McCarn and Fassinger (1996) maintained that the previous models of sexual
identity formation relied too heavily on coming out as the process through which one maintains a
positive lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. In addition, they believed that other models relied too
heavily upon the outcome of identity development being either gay or lesbian, while an outcome
of straight or bisexual was seen as a “developmental arrest” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 420). Finally, they observed that the previous models had not taken an individual’s perception of hir own group membership enough into account (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) developed a model that is ultimately more inclusive and does not depend upon a person arriving at a prescribed identity. However, although D’Augelli (1994) and McCarn and Fassinger developed models that provided more room for differences within the LGB community, they did not consider how being LGB might also be different when combined with other identities or when considering the intersections of identities. Moreover, Worthington et al. (2002) offered some important contributions in their model of heterosexual identity development that may be applicable to other sexual identities.

**Conclusions and Implications of Gender, Race, and Sexuality Identity and Identity Development Theories**

Overall, these studies reveal that identity categories of analysis seem to have a more significant impact when paired with other aspects of identity. In other words, the more that we are able to define various aspects of a person’s identity and infuse those identities, the more we are able to understand about that person’s development. However, this is not simply a case of adding every identity together in order to create a picture of a whole student, as research in multiple and intersecting identities ultimately reveals.

Specifically, there are three concepts from gender, race, and sexuality identity development theory that are important to note when considering the intersections of these three identities. First, many of these identity development models include some aspect of defining self in relation to others. Next, several models also highlight the impact that social groups and environment can have on positive identity formation and development. Finally, the results of
some models suggest that when you add further categories of identity analysis (for example, considering a Black woman versus a White woman), identity development is altered in some capacity. These themes made it necessary to explore development as it relates to multiple and intersecting identities as well as environmental impact.

**Multiple and Intersecting Identity Theories**

Multiple and intersecting identity theories have been at the forefront of identity development research in higher education as of late (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2002, 2008, 2009). As previously noted, studying identity development through singular categories of analysis has proven to be problematic in that it does not take into consideration all aspects of an individual’s lived experience, as well as how identities may influence each other. This call toward having identity theory reflect the whole development of a person is a return to the basic ideals of student affairs, as prescribed by foundational research and documents in the field (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997; American Council on Education, 1934/1994).

Both the *Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949) and *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997) call upon professionals in student affairs and higher education to reflect upon the student as a whole learner and being and also to respect students’ abilities to have their whole selves valued in the college environment. Given that these have been foundational principles in student affairs throughout the history of the profession, it only stands to reason that identity development theory make a return to these ideals. Researchers in multiple and intersecting identity theory can be seen as falling into two
categories. The first group of theorists (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1996; Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007; Dill & Zambrada, 2009; Stewart, 2008, 2009) urge us to look at identity as multiplistic and situated, meaning that we all have many identities that allow us to experience privileges and oppressions that can vary and depend on circumstance. The second group of theorists (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991) have developed models that incorporate multiple and intersecting aspects of identity in which the person is centered and identities overlap and impact each other.

**Identity as Multiple and Situated**

Collins (1990) asserted that all people experience differing levels of oppression and privilege through their identities and that people’s experience of oppression or privilege is context driven in terms of environment. In other words, because our identities are multiple and varied, we can all experience different feelings related to oppression and privilege. For example, while one Christian-identified person can feel oppressed on a college campus that promotes secularism, another Christian-identified person could feel privileged on a college campus with a Christian affiliation. As a result of this difference in how we make meaning of our identities, as well as how the environment could impact that meaning making, many researchers have begun to create more holistic models of identity development.

Collins is not alone in calling for theorists to consider identity in more expanded capacities (see also Crenshaw, 1996; Dill et al., 2007; Stewart, 2008, 2009). Ultimately, this group of scholars believed that intersectionality must be focused on valuing an individual as a whole person and recognizing all of their identities, both in the construction of theory and in research. Otherwise, we are missing key components of identity development and analysis. This
approach to research is also in line with theories of constructivist inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as will be discussed later under methodology.

**Multiple and Intersecting Identity Theory Models**

The other group of intersectionality theorists has developed models that employ multiple and intersecting identities (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). All of these models share a great deal of similarity in that they situate an individual in the middle, with categories of identity intersecting with each other in order to form the core of that person at the height of identity development. However, the models are somewhat distinct in terms of their approaches.

Reynolds and Pope (1991) explored the impact of multiple oppressions on identity categories and created a model that included the following categories: viewing one aspect of self identity according to society; viewing one aspect of self identity; viewing multiple aspects of self identity but separately; and viewing multiple aspects of self identity in an intersecting and integrated fashion. This model served as a framework for other models that have come after it.

Jones and McEwen (2000) developed a model that seeks to infuse the multiple dimensions of identity construction at the core of an individual, while also strongly considering the influence of environment and the context of history and placement for that individual. Abes and Jones (2004) introduced an idea that began to formulate the importance of meaning making in relation to identity development. Meaning making refers to not just where a person may be in hir identity development, but also how ze internalizes, defines, and prioritizes hir identities in relation to context. This meaning making concept was based on Kegan’s (1994) theory about how adults make meaning of their lives. This is an important addition to the models in that it
reflects the connection between identities being multiple and situated, as well as the potential impact that environments (contexts) can have on identity development.

King and Baxter-Magolda (2005) developed a model of understanding the multiple dimensions of identity construction and used the Jones and McEwen (2000) model as a frame, while adding context, meaning making, and identity perceptions. Similarly, Abes et al. (2007) reconceptualized their earlier model to also include a dynamic of identity formation that included making meaning of identities. These models are beneficial in that they provide a concrete methodology and varying lenses for viewing identities as multiple and intersecting, while also considering context, which begins to recognize environmental factors that may influence identity formation.

Renn (2000, 2004) studied identity development in multiracial students. Renn asserted that there were two main factors that significantly contributed to identity development in multiracial students: access to and inclusion in public space on campus and how peer culture impacts the creation of and context for public spaces on campus. In other words, Renn was able to identify the importance of environmental factors in the identity formation of multiracial students. Specifically, campus spaces are an absolute necessity and may positively or negatively impact students as they grow and develop. Moreover, the degree to which the peer culture (student organizations, etc.) has access to and is involved in the creation of those campus spaces seems to matter significantly. Thus, peer influence on identity formation is another crucial consideration in considering multiple and intersecting identities.

Renn (2004) used the ecological model of human development in another study to explore how multiracial students develop identity. Ultimately, Renn found five identity patterns, which explain how multiracial students often self-identify: monoracial identity, multiple
monoracial identities, multiracial identity, extraracial identity, and situational identity. These are not to be defined as stages. Renn did not focus on the identities themselves, but rather, how students move through them and make meaning therein. In other words, students can identify in more than one of these categories simultaneously and moreover, gender, heritage, and higher education institution can impact how a student defines himself (Renn, 2004). The situational identity piece is another important consideration for the purpose of this literature review, as it indicates that a person often changes their racial identification, dependent upon context or environment. This, again, means that environment may have a much larger impact on how students identify themselves and make meaning of their identities.

All of these theorists and models reveal that a singular approach to research on identity development is not sufficient (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1996; Dill et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2008, 2009). Even in the early stages of student affairs as a profession, we were focused on development of the whole student. Separating identity categories for research purposes requires our students to separate themselves, as well. In order to begin to value students as whole people, we must work to do research that values the multiple and intersecting identities of our students and ourselves.
Environment Theories and Their Impact on Identity Development

This portion of the review of literature focuses on two items. First, there is an overview of four environmental theories that inform the literature on how environment may impact identity formation and making meaning of identity. Next, there are a few studies that have begun to focus on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and environmental impact that are important to note, as well.

Environmental Theories

There are four primary theories regarding college students and environmental impact that are noteworthy with respect to identity formation: campus environments theory (Strange & Banning, 2001), a formula for understanding how environment and people interact (Lewin, 1936), the sociology of collective behavior (Blumer, 1951), and a framework for understanding the systems at play around college students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Renn, 2004). These theories reveal that a college campus and the culture of groups can have dramatic influences on student identity formation and behavior.

Strange and Banning (2001) maintained that college campuses create distinct environments where student identity and development are affected in the following capacities: “environments exert their influence on behavior through an array of natural and synthetic physical features, through the collective characteristics of inhabitants, the manner in which they are organized and as mediated through their collective social constructions” (p. 200). In other words, the structure, culture, demographics, and social constructions of a college campus can greatly affect student behavior. This is particularly important for the purpose of determining how social group communities (such as may be defined by race and/or sexuality) may affect students’ developmental processes. For example, if students begin to define themselves
according to their surroundings, it would stand to reason that students who do not regularly see a reflection of intersected and multiple identities may struggle with being able to make meaning of their own identities. As such, environment is an important factor to consider.

Lewin (1936) wrote that how a person interacts with hir environment may impact a person’s behavior. Lewin coined the formula $B = f(P \times E)$. Essentially, this formula states that a person’s behavior is a function of the interaction between that person and the environment that surrounds hir. In other words, how a person acts and interacts with other people is a function of hir own identities as well as the environment that surrounds hir. This is important in that environment is posited as being just as influential on behavior as a person’s identity construction. As such, if environment impacts identity so dramatically, it is important to not neglect that factor in identity formation.

The sociology of collective behavior attempts to define how the behavior of individuals can be explained through group consciousness (Blumer, 1951). The most noteworthy example of collective behavior as it applies to this topic is the idea of crowds. Blumer asserted that crowds can greatly influence the behavior of individuals, whether in a positive or negative capacity. Ultimately, crowds of individuals can be spread out over a geographic place or situated in one instance and the behavior of the collective becomes the behavior of the individual (Blumer, 1951). This is an interesting notion, given the context of a campus environment, where students are situated in crowds in a variety of spaces. This idea of collective behavior influencing individual behavior in such a dramatic fashion can provide insight in terms of how groups of people on college campuses may influence individual student behavior. For example, if a student is a member of a racial or ethnic student organization on campus and that group behaves in a certain manner as a collective, it may be that the individual students behave in that
manner just as a consequence of being members of the group. Another way of thinking of this concept is referred to as signals of legitimacy, which means that students must exhibit certain collective signals in order to be deemed legitimate by the larger group (Boulding, 1978). Thus, people in an environment can have a dramatic impact on identity development and meaning making.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed levels of systems that surround people and impact identity development. There were three levels of systems that Renn (2004) discussed in relation to college students. The macrosystem refers to historical issues, societal influences, and cultural expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The exosystem refers to policies and procedures and the systems that create those as well as familial influence. The mesosystem refers to the students’ job, classes, partner, and close friends. Together, these three systems create the campus and external environmental factors that can impact student development in college.

Moreover, other theorists in higher education have begun to note the impact that environment may have on identity formation in multiple and intersecting identities. As previously noted in the research on multiple and intersecting identities, Renn (2000, 2004), Jones and McEwen (2000), Abes and Jones (2004), and Stewart (2008) have all begun to note the importance of environment in how people define self and make meaning of self. Additionally, Howard-Hamilton (2003) also commented on the importance of creating campus spaces for students of color, while Rankin and Reason (2005) pointed out that students who identify differently in terms of race will perceive campus climate differently, as well.

Other researchers who have touched on this environmental impact of college life on LGB development include Enochs and Roland (2006) and Evans and Broido (1999, 2002), all of whom explored the experiences of students in the residence halls. Harris, Cook, and Kashuback-
West (2008) looked at the religious attitudes of LGB people. Jourdan (2006) studied how family impacted development for multiracial students. Finally, Renn and Bilodeau (2005) researched how student organization involvement impacts LGB student development. Overall, the evidence on campus environments and their impact on identity development lead me to believe that research regarding multiple and intersecting identities must become more inclusive of how environmental factors may also be a salient part of how students develop and make meaning of their identities. This study brings those factors into consideration.

**Theory that Encompasses Intersections of Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Environment**

There are some current research studies that are beginning to discuss the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and environmental impact. Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, and Burkholder (2003) studied the unique experiences of Black lesbians. Brown, Cilente, Drechsler, Greene, and Jones (2008) studied the impact of identity construction in connection to sociocultural realities and more specifically, how to use autoethnography as a research method in considering all aspects of identity construction as well as environmental influences. Greene (2002) explored the effects of internalized racism as a result of environment among African American lesbians and bisexual women. Narvaez, Meyer, Kertzner, Ouellette, and Gordon (2008) studied the impact of identity construction in terms of the intersections of sexual, ethnic, and gender identities. Ohnishi, Ibrahim, and Grzegorek (2006) studied the intersections of race/ethnicity and sexual orientation through the lens of Asian American LGBT people. The researchers created the instrument, the Racial Ethnic and Sexual Orientation Identification Chart (RSIC), as a result of this study. Singh, Dew, Hays, and Gailis (2006) concluded that internalized homophobia is made worse when lesbian and bisexual women are not able to self-disclose their identities or have social ease regarding them. This may have implications for the
college environment in that the degree to which a person can be open may impact their internalized sense of self. It should be noted, however, that this study did not encompass race nor did it take place with college student participants. Patton and Simmons (2008) interviewed Black lesbian students at an HBCU. Their findings indicated that students struggled with negotiating their racial and sexual identities and often felt oppressed in White LGB contexts. This dissertation is the only current study that that focuses on QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color on a college campus.

There are some interesting themes that emerge from this current research. First, the unique intersection of gender, race, and sexuality, combined with environment, creates an identity confusion and tension for individuals (Bowleg et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2008; Greene, 2002; Narvaez et al., 2008; Patton & Simmons, 2008). In other words, environmental factors that were at play caused individuals to experience tension with one or more of their identities. For example, Greene noted that Black women who identify as lesbian or bisexual often experience heightened homophobia in Black communities. As a result of the environmental factor (the Black community’s response to sexuality), Black lesbians or bisexuals will often experience more direct trauma and tension (Greene, 2002). Some potential environmental factors in the campus and external environments (macrosystem, exosystem, and mesosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner, (1979) and Renn (2004)) may include: the presence of physical spaces, the existence of support and student groups, the role of faith/religion, the role of family, the role of significant others, visible markers of identity validation and support.

In addition, participants often preferred one identity over the others in an effort to alleviate the confusion and tension that they were experiencing (Bowleg et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2008; Greene, 2002; Narvaez et al., 2008). In other words, one aspect of the three identities
becomes more salient than the other two. Bowleg et al. (2003) demonstrated this in their study by asserting that Black lesbians described sexism and heterosexism through the lens of racism. Another example of this comes from Narvaez et al. (2008), who constructed a theory surrounding the idea of preferencing identities or equating identities, dependent on environmental factors.

Next, it is clear that individuals will often face similar oppressive attitudes and experiences along certain racial, gender, or sexuality differences (Bowleg et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2008; Greene, 2002; Narvaez et al., 2008). For example, most people of color in the studies reported experiencing difficulty with their sexuality in communities of people of color. Similarly, people who were gender variant reported experiencing hostility across the board, with the exception of within the LGBT community (Narvaez et al., 2008). This reveals that there may be some commonalities in how people experience reactions to their identities within certain communities, as well as how individuals perceive those reactions.

Additionally, most people in the studies reviewed above reported that once they had found a community that was supportive and inclusive, they felt free to express themselves as drastically as they wanted to in terms of sexuality, gender, or race (Bowleg et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2008; Greene, 2002; Narvaez et al., 2008). In other words, once people felt accepted and encouraged they could be as gay, butch, and/or Black as they wanted to be. And often, although the studies may not have necessarily been looking for this effect, the description of how participants fully submerged themselves in identities such as being gay and/or Black may lead one to question whether or not the participants could have been influenced by their social group membership to take these behaviors to an extreme (see Narvaez et al., 2008). For example, once a butch, Black lesbian feels comfortable in the gay community and becomes more butch than she
has ever been before, is this change due simply to her increased comfort or could the LGBT community be encouraging her to take those gender identifications to an extreme? This is important because it may support the idea of a collective group thought that encourages people to go beyond where they normally might in terms of expressing themselves in any particular way. This is also consistent with Blumer’s (1951) research on the relationship between crowd behavior and individual behavior, as well as Renn’s (2004) research on the influence of peer groups on identity formation. This, again, refers to what signals of legitimacy are required for entry into the larger LGBT community on campus.

Considering future research, there is a gap I have identified and an important final note to take away from these studies. One significant omission is that although several of these studies consider gender identity and its influence on holistic identity, only one specifically addressed gender expression. Gender expression is different from gender identity in that gender expression encompasses how a person performs aspects of gender, including one’s appearance, clothes, interactions with other people, tone of voice, etc. Gender identity, on the other hand, refers to one’s internal self-identification of gender status. Thus, the scope of gender should be more broadly defined in these studies, in order to determine how gender expression may play a role or make a difference in people’s experiences in different communities and in terms of understanding their own identities.

It is also important to note that with respect to environmental factors, communities of support (e.g. LGBT or African American communities), spirituality, work, and family all seem to rank significantly in terms of their influence on the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality. In other words, in exploring the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, the aforementioned factors ranked highly in participants lives in terms of what they struggled with as well as how
they made meaning of their own identities. All of these themes represent potential areas for exploration in this study.

In conclusion, the proposed study would impact higher education by contributing to the research in three areas. First, this study would add to the literature on intersecting and multiple identity development for students in higher education settings. Next, this study would explore QLGBTSGIL undergraduate students of color on a college campus; this is a group that has not been widely studied, especially in higher education. Finally, this study would contribute to using intersectionality as a framework and methodology for higher education research. The next chapter, methodology, will focus on the theoretical approach to the study, as well as data collection and analysis procedures.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter is methodology and will review the approach to methodology and methods used in this study. Again, the research questions that guided my study are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color on a college campus? How do QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color perceive their college experiences to be different from and similar to other students in college?

2. How do environmental factors (e.g., spiritual community, society, family, student organizations, and support groups) affect identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college?
   a. How does participation in identity-based social and/or activist groups on college campuses influence identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color?

3. How do interpersonal relationships, such as those with friends, family, and romantic partners, influence identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college?

4. How do QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color make meaning of their identities? In what ways do identity consistency and coherence characterize their identity meaning-making?

Specifically, this chapter focuses on description of participants, philosophical and paradigmatic approach, interpretive frameworks, intersectionality, the researcher’s role, research design, and measures of quality.
Description of Participants

Ultimately, there were six participants in this study, who completed all parts of the study and agreed to participate at all points. Data were collected from February to September, 2011. Initially, I sent out the recruitment information through the two lists of people that I had worked with and the LGBT Consortium, as planned. This resulted in three participants agreeing to be involved with and sign up for the study. All three of those participants filled out the electronic survey for the study. However, following that, two of the participants never responded to requests to conduct interviews. The third participant did participate in the interview. Shortly thereafter, the third participant dropped out of the study, citing her own struggles with her sexuality and coming out. At this point, I went through gatekeepers to make contact with potential participants for the study. I found the most success in finding participants through gatekeepers at one institution in particular. As such, all participants are from that same regional, rural, mid-size, 4 year public institution.

In terms of data collection, after participants indicated their consent to participate, I sent them the electronic survey. I told participants that I would follow up with them in a week. After that first week follow-up, I waited an additional week and contacted participants again who had still not returned the survey. Following the second contact, I contacted two participants once more to receive their surveys. The data from these surveys ranged from 2-3 pages for all participants. After I received each individual participant’s survey, I contacted hir about conducting an interview. Five of the six participants ended up being close enough to do the interview in person. As such, that was how we conducted those interviews, in the location of the participants’ choice. The last participant interview was conducted by phone, as the participant did not have access to a web camera to conduct the interview on Skype. When I spoke with
participants in interviews, I asked them to choose pseudonyms for me to use when referring to them in the study. I also asked participants to identify themselves in the survey and expand on those identifications in the interviews. See Table 1 below for a description of participants’ pseudonyms, self-identifications, and length of interview.

Table 1

*Participant Self-Identifications and Interview Length*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Self-Identifications</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austin Christopher</td>
<td>Black, gay, man/male, spiritual Christian</td>
<td>64 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bre</td>
<td>Black, lesbian, woman, spiritual but not religious</td>
<td>42 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>South American descent, homosexual, male, Buddhist</td>
<td>66 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>Latina/Hispanic, bisexual, woman, feminist</td>
<td>67 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Black, Lesbian, female, nature girl, spiritual, INFP</td>
<td>69 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Tony, person of color</td>
<td>77 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Philosophical and Paradigmatic Approaches to Naturalistic Inquiry**

When designing the methodology for any research project, it is important to explore the philosophical and paradigmatic approaches that drive the project. The methodology chapter outlines the philosophical and paradigmatic approaches to qualitative research, interpretive
frameworks, intersectionality, the researcher’s role in methodology, the research design, and measures of quality. This beginning portion of the methodology chapter explores the philosophical and paradigmatic tenets of qualitative research that drive this research project.

**Philosophy**

There are five philosophical assumptions in naturalistic inquiry, including ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological (Creswell, 2007). Ontologically, which refers to the nature of reality, qualitative research sees reality as multiple and situated (Creswell, 2007). In terms of epistemology, the relationship between the researcher and the research topic/study, the assumption is that the researcher will decrease the objectivity or distance between himself and the research study (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, epistemology deals with the researcher’s view of valid sources of knowledge, as well as how knowledge is constructed. Axiological assumptions refer to the role of values in the research project and in qualitative research, the researcher acknowledges that all research is full of values and decreasing bias is not a goal (Creswell, 2007). Rhetorically, the language of research, qualitative research values the participants’ use of language and does not greatly define or limit language (Creswell, 2007). Finally, methodological assumptions refer to the process of research and in qualitative research that means the “researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17). These are the underpinnings of the philosophical approach to qualitative research that I will use in this study.

**Paradigm**

A paradigm is, “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). There are three primary paradigms that will drive this study: social constructivism, symbolic interactionism and advocacy/participatory. Social constructivism, often combined with interpretive
frameworks, find meaning in multiple and situated understandings of the world around us (Creswell, 2007). Constructivism, then, means that we each, individually, construct our own meaning and reality, dependent upon many factors, including history, identity, and society (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, the goal of a constructivist approach is garnering rich detail and understanding from the emerging data (Creswell, 2007).

Next, symbolic interactionism is the study of subjective meaning and human interaction, thereby determining the participants’ interpretations that carry great meaning (Willis, 2007). In other words, in this paradigm, researchers focus on the participants’ interpretations of the world and their locus of the world. Objectivity is not a goal for this approach, as every person has their own interpretations that create their worldview (Willis, 2007). Finally, in using symbolic interactionism, researchers press the need to view the world in historical capacities and contexts. In other words, we, as researchers, cannot and should not avoid how history and society have shaped our participants over time.

Finally, a paradigm built upon advocacy and participation approaches research with the understanding that people who are members of oppressed groups are often so at odds with the “norm” that their worldviews are not included in the nature of the world (Creswell, 2007). As such, an advocacy/participatory approach encourages participants to become active agents of change in the research process (Creswell, 2007). In other words, this approach is designed to offer a voice to the participants so that they feel empowered, and perhaps develop a plan, to create change (Creswell, 2007).

This study employs both of these paradigmatic approaches, as the constructivist approach solidly grounds the research design in multiple and situated knowledges with the emphasis on the participants’ experiences (see Figure 1, p. 49). Moreover, the advocacy/participatory approach
embraces many of the tenets of interpretive frameworks and intersectionality, including the idea of assisting participants in creating change for themselves and others (see Figure 1, p. 49).

**Interpretive Frameworks**

A framework is, “a set of broad concepts that guide research” (Willis, 2007). Interpretive frameworks center on the experiences of marginalized or oppressed groups of people (Creswell, 2007). Interpretive approaches fundamentally keep the participants at the center of the research process: the data and results are theirs, the power imbalance in the relationship between researcher and participants is acknowledged, the type and structure of interview questions allows participants to define self rather than fitting them into categories, the presentation and utilization of results must remain true to participants and the intent of the research (Creswell, 2007). This study will use an interpretive framework, intersectionality, that has components of many other approaches, described further below (see Figure 1, p. 49).

Intersectionality is best situated as an interpretive framework that blends four others: critical theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and postmodern perspectives. At its core, intersectionality derives its purpose from the idea of creating social change for the participants and society in general. Critical theory concerns itself with encouraging people to transcend the limitations of race, class, and gender constraints in society (Creswell, 2007). Taking its history from critical race theory (CRT), critical theory builds strongly on concepts related to race and ethnicity and the oppression of people of color. The purpose of critical theory is to critique societal issues and offer new ways of thinking and performing (Creswell, 2007). Finally, critical theory indicates that researchers should look at how historical domination and alienation impact our worldview and identities today.
Feminist theory puts women’s experiences and issues as central in making meaning of the world and resists gender constraints, rules, and roles (Creswell, 2007). In other words, feminist theory posits that the gender binary in society and the historical patriarchy of the world influences how we all view the world. Feminist theorists have an underlying purpose of eradicating gender and sex-based oppressions, as well as giving voice to those who have been historically silenced. Finally, most current feminist theory reveals that its principles can be applied to any research in any discipline and should be, as well (Creswell, 2007).

Queer theory focuses on individual, fluid identity and how we make meaning within roles and common norms surrounding gender and sexual orientation (Creswell, 2007). In other words, queer theory has a strong focus on individual and how people relate to their sexual and gendered selves. Queer theory’s goal is to eradicate oppression toward all people, regardless of sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, or gender expression (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, queer theory seeks to critique modern representations of heterosexist, homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic issues in society. Finally, queer theory stands firm on the point that all people are fluid in their sexual and gender identities and that any attempts to normalize identities, behaviors, or issues is invalid as an approach to research.

Postmodern perspectives assert that knowledge should only be situated within our current worldview and multiple perspectives of identity (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, researchers should always be attuned to locations, oppression, privilege, and the systems at play in society that affect these issues. Finally, postmodern perspectives look specifically at domination and have the purpose of deconstructing those systems of domination. Pieces of all of these interpretive frameworks define the methodology of intersectionality as well as the methods I use, as will be defined in the following section (see Figure 1, p. 49).
Figure 1. Intersectionality’s Relationship with Paradigms and Frameworks
**Intersectionality**

The most appropriate approach to this type of study is intersectionality. Intersectionality can be used as both a methodology (theoretical tenets used as a framework) and to inform methods of data collection and analysis (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2008; Collins, 1998; Dill et al., 2007; Dhamoon, 2004, 2008; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Warner, 2008). While other approaches to qualitative research tend to focus on identities themselves, intersectionality puts the focus on issues rather than identities. For example, instead of asking a student what it means to be a Black lesbian and making assumptions about that student’s identities, an intersectionality focus would ask how the student identifies him/herself and what that identity means to him/her. Further, intersectionality would advocate asking the student about issues surrounding how they make sense of those identities, such as what privilege and oppression mean to that student.

There is a growing body of literature that promotes the use of intersectionality in research so as to truly capture the perspectives of people as they see themselves (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2008; Collins, 1998; Dill et al., 2007; Dhamoon, 2004, 2008; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Warner, 2008). While some of these scholars (see Cole, 2008; Hancock, 2007; and Warner, 2008) have attempted to develop models for doing intersectionality based research, others, such as Dhamoon and Nash have called upon scholars to be conscious of not creating a standard that does not encompass all people or that may restrict the expression of self in any way. As such, the tenets of methodology and methods that I use for this study do not come from one model of intersectionality, but rather, many opinions concerning the approach.

**Theoretical Tenets**

The tenets that drive the methodology of intersectionality are multiple and varied (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2008; Collins, 1998; Dill et al., 2007; Dhamoon, 2004, 2008; Hancock,
Hancock (2007) included attention to three concepts with an intersectionality paradigm: dimensions through and in which power operates, levels where interaction occurs, and different forms and degrees of privilege and oppression in participants. Similarly, Dill et al. (2007) said that intersectionality focuses on concepts or issues, such as privilege and oppression, rather than identity characteristics and Nash (2008) stated that it values aspects of identification, privilege, and oppression as influencing each other and being inseparable in defining meaning and self for participants. Moreover, intersectionality values the relationships between and across varying methods of interaction (Warner, 2008), which is substantial to understanding how privilege, oppression, and power operate. Finally, intersectionality highlights the need to address power differences in order to achieve working relationships and understanding (Warner, 2008). This is an essential piece of the researcher experience and role and must be addressed (see Table 2, pp. 52-53).

Intersectionality posits that social positions and identities are relational (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007) and avoids an additive approach to identity exploration and understanding (Bowleg, 2008). Cole (2008) and Dhamoon (2004) maintained that intersectionality conceptualizes social categories in terms of identity, characteristics, and individual and institutional practices, while attending to the diversity within all social groups. However, intersectionality also recognizes the challenges of defining commonalities in order to bring diverse people and groups together (Cole, 2008), which is important in that it does not attempt to reduce data in order to come to consensus. Additionally, intersectionality emphasizes lived experiences and situated knowledge (Collins, 1998) as important, while noting that social identities are entirely socially constructed and social locations and identities are changeable.
(Dhamoon, 2008). Furthermore, intersectionality considers how othering and normalizing impact people (Dhamoon, 2008). This means that allowing participants to construct identity is important while also realizing that those identifications are not finite and value should not be placed upon them (see Table 2, pp. 52-53).

Finally, intersectionality recognizes and allows for emphasis on the interaction of people with the systems around them (Hancock, 2007). Intersectionality also recognizes that how a person defines any one identity group membership is dependent upon defining other multiple and intersecting identities (Bowleg, 2008). Finally, it acknowledges the relationships between and within social groups (Hancock, 2007). All of these characteristics deal with how participants negotiate social group membership and the theoretical approach that is preferred here. Additionally, Collins (1998) stated that intersectionality demonstrates that each system needs others in order to function. These tenets focus on the interaction between many groups and how intersectionality theorists must focus on both the groups themselves as well as how they interact, shape, and inform development for participants.

Table 2

Intersectionality as a Framework and Use in this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tents of the Framework</th>
<th>Use in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes interaction between people and systems that surround them</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for emphasis on the interaction of people with the systems around them</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends to diversity within all social groups</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualizes social categories in terms of identity, characteristics, and individual and institutional practices</td>
<td>Social categories and the application of/identification with them was not implied or assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on concepts or issues rather than identity characteristics</td>
<td>Questions focused on issues and allowed participants to define self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoids an additive approach to identity exploration and understanding</td>
<td>Questions did not ask participants to view themselves singularly, nor as additive-identified people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posits that social positions and identities are relational</td>
<td>Asked questions to explore this relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examines the relationships between social identities, subject formation, and dimensions of social connections</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values aspects of identification, privilege, and oppression as influencing each other and being inseparable in defining meaning and self for participants</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts and did not separate them in description of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that how a person defines any one identity group membership is dependent upon defining other multiple and intersecting identities</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts and did not separate them in description of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledges the relationships between and within social groups</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values the relationships between and across varying methods of interaction</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates that each system needs others in order to function</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes attention to 3 concepts with an intersectionality paradigm:</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts and did not separate them in description and definition of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions through and in which power operates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels where interaction occurs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different forms and degrees of privilege and oppression in participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes lived experiences and situated knowledge</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrates that social locations and identities are changeable, dependent upon time, region, etc.</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posits that social identities are entirely socially constructed</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers how othering and normalizing impact people uniquely</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue; questions focused on issues and allowed participants to define self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes the challenges of defining commonalities in order to bring diverse people and groups together</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights the need to address power differences in order to achieve working relationships and understanding</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study, as well as researcher interaction with participants attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The methods that are defined for an intersectionality approach include recommendations for both data collection and analysis (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2008; Collins, 1998; Dill et al., 2007; Dhamoon, 2004, 2008; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Warner, 2008). These methods for data collection and analysis will define my approach to the study. First, in terms of data collection, intersectionality examines four primary ideas/concepts. It considers the identities of individuals or groups of individuals who are marked as different. Intersectionality also investigates categories of difference, such as race or gender. Third, processes of subject formation and differentiation, such as racialization are important in intersectionality. Fourth, intersectionality explores systems of domination, such as sexism (Collins, 1998). This study utilized all of the aforementioned concepts (see Appendices G and H).

Next, in terms of data collection, intersectionality values the participants’ definitions of self and identity (Collins, 1998). Additionally, intersectionality weighs identity categories equally and does not preference any one category (Hancock, 2007). Moreover, intersectionality maintains that unitary and multiple approaches to identity research are unacceptable in and of themselves; intersections must be explored (Nash, 2008). Finally, intersectionality does not normalize, privilege, or preference any social group identity status (Cole, 2008). In other words, intersectionality derives methodological approaches from the basis of understanding the complexity of multiple and intersecting identities (Warner, 2008). Furthermore, intersectionality defines culture in a broader, anti-essentialist context, so that it denotes a group of people who have continuous contact and some social identity aspect in common (Warner, 2008). Moreover, intersectionality maintains that language is vital in how you define terms and structure questions
(Bowleg, 2008). As is evidenced in Table 3 below (pp. 56-57), my study selected participants and asked questions of participants in ways so as to adhere to these guidelines.

Next, intersectionality requires that the researcher make decisions regarding research design, participants, and assumptions clear at the outset of the study (Warner, 2008) and employs multiple methods of data collection and analysis (Bowleg, 2008). Additionally, intersectionality uses case study and narratives as methodological approaches, either with individuals or groups centered on common factors (Warner, 2008). I have accomplished all of these recommendations in this study (see Table 3, pp. 56-57).

In terms of data analysis, intersectionality methodological considerations center on three issues: what intersections of identities to focus on, considering both master (e.g. gender) and emergent (e.g. intersections) categories of identity, and defining and understanding identity through institutional, political, and societal structures rather than characteristics or traits (Warner, 2008). Intersectionality also explores the norms that are shaped by people who are labeled as other (Dhamoon, 2004). This means that had to be in tune with these concepts in my data analysis process and continually remind myself of the goals of intersectionality theory.

This study employed all of these methodological tenets and methods to data collection and analysis. McCall (2005) suggested three approaches to categories of identity analysis in intersectionality: anticategorical (none), intercategorical (strategically), and/or intracategorical (social groups at neglected points of intersection). In terms of categories of identity analysis, identity characteristics will be used in this study for participant recruitment in order to achieve purposeful criterion sampling initially. Thereafter, I used the intracategorical approach, in which the researcher allows participants to identify themselves, but also uses identity categories strategically to discuss issues and findings (McCall, 2005). Another hallmark of this approach is
that the researcher acknowledges the benefits and challenges of identity group labels and membership (McCall, 2005). Using intersectionality as a theoretical framework and methodological approach to data collection and analysis in this research project allows for the study of how identities intersect and can create points of intersection that are not normally crossed.

Table 3

*Intersectionality as an Approach to Methods and Use in this Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach to Methods (Data Collection and Analysis)</th>
<th>Use in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values the participants’ definitions of self and identity</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighs identity categories equally and does not preference any one category</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not normalize, privilege, or preference any social group identity status</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derives methodological approaches from the basis of understanding the complexity of multiple and intersecting identities</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue; see chapter 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employs multiple methods of data collection and analysis</td>
<td>This study employed 2 methods of collection and 3 methods of analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for interactive processes of subject formation in identity construction</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue; see Survey question #1, e.g.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasizes that different social identities cannot be singled out into distinct strands</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examines four primary ideas/concepts, including:</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
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<td>■ The identities of individuals or groups of individuals who are marked as different;</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Categories of difference, such as race or gender;</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Processes of subject formation and differentiation, such as racialization</td>
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<td>■ Systems of domination, such as sexism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses case study and narratives as methodological approaches, either with individuals or groups centered on common factors</td>
<td>This investigation used case study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintains that a unitary or multiple approach to identity research is unacceptable in and of itself; intersections must be explored</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explores the norms that are shaped by people who are labeled as other</td>
<td>Asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
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<td>Models of approaches to identity in research</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue; see chapter 2</td>
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<td>Defines culture in a broader, anti-essentialist context, so that it denotes a group of people who have continuous contact and some social identity aspect in common</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
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<td>Favors methodologies that garner complexities of intersectionality</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodological considerations center on three issues:</td>
<td>This study focused on all of these issues and asked questions concerning these interactions and concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Which intersections of identities to focus on</td>
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<td>- Considering both master (e.g. gender) and emergent (e.g. intersections) categories of identity</td>
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<td>- Defining and understanding identity through institutional, political, and societal structures rather than characteristics or traits</td>
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<td>3 approaches to categories of analysis:</td>
<td>This study explored how participants used all three approaches to categorizing their identities</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Anticategorical (None)</td>
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<td>- Intercategorical (Strategically)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Intracategorical (Social groups at neglected points of intersection)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approaches can be a blending of these methods</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship between categories of analysis is an open, empirical question</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue; see Survey question #1, e.g.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language is vital in how you define terms and structure questions</td>
<td>The formation of questions and the study attended to this issue; see Appendices A-H.</td>
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**Researcher's Role in Methodology**

There are a variety of factors that are directly tied to the researcher’s role in the qualitative research process, including positionality, voice, critical subjectivity, reciprocity, and sacredness (Lincoln, 1995). I had to be attentive to all of these issues in the process of participant recruitment and selection, data collection, and data analysis.
Positionality refers to fully disclosing where the researcher is coming from and points of subjectivity rather than straining for objectivity (Lincoln, 1995). I had to remember that my role as a researcher is to examine and be knowledgeable concerning my sources of subjectivity. As such, I outlined those sources in the introduction to the study and with my participants. As a queer and feminist theorist in higher education, I was fully aware that my inclinations toward queer, racial, and feminist issues helped guide me to this research topic and study. I made sure I was attuned to the positionality that I brought to the study.

Voice is giving attention to who is speaking, why, and on whose behalf ze is speaking (Lincoln, 1995). In order to determine what voices were present and where voices were included in the results of the data, it was important that I engaged in data triangulation, wherein I used multiple methods of data collection and asked a variety of questions in order to get an accurate picture of the responses (Lincoln, 1995). Ultimately, I was concerned with not further marginalizing participants by not giving them voice.

Critical subjectivity refers to the researcher’s ability to define hir own psychological and emotional states throughout the research project (Lincoln, 1995). Being aware of my own identities and how they impact my view was important in this capacity. Peer debriefing assisted in determining my own critical subjectivity, as I peer debriefed after every round of data analysis with four to five different colleagues of mine. Additionally, I remained honest and open with participants about my own experiences and growth in the research process (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

Reciprocity is the degree to which the research process is mutual between the researcher and participants as equals (Lincoln, 1995). I had to continually check myself on my own role as the researcher and the issues of power, privilege, and oppression that were at play between me
and the participants. Obeying the tenets of intersectionality got me to this goal easily, including member checking, which helped in this process by allowing participants to have license over the final product of the research. I engaged in member checking at every round of data collection and analysis, thereby ensuring their continual participation and agreement with the results.

Finally, sacredness is the degree to which the researcher concerns himself with human dignity, justice, and interpersonal respect (Lincoln, 1995). I ensured sacredness by valuing participants and their process throughout the research design. Intersectionality deeply engages the principles of dignity and justice as primary purposes of research. Moreover, I am deeply committed to the principles of social justice and it is my overriding goal in life, every day, to do what I can to eradicate oppression for all people. This core piece of myself made it easy for me to meet this area. Overall, I believe I was able to fulfill these researcher considerations through an intersectionality approach to this study.

**Research Design**

The research design for this study includes the description of data sources, the population being sampled, the sample and participant recruitment and selection methods, data collection and analysis, data storage, and research questions. This section will define those components in detail.

The sources of data for this study are QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color on a college campus. Ultimately, through an electronic survey and an interview, the human instrument will provide the data for this study. Questions for the electronic survey are listed in Appendix G. Questions for the interview are listed in Appendix H.

The population studied in this project is QLGBTSGGL undergraduate students of color on a college campus. The hallmarks of being eligible for participation in this study include
identifying as sexually non-straight or non-cisgendered, as racially not exclusively White, and as being an undergraduate college student. In this strategy and approach, I will be utilizing criterion sampling as a method, which means that I will be stating my criteria and all participants should meet those requirements for participation (Creswell, 2007).

I recruited students to this study through three primary venues. First, I have a list of directors of LGBT centers from around the country that I have worked with in the past. I solicited help from these people first and asked them to send my recruitment information out to their student listservs. Additionally, I used the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals listserv as a means of sending out recruitment information. Finally, I sought participants through gatekeepers, who could provide connections with potential interested participants. As previously mentioned, participants were selected based on criterion sampling, considering the principle of maximum variation. I looked for variation in gender, sexuality, race, and institutional type. The goal of constructivist inquiry is not generalizability, but rather, to describe the particular circumstances at hand (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, data saturation is reached when the number of participants is sufficient to produce redundant themes and stories in the participants’ stories (Lincoln, 1995). When I achieved data saturation, I knew that my number of participants was adequate.

Data collection and analysis should be discussed together because of the approach to these activities in naturalistic inquiry – they should go hand in hand and create a seamless, ongoing process (Creswell, 2007). In terms of data collection, I offered two qualitative approaches, as indicated as being important by an intersectionality paradigm (McCall, 2005). I did an electronic qualitative survey and a round of interviews (Creswell, 2007; Erlandson, 1993). These are appropriate approaches for this study in that they garner rich amounts of data in both
First, I sent an electronic qualitative survey to my participants (see Appendix G). This allowed me to ascertain how students began to define themselves, make meaning of self, and how issues on and off campus may be impacting students’ development. Next, I did a one hour interview through Skype, an electronic videoconferencing site, telephone, or in person with each of my participants. This allowed me to further investigate the issues affecting each student that arose from the electronic survey, thereby providing the first level of member checking and rich data. Additionally, I was able to ask more questions concerning the students’ experiences on their college campuses. The data was stored at my home, in a locked desk, for the period of the duration of the study (approximately one year).

In terms of data analysis, I used open (line by line), axial (weave data back together), and selective (using core categories and finding the links between them) coding systems and was extremely conscious of member checking and peer debriefing throughout the coding process (Creswell, 2007; Erlandson, 1993). I conducted peer debriefing sessions with five colleagues, who all confirmed the emerging themes. Moreover, I conducted two rounds of member checking with my participants, which allowed me to further clarify and capture accurate results. Because the students’ constructions of self and making meaning are hugely important in an intersectionality approach, I believe that member checking and peer debriefing are that much more important. Finally, throughout the research project, I used my field journal to track my data collection and analysis procedures, so as to further align myself with principles of trustworthiness and ensure proper transferability (Creswell, 2007). Overall, I believe that
through an intersectionality paradigm and methods of data collection and analysis, I will gain the richest and most emergent data for this study.

**Measures of Quality**

Measures of quality in naturalistic inquiry center on three issues: trustworthiness, authenticity, and participant considerations (Creswell, 2007). These three concepts come together to build the foundation for standards of a sound qualitative research study.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the degree to which the researcher establishes confidence in the research project and findings through consistency and congruence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some requirements for trustworthiness include that data collection and analysis procedures are correctly applied, demonstrating awareness of the background of the problem, explaining why some conclusions were drawn over others, and addressing the applicability of the study to practice (Jones et al., 2006). Trustworthiness includes four concepts: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to whether or not the researcher’s conclusions are logical, given the topic and review of literature and can be traced in the field log and peer debriefing (Jones et al., 2006). As traced from the beginning to the end of this text, I believe that my study does this well. Transferability is the degree to which the results of the study can be transferred to similar settings and circumstances and depends upon the soundness of the logic as well as the researcher’s description of the study and circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout my study, I have been conscious of the circumstances in which my study may be applied and how other researchers may conduct a study of this nature. Dependability refers to whether or not a researcher would get similar results if the study were conducted again and is usually tracked through a field log (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the
details provided in this text, the path to my results is clear, as in my field log, which is available upon request. Confirmability is the degree to which the results of the study could be confirmed by others and is often achieved through peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As previously mentioned, I used four to five peer debriefers at all rounds of data analysis. I attended to all of the relevant trustworthiness issues as indicated through peer debriefing, field log, and member checking.

**Authenticity**

Authenticity is the degree to which the study adheres to the constructivist paradigm assumptions and approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The criteria for authenticity measures were developed out of the need to discuss the quality of all components of the study and not simply methods. Authenticity criteria include fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Fairness concerns itself with identifying stakeholders and their recommendations for further action and is achieved through member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As I spoke with my participants, I was conscious of asking how this study could improve others’ knowledge and skills and reporting those findings. Intersectionality holds social justice and growth as a primary concern; as such, this was the most central of theoretical approaches for me. Ontological authenticity refers to whether or not there is an improvement in the circumstances of participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Participants did not report an improvement in circumstances in this study, but focused more on educative and catalytic authenticity. Educative authenticity is when participants become more aware of others’ issues and complexities (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Catalytic authenticity refers to the degree for which participants are able to use the information that they learned in the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Participants discussed the fact that they
were able to see others’ experiences being similar to theirs and that they could tell others about a collective experience now. Finally, Tactical authenticity is whether or not the study empowered the participants to take action (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Participants in this study reported high levels of active participation based on their identities, which pre-dated their participation in this study. The participants also reported continued intentions for action in their communities.

Overall, as a researcher, I began to ensure authenticity through my commitment to participants and the paradigmatic approaches that I am using in this study. An advocacy/participatory approach encourages participants’ active engagement in creating change, which is an element that is included in several of the authenticity criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Moreover, I was diligent in my efforts to achieve the measures of authenticity in my paradigmatic approach as a researcher. All participants reported that their participation in the study caused them to learn more about themselves and others like them, thereby demonstrating both educative and ontological authenticity the most.

Participant Considerations

In terms of participant considerations, there are a variety of methods that I employed to ensure their safety and confidentiality. First, various contact with participants in advance of the study, during the study, and after the study ensured that participants were well informed throughout the process (see Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H). The recruitment, informed consent, and interview protocols outlined the timeline for participants in the study, as well as letters concerning participation, confidentiality, and overview of the study. By maintaining high standards in terms of valuing participants, I was able to ensure a quality study.
Summary

This chapter focused on the methodology of the study. The methodology situates the context of the theoretical approach to the study, as well as the methods of data collection and analysis. Additionally, I addressed the philosophical and paradigmatic approach to this study, as well as interpretive frameworks that I used in this study. Intersectionality is the framework for the study in both theory and methods used in this study. Moreover, I discussed my role in methodology as the researcher, my research design, and measures of quality to ensure a sound study. The next chapter, findings, will reveal the findings from the study.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This chapter in the study focuses on the findings of the study. The research questions are answered throughout the data in this chapter and final conclusions and discussion will be in chapter five. There are three emerging themes that have come from the data in this study. These three themes include defining self, intersections and interactions of identities and social group membership, and defining ethics, morals, and values. This chapter will reveal the three emerging themes from this study.

Emerging Themes

There are three emerging themes and findings from the data in this study. These three themes include defining self, intersections and interactions of identities and social group membership, and defining ethics, morals, and values (see Figure 2). The sub-themes of each of the emergent themes are described in detail below.

Figure 2. Results: Emerging Themes
Emerging Theme One: Participants Define Self

As participants defined self, they discussed “I Am Me” as a central descriptor. “I Am Me” was a phrase that was stated by four participants in the study, all of whom indicated that stereotyping and labels were problematic in defining self. Although some of those participants went on to adopt labels, one in particular, Tony, resisted labels in all forms. In this first emerging theme, the six participants discuss defining self through five sub-themes: gender and sex, race and ethnicity, sexuality, spirituality, and emotions (see Figure 3). Although some of their identifications of self may have been similar, the meanings they attached to them were varied, as demonstrated below.

Figure 3. Results: Emerging Theme One
**Gender and sex.** As indicated in Table 3, participants’ self-identifications in gender and sex included man/male, female, woman, and feminist. The participants’ definitions and meaning making for each of these identifiers follows.

**Man or male.** Austin Christopher identified as man or male and associated that with biology, “man for me is like male. Um it doesn’t come with, you know, any um characteristics. Or certain beliefs about life, like for me man is a lot more anatomical than anything else. Yeah, [more] biology than the way that you act, the way that you think.” Cash agreed and shared the same definition of male, saying, “being a male is biological.”

**Woman.** Lydia identified as a woman, as did Bre. For them, this meant empowerment, being able to do anything, and having strength. Lydia said,

> I don’t like people telling me that I have to do something or that I have to be a certain way. So, like, I just kinda do my own thing. I don’t mind having like, the mommy, caring, taking care of people, cooking… I don’t mind doing that. It’s just when you degrade women. Like, you have to do this cuz you’re a woman. I just kinda do my own thing. I don’t really try to fill anybody’s stereotypes or expectations of me.

Bre agreed with the idea of filling multiple roles and the strength in being a woman,

> For me to be a woman, it means I have to be… I have to be strong. I feel like I can be every woman. I can be a dominant woman. I can be the sensitive woman, the emotional woman. So, to me, being a woman encompasses everything cuz, you know, I feel like mother earth. Women are everything.

**Female.** Sam identified as a female and that referenced biological origins for her: “Um, I have a vagina.” Thus, whereas the other two female participants identified being a woman with gender roles and society, Sam identified being female as biology and did not identify with being
a woman.

**Feminist.** Lydia identified as feminist and that meant disrupting traditional gender expectations and feeling more comfortable in gender roles that are against norms for women. She said,

The reason that I say that I’m a feminist is because I do have a lot of issues with my family telling girls that, hey, you’re a woman; you have to do this. There was this one time, my uncle called my aunt a woman, but like, “woman, go get me that!” And I was like, whooooa, whooooa. The reason why I started looking into feminism and researching it and getting involved in organizations and stuff is just to teach girls that they don’t have to fill the role that they think that they have to. Like, oh you’re just here to make babies and stuff, you know?

**Race and ethnicity.** In this second sub-theme of identifying self, participants discussed race and ethnicity and self-identifications (see Table 3) included Latina/Hispanic, Black/person of color, and South American descent. These labels carried distinct meanings for the participants that are reported below.

**Latina/Hispanic.** Lydia identified as Latina/Hispanic interchangeably and that meant love of culture and spirit of family for her. She recounted,

I started researching some different holidays that they – Hispanics – celebrate and stuff and then I talked to my mom and my grandma about it. And then we just started doing more stuff like, of our heritage and stuff. We would get together and actually have, a Hispanic meal every so often. At Christmas, we actually don’t cook traditional ham and stuff, you know? We have a plethora of enchiladas and tamales and stuff and it’s just, I dunno. It’s really nice to get a feel of the culture that you’re from, but you don’t have to
live in a certain area, you know? Like, the United States is referred to the melting pot or whatever, you know? It’s just really nice to know how your relatives lived when maybe, they were in Mexico or whatever. It’s really fun being Hispanic. They’re just loud and fun! My Hispanic family is so crazy, it cracks me up.

**Black/person of color.** Black was an identity for Bre and Austin Christopher, who both connected differently to what that meant for them (nothing for Austin Christopher and pride with struggle for Bre). Additionally, Tony used Black and person of color interchangeably and saw race and ethnicity as how others saw him. Similarly, Sam identified with Black in terms of how others saw her. Definitions of Black also fell into two sub-themes: signals of legitimacy and expectations of others. All of these data are represented below.

Several participants discussed signals of legitimacy in the Black community being related to expectations in music, dress, and dialect. Sam said, “I don’t relate to the culture. I know, going to school, people expected certain things of me because I was Black. And it was just like, I really don’t… Like, [that] music choice or clothing or dialect, I guess.” Tony spoke in great detail about this theme, as well, indicating repeated attempts by both White and Black people to make him a legitimate Black man by expectations of taste in music, clothing, and dialect. He said,

I just felt like me being me. I dress how like I feel I should dress. I listen to music I wanna listen to. I don’t listen to rap music. I just don’t. It’s just not the kind of music I like. I like to listen to music that has instruments in it. I love instruments. I love vocals. And that’s the kind of music that I like. And that’s me. And most people say that you should be proud of who you are. I’m proud of who I am. I’m proud of me. I’m Tony. I don’t care what you’re proud of. I’m proud of me. I don’t care how you define your
pride. I define my pride and what makes me happy and what makes me wanna get up everyday and be happy everyday. And if my pride conflicts with yours, then obviously, who cares? We’re two different people. Two totally different people. We can both be Black. We can both be men. We can both be Black, gay men, but if you take pride totally different than I do, then that doesn’t make any of us in the wrong. And a lot of the people that I come across… a lot of the Black people that I come across are always like, ‘oh, you should be proud. You should talk where people can barely hear you – with a really deep voice.’ I don’t have a deep voice. I can’t even fake a deep voice. Like, my voice is a man voice, but it’s not like ::lowers voice:: yo, let’s go do this. I can’t fake that. It would hurt if I tried to fake that. And I just talk how my voice comes out. I’m not trying to make my voice higher than what it normally is; I’m not trying to make it lower. I just talk how I’m supposed to talk. People don’t understand that and it’s sad. I think that comes from inside that community because recently, actually, last night, I had a friend over. It was someone who I just met and he goes, “you’re my Black-White friend.” I was like, “wait, what?” He goes, “yeah, you – you’re Black, but you don’t really act Black.” I was like… I just kinda ignored that cuz I was like, you know what, whatever. I don’t wanna get into a debate right now, but at work, my friend will say, “you’re the Whitest Black guy I know.” And I was like, okay, we’re at work. “What does that mean?” Yeah! What does that mean? He’s like, “you don’t act Black.” I’m like, “how am I supposed to act, then? If I don’t act Black, how am I supposed to act?” He goes, “you know, what up, bro? Blah blah blah, do this and that and this. And let’s go fuck some bitches.” And I’m like, “That’s how it’s supposed to be?!?” If that’s how it’s
supposed to be then, I’m not gonna ever be like that – ever. If, as a Black man, that’s how I’m supposed to be, then sorry, I let you down! I don’t know what to tell you.

Expectations of others was a key signifier in determining meaning for people who identified with Black. Tony explained, “Well, I really… I don’t see myself as any color. I just see myself as me, so I don’t know. It depends. Most people see me as a person of color regardless of if I am, but I just see myself as Tony.” Sam agreed,

I’ve never related to my own culture or whatever. When I was little, I didn’t even like the food. It just got on my nerves. I know I’m Black and I’m happy being Black. I love my skin tone and everything and I like how fluffy my hair is. I don’t relate to the culture.

I know, going to school, people expected certain things of me because I was Black. Bre also discussed how she chose the order of her three most salient identities, woman, Black, and lesbian, based on how others viewed her,

I really picked it because that’s how I initially am viewed by others. So, I feel like when something happens, I try to figure out what order things are happening in. Like, because, I’m a woman first, that I’m Black first or did they realize that I was gay? I feel like it’s because that’s how I’ve been read all my life. And so that’s why I identify with that first.

South American descent.

Cash identified as being of South American descent and for him, that means he was adopted from an Ecuadorian orphanage in the jungle and relates to other people of color, as he said,

I am originally from Ecuador, which is in South America. I don’t know my parents. I was born in a jungle and then left in a hospital so, I really don’t know much about, like, my birth parents and stuff like that. So I think [the reason] I really use that as one of my
key signifiers is because it just shows that it’s a blessing. I mean, I came from nothing—literally just, you know, left on a step at a hospital. So, coming from there and where I am now to be able to get a college education, and have a loving family, and having awesome friends… it’s a big blessing for me. So, that is why I use that as a definite signifier to remind myself of where I came from and who I am.

**Sexuality.** The participants defined their sexuality in terms of four identifiers: bisexual, gay, lesbian, and homosexual. As a point of interest, one of the participants did identify as homosexual, which was a surprise for me, as I believed gay was a more common identifier. In this study, one participant identifies as gay, while one identifies as homosexual. The significance comes in meaning making of these identities, as described below.

**Bisexual.** Lydia identified as bisexual and that meant, “to me, the meaning of that statement is simply that I can have both a sexual and an emotional relationship with both men and women.”

**Gay.** Gay was an identity used by Austin Christopher, who confirmed, “Mhm. That’s pretty accurate,” when I asked him, “that identity for you, means that you want to spend your life, or be in a relationship with another man?” This is consistent with Lydia’s identification of sexuality in terms of who one is attracted to and desires a relationship with.

**Lesbian.** Sam and Bre both identified as lesbian and defined that as who they love and want to be in a relationship with. Sam said, “I mean, overall, I think love could be anybody. But as far as having a relationship or anything like that, I like girls [defining lesbian].” Bre agreed and went on to say that her sexuality did not mean anything other than who she loves,

Oh, to be a lesbian means actually, nothing, really. Because it’s like, that shouldn’t matter anyway. So, when I think about being a lesbian, I just think about who I love.
Just I can’t control it and I don’t understand why people don’t accept it. But it means nothing. Like, I don’t have any thought about being a lesbian because I feel like that’s just who I am and just who I love. –Bre

**Homosexual.** Cash defined himself as homosexual and that meant that he seeks companionship with men. He also could relate to other homosexuals, did not prefer gay because it did not fit right, and had a sense of pride around this identity. This definition of sexuality is similar to the relationship features of the previous definitions, as well. Cash said,

>[Being homosexual] means that seek companionship with the same sex. To me this means that I can relate to not only other homosexuals but also people of color and foreign origin. However I try to relate with as many people as possible regardless of color and orientation because I feel I get a lot better view of the world that way. I would just say I am a homosexual male, just because I feel “gay,” when I say gay I feel, like, if you’ve ever noticed usually gay pertains to males, like if you hear somebody use gay its, you know, gay and lesbian, but lesbians are also gay- its not just a male thing so I try not to say I’m gay because I don’t want to sort of fit that- this sort of, I’m this gay male. No, you know, there are women that are gay too, so I am homosexual so I just like to use, I guess, specific terms.

**Spirituality.** Participants identified spirituality as a key component of identity and this included the following four identifiers: spiritual, spiritual Christian, spiritual but not religious, and Buddhist. It is also important to note that the other two participants strongly identified as not spiritual, due to their own struggle with the intersection of sexuality and religion, as will be discussed in the next emerging theme. Of the four spiritual identifications, the commonalities
were definitions of how people should treat each other, as well as how one engages with God. These identifiers are described in more detail below.

**Spiritual.** Sam identified as spiritual and for her that means everything is connected to nature. She said,

My belief is that everything comes from the earth. I don’t believe that I should praise anything, but the earth because the earth gives us what we need to survive. Food, everything else. That’s what I feel as though deserves my prayer and my everything. But when it comes to a God, I just can’t. Because growing up with my mom – she’s extremely, extremely religious. Growing up with her, it was always, something’s wrong – read the Bible. Something’s wrong; go pray for it. This is wrong; do that. I understand to some people, prayer fixes things, but to me, I feel like I’m just sittin there talking to myself. And I’d rather do something more constructive than talk to myself and believe that I’m talking to someone else higher than me. That’s about as spiritual as I will get. When most people talk about a spiritualness, they talk about a higher being. That’s where I don’t much agree. I don’t really agree with that and that’s not where I’m at. But I do believe that everything comes from something and in my point of view, it’s the earth. That’s what helps us out.

**Spiritual Christian.** Austin Christopher identified as a spiritual Christian and that meant specific beliefs for him, including the Holy Trinity, Jesus dying for our sins, and not prescribing to prejudicial and hypocritical theology. Again, this reflects the conflict between sexuality and religion, as discussed in the next theme. Austin Christopher said,

I am a spiritual Christian. I believe in the Holy Trinity of the father, Son and Holy Ghost. And I believe that Jesus Christ came to the World to die for our sins and through him we
are saved. I do not adhere to the prejudicial and hypocritical theory and theology of many churches and their message. I do not attend church regularly, but prefer to find God myself as I walk through life.

**Spiritual, but not religious.** Bre identified as spiritual, but not religious and that meant going to church, being non-denominational, and finding God in daily life and personal relationship, which was also a theme among some of the other participants, as previously noted. Bre said,

I would define myself as pretty spiritual but not religious. I attend Church of God in Christ but I am not devout in that religion. I like to research all religions and listen to the stories but I do have my own relationship with my God. I’ll say religious is more so, I’d say it’s more commitment. Like, I have more commitment to a certain denomination and I’m devoted to that. Like, I go and I practice and I do everything the church tells me. But spiritual is more so that I have my own relationship. I have my own beliefs. I have my own thinking of what happens after life or who God is or whatever. And I’m content with that. I’m happy with that.

**Buddhist.** Cash identified as Buddhist and that meant peace and harmony, as well as loving each other. He described his faith in detail, saying,

I am a heavy believer in Buddhism. However, I consider myself a “co-exister” I say this because I am open to all religious and spiritual beliefs. I see no separating line and all religions equal love to me. I came across Buddhism and I think Buddhism has played just the biggest part in my life because it’s a belief that doesn’t pertain to, this person is right, and that person is wrong, this god is right, and that god is wrong, Buddhists really sort of believe about the here and the now, they don’t worry about the afterlife. I think
Buddhism has definitely made me more appreciative of everybody in life. It has definitely helped me with knocking down stereotypes and prejudices that I once had and just to see everybody as we are all in this together, sort of thing. Even being homosexual too, as well, you know, I mean we’re not completely accepted all the way in society but with hope of peace, love, and harmony, that just keeps me going forward, and stuff like that. To hopefully believe that one-day people will just put those sort of labels aside and just see us as them. Human beings.

**Emotions.** In discussing identity, emotions played a large role in how participants defined themselves. Specifically, participants discussed avoiding emotions, experiencing deep hurt, and being expressive.

**Avoiding emotions.** Bre described her attempts at avoiding her own emotions, even while she recognizes that they are important to her. However, she spoke in terms of her impact on others and how her emotions may negatively impact them, thereby causing her avoidance:

I’m very much – sometimes I feel like I’m overly emotional, so sometimes I try to devalue and say, “oh, you’re being upset or you’re being sad over nothing. Like, you shouldn’t be upset over that.” So, I try not to be emotional. Like, I’m always around a lot of people, so I want to be that down person. That person that brings the party down or brings the mood down. I try to always keep a smile on my face and help out anyone else that has a problem because I feel like things could be a lot worse for myself. There’s no reason for me to dwell on the little things that I go through. But at the same time, sometimes they eat at me because I don’t express them or try to share them as much as I should.
**Experiencing deep hurt.** In addition to avoiding emotions, participants discussed how their experiences with deep hurt impacted their emotions and expression thereof. In particular, due to hurt, avoidance and distance is created. Austin Christopher indicated this when he said, I have a barrier around my emotions because I have been hurt and used by people before. I have been in love and had my heart broken, so I don’t allow people to get very close, but I do allow people to see my emotions. I don’t hide them and am very much able to express how I feel at that time. I’ve spent so much time inside myself, I have a better understanding of where my feelings for certain things come from and that helps me to better understand the world around me. One friend once said that I don’t let people in (meaning to really let them know me), and they were correct. I don’t allow people to know everything about me or understand everything I think. This is because I don’t like to give myself to others and put myself in a position where I have to rely on someone else to keep me safe, physically or emotionally.

Bre agreed, “I define myself as very emotional but stubborn so I try to devalue them and not show them.”

**Being expressive.** While emotional hurt has caused some participants to avoid emotions and expression, other participants discussed how important emotional expression is to the process of understanding self. For example, Sam said,

I am extremely emotional and although that’s tough sometimes. I appreciate it because I agree with Einstein that they are our most genuine paths to knowledge. Feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge. [For example,] going through that depression [I had]. Most people would say don’t buy into it. It’s a trap, but it might have been at the time, but it led me here and I know a lot more know. So, I definitely agree with that. That’s
right on, at least, for my experience. Cuz if I wouldn’t have done that, I’d still be kind of
unaware of a lot of things.

Cash agreed with Sam, when he stated, “I try to feel emotion as much as possible because
I feel that emotions not only influence what you believe nut they also open you up to another
understanding of life and the people you encounter in it.” Finally, Lydia demonstrated the most
commitment to be emotionally expressive when she said,

It just really confuses me why people wanna keep their emotions in. I’ve never been like
that. I just do me, all the time. Like, if I’m feeling something toward you, I will express
to you how I’m feeling at any given time. Okay, sometimes I can probably be a little
over-emotional. I cry a lot. If I have a problem in my life, sometimes I just need to sit in
my room and cry. Like, now that that’s out of the way, I can finally… it just helps me
clear my head, I guess. You know, expressing your emotion at the time, if you’re really
frustrated, you can sit there and go, “uhh, I’m so mad,” and then clear out your head and
be like, okay. What am I gonna do about it? It’s just easy for me to always express
myself because then I can move on.

**Emerging Theme Two: Intersections and Interactions of Identities and Social Group Membership**

Participants discussed the intersections and interactions of their identities in detail. The
four emergent sub-themes in the intersections and interactions of identities include the following:
identities that complement each other, identities that conflict, making meaning of identities, and
identity interactions with society (see Figure 4).
Figure 4. Results: Emerging Theme Two

**Identities that complement.** The participants in this study discussed complementing identities in three areas: race and religion, creating a unique self, and religion and sexuality through God. All of these areas are described below.

**Race and religion.** Participants discussed the connection between Black and religious identities, both in themselves and in the Black communities that they were a part of growing up. Even while recognizing that this is a stereotype of the Black community, these participants found it to be true for their experience. Austin Christopher said, “Yeah, those [Black and religious] identities are tied. And it’s probably because of the stereotype of most Blacks are Christian in America. I mean, growing up, that’s where I met most of the people that I knew was in church and they were mostly Black.”
This leads to the next area of identities that complement, creating unique self.

**Creating unique self.** Four of the participants talked about how their identities complemented each other to create the unique mixture of themselves. They also related their identities to one another in order to understand the whole picture of who they are and how they identify. Lydia said,

My identities are unique, I feel. A lot of people can have the same identities; it’s just the different ways you empower it and you know, build your life around it and stuff. I have more identities. I identify myself as other things, but my three major ones, bisexual, woman, and Hispanic, I dunno… I feel those three qualities, you can really get the feel of my personality once you find those out. I mean, obviously you know I’m a woman.

Whatever. But not a lot of people know that I’m bi and I like to hear people’s reactions.

Cash agreed,

I believe that all my identities balance each other out. I learn by relating my identities with each other. For example, I was adopted from a very poor country when I was young and then brought to the U.S. I relate this with my spiritual beliefs and see it as a blessing and always remember to treat life as a gift, even if it’s just waking up.

Sam also discussed her identities in this way when she said, “[My identities] just flow with one another to create a unique mixture. I think they’re all compatible with each other because they all stem from the same values of mine.” This leads to the next area where identities complemented, religion and sexuality through God.

**Religion and sexuality through God.** Two participants, who identified as Christian, discussed the idea of whether or not God will condemn them because of their sexuality. They both agreed that they understood God to be loving and would not make them gay or lesbian just
to condemn them for it. Moreover, these two participants reported feeling at peace with themselves spiritually. In other words, this realization was connected to resolving the conflict with being Black, gay, and Christian. Bre said, “I feel like, with my spirituality, it doesn’t have me in this thinking of, you know, “is God gonna condemn me because I’m gay or I know what’s that like with religion. And I would have to face people telling me that I’m wrong for loving who I love and believing what I believe.” She went on,

I know that God’s a loving God and a giving God and he’s the all-mighty and knows all. So, I just have this belief that God wouldn’t make me the way that I am if He’s gonna abolish me and condemn me to hell for this. And when I was going through my whole questioning phase, I was in church every day, askin for Him to show me the way and help me and get this out of me or whatever. And I feel like He never did. And He already knew this was gonna happen. So I mean, I feel like we have an understanding. I feel like God already knew it would happen. He’s not gonna hold a grudge.

This completes the complementing identities and leads to the identities that conflicted for participants.

**Identities that conflict.** In this second sub-theme of intersections and interactions of identities, participants discussed three areas in which identities conflicted for them. First, racial and sexuality identities conflicted. Next, sexuality and religion conflicted. Finally, the intersection of race, religion, and sexuality was also a place of conflict for participants.

**Race and sexuality.** Some participants discussed the on-going and lifelong conflicts they have had between their Black and gay or lesbian identities. Bre told a compelling story,

I had a… I guess you would say I was her protégé in high school, but she was an advisor and a teacher and a counselor at my school. And we were really, really close. We were
almost like family and I watched her kids. You know? We would do family outings.

And once she found out I was gay, she pretty much disowned me and tried to tell me that she was tired of defending me and all these other things. She tried to tell me how she was opposed to it and it’s not right by God and the church. And so, she was one. Just general people that I encountered in the Black community. So, like, my mom would try to tell me how I’m supposed to live and this isn’t right. But she eventually came around to being understanding. I would say that teacher pretty much sticks out the most of those who opposed it in my life. And I thought we were better than what we are. And to this day, we still don’t really speak. I’ve seen her a couple of times, but we still don’t speak.

Austin Christopher agreed with Bre when he wrote,

My Gay identity conflicts with both my Black and Christian identities. The ideas and culture of the both the Black and Christian identity teach against anyone being homosexual. Instead of working with those who are gay and just focusing on the happiness and wealth of the community, there is an aggression against gay peoples. For the beginning years as a gay young boy I hid my feeling and thoughts to myself because they were not accepted in those communities. I would have been shunned and made to be ashamed of who I believe I am, who I wanted to be.

This leads to the next area of conflicting identities, sexuality and religion.

**Sexuality and religion.** Some of the participants talked in great detail about the manner in which their gay, lesbian, or bisexual identities conflicted with being religious, usually while growing up. In fact, these participants experienced religion as an attempt to alter their sexuality or “pray the gay away”. Austin Christopher shared the following memory from his childhood,

When I was five or seven years old, my pastor does laying of the hands. And she told my
mom that I was gonna be gay. She told her that I was gonna be gay and from then until 17 years old, I’ve had hands laid on me to cast out the gayness repeatedly. This was non-stop. Just seeing that, I mean, it was an all-Black church. It was a very religious, non-denominational church, but they were still very religious. And so, I mean, to have that happen to me and to hear how much anger and hate – to feel that kind of hate towards me, especially being young. And then having to go through it over and over again. And of course, they didn’t look at it as hate. They called it love, which to them, it was. But I mean, the truth of it is is that it felt like hate. It felt like people were telling you, no. You can’t do this. You’re not allowed to this. I mean, at five years old, it’s like, I dunno… I mean, I probably didn’t even hear the word gay until they said it and I’m like, “oh, what is that?” So, I mean, that is the experience that stayed with me forever, which really drives the way that I feel about my identities conflicting – about gay conflicting with being Black and being Christian. I mean, I’ve been in school where I’ve seen the gay kid get beat up or I’ve seen him get talked about. I was talked about a whole lot, from kids who didn’t know anything but was repeating what their parents said. Repeating what their older brother or sibling said. So, I mean, it’s just a constant… you know, it’s a passed down type of feeling because we aren’t born with these feelings towards other people. It’s learned and so, that’s why I feel that way.

Tony had a similar experience with his parents and church,

I am not a very spiritual person. Manly because my parents shoved religion down my throat as a child and they tried to “pray the gay out.” Other reasons why I am not very religious is that I do not need a higher being to guide me in life. I know right from wrong and good from bad. Some people would call me atheist but I consider myself a person
who really does not care about that stuff.

Lydia shared a similar sentiment,

I saw when I was a lot younger, I saw what I think was hypocrisy in the Christian church when I was way younger and still trying to figure myself out. I saw it and so I knew that the whole doctrine, living how they lived, wasn’t necessarily what I wanted, even back then. So I knew that there was a part of the theology which connected with me. God connected with me, Jesus connected with me. But the people I was around, the types of things that they were doing and saying didn’t work for me. That’s where I, that’s where I disconnected from it.

This leads to the unique conflict between the intersection of race, religion, and sexuality.

**Race, religion, and sexuality.** The intersection of three identities, Black, religious, and gay or lesbian, is significant for some participants in this study. Participants discussed this unique intersection as being conflicting for them. This is a unique intersection in that the interplay of these three identities is a common issue of stress and conflict. Bre said,

Being Black and lesbian is extremely conflicting because of, like I stated, homophobia in the Black community, based around religious beliefs. So, it’s almost like it follows three things at play: it’s lesbian, Black, and then being gay, and whatever religion I’m supposed to be. So, it’s more conflicting when I try to be around people of the same color as me and try to be the person that I am as far as being a dominant female.

Austin Christopher agreed and shared a story,

I wouldn’t say it was a pressure to be a certain way. It was to NOT be a certain way. And that pressure came from… I mean, it came from everyone. Yeah, it came from my mom, my dad, my brother and sister, my grandparents, uncles, aunts. Very strong in
family. See, lookin outside of family… I spent so much time with my family. When I hit the age that I was able to go out and ride the bus and get away from people, I kind of was able to experiment and not be around those who didn’t wanna be around me. So, I would say that those and people from church were some of the ones that would discourage me from acting or behaving in certain manners. I even, when I was 12, I was walking down the street. And my pants were too big. I was just goin to the corner store. And my pants were too big and I hate baggy pants. I hated them then. I don’t like wearing them now. And so, like, they were really big. So, hitched the side of my pants and continued to walk down the street. There were two guys standing across the street working on a car. They stopped and they saw me and they was like, “Yo! Stop that.” I’m like, “stop what?” He’s like, “put your pants down.” I was like, “what are you talking about?” He was like, “man, these fags just need to – they just really need to learn how to control they kids.” Something like that. And I just kept on walking. I was like, really? Can’t you see I’m holding them up? It’s not like I’ve got my hands on my waist or something. But I’d say that’s the most significant community just random act that I can remember having that influenced me growing up. But mostly family, church members, cuz that’s who I spent most of my time around.

This makes the participants’ experiences with conflicting identities clear. Now, it is important to explore how participants made meaning of their identities.

**Making meaning of identities.** One of the most important parts of identity is identity development, or how students have come to understand themselves and make meaning of their identities. In this third sub-theme of intersections and interactions of identity, participants discussed how they made meaning of their identities. Participants’ responses fell into four areas:
interpersonal relationships, external expectations, environmental influence (in particular, the college environment), and personal identity and salience. These themes are discussed in detail below.

**Interpersonal relationships.** Participants discussed interpersonal relationships in four primary ways as they relate to assisting in the meaning making process. These four types of interpersonal relationships included friends, family, mentors, and first romantic relationships. Bre named an advisor and described why she is important to her,

…because she is a woman of color who identifies as a lesbian or as a part of the LGBT community and she didn’t come to terms with her official identity until she was in her thirties. She had a child and was already married, but she still came to terms with it and made her way of accepting that. And then deciding that she’s more of a dominant woman or whatever – however the process went for her. She pretty much accepted herself. And she has numerous amount of degrees. She’s a doctor. She’s just a woman that I can always look up to and always strive to be like. And she’s so educated and intellectual and has these philosophical words that will just blow someone’s mind. And she’s always very supportive of me and many other students. And she treated [me like a] second mom [would] cuz she put me through college, my undergrad. She is the reason I graduated, so I know I have to give a lot of credit to her. And she’s helping me with my grad school process now, also. So, she impacts me tremendously.

Lydia described her friend’s impact on her,

I would have to say that one of the biggest influences would have to be my best friend. He is just the bees knees! He is always there for me when I need him, we basically do
everything together, and I really do not know where I would be at in this present state if I didn’t have him in my life.

Tony agreed that his friends were the most influential when he said,

My friends are the most influential people in my life. They are the ones who helped me understand that I can only be me. They accept me for my faults and my imperfections. There is nothing in the world that I can find more influential than the people who helped me love myself as much as they do. There are a few friends in particular who influenced me more than other, but in the end all of my close friends have helped in their own ways.

Austin Christopher defined family and their impact on his meaning making when he said,

Well, there’s the biological family that you’re born into and then there are the people that you spend time with and they make you smile, where you actually want to spend time with them. And you want to know what’s going on with them. You want to learn from them. That’s how I define family.

Cash agreed,

You can’t choose your family – but you can choose a second family and that’s it. My second family are all of my friends. I can be me and do whatever I normally do in my normal life and not feel like I’m gonna be judged. And that’s why I love my friends so much. If I didn’t have them, I wouldn’t have anyone, to be honest.

Tony spoke about the importance of his first boyfriend,

It took a while for me to understand what I am. At first, due to others views, I never considered myself gay, straight, or bisexual. I was not until I met my first boyfriend that I realized that I am gay. I met my first boyfriend. I was like, this is what I like. And this is what I am comfortable with being with. And that’s when I told myself, “I’m a gay
man. I am not a bisexual male. I’m not a straight male. I’m a gay man.” It mostly came down to who I was interested in. I found myself getting a lot closer to guys at that age and with the girls, I’d want to be their friends. But the guys I thought were cute, I wanted to be extra good friends with them. Like, let’s be really close friends. I think you’re cute, so I’m gonna keep you around for a minute. And that’s when I knew, like, this… straight people don’t do that. ::Laughs:: Straight people don’t do that.

Lydia agreed,

It honestly took me awhile to realize that I am bisexual. In junior high I had an emotional relationship with a girl, but I didn’t know the true extent of my feelings. If you would’ve asked me then what I thought about her I would have just said that she was one of my best girl friends, but if someone asks me about her now, I will say that she was my first love. The reason why I had no idea about how I was feeling is because I didn’t even know the terms homosexual or bisexual until I was a sophomore in high school, and growing up my parents always taught me that I should be with someone from the opposite sex.

This concludes how participants made meaning through interpersonal relationships and leads to the expectations of others and how that impacted their identity meaning making.

**External expectations.** Participants talked about external expectations in relation to meaning making in a very specific instance: negative influences of stereotyping and expectations of behavior related to identity. Tony was frustrated when he shared,

I thought people wanted me to be this like, gay guy. He’s gay, so he has to be this flamboyant! He’s gotta wear rainbows all the time. I think I got that from people that I knew who were gay, and then, also, you watch movies with the gay guy in it. The token
gay guy. Like, hey, girl, let’s go pick out this dress. Okay girl, let’s go look in this store. Like, I have friends who, once I came out, my friends were like, let’s go shopping! I like to shop. But I don’t like to shop with people because I’m shoppin for me. I’m not tryin to help you pick out what gets you a date. My girlfriends are like, “hey, do you like this dress?” I’m like, “it looks nice.” And I’ll give them advice and I’m like, this is taxing. Ugh, this is so taxing. I wanna go shop for me. And then you go to the mall and you see the actual flamboyantly guy. Going, well, he’s gay! Oh, he’s gay. It’s like, oh, well, maybe that’s how all gay people are and then I met some gay people who aren’t like that and I was like, oh, okay! You don’t have to be this flamboyantly gay guy to get your point across that you’re gay. You’re gay. Be yourself. If people don’t know you’re gay, that doesn’t matter. If people know you’re gay, it doesn’t matter. But, as long as you’re being yourself, that’s all that matters in the end.

Sam stated, “people expected me, I think even more, when I got into a more diverse group, they expected me to display specifically African American cultural values and stuff like that, just because I’m supposed to be contrasting the other ones in the group.” This leads to how the college environment influenced meaning making.

**College environmental influence.** Participants said that there were three ways the college environment influenced them in terms of making meaning of their identities. Environmental influence refers to the participants’ perception of the college environment, participation in identity and activism based social groups, and involvement in college. Bre said, “I would say more so, the LGBT community on my campus was my support.” Tony agreed, I’ve been to [an identity and activism LGBTIQQAA group] meetings. I’ve been to those and those are the meetings for my gay part, my gayness. That’s my support and I’ve met
friends through there. And that’s like, I’m okay with that, but I don’t know. I never really thought about support and needing support for things. Does that make sense? Like, I’ve never like, oh, I’ve got a group of people to go talk to about this situation. Because most of the time, I confide in my friends. That’s my biggest support group. I never really thought about on campus support groups, which mainly the reason why I think of [an identity and activism LGBTIQQAA group] is because gay people need – we need each other. Cuz you have the straight people who are there for us, but in the end, we all have each others’ backs. And you – I just feel like [an identity and activism LGBTIQQAA group] helps out because it helped me meet a lot of my friends.

Austin Christopher agreed,

[One of my sources of support on campus] was the Resource Center. Being a part of the LGBT Resource Center and [an identity based queer people of color group] really did help me to jump over that last hurdle of being comfortable with myself. It did. I was – it didn’t push me, but it really did give me that extra speed to really just say, “F the World.” It kinda solidified the ideas that I have about myself.

Cash described how the college environment helped him make meaning when he said, “it wasn’t until I hit college that I had a clear understanding of who I was and what I wanted out of life. I was raised very differently from what I believe now and how I view the world. I attribute this to many life experiences that involve religion, orientation, race, and how I view myself.” This leads to how participants made meaning through personal identity and salience.

**Personal identity and salience.** In discussing the impact of personal identity and salience in meaning making, participants discussed concepts related to identity coherence (understanding one’s individual identities and the meaning behind them) and consistency (applying identity
similarly across multiple instances), as well as the saliency of sexuality as an identity. In identity coherence, participants made it clear that this was a necessary component of one’s identity development, as they reflected below. In terms of consistency, the participants discussed being true to “me”, which was often associated by their own names rather than reflections of the same self-identifications across multiple instances. Finally, sexuality was salient due to the struggle associated with that identity for participants.

Lydia shared,

Not a lot of people know that I’m bi and I like to hear people’s reactions because I did not realize how many people are against bisexuality until I actually said that I was bi. I’ve had a couple of people say that it’s just a fluke; you’re doing it for attention; bisexuality isn’t real. That’s my favorite. Whatever. Don’t tell me what I am and what I’m not! I’m me!

Sam saw the naming and making meaning of identities as illegitimate because it did not capture the essence of self as much as a deep understanding that guides oneself. In other words, Sam mentioned that coherency is important but consistency is not because naming identities, let alone performing the same identities, is not an important way to make meaning of self. Sam said,

None of [my identities] are [important] because I don’t think that words can necessarily define a living being. Even if they could, I don’t think the one trying to define such a thing can ever really know. You can’t know what you are. Like, yeah, you might know terms or labels from society of what you are. But you really don’t. Like, I think people… like, I actually stayed up all night writing this and I had a lot deeper answers, but then I was like, this isn’t necessary. So, I kept editing it. So, what I really think about that is that I think people – I hope this isn’t too deep… I think people are just like the universe,
trying to understand itself because we think and we experience things and it doesn’t—like, when you really look at it, it’s really not changing anything. We’re just learning more. So yeah. I think it’s just like, energy and matter, interacting and trying to figure itself out. I think even if we, like, particularly with the words thing, I think you can’t really define a person in words because ultimately, I think we’re more so like, infinite, kind of. And I think we all flow through each other with our communication and our feelings and things. But I think even if you did try and explain something, you can’t because it’s like this other quote I heard: “Describing yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth.” Like, you really can’t do it. I don’t think it’s possible for us to really know what we are. Yeah. Like, I think, to an extent, you have to have some idea of who you are. But I think it goes back to that understanding and knowledge thing. As long as you understand, you don’t really have to know necessarily.

Austin Christopher reflected on the saliency of his sexuality when he said,

My Gay identity means the most to me. I’ve had all my life to understand the Black and Christian cultures. I feel like I understand the way both cultures behave and think. I don’t have a great understanding on the Gay part of me. I’ve been living my life as a gay person for 12 years, but as a child you don’t understand things as well as you should. Growing and learning more about others who identify as gay and learning about our culture and ideas, gives me a better understanding of myself and my place in life. That’s also because I have a lot of struggles with my sexuality, a lot of people pushing against me, while I’m the only one pushing against them. I’ve had to fight really hard to keep myself happy, and to keep myself sane. I feel like I’ve had to fight a lot for myself, to be
the person that I wanted to be, that I want to be. And so that’s why those two things mean the most to me.

Cash agreed with Austin Christopher when he stated, “My orientation [is] probably the most important. These identifiers are what have strongly impacted my life and my beliefs.” Finally, Lydia said, “I also empower the fact that I am … bisexual. These identities are most important to me because they really build the structure for who I am as a person.” Next, it is important to recall how participants discussed their interactions with society.

**Identity interactions with society.** In this fourth and final sub-theme of intersections and interactions of identities, participants discussed their understanding of societal concepts and issues and often used personal examples of identity and shared stories related to their own experiences of power, oppression, privilege, and issues that impact them. The participants’ connections between self and societal concepts and issues are described below.

**Definitions of power.** Participants talked about power in three ways: you can use power to uplift or oppress; everyone has power in some ways; and how someone interacts with power is the important part. Austin Christopher said,

> Power for me means the ability to act by your choice- to do things by your choice. Mhm. I mean, as long as- for me its like, do whatever the hell you want, just don’t hurt anybody. The minute that you infringe on somebody else’s rights then that’s where the problem occurs, and there has to be some type of litigation.

Tony expressed everyone’s connections to power when he said, “In my opinion, no one can have power over anyone. Most people think that other people have power over them, but no one has power over anyone. Well, that’s how I feel. I don’t let anyone think that they have the power over me because that’s not how I roll.” Sam agreed with Tony’s assessment,
Power. I think power is kind of subjective because it depends on who you’re having power over. Cuz it’s like, if people don’t legitimate it, then you don’t have any power. So, I would say power is one of those deceptive things that makes you think you’re in control of something, but you’re not, at all. Like, with our government, it’s just like, yeah, they think they can control everything, but really, if everybody got together and said, hey, let’s change this, they’re screwed. So, I mean, I dunno. Particularly tyrants. Like, I dunno what kinda crazy mindset they have to think that, I mean, they can probably get away with a lot for a fair amount of time, but eventually, it’s gonna come down. It’s not gonna last forever. That was kind of blurry to me. It’s halfway non-existent for me, actually. I don’t allow it to exist. I don’t prescribe to it.

Lydia reflected on how people interact with power when she said,

I would say that there’s two different types of power, for sure. Well, maybe two different qualities of power? If you’re in a position of power, there’s the people that can embrace it and be like, okay, I’m gonna make this organization better. I’m gonna do everything that I can to help out with everybody. And then there’s the people that are like, okay, because I’m the head of this organization, I can do this and I’m gonna do it because I can do it. Like, you know? Power is a very – it can be complicated because it’s just the way that people take the power. I came to realize, especially this semester, with being involved with an exec board and stuff and seeing other organizations’ exec boards, that people really do react differently to power and I did not realize it at all. People can be kind of awkward when they get positions of power.

This leads to participants’ definitions of oppression.
Definitions of oppression. Participants identified oppression in four ways: oppression is systematic and has groups who hold control/have power over other groups; oppression depends on the oppressed buying into it; oppression happens to everyone, everyday; and as a common response to racist or homophobic ideology. Austin Christopher said, “Oppression is a systematic device in order to have a hold over someone for something. It’s well thought of, it’s continual, it’s a plan of enslavement.” Cash agreed, “I would define oppression as anyone who is put down, treated negatively, or affected in a negative because of their religious beliefs, their ethnicity, their orientation, their race. Anything different about them. If you are putting someone down, for being different, I think that is the biggest definition of oppression.” Also, Bre discussed how oppression happens everyday in saying, “I believe that being Black and a woman might be more hindering to me when it comes to society because those are visible.” Sam also reflected on everyday oppression, saying,

I just think oppression is more common in those ways than it is in the expected ways. Like, KKK – how often do you see that? I’m sure they do stuff and we don’t hear about it, but still, it’s – I see more oppression happening everyday, on like, subways and on a bus than anywhere else. But that’s just because that’s where I live. I just think it’s those little things and it keeps those things there and it’s like, if you want that to go away, you have to stop doing that.

Tony discussed oppression as needing to be validated by the oppressed group of people when he stated,

I feel like it’s when people are – when a certain group of people or people don’t let another certain group of people or person realize that they have the power to do what they need to do. That’s how I feel about that word because if you think about it, Black people
back in the day, they wanted – they were being oppressed because people made them believe like, just because you’re Black, you can’t do this. You can’t do that. Low and behold, we’re all human beings, we all… just because my skin color’s different does not mean I don’t have the right to do what you have to do. And you should not make me believe that that is the case because that is not the case. And most people think that most of the people who are being oppressed is people trying to make them believe that, hey, you are this kind of person. You can’t do this. You can’t do that. Don’t do this because of this. Don’t do that. And no, not with me. Like, you tell me what I can’t do, I’m gonna do it just cuz you told me I can’t. And you’re gonna tell me I shouldn’t do it because I… you can’t do this because you’re gay. I can’t get married because I’m gay. Okay, well, hey, I’m gonna go for it and you can suck it. That’s how I feel about it.

Three participants had a common response to offensive language, which was “I guess I know what kinda person you are,” as stated by Tony, Sam, and Lydia. This leads to participants’ definitions of privilege.

**Definitions of privilege.** Participants defined privilege in four ways: privilege is having the unquestioned ability to make choices; privilege means you have an advantage and are fortunate; and privilege is about what people take for granted having. These themes share the unquestioned or given ability to make choices and engage in behaviors. Austin Christopher shared,

Privilege for me means an unquestioned ability- having the, having the unquestioned right where nobody is asking, well, how were you able to do that, or why did they do that for you? That’s privilege for me. Is being able to- to make a choice, and not have it – not have it questioned. An example would be [pause] a female being able to wear braids, but
a male not being able to wear braids. I mean, that, you know, a straight man being able to marry his wife, a rollercoaster, or a horse, but a gay man can’t marry his husband.

Bre agreed,

Privilege means either known or unknown, you have an upperhand. Like, you have an advantage. You have – basically, you’re fortunate. You have something others don’t have and whether it’s known or unknown, it keeps other people down. But you’re not intentionally doing it. It’s something you’re unaware of and yeah. Just an upperhand, basically.

Next, participants discuss the issues the impacted them the most.

**Issues that impact participants.** In this area of identity interaction with society, participants discussed societal, political, and other types of issues that they love, hate, or care about. Issues fell into stereotyping, equality, gay marriage, and money and materialism. Tony shared,

I think most of it is stereotypes. Most of it is stereotypes. And a lot of it is like, people’s ignorance because when it comes to stereotypes. Like I said, people expect me being a Black man, they’re like, “hey, you’re not dressed like how I dress.” You’re not talking all slangy and mumbly and saying all the n-word and every other word is a really awkward. So, I dunno. That makes me feel weird because just because of my skin color doesn’t mean I have to do that. Just because I’m Black, just because I’m gay, doesn’t mean I have to talk with a lisp. It doesn’t mean I have to wear baggy pants. It doesn’t mean I have to talk all ghetto. Like, that is not how life should be and that’s how people expect people to be and I kinda feel like this is why I am like this right now. Because people, when they – I’ve noticed, walking down the street, sometimes I will look at
people and smile and they will try not to look at me and I’ll think, “is it because I’m Black or is it because they’re weird?” So, you never know. I don’t wanna assume. Maybe it’s because… and that’s why, I make sure when I see people, I smile at them. And I say, “hi!” and if they don’t say hey, I’m just like, okaaaay. We’re not gonna… And when they say hi, I think, “okay, you’re a cool person.” I feel like stereotypes need to go! They just need to go because it gives people the wrong thought about how people should be. It gives them… if stereotypes were real, I would not be me right now. I wouldn’t be me. Stereotypes group people and then it gets people – it doesn’t allow people to be individuals. It makes people a whole. And we’re not all a whole. Everyone’s their own person.

Lydia agreed and shared her own story,

It’s just like the common stereotypes, discrimination, you know? I was actually at my cousin’s quinceañera and there was this guy that was there, like a whole bunch of Hispanics, you know? Like, some people brought their friends and stuff, so there were different races, but this guy that walked up to me and he asked me why I was there because I didn’t look Mexican. And I’m like, “just because I don’t look Mexican doesn’t mean that I’m not Mexican. I don’t even understand why you have to be Mexican to be here.” You know, it doesn’t make any sense.

In the next important issue, Bre discussed how equality and unity are central to her,

I wanna be passionate about just equality, basically. Just unity in the world. I just want everything to be peaches and rainbows, I guess. Equality’s a big thing for me that I strive for and I guess that goes along with oppression, too. But like, whether it be disability acts or LGBT rights, but equality’s something that I’m very passionate about.
Next, Sam discussed her disgust for money and materialism in saying,

I absolutely hate – I think I passionately hate money. I can not say how much I hate money. I just wish that we didn’t have it at all. I just think… That probably hits the deepest nerve, I think, is money in general. Because I think it just – it’s like, the standard that everybody goes by and it’s just like, that teaches all the wrong values to everybody. It’s like, once you introduce money, people think that other things can be bought and I think, when I look at society, it’s kinda obvious how it’s influenced relationships between people and the expected – what types of relationships are expected within our culture. It’s just, it’s sick, and I don’t know why.

Cash agreed with Sam’s displeasure with money in saying,

I would say, just, the way people put so much emphasis on material things and objects that really don’t have any, I mean they might have meaning as far as, you know, that’s a really nice, you know, couch. You might want that couch, but do I really need that couch, and is that couch really going to make me happy? Something my mom said to me a couple of weeks ago, which is still blowing my mind, and I think she- she might have used the wrong word, but still just blows my mind. I went home and we got on the subject of college loans, and she’s like, you know you are going to have to pay me and your dad back, more and more as you continue with school. And I was like, yeah, I understand that and I am paying you guys back now. I completely understand that. And then she told me, she was like, because, you know me and your dad are suffering right now. Suffering, like you know, you guys aren’t making enough? Is income all right? Are you guys working enough? Like, you know, if you guys don’t want to have me over for dinner, or, you know, if you guys don’t have the money to spend on an extra plate of
food, or anything like that, don’t bother, you know, giving me a call or anything like that. And she went on to say, you know well we would like to, you know, go on ten vacations, or we don’t have a boat, and I stopped her right there and I’m like, that’s your idea of suffering? Because we can’t go on all these vacations, and we don’t have a boat. That’s your idea of suffering. And I think, I mean I think she might of, she didn’t really realize what she said, or I hope she didn’t, because that’s- that’s just kind of sad. But I think that people look for happiness in the wrong ways. And that just really sort of bothers me because when I get so much joy just looking at a cloud, or feeling the grass, I just wish so badly that people could get the same experience of life that I have, and not put so much emphasis on, I’ve got to have this- I’ve got to have this- I’ve got to have this- because it’s going to make me.

Cash also identified gay marriage as a significant issue that affects him and connected that with his identity,

I would say gay marriage. [That would] definitely be the biggest one that affects me. And not because I’m saying I wish to be married under a certain religion, or be acknowledged by a certain religion that I marry. But, since religion and spirituality have such a big impact in my life, I don’t like the fact that there are religions and spirituality out there that shun away certain people and I don’t think religion should ever do that. I don’t think religion should ever turn their back on anybody, no matter who they are.

Well, yeah. What it is- I mean, you preach love, you preach, you know, coexistence or understanding, but when its not convenient for you, this is what happens. So I would definitely say probably gay marriage is one of the things just because it has something to do with me spiritually and religiously, and it really affects me that way.
Emerging Theme Three: Ethics, Morals, and Values

In this third and final emerging theme, participants discussed their ethical and moral foundations and beliefs, as well as their values. The primary ethical and moral principles and values of the participants are represented by four sub-themes: acceptance of self and others, love, respect, and don’t hurt others (see Figure 5). These themes are discussed in detail below.

![Figure 5. Results: Emerging Theme Three](image)

**Acceptance of Self and Others**

Participants discussed acceptance of self and others as an important value. Moreover, participants said that it was important to be true to oneself. Bre said,

"The most important value I hold is to be authentic no matter what! I live by this because I..."
feel no one should hide who they truly are to make anyone else feel better. I strive to be accepted for who I am fully! It comes from me actually trying to adapt and be something that I’m not. I’ve done that several times and I just can’t do it. I hate doing it. So, I just decided that I wanna show up and I wanna show up authentic. So, that’s me. And you can talk it or leave it, but I feel like that’s the best way because that way, there’s no lingering feeling. There’s no wondering. There’s no if’s, and’s orbutt’s about it. You’re gonna tell me up front if you wanna deal with me or you’ll tell me to get lost. But I feel like me coming up front is not putting any pressure on myself or putting any pressure on you. It’s like, we can go from there or we can just stop it all together.

Next, is love as a value.

**Love**

Participants discussed love in four ways: romantic love being reserved for a special person, love for family and friends being similar, having general love for all people, and having love drive one’s life. Austin Christopher described reserving romantic love by saying,

I am in love with my boyfriend. The difference between loving someone and being in love with someone has to do with my “personal space”. I love my family and friends, but the only person who I really allowing to understand me freely and who has an impact on the decisions that I make for my life is my boyfriend. Because I am in love with him, I want to learn all about him, on as many levels that I can, emotionally and physically intimately. I don’t allow other, even my friends and family who I love because of who they are and the personal connection that I have with them each, in a place where I am vulnerable like I am with my boyfriend.

Lydia agreed with Austin Christopher and defined romantic love as, “…when you feel a certain
connection with another person that you don’t feel to your loved ones. You will sacrifice for them and do everything possible to make sure that they are happy and stable.” Bre went on to describe relationships with friends, saying, “[There are] other ones, like a friendship or you know, a family member. So, I love this person. I don’t have to talk to them every day. I don’t have to see ‘em every day, but when we talk, it’s like nothing ever happened. It’s like we haven’t wasted any time together. So, and I have a lot of that love in my life.” Finally, Sam described her sense of love for the world: “I have a general love for all living beings.”

Overall, love was important and central for the participants in this study. Cash described its impact on his life, saying,

Love is extremely important in my life no matter what kind of love it is. Without love I feel there is no hope. Definitely, if I didn’t have the viewpoints on love that I do now, I would definitely say I would not be as happy in life as I am now. Because I feel that I’d be still distracted by a lot of different prejudices or stereotypes or, you know, love for things that, you know, I shouldn’t have love for. I guess which would be like lusting or something like that. So I think love has definitely made my life a lot happier. And to be able to experience it with someone else in this stage of my life is awesome.

Next, the participants identified respect as a value.

**Respect**

In this third sub-theme, the participants reported a moral principle of respecting others. Respecting others means treating people how you want to be treated and deals with interactions. Lydia described how she approached this:

My biggest value is just to give respect to the people that deserve it; I follow the rule of always give someone respect until they give you a reason not to. One of the biggest
issues in any community is respect; people don’t respect others that are in a different group than what they are, but the sad part is that people don’t even give each other a chance.

This leads to the last value described by participants, don’t hurt others.

**Don’t Hurt Others**

In this fourth and final sub-theme for ethics, morals, and values, participants reported that not hurting others is an important ethical principle and value. Usually, participants also talked about past hurt in discussing this as a principle, thereby connecting the two. Tony said,

The most important value in my life is live your life without hurting anyone. Life is already stressful. No one needs the added stress of others being ignorant and just flat out mean. They are important to me because I do not want someone’s rudeness to ruin my day so I am not going to be mean or rude to anyone to ruin their day. No matter what my personal feelings are, I would never do anything to hurt another person physically or emotionally. I just don’t believe that people should hurt other people. It’s just not how I am. But I’m not gonna go and lash out at you because you were stupid. And that’s just – my mom always told me hold yourself higher than everyone else around you. So, if anyone’s being low, don’t stoop to their level because it makes you a lower person. And that’s how I feel about anyone doing anything like that. It doesn’t fly well with me. You can’t fight me for me being me. I just don’t like that.

Sam agreed with Tony, saying,

If you’re harming others, you’re preventing them from living their life. So, I think it’s important that they get to do that the same because you have to share parts of your lives and that helps the growing further. So, like, if you’re messing up their stuff, you’re
ultimately messing it up for everybody. And it’s just considerate. Why would you do that? You wouldn’t want someone to do that to you.

This section focused on the ethics, morals, and values as described by participants. This reflects the final emerging theme in this study.

**Summary**

Chapter four focused on the findings from the study. There are three emerging themes that have come from the data in this study: defining self, intersections and interactions of identities and social group memberships, and defining ethics, morals, and values (see Figure 6). The findings from the study reveal that the participants identify in complex ways and recognize the various ways that their identities interact on a daily basis. Moreover, participants understand and see the impact of society on self-identification and meaning making. The findings also reveal that the college environment, as well as friends, family, and mentors have the biggest influence on meaning making and successful identity development for participants in this study. Finally, ethics and morals are important and clearly stated for participants and are usually connected to past hurt or experiences with oppression. The next and final chapter, chapter five, will focus on conclusions and discussion. Chapter five will include implications for policy, practice, and research, as well as suggestions for future research.
Figure 6. Results: A Complete Model
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will focus on conclusions and discussion surrounding the findings of the study. In particular, this chapter will center on conclusions and interpretations, connections to existing literature, implications and recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Conclusions and Interpretations

This section of chapter five focuses first on answering the research questions and comparing the findings to the review of literature. Following that, I offer some conclusions and interpretations for each of three emerging themes in the study: defining self, intersections and interactions of identities and social group memberships, and defining ethics, morals, and values.

Experiences of QLGBTSGL Students of Color on Campus

This portion of the conclusions and interpretations focuses on answering research question one, concerning the experiences of QLGBTSGL students of color on college campuses and the participants’ perceptions of comparing their experience to others. In this study, QLGBTSGL students of color on college campus experienced their campuses as welcoming and affirming, as well as supportive of meaning making and development. For example, participants cited creating family on campuses and mentors on campuses as essential pieces of identity development. Moreover, participants also cited involvement as a key assistance mechanism in defining identity and identity development. As such, it is clear that the participants in this study count the college environment as an essential portion of identity, identity development, and meaning making. Also, participants reported that diversity offices, residence life, and counseling centers provide support and guidance to students in their sense of meaning making and identity development.
In addressing the second part of research question one, participants’ perceptions of comparing their experience to other students, there is not sufficient data to answer this portion of the question. In retrospect, none of my survey or interview questions specifically addressed how the participants compared their experiences to others. I should have addressed this question more specifically either in the survey or interview.

The conclusions for this first research question are in line with many studies and theories that focus on the impact of college on successful identity development, especially considering the impact of environmental factors and involvement on campus (Abes & Jones, 2004; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Evans & Broido, 1999, 2002; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Renn, 2000, 2004; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Stewart, 2008). Specifically, every conclusion in this area is supported by research that has already been established discussed in chapter two.

**Environmental and Student Organization Influence**

This portion of the conclusions and interpretations focuses on answering research question two, concerning how environmental factors (e.g., spiritual community, society, family, student organizations, and support groups) affect identity development for QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college, with a special focus on how participation in identity based and/or social activist groups impacts identity and identity development for participants. In this study, QLGBTSGL students of color were strongly impacted by environmental factors in terms of meaning making, which will be discussed in detail in conclusions for research question four. However, it is important to note that the campus environment, as well as identity and social activism based groups on campus had a positive impact on identity development and meaning making for participants. Moreover, the impact of identity and social activism based groups was
varied, but significant. Social and identity based groups on college campuses strongly impact identity, meaning making, and identity development for participants in this study.

This is consistent with previous findings which state that involvement for underrepresented students is a positive influence on identity development, as well (Evans & Broido, 1999, 2002; Renn, 2000, 2004; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Torres et al., 2009). Thus, the impact of identity and social based groups on QLGBTSGGL students of color’s successful definition and understanding of self cannot be overstated in this research.

**Interpersonal Relationships Influence Identity Development**

This portion of the conclusions and interpretations focuses on answering research question three, concerning how interpersonal relationships, such as those with family, friends, and romantic partners, influence identity development in QLGBTSGGL students of color. In this study, QLGBTSGGL students of color defined interpersonal relationships as central and core to identity and identity development, specifically through the lens of meaning making. In other words, interpersonal relationships assisted participants most in terms of making meaning of their identities. The types of interpersonal relationships that impacted participants the most were those with friends, family (both biological/adoptive and what you create), mentors, and first same sex romantic partners.

This is consistent with previous findings that indicated that interpersonal relationships had a significant impact on identity development (see Chickering & Reisser, 1993), which is also discussed later in this chapter, under love.

**Meaning Making, Identity Consistency, and Identity Coherence**

This portion of the conclusions and interpretations focuses on answering research question four, concerning how QLGBTSGGL students of color made meaning of their identities
and characterized identity consistency and coherence. In this study, QLGBTSGGL students of color reported that they make meaning of their identities through four primary areas: interpersonal relationships, external expectations, environmental influence, and personal identity and salience. In other words, interacting with other people, other people’s stereotypical expectations of identity performance, the college environment, and identity consistency and coherence were the vehicles through which participants made meaning of self. As discussed in the previous chapter, identity consistency as a successful measure of identity development was not valid, but identity coherence was. This is inconsistent with previous findings in research, as also indicated later in this chapter.

The first conclusion here, that participants make meaning in four primary ways, is consistent with previous findings in research that indicated similar methods of defining self and making meaning (Baxter-Magolda, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn, 2000, 2004).

**Participants Define Self**

This section focuses on conclusions and interpretations for the first emerging theme. Conclusions from this emerging theme include the following: identity is vast and varied; Black is a complicated identity; and emotions play a large role in defining relationships, self, and processing. First, from the 18 different identities that were described by six participants, it is clear to see that identity is vast and varied for the participants in this study. This is not uncommon and further validates findings from theorists who view identity as multiple and situated, as well as intersecting (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Stewart, 2002, 2008, 2009). This conclusion further validates the methodological and theoretical approach to this study,
intersectionality, as well, as a singular focus on identity would not have resulted in such diversity in identification, as well as participants’ reflections on identity interactions.

Next, four participants in this study revealed through their identifications that Black is a complicated identity and identity development process. Many previous scholars have noted the complications of race (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Helms, 1990; Kim, 2001; Phinney, 1990; Renn, 2000, 2004; Root, 1990; Torres, 2003). However, the meaning making tied to being or identifying as Black that is noted here may not be as present in other studies as themes.

Third, emotions played a large role in defining relationships, self, and processing. This is a finding that is also largely connected to other identity development models, including Chickering and Reisser (1993), most specifically, when they talk about managing emotions. Thus, the presence of negotiation of emotions for these participants is on track with other identity concepts.

**Intersections and Interactions of Identity and Social Group Membership**

This section focuses on conclusions and interpretations for the second emerging theme. The conclusions are as follows: intersections and interactions of identities and social group memberships are alive and present and the participants recognize them; meaning making covers the gamut from people to expectations of others; identity consistency does not matter for making meaning of identity, but coherence does; sexuality is salient due to conflict and struggle; identity interactions with society are connected with identity self-identifications, and finally, un-addressed intersections. First, the interactions and intersections of identities are very present in the findings. Moreover, the participants were able to recognize the points of intersection and discuss how they impacted identity, identity development, and meaning making. This means that
Intersectionality is a solid approach to identity-based research. It also indicates that students are able to think of their identities in more complex manners than, perhaps, was previously thought in higher education research on cognitive abilities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Next, participants’ methods of meaning making covered a wide array of sources and uses, from people to student organizations. This, again, falls in line with previous research, as identity-based theorists have long understood the variety of methods that are used in making sense of self (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erickson, 1968).

Then, identity consistency as a measure of successful development is inaccurate and incomplete; it actually limits one’s ability to be fluid and adaptive in their application of self. The central question becomes this: why should one’s understanding of self, identification of self, and application of self need to be so limiting (one approach, one thought, one feeling, etc.) in order to be a higher level of development? Especially as we consider intersectionality’s focus on societal structures, issues, and identity as a process, it requires that we investigate how people approach life in different places, with varying levels of oppression, privilege, power, etc. Participants’ responses revealed that coherence is key to development, but consistency is a false predictor of successful development. This is a departure from the research on identity and identity development, as it indicates that identity consistency may not be as central to successful development as once believed (see Cass, 1979; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; D’Augelli, 1994). For example, in Cass’ model, successful identity development at the last stage depends upon integrating one’s identity in every aspect of life consistently. Participants in this study resist identifying in general, let alone identifying the same in every aspect of life.
Next, sexuality was reported by participants as a salient identity aspect. Moreover, the saliency of that identity was connected to how much participants have had to struggle with oppressed sexual identities. In other words, because participants had to struggle or fight against others to be QLGBTSGl, their sexual identities were salient. Abes et al. (2007) and Renn (2004) discussed how environment can impact identity saliency and understanding, making this finding consistent with other research, as well.

Then, conclusions and interpretations for identity interactions with society include the following: similar definitions of power, oppression, and privilege, as well as how they affect participants, and top participant issues being strongly connected to identity. In other words, as participants defined power, oppression, and privilege, they tended to have similar definitions and those definitions were tied to how power, oppression, and privilege impacted the participants. This finding has not been explored in previous research and is a new insight into how QLGBTSGl students of color define and interact with societal concepts and structures. Next, participants strongly connected the issues that they cared about the most with their identities. In other words, gay marriage came up as a strong issue and that had a direct link to participants’ definitions of self. This means that students are likely to care about issues that affect who they are and what they encounter in the world. This is another finding that I have not seen in previous research and also provides further support for intersectionality as an approach to research, in that it preferences the societal impact on identity as central to how we make meaning of our identities.

Finally, a conclusion for unaddressed intersections includes racism in the queer community. Some of the preliminary research on identity development for this group of people had indicated that participants experienced racism from White people in the queer communities
in which they were a part (Patton & Simmons, 2008). However, participants in this study did not report such experiences. Conversely, participants reported that they found racial diversity and acceptance within their queer communities in this study.

**Have Respect for Others and Don’t Hurt People: Ethics, Morals, and Values**

Conclusions from this third and final emerging theme include the following: ethics, morals, and values are connected to identity and identity development. First, ethical and moral principles were tied to identity factors for the participants in this study. In other words, how participants identified had meaning for what they believed was right or wrong. This finding is consistent with moral identity development models (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Next, reported values and definitions of values were connected with identity and identity development stories for participants. In other words, participants tended to value things that allowed them to be more of themselves or feel better about their identities. Moreover, participants discussed that they arrived at certain values as a result of struggling with identities. This finding is consistent with the development of morals and ethics, as well (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

Finally, the role of love was critical for the participants in this study. Such varied definitions of love and participants’ reports of love’s connection with identity were not themes that have been reported elsewhere in identity or identity development research. Rather, romantic interpersonal relationships may be discussed as having an impact on identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). But the specific definitions of love as being central to values and guiding a person have not appeared in research.
Connections to Existing Literature on Identity Development

There are many connections between this study and existing identity based research. This section will detail the connections between this study and identity research based on gender, race, sexuality, and multiple and intersecting identities.

First, in terms of gender, there are four themes that can be drawn from this research. First, women tend to be more relational while men rely on objective rationality (Bem, 1983; Beemyn, 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Carter, 2005; Davis, 2002; Downing & Roush, 1985; Jones, 1997; Jordan, 1992; Lev, 2004). Next, as women and men move through their development, they gain a greater confidence about self and gender. Third, women, men, and transgender individuals all struggle with concepts of femininity and masculinity as it relates to self and others. Finally, the social constructions of gender are binding and present obstacles to development and internalization of gender identity and expression. In terms of this study, only the first conclusion was not supported; my participants reported greater confidence, the complexities of gender expression, and that social constructions of gender were binding to self. In addition, while there were no participants who identified as transgender in this study, a couple of participants did report problems in dealing with gender expression, which connects to both Beemyn (2005) and Bilodeau (2009). In terms of Downing and Roush (1985), there was one participant in this study, in particular, who identified as feminist and her development path as she discussed it, seemed to fall in line perfectly with this model and characterization. Finally, while there were no gender variant people in this study, the participants did discuss how their various roles fit together and influenced one another in similar capacities as Lev (2004) described.

Next, in terms of race, there are two ideas that the models share. First, these theories incorporate environment and group encounters as being a primary factor in development, in that
a person’s development can be significantly altered by their experience of oppression or
privilege as well as their perception of support. The participants in this study indicated that these
were important factors in their development. In addition, many of these models seem to agree on
a basic format for developing a positive racial identity. Earlier stages of development indicated a
confusion or lack of interest in regard to issues of race, as well as viewing race in similar
capacities as those that surround individuals. Middle stages of development designated a
struggle with identifying what race means in relation to self and others and this is usually
triggered by an encounter with other people or environments. Later stages of development
revealed a positive, internalized racial identity that is aware of privilege and oppression and how
they work and also includes a commitment to one’s racial identity. At least two participants in
this study revealed indications of having gone through some of these stages of development. In
addition, in relation to Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1998), few participants in this study identified
strongly with their racial identities or any discussed their racial history in detail, and thus, it was
difficult to describe whether or not they had gone through these stages. Because there were no
White or Asian identified participants, Helms (1990) and Kim (2001) were not applicable.
Moreover, no participants identified mixed-race identities in this study, which made Renn (2000)
and Root (1990) irrelevant. However, several of the participants in this study reported having
gone through all three of Phinney’s (1990) stages of ethnic identity development. Regarding
Latino students, Torres’ work indicated that students’ environmental and contextual influences
have a great deal to do with their ethnic identity development. There was one participant who
identified as Latina in this study. Her responses indicated that she was very much in line with
Torres’ model in that she had a cultural dissonance and was affected by all three influences in
her time in college.
Third, in terms of sexuality, the participants reported finding themselves in all stages of Cass (1979) and processes of D’Augelli (1994). Additionally, all participants in this study revealed indications of developing in similar capacities as described by McCarn and Fassinger (1996). In looking at the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality there are three concepts that are important to note. First, many of these identity development models include some aspect of defining self in relation to others. The participants in this study strongly reported findings that support this. Next, several models also highlight the impact that social groups and environment can have on positive identity formation and development. This ended up being one of the key findings in this study. Finally, the results of some models suggest that when you add further categories of identity analysis (for example, considering a Black woman versus a White woman), identity development is altered in some capacity. Again, as this study focused on intersectionality and not an additive approach to identity research, it was easy to see that identity is complex and varied.

Finally, in terms of identity theory for multiple and intersecting identities and environment, the participants reported all factors attributed with Reynolds and Pope’s (1991) model, as well as Jones and McEwen’s (2000) ideas about identity. Moreover, as with the previous model, participants reported identity factors that strongly fit with King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) model. In fact, many of the components in King and Baxter Magolda’s model parallel findings of this study. The participants in this study, although not identified as multiracial, strongly supported Renn’s (2004) findings, as the results in this study indicate that both campus environments and student organizations significantly contributed to students’ development. All environmental theory, except for Blumer (1951), was supported in this study,
as participants indicated that the college environment, especially student organizations and mentors, were an important part of identity development and meaning making.

**Implications and Recommendations**

There are several implications for policy, practice, and research from this study, as well as recommendations. These include the following: expanding views of identity; focus on emotions, interactions, support, and sexuality; reframe successful identity development to include coherence, but less emphasis on consistency; ensuring family connectedness for students; fostering positive role models; communicating regarding societal structures and issues and how they are connected to identity; conducting assessment to determine campus climate; and providing more support for student affairs and student organizations.

First, higher education and student affairs must work to broaden its views and approaches to identity. As evidenced by this study, people identify in a variety of fluid ways. Professionals in higher education can not assume that simple demographic data or singular approaches to identity research will produce the most fruitful and accurate data. As such, I would recommend that in planning for campus services and programs, professionals expand their definitions of identity and take an intersectionality approach to the research. In order to do so, professionals need to become well-versed in intersectionality as both a framework and approach to methods of data collection and analysis. Interested researchers should publish research involving intersectionality and present on the topic at national conferences, which would help in this effort.

Next, in terms of services and programs in higher education, these findings suggest that it would be prudent to focus on emotions of students, intersections and interactions of identity, support for students on campus, and enhanced sexuality support. All of these areas represented strong themes for students needing support and discussion. I would recommend support and
discussion groups regarding sexuality on campus. Moreover, student affairs and higher education needs to re-think how we structure our programs and services. Divisions that unite identity-based offices under one umbrella, with a focus on inclusion would be the ideal model to fall in line with intersectionality.

Third, I would recommend that researchers reframe successful identity development criteria to include coherence, but place less emphasis on consistency. It is clear from the way that participants discussed identity in this study that identity consistency may not be as useful a predictor of identity development as may have been indicated in higher education.

Next, it is important to ensure a sense of family connectedness for this population of students on campus. As the participants in the study defined second family so strongly and indicated that this was a source of development and meaning making, professionals should be more attuned to this family atmosphere in higher education. Professionals can work to create intentional family moments by mirroring the family environment. Family dinners, family game nights, and family town hall meetings are all examples of programs that could help in this effort.

Fifth, it is necessary to foster positive role models and mentors for this population of students on campus. As the findings indicated, mentors played a big role in the successful identity naming and development for participants in this study. As such, the role and importance of positive role models can not be understated. Role models need to come in the form of peers, but also and perhaps most important, must come in the form of faculty and staff. Institutions must value and place emphasis on mentoring and creating mentor-mentee relationships on campuses.

Next, providing a way for students to communicate and interact regarding societal structures and issues would help build bridges for students regarding how they negotiate their
identities with and in society. The manner in which the participants discussed identity was multiple and varied, with a deep sense of self. College campuses should work to make these issues present and topical in their programming, so that participants like these can engage in more discussions concerning their identities.

Next, conducting assessment for campus climates will inform campus leaders concerning whether or not students, faculty, and staff are experiencing welcoming and inclusive environments. It is important that professionals are able to draw conclusions concerning the action plan for diversity, including appropriate programs and services.

Finally, higher education must make it a priority to provide more fiscal and university-wide support to student affairs and student organizations. These two areas represented almost solely, the positive influences and support that these participants found on campus. As such, it is important that those services are adequately staffed and funded.

Limitations

There are five areas that represent limitations in this study. First, there are language limitations in how I named identity categories for participants. Next, the sensitive nature of the subject matter (sexuality and gender) may have impacted participants’ willingness to participate and/or disclose information. Third, the study used the Internet as a primary means of participant recruitment. Next, my legitimacy as a researcher may have been questioned due to my own identity as a White person. Finally, the transferability of this data depends on the similar circumstances and identities, as well as locations that may be at play.

First, the language limitations that I placed on the title of the study may have meant that I missed some participants who could have participated in the study, who would recognize and identify with different identity labels than those I am using: queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual,
transgender and same gender loving undergraduate students of color. The QLGBTSGL community as a whole is one in which language is constantly new, shifting, and changing (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). As such, I chose not to encompass all variations of identity possibilities in the title. This also assists in reducing confusion for participants and readers. In discussions with students and my work with LGBT populations through the years, I found that the identity labels that I chose were most common and recognizable to students.

Second, due to the sensitive nature of discussions regarding sexual orientation and gender, gaining the trust of students to discuss these concepts may have been difficult. However, participants reported feeling comfortable in all settings and I made certain to use counseling techniques to respond with warm and empathy. Moreover, gaining the trust of the participants took concentrated time and effort, more so than may be necessary in other types of studies. As such, I had to be intentional in how I addressed trustworthiness as a researcher (Creswell, 2007). I had some participants drop out of the study initially, which I largely contribute to this limitation.

Third, this study used the Internet as a primary means of connecting with participants who may have been interested in this study. This means that I may have limited the number of participants who could be a part of the study. Additionally, I may not have been able to reach students who did not have the necessary internet technological resources. However, I did have a plan to use phone communication as a fail-safe in the event that I absolutely could not connect a willing participant with the necessary technology to participate in the interview for the study. As it turned out, I conducted one interview by phone, so this was an important inclusion. Because all of the other interviews were conducted in person, using Skype was not an issue. However, I still may have limited myself to participants with internet capability.
Fourth, my legitimacy as a researcher on this topic may have been questioned, as I am a White person studying issues that affect people of color. This issue refers to the insider versus outsider debate, wherein an insider shares identity characteristics with participants and an outsider has differing identity characteristics than participants (Collins, 1990). However, I believe an intersectionality approach to this issue served me well in this study. According to Naples (1996), all relationships between people are impacted by various identities, power structures, privileges, and oppressions. As such, although my own identities interacted in both positive and negative ways with my participants, that would be true regardless of my study. Ultimately though, in the recognition of my own role as a researcher, I was more intentional about how I built rapport with my participants because of my identities and I do not believe that my White identity limited the results.

Finally, the transferability of these findings is only appropriate in so far as the identity characteristics, the region, the location, the cultural components, etc. are similar. In other words, this study may or may not be transferable to other locations, as students and identities invariably create differing experiences. For example, I did not have any gender variant or transgender participants in this study. Therefore, applying these findings to that population would not be appropriate. Moreover, as is necessary in an intersectionality approach, I must be attuned, as all people should be, to the voices that are not present in many ways. I did not have participants who identified racially different that Black, Latina, and South American descent. There are many voices missing from those racial identifications. As such, findings should only be applied where conditions are similar.
Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings and conclusions from this study and some of the limitations noted above, I would recommend future research in the following areas: intersectionality theory and methods and their application in higher education identity based research; repeating this study in other places and with different participants (especially transgender participants); the points of intersection of identity from this study; identity consistency versus coherency; how ethics, morals, and values impact student identity and identity development on campus for QLGBTSG\L students of color; self-identifiers and definitions of language; the definitions of and interactions of QLGBTSG\L students of color and their communities; and finally, how the “I am me” concept fits with other QLGBTSG\L students of color.

First, I would recommend future studies that explore and implement the use of intersectionality as both a framework and approach to methods of data collection and analysis. In particular, studies based on identity and identity development in higher education should further explore the use of intersectionality, as is also recommended by Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009).

Next, I would recommend repeating this type of study in other locations and institutions, as well as with different participants. One of the most glaring oversights in participant involvement in this and many other studies is the exclusion of gender variant or transgender participants. Although I attempted to recruit this population, I was not successful. Moreover, my participants ended up all being from the same institution. As such, I would recommend research being done in varying locations and institutions of higher education.

Third, I would recommend more research on the points of intersections and interactions of identities from this study. Intersectionality as an approach posits that information and
findings should build upon knowledge. As such, future research projects that involve research questions centered on the points of intersections and interactions here would be helpful. For example, a study on how identities complement and conflict with each other may be a possibility.

Next, I would recommend future research on identity consistency versus identity coherence and the role that they play in identity development and meaning making. More frequently, theorists are finding that the fluidity in people’s self-identifications makes identity consistency a false predictor of successful identity development (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). As such, this is an area that needs to be specifically explored.

Fifth, I would recommend research in which the self-identifiers and definitions of language are explored. It is clear from the variety of self-identifiers and wide range of defining variables in this study that more research on how students use and make meaning of their identifications is needed.

Next, it would be important to explore how other QLGBTSGGL students of color define and interact with their communities. Community and family were very important in this study with the participants’ successful development and sense of meaning making. I would advocate for other studies that explore this aspect of development and how it impacts this community.

Then, I would recommend research that explores how ethics, morals, and values impact student identity and identity development on campus for QLGBTSGGL students of color. It is clear from these findings that there is some interplay between moral development and identity development for this population of students. However, the data are not sufficient enough to directly address questions between these two aspects of development.
Finally, the theme “I am me” was a significant finding in this research and one that points to the intersections and complexities with defining self for this population of students. It would be interesting and important to know if this phenomenon exists among students at different institutional types and regions of the country as a strong self-identifier for this community.

**Summary**

This study explored the experiences of queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and same gender loving undergraduate students of color in college. The theoretical framework, intersectionality, preferred studying identity at the points of intersection rather than through singular definitions and aspects of identity. The literature implied while substantial research has been done in identity and identity development in student affairs, including in race, gender, sexuality, and environment, the intersections and interactions of those identities had been less explored in research, if at all. The findings produced three emerging themes related to the unheard voices of the population at hand: defining self; intersections and interactions of identities and social group memberships; and defining ethics, morals, and values. The conclusions and implications both confirm previous findings on identity and identity development, while also acknowledging new areas of knowledge, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.
REFERENCES


Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Gender Loving (QLGBTSGL) Undergraduate Students of Color in College

Dear (Insert Name):

My name is Annie Russell and I am a doctoral candidate at Bowling Green State University. In completing the research for my dissertation at BGSU, I am doing a study on the experiences of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college. I understand that you work as a Director/Coordinator for LGBT Programs on your campus and I’m hoping that you can help me recruit participants for my study.

I am writing to see if you would be interested in sending out a letter of invitation to your students, inviting them to participate in the study. If you choose to participate, I will send you the letter of invitation to send out to your students electronically, as well as a timeline for my study. After sending this initial email to your students, I would ask that you follow up with another email in two weeks time. That would conclude your responsibilities in assisting me with this study.

If your students choose to participate, they will need to fill out a survey and meet with me one time for one hour each session. The survey will have open-ended questions and will require them spending an hour responding to them. The meeting will be a private interview with them and I only, conducted online using an internet video system or on the phone. Your and their participation in this study would allow us to more readily understand how QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color develop, learn, and grow in college, as well as what issues may affect this group more than others. The potential risks to them in this study would be no higher than those they encounter in normal daily life. Additionally, this study may provide your students with an opportunity to reflect on themselves and their experiences. Information they provide during this study will remain confidential and their identities will not be revealed. I will protect the confidentiality of them as respondents and their responses throughout the study and final written report. Only I will have access to the information your students provide. Finally, your and your students’ participation is entirely voluntary and you and they would have the opportunity to withdraw from the study or not answer questions without risk of penalty at any time.

I sincerely hope that you will choose to take part in this study. If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at 317-679-8892 or erussel@bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart, at 419-372-6876 or dafinas@bgsu.edu. If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Thank you so much for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please fill out the attached form and email me back by (insert date) or contact me at my phone number or
email address. I will contact you again within 14 days to see if you are interested in participating.

Best Wishes,

Elizabeth (Annie) Russell
1061 Varsity East
Bowling Green, OH 43402
317-679-8892
erussel@bgsu.edu

BGSU HSRB ID#H11D121GE7
Effective: 3/4/11
Expires: 1/6/12
APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Gender Loving (QLGBTSGL) Undergraduate Students of Color in College

Dear (Insert Name):

My name is Annie Russell and I am a doctoral candidate at Bowling Green State University. In completing the research for my dissertation at BGSU, I am doing a study on the experiences of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college. I received your contact information from [Insert name of contact here], who indicated that you may identify with this group of students and could be interested in my study.

I am writing to see if you would be interested in participating in this study. If you choose to do so, you will need to fill out a survey and meet with me one time for one hour each session. The survey will have open-ended questions and will require you spending an hour responding to them. The meeting will be a private interview with you and I only, conducted online using an internet video system or on the phone. Your participation in this study would allow us to more readily understand how QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color develop, learn, and grow in college, as well as what issues may affect this group more than others. The potential risks to you in this study would be no higher than those you encounter in normal daily life. Additionally, this study may provide you with an opportunity to reflect on yourself and your experiences.

Information you provide during this study will remain confidential and your identity will not be revealed. I will protect the confidentiality of you as a respondent and your responses throughout the study and final written report. Only I will have access to the information you provide. Your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification. Finally, your participation is entirely voluntary and you would have the opportunity to withdraw from the study or not answer questions without risk of penalty at any time.

I sincerely hope that you will choose to take part in this study. If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at 317-679-8892 or erussel@bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart, at 419-372-6876 or dafinas@bgsu.edu. If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Thank you so much for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please fill out the attached form and email me back by (insert date) or contact me at my phone number or email address. I will contact you again within 14 days to see if you are interested in participating.

Best Wishes,
Elizabeth (Annie) Russell  
1061 Varsity East  
Bowling Green, OH 43402  
317-679-8892  
erussel@bgsu.edu

BGSU HSRB ID#H11D121GE7  
Effective: 3/4/11  
Expires: 1/6/12
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

Participant Information Form

Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Gender Loving (QLGBTSGL) Undergraduate Students of Color in College

Elizabeth (Annie) Russell
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration, Bowling Green State University
1061 Varsity East
Bowling Green, OH 43402
317-679-8892
erussel@bgsu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart
Associate Professor, Higher Education and Student Affairs, Bowling Green State University
330 Education Building
Bowling Green, OH 43403
419-372-6876
dafinas@bgsu.edu

You are invited to participate in a research study that allows me to explore the experiences of QLGBTSGL undergraduate students of color in college. As part of my work as a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program, I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to ascertain how being a QLGBTSGL student of color has impacted you. This study will ask you to fill out a survey and meet with me, spending an hour on each session. This study involves qualitative research methods and will ask you to engage in a conversation with me and reflect on your own identities. Your participation will involve being interviewed and writing about yourself. The anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life. This study may benefit you by allowing you to explore yourself in-depthly.

The information you provide will remain confidential and your identity will not be revealed. I will protect the confidentiality of you as a respondent and your responses throughout the study and final written report. Only I will have access to the information you provide. Your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification. Recordings of the interview will be stored in a locked desk and will be erased after one year. You may request a copy of the recorded interview or final report and findings within one year of the date of our interview.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. You are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time. If you decide to participate and change your mind later, you may withdraw your consent and stop your participation without penalty or explanation. Not volunteering for the study or withdrawing from the study will not negatively affect your relationship with your current institution or any future relationship you may have with Bowling
Green State University. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, so it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail or Internet browser will gain knowledge of your interest in the study. I recommend that you close all browsers and clear your memory cache after submitting any information to me concerning this study.

If you would like to participate, please fill out the attached form and email me back by (insert date) or contact me at my phone number or email address. I will be contacting you within 14 days to see if you are interested in participating in this study. Please contact me with any questions concerning the study or your participation.

Best Wishes,

Elizabeth (Annie) Russell
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration, Bowling Green State University
1061 Varsity East
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erussel@bgsu.edu

BGSU HSRB ID#H11D121GE7
Effective: 3/4/11
Expires: 1/6/12
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Research Participation

Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Same Gender Loving Students of Color in College

You are invited to participate in a research study that allows me to explore the experiences of queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and same gender loving students of color in college. As part of my work as a doctoral student in the Department of Higher Education Administration, I am conducting a research study for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to ascertain how being a queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or same gender loving student of color has impacted you. This study will ask you to fill out a survey and meet with me, spending an hour on each session. Additionally, I will ask you to read and provide feedback on results from the study. The total expected time you will spend on the study is three hours and fifteen minutes. This study involves qualitative research methods and will ask you to engage in a conversation with me and reflect on your own identities. Your participation will involve being interviewed and writing about yourself. The potential risks to you in this study may include emotional stress, as you may have experienced trauma relating to the topic. Both during and at the conclusion of the study, I will be offering you a variety of resources for support and follow up. This study may benefit you in terms of allowing you to explore yourself in an in-depth capacity.

Information you provide will remain confidential and your identity will not be revealed. I will protect the confidentiality of you as a respondent and your responses throughout the study and final written report. Only I will have access to the information you provide. Your identity will not be revealed in any published results unless you specifically request identification. Additionally, you have the right to rescind any statements from the final report that you feel may reveal your identity. Recordings of the interview will be stored in a locked desk and will be erased after one year. You may request a copy of the recorded interview or final report and findings within one year of the date of our interview.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. You are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time. If you decide to participate and change your mind later, you may withdraw your consent and stop your participation without penalty or explanation. Not volunteering for the study or withdrawing from the study will not negatively affect your relationship with your current institution or any future relationship you may have with Bowling Green State University. Please note that e-mail is not 100% secure, so it is possible that someone intercepting your e-mail or Internet browser will gain knowledge of your interest and/or
participation in the study. I recommend that you close all browsers and clear your memory cache and outgoing email after submitting any information to me concerning this study.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at 317-679-8892 or erussel@bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Dafina Lazarus Stewart, at 419-372-6876 or dafinas@bgsu.edu. If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

I have received a complete explanation of the study and I agree to participate.

Name:___________________________________  ____________________________________

(Printed Name of Participant)        (Electronic Signature of Participant)

Date:____________________

BGSU HSRB ID#H11D121GE7
Effective: 3/4/11
Expires: 1/6/12
Appendix E: Letter of Confirmation

Participant Letter of Confirmation

Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Gender Loving (QLGBTSGL) Undergraduate Students of Color in College

Dear (Insert Name):

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! This letter serves as a confirmation of your participation in the study and what I am asking of you in participating. As a reminder, you may withdraw from the study at any time without fear of penalty and you may also choose to not respond to any questions, for any reason, throughout the study without harming your relationship to your current institution or any future relationship you might have with the Bowling Green State University.

In participating in this study, I am asking you to fill out a survey and meet with me. The survey will have open-ended questions and will require you spending an hour responding to them. The meeting will be a private, one hour interview with you and I only, conducted online using an Internet video system or on the phone. Finally, I will also contact you following your involvement in order to confirm my results with you as a participant. Please fill out the questions below for demographic data and return this form to me in the self-addressed envelope by (insert date). I will be in contact with you within 14 days of receiving your letter of confirmation.

Name:____________________________________  Phone:________________________

Address:______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Email:________________________________________________________________________

Class Standing (Circle One):          First Year          Sophomore          Junior          Senior

Best Wishes,

Elizabeth (Annie) Russell
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration, Bowling Green State University
1061 Varsity East
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APPENDIX F: LETTER OF APPRECIATION

Letter of Appreciation

Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Gender Loving (QLGBTSGL) Undergraduate Students of Color in College

Dear (Insert Name):

Thank you so much for your thoughtful participation in this study. Your contributions and sharing your story will add to the knowledge that we have and how we work with people like you in higher education. I hope that participating in this study proved beneficial in your own life exploration, as well.

You are welcome to see the full results and report from the study at your request, which I will also be sending you to confirm as I continue to analyze data. Please contact me should you have any additional questions, comments, concerns, or to request a copy of the final results. I would also be happy to provide local resources that may be helpful for you, should you want or need additional follow up. Again, thank you for your time and participation and best of luck in your future endeavors!

Best Wishes,

Elizabeth (Annie) Russell
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Bowling Green, OH 43402
317-679-8892
erussel@bgsu.edu

BGSU HSRB ID#H11D121GE7
Effective: 3/4/11
Expires: 1/6/12
APPENDIX G: ELECTRONIC SURVEY GUIDE/QUESTIONS

Electronic Survey Guide/Questions

Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Gender Loving

(QLGBTSG) Undergraduate Students of Color in College

☐ How do you define yourself? What does that mean to you?
☐ Talk with me about how you came to understand yourself as who you are.
☐ What identities are important to you? Why?
☐ Do any of your identities conflict and/or complement each other? Which ones? How?
☐ Have there been particularly influential people in your life? Who? Why and how have they influenced you?
☐ What are the most important values that you hold? Why are those values the most important for you?
☐ How do you define yourself intellectually? What stimulates you intellectually? How do you go about understanding concepts and issues?
☐ How do you define yourself spiritually? Why?
☐ How do you define yourself ethically or morally? How have you come to understand what your ethical principles are? What are those principles? What are your morals? How have you developed those?
☐ How do you define yourself emotionally? Why?
☐ How do you define yourself physically?
☐ Who do you love and why? How do you define romantic love? How do you define other types of love? How does love impact your life?
☐ How do you approach and interact with people?
☐ How comfortable are you in who you are? Why?

☐ Has your comfort with yourself changed over time? Why and how?

☐ What factors have caused you to change how you define yourself over time?

☐ How do you think other people view and/or feel about you?
APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW GUIDE/QUESTIONS

Interview Guide/Questions

☐ Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Same Gender Loving (QLGBTSG) Undergraduate Students of Color in College

☐ Follow up with questions about the survey for each individual. These questions will vary.

☐ How do you define power? Why? What does that mean to you?

☐ How do you define oppression? Why? What does that mean to you?

☐ How do you define privilege? Why? What does that mean to you?

☐ What issues impact you the most with respect to how you define yourself and your identities? In what way?

☐ Who impacts you the most? Why and how?

☐ How do you define family? What does that mean to you? How do you engage with family?

☐ What are your sources of support in life? On campus?

☐ What are your sources of stress in life? On campus?

☐ Where do you feel comfortable?

☐ What spaces and/or circumstances cause anxiety for you?

☐ How are you involved on campus? Have those experiences shaped you in any way? How?

☐ Is there anything else that is an important part of you that I should know about?
March 4, 2011

TO: Elizabeth Irene Ann (Annie) Russell
HESA

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H1I1D121GE7

TITLE: Voices Unheard: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, and Same Gender Loving Undergraduates Students of Color in College

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of March 4, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on January 6, 2012. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 35 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:
Stamped consent document is coming to you via campus mail.
Reviewer Comment: You are approved to recruit at the locations from which approval has been document. If you wish to include additional locations please submit a modification request for review.

c. Dr. Dafinia Lazarus Stewart

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7