SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR LGBTQ+ STUDENT LEADERS OF LGBTQ+ IDENTITY-BASED STUDENT GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative, interview-based study was to use the framework of social capital to explore how 15 LGBTQ+ student leaders of LGBTQ+ identity-based student groups described the impact of serving in those leadership roles on their sense of engagement and belonging with their university community. Using a constructivist paradigm, I sought a better understanding of how participants understood their own social capital within the university community and how they constructed the meaning of those relationships. I used a constructivist design and analyzed interviews, observations, and documents related to the topic. Participants identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, all had at least one semester of positional leadership experience in an LGBTQ+ student group, and all were either currently enrolled undergraduate students at the research site or within one year of graduation. I used a semi-structured interview protocol and conducted one interview, lasting between 45 minutes and two hours, with each participant.

I gained an understanding of the participants’ described experience as LGBTQ+ student leaders of LGBTQ+ identity-based student groups and how they interacted with their campus community. Four major themes emerged: (1) gaining social capital; (2) being a visible leader; (3) experiencing changing relationships; and (4) participating in the interactive campus. Through serving in these leadership positions, student leaders gained social capital granted to them by their institution and created by their positional leadership role; they gained capital within their own organization; and they joined two larger social networks of people working for
social justice and of student leaders. Participants experienced the campus as highly visible and prominent student leaders. This reputation granted them access to circles denied to others and allowed them to develop instantaneous rapport with people they did not know directly. This visibility came with pressure to represent the LGBTQ+ community well, leaving student leaders feeling like they did not have the freedom to make mistakes. Student leaders experienced changing relationships with advisors, campus administrators, peers, and family members. Finally, student leaders found that the campus community was more interactive and open to them than it had been previous to their assuming a leadership role. This interactive campus community contributed to a sense of belonging that encouraged them to become further engaged with the institution.
To

Dr. J. Holt Merchant
Professor of History, Emeritus
Washington and Lee University

Thank you for taking the time to teach me to write, not simply put words on a piece of paper.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

For as long as there has been higher education, there have been marginalized student populations. Whether by race, gender, religion, or another identity, the academy has excluded people for centuries. Even as higher education institutions cast open their doors to individuals of all types, the environments on campuses were not always welcoming and supportive. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) students this remains true (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). Nonetheless, universities have made progress in recent decades as more and more universities have instituted programs and offices targeted toward the needs of LGBT students (Rankin et al., 2010). Currently, many American university campuses at offer at least one student group for LGBT students (Rankin et al., 2010).

Still, many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students experience hostility, marginalization, harassment, or even violence on college campuses (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2012; Holland, Matthews, & Schott, 2013; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). LGBTQ students often feel isolated from their peers (Dugan, Komives, et al., 2012; Stevens, 2004). Isolation can cause students to feel like they are not part of the larger university community (Dugan, Komives, et al., 2012; Stevens, 2004). When students do not feel like they are part of the university community, they do not fully engage in the learning environment (Dugan, Komives, et al., 2012; Holland, et al., 2013).

Part of engaging in the university community is to become involved. Student involvement is a key component of college success and has been demonstrated to be positively associated with persistence, academic achievement, and social self-confidence (Pascarella &

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1 While I used the term LGBTQ+ to discuss the community of participants in this study, I have sought to use the terminology used by the cited researcher to discuss those researchers’ own work. For example, if the author labeled the community as LGBT, I used LGBT to discuss the results of that study.
Terenzini, 2005). If LGBTQ+ students are not engaging with involvement opportunities, including participation in student organizations, they are not gaining the positive outcomes associated with this involvement. Learning is an intended outcome for all students attending college and involvement can serve as a catalyst for learning. Astin (1984/1999) argued that the learning students gain from their involvement is directly related to the caliber of that involvement. Therefore, the more meaningful the involvement, the more learning that should be gained from the involvement.

For marginalized student populations, one type of involvement is identity-based. Identity-based organizations, organizations that center around one or several aspects of an individual’s identity, play a valuable role in fostering an educational environment that supports students on campus. Examples of identity-based organizations include a Black student union, a Latino alliance, or a queer students organization. They are organizations established to support and advocate for a specific group of students who are not a majority population on their campus or in their community. Dugan, Kodama, and Gebhardt (2012) put it aptly that “identity-based groups often serve as cultural enclaves providing critical support in negotiating the college environment” (p. 185).

A LGBTQ identity-based student organization can be a safe space for these students to come together, share experiences, and grow in their LGBTQ identities (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). These groups often serve as a place to make like-minded friends, learn more about the LGBTQ community, connect with mentors and role models, and find support during the coming out process (Renn, 2007). Students who choose to become leaders of these identity-based groups will have access to leadership development opportunities and connections to campus resources and allies.
Leadership Development

Leadership roles provide opportunities for LGBTQ students to gain a broader perspective on leadership, find congruence between their identities and their work, and become more aware of themselves as LGBTQ student leaders (Ostick, 2011). Dugan and Yurman (2011), however, found that LGB participants in their study reported holding few positional leadership roles. A positional leadership role is considered to be a sanctioned leadership position that comes with some sort of responsibility and title. A student organization president or treasurer are both examples of positional leadership roles.

There are many reasons a LGBTQ+ student may choose to not seek a positional leadership role within an identity-based organization. Possibly, students do not view being the public face of LGBTQ+ campus issues to be a safe or desirable prospect. They may not wish to take on the responsibility and time commitment of these often prominent positions. It could be that they simply are not interested in the mission and vision of identity-based groups. Because of these reasons and others, the select few who do elect to take on positional leadership roles in LGBTQ+ identity-based groups are an important group of student leaders to understand. They are separated out from the larger LGBTQ+ community in that they have elected to take on the positional leadership roles that their peers have seemingly avoided. Still, they are not wholly part of the majority student leader community because their sexual orientation or gender identity casts them as a historically marginalized student population. These students exist in multiple communities and within multiple social networks, simultaneously.

When examining the literature concerning this small and select group of LGBTQ+ student leaders in LGBTQ+ identity-based groups, it is clear that researchers have examined the benefits these students personally gain through these positions. Much has been written about
their identity development, both as LGBTQ individuals and as leaders (Biddix, 2010; Dugan, Kodama, et al., 2012; Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Ostick, 2011; Renn, 2007; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). What is less clear, however, is how these positions affect the students’ experience on campus.

**Social Capital**

LGBTQ+ student leaders operate within groups and between groups on campus. They are parts of both a marginalized population, that of the LGBTQ+ community, and a privileged population, that of a student leader. In this study, I use the framework of social capital theory as a lens to interpret these student leaders’ social experiences on campus. Social capital is gained by the “investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace” (Lin, 2001). In its most basic form, social capital is the goodwill and benefit granted by membership in a certain group (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Ostrom, 2009). Lin (2001) proposed social capital as the resultant profit of interactions and networking. Be it through trust, forgiveness, or access to resources, the theory of social capital proposes that the place one holds in the social structure informs one’s experience (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Social capital is the ability to trade upon those resources, to call upon other individuals, for benefit and aid. Social capital, like physical capital, is a resource that can be invested and cultivated. In the most basic sense, social capital is the notion that “relationships matter” (Fine, 2008, p. 1).

I used social capital as a way to understand a student’s experience on campus. A student engaged in the university community should have social capital within that community. And if that student has social capital within that community, that student should feel a sense of belonging (see Figure 1). In higher education, the term belonging is used to convey the notion that students have found a niche on campus, that they are comfortable and has a sense of home
within the university. While certainly sounding less warm and comforting, the term social capital could easily be interchanged with the term belonging. If a person has found a connection to the campus, that student should have social capital, the goodwill and trust of others, and access to corresponding resources. If students are engaged, they should have social capital; if students have social capital, they should feel a sense of belonging within the university community.

![Engagement → Social Capital → Belonging](image)

*Figure 1. Proposed Relationship Between Engagement, Social Capital, and Belonging.*

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how serving in a leadership role in an LGBTQ+ identity-based student organization affected social capital for LGBTQ+ students. The students targeted for this study existed in a small subsection of the LGBTQ+ student community. The participants of this study identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community who had chosen to take on a positional leadership role in an identity-based organization. These students often became the public face of the LGBTQ+ student population on campus.

Serving in these positions has implications for how students understand themselves as leaders and as a LGBTQ+ individuals, as demonstrated by the literature base introduced in Chapter II. However, in this study, I seek to further our understanding of how these roles impact students, not just as individual people, but also as part of a university community. Through this study, I seek to provide insights into how this student population perceived themselves as members of their university communities. Students may develop a better understanding of themselves as LGBTQ+ individuals and as LGBTQ+ leaders, but may still have a difficult or
negative day-to-day collegiate experience. Conversely, students may find new allies and resources unknown to them previously, and find themselves isolated from their LGBTQ+ peers. In this study, I sought to further our understanding of how these student leaders find a sense of engagement, trust, and belonging on their university campuses. Moving beyond a campus climate survey, I sought to understand how these student leaders engage in the social networks (i.e., peers and university authorities) around them. By using the framework of social capital theory, I aimed to gain a deep understanding how serving in a leadership role of a LGBTQ+ identity-based organization affected a LGBTQ+ student’s collegiate experience.

**Research Questions**

I conducted a qualitative, social constructivist, interview-based study to examine social capital for LGBTQ+ student leaders of LGBTQ+ identity-based student groups. The following research questions guided the construction of this study:

1. How do LGBTQ+ undergraduate students in positional leadership roles in a LGBTQ identity-based student group understand their own social capital?

2. How does having social capital impact LGBTQ+ student leaders’ sense of belonging and engagement with the university community?

3. In what ways are LGBTQ+ student leaders’ perceptions of social capital within one network impacted by their perception of their changing social capital in another network?

**Significance of the Study**

LGBTQ+ students are a historically marginalized population. In many areas of campuses, they are still an invisible or ignored population. Put simply, gaining a further understanding of marginalized populations prepares us as administrators to better serve our students. Part of being an educator on a college campus is the responsibility to foster community (Roberts, 2003).
Community building fosters students’ learning and development. A better understanding of this student population allows administrators to better foster community for and around these students.

LGBTQ+ student leaders of LGBTQ+ identity-based groups are different from many student leaders of even other identity-based organizations. These students represent an invisible minority (Renn & Ozaki, 2010). African American students who lead an African American student group are usually seen as African American students regardless of their membership in the identity-based group. The same is typically true for the Latino student leading a Latino student group or the woman leading a woman’s group. LGBTQ+ students, however, are not a visible minority or a population that can be easily be identified and counted. By consequence, LGBTQ+ students can go unseen and be easily ignored. When the academy has ignored these students, we have ignored their stories. In this study, I sought to tell those stories, to give voice to a population who may be experiencing the social environment differently than other students and other student leaders.

LGBTQ+ student leaders of identity-based groups are often the most prominent LGBTQ+ students on their respective campuses. Perchance without even recognizing it, peers and university administrators frequently ask these students to speak for the entire campus LGBTQ+ community. Pictured on university websites and quoted in campus newspapers, these students visibly represent the campus LGBTQ+ community. They generally live a life that is wholly “out” on campus. They can no longer “pass” as non-LGBTQ+, if they may have even wanted that as an option. This prominence can also make them a target of ignorance and bias. While the research base has examined what students gain from their service in these positions (Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan, Kusel, & Somounet, 2012; Ostick, 2011; Renn, 2007;
Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005b; Renn & Ozaki, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011), there is a lack of research on how these students experiences college as a LGBTQ+ student leader. Using social capital as a theoretical framework provides a context for understanding the student’s sense of belonging, worth, and trust as a member of the community.

Many aspects of identity are socially constructed and informed (McEwen, 2003). For example, gender as a binary is a socially constructed phenomenon that influences how individuals make meaning of their own gender identity. Even if a student does not subscribe to the gender binary, that student still operates in an environment that will seek to force the socially constructed understanding of gender onto the student. Social capital theory is built, in part, upon the norms and presuppositions of society. By examining how students perceive their own social capital, and therefore their own sense of belonging within the university context, we can gain a better understanding of how social constructs inform and affect a student’s relationship with the university community.

As practitioners, we can better foster social capital for LGBTQ+ students by understanding how social capital is gained or lost by some of the most prominent LGBTQ+ student leaders. With this knowledge, we can become agents of social capital. By connecting students to resources and networks that are supportive, we will be able to foster a better environment for LGBTQ+ students on our campuses.

Definitions

I provide the following definitions for clarity of understanding throughout the presented study. Definitions are sorted into three categories—identity, involvement, and social capital—and presented alphabetically within the categories.
**Identity.** Throughout this dissertation, the following terminology regarding identity were used.

*Bisexual:* A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is attracted to or engages in sexual, emotional, and/or physical relationships with people of more than one gender (Barker et al., 2012).

*Cisgender:* A term used to describe the gender identity of a person whose gender identity and gender expression match that person’s assigned biological sex. For example, a person who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman is cisgender. The term cisgender “reminds us that all people have a gender identity, not only people who navigate a non-conventional gender identity” (Krane, in press).

*Gay:* A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is attracted to or engages in sexual, emotional, and/or physical relationships to some members of the same sex Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2013).

*Gender:* A term “that refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex” (American Psychological Association, 2011, para. 3). Gender is a social construct informed by societal and cultural norms such as masculinity and femininity.

*Gender identity:* Gender is internally felt by a person, regardless of that person’s gender expression, sex, or sexual orientation (American Psychological Association, 2011, para. 4). Gender identity “refers to an internal sense of being female, male, both female and male, neither female nor male, or transgender” (Krane, in press).
**Gender expression:** “Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and other forms of presentation” (Gender Spectrum, 2014, para. 4).

**Genderqueer:** “This term represents a blurring of the lines around gender and sexual orientation. Genderqueer individuals typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and sexual orientation” (Gender Spectrum, 2014, para. 8).

**Intersex:** Individuals who “are born with chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and/or other sex characteristics that are not exclusively male or female as defined by the medical establishment in our society” (Gender Spectrum, 2014, para. 13).

**Lesbian:** A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is woman identified and is attracted to or engages in sexual, emotional, and/or physical relationships with some other women (GLSEN, 2013).

**LGBTQ+:** An emerging term used to describe a community of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), queer (Q), but also questioning, genderqueer, asexual, pansexual, and so on (Tillman & Norsworthy, 2015). The Q+ represents the myriad of non-heterosexual, non-heteronormative, or gender non-conforming identities that may be included in the larger Queer community. It was the term commonly used by the participants in this study to describe their own community.

**Pansexual:** A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is attracted to or engages in sexual, emotional, and/or physical relationships with people of more than one gender. The term pansexual is “commonly used in society as an identity term that is more inclusive (as the prefix suggests) than bisexual” and challenges “the multiple binary systems that oppress all people by way of the binary system that still rules the LGB trinity” (Elizabeth, 2013, p. 333).
Queer: An “umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative society” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 9).

Sex: A term used to describe the label given to a child at birth, such as male, female, or intersex. Sometimes referred to as biological sex, this term refers to a person’s reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones (American Psychological Association, 2011, para. 2).

Sexual orientation: A term that “refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted” (American Psychological Association, 2011, para. 6). There are many ways an individual may identify their sexual orientation, some of which include heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual.

Trans*: An emerging umbrella term for a person who is gender non-conforming (Matheis & Rankin, 2009). This term is seen as both an abbreviation of transgender and as a way to acknowledge the multitude of individual identities that fall under the term transgender, including transgender, trans-man, trans-woman, transsexual, or genderqueer. The participants included in this study used this language and understanding.

Transgender: A term used to describe individuals “whose gender identity does not match their assigned birth sex. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation… Therefore, transgender people may additionally identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, etc.” (Gender Spectrum, 2014, para. 6).

Involvement. This dissertation used the following definitions related to involvement.

Belonging: Used to describe the degree to which a student feels integrated into the college environment (Weidman, 1989). Students with a high sense of belonging perceive themselves to be a part of the college community, both academically and socially. These students feel an internal attachment to the college community.
Engagement: A student displays engagement through actively participating in the campus community, both academically and socially.

Identity-based group: Student organizations or suborganizations “based on psychosocial identities such as race, gender, or sexual orientation” (Renn, 2006, p.1).

Group: A term used to collectively refer to student organizations and suborganizations.

Positional leadership role: A role within a student organization or suborganization that comes with specified responsibilities and a title. Includes positions such as president, treasurer, new member educator, and so on. The role may be elected or appointed.

Student organization: This term represents an officially registered student organization on this campus site. These groups are stand-alone entities that have submitted paperwork to the campus’ student activities office, receiving the corresponding privileges associated with registration. They may have suborganizations or programs within their structure.

Student suborganization: This term represents a group that exists on this campus site but that is not an officially registered student organization. These suborganizations fall under the registration and responsibility of another organization. They are not independently registered. However, the sub organizations have their own governance and leadership structures, distinct from the registered student organization.

Social capital. This dissertation used the understanding of social capital as defined below.

Capital: Something that can be invested “with expected returns in the marketplace” (Lin, 2001, p. 8). This can include physical, human, or social goods.

Social capital: The outcome of investing in social networks. “Social capital is all about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging diverse people, with norms of
reciprocity. Social capital is fundamentally about how people view each other” (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001, p. 3).

_Social network:_ A grouping or class of people, either formal or informal, which “create value, both individual and collective” and allows a person to “invest” in networking (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 8).

**Summary**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In this chapter, Chapter I: Introduction, I have presented the problem, outlined the significance to higher education, articulated research questions, and provided relevant definitions. In Chapter II: Literature Review, I provide a review of related literature, including relevant research related to LGBTQ individuals and theoretical frameworks regarding social capital. In Chapter III, I present the methods section, including the research paradigm and my assumptions and biases as a researcher. In that chapter, I articulate participant selection process, methods of data analysis, and techniques to ensure trustworthiness. In Chapter IV: Findings, I present the findings of the study as drawn from an analysis of the data. Finally, in Chapter V: Discussion, I discuss the findings as related to the research questions and the literature review, as well as articulate implications and limitations.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

I have divided this literature review into two main sections. First, I examine the role of student involvement, narrowing in the focus on LGBTQ+ student organizations in providing opportunities for LGBTQ+ student involvement and leadership development. The second section focuses on socialization theory, social capital theory, and social capital’s applicability to understanding university communities.

**Student Involvement**

Involvement is a broad term used to discuss how students interact with their campus community (Astin, 1984/1999). In this study, involvement is assumed to lead toward engagement. By becoming involved, students engage with the campus community around them. While this section provides an introduction to the concept of student involvement, I will return to the topic later when discussing student leadership development.

Students interact with their campus community in a variety of ways, which should contribute to students’ sense of belonging and engagement. Providing opportunities for involvement, including in student organizations, represents one way in which colleges attempt to ensure that students learn and grow during the college experience. Astin (1984/1999) authored a hallmark involvement theory in which he postulated that involvement has five components. First, involvement requires “the investment of physical and psychological energy” (Astin, 1984/1999, p. 519). Involvement also exists along a continuum, where one student could invest in different tasks at different levels of involvement. One can measure involvement both quantitatively and qualitatively. For example, a researcher could track the amount of time a student spends volunteering but also the effort and energy exerted during the service opportunity. Next, student learning and development can be linked to the amount of student involvement in the activity, in
both quality and quantity. Finally, policy and practice effectiveness is tied to the ability of the policy or practice to foster student involvement.

The experience of attending college can have a profound effect on students. The college environment can intimately affect the way individual students develop their own identities. Astin’s (1970) Inputs-Environment-Outputs (I-E-O) model serves as a touchstone for many college educators as they seek to develop policy and practice that fosters student growth. While I introduce the model here, I will refer to it again in the later sections discussing student socialization. In the I-E-O model, inputs represent the raw materials students bring with them to college. These are how students appear on campuses on that first day of their enrollment—their skills, attitudes, values, and hopes for the future. Outputs represent these same factors but as affected by the college environment. In between the inputs and the outputs is the college environment, how the college affects the students. The impact of the college environment can vary depending on the college itself and depending on the individual student. Each student will experience college differently, but based on the I-E-O model, there should be a direct impact on the student by attending college and engaging in the collegiate environment.

Learning is assuredly an intended outcome of attending college and involvement can serve as a catalyst for learning. Astin (1984/1999) stressed involvement as a behavioral function. Involvement is defined by doing. The learning students gain from their involvement is directly related to the caliber of that involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). More meaningful involvement will result in a higher level of learning and development for students.

**Psychosocial Identity Development**

Throughout this work, I will refer to two types of identity development: psychosocial and leadership identity development. I will introduce leadership identity development later, but an
understanding of psychosocial development is needed before I can further discuss identity-based groups.

Psychosocial identity development refers to a person’s self-concept of their own identities. Every person has multiple, varied identities, including race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and spirituality. These identities do not exist in a vacuum but are intrinsically linked to each other, intersecting and varied for each person (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). A White, heterosexual, middle-class, woman will have a different identity self-concept than a White, lesbian, middle-class, woman. Though the two women would share a privileged racial identity, the latter’s historically marginalized sexual identity would affect how she interprets and understands all her identities. The connection between one’s identities is known as intersectionality. According to Nash (2008), intersectionality is “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality” (p. 89). Intersectionality is used to give voice to individuals’ identities as well as their oppression (Nash, 2008). In research, intersectionality “foregrounds a richer and more complex ontology than approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time” (Phoenix, 2006, p. 187).

People are complex beings, influenced by the societal context in which they interact. Their own understandings of self, and how they make meaning of their intersecting identities, is influenced by the context in which they experience those intersecting identities.

The discussion of a person’s psychosocial identity development is especially important in regards to college students. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) in their review of identity development research summarized, “That these conceptually and methodologically varied studies consistently indicate that students develop their identities during college leads to a greater confidence in concluding that students probably make important progress in this facet of their
psychosocial development during the college years” (p. 261). While it is difficult to place such a personal journey as psychosocial identity development on a timeline, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) argued that the fact that development was consistently seen across multiple and mixed studies, a safe assumption could be made that psychosocial development did occur for many college students. Many of our students will be moving through an understanding of their own identities during college, so it is important as higher education professionals to have an understanding of this process.

While acknowledging the intersectionality of identities, many models have emerged in an effort to understand a student’s identity self-concept. For this study, an understanding of sexual identity and gender identity development are useful. Three of the most well regarded models of sexual identity development include Cass’s (1979) model of sexual orientation identity formation, Fassinger’s model of gay and lesbian identity development (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), and D’Augelli’s (1994) model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. It is unnecessary for the purposes of this study to go into a lengthy discussion of the differences between each of the three models. Instead, consistent across the models is the movement from a heterosexual identity to an integrated understanding of one as a LGB or queer person, where sexual orientation is an aspect of an individual’s overall identity. During this process, a person becomes aware of a non-heterosexual identity, begins to explore that identity, and immerses oneself in gaining an understanding of that identity. The person often seeks out community as a way of making meaning of their sexual orientation identity.

Psychosocial models of transgender identity development emerged in recent years, but there has not yet been a coalescing around a singular understanding of how gender identity
development occurs. Levitt and Ippolito (2014) authored a grounded theory of transgender identity development that included three core components:

(1) Developing constructs to represent one’s gender authentically; (2) finding ways to communicate one’s gender to others and be seen; and (3) balancing these needs with my need to survive under discriminatory political, social, and economic conditions. (p. 1736)

Dargie, Blair, Pukall, and Coyle (2014) noted that “although research on trans persons is growing, is it limited in content and methodology” (p. 60). They suggested that the struggle to articulate a model of transgender identity development stems from the “the multi-faceted and often fluid nature of trans identities, both in terms of gender and sexual orientation” (p. 61). That is, the transgender umbrella includes a vast array of identities and cannot be easily forced into one singular understanding of identity development. Psychology researchers have attempted to propose ways in which biology merges with cultural and family influences to form a “true gender self” but have often defaulted to the understanding that gender self-concept is individualized and there may not be one specific “origin theory” of gender identity (Fausto-Sterling, 2012).

**Identity-based Groups**

Having discussed both student involvement and psychosocial identity development, I will now introduce identity-based groups. As discussed earlier, involvement requires both physical and psychological activity (Astin, 1984/1999). A wide array of activities can be put under Astin’s umbrella of involvement. Everything from going to class, studying for a test, playing a sport, or volunteering fit within the definition. For the purpose of this inquiry though, I narrow involvement to consider strictly involvement in a LGBTQ+ identity-based group.
For many LGBT students, these identity-based groups are very important (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Holland et al., 2013). Many LGBT college students navigate a coming out process of identity disclosure during the collegiate years and college campuses can be challenging environments for LGBT people (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Holland et al., 2013). Campus climate, informed by the policies, practices, and attitudes on a campus, shapes LGBTQ student experiences (Rankin et al., 2010). LGBTQ students experience violence and harassment on college campuses (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Holland et al., 2013; Rankin et al., 2010). Even if an environment is not perceived as threatening or dangerous, it may still be marginalizing and unsupportive (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Holland et al., 2013; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

LGBTQ students reported feeling less comfortable with climates in their academic classrooms than their heterosexual peers (Rankin et al., 2010). Students can feel isolated and alone, suffering from a low sense of belonging within their university community (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Stevens, 2004). This lack of belonging can be especially heightened for bisexual and transgender students, who may not see themselves within or feel supported by the larger lesbian and gay community (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Dugan & Yurman, 2011). These negative experiences can keep LGBTQ students from fully engaging in the academic and social communities around them and may even lead an LGBTQ student to leave the university community completely (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Holland et al., 2013; Rankin et al., 2010).

Identity-based groups are important for providing safe spaces for students to come to and feel welcomed on their campus. When a student encounters hostility or harassment, it is important for that student to have a positive experience to counteract the negative campus climate (Stevens, 2004). If a student has positive and welcoming experiences upon which to draw, it can be easier to process the potential effects of a negative experience (Stevens, 2004).
Student organizations also give LGBTQ students social outlets to connect with networks of likeminded individuals (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). For those estranged from their own families, organizations can provide a familial environment of support (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Identity-based groups also provide social support for LGBTQ students. This social support has been positively associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with loneliness and depression (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). These groups provide spaces for reflection and healing, spaces where individuals can feel heard and to see their own stories reflected and honored (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). The organizations can connect individuals with campus resources and allies, including students, staff, and faculty (Stevens, 2004). These nonjudgmental and supportive climates can provide opportunities for individuals to feel validated and to heal but also to navigate their own identity development (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

**Student Leadership**

Student groups provide an opportunity for students to explore their own leadership identity and development. Understanding what is meant by saying these students “are leaders” or that they perform “leadership” is a complicated thing, however. Leadership seems to be one of those areas that people have a difficult time defining; they simply know it when they see it, and in the literature a myriad of definitions exist. In the last 100 years, leadership theory evolved from being personality and trait driven, to leadership as a behavior, and finally to a complicated understanding of leadership as inclusive of traits, behaviors, and processes (Northouse, 2013). In understanding leadership development amongst college students the Leadership Identity Development Model (LID) emerged, built upon relational leadership theory and the Relational
Leadership Model (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013).

**Relational Leadership**

As leadership theory has evolved, it has moved from a hierarchical understanding to a networked understanding, emphasizing the connections between individuals. Boundaries begin to blur as the emphasis moves towards connections (Allen & Cherrey, 2000). In this relational understanding of leadership, one person does not hold all the power but rather all those involved share power (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Uhl-Bien, 2006). In this perspective, leadership is not simply a process but a social process. That is to say, moving towards a goal is not enough, a leader must be moving toward that goal with others.

Not all relationships translate into relational leadership, though. Relational leadership occurs when a process results in change. Uhl-Bien (2006) clarified relational leadership to be “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (i.e., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, ideologies, etc.) are constructed and produced” (p. 668). Relational leadership, in this context, considers both influence and structure (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Relational leadership functions as a constructionist process, co-created by both the leader and those around the leader (Uhl-Bien, 2006). These relationships serve as energy to an organization, nourishing it over time (Allen & Cherrey, 2000). This process is ongoing, as knowledge emerges, contexts and players change (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

**Relational Leadership Model**

The theory of relational leadership has led to the Relational Leadership Model (Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000). Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2010) defined the Relational Leadership Model (RLM) as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to
accomplish positive change” (p. 52). The RLM (see Figure 2\(^2\)) consists of five components: process, purpose, ethical, inclusive, and empowering.

Within the RLM, purpose is in the center (Komives et al., 2013). Purpose is the driving force for relational leadership, it guides and focuses the individual leader (Komives et al., 2013). For this purpose, people work toward a positive goal or vision. Surrounding and intersecting purpose are the concepts that the process must be inclusive, ethical, and empower others. Relational leadership holds that people matter; how they feel and how they are included is inherently important to leadership. Finally, process surrounds and informs all in the RLM. The

![Figure 2. The Relational Leadership Model](image)

process is intentional and leaders and followers work together (Komives et al., 2013). Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) proposed that in the RLM, “purpose is vision-driven and not position-driven. Leaders and members promote the organization’s purpose through a shared vision and not for self-gain, such as achieving higher leadership position or fame” (p. 97). What one does, and how one does it, is more important than the title or achievements acquired by doing.

**Leadership Identity Development Model**

There is no shortage of leadership theories and models available for study. Perhaps one of the most important in working with American college students, though, has been the emergence of the Leadership Identity Development Model (LID). Until the last decade, there was very little agreement about how college students developed a leadership identity during college. College students were “leaders” or they did “leadership” but few articulated the difference between doing leadership and being a leader. An agreed upon definition did not exist for what the leadership journey of a college student looked like. The creation of the Leadership Identity Development Model has been one of the most important recent developments in the study of leadership amongst college students. Established by Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006), the model was the first to integrate the processes of student development and leadership development. The LID brought together identity development, cognitive development, and relational leadership theory to propose a model of how students move through their leadership development, with a focus on the collegiate experience (Komives et al., 2006). Similar to its predecessors, the LID represents a familiar linear developmental process shared by a myriad of identity models. The LID includes six-stages and each stage is
completed before the individual moves into the next stage (see figure 3). Between each stage is a transition period. This transition period is a time of reflection, sometimes facilitated by environmental factors, and marks a shift in how the individual perceives leadership. Stages are built on a helix development model, meaning that participants can return to each stage repeatedly and each return can strengthen the understanding of that stage by the individual (Komives et al., 2006).

In stage one, Awareness, students begin to recognize that leadership is occurring around them. They see authority figures as leaders and believe that while leaders exist, leadership tends to be a generally nebulous construct. If involved at all, they are typically uninvolved followers with little sense of a personal leadership identity. As they begin to receive recognition and affirmation from adult authority figures, the transition to stage two begins. They begin to explore the general concept of leadership and to get further involved.

In stage two, Exploration/Engagement, students explore various involvement opportunities, such as team sports, musical groups, and youth groups. They become actively involved in a diverse array of organizations and build self-confidence and leadership skill sets. Role models, including adults and older peers, are important at this stage, as students seek affirmation and encouragement. The transition to stage three begins as the students begin to want to take on a larger role within a narrower set of activities. They hone in on specific interests and want to change something within those areas.

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**Figure 3. The Leadership Identity Development Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Exploration/Engagement</th>
<th>Leader Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key categories</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Immersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Descriptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong> Identity Development Model</td>
<td>Recognizing that leadership is happening around you</td>
<td>Intentional involvements [sports, religious institutions, service, scouts, dance, SCA]</td>
<td>Tying on new roles [leadership needed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting exposure to involvements</td>
<td>Experiencing groups for first time</td>
<td>Taking on individual responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadening View of Leadership</td>
<td>&quot;Other people are leaders; leaders are out there somewhere&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I am not a leader&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I want to do more&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I want to be involved&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;A leader gets things done&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Self</td>
<td>Becomes aware of national leaders and authority figures (e.g., the principal)</td>
<td>Want to make friends</td>
<td>Models others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop personal skills [identity personal strengths/weaknesses]</td>
<td>Leader struggles with delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare for leadership</td>
<td>Moves in and out of leadership roles and member roles but still believes the leader is in charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build self-confidence</td>
<td>Appreciates individual recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Influences</td>
<td>Uninvolved or &quot;inactive&quot; follower</td>
<td>Want to get involved</td>
<td>Group has a job to do; organize to get tasks done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Active&quot; follower or member</td>
<td>Involves members to get the job done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage in diverse contexts (e.g., sports, clubs, class projects)</td>
<td>Sticks with a primary group as an identity base; explore other groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Influences</td>
<td>Recognition by adults (parents, teachers, coaches, scout leaders, religious elders)</td>
<td>Observation/watching</td>
<td>Model older peers and adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Affirmation of adults</td>
<td>Observe older peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Adults as mentors, guides, coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing View of Self With Others</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The KEY | Leadership Differentiated | Generativity | Integration/Synthesis | |
|---------|--------------------------|--------------|----------------------| |
| Transition | Emerging | Immersion | Transition | |
| **Shifting order of consciousness** | Joining with others in shared task/goals from positional or non-positional group roles | Seeks to facilitate a good group process whether in positional or non-positional leader role | Active commitment to a personal passion |
|  | Need to learn group skills; few belief that leadership can come from anywhere in the group (non-positional) | Commitment to community of the group | Accepting responsibility for the development of others |
|  | "I need to lead in a participatory way and I can contribute to leadership from anywhere in the organization. I can be a leader without a title" | Awareness that leadership is a group process | Promotes team learning |
|  | "Leadership is happening everywhere; leadership is a process; we are doing leadership together; we are all responsible" | "Who’s coming after me?" | Responsible for sustaining organizations |
|  | "I am responsible as a member of my community to facilitate the development of others as leaders and enrich the life of our group" | "I need to be true to myself in all situations and open to grow" | Continued self-development and life-long learning |
| Recognition that I cannot do it all myself | Learn to trust and value others & their involvement | Leans about personal influence | Sees leadership as a life long developmental process |
|  | Learn to value the importance/validity of others | Effective in both positional and non-positional roles | Want to leave things better |
|  | "Let go control" | Practices being engaged member | Whm trustworthy and value that I have predictability |
|  | Learning about leadership | Values servant leadership | Recognition of role modeling between leaders |
| Meaningfully Engage With Others | Seeing the collective whole; the big picture | Value teams | Sees leadership as a life long developmental process |
|  | Learn group and team skills | Value connectedness to others | Seeing organizational complexity across contexts |
|  | | Leans how system works | Can imagine how to engage with different organizations |
| Older peers as mentors & meaning makers | Practicing leadership in ongoing peer relationships | Responds to meaning makers (student affairs staff, key faculty, same-age peer mentors) | Responds to meaning makers (student affairs staff, same-age peer mentors) |
|  | Learning about leadership | Begins coaching others | Responds to meaning makers (student affairs staff, same-age peer mentors) |

Interdependent
The transition from stage three, Leader Identified, to stage four, Leadership Differentiated, is the key transition in the LID model. In stage three, there are two substages: emerging and immersion. In the emerging substage, the students take on new skills and turn to older mentors to understand what it means to be leaders. A leader is viewed as task oriented and someone who gets things done. A leader of a group organizes responsibilities. As the students move into the second substage of immersion, they grow in confidence in their skill sets as leaders. They view themselves as leaders because of their positional roles. Because of their role, people follow them and that makes them leaders. Other leaders are perceived to be those who the students follow. Students in immersion crave recognition and validation for their leadership. The students move between follower and leader in various groups, but consistently view leadership as tied to positional power. While in leadership roles, they attempt to include members of the organization but sometimes struggle with delegation.

The most important transition in the LID model is after the immersion substage of the third stage of Leader Identified. During this transition, the students’ views of their leadership capability switch from being dependent on others to being driven by their own perceptions of their leadership. As the students take on more and more responsibility, they begin to recognize that they cannot do it all alone. The role of peer mentors and older individuals is important in fostering the reflective learning needed to move towards stage four. Some students find these resources through formal educational experiences. At this transition, students move from viewing leadership as embodied in a positional role to viewing groups as interdependent, requiring individuals to come together in the leadership process.
Like stage three, the fourth stage, Leadership Differentiated, also consists of the two substages of emerging and immersion. During the emerging substage, the students begin to value shared processes that involve those in positional leadership roles and those outside positional leadership roles. The differentiated leader recognizes that leadership can come from anywhere in the organization and that titles alone do not confer leadership. When serving as a positional leader, they begin to relinquish some control and find value in the leadership processes of others. They are learning about team skills and processes. In the second substage of immersion, the students not only recognize that leadership can come from anywhere within the organization but they foster this in happening. The students view all members of the organization as responsible for leadership and the group process. They do not feel compelled to have positional leadership roles to be active within the organization. They value systems and teamwork, recognizing that teamwork is a community responsibility.

Students transitioning from the fourth stage to the fifth stage of Generativity begin to question who will come after them in the organization. They also begin to consider the need to make their involvement activities congruent with their passions and vision for society. Within stage five, the students take the interests solidified in stage three and turn them into larger life commitments. They begin to codify personal missions and visions of leadership, articulate long-term goals, and internalize a leadership identity. Additionally, individuals in this stage begin to take commitment for the leadership development of others. They seek to foster emerging leaders and believe in cultivating a leadership pipeline. Being a leader is less about the role or task and is instead about ensuring the long-term viability of organizations and ideas.

The transition to the sixth and final stage of the LID model, Integration/Synthesis, is marked by the students seeking to grow in new ideas and new roles. Individuals at this stage
engage in a reflective process and recommit to their passions, ideals, and internal understanding of themselves. They have fewer concerns for external validation than during most of the previous stages. The sixth stage of Integration/Synthesis involves a commitment to self-development. The students do not simply sign up or volunteer for any and every group or activity. Instead, they selectively become involved in areas where they are most helpful or useful. They have internal confidence in themselves as leaders and in their ability to work with other people towards a shared group outcome. They recognize that not only are individuals interconnected but groups are interconnected as well.

The LID model (Komives et al., 2006) represents the process of student leaders moving from an external definition of leadership towards internal consistency. The progression through the model involves students moving from needing external validation and encouragement to being able to view themselves as leaders within any context. As students move from lower stages of the model, interconnectedness is emphasized and positional power and authority is deemphasized. Similar to other identity development models, the final stage highlights the integration of the students’ views of themselves as leaders within their overall perception of themselves.

Leadership and LGBTQ+ Student Leaders

Several researchers have focused efforts on understanding leadership development for LGBTQ+ student leaders. As Dugan, Kodama, et al. (2012) pointed out, leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon. It is directly impacted by other social constructions (Dugan, Kodama, et al., 2012). Sexual orientation and gender identity are social constructions influenced by environmental contexts. As such, the leadership development of LGBTQ+ students is going to be impacted by the student’s sexual and gender identity. Students are gaining in myriad ways
from their experiences as student leaders within identity-based groups. Leadership roles provided opportunities for lesbian and gay students to gain a broader perspective on leadership, find congruence between their identities and their work, and become more aware of themselves as queer student leaders (Ostick, 2011).

Renn (2007) sought to integrate the disparate models of LGBTQ identity development and the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2006) to help understand the motivations of LGBTQ student leaders in identity-based groups. She challenged the assumption that student leaders were simply in an “immersion” or identity pride stage (Cass, 1979; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Renn argued that this was a “monolithic approach” to understanding student leaders (Renn, 2007, p. 312).

In her model, Renn posited that LGBTQ students come to or create a LGBTQ student organization for a variety of reasons. They may be simply looking for a leadership position, or they may want to explore their identity, or they might be seeking a social network. In some cases, it may be a negative incident that originally brings students to the group and motivates them to pursue a leadership role. Whatever the initial reasons for seeking a leadership role, the presence of mentors served to encourage the students to maintain involvement in the organization. Mentors also validated the students’ participation in the group. This organizational involvement led a student to be more “out” on campus. The student then entered what Renn called the involvement-identification cycle. As the individual increases leadership in the LGBTQ group, the person develops a more public LGBTQ persona, which reinforces the leadership in the LGBTQ student organization. These reciprocal forces are continuously reinforcing each other. Similarly, Ostick (2011) found that for student leaders being out led to greater self-confidence, which led to greater involvement, which then lead to being more out and
more self-confidence, and so on. These mutual forces strengthened each other, just as in Renn’s (2007) model, to increase leadership capacity and commitment.

Renn (2007) proposed four types of LGBTQ student leaders: LGBT Student Leader, LGBT Activist, Queer Student Leader, and Queer Activist. The “student leader” description reflects a positional view of leadership while the “activist” terminology reflects an integrated view of leadership. “LGBT” is used in the model to describe an individual who has a nonheterosexual identity, framed as the opposite of a heterosexual identity, while “Queer” is used to describe someone who actively seeks to challenge gender and sexuality norms. Renn noted that none of these labels exist in a hierarchy but that they reflect a different orientation within a power system and the perception of oneself within that system. LGBT in the model is not intended as a developmental step on the way to identifying as Queer.

LGBT Student Leaders have a public LGBT identity and work within the established context of LGBT student organizations. Their view of leadership is associated with positional power and in the ability of the position to accomplished tasks and goals. Their public LGBT identity is often a consequence of their involvement and organizational leadership. The LGBT Activists, however, have begun to work outside of the positional constraints of established organizations. These students, while having similar sexual orientation identities as their LGBT Student Leader peers, have begun to participate in activism in general. They do not, however, seek to deconstruct established gender norms or categories.

Renn (2007) did not find the Queer Student Leader in her study and instead called this a “hypothetical identity” (p. 323). She questioned whether it was possible for a person to commit to challenging dichotomous gender and sexuality norms while still subscribing to positional leadership values. The final student leader type is the Queer Activist. These students embrace a
public queer identity outside of a LGBT identity and seek to challenge normative heterosexual expectations of behavior. They work to change social systems and have integrated a queer identity into their leadership work. Queer Activists see involvement as different from activism and seek to advocate for social justice in all areas of the university and society.

Renn (2007) drew a line of demarcation between those student leaders who worked in established LGBT groups and student activists who worked on larger social justice issues beyond a narrow scope of the LGBT community. There is another implied demarcation, though. The model, and most research, intentionally excludes LGBTQ+ students who choose to focus their involvement outside of LGBTQ+ student group or social activism. Ostick (2011) found that integration of a sexual orientation identity and a leadership identity was less common for gay and lesbian students who held leadership roles outside of LGBTQ+ groups and the leadership role did not relate to their sexual orientation.

In 2010, Renn extended her work regarding the leadership identity development of LGBTQ+ student leaders. She and Ozaki (2010) used the LID model to develop a grounded theory for psychosocial and leadership identity development among leaders of identity-based groups. Their sample included leaders of various identity-based organizations, not strictly LGBT student organizations. In this study, Renn and Ozaki (2010) found that leaders of identity-based organizations indicated some increased salience in the identity of the identity-based organization. However, there was little interaction between leadership identity development and psychosocial identity development for leaders of identity-based groups other than for LGBTQ student leaders. For example, the female leader of the woman’s group did not see her gender identity and her leadership identity as interacting. For LGBTQ student leaders, however, these identities did interact.
Renn and Ozaki (2010) developed two identity paths to articulate involvement in the identity-based organization: the parallel path and the merged path. In the parallel path, students arrived at the identity-based organization looking to explore that identity. They sought to make friends, learn about the identity, but they generally did not originally come to the organization with the intent of becoming a leader within that organization. People on the parallel path viewed their psychosocial identity and their leadership identity as separate, even though they took on a leadership role in an organization about their psychosocial identity. The leadership development and the psychosocial development maintained separate progressions and did not merge into one identity—they remained on parallel paths. The students on parallel paths did experience a similar reciprocal force as discussed earlier, as increasing involvement in the identity-based group led to increasing identification with that psychosocial identity. While the path of leadership and psychosocial identity development did not merge, they did reinforce each other.

The second path in Renn and Ozaki’s (2010) theory is the merged path. In this path, psychosocial identity and leadership identity merge into one overall identity. While the student may have entered the leadership role viewing themselves as “gay” and as a “leader” the experience of leading the identity-based organization lead the individual to describe themselves as a “gay leader” (Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Their psychosocial and leadership identities had fused. Renn and Ozaki noted that all participants in their study who demonstrated a merged path were LGBTQ student leaders of LGBTQ student organizations. They posit that the coming out process as construed in an American context may affect the way that these identities merge. They proposed that further stages of development within sexual orientation models generally requires the individual to be out in some context and that the more out a person is typically relates to a further stage of development. LGBTQ leader of a LGBTQ identity-based
organization are typically out publicly by the nature of their role in the organization. The more involved they become, the more out they are perceived to be on campus. Renn and Ozaki (2010) suggested that the potentially hidden nature of a LGBTQ identity, along with the construct of the coming out process, make the fusing of an identity development path and a leadership identity path different for LGBTQ student leaders than other identity-based student organization leaders. This construct, being different than other identity constructs, may explain why only LGBTQ participants demonstrated the merged path of leadership and identity development.

**Being an LGBTQ+ Student Leader**

Outside of Renn’s work regarding the leadership development of LGBTQ student leaders, the works focused on LGBTQ+ student leaders have centered on the benefits of leading LGBTQ+ identity-based groups, the challenges of leading those groups, and examining LGBTQ+ student leaders’ capacity for leadership.

**Benefits of Leading LGBTQ+ Identity-based Groups**

Participation in an on-campus LGBT community fosters resiliency and identity development for LGBT students (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a). Having a safe community in which to first navigate the coming out process can ease the fears of further disclosure (Stevens, 2004). For the leaders of these groups, benefits increase. Serving in a role that requires public interaction with others can encourage an individual to leave behind a heterosexual identity (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a). Being the public face of the LGBTQ+ community typically makes it very difficult for those individuals to hide their sexual orientation identity. Within the identity development models, there is a movement from holding a nonheterosexual identity in private towards holding a nonheterosexual identity, to some degree, in public (Renn, 2007). As individuals begin to immerse themselves into this nonheterosexual identity, they begin to
integrate that identity with other identities, moving towards congruence with one’s overall sense of identity (Renn, 2007).

Being a student leader of an identity-based group can also introduce students to resources they may not have known otherwise. Because these students have difficulty being anything other than fully out on campus, they can also discover supportive communities beyond what they may have known prior to their leadership role (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a). Specifically, interacting with other student leaders and campus administrators can lead to the recognition of allies across campus (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a). It is important that the student leaders utilize these support systems to help them during the more difficult aspects of their leadership roles, especially as related to their own identity development

**Challenges of Leading LGBTQ+ Identity-based Groups**

Leading an LGBTQ+ identity-based group, especially for students with multiple marginalized identities, can be a difficult and draining experience. Vaccaro and Mena’s (2011) study of queer activists of color on campus articulated many of the challenges facing LGBTQ student leaders within organizations. Organizations have individuals at all stages of development, which can at times be a challenge (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Student leaders find themselves leading a group that often tries to be everything to all people. These groups need to help those who are just navigating their sexual orientation or gender identity for the first time, those members in a stage of immersion or pride where their identity becomes increasingly important, and those who have begun to integrate their sexual orientation or gender identity as part of their larger identity. These students may have very different expectations and opinions on what the group should do or accomplish.
Navigating these political tides can be difficult enough, but student leaders of LGBTQ+ student groups may not have adequate training for the situations they may encounter. There can be tremendous pressure to be “fully developed” in their own identity and to have a full grasp of what it means to be a queer person, regardless of where they may be in their own lives (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Participants in Vaccaro and Mena’s study articulated the need to be perceived as living an authentic life and to model successful integration of a sexual orientation identity. These students can be seen as role models for other students navigating their own coming out process (Holland et al., 2013). As role models, there can also be significant pressure, whether self-imposed or externally expected, to help fellow students navigate their own self-discovery and coming out process, even while the student leader may be navigating their own process (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

Vaccaro and Mena (2011) found that it became important for students to see change happen on campus and they began to internalize external expectations (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). The student leaders were continually called upon for their knowledge of campus resources, their ideas, and their input (Biddix, 2010). They felt pressure to know the answer to all potential questions and to be able to help their peers in any situation (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Student leaders who engage in organizational activities found themselves serving as almost consultants to their peers (Biddix, 2010).

Student leaders spent so much time giving of themselves to others, they sacrificed their own health, social life, and overall self-care (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Student leaders spent much of their own energy supporting the members of their organizations; that energy was not always given back to them in kind by the members themselves (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Because of this, burn out, or what Vaccaro and Mena call “compassion fatigue” is a real
possibility (p. 358). Many of these student leaders give unselfishly of themselves to the point of breaking.

Vaccaro and Mena (2011) hypothesized that engaging in a leadership role actually makes individuals less likely to seek out help for their own crisis. Seeking help could be seen as being not in control or not knowing enough. Student leaders were continually pushed to do more and accomplish more (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Some student leaders described a sense of exhaustion at continually having to battle back homophobia and discrimination (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). As the face of the organization, they felt they had to continually edit themselves, be conscious of what they said and how they said it, and to be vigilant (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Failure to confront a situation could leave the student leaders scolding themselves that they did not intervene (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

It may be that the demands of battling multiple layers of discrimination and intolerance affects LGBTQ student leaders with multiple oppressed identities in an increasingly negative manner. It can be difficult for students with multiple marginalized identities to find support within some LGBTQ student organizations and they sometimes face rejection and hostility within what should have been a supportive environment (Stevens, 2004). In the search for that supportive environment which recognizes all their identities and does not ask them to prioritize one over another, these students have sometimes had to break off and form their own student organizations, which can be even more challenging or difficult (Stevens, 2004).

**Capacity for Leadership**

When considering the leadership development of LGB student leaders compared to their heterosexual peers, Dugan and Yurman (2011) found that LGB participants in their study reported few positional leadership roles overall and reported holding fewer positional leadership
roles than their heterosexual peers. Dugan, Komives, and Segar (2008) found no differences in the capacity of socially responsible leadership between LGB and non-LGB students. Similarly, Dugan and Yurman (2011) found no significant difference in leadership efficacy and socially responsible leadership between LGB students and their non-LGB peers. If students’ capacity for leadership and their leadership efficacy are similar to their peers, why are fewer LGB student leaders holding fewer leadership positions?

Dugan and Yurman (2011) posited two explanations for this difference. First, using Renn’s (2007) model of LGBT student leadership development, Renn found notable differences in the leadership identity development within populations of LGBT student leaders. Dugan et al. (2008) suggested that collapsing all LGB student leaders into one identity group negated these with-in group differences and thereby negated the between group differences of the LGB student leaders and their non-LGB peers. Secondly, Dugan and Yurman (2011) also used Renn’s (2007) assertion that the difference between LGBT student leaders and LGBT students in general is not in the way in which the student leader develops a nonheterosexual identity but instead in how the student leader integrates that identity, creating a salience between one’s leadership identity and one’s sexual orientation identity. Dugan and Yurman (2011) suggested that by not separating out the LGBT identity-based group leaders, the effects of this identity integration are nullified in the larger sample, resulting in no significant differences between the populations.

Socialization

The students in this study were not just members of the LGBTQ+ community and leaders of their student groups, they also existed as part of the overall campus community. The campus context affected their identity development, their leadership development, and their experiences within their organization. They shape the climates of their campus and that campus climate in
return shapes them, through a process Weidman (1989, 2006) called socialization. Earlier, I introduced Astin’s inputs, environment, outputs (I-E-O) model and the value of involvement during the collegiate experience, Weidman (1989, 2006) extended Astin’s thinking through the development of a framework for understanding how the socialization process occurs during the undergraduate experience. Weidman wrote, “Socialization involves the acquisition and maintenance of membership in salient groups … In order to understand socialization more clearly, it is important to identify social patterns of influence affecting individual and groups” (Weidman, 1989, p. 294). Students are being influenced and socialized by faculty, staff, and peers through interactions, learning, and social integration (Weidman, 2006). Socialization of students occurs across campus, including within student organizations (Weidman, 1989). For

Figure 4. Model of Undergraduate Socialization.
This study, the process of gaining or losing social capital is part of the socialization context. It is a normative pressure. Using Weidman’s (1989) model (see Figure 4), I situate social capital within the student’s overall collegiate experience.

Weidman’s (1989) socialization model incorporated psychosocial and structural influences to understand the process of attending college, specifically focusing on non-intellectual outcomes. Part of socialization is the “acquisition and maintenance of membership in salient groups” (Weidman, 1989, p. 294). These groups can be formal, including families and student organizations, or they can be general, such as larger societal groups. Weidman used reference group theory to understand potential socializing influences. When an individual takes into consideration another’s opinion or thoughts, the other person becomes a reference group. The reference group is influencing the decisions of the first person. The person may make decisions based on normative pressures of what is expected (Weidman, 1989). These actions may be to seek rewards or avoid punishment (Weidman, 1989).

Students arrive on campus with many beliefs, values, and goals. They then experience a college environment composed of multiple normative contexts. Weidman explained, “Undergraduate socialization can thus be viewed as a process that results from the student’s interaction with other members of the college community in groups or other settings characterized by varying degrees of normative pressure” (Weidman, 1989, p. 304). This normative pressure is a key component of the socialization process. These pressures are structured as expectations for students during their collegiate time.

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Weidman (1989) divided normative pressures into two contexts: academic and social. The academic context focuses on those parts that fulfill the academic mission of the institution or fulfill an individual’s educational objectives. The social dimension focuses on aspects that allow for interaction among members of groups. Weidman divided both dimensions into formal and informal aspects. Formal aspects of academic and social contexts exist to meet stated objectives, often with formalized rules, guidelines, or policies. Informal aspects of the academic or social contexts are guided individually, more implicit than explicit. Undergraduates who attend a college or university are experiencing a socialization process that incorporates both the academic and social contexts, within formal and informal aspects.

Existing in a normative context does not ensure socialization, however (Weidman, 1989). Within those contexts, students engage in a socialization process, which Weidman (1989) divided into three components: interpersonal interaction, intrapersonal processes, and integration. Within interpersonal interaction, the “frequency and sentimental intensity” of the interaction guided the socialization process (Weidman, 1989, p. 308). How often individuals interact with a person, and the intensity of the attachment, affects the socialization influence. Intrapersonal processes, later renamed learning, reflects the students’ own appraisal of their collegiate experience (Weidman, 1989; Weidman, 2006). This can include student satisfaction, perceptions of participation in various aspects of the environment, or the way students make meaning of the situation around them. All may affect students’ overall socialization. Integration is the final socialization process in Weidman’s model. Based on a person’s interaction with faculty, staff, and peers on a campus, the person becomes integrated into the college experience and develops an affinity for the community. This affinity can lead to a student pursuing opportunities or changing previously held goals based upon influences from the larger community.
In-college normative pressures result from combining the normative context and the socialization process. An individual responds to in-college normative pressures by the changing or the reinforcing of values. The consequence of changing or reinforcing one’s values is Weidman’s (1989) socialization outcomes. As a result of socialization as an undergraduate, people may have lifelong interests, aspirations, career choices, or values that have been modified and impacted. These changes or reinforcements persist and are not limited to strictly academic knowledge.

Weidman’s (1989) socialization model helps us understand the effects of the college experience for an individual. In Weidman’s articulation, student organizations provide normative pressures, group expectations, in which student leaders are socialized by interpersonal interactions (Weidman, 1989). This language can be amended to use the language of social capital, as I will introduce more fully in the next section. Rather than saying that students form groups with normative pressures, student organizations form social networks, which also have group expectations and standards of behavior. In Weidman’s framework, the interpersonal interactions are a process that results in socialization. This process of interpersonal interactions also results in social capital.

Social Capital

When considering the socialization and interpersonal interaction of LGBTQ+ student leaders, researchers have thoroughly examined the effects of serving in a LGBTQ+ identity-based organizational leadership role for an LGBTQ+ student. These roles can progress students through the meaning making process of their sexual orientation or gender identity. These roles can foster leadership development and lead to a merged sense of self as a “gay leader” (Renn & Ozaki, 2010). LGBTQ+ student leaders may develop a deepening commitment to LGBTQ+
activism and the overall LGBTQ+ community. However, the research has only begun to explore how these roles affect the student’s experiences, of socialization, on the college campus.

Dugan and Yurman (2011) found that, as a percentage of students, LGB students held fewer positional leadership roles than their heterosexual peers. Consequently, the LGBTQ+ students who lead the LGBTQ identity-based groups are setting themselves apart from multiple communities. By electing to serve in a leadership role, they separate themselves from the LGBTQ+ community that may have shunned these types of positions. Conversely, though, their sexual orientation and/or gender identity separates them from the majority population student leaders on campus. These LGBTQ+ student leaders seemingly exist simultaneously between two worlds and fit perfectly in neither.

When students take on positional leadership roles, they enter into a realm of general student leadership. They are invited to serve on committees, attend workshops, and serve on advisory panels. They gain access to resources and powerful people within the institution they may not have accessed otherwise (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a). Within these resources, they can also find supportive communities of allies in fellow student leaders and university administrators (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a).

If student leaders are experiencing isolation from LGBTQ+ peers but gaining supportive resources in other student leaders and administrators, it is easy to question how this affects their overall collegiate experience. One way of examining the interactions these students have with their LGBTQ+ peers, their non-LGBTQ+ peers, and with other members of the university community is to use social capital theory. In this section, I will introduce the historical context of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, discuss the discourse of sociologist James Coleman
and political scientist Robert Putnam, and overview the standing critiques of social capital theory. I then seek to unite the theories into a common understanding that can be applied to this study.

**Pierre Bourdieu**

In 1916, social reformer L. James Hanifan first wrote the term “social capital” (Putnam, 2002). Hanifan wrote,

In the use of the phrase social capital I make no reference to the usual acceptance of the term capital, except in a figurative sense. I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property, or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individual and families that make up a social unit. (Putnam, 2002, p. 4)

Though Hanifan had introduced both the verbiage and loose description that would continue for the next century, the concept of social capital did not truly catch researchers’ attention for several more decades. Social capital eventually gained prominence under the tutelage of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in the 1980s, even though Bourdieu wrote of social capital as a secondary thought to his primary focus of cultural capital.

Bourdieu based his theory in the concept that society inherently structures itself into groups or class. Groups became inevitable because “nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 723). People had the natural inclination to arrange themselves in groups, even beyond how external forces may have arranged them. This constructed social reality for grouping reinforced itself through collective societal pressures (Bourdieu, 1989). That is, even if the people themselves sought to arrange themselves into groups, the grouping became a collective act of society, not simply the act of those people. This
pressure is cyclical. People arrange themselves into groups, so society expects groups to occur, and then societal pressures imprint groups on people, reinforcing the desire for people to arrange themselves in groups.

One of the key ways to divide people is through social divisions (Bourdieu, 1984). In this study, the social division centers on sexual orientation and/or gender identity and group membership. Students organize themselves into formal student organizations, but also into socially constructed groupings including college students, LGBTQ+ students, and student leaders. When groups exist, struggles between and within groups will naturally emerge (Bourdieu, 1984). These struggles reinforce themselves. Bourdieu (1984) explained,

Principles of division, inextricably logical and sociological, function within and for the purposes of the struggle between social groups; in producing concepts, they produce groups, the very groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced. (p. 479)

When groups exist, there then exists a relationship, a power, between groups and members of groups. This social structure operates across multiple dimensions and spaces (Bourdieu, 1985). The relationship between these individuals and groups requires work, and this work results in social capital. It “is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Social capital, in Bourdieu’s interpretation, fits within a larger conversation of inequality of resources and, therefore, of power (Field, 2005). Within and between groups, social capital is the ties that bind two people together in a reciprocal relationship. And like all capital, social
capital can be won or lost. Social capital “like the aces in a game of cards, are powers that define the chances of profit in a given field” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724).

**James Coleman and Robert Putnam**

While Bourdieu based his research in Europe, James Coleman, an American sociologist, and Robert Putnam, an American political scientist, add distinctly American voices to the understanding of social capital theory.

**James Coleman.** Whereas Bourdieu’s research centered on the French bourgeoisie, Coleman researched educational attainment and marginalized communities (Field, 2008). Bourdieu argued that social capital was accessible only to the privileged. Coleman, in his work regarding educational attainment, demonstrated that social capital benefited marginalized communities as well (Field, 2008). Like Bourdieu, Coleman distinguished social capital from physical capital and human capital, though he saw human capital and social capital as inherently linked. Through his work, Coleman helped form the boundaries distinguishing these three types of capital:

> Just as physical capital is created by making changes in materials so as to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created by changing persons so as to give them skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways. Social capital, in turn, is created when the relationships among persons change in ways that facilitate action. Physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable form; human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual; social capital is even less tangible, for it is embodied in the *relations* among persons. (Coleman, 1990, p. 304, emphasis in original)
For Coleman, social capital turned on the understanding of reciprocity and obligation (Coleman, 1990). This interpretation emphasizes close ties between individuals, ignoring potential capital within loose or weak ties (Field, 2005). In Coleman’s interpretation, when a person does something for another person it establishes a sense of social obligation, which if unfulfilled can have social consequence. Coleman argued that rational people will only do an act if they have a reasonable expectation of something in return. This reciprocity is based on a “mutually profitable exchange” (Coleman, 1990, p. 309).

Even though Coleman focuses on close relationships, Coleman saw social capital as a public good and not a private good (Coleman, 1990; Field, 2008). Unlike other types of capital, “most forms of social capital are created or destroyed as a by-product of other activities. Much social capital arises or disappears without anyone willing it into or out of being” (Coleman, 1990, pp. 317-318). Social capital not only included the players themselves, but the social environment in which they operated. This environment could create and destroy capital as much as the purposeful intentions of any one individual. In his critique of Coleman’s theory, Field (2008) summarized, “actors did not set out to create social capital as such, rather it arose as an unintended consequence of their pursuit of self-interest” (p. 28). The “unintended consequence” manifestation of social capital distinguishes it from human and physical capital. Whereas human and physical capital are, in this understanding, inherently a private good, social capital is a public good because it benefits all those within the system, not just those creating or using it (Coleman, 1990; Field, 2008).

**Robert Putnam.** Putnam built upon Coleman’s work and shared many similar views, but Putnam’s interpretation introduced empathy to the process which results in social capital. It is also the interpretation to which I most closely hew, so I will describe it in greater detail here.
Putnam, like Coleman, also saw the building of social capital as somewhat happenstance, explaining, “virtually no one sets out to ‘build social capital’” (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003, p. 269). Differentiating himself from Coleman, Putnam also saw social capital as a public good. Whether a person engaged in social capital intentionally himself or herself, the benefits “spill beyond the people immediately involved in the network and can be used for many other purposes. The more neighbors who know one another by name, the fewer crimes a neighborhood will suffer as a whole” (Putman & Feldstein, 2003, p. 260). By social capital existing, the network improved for all those in the network.

Coleman and Putnam both viewed social capital as based in reciprocal relationships. However, Coleman’s understanding is much more calculated, and one could even say cold, than Putnam’s. Coleman argued that individuals were inherently self-interested, whereas Putnam believed that social norms meant that people generally were trusting and well intentioned. Putnam’s interpretation of social capital places emphasis on the individual rather than the group, and adds the component of empathy. Coleman saw the exchange of capital as an analysis predicated on one person sacrificing in the short term to gain in the long term, while Putnam described his reciprocal relationships in a more sympathetic tone. He wrote of “circles that overlap” which “reinforce a sense of reciprocal obligation and extend the boundaries of empathy” (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003, p. 291). This obligation is still built on the calculus of personal gain, but is also predicated on a human empathy and the “sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity” fostered by social capital (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 7). Social capital, and the norms established by the desire to have social capital, encourages “people to act in a trustworthy way when they might not otherwise do so” (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 7).
Putnam distinguished himself from Coleman in other ways, as well. Much more so than Coleman, Putnam saw social capital as an individual and private good (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). “Social networks matter. Networks have value, first of all, for the people who are in them. In the language of microeconomics, networks have private or ‘internal’ returns” (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 6). Social capital, like physical capital, can be strengthened, exploited, invested, and grown (Putnam, 1993). Social capital represents “resources whose supply increase rather than decrease through use and which become depleted if not used. The more two people display trust towards one another, the greater their mutual confidence” (Putnam, 1993, p. 169). Social capital, in the Putnam understanding, is at the core of a relationship between two people who need to come together, trust each other, and work together.

This trust and confidence between people best grows in small, personal settings—a hallmark of Putnam’s understanding of social capital (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). In a smaller setting, it is easier to interact face-to-face, build personal connections, which can lead to “spontaneous cooperation” (Putnam, 1993, p. 167; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). When interacting people share their personal narratives. The narratives are built on I, we, and they stories (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). “I” stories build trust. “We” stories build connections. Any we, of course, needs a “they,” the common target or enemy. While a common enemy is not required for social capital to form, it does help foster social capital (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003).

When it is unrealistic for all interactions to be personal and face-to-face, Putnam advocates for nesting smaller groups within larger groups. This allows the personal connections to foster and sustain social capital, while still reaching the “critical mass, power, and diversity” offered by a larger group (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003, p. 277). For Putnam, social capital is “incremental and cumulative” and process dependent (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003, p. 286). It
tends towards the personal over the public, but it can be destroyed by the action of poor or misguided policies (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003).

**Critique of Social Capital**

Detractors have lobbed many critiques at social capital (Graeff, 2009). Critics accused both Coleman and Putnam of focusing only on the merits of social capital (Field, 2008). Critics of Putnam, specifically, argued that he placed too much emphasis of the “benign macro effects of social capital” (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001, p. 2). There is certainly an argument for social capital as anything but benign. Social capital can lead to negative associations and group hostility to those who threaten their standing (Fukuyama, 2001). Social norms can lead to tight social control, excluding or punishing those who may act outside the norms (Graeff, 2009). Social norms can lead to standardization and homogenization of members of social network (Graeff, 2009). Not only does this exclude those who may be different, it can lead to negative homogenization. The Ku Klux Klan may have high social capital through social networks of reciprocal relations and social norms, but most would not hold the KKK up as a social network to be heralded. Reciprocal norms themselves are not always positive. Corruption can be a reciprocal norm, with very negative impacts on society but large personal benefits (Graeff, 2009). However, as Fukuyama (2001) pointed out, the possibility of negative consequences from social capital is no different than negative consequences beget of physical capital.

There is also an argument that social capital exacerbates group inequalities. Putnam himself pointed out that:

Networks and norms might, for example, benefit those who belong—to the detriment of those who do not. Social capital might be most prevalent among groups of people who
are already advantaged, thereby widening political and economic inequalities between those groups and other who are poor in social capital. (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 9)

In this argument, those with social capital are positioned to gain even more social capital. In other words, the rich get richer. Given that this study focuses on the social capital of a marginalized population, that critique becomes all the more important. As the researcher, I attempted to hold this critique in mind during the data collection and analysis stage. In seeking to understand these participants’ social capital, I also sought to understand how their marginalized identity affected their social capital.

**Unifying the Theories**

In this section, I have provided an overview of the three main theorists of social capital and the distinctions they have made in understanding social capital. Bourdieu viewed social capital as a subsection of cultural capital and as an asset of the privileged. Coleman progressed our understanding that everyone has social capital, even those marginalized by society, and introduced the concept of social capital as a public good. Putnam shifted the conversation to focus on an individual’s own social capital, not just the social capital of the individual within a group. In examining the three branches, Field (2005) concluded:

> Despite differences and controversies, though, there is a broad agreement among those who use the concept that the core elements of social capital consist of personal connections and interpersonal interaction, together with the shared sets of values that are associated with those contacts. (p. 19)

At the most basic understanding of social capital is that a person receives goodwill by being a member of a specific social network (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Ostrom, 2009). It is the concept that
goodwill—the sympathy, trust, forgiveness, and so on—that a person has access to is a substance derived from one’s place within a structure of social relations (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Social capital does not function singularly on its own. It functions in relation to human capital and physical capital and a limitation of this study is the singular focus on social capital. Social capital is primarily an outcome. One achieves social capital by participating in a social network. However, social capital is “not just an input into the production function, but it is also a shift factor (or exponent) of the entire production function” (Grootaert, 2001, p. 17). The presence of social capital affects the process of building social capital. It is an “exponent.” When a person has capital, it can be used to leverage the networking process to build even more social capital. Social capital, like all capital, can be invested. Putnam (2002) wrote that:

The core idea of social capital theory is that networks have value… social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups. Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (p. 19).

Field (2008) summed up the concept of social capital in two words: “relationships matter” (p. 1).

Social capital has widely been used in the fields of sociology, economics and political science (Grootaert & Van Bastelaer, 2002). Social capital is similar to physical capital in that it requires an initial investment and must be tended to regularly (Grootaert & Van Bastelaer, 2002). It cannot, unlike human capital, exist individually. It is a relational construct. Groups and individuals can form circles of trust that extend their relationships and influence well beyond their immediate surroundings (Fukuyama, 2001). The more that social capital is used, the better
it can become (Ostrom, 2009). Social capital does not wear out, but social capital can be easily destroyed and can be difficult to rebuild (Grootaert & Van Bastelaer, 2002; Ostrom, 2009).

**Forms of Social Capital**

There are several constructs that can be used to describe and categorize social capital (see Table 1). In this study, I identify twelve different constructs to define and examine social capital. Putnam and Goss’s (2002) framework outlines four comparisons: (1) formal and informal social capital; (2) thick and thin social capital; (3) inward-looking and outward-looking social capital; and (4) bridging and bonding social capital. The first pairing, formal and informal social capital,
### Table 1

**Social Capital Constructs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Capital Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Relationships and interactions based on formal associations such as group membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Relationships and interactions based on informal or unstructured associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>Densely woven, multistranded and deeply felt social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Individuals know and acknowledge each other but connections are tenuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inward-looking</td>
<td>Promotes the interests of the group’s own members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward-looking</td>
<td>Promotes the public good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging</td>
<td>Connects people across disparate identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding</td>
<td>Brings together people who share an important identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized reciprocity</td>
<td>An ongoing exchange that at any time is unbalanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced reciprocity</td>
<td>An exchange of equivalent value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Web-like and brings together people of equal status and power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Pole-like and brings together people of unequal power who have relationships of hierarchy and dependence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

compares interactions and relationships that are “concentrated on formal associations,” such as membership in a student group, to those relationships that are based on informal and unstructured associations (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 10). Thick and thin social capital compares thick capital that is “closely interwoven and multistranded,” where people have deep connections
to each other, and thin capital where individuals know and acknowledge each other but the relationships are tenuous compared to relationships of thick social capital (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 10). Inward and outward looking social capital compares inward looking groups that “promote the material, social, or political interests” of the group’s own members while outward looking social capital focuses on public goods (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p.11). Inward and outward social capital focuses on the groups themselves, while bridging and bonding focuses on them members themselves. Putnam and Goss (2002) explained bridging and bonding social capital:

Bonding social capital brings together people who are like one another in important respects (ethnicity, age, gender, social class, and so on), whereas bridging social capital refers to social networks that bring together people who are unlike one another. (p. 11) Additionally, social capital is built on norms of reciprocity. These norms can be generalized or balanced (Putnam, 1994). In generalized reciprocity, the scales are rarely equal. Instead, there is an ongoing relationship that is unbalanced. Generalized reciprocity “involves a mutual expectation that benefit given now should be repaid in the future” rather than as a direct, equal exchange (Putnam, 1994, p. 172). Conversely, balanced reciprocity is the exchange of equivalent value, such as “when office-mates exchange holiday gifts or legislators log-roll” (Putnam, 1994, p. 172). Finally, social networks can be horizontal, connecting people of equal status and power, or social networks can be vertical, connecting people of unequal status and power (Putnam, 1993). Horizontal networks are web-like while vertical networks are pole-like.

No one type of social capital is superior to another. Instead, these are twelve lenses through which to view social capital. They help us understand the different types of interactions from which groups and individuals do or do not benefit.
Social Capital and this Study

Research using social capital as an outcome is frequently seen in economic and global development texts. Within higher education, researchers often use the more broad constructs of human capital and cultural capital (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). These Bourdieuan frameworks have been used to look at racial inequality in admissions, perceptions of financial aid, informal academic standards, and college choice (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). However, the opportunity to progress the use of social capital exists as it permits “an investigation between the individual and the group as well as between the group and the social structure” (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p. 60). Understanding social capital can aid practitioners in assisting and serving students. Winkle-Wagner (2010) articulated the need:

“Perhaps the most important implications related to the study of Bourdieu’s notion of social capital in education contexts is that educational practitioners can become a source of social capital for students. Hence, faculty, teachers, and administrators have a duty to connect students to other successful students and to those who might be able to afford students the social networks they need.” (p. 108)

Administrators have the opportunity to leverage social capital networks to better serve students in need. Understanding the nature of these social capital networks, how they exist and interact within the university context, equips us to provide students who have come from oppressed or marginalized groups with a more welcoming and supportive collegiate environment.

Summary

Student involvement offers opportunities for students to deepen their learning through out of the classroom experiences and develop both psychosocial and leadership identities. One type of student involvement is through student groups and organizations, which for LGBTQ+ students
can provide a safe haven in a challenging and marginalizing culture. For the LGBTQ+ students who chose to lead these groups, the experience can reinforce their sexual orientation identity and their leadership identity. The student leaders move, for example, from being a student leader who is gay to becoming a “gay leader,” where the psychosocial and leadership identities have merged and reinforce each other. Much research has been done on how LGBTQ+ student leaders develop by serving in a leadership role in an identity-based group. However, there exists a hole in the literature when considering how these students experience social aspects of the campus community. The framework of social capital theory provides a language with which to consider these interactions. Social capital theory incorporates the natural and formal groupings of individuals to evaluate how gaining membership into one group affects the relationships with another group. It allows us to consider how, when a student moves from simply being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, to being a formal member of a LGBTQ+ group, then to being a leader within the group, that student’s resources and networks evolve and change. Understanding these networks and relationships will allow college administrators to better serve students who have been historically marginalized within the academy.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the research base regarding LGBTQ+ undergraduate student leaders in LGBTQ+ identity-based student organizations, specifically utilizing the lens of social capital. The research questions were:

1. How do LGBTQ+ undergraduate students in positional leadership roles in a LGBT identity-based student group understand their own social capital?
2. How does having social capital impact LGBTQ+ student leaders’ sense of belonging and engagement with the university community?
3. In what way is LGBTQ+ student leaders’ social capital within one network impacted by the student’s changing social capital in another network?

In this section, I explore the frameworks of analysis, address my own assumptions and biases, and address the methods of site and participant selection, data collection, and trustworthiness.

Through this research, I sought to give voice to a frequently disenfranchised population. Qualitative methods were thereby an appropriate lens to examine these research questions because qualitative research serves to “empower individuals to share their stories [and] hear their voices” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Through qualitative research, I sought to gain an understanding of how the individual participants understood and made meaning of their own experiences. Qualitative research allows us to delve into individuals own experiences and construction of their world (Merriam, 2009).

I grounded this research in a constructivist paradigm and study design. Patton (2002) wrote, “a paradigm is a worldview—a way of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the world” (p. 69). That is, a paradigm shapes how we view and interpret the world. Accordingly, Guba and Lincoln (1989) further explained that a paradigm is “a basic set
of beliefs, a set of assumptions we are willing to make, which serve as touchstones in guiding our activities” (p. 80). It is important to articulate the paradigm used to give context to how I, as the researcher, view and assume knowledge and how I used that lens to make meaning of my observations and interviews throughout this study.

Paradigms represent a distinct set of philosophical assumptions—axiological, ontological, and epistemological—which ground and frame the study (Creswell, 2013). Ontology is the understanding of the nature of reality. A constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist understanding, in that multiple, socially constructed realities exist (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Individual people construct these realities as they interact with others and interpret their own experiences (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Within this interpretation, multiple individuals may share the same construction of reality but that reality is no more or less real than a reality not shared with others (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Epistemology is the understanding of how reality is known. Within a constructivist paradigm, it is assumed that the researcher and participant mutually create reality (Creswell, 2013). As Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained, as humans, the researcher and participant are unable to set aside their humanness for the course of the study. Given the ontological assumptions of a socially constructed reality, both researcher and participant bring their interpretations of reality to the study. The process of inquiry then fosters a shared construction of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Axiological beliefs explain the role of values within the paradigm (Creswell, 2013). In a social constructivist perspective, it is understood that the values of participants should be incorporated and reflected throughout the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Values are considered an honored part of inquiry (Creswell, 2013). A constructivist paradigm assumes that values
inform the reality that is co-created between the researcher and the participant. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge and provide context to the values brought to the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

**Role of the Researcher**

Situating myself in the research is important so that the reader best understands my own assumptions and biases. Gergen and Gergen (2003) explained reflexivity:

[I]nvestigators seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographic situatedness, their personal investments in research, various biases they bring to the work, their surprises and “undoings” in the process of the research endeavor, the ways in which their choices of literary tropes lend rhetorical force to the research report, and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view. (p. 579)

I must share my understanding of the world, my values, and my beliefs because in the constructivist paradigm, they inform my research and the lens by which I interpreted data.

My motivation to do this study was my long-standing interest in the power of student organizations and a commitment to improving university environments for LGBTQ+ students. I believe that student involvement is a key component of student learning. I believe that student organizations provide an outlet for students to discover themselves as individuals. I worked full-time for five years before returning to coursework and I spent four of those years working directly with student organizations. As an undergraduate student, I was heavily involved in student groups and it was that involvement that initially led me to work in student affairs.

I identify as a White, heterosexual, cisgendered woman. I grew up in a nearly exclusively White, lower middle class, Christian, farming community in Iowa. Throughout my
years of elementary and secondary schooling, I never once sat in a classroom with a student of another race or religion.

At 15, I can distinctly remember meeting the boy who became my first non-heterosexual friend. Coincidentally, he also became my first African American friend. He went to a different school in another town and we met, as a hallmark of the time, in a video rental store. I look back on this friendship now and, even though I recognize him as my first non-White, non-heterosexual friend, I do not remember being especially interested or intrigued by my friend’s sexual orientation or his race. He was simply my friend. He just happened to be different than the people I grew up around. Though I recognize in hindsight what must have been vast differences in how we interacted with our local communities, that difference did not occur to me at the time.

My commitment to and understanding of social justice deepened when I went to college. I attended Washington and Lee University as an undergraduate. W&L is seen as a staunchly conservative campus, although I argue it is not nearly as conservative as it appears. Still, it is a campus named for a Confederate general, and the dearth of quantifiable diversity within the student body was and remains a constant discussion point. During the spring of my freshman year, I, on a whim, decided to take over the LGBT-Ally student organization. I did not have a strong commitment to LGBTQ+ rights at that time, I just felt that the campus needed a LGBTQ+ group and the only out student on the entire campus was about to graduate. I could not, in that moment, recognize how much that decision would shape my life.

I spent the next two years leading the LGBT-Ally group, even though I identified as both heterosexual and cisgender. During my time in this student group, I attended the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Creating Change conference. For the first time in my life, I was in an environment where I was a minority. Although I had experienced having my sexual orientation
incorrectly assumed before, I had always been able to reclaim privilege by asserting my heterosexual and cisgender identities. In this environment, though, my identities did not grant me privilege. In fact, they occasionally left me in awkward or even hostile spaces, where I was viewed as the other, as an intruder, as one who did not belong and was not wanted. I will never forget the feeling of exhaustion after four days of considering each word I spoke, trying to determine with each new interaction if I should clarify and correct their assumptions or if I should just “pass.” At the end of the conference, I just wanted to go home and go back to where I did not need to worry about people’s reactions to my identities. And I had the privilege of doing that. After four days, I went back to my majority life, where most people assumed I was exactly what I presented externally: a White, heterosexual, woman. This experience, though, sat with me for a very long time afterwards. I could not let go of the fact that I had the ability to go “home” and it would all be easy again. I could not imagine having to live in those four days for all my life. From that point on, I committed to working towards an environment where all people can feel at home, welcomed and supported for their authentic selves. It was in this role as a leader of a LGBTQ+ identity-based group that I found my deeply held belief in social justice.

My commitment to social justice, and specifically to LGBTQ+ issues, is a known part of my professional identity. I served as a member of the LGBTQ+ Advisory Board on my campus for four years. For two years, I served as the advisor to the social fraternity described in this research, which describes itself as a social fraternity for “gay, bisexual, and progressive men.” I am proud to be an official friend of the fraternity. Over the years, I have had close relationships as a mentor and advisor with student leaders in several of the LGBTQ+ groups included in this research, and with some of the individuals who participated in this research. When I decided to
begin coursework, I selected a doctoral cognate focusing on student involvement and within that I centered my projects on historically marginalized populations.

Assumptions

In this research, I bring with me my own biases and assumption. I assume that sexual orientation and gender identity are social constructs. I believe that intersecting multiple identities form our understanding of ourselves. I believe that no one identity is inherently more important than another. I believe that the people who participate in this study will bring with them multiple identities and, though this inquiry focuses primarily on sexual orientation and gender identity, that the results will be informed by each of the participants’ multiple identities. I assume that, even though great progress has been made, LGBTQ+ students still face a hostile and difficult environment on college campuses. I believe that LGBTQ+ identities are still marginalized, regardless of the new found place for LGBTQ+ issues in popular culture. I believe that I bring with me to this study a knapsack full of privilege. As a woman, I have some understanding of navigating a marginalized identity, but I believe that navigating a marginalized identity is different than navigating a marginalized, minority identity. I know that it is not my place to speak for a group to which I do not belong, and instead seek only to give voice to their stories. I believe that by understanding how my students experience the college social environment, I will be better able to serve them.

As a researcher, I have influenced and affected this study from the design to the analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, “Inquires are influenced by inquirer values as expressed in the choice of the problem, evaluand, or policy option, and in the framing, bounding, and focusing of that problem, evaluand, or policy option” (p. 38). I shaped this study through the decisions I made as to what questions to ask and the areas of focus. Moreover, my personal interactions
with these groups and students have inherently influenced the outcomes of my study. Of the fifteen participants who will be introduced in a later chapter, I knew eleven, to varying degrees, prior to their participation in the study. In part, this is due to my role on campus. The participants were accomplished student organization leaders and I worked directly with student organizations on this campus. Nine have participated in leadership development programs that I coordinated. Five are brothers in the social fraternity that I advised, though two joined after I no longer advised the organization. Their relationships with me, with the offices to which I am affiliated, and their perceptions of my role on campus may have impacted how and what they said, including the information they shared about relationships with other university staff.

I believe that it is not my place to speak for a community of individuals but to empower the voices of those individuals. Through my own identities, my own privilege, and my role in relationship to these individual participants, I shaped this research. As Fine (1994) argued, “full detachment has been revealed as illusory and the stuff of privilege” (p. 16). I have attempted to fill this inquiry with diverse voices with rich stories and sought to use spaces that empowered the participants (Fine, 1994). However, it was impossible to fully remove the power relationships that existed between myself and the participants.

The Nature of Knowledge

I subscribe to a constructivist viewpoint. I believe that multiple realities exist and that our interactions with others influence these realities. I believe that the lived experience of the individual is key to shaping that reality. I assume that qualitative research, by its very nature, results in co-created knowledge and co-created realities. I believe that the values and identities an individual brings with them are vital to understanding and that these values should be honored.
Anticipated Results

As part of fully placing myself and my assumptions into the research, I must also disclose what I presumed to be the anticipated findings of this study, based upon my own experiences. I entered this research believing that student leaders will have a positive perception of their own social capital based upon their positional leadership roles. I anticipated that students would perceive themselves to have gained social capital within networks including fellow student leaders and university administrators. However, I believed this added social capital would have cost them, to at least some degree, social capital with the LGBTQ+ community. As students leader integrates further into the student leader and administrative networks, they may be seen as party to decisions or systems viewed negatively by their LGBTQ+ peers. This may cause the student leaders to lose social capital within that network, while simultaneously gaining it in another.

I believed that the student leaders would, nonetheless, view their positional leadership role as positively impacting their overall social capital. I also believed that this increased social capital would be associated with increased sense of belonging and engagement with the institution. With increased connections to the social networks of the institution, the student leaders would have an increased affinity and affection for the institution. This affinity will likely also lead to further participation in the campus community outside of their involvement with the LGBTQ+ student organization.

Study Design

I designed this study using a constructivist paradigm within qualitative methodology informed by natural inquiry. I believe that one way to understand a phenomena is to tell a person’s story. As Robert Stake (1995) wrote, “To the qualitative scholar, the understanding of
human experience is a matter of chronologies more than of causes and effects” (p. 39). A constructivist paradigm places emphasis on these stories as a way to honor each participant’s interpretation of the world. A researcher should state “the procedures that will be employed” including the sampling, instrumentation, and data-analytics procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 222). For this study, I used purposeful and snowball sampling; collected data through interviews, observations, and document analysis; and analyzed the data through open and axial coding to find themes. From a constructivist viewpoint, qualitative methodology was an appropriate choice as it was “more adaptable to dealing with multiple (and less aggregatable) realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). Within natural inquiry, the focus shapes the study in an evolving and unfolding manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of an emergent and flexible design informed by ongoing analysis allowed for the mutual shaping of realities to construct and inform the design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By placing the individually constructed realities at the heart of the analysis, the researcher empowers readers to consider their own interpretations.

**Sampling**

Naturalistic inquiry “is likely to eschew random or representative sampling in favor of purposive or theoretical sampling because he or she thereby increases the scope or range of data exposed” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). As such, I used purposeful and snowball sampling within a single site for this study.

**Site.** I selected a Midwestern, regional, public institution that had an emphasis on undergraduate education as the site of this study. The selected institution displayed a high number of LGBTQ+ student leadership opportunities but was not known as having an exceptionally diverse population or a historical commitment to issues of social justice. As of Fall 2011, the institution enrolled approximately 13,000 full-time undergraduate students, with
6,000 living in on-campus housing. While the institution has a branch campus within the same state, I limited this study to students enrolled at the main campus.

At the time of the study, the selected site offered seven groups for LGBTQ+ students on campus, while another three ceased existence previous to data collection, for various reasons. Each of the organizations and groups will be introduced in Chapter IV. While it may have been possible to gain an understanding of social capital by speaking to members of only a few organizations or groups, I felt it imperative that I honor the breadth of the LGBTQ+ community on this campus. There was no logical reason to exclude any group. I intentionally recruited leadership of each group. However, some groups are more represented than others based upon the number of leadership roles they offered, the number of leaders who had held roles at the time of this study, or the number of people available who met the participant selection criteria outlined later in this chapter.

The study included five established groups, in that they had been in existence for at least one year at the time of this research, two new groups that existed for less than one year at the time of this research, and three defunct groups that no longer existed as active groups at the time of this research. Of the defunct groups, one had shut down within the semester that I conducted this research and two shut down in previous academic years. In an effort to protect the identities of the student leaders, I chose not to identify the site of this research, or the names of the student groups themselves. However, I did not feel comfortable selecting pseudonyms for the groups; in some cases, the original names of the groups had meaning affiliated with the group’s identity and values. I did not feel it appropriate for me to select, for example, three random Greek letters to label the social fraternity. As such, I have chosen to use identifying names affiliated with the mission of the groups. The established groups included in this research were: (a) Umbrella, a
registered student organization which serves as an umbrella organization for all queer students; (b) Women’s, a registered student organization for women identified individuals who engage in romantic relationships with other women, purposefully cast as broader than women who identify as lesbian or bisexual; (c) QPOC, a suborganization for LGBTQ+, same-gender loving, and queer people of color; (d) Social Fraternity, a recognized social fraternity for gay, bisexual, and progressive men; and (e) Trans*, a suborganization for trans* advocacy. The new groups included in this research were: (a) Spirituality, a suborganizations focused on the intersections of faith, spirituality, gender identity, and sexuality; and (b) Middle Sexualities, a suborganization to support individuals with non-mono identities, including but not limited to bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, or fluid. The defunct organizations included were: (a) Activist, a registered student organization to support and educate individuals regarding activism efforts; (b) Worldview, a registered student organization which sought to provide a space to discuss the intersection of religion and sexual orientation; and (c) Transgender, a registered student organization which sought to educate about transgender topics and advocate for transgender people. Each of the ten groups offered leadership positions to students including roles such as president, treasurer, events chair, and publicity chair. Across the groups there were over 40 possible leadership positions for students. Each group will be introduced in-depth in Chapter IV.

Participants. Gamson (2003) argued that multiple voices are needed to inform a depth of understanding and to reflect multiple perspectives on the research questions. Sampling can be both “particularizing and generalizing” (Gerring, 2007, p. 76). Using that as a guideline, I recruited participants for this study using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling allowed me to target information-rich cases that had potential to yield insightful information, illuminate the research questions, and that could be explored for depth (Patton,
Patton (2002) argued that the use of information-rich cases leads to insights and in-depth analysis rather than “empirical generalizations” (p. 230). This campus required that registered student organizations also register their current executive leadership. I used this list as an initial starting point for recruiting participants, with an emphasis on including each organization, and recruited participants through email communication (Appendix A). I used both snowball and purposeful sampling. As I spoke to participants, these individuals identified other potential participants (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling allowed me to intentionally seek a participant pool that represented each group, and various levels of leadership and tenure within each (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). I experienced difficulty in securing participants from Women’s Organization, so I chose to use gatekeepers, individuals with knowledge and access to the organization, to identify and make initial contact to potential participants from that organization (Creswell, 2013).

It is important to outline the criteria for selection, as these criteria reflected the overall purpose of the study and allowed for easier identification of possible participants (Patton, 2002). Established criteria articulate who was a potential participant and who was excluded from participation (Yin, 2014). The research questions outlined consider LGBTQ+ undergraduate students who were leaders within LGBTQ+ identity-based groups. As such, I bounded the study to focus on undergraduate students at the selected institution. Participants needed to be currently enrolled as an undergraduate student or within one calendar year of graduation. By limiting the participant pool in this manner, I attempted to address how participants remember – or do not remember – their college experiences. It is possible that as individuals become further removed from the experience in time, they remember their interactions and challenges differently. Additionally, students who transferred or withdrew from the institution were not eligible. I was
concerned about the ability to locate those students and the confounding experiences that led the students to transfer. While their social capital, or lack thereof, may have led to them withdrawing or transferring, I felt this experience would be best evaluated separately. I limited the sample to those individuals holding positional leadership roles in the identified LGBTQ+ identity-based groups, either those currently serving in those roles or those who have previously served. Given that social capital is built on relations and connections, students who have extended experience in the leadership roles were best placed to offer insight. Therefore, the individual must have been in a leadership role with a LGBTQ+ identity-based student group for at least one semester at the time of our interview. Eligible participants included both those currently serving in a leadership position at the time of the interview or those who served in a leadership position for at least one semester during their time on campus.

All participants needed to self-identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Throughout the course of this research, participants indicated a preference for the terminology of LGBTQ+, rather than LGBT, LGBTQ, or Queer as a way to identify and talk about their community. They felt that this acronym was easy to use in everyday language while the “plus” acknowledged that dozens of identities existed that could fall within the acronym and that all these identities should be honored and celebrated. While many participants self-identified as Queer, they felt strongly that not all LGBTQ+ individuals approved of the word queer, which has at least some roots as a reclaimed pejorative label. Participants rejected the word queer as a way to describe their own community and felt that LGBT and LGBTQ did not fully encompass all of the members of the community. The term LGBTQ+ is used by the community on this campus to describe themselves. I believe that people should be called what they want to be called, and
described how they want to be described. As such, I am using the terminology of LGBTQ+ in this dissertation to discuss this community.

Patton (2002) asserted that a minimum number of participants should be specified, and that an appropriate sample should be small enough to result in manageable data but large enough to provide depth of detail. I set an initial sample size of fifteen. I established this threshold based on the number of five established groups, with two emerging groups and three defunct organizations. I spoke to fifteen individuals (see Table 2), who will be introduced in further detail in Chapter IV.

I sought to speak to at least two members of each established group and at least one member of each emerging group. Students often hold more than one leadership position, so some groups are more represented than others. Though the groups were not individually compared to each other, I wanted to have multiple perspectives on each of the active groups. I sought to reach redundancy, or when new information is no longer offered by participants (Merriam, 2009). I did not reach redundancy, but I reached a point where I did not have any more eligible participants, based on the outlined criteria, who desired to participate in the study or who responded to communications inviting them to participate.

**Data Collection Strategies**

Qualitative constructivist inquiry should be “iterative, interactive, hermeneutic, at times intuitive, and most certainly open” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 183). Iterative means that information informs and shapes further actions, that different types of repeated analysis shape meaning. It is interactive in that meaning is co-created by the researcher and the participant together. It is hermeneutic in that it is interpretive (Guba & Lincoln 1989). The work must
Table 2

**Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Cis Male</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matilda</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian/Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Cisgender Female</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Arab-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Woman/Female</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packets Joy</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Genderqueer/non-binary</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabre</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Trans Man</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Senior</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wade</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-Ray</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\) All names are pseudonyms chosen by participants

\(b\) Participant’s self-described gender identity and sexual orientation
also be intuitive and open in that plans and methods will shift and change throughout the course of the study. It was important that I began the project with a well-articulated plan but was open to altering that plan as new information was discovered.

Within qualitative research, and using a social constructivist paradigm, I elected to use the human instrument—that being myself—for data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The human instrument better honors the multiple and mutually constructed realities “because it would be virtually impossible to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety or realities that would be encountered” during the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). The human instrument is “responsive, flexible, and adaptable” and “brings a holistic emphasis and processual immediacy to inquiry situations” and “builds upon tacit knowledge” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In this study, I used interviews, observations, and document analysis to gain an understanding of multiple perspectives and in an attempt to triangulate the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

**Interviews.** Interviews served as the main method for understanding multiple constructed perspectives in this research (Stake, 1995). I used flexible, semi-structured questions to explore the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The questions (Appendix B) were ordered but the interview was flexible and the questions were not always asked in consecutive order (Merriam, 2009). This was consistent with a constructivist research design, which calls for a “a highly adaptable instrument that can enter a context without prior programming, but that can, after a short period, begin to discern what *is* salient (in the emic views of the respondents) and then focus on *that*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 175, emphasis in original). A less formatted interview structure provided an opportunity for participants to describe the world in their own way (Merriam, 2009).
Interview questions focused on the relationships students perceive with various members of the university, what they consider it meant to be a student leader, and how their leadership role as affected their college experience. Through these questions, I sought to gain an understanding of how students considered their leadership role to situate them within the university community and to understand the relationships that develop and change because of these roles. I prepared the main questions prior to the interviews but used follow up probes throughout the interview process to elicit further information and clarification (Stake, 1995). Piloting interview questions is useful in refining lines of inquiry and clarifying the research design (Yin, 2014). For this study, I piloted initial question protocols with one individual, who met the participation criteria except that he was more than one calendar year from his graduation from the institution. I refined the questions after this pilot interview (Stake, 1995, Yin, 2014). The results of the pilot interview were not incorporated in the analysis (Stake, 1995).

I conducted one interview with each participant. Participants selected their own interview locations, in an effort to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible during the interview process. One participant selected the Umbrella on-campus office; one participant selected the on campus LGBTQ+ center; three participants asked to meet in my office in the student union; six participants selected a meeting room in the campus student union; and I conducted four interviews via Skype. Though I strongly preferred in-person interviews, all four of these participants were alumni of the institution and no longer within reasonable driving distance of my location, and a Skype interview served as a viable alternative to an in-person interview. Interviews lasted between 45-minutes and two hours. After the analysis, I sent a report of the major findings to the participants so that they could evaluate that the findings adequately reflected their experience and that the results reflect their story. I sought feedback
from them in a manner in which they felt most comfortable responding, indicating my desire to meet with them in person or via Skype to discuss the findings. I revised my analysis using the feedback of those who participated. Revisions included expanding some sections of analysis. This expansion included more individuals, as participants broadened how they viewed their own social capital after reviewing the experiences of others.

**Observations.** Social capital is a relational construct that occurs between people or groups of people. At the core, social capital concerns working with and interacting with others. I originally sought to conduct observations of each organization, as a means of better understanding students’ social capital on campus. I sought observations from each organization in an environment where the student leader would interact with other members of the university community, such as group meetings, workshops, organizational events, or advising sessions. In order to honor the privacy of general members of the organization, I asked that any observations be held at an event that would be defined by participants as relatively public or open. For example, a meeting being observed would not need to be open to the entire University community but it should also not be a meeting with an assumed confidentiality. Due to confidentiality concerns from the student leaders and scheduling challenges, I only conducted two observations. Most of the organizations did not hold an event that they felt met the criteria for observation, at which they felt comfortable having an observation occur, during the time of data collection. I conducted two observations. First, I observed a candle light vigil to honor members of the LGBTQ+ community, held by Women’s Organization during the campus’ “Coming Out Week.” Second, I observed a simulation game designed to foster conversations about systems of oppression, organized by QPOC, Umbrella, and the campus’ two largest organizations advocating for and supporting Black and Latino students. To record observational
information, I used an observation protocol that included descriptive notes of the activity occurring and reflective notes of my thoughts and insights during the observation (Creswell, 2013).

**Document analysis.** I used document analysis to establish a more thorough understanding of the context of the case, guided by the research questions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Through document analysis, I reviewed student organization constitutions, in order to gain a better understanding of the mission, vision, and purpose of each organization. The review of the constitutions allowed me to gain a better understanding of the organizational structure that could not be readily or easily observed (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). In addition to constitutions, my document analysis also included publicly available social media platforms for the student groups. These included group Facebook pages and organizational Twitter accounts. I restricted social media analysis solely to organizational, not personal, social media pages and accounts. Additionally, I further restricted social media analysis to those accounts that were publicly available, ones that do not require permission to join and view. Given the increasing prevalence of social media in student life, I aimed to see how these students used or created social capital through social media.

**Data Analysis**

In an effort to save time, I used a transcription service for the transcribing of interview recording. I reviewed transcripts and corrected for errors. I then sent transcripts to participants for review for both clarity and content. After review of the transcript, I initially analyzed the data using open coding. Open coding is used to segment the information (Creswell, 2013). In open coding, I read the transcripts and took margin notes of insights, key words, and questions (Merriam, 2009). At this point in the analysis, I looked for anything that may have been helpful,
such as repeated words or important phrases. I then summarized and combined this open coding through axial coding, when open codes are reassembled in new ways (Creswell, 2013). I combined open codes across commonalities to form categories. I finally combined categories to create themes. I repeated this method with each new data set, with open and then axial coding, and then comparing those codes to an emerging master list of codes, categories, and themes (Merriam, 2009). Through this process, themes emerged that cut across the data.

**Social Capital Theory**

As the research questions in this inquiry relied heavily on social capital theory, I sought to use the framework of social capital theory to orient the data analysis from the beginning (Yin, 2014). Social capital theory is based on relationships and group membership, be it group membership in a defined organization or in a larger community of people. A LGBTQ+ student leader may be a member of the LGBTQ+ community, the LGBTQ+ student group, the student leader community, and the university student community. Membership in each of these would come with its own norms and expectations. Relationships would be gained or lost as the student moved between the memberships. Individuals can hold overlapping and simultaneous membership in divergent groups (Fukuyama, 2001).

I used twelve social capital constructs to analysis the data. Though the types are not mutually exclusive, they give a unified lens through which social capital can be analyzed. As introduced in Chapter II, these include: (a) formal versus informal social capital, (b) thick versus thin social capital; (c) inward-looking versus outward looking social capital, (d) bridging versus bonding social capital; (e) horizontal and vertical social capital; and (f) balanced and generalized reciprocity. Jones and Woolcock (2009) recommended analyzing social capital across six dimensions: groups and networks; trust and solidarity; collective action and cooperation;
information and communication; social cohesion and inclusion; and empowerment and political action. I used these dimensions to inform my interview protocol. However, I excluded the dimension of empowerment and political action, as it primarily focuses on the empowerment of members to recall or remove those in power and for those in power to challenge political powers. While important, this did not pertain to the research questions of this inquiry. Within the remaining five dimensions, various perspectives on the twelve constructs of social capital were incorporated. Using the six dimensions ensured a holistic evaluation of social capital as it existed for these students within these networks in this context.

**Limitations**

Two major limitations, participant demographics (e.g. class rank, race, and age) and the numbers of observations are present in this research. The participants included in this study were primarily well established, upperclass student leaders. Emerging leaders or underclass students might have understood their social capital differently. This study is limited in that only two observations occurred. Not all student leaders or all groups were observed. Participants in this study are predominately White and all are traditionally aged. Students who navigate marginalized racial identities or non-traditional ages on a college campus may view their social capital differently.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness represents the trust a reader has in one’s findings and assertions (Shenton, 2004). Within qualitative research, trustworthiness often comes under question, in part, because qualitative research does not have the prescribed, quantifiable statistics of validity and reliability offered by quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). Assuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is more art form than recipe. In this study, I intended to use methodological
triangulation to inform my analysis (Stake, 1995). The use of multiple sources of information through interviews, observations, and document analysis aim to “illuminate or nullify some extraneous influence” (Stake, 1995, p. 114). Nonetheless, triangulation was limited based on the small number of observations and narrow scope of the document analysis. I sought to shape my research techniques to assure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

Credibility is the effort for internal validity; the study answers the questions it sought to answer and that the conclusions are congruent with participant realities (Shenton, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained that “instead of focusing on a presumed ‘real’ reality, ‘out there,’ the focus has moved to establishing the match between the constructed realities of respondents (or stakeholders) and those realities as represented by the evaluator attributed to various stakeholders” (p. 237). In a constructivist understanding, no one viewpoint is more correct or “true” than another. Gitlin and Russell (1994) wrote, “the researcher’s knowledge is not assumed to be more legitimate than the ‘subject’s,’ nor is his/her role one of the helping the needy other.” (p. 187).

To ensure credibility, I used established methodological techniques appropriate to my research questions (Shenton, 2004). During interviews, I used probing questions to elicit a clearer understanding of participants’ stories (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, I conducted member checking (Stake, 1995). I sought participant feedback on the themes and incorporated that feedback (Stake, 1995). This supports my constructivist framework where reality is assumed to be co-created by researcher and participant. Finally, I used a peer debriefer in addition to discussing the analysis with my advisor (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Shenton, 2004). My peer debriefer had a terminal degree in my area of study and had a familiarity with the research
site and the student groups included in this inquiry. The peer debriefer reviewed transcripts, themes, and analysis and verified both case construction and construction of the general study. This outside perspective helped me see blind spots and assumptions I made and provided an external and detached view of the link between my conclusions and the data offered.

Transferability

Qualitative research is not predicated on generalization to an entire population (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Gitlin and Russell (1994) proposed:

It is also undesirable that independent researcher-subject teams come to the same conclusions. It is also undesirable for the procedures to remain unchanged from context to context. Procedures should be allowed not only to evolve within a specific research study but also to change given the needs and priorities of a particular population. (p. 188)

In constructivist research, it is not necessary for procedures to be replicated exactly or for the same conclusions to be made in another context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) warned against “broad application” of findings “because realities are multiple and different” (p. 42). There are divergent views on how much can be transferred from one context to another (Shenton, 2004), but it is incumbent on researchers to offer the reader the necessary information to draw their own conclusions about transferability. While not predicated on generalizability, qualitative research should inform our understanding of a phenomenon or question.

To inform transferability, I sought to use thick description, a detailed and thorough description of the context of the study, such that the reader can understand “the time, the place, the context, the culture in which those hypothesis were found to be salient” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 241-242). I provided readers with thick description so that “we can understand the phenomenon being studied and draw our own interpretations about meaning and significance”
Thick description empowers readers to conclude how well the finding can generalize or transfer to their own environment.

**Dependability**

Dependability is “concerned with the stability of the data over time” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 242). This is the degree to which the study can be repeated, though the results may be different (Shenton, 2004). To accomplish dependability, I used established methods and peer review to evaluate analysis. I sought to provide a thorough accounting of the methods used, such that they could be repeated if desired, and how the methods shifted over the course of the study to reflect the environment in which the study occurred.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the ability of the researcher to limit bias and present the neutrality of the interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The qualitative researcher acknowledges that biases and assumptions are an inherent part of the research process. I have used reflexive writings in this document to place myself in the research and acknowledge my own beliefs and limitations. I did this so that the reader knows and understands the lens in which I view the inquiry. Additionally, I used field notes and a research journal (Patton, 2002) to track my emerging thought process during the data collection and analysis process. This journal contained descriptions of events and emerging insights and interpretations (Patton, 2002). This process tracked the logic that informed my interpretations and led to the construction of the narrative (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). These notes and journal were maintained such that they can be externally reviewed if necessary (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).
**Ethics**

Constructivist research creates a collective meaning and experience between the researcher and the participant. It is not simply enough to say, “Do no harm,” and proceed with the research efforts. Given that this is a historically marginalized community, participants can be especially vulnerable when discussing issues around their own identities. I sought to be sensitive to emotional feedback and adjusted the interview protocol when necessary. I included information regarding available university support systems within my participant consent form (Appendix C). I used established methods and participated in an approval process for the use of human subjects (Appendix D).

I have taken efforts to protect the identities and spaces of the participants to the degree possible. Informed consent was used to outline the purpose of the study, any potential risks of participation, and the rights of the participant. I sought consent during each additional step in the inquiry process. Participants had the right to leave the study at any point. Participants had the opportunity to not answer any question or to not participate in aspects of the data collection. Participants selected a pseudonym for use in the analysis, and I made efforts for confidentiality through disguising identities. However, total anonymity was not possible. By seeking multiple voices from each group’s leadership team, the overall small number of people in leadership within the groups, and by using thick description, a person with knowledge of the members of the community would likely be able to deduce participant identities. I communicated this important fact to participants in advance of their participation, and reiterated the ability to opt out of any question at any time during that discussion.
Summary

I designed this inquiry as a qualitative, naturalistic inquiry grounded in a social constructivist paradigm. Data collected focused on participants at one institution. I gathered data primarily through interviews, supported by two observations and document analysis. I solicited participants using purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. I conducted data analysis throughout data collection. I coded, categorized, and themed the data using open and axial coding techniques. I utilized social capital theory as a framework in inform my analysis. To encourage trustworthiness, I took various techniques to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I introduce the eleven organizations and fifteen participants included in this study. Additionally, I present the four major themes and relevant subthemes drawn from the data analysis process. These themes included: (a) gaining social capital, (b) the visible leader, (c) changing relationships, and (d) the interactive campus (see Table 3).

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes of Research Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme and Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Social Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionally Created Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positional Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Within One’s Own Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining a Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leader Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Visible Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sentinel Protectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Interactive Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Group Profiles

At the time data were collected, seven student-run groups focused on the LGBTQ+ population existed on this campus site. Five had existed for more than one year at the time of data collection. Students established two groups in the year prior to data collection. In addition, in this section, I introduce three groups that no longer existed at the time of data collection. One ceased to function during the year which I collected data. Two closed several years prior to data collection; however I describe them because participants included in this study at one time held positions in those organizations.

I use pseudonyms for all group names in an effort to further protect the identity of the student leaders interviewed. Group pseudonyms are based on descriptive labels of the group, usually representing either the mission of the group or the target audience. I chose to use descriptive labels rather than to create false names in order to honor the groups’ historical identities. For example, many of the group names have deeply personal meanings that founders of those organizations selected with purpose. The original names represent the values and ideals of the groups. I felt it inappropriate to create a new name for the group without being a member of that group. While it may feel reductionist to label an entire group based on the population it serves, I made this decision with the intention of respecting how the groups self-identified and labeled themselves.

If described as an organization, that group was independently registered as an official student organization at the campus where the study was conducted. If labeled a suborganization, that group was a suborganization housed within a larger independently registered student organization; while part of the larger organizations, the suborganizations still had a governance structure and leadership of their own. Two groups, QPOC and Trans*, originated as independent
organizations but elected to come under the leadership of Umbrella at the start of the academic year during which I collected data. All other suborganizations only ever existed as suborganizations.

**Established Groups**

Five groups existed on this campus with histories longer than one year at the time I collected data. These groups included Social Fraternity, Umbrella Organization, QPOC Suborganization, Trans* Suborganization, and Women’s Organization.

**Social Fraternity.** A chapter of an international social fraternity, this organization arrived on campus in 2007. Established nationally in 1986, the organization offers “gay, bisexual, and progressive men the opportunity to grow in the true spirit of brotherhood — one that embraces diversity and respects the value of all.” The organization sought to uphold the values of excellence, integrity, diversity, justice, service, friendship, and commitment. On this campus site, a multicultural council governed the chapter within the larger fraternity and sorority community. The multicultural council was one of four governing councils on campus, including the Interfraternity council, Panhellenic council, and National Pan-Hellenic council. The multicultural council included six organizations, inclusive of Social Fraternity.

During the time of data collection, sixteen brothers participated in Social Fraternity. Leadership positions offered within Social Fraternity have included president, vice-president, treasurer, pledge educator, social chair, fundraising chair, and sergeant-at-arms. It was common for brothers to hold multiple leadership positions simultaneously within the chapter. The annual drag show was Social Fraternity’s signature event. Within this research inquiry, five participants (Rory, Kyle, Henry, Tom, and Packets Joy) are brothers of Social Fraternity and all held leadership roles at one time. Rory served as President. Kyle served as Vice President, Sergeant-
at-Arms, and Pledge Educator. Henry held the positions of Vice President, Sergeant-at-Arms, and Fundraising Chair. In addition to serving as Vice President, Tom also represented the chapter at the multicultural council. Finally, Packets Joy filled the role of Pledge Educator.

**Umbrella Organization.** The oldest LGBTQ+ organization on campus, Umbrella has undergone several incarnations over the years. The group’s name and purpose has shifted as the members’ understanding of gender and sexual orientation has shifted and evolved. At the time of data collection, the purpose of Umbrella was:

To represent the interests of all LGBTQAIQA members of the [institution] community; to advocate for and promote education around issues and causes involving the queer community within the campus; to provide an accepting supportive environment for queer individuals; to advocate on behalf of members and educate on issues of discrimination and harassment based on gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, and sexual identity of all members of the [institution] community; to create an open dialog between the university community and surrounding area with [Umbrella] in order to increase knowledge, awareness, and acceptance. ([Umbrella] Constitution, 2013).

Prior to the time of data collection, the organization officially absorbed QPOC and Trans* as suborganizations, and launched two new suborganizations, Spirituality and Middle Sexualities. The group has four “mandatory positions” including president, vice president, treasurer and secretary, and three optional positions of community outreach, marketing, and event planner ([Umbrella] Constitution, 2013). Several other positions existed at one point in time before being absorbed into different roles, including webmaster and historian. Additionally, facilitators of each of the suborganizations (i.e., QPOC, Trans*, Spirituality, and Middle Sexualities) hold positions on the executive board.
Umbrella had several signature events, including a week-long celebration of Coming Out Day in October and a week of events called Rainbow Days in April that culminates with an annual queer prom. The organization also offered panel programs, which groups and academic courses can host, and a mentoring program. For the panel program, Umbrella trained group members to go into spaces to discuss LGBTQ+ issues and reflect on members’ own experiences as LGBTQ+ individuals and students. The mentoring program paired freshman and sophomore LGBTQ+ students with junior and senior LGBTQ+ students in an attempt to create community within the LGBTQ+ student population and help cultivate leadership within the LGBTQ+ student population.

Umbrella held a seat on the Vice President for Student Affairs advisory board. It was very common for leaders of the other LGBTQ+ student groups to hold positions simultaneously in Umbrella. Of the participants in this inquiry, ten (Audre, Guy, Henry, Jack, Nora, Olivia, Rory, Sabre, Wade, and X-Ray) held leadership positions in Umbrella. Audre served as secretary. Guy worked as marketing chair and participated in the mentoring program. Henry held the positions of president and treasurer. In addition to serving as a student panel facilitator, Jack served as vice president. Nora worked as event planner, treasurer, and then community outreach chair. Olivia spent time as historian, webmaster, secretary, and facilitated student panels. Rory worked as the event planner and X-Ray served as treasurer. Finally, Sabre served as president, undergraduate advisor, and created and oversaw the mentoring program.

**QPOC Suborganization.** This group began in 2007 as a discussion group for queer people of color to talk about their experiences on campus and have a safe space to discuss their intersecting identities. During its existence, it has evolved from an informal discussion group, to an organization, and then to a suborganization. Audre described the group:
So it all it started off as [QPOC] was just a— really like family-based organization that's really big on like surviving campus, being each other’s [support system]. Like, we needed tutors. If you need help in anything, we're a family.

The QPOC constitution described the group as:

[QPOC] is dedicated to fostering connections between the multicultural Same-Gender Loving, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community at large. We do this by honoring the multiple identities of students, urging students of color to embrace and share their identities, and empowering this vital population of students to embrace all that makes them, them. [QPOC] is intended to be a safe space where members can speak freely and collectively build a network through self-definition, self-acceptance, and acceptance of each other acknowledging that there are multiple ways of being. [QPOC] believes in providing a safe space for individuals to feel nurtured, supported, affirmed, and unconditionally accepted. We intend to accomplish this through support, fellowship, and collaborations in service, activism, and education.

The group had a consistent membership base but struggled to convince members to take on official leadership roles. For many years, Audre and X-Ray carried the group single handedly.

At one time it appeared the organization would fold, with Audre and X-Ray’s imminent graduation. However, Nora and Guy stepped forward, asking to take the group over and move it under the governance of Umbrella. This reduced the responsibility of the QPOC leaders, allowing them to focus on sustaining and building the group, rather than having to meet bureaucratic obligations, such as required meetings and training sessions, for leaders of registered student organizations. QPOC officially ceased to exist as a stand-alone organization and became a suborganization of Umbrella. QPOC has co-facilitators who take responsibility for
the group and both have membership on the Umbrella executive board. Nora explained the importance of QPOC:

I think maybe it’s just this idea of experiencing the world as a minority and having that be the focus of the organization kind of helped be like, “We’re on equal, even playing fields, like we’re here to work together because this is all our fight” and in [Umbrella] it’s a largely White organization and I guess it just doesn’t have that same sort of feel to it.

By folding the group into Umbrella, the leadership not only saved the group from becoming defunct but freed their time to actually focus on the purpose of the organization. Of the participants in this inquiry, four (Audre, X-Ray, Guy, and Nora) held leadership positions in QPOC. Audre served as member-at-large and president. X-Ray served as treasurer and president. Guy and Nora both served as co-facilitators.

Trans* Suborganization. Trans* Suborganization started as a roundtable discussion group, became an official registered student organization, and eventually went under Umbrella as a suborganization. The group maintained its status as a registered student organization for a period of time before becoming a suborganization of Umbrella. Trans* sought “to further the awareness of Trans* issues on the [institution] campus through education, activism, and fellowship” ([Trans*] Constitution, n.d.).

The group struggled to maintain consistent leadership and membership. It appeared that the organization would cease to exist. However, student leaders decided to instead bring Trans* under the purview of Umbrella. The organization maintained its name and has one facilitator who holds a position on the Umbrella executive board. Of the participants in this research inquiry, two served as student leaders of Trans*. Guy served as president when Trans* had status as a registered student organization. Sabre took over as facilitator once the group became
a suborganization of Umbrella. The group holds monthly discussion forums and educational sessions for members. Though a suborganization of Umbrella, members of Trans* do not need to be members of Umbrella.

**Women’s Organization.** This organization began in an effort to offer “a safe and encouraging environment for self-identified” women who love other self-identified women and “allies to be their authentic selves” ([Women’s Organization] Constitution, 2013). The groups sought:

To provide encouragement to and a safe environment for all members; to learn about varying viewpoints regarding gender and sexuality; to support and connection with other LGBTQ+ groups at [institution]; to educate the larger [institution] community concerning issues that affect women who love women; and to offer a space for women who love women to interact with each other. ([Women’s Organization] Constitution, 2013)

Women’s Organization did not become a suborganization of Umbrella, unlike most of the other LGBTQ+ student groups. Matilda explained the need to have an organization dedicated to just women:

I’ve always been of the mind that while the LGBTQ community is a fantastic thing, people want to collapse us down and go, “You’re one community.” We’re not one community. We’re many communities who happen to have struggles that are similar enough that we feel like, “Let’s work together” and I felt like there was not a place for me to be a – just that one identity, where I could focus on that one identity without having to focus on all the other identities. And I felt like that was important.

Michele offered the contrasting viewpoint:
I personally feel that if [Women’s] went under [Umbrella] it would be better and we could build a stronger foundation and then if we wanted to split we could. They just didn't want to be under [Umbrella]’s claw, 'cause sometimes what happens is like if we collaborate with [Umbrella], it will be like, “Oh, we're collaborating with [Women’s],” instead of [Women’s] is collaborating with us. So they just – they want to be like, “Okay, well, [Umbrella] is so umbrella and we're so specific it just wouldn't work.” So I mean, I guess I could understand that. I don't know. It's okay. I wish that people would see what I'm talking about, but I've brought it up and it has not been discussed since then. So I mean I'm like – I'm okay with it being separate, I just think it would function a little bit better under [Umbrella].

Given Women’s struggle to maintain membership and a full executive team, Michele longed for the stability she believed that Umbrella would give the group. However, Women’s remained a separate, registered organization. Of the participants in this study, four (Matilda, Michele, Sabre, and Audre) held leadership positions in the group. Sabre and Matilda both served as secretary. Audre held the positions of vice president and events coordinator. Michele served as public relations chair and then treasurer.

**New Groups**

At the point of data collection, two groups with a history of less than one year existed at this institution: Spirituality Suborganization and Middle Sexualities Suborganization. Both functioned as suborganizations of Umbrella.

**Spirituality Suborganization.** Spirituality Suborganization is a suborganization of Umbrella. The co-facilitators of the group are part of the Umbrella executive board. It met weekly, with the mission to “create a safe space for LGBTQ+ identified individuals and allies to
explore spirituality in relationship to sexuality and gender identity/expression. We hope to do this through discussion, educational events, and social activities” (personal communication, March 25, 2015). The group has held various events including a discussion on the symbol of the rainbow for faith groups and within the LGBTQ+ community, a movie screening, a queer theology discussion, and a discussion about LGBTQ+ community and East Asian religions and ideologies. Though an official suborganization of Umbrella, members of Spirituality Suborganization do not need to be members of Umbrella. The group has six general body members who regularly attend, but membership fluctuates greatly.

Of participants in this study, Michele co-founded Spirituality Suborganization and served as its co-facilitator. She explained to her vision for group:

[W]e want it to be within the LGBTQ community but not [Umbrella]’s and [Women’s] LGBTQ community, because we want people who are not involved in that to know that this is readily available to them. Because I know there are people, and we want people who are like in interfaith and are who are like Wiccan or Muslim or – you know, that kind of thing, to feel comfortable to come to [Spirituality Suborganization]. Because, I mean, I know of people who identify as something other than heterosexual who attend [campus Christian organization] and that kind of thing, and like the Christian organizations on campus, but they are not going to [Umbrella] regularly. So I want it to be a campus-wide thing instead of an [Umbrella]-wide thing.

Michele hoped that Spirituality Suborganization would benefit from the support of Umbrella while also being open to the entire LGBTQ+ community—not simply the community that already frequented the pre-existing group meetings.
**Middle Sexualities Suborganization.** Participant Olivia founded and facilitated Middle Sexualities Suborganization. The facilitator of Middle Sexualities was a member of the Umbrella executive board. Middle Sexualities Suborganization was described as a group “for anyone who identifies as ‘somewhere in the middle’ between gay and straight” ([Umbrella] Facebook, September 23, 2014). The group avoided any attempt to categorize the identities discussed, but generally was described as a group of individuals who identify as bisexual, pansexual, fluid, and allies.

Olivia conceptualized the group after attending an LGBTQ+ conference. She explained, “[W]e need this for middle sexuality because I got this feeling at [the conference]. I don't get this feeling here, and I'm gonna guess that there are quite a few others like me that have the same thought process.” She encountered stiff resistance to the group from within the Umbrella executive board. Olivia reflected:

[Umbrella] this past [year] – the end of the school year— they in exec board meetings, [we] were talking about how they were kind of absorbing [Trans*]… and absorbing [QPOC]… and making them into these monthly support groups. And we're in the exec board meeting and my hand immediately shoots up and I'm like, “We need a group for middle sexualities.” Everybody kind of looked at me. They weren't really on board. Nobody else in there identified as a middle sexual identity. I was the only one, kind of the black sheep sitting in there, and everybody just kind of like, “Really? We need that?”

Certain members of the executive board felt the idea of middle sexualities implied a binary sexual orientation, in order to be in the middle there needed to be two end points to be between. Others felt the groups led to fracturing of the community and that there may not be enough members to support the group.
Regardless, Olivia pushed her idea, insisting that the campus needed this group. She eventually received approval and Middle Sexualities Suborganization formed. Of the participants in this inquiry, Olivia is the founder and facilitator of Middle Sexualities.

**Defunct Groups**

The nature of student groups is that they rise and fall. A student leader sees a need, recruits like-minded people, and forms a group. Sometimes the groups hinge on that individual leader and they cannot be sustained when the driving force graduates. In other cases, student groups run a natural course and lose their relevance as student populations shift and change. Of the groups included in this inquiry, three groups ceased to exist. One, Activist Organization, shut down during the time of data collection. Two others had closed down several years earlier. They are included here for reference purposes as some of the respondents in this study were group leaders when the group existed.

**Activist Organization.** Activist Organization existed for only one and half years. Conceptualized by Kyle and Audre, the organization sought to provide a place to discuss activism and advocacy in the LGBTQ+ community. Both students sought opportunities to have more critical conversations as they grew frustrated with the social nature of the other LGBTQ+ groups. Audre explained,

> [W]e never talked about how activism fits into [the community] and [it] was always like, ‘We're just doing the social, and we're going to tell you about this, but it's a social, because we're not going to talk about it too critically, because we want you all to come.’ So I think I was looking at all this stuff and in the all these conversations and going to meetings, and they were socials and kinda talking about activism, but not on a critical level.
Kyle concurred:

The way I see it is just different focuses for what the group should be doing. So, should we be primarily social and just enjoy ourselves? Should we seek to affect change at the [institution] or in the [local] community? And then just, what our goals were and what we felt like doing.

The organization chafed under the restrictions put on it by the university. Kyle and Audre wanted to have a loose, horizontal leadership structure, with no centralized authority. However, the institution required certain hierarchical leadership positions in order to become a registered organization, apply for funding, and reserve space on campus. Eventually, Kyle and Audre served as co-presidents of the group. The group had a fluctuating base of interested members but never fully developed a committed membership base. This ultimately became the downfall of the group.

After Kyle and Audre graduated, Kyle recruited Packets Joy to take over the organization. Packets Joy, a fraternity brother and mentee of Kyle’s, agreed to do so mostly out of obligation to his friend. Upon returning to campus in the Fall, Packets Joy struggled to run the organization alone for several weeks before allowing the group to be closed by the student activities office for failure to register required officers. Of the participants in this inquiry, Kyle and Audre founded the organization and served as co-presidents. Packets Joy served as president.

**Worldview Organization.** A registered student organization, Worldview sought to “lead and promote discussions on religion, spirituality, theology, philosophy and social justice issues” ([Worldview] Constitution, July 2010). Founded in 2009, and reconstituted in 2010, it is unclear
when Worldview officially ceased to function as a student organization. Worldview’s stated purpose was to:

build bridges with members of student organizations of various religious traditions and seek to create interfaith service opportunities for students. [Worldview] welcomes and encourages all faith traditions. We want to be clear that we will not “convert” or reject others. The goal is to celebrate the uniqueness of each student’s spiritual journey and to provide encouragement along the way. ([Worldview] Constitution, July 2010)

The organization leadership sought to facilitate conversations about how religion intersected with social justice topics, primarily focusing on sexuality. Of the participants in this study, Henry helped found the organization and spent one year as a member.

**Transgender Organization.** This organization officially constituted on January 27, 2006. The group sought to:

further education at [institution] and in the surrounding community regarding gender identity and gender expression; to offer social support to students, faculty, staff, and community members who identify as transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, drag queen, drag king, bigender, cross-dresser and other non-traditional genders, as well as significant others, friends, families, and allies of the transgender community; to work towards the elimination of transphobic bigotry, prejudice and discrimination; and to create policies which protect transgender people from discrimination and foster a more inclusive and just environment for gender minorities at [institution] and in the [region]. ([Transgender Organization] Constitution, 2007)
The group struggled to maintain membership and secure leaders necessary for registration. It is unclear when the group officially closed. Of the participants in this inquiry, Henry served one year as historian.

**Participant Profiles**

Fifteen students participated in this research inquiry (see Table 2). Those fifteen students held leadership positions in ten different student organizations (see Table 4 and Table 5). In this section, I introduce the participants, including their leadership roles. I do this in order to convey an understanding of who these individuals were so that readers are better able to understand the context of these finding and to determine the transferability of the findings to their own contexts.

**Audre**

Audre, an alumna of the university, was in graduate school on the East Coast of the United States studying ethnic and cultural studies at the time of data collection. A Queer, African American female, Audre spent much of her time on campus crossing cultural and demographic boundaries. She developed a reputation for bringing conversations of sexuality into areas they had previously been ignored. She especially focused on the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

After transferring into the university from another regional Midwestern institution as a sophomore, Audre immediately moved into a leadership position in QPOC Suborganization as the member-at-large. After one year in that role, Audre rose to the presidency of QPOC and held that role for two years. Audre’s identity became indelibly linked to QPOC, an association that followed her even after she left her leadership role in the organization. During her junior year, and her second year as QPOC president, Audre decided to seek leadership roles in other
Table 4

Participant LGBTQ+ Student Group Leadership Positions Held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Established Groups</th>
<th>New Groups</th>
<th>Defunct Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matilda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packets Joy</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabre</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wade</td>
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<tr>
<td>X-Ray</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.*  SF = Social Fraternity; U = Umbrella; Q = QPOC; W = Women’s; T* = Trans*; S = Spirituality; MS = Middle Sexualities; A = Activist; W = Worldview; T = Transgender.
Table 5

*Participant Leadership by LGBTQ+ Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Established</th>
<th>Social Fraternity</th>
<th>Women’s Organization</th>
<th>Umbrella Organization</th>
<th>OPOC Suborganization</th>
<th>Trans* Suborganization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>Sabre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>Matilda</td>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>X-Ray</td>
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<tr>
<td>Packets Joy</td>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Olivia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>Sabre</td>
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<td>Tom</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New</th>
<th>Spirituality Suborganization</th>
<th>Middle Sexualities Suborganization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>Olivia</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defunct</th>
<th>Activist Organization</th>
<th>Worldview Organization</th>
<th>Transgender Organization</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audre</td>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Henry</td>
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<td>Kyle</td>
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<td>Packets Joy</td>
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</table>
LGBTQ+ organizations. She went on to become the vice-president and events coordinator of Women’s Organization, secretary of Umbrella Organization, and created and served as co-president of Activist Organization. Audre and Kyle served as the driving force behind Activist Organization. Audre largely left formal leadership within the LGBTQ+ community during her senior year. She maintained her co-presidency of Activist Organization, but she primarily began to focus her energies in other areas. She served as a peer leadership assistant in the campus leadership center and as president of her National Pan-Hellenic sorority. Even though she mostly left formal LGBTQ+ positional leadership, Audre remained an active force within the community, frequently presenting and working with programs hosted by the various organizations.

**Guy**

The quiet leader, Guy was known for his positive outlook and willingness to work hard. Guy struggled with finding his niche on campus, a feeling exacerbated by having to take a semester off during his sophomore year for personal reasons. He never truly felt at home on the campus until he found Trans* Suborganization. Guy identifies as an African American, bisexual (same and other) male, a term used to challenge the gender binary of bisexuality and emphasize that there are more than two genders. People who identify as bisexual (same and other) are attracted to people of their own gender and people of a different gender, but not necessarily the gender on the “opposite” end of the gender binary.

Guy believes in creating inclusive spaces within the LGBTQ+ community for all identities. He did not think the community should build artificial walls around itself, restricting who could be a part of the community or defining what identities were legitimate. He eventually
took on the role of Trans* president, after the president did not return to the university. Guy facilitated the move for Trans* to become a suborganization of Umbrella.

Guy sought out conversations about intersectionality and wanted to learn more about the diverse cultures around him. He joined the Black student organization and Latino student organization, and began interning in the campus LGBTQ+ center. After one year as Trans* president, Guy became the Umbrella marketing chair, facilitator of QPOC, and a mentor in Umbrella’s mentoring program.

**Henry**

Henry moved into leadership very early during his time on campus, a fact that probably both helped and hurt him. During his first year on campus, Henry served as event planner for Umbrella, historian for Transgender Organization, and pledged Social Fraternity. The next year, Henry took on additional significant responsibilities within the LGBTQ+ community. As a sophomore he became Umbrella president, created Worldview with a group of fellow students, and became vice president and sergeant-at-arms in Social Fraternity. Henry’s organizational involvement defined his identity and he failed to prioritize his academics. He routinely skipped class and failed to finish his homework assignments because he preferred to be working on his organizations. His grades began to slip and Henry decided to curtail his leadership obligations. The next year, Henry limited himself to simply serving as the treasurer of Umbrella. However, the elected president of Umbrella resigned and the vice president declined to take the role, leaving Henry as the heir apparent to the position. Feeling indebted to his mentor, the Umbrella advisor, Henry reluctantly agreed to take on the Umbrella presidency. It proved a potentially disastrous decision. Henry’s already perilous grade point average dipped even lower and the University suspended him for poor academic performance.
Henry left the institution for a year, enrolling in a local community college, and getting a job outside of the LGBTQ+ community—working intramurals at his new school. The separation gave Henry time to reflect on what his priorities needed to be long term. He reapplied and re-enrolled in the institution. This time, he focused solely on his academics. He limited himself to a low responsibility position in Social Fraternity, serving for a year as fundraising chair. His recommitment to his academics brought him success. At the time of data collection, he was studying student affairs in a graduate program at a university in New England.

**Jack**

Jack did not set out to be a leader. He simply decided he wanted to be more part of the campus LGBTQ+ community. A leadership role eventually became the natural extension of that decision. A White, gay, male, Jack found a new sense of love and affinity for his school though student leadership. Not only did campus become home, but he started to buy into the traditions and rituals of the institution.

Jack credited Sabre with encouraging him to take on a leadership role in Umbrella. He started small, first serving as a panelist for the panel program. He eventually became a panel facilitator. Going into his junior year, Jack partnered with his long-time best friend, Wade, to take on leadership roles in Umbrella. Wade ran for president and Jack for vice-president. After successfully winning the Umbrella vice presidency, Jack’s leadership identity blossomed. Shortly thereafter he was recruited to serve as a mentor for a campus-wide leadership program and as a student ambassador for his college within the university.

**Kyle**

Kyle, who identifies as a Queer, White, cis male, prided himself on asking tough questions while on campus. Never afraid of expressing a difficult truth, Kyle wrote a column for
the student newspaper and the LGBTQ+ electronic student publication. He pledged Social Fraternity during his first-year, and began a term as vice president during the second semester of his freshman year. He eventually held that position for two years, overseeing a bylaw review during that time. In addition to the vice presidency, Kyle held positions of pledge educator, programming chair, and sergeant-at-arms in Social Fraternity. He also served for one year as vice president for brotherhood/sisterhood and conduct in the multicultural council.

Kyle had a passion for activism and LGBTQ+ advocacy. He never held a formal leadership role in Umbrella but frequently led workshops and discussions in collaboration with the organization. Kyle channeled his love for tough conversations into the creation of Activist Organization, pairing with Audre who shared his goal to pivot the community away from social aspects and develop a community-wide place to talk about activism. Kyle graduated and at the time of data collection was enrolled in a Women’s Studies graduate program at a school in the Midwest.

**Matilda**

Matilda did not plan to be a student leader in the LGBTQ+ community. Busy with a time consuming major and working over twenty hours a week off campus, Matilda did not have much free-time to spare. She joined Women’s Organization and regularly attended meetings during her sophomore year. Shortly thereafter, she joined Umbrella as a general body member. Between those two memberships, and belonging to another popular culture student group, Matilda mostly felt content. She thought she could be a leader, but never took the next step.

As a rising junior, leaders of Women’s Organization approached Matilda and encouraged her to take on an executive role with the group. With the leadership of the organization slated to graduate, they identified Matilda as a dedicated member who would be a good fit with the board.
Matilda won the position of secretary, a position she held for one year. She did not run for a second term as her course load and work schedule did not give her the necessary time to dedicate to the organization. While Matilda remained a member of Women’s Organization and Umbrella, her outside obligations mostly prevented her from attending meetings during her senior year.

**Michele**

The youngest student leader included in this study, Michele was in the first semester of her sophomore year at the time of data collection. Women’s Organization served as Michele’s entry point to student leadership. A resident assistant in the residence halls encouraged Michele to start attending meetings and she eventually agreed to take on the role of public relations chair. That position led her to become Women’s Organization treasurer for her sophomore year.

Michele could be seen across campus, as a member of Umbrella, the feminist organization, and writing and reporting for the student newspaper. Channeling her love for politics and law, Michele had recently been elected a diversity affairs senator for the student government.

Michele created Spirituality Suborganization with a fellow Umbrella member in an effort to provide a space to discuss the role of religion and spirituality in the LGBTQ+ community. A self-described White, lesbian, queer, female and a non-practicing Mormon, Michele felt passionately about the importance of her faith and the need to provide safe spaces for other members of the LGBTQ+ community to express their faiths. Michele hopes to one day open a youth shelter for LGBTQ+ teens and young adults that provide spaces for spiritual exploration.

**Nora**

Nora’s passion for social justice radiates from her when she speaks. Her quiet calm is offset by an inner rage about systemic oppression. An Arab American, queer, cisgender female, Nora specializes in facilitating conversations about intersectionality. She challenged the campus
LGBTQ+ community to expand its definition of queer people of color. She broadened the conversation to include all queer people of color, whereas much of the previous conversations had been focused primarily on the experiences of Black and African American queer people. Nora’s favorite form of activism is education and she has excelled in her role as community outreach chair. She has grown Umbrella’s panel program, increasing the number of trained panelists and the number of panels offered each year.

Sabre recruited Nora to join Umbrella’s leadership team as event planner, striking up a friendship that eventually grew into a committed relationship. Nora did not spend any time in Sabre’s shadow, though, and she quickly established herself in her own right in the community. She became a powerful force working to pull the individual organizations out of their own silos, believing that the groups would be stronger together. In addition to event planner and community outreach chair in Umbrella, Nora also served as Umbrella treasurer. She is a member of the feminist organization, the Black student organization, a group working for a multicultural student space, and the intersectionality round table. After Audre and X-Ray graduated, Nora partnered with Guy to bring QPOC Suborganization under Umbrella Organization, and now serves as the group’s co-facilitator.

Olivia

Olivia joined the leadership of Umbrella early but she refused to limit herself to strictly LGBTQ+ spaces. A member of the university’s honor college, Olivia is a student ambassador for the college and a member of their student association. She’s also been the secretary of an honor society and the scholarship chair of her multicultural sorority. Within Umbrella, Olivia served as historian, webmaster, and secretary. She facilitated Umbrella panels, leading a group of Umbrella members in classroom discussions about LGBTQ+ issues.
Olivia’s proudest moment was successfully establishing Middle Sexualities Suborganization. She identifies as a White, pansexual, woman and had a passion for educating others about non-binary, non-mono sexualities. In forming the group, though, she encountered stiff resistance from members of the Umbrella leadership. People often questioned her role within the LGBTQ+ community, with some pointing out that she was dating a man. She felt that people assumed she could pass as straight, or simply choose to leave the LGBTQ+ community behind. Olivia refused to back down. A typically soft-spoken leader, she saw a need and refused to let others talk her away from her mission. She pushed back against her fellow student leaders and established Middle Sexualities. She’d only had one meeting at the time of data collection, but she radiated with excitement when recalling the discussion of the twenty students in attendance.

Packets Joy

A senior, Packets Joy worked extensively in sexual assault awareness and prevention during their time on campus. A White, queer man, Packets Joy uses the neutral pronouns of they, them, and theirs. Packets Joy joined the student group supporting the community’s sexual assault resource center, serving as president during their senior year. They pledged Social Fraternity as a sophomore and eventually took on the role of pledge educator.

A vocal critic of power and privilege, Packets Joy found a like-minded leader and mentor in Kyle. Kyle recruited Packets Joy to take over Activist Organization when Kyle and Audre graduated. Packets Joy, a leader who is more naturally inclined to work outside of the system rather than inside the system, struggled with the bureaucracy of running a registered student organization. Lacking a large base of membership support, Packets Joy decided to deactivate
Activist Organization. Still committed to activism and advocacy, Packets Joy decided to pursue that work without the structure of a formal student organization.

**Rory**

Rory graduated after four years of involvement across the university. Rory identified as genderqueer/non-binary and used the neutral pronouns of they, them, and theirs. Rory’s earliest involvement came through Social Fraternity, which they pledged as a first-year student. Only weeks after initiation in the fraternity, the organization elected Rory president, beginning the role the second semester of their freshman year and holding the position for two consecutive terms. During their first term, Rory explored other aspects of Greek life on campus, serving first as a delegate to the multicultural council and then as vice president of scholarship and service. Eventually becoming frustrated with the council, and discovering their passion for social justice, Rory left the multicultural council behind. They joined the campus feminist organization, serving as vice president, and the Women’s Studies honor society, serving as treasurer. During the spring semester of their junior year, Rory’s term as Social Fraternity president ended and they stepped into a role with less responsibility, becoming pledge educator and social chair. Rory decided to use their new found free time to lead the student ambassador team for the student activities office and become event planner for Umbrella. At the time of data collection, Rory was a Women’s Studies graduate student at a university in New England, having left behind a legacy of pushing conversations of gender identity and gender expression, and challenging inclusion in the Greek community.

**Sabre**

Sabre built community. Within this study alone, four participants credited Sabre with being the first person to call them a leader. Nora, Guy, Wade, and Jack all pointed to Sabre as
the person who identified them as a leader, encouraged them to take on a leadership role, and crafted opportunities for them to explore what leading a student group could be for them.

Sabre arrived on campus as a first-year student with a clear goal in mind: to become the Umbrella president. He achieved that goal earlier than expected, taking over Umbrella at the beginning of his sophomore year when the president unexpectedly resigned. Sabre led Umbrella for two years as president before moving into the role as undergraduate advisor. During that time, he also served as secretary in Women’s Organization. A high profile, White, queer, trans man, Sabre transitioned during his second year as Umbrella president, making him the most visible trans undergraduate student on campus. When Sabre left the Umbrella presidency, he stayed on the Umbrella executive board, taking on the role as facilitator for Trans*. As Trans* facilitator, Sabre became the first transgender leader of the group in several years.

Sabre put his skills for cultivating peer leadership to use when he created a LGBTQ+ peer mentoring program, wanting younger members of the LGBTQ+ community to have access to role models who may have been denied to them in high school. Sabre also worked as a peer leadership assistant in the campus leadership center, providing training sessions and education workshops to groups from across campus.

**Tom**

Tom identified as a White, gay, male and was a senior at the institution during the time of data collection. Tom joined Social Fraternity as a sophomore and focused much of his involvement on Greek life. He served as the vice-president of Social Fraternity, and spent a term as vice president of scholarship and civic engagement before accepting the position of president of the multicultural council. During his time as multicultural council president, Tom chose to become more involved with the school’s student government, serving two terms as a senator and
chairing a standing committee. Additionally, Tom hears cases as a member of the student
cconduct board and is a member of a university-wide diversity committee.

Deeply committed to the ideals of Greek life, the campus’ fraternity and sorority program
invited Tom to join a select group of students serving on a program review committee. A fitting
capstone, as Tom spent his college years trying to break down barriers to what others perceived
to be the highly heteronormative cultures in Greek life and student government.

**Wade**

Wade, a Queer, White woman, did not see herself as a leader. In fact, when Sabre first
identified her as a potential future leader of Umbrella, Wade’s first reaction was, “What are you
talking about?!?” Wade did not see herself in the leaders around her, she did not think herself
capable of those feats. She’d gone on several extended immersion trips with the University,
coming back from each with a renewed drive to break down exclusive groups that granted
privilege only to the few. She joined a group affiliated with her major, an outdoor recreation
group, and started attending Umbrella. Still, in her perceptions, leadership was something that
described others. It was not something she saw in herself. Until she did and everything changed.

Sabre recruited Wade to join a program in Umbrella designed to cultivate future
executive board members and it was almost as if Wade could see the light bulb turn on. Not only
could she be a leader for this group, she realized she could actually be good at it. With her long-
time best friend Jack – they trace their friendship all the way back to middle school—Wade won
the Umbrella presidency. This new found leadership path opened other doors for her, and Wade
joined a campus-wide diversity group. She also started to think about oppression and privilege
outside of her own community and became an active member in the Black student organization.
X-Ray

X-Ray preferred to lead out of the spotlight. Though he recognized his rising profile, he preferred to simply do his job and do it well. A long-time student leader, X-Ray specialized in understanding and perfecting the intricate financial management systems of the university. The treasurer position in QPOC served as X-Ray’s entry point into LGBTQ+ student leadership and he held that role for four consecutive years before becoming QPOC president during his final year on campus. X-Ray, a Multiracial, Homosexual male, he became so well known for his mastery of the university financial system, he eventually served two years as the Umbrella treasurer and one year as a treasurer advisor for both Women’s and Trans*. He and Audre served as foils for each other, his quiet reserve balancing her bold outspokenness. They spent four years as a leadership duo, leading QPOC through a rejuvenation. He agreed to take on the QPOC presidency from Audre when she decided she needed a new challenge, but in truth, he much preferred his role a treasurer.

X-Ray also served as the public relations officer, vice president, and eventually two terms as president of an organization related to his major. He graduated and at the time of data collection was working full-time.

Participant Summary

Fifteen individuals participated in this study. They included representatives of ten organizations and involvement at a variety of leadership levels. They identified across the spectrum of gender and sexualities. Participants ranged in age from nineteen to 24. They included five alumni, seven seniors, two juniors, and one sophomore at the time of data collection. Having introduced the participants, I will now outline the themes that emerged from the data.
Gaining Social Capital

Participants articulated at length ways in which they had gained access to social capital by serving as a leader in their student organization. While it is clear that some students may have more or less social capital than others, often depending on the participant’s role in the student group and in which group the student participated, all participants were able to articulate ways in which they had gained access to individuals, or networks of individuals, based upon their leadership roles. The capital gained took the form of four types: capital fostered by the institution, capital gained as a result of the leadership position held, capital gained within one’s own organization, and capital gained within a larger network of individuals. I have divided the latter into two types of networks—a social justice network and a student leader network.

Institutionally Created Social Capital

The people and systems within the institution created capital for certain groups, and by extension the leaders of those groups, by controlling access to information and through institutionally created and maintained leadership programs and networking opportunities.

Information. Wade observed, “I don't think that people get the same information on an institutional level,” a sentiment echoed by several participants, especially those who held leadership positions in Umbrella. They contended that the way institutional information was communicated depended greatly on the group’s place within the institution. The more prominent, the more high profile, or simply the larger the group, the more direct information the group received from the administration of the institution. Jack drew the distinction that depending on “what space you’re in on campus” a group may “have access to the information, but it’s not served up on a silver platter to them.” That is, groups all could access the same information, but
for some groups institutional staff more actively communicated the information. For example, Umbrella occupied a place of prominence on the campus and Henry observed:

[I]n [Umbrella], our organization is given a ton of information from the Vice President, from Student Affairs, from the Dean of Students, and from the [student activities office], constantly about where we should be and what we should be doing and how we should be involved as an organization… And so we would get all of this information from the institution, right, and from administrators, [information] that I know [Transgender] wasn’t getting; I know that [Worldview] wasn’t getting this. They’re recognized student organizations but they don’t have the same institutional support that those larger organizations did… [I]t has been my experience that institutions sometimes aren’t looking for individual organizations to grow.

Similarly, in the Greek community, Tom drew the distinction between the Interfraternity council and the Panhellenic council and his own smaller multicultural council:

Information is given to those who, I shouldn’t say deserve it, but who are favored. In the Greek community in particular, everybody makes sure that [Interfraternity council] and [Panhellenic council] knows everything they need to know, and that if their chapters don’t know something, it’s being communicated, and it’s being communicated actively. With [multicultural council], things are communicated, and they make sure that everybody gets the information, but it’s not exactly an active ensuring that everybody is getting it.

The systems and people within the institution created social capital for certain groups, such as Umbrella, based upon an unstated hierarchy of organizations. In participants’ perceptions, those organizations which administrators valued more, received more support and more information,
that staff actively ensured they heard and understood. Participants could articulate the social capital conveyed by access to information, and how this access impacted their organizations, and by extension, themselves as leaders. This access to information was predicated on the organization—some organizations had access while others did not. However, the social capital extended itself to individuals. When a student led a group granted social capital by the institution, that student could individually access and benefit from that institutionally created capital.

**Leadership programs.** The institution also created social capital through leadership programs and meetings, including an advisory board for the Vice President of Student Affairs, a student organization leadership retreat, and a campus-based LeaderShape Institute © — a week-long leadership development program (The LeaderShape Institute, n.d.). The first two are by invitation only, while LeaderShape was open to any student through an application process.

Of the LGBTQ+ student organizations, only Umbrella has membership in the advisory board. The advisory board is comprised of several of the most prominent student organizations on campus, including the major multicultural organizations, student government, and Greek governing councils. Advisory board typically includes the presidents of these organizations. As such, Sabre, Henry, and Wade have all served as a representative at the advisory board during their time as Presidents of Umbrella. Sabre noted the importance of getting time with these prominent student leaders, “I wouldn’t have even gotten that time because it’s an hour and a half every month with specific student leaders. I wouldn’t have gotten any of that time with any of those people.” By gathering these student leaders of select student groups, the institution’s administrators not only gathered feedback and shared information with a very select group of
students, they also connected the student leaders to each other. Henry reflected on the voice this access granted him, for a time at least:

[F]or the year I was the [Umbrella] president, I had a ton of institutional voice, and so because of my role as a leader in that organization, as the president, I had a seat on [advisory board]. So I can turn to the – and they would use this word— but to the top organizations on this campus, really the ones that the institution affirmed and empowered the most and gave the most funding to. And then also just organizations to sort of give them a checkmark and tokenize certain communities, which was very relevant and very apparent to us, which I found out afterwards when I left that role, I was no longer that person.

Henry benefitted from this institutionally created capital—the access he had to administrators and peers and the access he had to information—for the time he served as president. When the institution created capital for Umbrella, Henry benefitted from it personally as the Umbrella president. However, this social capital did not last. It lessened or disappeared when he left the position that the institution’s administrators sought to empower.

Another way in which the institution creates social capital for select organizations and individuals is through the annual student organization retreat. This was an invitation-only, August, off-site retreat, and two to three members of the executive boards of the invited groups attended. The invited groups included all member organizations of the advisory board and then representatives of another five to ten hand-picked other groups, as selected by the leadership center on campus in conjunction with the Vice President of Student Affairs’ office. Of the groups in this study, Umbrella had a standing invitation as a member of the advisory board and QPOC had been an invited group for several years. Audre, X-Ray, Jack, Henry, Sabre, and
Wade attended the retreat at some point in their leadership journey. While all noted that they enjoyed the experience, X-Ray noted the increased institutional profile that attending gave QPOC, “After [QPOC] was invited to the retreat more people knew about it, more people were looking for the communication and the collaboration with [QPOC].”

X-Ray and Wade both discussed that attending the retreat helped them crystallize their place on campus as student leaders. X-Ray reflected:

[B]eing able to sit in the same room as other leaders, and of like different organizations that aren't even related to LGBT groups, and talk and communicate about how our groups are helping the campus was the point where I realized that I’m actually doing something.

Similarly, Wade also felt this concept of being part of something larger than one’s self, as both an organization and as an individual:

So it's affected me personally but also I think it's affected [Umbrella] an immense amount because we already have these established relationships with [other student leaders]. They have identity, they have strength, so bringing something that has strength into something that has a lot of strength, like [Umbrella], it's able to make something bigger and to be a part of something.

By attending the retreat, Wade gained social capital for her organization but also as individual. Just as the organization could develop relationships with other groups, Wade could develop relationships with other student leaders. As Wade noted, even a simple participant biography book “was something tangible to take home,” filled with “all of the pictures of all of the people that were there, those are all contacts [that] could be an invaluable tool” for the organizations who were privileged to attend. At the retreat, staff intentionally tried to communicate information and develop connections between the groups present. Jack explained:
Specifically [retreat] is like, “Here are your resources for the year. Here are the organizations for the year. Use them. Utilize them.” I think that’s awesome. Sometimes [Umbrella] gets stuck in a bubble of their own and we get stuck in our own community, but to branch out and know that we can use resources that everyone else is utilizing, we just didn’t know they were there.

The retreat forced the LGBTQ+ student leaders to interact with a wide of array of campus student leaders, pushing them out of their comfort zones. X-Ray’s described the experience:

[K]nowing some of the history of other groups, how they were not really against LGBT groups but they never really accepted it, it was a little bit difficult especially when having, like, one-on-one conversations with those people. Although the person themselves were open minded, the group they were representing wasn't as accepting. So it was just a little bit nerve wracking but doable in a sense.

Those initial fears dissipated and all participants who attended the retreat discussed forming connections with their fellow student leaders. Those connections continued when the leaders of Umbrella and QPOC returned to campus, as Wade concluded, “I cannot go ten feet without seeing someone I know from” the retreat. Those connections allowed Audre to develop collaborations on campus:

I could go to [non-LGBTQ+ student organization] because I had the [retreat] and I met [the president] and everybody else. So that was like my opening, like [the president] and everybody knew who I was, knew I was the president of these things, and it was like I was able to make in through that way.

By attending the student organization leadership retreat, whose invitation list was decided by university staff, the participating students developed relationships to other student leaders that
they could call upon, both on behalf of their organization and for themselves as individuals, long after the retreat ended.

While the student organization leadership retreat is by invitation only, LeaderShape is open to any student by application. Wade, Sabre, Jack, Nora, and Olivia attended LeaderShape over the span of two years. This leadership program served to develop relationships between student leaders both inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community. Jack noted the relationship building that occurred between student leaders within the LGBTQ+ community:

Even with going to things like LeaderShape… it strengthens the network that you’re a part of. So, having three to four other leaders at LeaderShape that were a part of either the LGBT community or another marginalized group was helpful to have, and it formed those connections I think.

LeaderShape participants came from across campus. Nora and Olivia, neither of whom attended the organization retreat, both discussed finding a larger community of student leaders during LeaderShape. Nora commented on how student leaders had more in common than they may have previously thought:

LeaderShape has been like a huge kind of like exposure to hey, student leaders are kind of all here together because regardless of what the passions are, everyone has a passion and people recognize that and they recognize that they want to go out and they want to do things with their organizations.

Similarly, Olivia reflected on connecting with LeaderShape participants and discovering that shared communal experience:

LeaderShape specifically, specifically with just other students leaders, there aren't many other instances of it that I personally get to experience, but just working – just having
those different networks … so sometimes it can lead to some sort of collaboration, but a lot of times it's just like “I've got this going on and it's so freaking annoying, and have you experienced this? Like what do you do in this situation?” A lot of times it's something as simple as that that we discuss.

Those connections, developed over the course of a week, fostered a high level of disclosure and sharing. When Sabre attended LeaderShape, he was in the early stages of his transition and was not widely out as a trans man:

I came out to a few people at LeaderShape … and getting that positive feedback from all of these different leaders who weren’t necessarily LGBTQ – because I had come out to a lot of my friends but they were all queer … I was still in the community that they were part of— but getting feedback, one guy in particular was a White, cisgender, straight guy, and he like had my back and was completely like amazed that I even told him, and it was like a really great experience. So I would say LeaderShape really was like a defining point in my leadership because it prepared me and encouraged me to be like authentic.

Those deep connections continued long after LeaderShape ended, even though, as Sabre explained, “there is nothing really like keeping us linked together now.” Instead, the communal experience of a week spent with other student leaders served to build lasting relationships.

Those relationships extended to the organizations. Due to these connections, Wade felt comfortable approaching a student organization, even if the member he had connected with was not present:

I don't know [that member], [but] now I know their presidents or I know – like the Panhellenic president, we don't talk as much but we're still able to hang out and like have a working relationship. So then if I am able to talk to her, I can talk to [that
organization], because they know her and I feel more comfortable and they're real people too.

The leadership center at the institution offers LeaderShape as a leadership development program for students, but it also serves as an institutionally sponsored way of connecting student leaders to each other. Those students who are selected to attend leave the week with strengthened bonds both internal and external to their own student group.

 Institutionally created social capital is granted to some and denied by others, often defined by position and group membership. Access to information is informed by an unstated group hierarchy, benefiting select organizations and by extension, the members and leaders of that organization. The advisory board and the student leader retreat are restricted to a limited number of officers from a limited number of groups. While the groups benefit from the capital created, the individual student leaders also benefit through the relationships they create. LeaderShape, by contrast, mostly benefits individuals, as they develop connections with other student leaders. While the student leaders may use their social capital to benefit their group, this is capital granted to the individual and not the group. However they receive the capital, and however they use it, the student leaders are affected by how the institution shapes opportunities for them to connect to other student organizations and other student leaders.

**Positional Social Capital**

For much of the aforementioned institutionally created social capital, access depended on the position the student held and in what group they held that position. For example, Audre held leadership positions in several student groups during her time on campus, including two years as President of QPOC. However, Audre never held the senior leadership position in Umbrella and
therefore was never invited to participate in the advisory board, despite her prominence within the LGBTQ+ student community:

> So they to go this place that I think doesn’t exist, with these people and get all this information about … the direction [the institution] is going... I've never been to one of those, which is crazy. Like me even being held up like THE student leader of [institution] while I was there, to not be included or not to have access to that meeting, where it's most of the big decisions are being made on campus and I'm one of the student leaders who is in a majority of all spaces, who can speak to a lot identities, and a lot of different experiences, and for me to not ever get there, I think that's totally interesting.

Even though Audre had positive relations and connections on campus, some networks and groups were barred to her because she didn’t hold the right position in the right group. Only the president of Umbrella was a member of the advisory board. Audre lacked the capital granted by that singular position. No matter how many connections she had, or who she knew, or the level of influence she attained, she never gained access to that circle because she did not have the right leadership position.

> It is not simply the presidency of Umbrella that conveyed certain access. Each position carried its own level of access external to the student organization. This represents positional social capital—capital that is granted to a person because of the position itself. The nature of the position and the location of the organization in the larger network of student organizations informs and structures the social capital from which the student leader benefitted. When X-Ray moved from being the treasurer of both QPOC and Umbrella to solely being the President of QPOC, he noted that he “gained a lot more people.” He felt he had increased access to and influence with administrators:
Talking to the director of [multicultural affairs] as a treasurer was way different than talking to her as the president … Not just because of the title but because of, I guess, how much pull I had as a president.

X-Ray moved up the organizational hierarchy, from treasurer to president, so it may be unsurprising that he felt more access and influence with a higher position in the organization. However, Guy noted a shift when he moved from being president of Trans* to being an executive board member in Umbrella, a shift down the positional hierarchy but into a larger group from a smaller group:

[Trans*] was always seen, it seemed as like a side group or just like, it was more focused, and that whatever everybody was working towards was [Umbrella] … so it seems like I’ve gained more leadership from taking a position on the exec rather than being the leader of a group.

As this social capital was associated with position, and not the person, the student forfeited it when they left the position. It could be hard for the student to reconcile the loss of that influence and connection. For students, such as Sabre and Henry, who had served in the presidency of Umbrella, this loss of position felt profound. Umbrella benefited from high levels of institutional social capital, so the position of president came with high levels of positional social capital. When the student left that position, and forfeited the positional social capital, they struggled to reconcile this loss. Sabre felt this loss just as he felt he was coming into his own as a leader:

[T]hat was a big part of my identity that I lost, was like being the queer go-to person, like the queer representative. Because I really grew in the past two years and finally was like I’m owning this so hard, and then it was somebody else’s turn.
While there remained opportunities for Sabre to participate in ongoing conversations and to serve on committees as an individual student, he lost the implied and understood place of being part of the conversation because he served as the president of Umbrella and “it was really hard to let those go.” Similarly, Henry felt the loss of his position and the connections with other student leaders greatly:

I sort of wasn’t regarded as a student leader anymore in a lot of ways … I was considered still somebody who was somewhat of an authority on these issues … but I was no longer sought out as much to collaborate with. People stopped connecting with me to come to their organizations... So I was no longer the person going to those places and meeting those people because of my title. It wasn’t because of me; it was because of my title.

And so that was a difficult transition for me because I’m like I still want to do these things, but now … I’m not as empowered by the system that was put in place in order to recognize our communities … [A]s a student leader and as somebody who very much seen myself as a student leader, that was difficult because that was a rough transition from being like you have this power just because you’re called the president, right, which is bull. But going from that now to, okay, but you were a student leader. You were the president. Even though I still had many leadership roles in many student organizations that I did not have the “top” one in our communities as a student, from [Umbrella], right.

And that’s a perception.

For these students, positional social capital was granted or denied based on the perceptions of the leadership position by those external to the organization. By occupying a certain leadership position, in a certain student organization, a student had increased social capital external to their organization. They had the ability to connect with administrators, serve
on committees, or voice an opinion about campus events. However, that social capital was affiliated with the position and not the person, and participants lost that capital when they lost the position. Students who occupied leadership positions in Umbrella, the group with the most institutional capital, gained the most positional capital but all positions came with their own level of positional social capital. Those positions that most frequently interacted with external constituencies had more positional social capital, regardless of group type. For example, a president of Social Fraternity may have more positional capital than the secretary of Umbrella, even though Umbrella had more institutionally created social capital.

**Social Capital Within One’s Own Group**

While student leaders were granted social capital by external constituencies when they moved into their positions, they also gained social capital within their own organization. This intra-group capital, while informed by the student’s position within the organization, became affiliated with them personally and extended beyond capital strictly associated with their position. They could maintain this capital even if they forfeited their leadership position. The type and amount of social capital gained depended on both the internal structure of the organization and their personal interactions with others. While all participants gained social capital within their organizations, some participants gained notably more than others. Students who did not have much social capital within their own organization often struggled to be effective or ran into hurdles that their peers did not experience. While some of the social capital came from the action of taking on the leadership role itself, this capital could be bolstered through personal relationships. For many of the students, the relationships with their fellow group leaders crossed into friendship. Participants were not able to draw a clear line in many cases of which came first—the shared leadership roles or the friendships. Regardless, those students who had
personal friendships within their organizations had higher social capital than those that did not, regardless of position.

**With group members.** “It's not my group. It's our group,” Olivia said. The idea of community permeated the conversations with the student leaders. As a part of their roles, they not only gained and deepened relationships with those outside their organizations but also, and perchance more importantly, with the members of their own organizations. Olivia described her student organization as “a community of people that understand you, that get where you're coming from, and that aren't going to judge you or shove you aside for it.” Within that community, participants felt the responsibility as student leaders to grow and expand the community. Nora explained, “I mean that’s kind of being a leader, is being able to pull in folks and ‘Hey, come,’ like ‘Come into my circle. Come talk to me.’” Henry, similarly, described the perceived duty one took on when they moved into leadership:

So for me, a leader is more somebody who has taken that next – that one half step further beyond member, and is actually pulling people into the organization, and taking what that organization is doing and putting it right back out.

Groups varied on how they sought to create relationships with their members. In Umbrella, being a large organization with membership nearing 100, the leadership tried to intentionally create opportunities to foster relationships with members of the organization. These relationships pulled many of the Umbrella leaders into leadership roles and they sought to create opportunities to pass that mentoring on to other group members. Jack explained the role of mentors in his path to the Umbrella vice-presidency, which began when others pushed him to run for president:
So my sophomore year when all of these people were like, “You should run for president. You should go to LeaderShape. You should go to [LGBTQ+ conference].” I’m like, “Okay. That’s really overwhelming, but okay.” Through them suggesting that, I was like, “I don’t know if I can run for presidency.” They were like, “Okay. How can you run for presidency? How can you make that look that you are able to do it?” We talked about delegating things out and making sure that it isn’t an exec board that is one person running two positions. I’m like, “Okay. Yeah, I can do this.” They managed to create a support system and encouraged me, pushed me to do it.

Even though he elected to run for vice president rather than president, the encouragement of others pushed him to make the decision to take on an officer role. Similarly, Sabre identified Wade as a potential leader to replace him in Umbrella and mentored her intentionally. Wade, in return, sought to pass that message of empowerment on to the other members of Umbrella:

> So it's people who want to do something, and I see that in so many people and they are leaders. They don't know it, and I know they can't – they were me, they don't see themselves as leaders and can never see themselves as leaders, they just want to do stuff and that's what it's all about. You want to do stuff, go do stuff. And [Umbrella] is just there to help empower that and give them a space to do that.

Following the example forged before them, Wade and Jack sought to intentionally create relationships within Umbrella. Jack explained the efforts to develop intra-group community, “I want our general body members to be coming to us with more personal questions and understanding that we’re a support system and not just an organization.” Umbrella leadership started hosting office hours in their office in the student union and publicizing those widely on social media. They also publicized informal hangouts, such as announcing when members
would be eating lunch in the dining halls and inviting others to join them. Umbrella leadership began a tradition of walking to the local ice cream parlor after each meeting, inviting all general members to join them. Guy explained the importance of this:

[B]ecause we have a really large constituency it seems, those people who come [to get ice cream], it gives them the ability to talk directly to Exec Board members and get their thoughts heard, and when they have concerns, it allows them to vocalize them in a quieter [way] and easier for us to comprehend what’s going on.

This intentionally created opportunity for student leaders to interact with their general membership allowed the organization to create smaller networks and relationships within a larger organization.

Social Fraternity felt powerfully about the bonds formed through the idea of brotherhood. They felt that membership indelibly linked brothers to each other through lifelong membership in the organizations, regardless of whether they liked each other personally, and they quickly admitted not necessarily liking all of their brothers. Brothers in Social Fraternity spent time hanging out with each other, bonding over a shared loved of card, video, and board games, and food. The organization membership had not perfected a balance of social time and business, even though they had developed intra-group relationships. Tom explained:

[W]e like to [play games], we love our potlucks, we love getting together and everybody bringing food and just eating our little faces off. We do drink together and go out, and so we do do those social things, but sometimes they’re more prevalent than others. There are times when where we’ll go a long time without doing those things and we’ll just focus on the business side of stuff.
Though the brothers of Social Fraternity did not perfect the balance of social time and business
time, they still developed deeply held connections to each other as brothers.

Leaders of Umbrella also discussed the difficulty in balancing “fun” and “work.”
Umbrella, because of its size, and Social Fraternity, because of its national obligations, both have
highly organized membership structures. For leaders of these groups, fulfilling their obligations
as leaders occasionally caused tension in their relationships with fellow group members. These
student leaders needed to protect the stability of the organization and make sure the groups met
their obligations. Kyle explained the strain this caused in some relationships, explaining, “I
definitely got some, ‘Kyle’s a hard ass,’ responses just because I was really focused on getting
the work done, and not just playing around and chatting and frivolity.” Similarly, Sabre and
Rory, as presidents of Umbrella and Social Fraternity respectively, discussed the challenge of
holding their peers accountable. Sabre tried to find a balance, describing it, “I’m really bad at
being the bad guy because these people are my friends and because I want them to enjoy
working on the executive board. Like, I don’t want them to hate it.” Rory concurred, “I want to
be able to raise those people up, and sometimes it’s like ‘Well stop messing up! C’mon, I don’t
want to have to be this person.”’” Rory continued, “So when I may have to potentially endanger
relationships with people based on the structure of this organization, I’m not just upsetting the
structure of the organization, I’m upsetting the structure of my social life.” In this way, Rory
threatened his own social capital within the group in order to fulfill the obligations of the group.

While QPOC did not have the same highly structured internal obligations as Social
Fraternity, QPOC did similarly develop strong intra-group relationships between leadership and
general body members. Rather than the brotherhood of Social Fraternity, QPOC described their
relationships as family. Participants emphasized the bonds formed through open discussion of
their intersecting identities, a conversation they did not feel happened outside of the organization. QPOC, at one point, suffered through internal group strife and membership started to dip. Personal tensions developed between group members, complicated by ongoing tensions between QPOC and Umbrella over the openness of the latter to people of color. People stopped attending QPOC, in X-Ray’s perception because of the negativity surrounding the group.

X-Ray, serving as treasurer at the time, spoke about the efforts to refocus the group away from the tension and towards the group’s strengths—those familial bonds:

Because we were losing so many people we decided that focusing on the family aspect of the group, like we were supposed to be in the beginning, was a better way of keeping each other to bear, keeping our membership.

X-Ray and Audre worked together to eventually stabilize the organization. After hitting a low point in membership, the group began to flourish again under the leadership of Guy and Nora through an intentional effort to build community.

Trans* and Women’s did not have robust relationships between group members and leaders. Participants from those organizations discussed the struggle to develop group buy-in and the struggle to have members who consistently attend. Michele contrasted her experience in Women’s with her experience in Umbrella:

[W]e're still working through it, trying to establish ourselves as an organization that provides a safe space for people who identify as women who love other identifying women and get [membership buy-in], that's always a really big issue. I mean, like, you know, [Umbrella] would never worry about not having enough people to have a meeting, but… I worry about every meeting if we're gonna have enough people to have a meeting, 'cause sometimes like people just won't show up. And that's not what I want for it,
[Women’s] can do bigger things than that. So that's what I get nervous about, that's what I get worried about. And I know sometimes like we address it in exec board meetings, but I guess personally that's what is hard.

Since Women’s did not have those robust intra-group relationships, student leaders did not have much social capital with their own members. The members did not feel any obligation to show up or participate in the organization. The lack of social capital with their own group members impeded what the leaders could accomplish with the organization.

Umbrella, in part because of its size, fostered relationships much more intentionally through purposeful events and outreach than the other smaller groups. QPOC and Social Fraternity benefitted from familial like atmospheres that bonded members and group leaders. Women’s and Trans* struggled with low membership numbers and did not have robust relationships between the leaders and the members. For the new organizations, Spirituality and Middle Sexualities, a clear sense of relationships did not emerge from the conversations, perchance in part because each organization was only months old at the time of data collection.

**Friends or fellow student leaders?** Participants developed relationships with their fellow group leaders through serving on executive boards and leadership teams together. As X-Ray said, the student leaders “had each other's backs.” This evolved almost naturally, as a factor of working together often. Rory developed a strong bond with Kyle, as they served as President and Vice President of Social Fraternity. As Rory explained, “when you have to interact with someone in a student leader position— which are very reciprocal to get things done— you have to work enough with each other, you have to become very close.” Sometimes these relationships build on pre-existing familiarity. As Guy moved into executive roles in Umbrella, he developed a closer relationship with Sabre, who served as Umbrella president:
I’d see [Sabre] and say hi, he’d just kinda throw up a hand and go “hey” real quick and just disappear on me, and now like, if he’s looking for someone to do something, he’s going to legitimately walk up and have a full conversation with me.

These relationships often became important during times of group conflict. For the groups, conflict often proved inevitable, as Nora observed, “because you have multiple brains with multiple ways to break something down.” Groups with stronger intra-group relationships helped student leaders navigate conflict by fostering trust between leaders. Even when they disagreed, student leaders had social capital with each other that they could use to navigate or solve the point of conflict, or at least trust that the difference of opinion came from a place of genuine care about the organizations.

Many of the participants developed friendships with their fellow group leaders that extended beyond the obligations of their positions. In some cases, these relationships clearly predated the leadership relationship and even served as the entry point for the leadership position. Nora traced the evolution of her relationship with Sabre:

Like we kind of just ran in the same party circles because we’re all queer and that’s what happens. And then we became friends and then he was like, “Hey, do you want to get involved?” And I was like, “Eh, whatever.” And then like, it’s gone from being this kind of acquaintanceship to this growth into this awesome friendship into this awesome leadership relationship of like, “Let’s work together. Let’s encourage each other.” And because we’ve gone through – well he’s been there my entire growth of leadership— so we work really well together and now we’re dating.

However, in most cases participants could not definitively state how the friendship developed, or which came first, the friendship or the student leader partnership. In those instances, the
relationships developed simultaneously. For example, Rory and Kyle came into Social Fraternity together, moved into leadership roles together, and their relationship deepened into a friendship, in part, because their mutual leadership roles reinforced their bond. Similarly, X-Ray and Audre came into leadership roles in QPOC at the same time and found a profound support system in each other that lasted through college. Audre explained this evolution:

[X-Ray] would only talk to me about his feelings and anxieties as a student leader and we had got to the point where we were literally calling just like “When was the last time you slept? When was the last time you ate? Did you go to class? Like you need to sleep.” We kind of checked in on each other, because we understood that we both were really, really people who just liked working and liked being busy. And when you’re that busy, it’s really easy to forget to eat. It's easy to go to sleep at 2:00 and be like “I have to be up at 6:00 because I got to be here at 7:00.” Like it's easy to let some of the most basic things go, but me and [X-Ray’s] relationship started off being based on literally getting each other to survive through being a really active leader. And then we became super best friends.

X-Ray echoed those sentiments:

We kept each other going. And I feel like if you have somebody that you come in with or that you meet early on, and you support each other in what you do, then you won't feel that “Oh, well maybe this isn't for me.” Or you won't have to second guess your decisions on anything because there is at least one person behind you saying “You made the right choice.”

Many of the participants could point to another student leader within their own group who they had developed an intense friendship with during their time as a student leader.
However, this was not a uniform experience. In some cases, the lack of group support failed to foster group relationships. Groups that did not have a strong support system from within the organization failed to develop relationships between their group leaders. Women’s struggled as an organization with buy-in both from members of the executive board and the general body. As Michele reflected, the organization struggled with mutual trust:

We had exec board members who did not want to be on the exec board but they were kind of like swindled into it because we needed those positions filled… It was just a mess, that whole exec board was a mess.

This contributed to the leadership failing to develop connections to each other. Matilda reflected that she “got to know the people on the exec board better” but that “more or less we stayed acquaintances.” Similarly, Activist did not have a strong group identity and Audre and Kyle as co-presidents did not develop a relationship beyond “acquaintances.” Kyle leveraged a relationship with Packets Joy from their mutual brotherhood in Social Fraternity to try and keep the group afloat after Kyle and Audre graduated, but the organization did not have support from the other leaders or group members and it quickly folded.

Still, some people did not benefit from the relationships in the same way others within their own organizations benefited. This seemed to have come down simply to the notion of whether or not people developed personal friendships. Students gained relationships based upon the way the institution interacted with them, they gained relationships both internal and external to the group based upon the position they held, but people also gained relationships based on who they were as individuals and whether their peers invited them into that inner circle of friends. Henry explained, “I think that those informal groups are very self-selected in many
ways, and so we include each other in those groups as we see each other relating to ourselves.”

Jack echoed this:

There are a lot of different friend groups. That’s not to say that we don’t all interact in the meetings or the events, but definitely there are friend groups that come to [Umbrella], or when they’re at [Umbrella], they kind of group up.

Because of those friend groups, those that have made it to the inner-circle, like Wade, can feel like she “had a support system behind me” in Umbrella. In contrast, Olivia felt pushed aside in the same organization. She almost left the organization, explaining, “there were times where I just wanted to give up on [Umbrella] because I didn't feel like I was a part of it. Even on exec board I didn't feel I was a part of it.” Olivia stayed because, “I was there as kind of the lone middle sexuality voice. That was needed on exec board because everyone else didn't identify that way.” Still, Olivia hit resistance in her efforts to create Middle Sexualities, resistance which she attributed in part to friendship groups:

It was a couple of select members, and one of them more than others, but they were really fighting against me and unfortunately had a couple people that kind of worshipped the ground that they walked on, so then those people also were kind of pushing against me, and that was – it was tough to see that we could be that easily divided in the LGBT community, and it was kind of disheartening because I had supported the other person through their various endeavors and the different things that they wanted to do or the different life moves that they did or realized or whatever, and to not get that same support in response was sad.

Similarly, Olivia found herself having to force her way into events to publicize her group while others were invited:
I kind of forced myself into the limelight of getting to talk about my group, because nobody approached me asking me if I wanted to talk about it, nobody asked me if there were two cents that I wanted to put in about the group. Even though Olivia had been a member of Umbrella and active in a leadership role for several years, she had never developed the friendships that other student leaders had forged with each other. This allowed individuals within the group to not only push her, but also her newly founded organization, aside.

Social Fraternity struggled when members of the executive board admittedly did not like each other. As Kyle put said, “It was just, people didn’t like other people and things got messy.” This caused negative relationships within the group and divided the organization into factions. Rory observed, “If you don’t like each other and you have disagreements, you’re just going to scream at each other, but if you like each other and have disagreements, you can potentially get past it.” Packets Joy viewed themselves as a divisive figure in the organization, believing that their brothers simply believed, “if we move him, we solve all of the problems in the world.” Since they did not have deep friendships with many of their brothers, they felt they could not call upon those relationships when needed:

I wanted to say [to the brothers] that my personal life got hard last week, but I felt like if I did so, that would be viewed as “You're bad for this,” you know, like a point of scrutiny with me and I was really worried about that.

Packets Joy had connections to individual brothers but not to the overall brotherhood. In spite of individual leaders having strong relationships individually, the brothers did not have strong relationships across the entire executive board and this led to organizational strife and impeded the group from being as effective as possible.
Even when an individual had robust relationships in one group, this did not translate across groups. Audre developed deep connections with QPOC but found that she did not benefit in the same way during her leadership with Women’s or Activist. She stated:

So me and [QPOC] hung out all the time. We hung out like crazy. What is interesting was when I started to get into the other groups, they didn't invite me places. I wasn't invited to the bars. I wasn't invited to peoples' house parties or birthday things or anything like that. I wasn't invited. I never knew about these things. And it was interesting because like when we were in meetings like “Yes, Audre, you're this or you're that,” but when it came to like really personal spaces I was never invited. That just wasn't what I was there for and I learned that really quickly and I just took it as that, like “We're in organizations together, but when it comes to on a personal setting like I am just not what you're about.”

The individual student leaders gained social capital within their organizations separate from their positions, but this capital did not take on a uniform style. More so than with the institutionally-created or positionally-created social capital, capital within one’s organization was much more personality driven. Individuals with close personal bonds to other members or leaders within their organization benefited from higher levels of social capital within their organizations.

**Joining a Network**

As part of taking on a leadership role within an LGBTQ+ organization, participants gained access to larger networks on campus. These networks represented individuals that participants felt connected to and could call upon, but did not have a formal link binding them together. Individuals had access to a multitude of networks based upon their campus jobs, their majors, or other student organization involvements. However, two overlapping networks
emerged that participants linked directly to their roles as student leaders in LGBTQ+ groups: a social justice network and a student leader network. These networks overlap but they are not embedded. The social justice network included student organization leaders of social justice focused groups who are also part of the larger student leader network. However, the social justice network also included faculty and staff who do not fit in the student leader network.

**Social Justice Network.** Sabre gave voice to the label “social justice network.” Though not a universal label, it was a common concept. Regardless of how they labeled or defined it, participants had a sense of a larger group of people committed to social justice. Student leaders of groups affiliated with social justice work, organizations representing historically marginalized populations, members of various university communities focused on issues of diversity and inclusion, faculty from various academic departments including Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies, and select staff members at state, regional, and national social justice networks comprised the social justice network. Part of joining the Social Justice Network came from simply being present. Sabre explained the network as “just people who are very obviously passionate about these things. You know, like I’ve held workshops or I’ve been to workshops about things, and I see a lot of the same people.” Matilda noted that student leaders had “gotten involved in sort of the other things that come up” on campus, including organizing efforts for collective student action to confront biased behavior, campus-wide efforts to create a more inclusive university community, and interning with or serving as campus representatives for groups external to the campus.

Though inclusive of people from every level of the university, and those external to the university, the social justice network primarily hinged on the student leaders and their relationships with each other. Student leaders called upon their common identity as student
leaders to recruit assistance when needed. Henry used the network to help navigate institutional boundaries, calling upon his peers for guidance, suggestions, and feedback. Guy explained the network:

   It gives like, just the connections. All of us have links to each other, so when it comes to being in the real world and working, if we need something from the other one, we can trust, like, hey if I’m coming to you with this, they’re probably going to say yeah.

Similar to the connections forged within one’s own group, participants developed alliances and partnerships with fellow student leaders in multicultural groups. In many cases these partnerships evolved into friendships. Audre explained her partnership with the president of the Black Student Organization:

   [We] established a relationship that was outside of anything. It was pure like student leader to student leader. It wasn't even based off any real topic. It was just like I'm a leader and I see you struggling, I want to help you. So I think being in all of those spaces kind of came out just like establishing relationships with people outside of even us being student leaders.

Those partnerships became key as Audre moved into activism and advocacy work on campus. They provided her a figurative safety net, knowing that someone else would understand what she was saying:

   So I wouldn't be completely like looked at like I was crazy and told to leave. Like there will be some people who kind of like would be okay and receptive to what I was saying, so that's kind of where all that started.

These partnerships became invaluable to participants’ emotional well-being. Rory explained, “You need people you can talk to about those things.” Without these inter-group personal
relationships, individual student leaders could feel lost or burnt out. These relationships served as points of stability, allowing the student leaders a chance to re-center and find validation for their efforts. Without caring for their well-being, student leaders may withdraw from the student leadership process, stunting their own development and potentially negatively impacting their organization.

Students developed implicit expectations for each other, especially within the multicultural student groups, to be present and support each other. Jack explained:

Being a student leader on campus this year has really shown me that there’s a difference, I think, in the level of commitment to organizations and how you spend your extra time…

[I]t is very obvious to me now that we’re expected to go to events for these other organizations. We’re expected to represent our organization and our community in specific ways.

This reciprocity meant that student leaders called upon this network frequently for collaborations. However, the power of their personal relationships and the prominence of their organizations contributed to their ability to call upon the people within this network. Those from more established organizations, more connected organizations, or with closer relationships with fellow student leaders could more easily leverage the network for collaborations. Michele explained the difficulty for Women’s to connect with other student groups when Umbrella cast a long shadow:

We kind of fend for ourselves for the most part, or we're trying to, and we've been like trying to collaborate a lot with other people but sometimes it gets hard because Umbrella has been around much longer than Women’s has and I don't know, it's very interesting.
Similarly, Guy noted his struggle with developing collaborations for Trans* when it was a stand-alone organization and then compared that to his experience leading QPOC after it became an Umbrella suborganization:

I haven’t had too many [collaborations] just as Trans* and [we] didn’t do a lot, because it was new and people were iffy on it, and I was swamped. I didn’t have time to go and create networks, but this year, a lot of the things, like talking with [Black Student Organization] constantly, that seems like, they work very well with us… Oh and—I guess they would be considered collaborations even though they’re under the same label—but working as QPOC’s facilitator with Umbrella… That works out very well.

Similarly, Tom noted Social Fraternity felt less a part of the social justice network. Social Fraternity tangentially connected to the social justice network but primarily operated in other networks:

You’ve got the multicultural student leadership network, so like the leaders of [Black Student Organization], the leaders of [Latino Student Organization], the leaders of [International Student Organization]. And then there would be overlaps. So like, I’m over here for [multicultural council] a little bit, but I’m also over here a little bit too, because I’ve got multicultural organizations and so I’ve worked with multiculturalism and in working with multiculturalism, I’ve worked with these leaders over here.

The social justice network comprised a group of like-minded students, faculty, staff, and external constituents who shared a passion and commitment for working for social justice which connected them in an informal network. The place of one’s organizations within the network and the strength of one’s personal bonds to others in the network reinforced how and when the
student leader, and by extension that student’s organization, could call upon the network and benefit from those connections.

**Student Leader Network.** The common identity of a student leader, regardless of involvement area, linked students. Henry affirmed, “I felt connected as other leaders just because they were leaders.” Michele described the mutual identity of student leaders, “I relate to other student leaders on campus that way because we kind of recognize, like, ‘Hey, you're a student leader, you're doing good things, you're trying to move things forward.’” This network formed by, as Packets Joy explained, being in the same places at the same times, “I think it's bothly composed of like just like student leaders having to be at certain things together.” Wade elaborated:

> We are in so many different spaces and we are – like just being in the [student organization office space], walking past leaders all the time, you're able to form these conversations and just hang out for a while and talk about each other's experiences. That network is amazing because there's so much talent and there's so much motivation within that network that we can feed off each other.

Guy discussed how students interacted with each other through the shared identity of student leader:

> It’s easy to do collaborations. You have more of peer mentoring that you can go to, if your org is struggling, theirs is successful, you ask them about something that they do that would help you with your organization and getting things going.

As part of the student leader network, students could call upon each other for assistance.

Membership in the network was loose and ill-defined. Participants had a sense that one always had access to the network, regardless of the group or position one held. However, one’s
place within the network gained in prominence as one took on a more prominent role. In Jack’s words, “I definitely think I gained access to a larger network once I entered into a formal leadership position, but I don’t think that it’s exclusive. I think that how you’re perceived in that network changes, though.” Tom elaborated:

[I]t was very interesting for me because I think it’s more so how big are you, honestly, or how big or a splash are you making. The bigger the splash, the more student leaders you are going to see and work with and get to know.

That “splash” represented the formation of social capital. A student made a “splash” by developing visible connections, being invited into circles or networks, collaborating with individuals or groups, and so on. Each of those represented some sort of social capital creation or exchange. Sometimes, that splash was shaped by the positional capital granted to the individual. Henry felt his prominence within the network as the president of Umbrella:

So I knew that I could go to a particular senator or the treasurer or even the president and vice president of undergraduate student government, and say, “Hey, can I talk to you for a few minutes,” and they would listen to me. And most times, if not all times, they would follow my advice and my thoughts. They would help me come to some sort of conclusion or come to them and say, “Hey, here is a problem that I see,” or I’d say, “Hey, I want to talk to you about you.” And I could do that because they knew who I was, and so that sort of – a lot of my roles gave me access to people that I wouldn’t have normally probably interacted with in a personal way or in an official capacity.

Not only could the student leaders access the student leader network to share their own ideas or advocate for their own group, they could pull other people into the network. After becoming the facilitator of QPOC, a fellow student approached Nora asking for assistance in forming a Muslim
student organization. She explained, “[T]hat was like one of those big moments… I was able to help him find connections in order to make this [Muslim student organization]. That was really, really awesome.” Nora leveraged her own relationships within the network to invite another student into the student leader network and assisted that student in forming a new student organization.

The student leader network shifted and altered with the shifting student leader populations. People moved into leadership positions and new connections needed to be formed, while other students left leadership positions and sometimes dropped out of prominence in the network. This could be frustrating for students. Henry explained:

So from year-to-year, I no longer had those connections to the people from the year before because those people may not have been there anymore… So because of the nature of higher ed and the nature of student organizations, in my mind, there is like from year-to-year, those student leaders on your campus, and those often change and morph. And while those people still may be there from year-to-year, their roles and their responsibilities change and so our perceptions of those people change. And the way that we interact with them and seek them out and connect with them to be involved, that experience changes very dramatically.

Even though people could maintain access to the network as individuals, how they interacted within the network changed with changing leadership positions. The individuals may maintain their personal social capital, but they may have lost their positional social capital. In forfeiting that capital, their place in the network evolved and shifted, even though they maintained access to the network. As such, the network had a constant influx of new members, who brought with
them new energy and new ideas, but who also needed to establish connections and partnerships with the other members of the network.

**The Visible Leader**

One way student leaders gained social capital and access to various networks was through being visible on campus. This became especially important for LGBTQ+ students who felt they lacked queer spaces on or near campus—places where students could feel safe exploring their LGBTQ+ identities. Consequentially, as Rory noted, “a lot of the times the organizations define the community.” As the most visible LGBTQ+ people on campus, the student leaders came to represent the LGBTQ+ community itself on campus.

**The Sentinel Protectors**

“I think people perceive you as being these sentinel protectors of the community or you should have a statue somewhere,” Rory said. As student leaders, the campus LGBTQ+ community held these students in high regard, the shining lights of the community. Rory continued, “I think that people immediately have this perception of student leaders that we’re somehow the best of the best, we rose up and we did things.” This concept that the student leaders became so well known that they could, even in jest, be commemorated in bronze, also provided an almost safety net for some student leaders. They became so known, and so visible, that they could say and do things they may not have been able to without the cover of their leadership roles. Henry commented on the safety that visibility gave him:

I felt more safe to be open and to be vocal about the issues that were important to me and that I perceived to be important to our community, and that the members in our organizations told us were important. So as a leader, as a recognizable figure in a community, it gave me power; it gave me safety; it gave me the ability to do some of the
things that I wanted to do without fear of repercussion to an extent, not completely, but to an extent … And safety, and that’s sort of – not physical safety, but that sort of – that safety net was very much there because of my role and my titles as a leader, which sort of diminished as I decreased my leadership.

As sentinel protectors, this visibility and esteem did not just give them safety, it also put them on a metaphorical pedestal. This social capital often came within their own group but existed as a direct result of their visibility within the community and impacted how others, both internal and external to their own organizations, interacted with them. Participants no longer occupied space on the same level as their fellow students, but now occupied an elevated place. They developed reputations and people had “expectations” or “assumptions” about them. People knew who they were before they met the student leaders, and began to treat them differently. As Guy described it, “it seems they treat me more like a student leader and less like one of the kids they go to school with.” Wade described this perception as a privilege, in that it made her more approachable:

[B]ecause of that privilege of having people know who you are, people feel very connected to you, even if they don't go to [Umbrella] every week, if they identify within the community, they're your friend and that's very nice because it creates cohesion of one identity on campus. And it's great because we were able to just start a conversation rather than just being like “Hi, this is weird, we're not friends yet,” it's just very natural.

That instantaneous rapport was important for those whose identities were less frequently represented in the larger LGBTQ+ community. For Olivia, she felt that being a visible leader in the community “made me a little bit more approachable,” especially for those students who
shared her pansexual identity. Similarly, Sabre felt his visibility as an out trans man made him a role model for individuals in his own community:

A lot of the times people don’t have role models. You don’t see people who look or identify the same as you on TV, and so you’re kind of like really yearning for that role model … [T]rans people have said, like “You encouraged me to come out because I’ve never seen an out trans person and you were everywhere. And, like, you didn’t get bullied and all these things.”

Sabre’s visibility extended well beyond his own community though, and he became the most prominent trans student leader on campus, educating those both inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community:

I don’t think a lot of people know trans people. So because I was a student leader and because I was out about being trans, I think I often became like, you know, people often used me for questions that they had. Or I was seen as approachable, more approachable about it, because I was a student leader and because I was outgoing and active and proud, and all these things … Yeah, I think I was often a microphone for that.

While this idea that fellow students, as Rory put it, “feel so connected to you and they know what you do,” may have made them more approachable to students who may not have known them, it could also be daunting. Many felt the pressure of being put on that metaphorical pedestal, where people had preconceptions and ideas about them without ever knowing the individual student. For some, like Wade, this simply felt “weird”:

So many times they're like, “Oh, I've heard about you, yeah, you're president of this.” That's still weird because that doesn't happen in my normal life outside of leadership world, and it's weird to talk in front of a group and have someone run up to me and be
like “That was awesome, you were awesome!” – like that kind of thing and I don't know this person.

For others, such as Nora, they realized they have become the people that they used to look up to themselves:

[There was one student in particular that has come to me multiple times now and has been like, “You really helped me through this and you helped me, like you helped me believe that I can do things,” and that was a really crazy moment, because I always looked at other people for that and then I realized I was that for other people.

The student leader as the sentential protector, the public voice and defender of the community, made the student a visible role model for students who may not have seen themselves in leadership roles otherwise. The student leaders occupied a space of high regard, being visible to people they may not have even known. This gave them permission to speak out, as that visibility not only made them known within their own community, that visibility also gave them a perceived safety net. They could say and give voice to ideas that may not have been allowed or welcomed because they held the spot of a celebrated student leader on campus. As a sentinel protector, the student leader was simultaneously a celebrated part of the community and held above and distanced from the community.

**Being Perfect**

Part of being a visible leader within the LGBTQ+ community included the need to be perfect, to represent their organization well, to always know the most up-to-date information, to always use the right terminology, to always have an opinion, and to always speak out. This expectation could feel daunting, as the student leaders navigated and learned about their own identities simultaneously. As Michele explained, “It's this like weird expectation that you have
to be the leader and perfect all the time, when in actuality, I'm 19 years old, just – I'm trying my best. So it's hard sometimes.”

As the student leaders moved through campus, they considered how their actions impacted their organizations. Jack explained, “I consistently and fairly often think about how I’m representing my organization and things that I do on campus and if I want [Umbrella] to be perceived in a certain way.” Guy concurred:

A student can kind of do whatever, they’re here for school, that’s it. It doesn’t really matter what they’re doing, but student leaders, their faces get associated with the organizations. So if they’re acting ridiculous and all, that’s reflected on the organization. So they have to be more calculated in their movements than a regular student would.

This expectation was never directly communicated, but rather implied. X-Ray said:

But it wasn't really explicitly stated that “Hey, you're a face, everything you do can and will be like attached to the group that you represent” but it's something I just noticed most of the time. Most presidents and leaders try to stay in good standing just because they knew they were being watched pretty much 100 percent of the time.

For student leaders of LGBT groups, these expectations included using the correct terminology and being inclusive of all identities at all times, without the freedom to make mistakes. This could be difficult, as many of the student leaders were learning about the nuances of their community while simultaneously leading the community. Most participants could point to specific examples of where they had made a mistake. One used incorrect pronouns when speaking with a member of her organization; another spoke incorrectly about intersexuality; another failed into include certain identities when giving a presentation. Whatever the example may be, participants felt held to a higher standard as student leaders, whether or not they thought
they should be. For them, the expectation was that if they wanted others to be inclusive and use inclusive language, they must model the way—always and without mistake. Wade spoke about this increased pressure:

I'm always going to be a student but also I need to have my stuff together, so that plays off of the whole I need to say the right thing at all times. I mean I need to be inclusive at all times, to the 8000th percent, and so I think that everyone can be inclusive at all times and that's a lot of policing and that's very hard on yourself. I don't want to police myself, I want to feel comfortable in being – in messing up. And I think that's very not okay for some people—when they see a president [messing up]. But that's something I would like to change in being a leader, is being able to see the president of an organization as a person first.

In addition to the pressure to be inclusive and to use inclusive language, multiple student leaders spoke about the pressure to always be present as a representative of a marginalized community. As Wade explained, “there's more expectations, I feel, that are on you to be at all of these meetings, to be a face of your community.” Being present often included speaking out. Audre explained:

I think the biggest expectation that was really hard for me was I felt like I always had to have an opinion… I always had to publicly make my stance… I never got a chance to kind of just be like “That's messed up and I'm going to deal with that by myself, because it's messed up.” I always had to be like, “I feel this way and this is why” and literally profess to campus how I felt about a situation and tell the different ways of why it was wrong. I could never simply be like, “This is wrong and I’m gonna go home.” It was
always like everybody expected me… to have like these public conversations and feelings about things happening.

These student leaders needed to act in a way that represented their organization appropriately, but to uphold a standard where mistakes were not tolerated and silence not accepted. They, as those bronzed statues of success for the community, did not have the freedom to make missteps because they had to represent their community perfectly. A mistake or silence could threaten the social capital granted them by their status. The social capital they received by the nature of their relationships and their prominence in the community came with expectations for behavior that the student leaders sometimes struggled to live up to on a daily basis.

**Changing Relationships**

When students moved into leadership positions in LGBTQ+ student groups, they experienced changing relationships with group advisors, the university administration, their peers, and their families. These relationships did not universally give them more social capital. Nonetheless, students could point to the relationships as having altered as a result of their time as student leaders.

**Advisors**

“My relationship with the advisor pretty much influenced most of my decisions,” X-Ray said. As student leaders moved into leadership roles in their organizations, their relationships with the advisor of their organization changed and gained in importance. For many of the student leaders, these relationships fostered social capital as their relationship with the advisor deepened and grew in importance.

Advisors served as key figures in the student leaders’ lives. For some, like Guy, the advisor gave guidance when he felt unsure where to begin:
I went to [the advisor] because I was thrown into that role as President with zero knowledge of what to do. Like, being on the Exec Board was completely foreign to me, and [the former president] wasn’t around and [the previous president] had already graduated, so I needed to find somebody who could help me with student leadership.

In this way, the advisor helped the student leader navigate the networks and the expectations of a new position. Advisors not only gave a place for the student leaders to start, but also helped the students figure out what they wanted the group to look like long term. Nora explained:

I’m trying to figure out what [QPOC] looks like. What does that space look like? What does that space need to look like? And [the advisor] has definitely helped me with that a lot, just sitting down and being like, “Here’s what I have” and just laying it down on the table and him being like, “Okay, did you think about this? Have you thought about that?” I mean just having those questions. No one else has asked me that. I’m like, “Thank you because it helps a lot.”

Within the vision for an organization, an advisor helped navigate conflicts and controversial decisions. X-Ray described it:

After speaking with [my advisor], she forced me to think of options and she forced me to choose my own option based upon my reasoning for each option. Like, “Why do you think this is happening and what is a solution? You found the first solution now what's another solution? What else could happen? And then from your reasonings like why do you think those are the solutions? Weigh those options, which one is the best one in your opinion?” Because at that time of choosing the solution it wasn't really about it being my decision, it was about what was better for the group.
For an experienced student leader, like Audre, an advisor played an important role in pushing her development and growth even further:

[My advisor] is the first person who was like, “You need to branch out of [QPOC].” And because before that I had never thought about it. That wasn't my realm. I stay here. That is not what I talked about… And then so she pushed me to do that, but then also she [was] always pushing me to think more critically, because like a lot of times I'll go like, “But this is the issue!” and she would be like, “Do you really think that's the issue or is that the most obvious issue?” So like I wanted to – it started to be like clockwork that I would go up to her office… because I always wanted to know that like, “Am I crazy or is this it? Or is it something else? Or should I be thinking about this differently?”… It was weird, because all of the things that I was kind of like doing and interested in as a student leader, there were always like a willing advisor or faculty or a staff person to kind of be there and see that and be like “Okay, well I'm going to nudge you a little bit and we're going to just keep you moving.”

Sabre concurred, “[My advisor] knows when to push me to do things, and he knows when – if he pushes me to do something, it’s not gonna get done.”

Organizations that did not have strong relationships with an advisor often felt the impact of that void. Henry explained:

Now, I haven’t always had [strong advisors] in all of my organizations. In the organizations in which I didn’t have a strong advisor, or an advisor who was involved and dedicated to that organization and the people within it, then we didn’t have that sense of efficacy; we didn’t have that sense of support. We didn’t have that feeling of we can
go to this person and say “We think that this is wrong,” or “We think that we have a problem with how this event is coming together.”

Advisor relationships primarily depended on the commitment of the advisor individually to the group and to the student leaders. Women’s had a positive relationship with an advisor but struggled after that advisor left the university. The first advisor actually pulled Matilda into the organization:

The advisor for [Women’s] was definitely one of those people that influenced my decision [to take a leadership role]. She was actually the one that turned me on to the group in the first place. She mentioned it in her class and I was in her class and I’m like, “You know what, I’m a lesbian… You know, I should probably go to at least one like LGBT group meeting, at least once in my life.” And I went and I just kept going.

Michele discussed the challenges the group had to navigate when the former, dedicated advisor left and the new advisor did not involve herself as much in the organization:

So when she left, I mean that was sad and she was a very good advisor… but we didn't really have a choice, we couldn't be like, “No!” And our new advisor is – it's kind of on the rocks. She doesn't attend a lot of the meetings… You know, like she doesn't really attend and when she comes, she's kind of rude. So we're just kind of like – I mean right now it's a very negative experience with our new switch of advisors.

Not all students gained social capital with their advisor, as not all students developed personal bonds with their advisor. In some cases, this became a larger group issue, as it did for Women’s. In others though, the lack of a relationship felt personal. Olivia encountered substantial group conflict when she created her group, Middle Sexualities. In navigating this
conflict, she struggled with whether to go to the advisor, based, in part, on the advisor’s closer relationships with other student leaders:

I kept debating if I wanted to go to him or not, but he does support the person that was against me and they are very close to each other and they are always working together and whatnot, and so I didn't wanna chance going to him and then [have] it backfire.

For those individuals who developed deep connections to their advisors, those connections could have profound impact on their own lives. Audre’s advisors not only pushed her further intellectually, but encouraged her to take care of herself:

[Having them] be like, “You need to sleep. You need to go eat. What are you eating? Fruit snacks aren't breakfast.” So having that constant reassurance of like adults kind of telling me, “Keep it in mind that you're thinking about longevity here.” Having them showing me that bigger picture, that was a good thing.

Advisors set high expectations for their student leaders. Guy worked to improve his grades based, in part, on his relationship with his advisor:

[Talking with [my advisor] about things, and letting him know, I can’t do that because of my GPA, or I’m struggling through this class, he’s like, “Well, you need to fix that, now.” And so a lot of my grades have increased from just sitting down and doing what [my advisor] suggested, or listening to him and rather than goofing off, in this time, you could be doing this instead.

For some, advisors became surrogate family. They not only monitored the student’s well-being but filled voids left by difficult family circumstances. X-Ray explained his relationship with the advisor of QPOC:
She was like a mother to me. After growing up without my mother's influence at all really, and me basically supporting myself throughout like the end of elementary school into high school, [my advisor] being there and her wanting to help and being involved in my life kind of helped mold me into basically who I am right now.

However, in some circumstances, those close personal bonds could be leveraged in a way that did not prioritize the student’s well-being. After serving as Umbrella president, Henry stepped down to treasurer. However, the newly-elected president resigned and the vice president refused to take on the presidency. This left Henry with a decision of whether to take the Umbrella presidency on again, even though he did not want the role and struggled immensely in balancing his dangerously low grade point average with the time commitment of the Umbrella presidency. His relationship with the Umbrella advisor compelled him to take on the role, even though he knew he should not and did not want to be president again:

But because the relationships that I had with professional staff in the LGBT center… it was the expectation of me was that I was going to step up and do this… But one relationship in particular, one person sort of drove me to do that work, and sort of by myself and without a lot of support. [T]hey knew that I could, which was good and empowering and wonderful… [but] so that was sort of a negative experience for me because I was thrown into a role I didn’t want, at a time I didn’t need it, in a situation that was very difficult, with frankly very little support… At some point, I wanted to step sort of back from those leadership roles and start to sort of focus on my life and my academics, and I wasn’t able to because of that relationship… And it’s like yeah, you think I’m good and you think I can do this work, and I can and I know that I can and I’m
confident in that. But at the same time, I really don’t want to right now… It’s being caught between a rock and a really hard place.

In the short term, the story did not end well for Henry. His GPA dropped below the university standards. Eventually, the university suspended him. He ultimately returned to the institution and graduated, having returned with a new commitment to do what he wanted to do in the first place, to “start to sort of focus on [his] life and [his] academics.” Henry perceived himself as having social capital with the advisor of Umbrella, through a long-standing advising and mentoring relationship. However, part of social capital is an understanding of reciprocity and the advisor, with good intentions, leveraged this relationship for the perceived benefit of Umbrella. It simply did not benefit Henry individually.

Relationships with advisors, even if pre-existing, changed as students took on leadership roles. In cases when the organization had an involved and committed advisor, those relationships often benefited the student leaders and the organizations. Advisors helped students navigate the obligations of leadership, set visions for the organization, and empowered the student leaders to think critically about situations. Advisors often formed personal bonds with the individual student leaders, encouraging students to take care of themselves, to prioritize their academics, and filled roles as surrogate family. However, not every student leader benefitted from these roles and those that did not could feel left aside. Even those who did have close relationships, did not always find that the relationships benefitted them in every situation. Relationships are reciprocal, and in some cases, as with Henry, the decision to give back to the relationships had drastic implications.
Administration

“I think you have to probably establish yourself in like the universities eyes,” Sabre said. Students collectively referred to university faculty and staff as “the administration” or “the university.” Even once students did the work to establish themselves with the university administration, students felt conflicted about the nature of those relationships. On one side, they could name specific individuals who they developed strong relationships with and the benefits that those relationships brought. On the other side, students struggled with the feeling the university tokenized them, only listening to them because the students complained or so that the university would not be perceived as biased.

Students, however, did enjoy developing personal connections with university administrators. Skeptical of these relationships at first, Nora eventually realized the benefit:

I know more people that are in administration now. I didn’t care anything about that before I was involved and then I realized you should know these people so that we can work together and get things done on campus.

The developing relationships could bring personal fulfillment as well. Michele discussed the satisfaction of people recognizing her for her hard work:

I think it's kind of cool that being a student leader on campus you are recognized by professors and with administration and with people who are important, you know, important for like after college. So that can also help a little bit with relationships, because you know, a lot of people view leadership as an initiative or as a responsibility, so they're more apt to help you out or to recommend you for something.

Students cited staff members in the student activities office, the Dean of Students office, the Vice President of Student Affairs, the campus leadership development office, the counseling center,
the LGBT center, and faculty in the Women’s Studies department as people they developed relationships with over the course of their leadership.

Students did not simply gain university allies through their student leadership. In several cases, participants also developed friendships, or near-friendships, with university staff. Rory explained how these relationships developed:

I think when you’re a student leader and you work with administrators like that, in like a regular way where you’re talking to each other, you start to develop more—you don’t have to become best buddies, but you can develop friendly relationships with them. It becomes more than just about what you’re doing. Because if you’re going to see somebody all the time, you can’t just be like, “Yep there’s this and that,” and then just drop right out.

Henry developed relationships with two doctoral graduate assistants who worked with his organizations. These relationships pushed him to think more critically about his organization and eventually led him to decide to go to graduate school in student affairs:

But it ended up being one of most impactful experiences of my life was to connect to these amazing people who were able to articulate things that nobody of my peer group could articulate… because of their educational level to some degree, but also because of who they are. I was able to connect to people that I never anticipated having a deep relationship with.

Similarly, X-Ray connected with a staff member in the student activities office who helped him feel more connected to the university.

I was able to talk to [student activities administrator] about what was going on in my personal life and what was going on in general on campus without feeling like, “Oh, I
feel like I'm talking too much or maybe this isn't a conversation I should be having with a person at this status,” or something. I was able to come to [that person] and laugh and joke without feeling like I was over stepping boundaries. Like I knew where the boundary line was 'cause it was clearly stated and I tried my hardest not to go there. But every now and then like it was okay to step over the boundary like the staff/student boundary into a friend boundary. And that completely helped the situation.

Even when students had positive relationships with individual administrators, they had a sense that they could only accomplish so much. Rory explained, “So it’s like yes, I can do all this organizing, but at the end of the day we still have to answer to the administration.” For many, like Tom, “answering to the administration” required playing a heteronormative “game.” As Tom perceived it, this meant, at least in part, not pushing the boundaries of gender expression and sexuality too far:

As much as I love working with this administration there are parts of the administration that have made me uncomfortable, just because it’s the continued, I don’t know how else to say it without – it’s like unless you play the game, that is a very straight, White game, good luck, because you’re playing with the odds already stacked against you and they don’t even know you yet.

In Tom’s perception, if he pushed the norms too much he threatened his social capital with the administrators who shaped and upheld the social norms. For those students who felt they had a voice, as Wade did as the president of Umbrella, they still questioned the genuineness of the support:
I think a lot of it is because “We don't want to sound like we're homophobic so we're gonna just let you do your thing and we're gonna back you up,” like that's a lot of – I feel like that's a lot of what the support is.

As Kyle explained, “I think I was more able to access administrative figures because of leadership positions,” but he felt that he “alienated” staff members by “being critical” of the administration. As he summarized, “they don’t wanna talk about things that I’m bringing up.” Nora agreed that sometimes she brought up topics that the university staff may not wish to talk about:

Sometimes that’s just what it is, because you need to make people uncomfortable and you need to make sure that they know that something’s wrong. So it becomes difficult sometimes when you have someone that’s like “Hey, don’t do that.” That’s like actually we kind of need to because even though I respect you and I am glad that we have this connection, there’s still something wrong. And I think that can be translated in multiple different ways. I mean that can be interpersonal just one person and one person and that can be an entire organization and the entire administration. There’s always just this idea of like I mean everyone has different ways of negotiating how they feel about things, and a lot of people are like “Work in the system.” A lot of people are saying work out of the system and sometimes you negotiate that even though maybe it’s better not to.

Nora felt the pressure of balancing relationships, which often came with tangible reciprocal benefits like co-sponsorship dollars, with not allowing those relationships to be used to silence her or her organizations.

Balancing those relationships could also be difficult when not all organizations benefited in the same way. As mentioned above, X-Ray developed a personal bond with a student
activities staff person and that relationship allowed him to “cheat” the system and “jump a couple steps that would have took longer [for] most.” He used this relationship to connect to other resources. However, X-Ray recognized the privilege this gave him and his groups, reflecting, “[T]he new groups, they were unaware of what's going on most of the time. And because they only knew just talk to a, b and c they didn't know that d, e and f could also help.” Nora echoed this struggle to reconcile the privilege granted to certain groups based upon personal relationships:

I mean it really sucks sometimes because it’s nice to know that we can be like “Hey, can you help us out with this?” but it’s also like okay, what about the organizations that have just as much need here on campus that don’t have that person and it’s a real bummer sometimes. So I think there definitely is a difference between organizations just based on the people that you know.

While student leaders benefitted personally from the capital that the institution granted them based upon the status of their organization and their position within that organization, the student leaders also benefitted their organization through developing personal relationships with members of the administration. They could call upon those relationships for the benefit of their organizations. This capital could not be accessed by all organizations or all student leaders.

Students who connected with the university administration often felt conflicted about these connections. On one side, they felt personal satisfaction for the recognition, benefited from personal bonds to staff members, and could often leverage these relationships on behalf of their organizations. On the other side, those same students felt conflicted about the potential ways those relationships could be potentially leveraged to silence them, even if they did not see administrators having actually done so. The sheer fact that it could be done, that administrators
could silence the uncomfortable truths, as the students perceived them, about the institution, left the students concerned about the nature of their relationships with administrators.

Leaders of larger and more established groups most frequently discussed connections to university administration. Leaders of Umbrella, QPOC, Women’s, and Social Fraternity more readily identified these connections than did leaders of Trans* or Middle Sexualities. As student leadership overlapped, students could call upon relationships built in one organization for use in another organization. For example Kyle and Audre developed relationships through Social Fraternity and QPOC, respectively, which they leveraged to launch Activist.

**Peers**

Relationships with peers changed in many ways when students took on leadership roles in LGBTQ+ student groups. I discussed already how students gained social capital within their own organization and how students gained access to both a social justice network and a student leader network by moving into these roles. Much of that capital gained is, to be sure, based upon a changing relationship with their peers. However, relationships with peers changed in broader ways than simply with members and leaders of their organizations and with fellow student leaders. Relationships also changed with friends and people who did not access the network in the same way that these student leaders accessed it. Of the fifteen participants, eleven specifically referenced a relationship negatively impacted by their involvement in LGBTQ+ identity-based student leadership. They lost social capital within one friend network by gaining social capital in a network to which their leadership positions gave them access. Nora put it succinctly, “I have actually lost a lot of friends in this process.” Relationships with peers fractured for a variety of reasons, including that student leaders no longer had time to devote to
the relationship and that student leaders no longer perceived the world in the same manner as their friends.

Time commitments, both positively and negatively, impacted relationships for some student leaders. For example, many of the relationships built within their organizations and within social networks existed because the student leaders committed time and energy to those relationships. The amount of time dedicated to the student organization positively impacted those relationships. However, as student leaders began to spend an increasing amount of time in their organizations, it meant they spent less and less time in other arenas, often with friends. They built new relationships with people who shared their experiences and frequented the same spaces as them, and those people did not always end up being people they called friends before becoming student leaders. Rory explained, “You need to decompress when you’re a student leader and if you have friends that don’t get that, who don’t understand the experience, it can become more difficult to be friends with them.” For Guy, his obligations to his organization occupied all his free time, leaving him no time to dedicate to a friend not in his organization, explaining, “I don’t really have too much time where I can just be like, “Hey let’s hang out,” and so when he was [on campus], I didn’t really have time to stop and be friends with him.” That perception that they, as student leaders, no longer had time for anyone else manifested whether true or not. As Audre, explained, her friends stopped inviting her to participate:

I think a lot of relationships that changed were relationships with students who weren't student leaders. Because I think a lot of times it was kind of automatically assumed that I was busy and I was not interested. So people would be going out and I'd be like, “So what about me?” And they’d be like, “But you're always busy, so we didn't think you would even want to come.”
Whether the students leaders actually lacked time to spend with friends or not, friends perceived them as being too busy. They no longer had a shared understanding of their friendship, which threatened the capital granted by the relationship.

Some relationships fractured because friends did not understand the dedication to the leader’s student group. Henry developed a self-described “obsession” with his student groups and this put a close friendship under strain. Though the friend held various student leadership positions himself, they did not become part of his own identity in the same way they did for Henry. Henry explained:

I was completely and totally invested in [my organizations] in a way that even other people didn’t seem to be... And so with this friend in particular, it was very strenuous on our relationship because he perceived… that it became my obsession in a lot of ways. I became very driven to do a good job in these student organizations, to the point where I spent less time around my friends because I was trying to make sure that I was doing this work and trying to make sure that I was doing things well... I considered him a peer, I considered him a friend, and so for us to argue about how much time I was spending doing this stuff, and how I was always talking about these things, and he didn’t want to always talk about these things because [for him]… they were just the fun things that he did sometimes.

Similarly, Sabre pointed to a relationship with an ex-partner, explaining that she did not prioritize Umbrella in the same way he did:

[A]t the beginning of my presidency, that wasn’t a problem. But throughout the year, like it became an issue because she wasn’t interested in going to [Umbrella]. I think one time she like came to [Umbrella] like drunk, and made a fool of herself, and I’ve never
been so mad. Well, I probably have been in my life, but that really made me mad and she couldn’t understand why I was mad. And so little things like that, like not really caring about an event or something like that.

In these examples, relationships came under strain because Sabre and Henry began to internalize their own identity with the identity of their organization and develop a shared understanding of their own leadership success and the success of their organization. When others did not share this understanding, relationships became stressed.

Whereas Henry and Sabre attributed the tension in their relationships to the personal priority they placed on their organizations, Tom and X-Ray attributed the breakdown of their relationships to jealousy. They had “risen too high” for their friends. Tom explained:

As I’ve gotten more involved and more involved in leadership roles in particular, I have found that my peers who have chosen not to do so no longer— they’re much more critical of me, and they’re much more – it’s almost like, they see me rising and they want to pull me back down to their level because they don’t like the fact that I’m rising.

X-Ray concurred, pointing to a specific relationship:

But as once I became a leader… things just went downhill from there. Although I tried to fix that, it didn’t really work out. Then I was just, I was assumed to be an attention whore of sorts, just being told that most of the stuff I was talking about was fabricated just for attention. Or the only reason why I got my leadership role was because I slept with somebody or something like that. And though all of those weren't the case, I— yeah, things ended really badly for that relationship.
For Tom and X-Ray, friendships faltered because they achieved success. As their place on campus changed, they left some friendships behind. As they gained social capital with others, they lost social capital with certain friends.

Some friendships waned not because of a participant’s changing place on campus but instead because of a participant’s changing world view. For Nora and Packets Joy, as they grew into their identities through their leadership experiences, they were no longer the same people that their friends knew. Packets Joy explained:

I did actually lose a lot of my older friends… They didn't really understand the identity that I was learning about and stuff like that… I think because they kind of had expectations for me and I remember them literally saying I “have changed” like it's a bad thing.

Packets Joy did not just lose high school friends. They also left many of their early college friends behind:

I still have friends from my first year and they occasionally still text me, but I feel like we're always like on two different playing fields. We don't talk about our lives. We just talk about our interests more and I think that that's a very different relationship.

Nora also found herself moving away from longtime friends as she committed herself to being a leader for social justice:

So friendships have kind of just fallen by the wayside for lack of effort on both sides. I mean I have to take a certain amount of responsibility for that as well. And also I don’t think they really understand why I stopped hanging out with them. And it’s just become really complex, because the more that I learn about exclusivity and the oppressive systems, the more I’m like these are things that need to change. We need to change them
in ourselves and they are not— they don’t understand that. They think I’m being too sensitive or they think I’m just being a butt. And that’s not the case. It’s really hard to communicate that with someone who knows you as someone that you’re not anymore.

As Nora and Packets Joy developed in their understanding of social justice and system of oppression, they changed as individuals, changes reinforced through their student leadership roles. They simply no longer were the people that they had been when the friendships started.

**Family**

Though a less common occurrence across all participants, the impact of leadership positions on relationships with participants’ families is also an important theme. Seven participants—Nora, Olivia, Packets Joy, Sabre, Tom, Henry, and Wade—discussed the influence of their leadership roles on their relationships with family members. For these participants, taking on a leadership role in an LGBTQ+ group allowed them to reestablish connections, reopen conversations, and change perceptions of them with members of their family. Just as individuals have social capital with peers or advisors, the individuals have formal social capital with members of their family. Some people may have thick social capital with a family member, sharing a deep and profound familial bond, while others may have thinner social capital based upon a strained relationship. For seven participants in this study, their student leadership position helped inform the relationship they had with their family.

As participants became a voice of authority in their organizations, people around them, including their own families, saw them as experts with knowledge to impart. Wade explained that her mother, “[is] impressed by me and she doesn't see me as a little girl anymore. She doesn't see me as this little kid, she sees me as someone to learn from which is very interesting.”
Packets Joy also discussed their parents learning through them and how that learning shaped their relationship:

I do a lot of social justice stuff and there was a period of time when I was going home and I was feeling miserable every time I came home, because I would have all these experiences, all of these things that I wanted to talk about, [and my] parents would [be silent]… I think being a leader has sort of bestowed that opportunity to educate them as well, and now they put a lot of faith [in] and understand a lot of the stuff I do… It was the transition from me as being more passive to them seeing me as a leader, but now they're one of the strongest support networks I got.

Sabre felt his leadership roles allowed his mother to see him as successful and allowed her to begin to reconcile his coming out process:

Even in coming out to my mom, I think that she was very – like when I came out to her as a trans man, I don’t think she thought I could be successful because you so rarely hear about successful trans people. It’s always like homeless people and people who are unemployed and people who are being like beaten in alleys and stuff like that. So to show my mom and kind of like the rest of the BG student leader community that like, “Hi, I’m trans. I am very successful, I am very involved, I’m very proud and I’m very out,” kind of was able to show people, like, oh, trans people can function in society.

By being a successful student leader, Sabre’s mother could see him as a successful person.

Students did not just become voices of authority, though. Their roles and experiences also allowed them to reopen conversations closed off to them previously. Nora found that as she grew into her leadership identity, her mother would make positive and light-hearted commentary about previously avoided topics “and that’s something that never happened before.” Similarly,
Olivia reopened conversations about her sexuality with her mother through her leadership roles. As a teenager, Olivia had a difficult coming out process with her mother. After coming out, the two never talked about Olivia’s sexuality:

   So I come to college. We're still not talking about it. It was a thing that got swept under the rug again. We had those two conversations in high school and that was it. And I come to college and I wait forever to tell her that I'm involved in LGBT orgs and that I've had these leadership roles and I'm going into classrooms and talking about my experiences, and it took her a while but she started commending me for my different achievements. So when I told her that I had to do something for a meeting or that I was elected into this position or whatever, it took her a bit but she started to understand and started to appreciate what all I was doing, and I called her after the first [Middle Sexualities] meeting and I was just ranting and raving about all these different things that had gone on and how many people had shown up, and I could hear her tearing up. She was so happy for me.

Olivia’s success as a student leader, both in and out of the LGBTQ+ community opened the door for her to reconnect with her mother and begin the healing process. Olivia credited that to her involvement, saying, “Taking on the leadership roles in the LGBT community have actually kind of changed [my mother’s] perception.”

   Tom also connected his LGBTQ+ leadership experiences with rebuilding relationships with his family. Like Olivia, Tom had a difficult coming out process and his conservative family struggled to accept his sexuality. While Tom did not rebuild his relationship in the same way that Olivia did, he found an internal sense of confidence that allowed him to find comfort in his identity:
Being a student leader though taught me that not everyone is going to agree with you. Not everyone is going to see how things affected you, or understand parts of your identity. But the way to gain respect from people is not so much by submitting to their expectations of you, but rather, saying, “I don’t agree with your expectations, I understand where they’re coming from, and I know you believe them to be valid, but I’m not going to adhere to them because that’s oppressive to me”… They give you more respect when you’re able to stand up for yourself. And being a student leader taught me how to do that with my family. My family now, do they like the fact that I’m a gay man? No, by no means, but they have a certain level of respect for me because I am unwaivered in that. I have not only unwaivered in that, I have said, “I still love you and respect your opinions. But you cannot impose these things on me any longer, because I will not stand for them as a person who respects myself.” And they respect me for that.

Tom’s leadership within the community helped him establish himself as a leader in the eyes of his parents, regardless of how they felt about his identity. He developed an inner self-confidence that allowed him to live his life authentically and congruently, regardless of the pressure to be someone else or someone he is not. That confidence allowed him to accept himself and also to accept his family. In doing so, his family began to accept him.

For these seven students, serving in a leadership role in an LGBTQ+ group had important impacts on their familial relationships and informed their place within those relationships. While not a universal theme across all participants, or even a benefit from involvement in a certain type of position or a certain organization, the act of becoming an identified student leader conveyed a sense of accomplishment, success, or knowledge that allowed students to engage in conversations and begin healing old wounds with family members—or at least some of them.
Gaining capital based upon their student leadership position informed the social relationships of their family.

**The Interactive Campus**

“It’s like the entire campus is something to interact with instead of you’re just part of campus,” Nora said. As students became more involved as student leaders, moving into positional leadership roles, the campus opened up to them. They learned things and gained access to parts of campus they did not know existed previously. Their engagement reinforced itself. As they became more engaged, more opportunities came to them, and so they became more engaged on campus. Participating in the campus community made them feel a part of the campus community. They found their niche. They felt part of the fabric of the university. They felt as if they belonged.

**Engagement**

By becoming involved in student leadership, students gained access to areas of campus, what Packets Joy called the “inner mechanisms” of the university that the average student did not see. Kyle said his leadership roles “put me in different places that I wouldn’t have been otherwise.” For some leaders, like Matilda, these places were physical. She spoke about navigating to new buildings and that “there are a lot of areas of campus I didn’t even realize existed until I was a student leader.” Other students meant metaphorical places rather than physical places. Nora felt doors open to her through connections she formed:

Campus became much more interactive, so instead of me just walking through my day, it was me being like, “Okay, what can I do with this? What can I do with this? These are the resources that I know of. Okay, these are the things that I want to do.” It just became much more open. So things definitely changed and I think that’s partially because of
learning about campus and learning about people and making those connections, but I think it’s also because I changed as a person.

Rory felt that the proximity that high profile student leaders gained to university administrators connected them to campus:

> You get a different perspective with the way things work because, even if it’s just a little bit, you’re closer to the higher-ups on campus. You’re going to those offices almost, if not a daily or weekly basis, you’re making contact with administrators, staff. And you’re kind of learning your campus more, because so often you’re going to bump up against things, especially if you’re part of an LGBT group, you’re coming up against a lot of really thoughtful issues, like “What is diversity on our campuses?”

In taking on leadership roles, these students engaged in thoughtful conversations and felt like their voices mattered. They felt the university granted them a place at the table and they needed, and wanted, to be there. X-Ray explained, “Since most of the time when I was at a meeting or something, I felt like I was needed there. Even if I didn't say anything, just my presence was enough to make a difference.”

> When students gained access to what they perceived as important or impactful conversations, they began to engage more in their community. Matilda stated:

> I feel like I was more aware. Normally I’m one of those people like, I’m so like in my own head space that I really don’t pay attention to a lot of things. But I definitely feel like it made me, “Okay, you need to pay more attention to your surroundings so you do know if there’s something going on where you need to go, and like at least make people aware that it’s going on.”
Michele concurred with this sentiment, saying “It's made me more aware of my surroundings and the people that I am trying to serve and help.” As students engaged more with their community, it reinforced their commitment to their community and it became a reinforcing spiral. X-Ray explained, “It kept me wanting to continue what I was doing.”

Students found personal satisfaction by engaging with the campus community. As Rory said, “I think that leadership made college worthwhile.” Audre talked about the rewarding nature of student leadership, saying “I think that is probably one of the most positive things that comes out of being a student leader— is sometimes you can see material change.” That material change came in many forms, including policies and practices, but also the cultivation of more student leaders.

Engaging on campus also reinforced the learning students gained in the classroom. Wade eagerly spoke of connecting her classroom learning to her co-curricular learning:

I've learned four times as much from being involved on campus than in my classes. I have grown ten times as much from being involved on campus than being a student. It's that experience factor and it's that you live it rather than reading it in a book and that is what made me the person that I expect myself to be.

Nora concurred:

Being a leader and being involved in general on campus has allowed the academic to be applied to passions almost immediately. So instead of being like “Oh, I’m going to wait until I graduate until I pursue things,” it’s like, “No, I can do things now, still get a degree and have that experience, have that hands on, like let’s get down and dirty and work on this while we’re learning.”
Nora’s leadership opportunities reinforced her academic experiences, allowing her to put her learning into practice.

By becoming student leaders, students engaged with their own organization but they also engaged with the larger campus community. Participants consistently demonstrated this, regardless of position type or organization. The act of engaging at the organizational level led to further and ongoing engagement. They became part of the fabric of the institution.

**Belonging**

The student leaders also felt that their leadership roles gave them a place of their own on campus. As Rory said, “I belong at [institution], and I found that out through things that I cared enough about to be a leader.” Student leadership helped the campus feel smaller. Olivia explained:

I felt like I had a little bit more purpose, like I wasn't gonna just fade into the background of the 16,000, 20,000 students on campus, and that I would hopefully be able to help in some way, some capacity. I wasn't sure what yet, but I wanted to help other people.

Nora agreed:

I feel much more a part of campus now. My freshman year, I felt like a number, you know. I mean even though it’s small campus, I still felt like I’m just another student here and I’m just making it through. And I think that’s because I felt that way in high school and that just carried over here because I felt like I was in high school still. And then I became a student leader and things definitely changed.

The students did not simply stop feeling like a number. Some also developed institutional affinity and began to try and share that school pride with the members of their organizations. Jack began to participate in the school tradition of wearing the school colors on Fridays. He and
Wade began calling Umbrella meetings to order by using the school’s call and response cheer instead of simply flashing the lights. Student leadership gave Jack “more school pride or a larger understanding of the community at hand.”

Student organization leadership also helped students feel more welcomed at the University. Guy admittedly did not enjoy his time on campus during his first two years. He felt “trapped.” He begrudgingly returned to campus but found that by the end of his sophomore year:

[I] got a little bit more involved towards the tail end, so I was really starting to enjoy myself, probably around like March, and then got more involved my junior year. As I get more involved, I get more excited to actually come back and be in school.

Involvement kept Guy coming back to the university and eventually helped him shift from that begrudging attitude and feeling of being trapped to feeling excited about being on campus.

Audre echoed Guy. She discussed how her rising profile as a student leader impacted how she felt walking through campus:

I think as I got more and more involved I started to like campus more and it made campus more welcoming. So before, I could be in the [student union building] and not talk to anybody. I could literally be in and out and not see anyone. Not have to worry about getting stopped when I was walking to class, I was just able to just exist. And then that changed and it was like I had to understand that people wanted to talk to me, like people wanted to understand what I was doing and what I was consuming. People who knew me through [student leadership] genuinely just wanted to talk.

As a student leader’s profile became more prominent, they met and interacted with more members of the university community. As they became more integrated with the university, they
felt more accepted. X-Ray explained, “[K]nowing that there was just a large group of people that I knew, I didn't feel like a stranger when I walked into a building or well, into most buildings. So it was just that level of comfort really.” Tom saw this comfort as part of a reciprocal relationship:

I felt much more comfortable actually, because I would just look around at the institution and be like, “I’m doing something for this place, I’m investing in this place, and in this institution, and the people here.” And so by investing in it, I’m giving to them a certain amount of trust, and so I feel more comfortable in doing that. I’m trusting the institution is working in my best interest because I’m working in the best interest of the institution too, and they haven’t given me anything to question, but I understand how the institution works more, because I understand how it runs more and am more comfortable with it, even if I see something that I don’t like, at least I understand it. And having those bits of clarity adds to my comfortability.

As the student leaders engaged more with the people around them on campus, they enjoyed their time more on campus. As they engaged with people on campus, they knew more people and the campus felt more welcoming. Finally, as they engaged with the people on campus, they trusted that those people had their best interests at heart. This all contributed to a feeling that the student leaders belonged on campus and as part of the campus community.

Student leaders attributed some of their comfort on campus to the very organizations and spaces they created through their own organizations. Rory explained:

Honestly I think the majority of the organizations I’ve been involved in made me feel more comfortable on campus, both because I felt like I had people who got what I’m
dealing with to some extent. We would become friends, we dealt with a lot of shit together. It also just makes you feel like you have a place.

The student groups gathered like-minded people with similar interests and stories, providing a space to discuss topics that may have been ignored by the larger campus community. Nora said:

I notice with [QPOC] that I’m even more comfortable there, where we’re constantly talking—we’re queer people of color, so we’re all acknowledging that race does play a role in our sexual identity, and we have similar stories and backgrounds, so it feels they understand what’s going on with me, and then the way I identify is an issue with people sometimes, so within the community, it helps that I usually feel normal, like welcomed by everybody.

Physical spaces also played an important role. Multiple participants noted the importance of the campus LGBTQ+ center. The space provided students a place to informally gather, meet new friends, and develop community outside of the student organizations. Jack decided to stop leaving campus during his time between classes and instead started spending his time in the LGBTQ+ center. As he said, he “was forming friendships instead of sitting at home and watching Netflix.” He continued:

[T]he resource center is something that I really tapped into this year. For the first month, I was going there every single day. If I got out of class, I was like, “I’m not going to go home. I won’t get anything done.” So, I went to the resource center and still didn’t get anything done, but I was spending time with people.

The spaces created by organizations and in the LGBTQ+ center helped students feel more welcomed and accepted on campus.
As students engaged with their student organizations and took on leadership roles, they developed an affinity for the institution. They no longer felt like a number on campus. They felt like they knew people, knew the institution, and had spaces of their own. They had purpose and felt wanted. They began to enjoy their time on campus more, trusted in the institution more, and felt part of the campus.

Summary

The fifteen participants in this inquiry represented ten different LGBTQ+ student organizations at the university. All identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community and held leadership roles in a LGBTQ+ identity-based student organizations. Through fifteen interviews, two observations, and document analysis, four main themes emerged: gaining social capital, the visible leader, changing relationships, and the interactive campus. The theme of gaining social capital represented ways in which the student leader expanded their social capital as a result of being a student leader on campus. This theme had four sub themes: (1) institutionally created capital, (2) positional capital, (3) capital within one’s own group, and (4) joining a social network with two networks emerging, a social justice network and a student leader network. The second theme, the visible leader, included two subthemes: (1) the sentinel protectors and (2) being perfect. In this theme, I discussed the prominent roles that the student leaders attained on campus, the pedestals that others placed them on, and the resulting pressure to be perfect as a student leader. The third theme, changing relationships, represented four types of relationships that changed as the student leader took on leadership roles in the LGBTQ+ community, including relationships with advisors, university administration, peers, and family. The final theme, the interactive campus, has two subthemes: (1) engagement and (2) belonging. With this theme, I discussed how students engaged with the larger campus community as a LGBTQ+
student group leader and how their leadership roles made the students feel more a part of the campus community. Having introduced the themes, I now apply the findings to the stated research questions. I will also apply the framework of social capital, informed by the themes, to the research questions.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Having outlined the four main themes of gaining social capital, the visible leader, changing relationships, and the interactive campus, in this chapter I relate those themes to the stated research questions. In Chapter II, I introduced twelve constructs through which to view social capital. In this chapter, I connect the social capital constructs and whether they were seen in the data (see Table 6). Additionally, I connect the findings to the relevant literature base and established theories. Finally, I present implications for practice and future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

In this study, I proposed three research questions:

1. How do LGBTQ+ undergraduate students in positional leadership roles in a LGBTQ+ identity-based student group understand their own social capital?

2. How does having social capital impact LGBTQ+ student leaders’ sense of belonging and engagement with the university community?

3. In what ways are LGBTQ+ student leaders’ perceptions of social capital within one network impacted by their perception of their changing social capital in another network?

Throughout the discussion of the three research questions, I make reference to the twelve constructs of social capital originally outlined in Table 1. I summarize this discussion in Table 6. I outline each of the constructs, note whether the constructed was realized in the data, provide supporting examples of the construct, and note the degree of salience to the participants. The most important constructs have a high salience.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Capital Construct</th>
<th>Construct Realized</th>
<th>Supporting Example</th>
<th>Degree of Salience to LGBTQ+ Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Connection to members of their own organization. Participation in the Social Justice Network. Creation of nested small groups in Umbrella.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Participation in the Student Leader Network.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized reciprocity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Development of partnerships with other student leaders. Use of relationships to develop collaborations, to fulfill their mission of education and outreach, and to foster a more inclusive community</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced reciprocity</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Capital exchange without an expectation of equal return</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Creation of relationships with members of their own organization Benefits accrued from institutional capital through the advisory board, student organization retreat, and LeaderShape. Benefits accrued from the social capital cultivated for the organization by the student leaders who led the group previously</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Social Capital Construct and Related Findings of LGBTQ+ Student Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Capital Construct</th>
<th>Construct Realized</th>
<th>Supporting Example</th>
<th>Degree of Salience to LGBTQ+ Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Creation of the Social Justice Network through the loose association of shared values. Fostering of individual social capital as an exponent of positional social capital with those not formally linked to their organizations. Participation in the Student Leader Network through the shared identity of being a student leader.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Development of tightly woven relationships with: • their advisor • the Social Justice network Some also had dense connections with the members of their own organization.</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Knowledge of individuals but still had tenuous relationships with: • administrators • the Student Leader Network For some groups, intra-group capital was thin.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inward-looking</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Development of personal, private relationships with group members and the Social Justice Network. Working for the betterment of their own group.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward-looking</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fostering relationships with administrators and other student leaders to positively impact the campus climate.</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Developing relationships with other student leaders.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Developing relationships with advisors, administrators, and in some cases, with members of their own groups.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ1: How Do LGBTQ+ Undergraduate Students in Positional Leadership Roles in a LGBTQ+ Identity-Based Student Group Understand Their Own Social Capital?

Through this inquiry, I have operated from an understanding that social capital emerges from “personal connections and interpersonal interaction, together with the shared sets of values that are associated with those contacts” (Field, 2005, p. 19). Social capital represents those implied resources that a person has access to, derived from one’s place within the structure of social relations (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

One gained social capital by participating in a social network. In this study, multiple networks existed. There were those networks external to one’s own organization—the social justice network and the student leader network. However, the organizations were themselves networks. The student leaders and group members were connected to each other through a shared commitment to the group. Student leaders could invest and grow social capital within their own organization while they simultaneously invested and grew social capital external to their organization—what Putnam and Goss (2002) referred to as bridging and bonding social capital.

Bonding social capital brings together people who share an important identity, while bridging social capital connects disparate individuals (Putnam & Goss, 2002). Participants shared an identity with their fellow group members, that of a member of Umbrella, of Social Fraternity, of QPOC, and so on. They gained intra-group capital that more strongly linked them to each other and reinforced the norms and values of the organization. Participants also gained bonding social capital with their fellow student leaders within the Social Justice Network. United through a shared commitment for justice, and often through a marginalized identity, participants created bonds that supported each other and helped each other navigate sometimes
difficult situations. In those ways, bonding capital provided a social safety net for individuals (Putnam & Goss, 2002). Audre spoke of the comfort of external validation, of knowing “I wouldn’t be completely looked at like I was crazy.” Henry discussed the safety net which allowed him to be “open and vocal about issues.” By developing relationships with others who shared their identities, building that bonding social capital, participants felt empowered to continue to work and validated for their efforts.

Some theorists have proposed building intra-group social capital, or bonding social capital, through nesting smaller groups inside larger groups (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Nested groups build social capital because “listening and trusting are easier in smaller settings. One-on-one, face-to-face communication is more effective at building relationships and creating empathy and understanding that remote, impersonal communication” (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003, p. 276). Umbrella, the largest organization included in this study, intentionally used nested small groups to build relationships between members. The suborganizations of QPOC, Trans*, Spirituality, and Middle Sexualities were all nested small groups. However, Umbrella also used office hours and informal gatherings to build trust between group members. Umbrella’s weekly post-meeting trip to the local ice cream parlor was effective for creating a loose nested small group. Members could share concerns and stories, build trust and rapport with the leaders of the group. These nested small groups helped foster bonding social capital, strengthening the overall network of the organization. With a stronger network, Umbrella had a higher level of membership buy-in than other organizations included in this study. By cultivating bonding social capital, the overall strength of the group was reinforced, freeing the leaders of the organization to focus energies on cultivating social capital external to the group, that of bridging social capital.
Whereas bonding social capital connects individuals who share an important identity, bridging social capital connects people across identities. Participants formed bridging social capital with administrators and with members of the Student Leader Network. Though participants shared an identity of being a student leader with other members of the Student Leader Network, I propose that these relationships were bridging and not bonding social capital. Generally, the LGBTQ+ student leaders did not share important identities with other members of the network, and while being a student leader is an identity, I propose it is a lesser identity for participants. Instead, participants created social capital with members of the Student Leader Network through forming relationships built on norms of “generalized reciprocity” (Putnam & Goss, 2002, p. 7).

This generalized reciprocity “refers to a continuing relationship of exchange that is at any given time unrequited or imbalanced, but that involves mutual expectations that benefit granted now should be repaid in the future. Friendship, for example, almost always involves generalized reciprocity” (Putnam, 1993, p. 172). The student leaders did not seek out intentional, equal trades with each other. Collaborations and partnerships emerged, but without the explicit understanding of direct reciprocity. There was little notion of direct swapping, the “I do this now so that you will do this later.” Rather, they sought out partnerships with other student leaders on campus believing that both parties could mutually benefit over the course of the relationships. The leaders of the LGBTQ+ student groups used these relationships to form collaborations, to fulfill their mission of education and outreach, and in an attempt to foster a more inclusive campus community. Student leaders built reciprocal relationships through a mutual trust (Putnam, 1993) predicated on a shared identity as a student leader. No matter what group they led, or how they demonstrated their leadership, participants felt connected to other student
leaders. As Henry put it, “I felt connected to other student leaders on campus because we were leaders.” Student leaders formed a shared set of values (Field, 2005) of what it meant to be a student leader at this institution.

When one has social capital, it functions as an exponent. As Grootaert (2001) explained, it is “not just an input into the production function, but it is also a shift factor (or exponent) of the entire production function” (p. 17). When a student has capital, that student can more easily create more capital. Social capital is a relational construct. Student leaders formed circles of trust, both internal and external to their organizations that extend their relationships and influence (Fukuyama, 2001). In fact, the more students used their social capital, the better it could become (Ostrom, 2009). In this way, student leaders used the institutionally created and positional social capital granted to them to develop their own personal social capital. Some student leaders gained access to administrators by the nature of their position; these were relationships predicated on the responsibility of the position. For example, as treasurer of QPOC, X-Ray naturally had access to the student activities administrator he referenced through the daily responsibilities of the treasurer position. However, X-Ray used that social capital granted by his position to form a deeper, personal connection with the administrator. He leveraged that relationship for his organization’s benefit, allowing him to “skip” steps or find alternative paths when he hit resistance, but he also leveraged the relationships for personal benefit, using the relationships as a way to process and gain a further understanding “what was going on in general on campus.” While any treasurer may have had access to the same positional social capital that X-Ray did, he used that capital as an exponent, investing in the relationship for his personal and organizational benefit.
The relationships, the social capital, formed between these student leaders and other student leaders, administrators, and advisors supports Renn and Bilodeau’s (2005a) argument that student leaders of identity-based groups gained access to a larger community of supportive individuals on campus. Students developed relationships both inside and outside of their own organizations they could call upon if needed. Renn and Bilodeau presented this as students connecting to allies on campus. In the language of social capital, the student cultivated social capital that they could invest in and call upon if needed.

The participants in this study demonstrated social capital as both a public and private good. As a public good, the entire campus LGBTQ+ community benefited in some ways though the relationships and connections fostered by the individual student leaders. Participants engaged in the larger student leader network, potentially creating a more inclusive community for all students on campus. They formed collaborations with a diverse array of student leaders and student groups, spreading the reach of their organizations. They developed relationships with university administrators and joined high-level conversations about inclusion and diversity at the institution. Their connections gave them a network of allies to call upon, not only in a crisis, but also to smooth the bureaucratic process that slowed other groups down. They served as highly visible role model for members of the LGBTQ+ community, allowing other students to see themselves in the student leaders. As a private good, the student leaders gained access to mentors who challenged and pushed them to think more critically. They gained public recognition, a visibility that opened doors for them and granted them an instantaneous rapport with potential members of their organizations. They created safety nets for themselves that helped them self-care and better navigate bureaucratic systems. People saw them as an authority and expert, and their opinions carried extra weight in conversations.
The data from this study did support some of the critiques of social capital. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) proposed that most people did not set out to build social capital. Indeed, participants did not attribute intentionality to their relationships building. Instead, they saw it as the natural function and obligation as their roles as student leaders within the LGBTQ+ community. The social capital gained did exacerbate inequalities between the organizations (Coleman, 1990). Umbrella was the largest, most high profile LGBTQ+ student group. Their leaders often benefited much more from social relationships and networks than the leaders of the other groups. Umbrella had more capital to begin with, and because of that they had access to networks and circles which granted them even more capital. For example, Audre had substantial social capital within the overall LGBTQ+ community, but because she lacked the backing of Umbrella, access to certain networks and circles was denied to her.

Both individuals and groups fostered and created social capital. Putnam and Goss (2002) called this informal and formal social capital, comparing interactions and relationships of formal associations with informal and unstructured associations. Formal capital came through a student’s group membership, whereas informal social capital came through loose ties between people. For example, an individual student leader, such as Sabre, benefitted both from the formal social capital cultivated by generations of Umbrella student leaders but he also benefitted from the informal social capital he cultivated himself. Umbrella, in return, not only benefitted from the capital the group at large had earned and invested upon, but benefitted from the new capital created by Sabre. This individual and group social capital served as exponents to each other—because Sabre had formal social capital through Umbrella, he could more readily cultivate informal social capital as a leader of Umbrella, both capital for the benefit of Umbrella and capital which he could take with him when he left Umbrella.
Putnam argued that networks had value because “social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups” (Putnam, 2002, p. 19). This can be seen in comparing groups and individuals. For example, comparing the collaborations of Umbrella and Trans* demonstrated how a group’s social capital can inform the individual student leader’s social capital. Umbrella, with a well established reputation and therefore a place of prominence in multiple networks, frequently called upon the social justice and the student leader networks for collaborations with other organizations. Trans* did not benefit from the same place in the network, and Guy as president acknowledged that he did not have time to create a better network for the organization. As a result, Trans* could not call upon the network in the same way and was unable to secure collaborations, which negatively impacted the productivity of the group. Trans* was not as productive as Umbrella, in part because it lacked the same formal social capital as an organization as Umbrella. This affected Guy’s individual ability to invest and grow informal social capital. He had less access to networks because Trans* had less access to networks. He still could have called upon the networks, attempting to grow informal social capital himself, but that would require a greater amount of input energy than if he had been granted formal social capital by the organization. He had positional social capital, but he had less of it than officers of other organizations. Even if Guy had invested in the network individually, both for the benefit of himself and the group, he likely still would have been less productive, as the investment would require more input energy to achieve the same outcome achieved by a leader of a Umbrella, for example. Guy noticed this difference himself, noting the difference in how people interacted with him when he took on an executive board position in Umbrella rather than be the President of Trans*. Even in a lower hierarchical position, he still had better—and easier—access to
networks through his association with Umbrella. Through that access, he could be more productive and better invest in social capital.

In this manner, the intersection of social capital fostered by groups and fostered by individuals highlighted Bourdieu’s (1984) discussion of power relationships. Relationships existed between the student leaders of the LGBTQ+ identity-based groups. Some groups, like Umbrella, had more power than others did, such as Women’s Organization. Though the organizations did not function in direct competition to each other, a natural tension existed between the two organizations, even if friendship circles and officers overlapped. Though individuals may have had social capital with each other, the power relationship between the groups meant that a tension still existed between the organizations, regardless of individual relationships. In this way, a group’s social capital shaped individual social capital.

Similarly to bonding and bridging social capital, Putnam and Goss (2002) also proposed thick and thin social capital. Thick social capital was densely woven and deeply felt, while thin capital was tenuous when compared to thick capital. Participants developed both thick and thin social capital through their leadership roles. Many had thick social capital within their own organization, with their advisor, and within the Social Justice Network. For example, Audre and X-Ray developed thick social capital with each other through their leadership journey, but Audre also developed a robust relationship with other members in QPOC, with her advisors and with other student leaders in the Social Justice Network, such as the president of the Black Student Organization. Participants also had thin social capital with administrators, their peers, and within the student leader network. While they were connected to these people, those connections are tenuous compared to the dense relationships of thick social capital. For example, many participants felt deeply connected to the members of their own group, with an intense sense of
responsibility and obligation extending from that feeling. Those same people felt connected to other student leaders, but that connection was tenuous when compared to the connection felt with the student’s group members.

Putnam and Goss (2002) also proposed inward and outward looking social capital. Inward looking social capital was private regarding, promoting the interests of the group’s own members while outward looking social capital was public facing, promoting the public good. Participants had both inward and outward looking social capital. They have personal, private, inward facing relationships with members of the Social Justice Network and members of their organizations. They had outward, public facing relationships with administrators and members of the Student Leader Network. However, their outward looking social capital was limited. In their organizations, the student primarily worked to better the experiences primarily of the LGBTQ+ community within the context of this campus and local community. A select few engaged in large scale activism and advocacy work on behalf of the regional, national, and international LGBTQ+ community but they did so as individuals outside of their roles as student leaders within these student groups and those roles did not directly impact their organization or its members. Their inward facing social capital had more impact on their role in their student organization than their outward facing social capital.

The social capital student leaders possessed in this study supports the concept that, while all networks have both, some relationships are horizontal, “bringing together agents of equal status and power” while others are vertical, “linking unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence” (Putnam, 1993, p. 173). Putnam explained that horizontal networks are web-like, where vertical networks are pole-like. Within this study, participants had horizontal social capital with their fellow student leaders. They had vertical social capital with
advisors, administrators, and in some cases, members of their own group. This crossing of types, trying to navigate both horizontal and vertical relationships, may account for the strained relationships leaders of Umbrella and Social Fraternity experienced when they held their peers accountable. They were trying to balance horizontal capital with their members as friends and peers while also incorporating vertical social capital formed by a hierarchical group structure.

Putnam proposed that “a vertical network, no matter how dense and no matter how important to its participants, cannot sustain social trust and cooperation” (Putnam, 1993, p. 174). Participants demonstrated this concept through their wary and conflicted emotions concerning their relationships with members of the university administration. Individual student leaders liked individual administrators, and those students benefited from those relationships, but they still viewed the overall basis of the relationship with distrust, concerned how the administrators would leverage the relationship.

Students combined their positional social capital, their institutionally created capital, and the place their leadership positions granted them within networks to form a type of organizational capital (see Figure 5). This capital represented the cumulative sum of the social capital granted to the student through their leadership positions. It was the access they had

![Figure 5. Formation of Organizational Social Capital](image-url)
through their positions and was a summation of all of their leadership roles. For example, if a student was active in more than one leadership position, that student drew upon the positional social capital, the institutional social capital, and their access to social networks from all their organizations.

This organizational social capital existed on an intersecting continuum, where their organizational social capital interacted with the amount of social capital fostered individually (see Figure 6). Along the horizontal axis, organizational social capital, a student benefitted from the amount of social capital granted by the positional leadership role(s) held and in what organization(s) they held the role(s). Some roles, such as president granted more social capital than others roles, such as secretary. Some organizations also granted more positional social capital than others, based upon the group’s place within the institution and various social networks. For example, the president of Social Fraternity had more positional social capital than

![Diagram](image_url)

*Figure 6. The Interaction Between Individual Social Capital and Organizational Social Capital.*
the pledge educator of Social Fraternity. However, the president of Umbrella had more positional social capital than the president of Social Fraternity. Students often held more than one positional leadership role at any one time and the roles typically served as additives to each other. For example, Michele held positional leadership roles in Umbrella, Women’s, and Spirituality. All her roles informed her place on the continuum, granting her more organizational social capital with each role. The groups demonstrated what Cohen and March (1974) called fluid participation:

The participants in the organizations vary among themselves in the amount of time and effort they devote to the organization; individual participants vary from one time to another. As a result, standard theories of power and choice seem to be inadequate; and the boundaries of the organization appear to be uncertain and changing. (p. 3).

This fluid participation impacted the organizations’ amount of conferred organizational social capital, which evolved over time. Social capital changed as the boundaries of the organization changed. On the vertical axis was the student’s individual social capital. In some cases, this social capital was fostered based on the individual’s own personality and intentionally developed connections. Even though Rory had limited positional social capital through Social Fraternity, they connected personally with many members of the LGBTQ+ community through intentional outreach and the power of their personality. Rory was well liked and was friends with many members of the community. That gave them social capital upon which they could trade and invest. As discussed above, X-Ray had positional social capital with the student activities administrator by being the treasurer. However, he invested in this relationship and developed a personal connection with that administrator. The social capital of that investment was his own individual social capital, external of the nature of his position.
These intersecting continua can be converted into a diagram (see Figure 7) to help us better understand the effect of a students’ place along the intersection of organizational and individual social capital. I have established four types of student leaders, as informed by their individual and organizational social capital: (a) charismatics, (b) influencers, (c) leaders in training, and (d) good lieutenants. Charismatics are those students who lack organizational social capital but who benefit from high levels of individual social capital. For example, Rory had limited organizational social capital. He was the President of Social Fraternity, but Social Fraternity did not benefit from being well placed in various networks. It was not well known within the larger campus community. It did not benefit from institutionally created capital. However, Rory was well liked. He was connected within the networks as an individual, outside of the expectations of his organizations and positions. He is the Charismatic, the student leader whose social capital is primarily informed by one’s individually created social capital.

\[\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{Charismatics} & \text{Influencers} \\
\hline
\bullet \text{Rory} & \bullet \text{Sabre} \\
\text{Leaders in Training} & \bullet \text{Guy} \\
\bullet \text{Matilda} & \text{Good Lieutenants}
\end{array}\]

*Figure 7.* Types of Student Leaders as Informed by Organizational and Individual Social Capital.
Sabre, on the other hand, had organizational social capital as well as individual social capital. Sabre led Umbrella, which was well connected in networks, benefitted from institutionally created capital, and conferred influence on its president. Sabre also individually connected himself to other members of the community. Multiple participants identified Sabre as the reason they took on a leadership position. Sabre was the Influencer, a student leader whose social capital was shaped by high levels of both individual and organizational social capital.

Guy had some organizational social capital. He held multiple leadership positions, including the President of Trans* and Facilitator of QPOC. However, Guy had limited individual social capital. While he was friends with many of the members of the Social Justice Network, he did not occupy a place of prominence. He could potentially invest in these relationships, cultivating more individual social capital. Guy’s combination of low individual social capital and high organizational social capital made him an example of the type Good Lieutenant.

Finally, Matilda represented the Leaders in Training. She only served for one year as secretary in Women’s Organization, a position that did not confer much positional social capital, in an organization that did not benefit from much institutionally created capital or a place of prominence within the social networks. Additionally, Matilda did not cultivate individual social capital. She was not well connected to other members of the networks. She had low organizational social capital and low individual social capital.

These four types of student leaders help us gain an understanding of a student leader’s social capital. No one type of student leader is inherently better than the other. Not every student needs to be an Influencer. However, this is a lens through which to evaluate the types of student leaders, their connections to various networks, and their corresponding social capital.
RQ2: How Does Having Social Capital Impact LGBTQ+ Student Leaders’ Sense of Belonging and Engagement With the University Community?

The proposed relationship (see Figure 1) between engagement, social capital, and belonging was demonstrated in the data. However, this relationship also became a reinforcing cycle. As students became engaged, and developed relationships on campus, they felt they belonged on campus, and by that sense of belonging, they became more involved, beginning the cycle again (see Figure 6). The social capital student leaders gained with other student leaders, administrators, and advisors supports Renn and Bilodeau’s (2005a) argument that student leaders of identity-based groups gained access to a larger community of supportive individuals on campus. Students developed relationships both inside and outside of their own organizations that made them feel welcome on campus. For example, Jack became involved in Umbrella and

Figure 8. Cyclical Relationship Between Engagement and Belonging. As students become engaged, they develop social capital, which fosters a sense of belonging within the university community that leads them to become more engaged with the community.
developed a deeper connection to other student leaders on campus, outside of the LGBTQ+ community. These connections made him feel more connected to the campus community and he began to buy into the rituals and traditions of the institution. This sense of belonging led him to become even more engaged on campus, actively attending other organization’s campus events and participating in campus discussions. Jack’s engagement with Umbrella gave him social capital with his peers, which led him to develop a sense of belonging on campus, which encouraged him to become more involved, which amplified his social capital, and so on.

In 1989, Schlossberg proposed the idea of “mattering” and how making students feel like they mattered contributed to a sense of community. Nearly twenty years later, Schlossberg’s argument holds true and social capital gives us a language to evaluate and frame the discussion of ways students feel like they matter. Schlossberg (1989) argued that “mattering refers to our belief, whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else. This belief acts as a motivator” (p. 9). She continued, “people need to feel that they count, they belong, they matter” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 11). The idea that students felt they mattered on campus aligns with what respondents perceived about their own engagement and belonging on campus. Audre explained that, “I think as I got more and more involved, I started to like campus more and it made campus more welcoming.” She went on to explain how she had to adjust to people wanting to stop and talk to her as she walked through the student union, or wanted to know what she was thinking or reading. In this sense, Audre was discovering that she mattered to people on campus. This sense of mattering, of belonging, was the result of the connections and relationships she developed on campus. She took on leadership positions, which invited her into networks and circles, which thrust her into a visible role on campus that made people feel connected to her even if they did not know her directly, which meant that people continually engaged her in dialogue that made
her feel like she mattered on campus. Part of her sense of mattering was predicated on her having and investing in social capital with those around her.

The social capital cycle fits well within our understanding of how student involvement impacts a student’s college experience. Students engaged and integrated into the fabric of the university should persist to graduation (Tinto, 1993). These “experiences outside the classroom influence subsequent experiences in the college and, in turn, influence persistence” (Tinto, 1998, p. 169). In other words, the interactions a student has on a daily basis on campus informs the student’s overall collegiate experience, and that student should be more likely to return to the university, moving towards graduation. Tinto (1998) wrote:

One thing we know about persistence is that involvement matters. The more academically and socially involved individuals are – that is, the more they interact with other student and faculty – he more likely they are to persist. And the more they see those interactions as positive and themselves as integrated into the institution and as valued members of it (i.e., validated), the more likely it is that they will persist. (p. 168)

This positive social interaction can be seen as the cultivation of social capital. In this study, students who had social capital felt like they were part of the fabric of the university and took part in a dynamic academic and social environment. They became more integrated in the university community which then increased the student’s commitment to the university community (Tinto, 1993). They not only felt they were part of the fabric of the university themselves, they helped build the fabric for other people.

Through engaging with members of the university community, students developed trust with the university community. Putnam (2003) explained that “personal interaction generates information about the trustworthiness of other actors that is relatively inexpensive and reliable”
That is, the interactions between individuals convey information about the dependability and reliability of the relationship between individuals. This information can be acquired readily, with little cost—social or otherwise—and shapes the interaction between the parties. As Tom said, “And so by investing in [the university], I’m giving to them a certain amount of trust… I’m trusting the institution is working in my best interest because I’m working in the best interest of the institution too.” The idea of social trust was “understood as the general inclination of people to trust their fellow citizens” (Hall, 2002, p. 32). It arises from the norms of generalized reciprocity people form with each other (Putnam, 1993), the idea that people are working together towards a better good but without an expectation of explicit, equitable trading. Tom was not giving a quantifiable amount of effort to the University community with the expectation of receiving an equal quantifiable return on his investment. Instead, Tom saw himself as working for the betterment of the university community and, as such, the natural return was that the university would support him.

Tinto’s (1993) idea of social integration was imperative to developing this trust, however. As Putnam and Feldstein (2003) explained, “social capital is necessarily a local phenomenon because it is defined by connections among people who know each other.” If student leaders were not socially integrated on their campus (Tinto, 1993), part of a peer group (Weidman, 1989) or involved in their campus community (Astin, 1984/1999), they may not develop social capital sufficient enough to develop trust with the University community. To develop trust, students needed to be socially integrated with the university. They needed to have “personal interactions” with members of the community in order to gauge dependability and credibility (Putnam, 2003, p. 172).
Weidman (1989) proposed that undergraduate socialization depended, in part, on interpersonal interactions. In Weidman’s (1989) model (see Figure 4), these interpersonal interactions produced normative pressures that shaped student experiences during campus. These normative pressures did not just shape the student, though. They also informed the context in which the student experienced the environment. They are the norms that inform behavior and people’s expectations of each other. In the language of social capital, norms of behavior help foster trust because people act in predictable and expected ways (Putnam, 2002). Though people may have been naturally inclined, as Hall (2002) proposed, to trust people, this natural inclination was confirmed through personal interaction achieved through social integration. Participants in this study affirmed this in their discussion of relationships with peers, advisors, and administrators.

Students felt that being a leader of an LGBTQ+ identity-based student group made the campus more “interactive,” as Nora called it. They began to form relationships, developed collaborations, and joined high-level conversations about the future of the institution. They developed connections across campus and felt like they were part of something bigger than themselves. Student leaders identified a shared, communal identity of being a student leader, regardless of the type of group they led. The student leaders no longer felt like a number, but rather they felt welcomed and comfortable on campus. They developed institutional affinity. Some, like Nora and Wade, began to put their learning from the classroom into practice. Students felt they had people they could call upon for assistance and that people within the community recognized them as key figures on campus.

However, the social capital formed through these interactions did not stay with them in perpetuity. When students left positional leadership roles, they forfeited some social capital
because they no longer were perceived as the expert on the topic or a leader within the community. This loss could be devastating for students whose leadership identities and psychosocial identities had merged, as proposed by Renn and Ozaki (2010). These students saw themselves as Renn’s (2007) queer activists, and the loss of voice challenged how they perceived themselves and their place in the community. Henry expressed his frustration, explaining, “I sort of wasn’t regarded as a student leader anymore in a lot of ways… [A]s a student leader and as somebody who very much seen myself as a student leader, that was difficult.” Henry’s identities had merged but he found that the loss of position meant the larger community did not see his identities in the same ways he saw his own identities. He went from feeling central to the community, of feeling like he mattered, to feeling marginal (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) explained:

Every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises. The larger the difference between the former role and the new role the more marginal the person may feel, especially if there are no norms for the new role. (p. 8)

Henry’s sense of marginality, the conflict between how he perceived his place in the community and how the community perceived his place, eroded his trust with the community to a degree. He became critical of the exclusionary circles of which he had previously been an excited member. Hall (2002) explained, “[S]hifts in a person’s material position may lower his levels of social trust by reinforcing a sense of disadvantage vis-à-vis others and removing him from networks that provide social integration” (p. 43, emphasis in original). Even though Henry had
been highly engaged with the University community, his loss of position and the resultant loss of social capital, hurt his access to social networks and hurt his sense of belonging with the institution.

**RQ3: In What Ways Are LGBTQ+ Student Leaders’ Perceptions of Social Capital Within One Network Impacted by Their Perception of Their Changing Social Capital in Another Network?**

Gaining social capital within one network did have an impact on social capital within other networks. Student leaders developed a visible identity on campus. For some, this meant that individuals within the community held them up as shining lights for the community. This led some people within the larger LGBTQ+ community to view the student leaders as celebratory examples, seeking out their support and validation. Others began to resent their visibility, and friendships could be threatened. The student leaders could more easily establish relationships within the community because of the external validation received from outside the community. However, the flip side of being highly visible and being celebrated was that students felt held to higher expectations. Student leaders could lose capital within the LGBTQ+ community if they were perceived as not being the ideal version of an LGBTQ+ student leader. This is challenging, given what we know about student development theory. Many student leaders indicated they moved into leadership roles during their sophomore year. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded in their review of psychosocial identity development theory that “students probably make important progress in this facet” during college (p. 261). However if students are still making meaning of their own identities, it may be difficult for them to support their peers in their meaning making processes, even if it is an expectation of the positions the student leaders hold. Additionally, in our understanding of students’ intellectual and ethical
development, students move from seeing the world in a black and White context, where a clear right and wrong exits, to seeing shades of grey, where all opinions are valid, to seeing the world as relative, where some opinions are more valid than others (Evans et al., 2010; Perry, 1970). Issues of identity and language are highly complex, however, as are the politics that surround them. If students leaders are highly visible, and by consequence are expected to be fully versed in complex issues of identities and language, while they are in a place where they believe a clear right and wrong exits, this could threaten the student leader’s social capital within their group. Or if they have moved to an understanding of the relative worth of certain opinions, while their group members are in a place of dualism, this may threaten the social bonds of the organization. Further research is needed on the intersection of social capital, and the impact the creation or loss of social capital, with a student leader’s psychosocial identity development and a student leader’s intellectual and ethical development.

Becoming a leader of a LGBTQ+ student group cost most participants at least one friendship. For some, they no longer had the time to dedicate to the friends who they did not see regularly at meetings or events. They became friends, instead, with the people who participated in the same networks in which they participated. Their relationships dissipated with those people who were not part of their everyday networks, including the Social Justice Network and the Student Leader Network. Student leaders also lost relationships with peers because they perceived their friends to not understand their new found purpose with their student organization. They felt that their friends did not understand why the student leader wanted to be on campus all day, or why they took their organization’s reputation so seriously. Some student leaders lost friends from what they interpreted as jealousy; the student had risen too high for the friend’s liking. Finally, some lost friends because they developed new understandings of themselves as
individuals, found new passions for social justice, and their student organizations reinforced these ideas. The student leaders no longer viewed themselves as the people they were when the friendship began and they no longer felt connected to their former friends. No matter the exact reason the friendship ended, most student leaders could point to a negative impact their leadership role had played in a friendship.

This loss of friendship potentially fits within the LID Model (Komives et al., 2006), if it is assumed that the student leader is progressing in developing a leadership identity at a different pace than some of their friends as a result of the student’s LGBTQ+ leadership role. In the latter stages of the LID Model, students begin to focus on their passions and their visions for society. In Stage 5 of the LID Model, generativity, students’ views of leadership moved toward an understanding that they “need to be true to myself in all situations and open to grow” (Komives et al., 2006, p. 414). In the final stage, Integration/Synthesis, students felt a need to be congruent and authentic, and felt a push to leave their environments better when they graduated (Komives, et al., 2006). It is possible that as students progressed in their understanding of themselves as leaders, their commitment, their passion, and vision for society no longer matched the perceptions of the people they were friends with at an earlier time in the students’ leadership development. The notion that the student leaders were no longer the person they had been when the friendship started also supports Renn and Ozaki’s (2010) proposed merged leadership and psychosocial identities. If the student leaders had moved from seeing themselves, for example, as both queer and as a student leader, to seeing themselves as queer student leaders—intrinsically linked, and identities that can no longer be viewed separately—then the student leaders truly are not the people they had been when the friendship started. How they see themselves, and how
they see their place in the world and their obligation to it, has fundamentally changed through the merging of their identities.

For seven of the fifteen participants, changing perceptions of themselves as student leaders allowed capital to potentially be rebuilt or strengthened in their families. Though not a major theme, this was important enough for some student leaders that it warranted discussion. Through their leadership roles, students developed a visible leadership identity and became perceived as an authority on campus. They were viewed as an expert in their area. They had noticeable success. Students perceived that these achievements shaped the way their families viewed them. For some, success on campus influenced their relationships with their family members. Through this, some participants were able to reopen conversations about their sexuality and gender identity with family members. Though it did not solve all strained family dynamics, it gave the students confidence that equipped them to continue these conversations with their loved ones.

University administrators fostered trust with student leaders through the access to information and through access to closed networks, such as the advisory board and LeaderShape. By the information shared with certain student leaders, and the meetings and events they received invitations to, the institution granted certain leaders social capital and denied it to others. They developed trust with certain leaders of certain groups, and encouraged those student leaders to connect with other designated student leaders. As student leaders gained social capital with administrators, this could positively impact their social capital within the Student Leader Network. Their connections with administrators, or their institutionally created capital, invited them into circles that reinforced or fostered relationships with other student leaders. Some student leaders struggled with what they perceived as the implication of this
access, worrying that the university administration would seek to silence them or steer them away from controversial topics by leveraging the relationships between the administrators and the organization leaders. There was no direct evidence of this type of reciprocity, but some student leaders chaffed under the possibility that it could possibly exist. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) proposed that a “we story” needs a “they.” Students build trust by sharing “I stories” and foster connections by building “we stories.” We stories work best with a common enemy or target, someone to work against or situate in opposition towards. By viewing the administration as a collective whole, a singular being that reinforced oppressive systems and could leverage relationships with students to silence them, the student leaders formed a “they” who could be cast as opposition. With a “they story,” the student leaders could reinforce and strengthen the “we stories” formed with other student leaders, regardless of individual connections with individual administrators.

**Moving Beyond the Questions: Other Insights Gained from the Inquiry**

Data collected for the study affirmed much of the existing literature base. Identity-based groups remained an important way to create spaces for LGBTQ+ students to feel their stories were heard and reflected (Dugan, Kusel, et al., 2012). Serving in student leadership roles supported Renn’s (2007) involvement-identification cycle, where involvement in the community strengthened the student’s LGBTQ+ identity, which led to further involvement in the community, which further strengthened their identity. Student also gained self-confidence as a result of their leadership supporting Ostick’s (2011) findings.

The leaders of the organizations included in this study also supported the development path of the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2006). Participants articulated seeing themselves evolve from understanding leadership as something other people
did, to seeing themselves as a leader because they held a position, to believing they were a leader who could create change regardless of positional power. The importance of mentors, including faculty, staff, and peers, echoed Renn’s (2007) discussion of forming LGBT or Queer identities for student leaders and activists. For many participants, they sought out group membership, stayed active in the group, and moved into a leadership role as a direct result of encouraging advice from an advisor or peer mentor. These mentors validated their experiences and encouraged them to grow their experiences even more. As students moved through their student leadership involvements, participants demonstrated the merged identity path proposed by Renn and Ozaki (2010). Participants articulated seeing their own sexuality or gender identities as indelibly linked to their self-concept of their leadership.

The participants of this study supported many of the conclusions reached by Vaccaro and Mena (2011) in their study of queer students of color who pursued activist roles on their campuses. Only those participants active in QPOC referred to their student organization as a family, and only they referred to their advisor as a mother-figure. This supports Vaccaro and Mena’s conclusion that these groups filled a familial place for queer students of color, especially for those estranged from their families. Vaccaro and Mena’s other conclusions were echoed by students of multiple racial identities and group memberships. Many participants spoke of the pressure to be fully developed in their own sexual or gender identities. Participants felt significant pressure to be perfect, to always speak out, and to actively confront every issue.

Lessons Learned

Throughout this research process, I learned several things. I set out to use a three pronged analysis including interviews, observations and document analysis. I did not succeed in conducting many observations. My study design limited the observations to only events
considered open to the public. Several groups did not host an event that they considered open to the public during the time of data collection. Of those that had events, few felt comfortable allowing a researcher into the environment, citing the privacy of their members. I gleaned very little usable data from the two events I observed. The events, a candlelight memorial and a multi-group simulation game, did not provide an opportunity to truly see group leaders interact in meaningful ways with other leaders or group members. A better method for observing social capital in action would have been to observe meetings and advising sessions. However, I was unable to gain access to these meetings in the time period allowed.

In recruiting participants, I sought to have representatives all the active organizations and groups. However, Umbrella is a large organization with multiple officer roles and students who led one LGBTQ+ group often had leadership positions in Umbrella. As such, when I tried to increase representation of the smaller groups, the participant pool of Umbrella leaders began to oversaturate because participants held multiple positions in multiple groups. In designing the study again, I would first recruit participants from the smaller groups and then back fill with Umbrella leaders. I recruited all groups simultaneously and, while not necessarily a problem, I did feel that Umbrella ended up overrepresented in the participant pool.

The participant selection criteria and the time of data collection limited the participant pool to primarily upperclass students. To be eligible for the study, participants had to have held a leadership role for at least one semester. I set this threshold under the assumption that to understand one’s social capital with an organization, the student needed to have prolonged exposure to the organization. I still believe this to be true. However, I collected data between September and November of the fall semester. This meant that participants effectively must have served on an executive board for the previous year. As such, my participant pool included
five alumni of the institution, six seniors, two juniors, and one sophomore. This is a heavy tilt
toward older, more established leaders. Participants who have moved out of leadership
positions, or who have graduated from the institution, may remember or interpret things
differently than they would have while still in active leadership. Additionally, many of the
participants indicated they moved into high-ranking leadership positions during the Fall of their
sophomore year. Moving the time of data collection to the Spring may allow a better
representation of first year and sophomore leaders.

Implications for Practice

Although many of the findings of this research are perchance unsurprising, the use of
social capital as a lens to understand the university experience for LGBTQ+ individuals had not
been documented in the research. This lens gives us an opportunity to gain a different
perspective on how we are engaging students in the collegiate environment. There are several
ways in which the findings of this study can be used in practice.

Students benefitted from capital granted to them by the institution. For those with access,
the programs and meetings made them feel more a part of the institution. They felt surrounded
by people who shared their commitments and who would support them in their work. All
participants who attended the two leadership programs discussed, the student organization retreat
and LeaderShape, along with those leaders who sat on the advisory board, discussed the impact
those events on their leadership. They spoke at length of how their attendance made them feel
like their work mattered and that they were part of something bigger than themselves. They built
relationships with fellow student leaders outside of the LGBTQ+ community. As administrators,
we should seek to intentionally build more of these opportunities and to cast the net wider. Only
one group benefitted from advisory board. Only two groups benefitted from the student
organization retreat. Finding ways to connect more student organizations more to the university and build intentional relationships across group types would build social capital and foster belonging for student leaders. We should also support open leadership events, like LeaderShape on this campus, that are open to student leaders regardless of group type. Even those individuals whose groups did not benefit from high levels of capital benefitted individually through their participation in this event.

Large groups should be encouraged to form nested smaller groups to build trust within the organizations. Through the informal meetings between group members and leaders, Umbrella fostered relationships that strengthened Umbrella. This study also highlighted the importance of horizontal networks, connecting student leaders to each other. As administrators, we should intentionally create bonds between like-minded groups, but also groups of all types, encouraging them to collaborate and support each other.

The findings of this study support the importance of involved and committed student organization advisors, to not only sustain the organization but also to push, challenge, and encourage the student leaders. As advisors, though, we need to think critically about how we are pushing and supporting our students. Multiple students referenced their struggle to balance academics and involvement. Advisors can play key roles in refocusing students and ensuring that they are fulfilling their academic obligations, not simply their student leadership roles. Additionally, being an involved student organization advisor takes time, which is often not part of the faculty or staff member’s job and for which they are not compensated. We should examine ways to train and support advisors and develop systems that support those that do spend time working with student organizations and student leaders.
The findings highlight the celebrated place that these student leaders held on campus as highly visible LGBTQ+ student leaders. They gained access to administrators and participated in important university-wide conversations. People, who did not know them personally, knew who they were by reputation. They could trade on their place within various networks to gain access and remove roadblocks. However, the consequence of having such a high profile was the expectation that they act perfectly at all times. Student leaders did not have the space to make mistakes. This pressure may cause emotional and mental strain. Administrators should reinforce the concept that no leader is perfect, and that all people make mistake. When students make mistakes that threaten their social capital, it is important to help students process the incident and determine ways to make amends with individuals or with their organizations. Additionally, adequate counseling and support systems need to be in place and leaders need to be made aware of them.

This visibility connected student leaders to each other and opened doors to an interactive and engaging campus community. However, it is important to balance that access. These students may be pushed to do more—attend more committee meetings, support other organizations, join new groups. Not only can this put pressure on their academic obligations, but it may also lead to over involvement. Are we stretching our highly visible and highly engaged student leaders too far? It is important that we find ways to balance the workload, so that more than a handful of people are doing to the work to support the community.

Participants discussed the importance of physical spaces as means to foster relationships between individuals. Places like LGBTQ+ centers create spaces where students can foster relationships and develop social capital with each other. The creation and expansion of these
spaces on campuses would help support both individual social capital and the social capital available to the LGBTQ+ student groups.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study confirm much of what Vaccaro and Mena discussed in their 2011 study of students of color who worked as queer activists on their campuses. However, many of their conclusions applied to the student leaders of this study regardless of racial identity. This concept that students feel high levels of pressure to be perfect, to always confront discrimination, and to be hyper-vigilant deserves further consideration across a wider population.

Further research is needed to discuss social capital in Social Fraternity specifically. Members of Social Fraternity had some capital in Greek life, but lacked a sense of belonging in that network. They felt that their organization did not align with the heteronormative structures of Greek life. Due to the research questions posed for this inquiry, and the study design looking for commonalities across groups, I could not delve deeply into this concept. However, future research should look at social capital specifically for multicultural Greek organizations.

Future research should consider the growing effect of social media on forming and sustaining social capital. Of the groups in this study, only Umbrella used social media heavily. Nonetheless, they used it to reach out to members, making them aware of informal group activities that contributed to bonding and the development of trust in the organization. Further research is needed to examine the long term capabilities and impact of social media to create and sustain social capital.

In this study, it was difficult to balance discussing the social capital of new organizations, the social capital of struggling organizations, and the social capital of established and flourishing organizations. Future researchers should consider limiting their study to one specific type of
group. For example, a study considering the social capital of Umbrella and its nested suborganizations would provide interesting insights into the effects of intra-group capital within student organizations. Additionally, further research is warranted on how social capital is related to groups that struggle. How can social capital be used to support student groups through inevitable shifts in leadership? How does leadership turn over effect the social capital of the organization and the organization’s place within networks?

Further research is needed to examine the relationship between overlapping horizontal and vertical relationships within highly hierarchical organizations. Several students discussed the internal conflict of having to hold their peers accountable, especially when those peers were also their friends. Research is needed into how students navigate these intersecting types of social capital—that of being a hierarchical leader and that of being a friend. Additionally, multiple student leaders indicated that their student leadership roles, and the resultant high profile and campus connections, made them feel safer on campus. Institutions frequently conduct campus climate surveys, examining how different populations experience campus. It would be interesting to evaluate a campus climate survey by involvement type and level of involvement. Do students involved on campus, or serving in student leadership roles, feel safer on campus?

Further efforts to examine capital for LGBTQ+ student leaders of LGBTQ+ student groups are needed. This study is limited in scope to only social capital. However, social capital works in conjunction with human and physical capital. They build upon and reinforce each other. Future research is needed to examine how these types of capital interact for these students.
Advisors played a key role in connecting student leaders to networks and other student leaders. However, the impact of the advisor’s own social capital in creating social capital with the student leaders and potentially for the student leaders in unclear. Research is warranted to examine the effect of an advisor’s social capital on the student organization they advise and the leaders of that organization.

Finally, this study is limited in transferability because it focuses on fifteen student leaders at one campus site, and examines their social capital through strictly qualitative, self-reported perceptions. Future research should expand to consider more campus sites and to examine the perceptions of the student’s social capital from not only their own perception, but also the perceptions of those with who they are forming relationships. Future research should also consider methods beyond qualitative interviews. Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002) contend that social capital is best examined through a mixed methods approach:

Growing empirical evidence indicates that social capital is best measured using a variety of qualitative and quantitative instruments. Indeed, the concept cannot be comprehended strictly within the economic paradigm, using quantitative methods. Neither can it be investigated solely through anthropological or sociological case studies. (p. 9)

Follow up studies using either quantitative or a mixed methods approach could strengthen the findings of this study and contribute to transferability.

**Conclusion**

In designing this study, I sought to push the literature base forward by gaining an understanding of how LGBTQ+ student leaders of LGBTQ+ identity-based groups experience the university environment. Much of the literature on this population considered how the individual students benefitted in their own understanding of self as a result of serving in these
roles. While an important construct, I wanted to learn more about how these students interacted with the campus community on a daily basis. I used the lens of social capital to structure this examination. In higher education, we talk of engagement and belonging and I wanted to examine the applicability of social capital as a framework for understanding these constructs.

I found that student leaders all gained social capital as a result of their positional leadership roles in LGBTQ+ student groups. Some members gained more capital than others. Based upon the place of their organization within the institution, the place of their positional leadership role within the organization itself, and their own personal connections to fellow students and student leaders, some participants gained more capital than others. Larger groups with more prominence on campus benefitted the leaders of their organizations the most. Participants in this study viewed themselves as part of something larger than themselves and considered themselves linked to other student leaders, regardless of group type, by the shared communal identity of being student leaders. Social capital gained or lost within one network did affect the social capital one had in another network. By becoming highly regarded within their student organization, and within student organization networks, student leaders gained increased access and developed stronger relationships with student leaders, advisors, and university administrators. They could more easily build rapport within the LGBTQ+ campus community regardless of group membership. However, their roles also cost them in some way. Most participants could point to at least one friendship that had been negatively impacted by their student leadership role. Finally, social capital did contribute to engagement and belonging in a reinforcing cycle. As students became engaged, they gained social capital through relationships, which led them to feel like they belonged on campus, which led them to be more engaged on
campus, as so on. Social capital helped students feel like they became part of the fabric of the institution.

Through this research, I found several things to be compelling. Winkle-Wagner (2010) argued that administrators “have a duty to connect students to other successful students and to those who might be able to afford students the social networks they need” (p. 108). We must become agents of social capital. As university administrators, we have an incredible opportunity to shape the college experience for students. In how we shape our leadership development opportunities, the way we talk to or about certain student organizations and groups, and the relationships we form, we confer social capital on our students. This capital can inform their place within social networks, which can then allow them to create and invest in more capital with others. We need to cast the net wider in how we, as administrators, create capital for students, especially those of historically marginalized identities. Through intentional outreach, relationships building, and programming, we need to create capital for more than the designated few. If our social capital investment is limited to the best and the brightest, the most prominent, or those of the most high profile organizations, then we have done a disservice to the other thousands of students we seeks to serve. If we do not cast the net wider, then the critique of social capital would hold true; it would simply be the rich getting richer. We have an obligation to build up the capital of those who did not start with much, as they are equally important within our institutions.

While connecting to our students is an important way to build social capital for our students, we can also help our students build social capital with each other. Student leaders should be encouraged to foster relationships and collaborations across differences. The ability to connect simply as “student leaders,” forming a shared identity, is a tool for connecting disparate
student populations. Additionally, the highest-functioning student organizations in this study spent time purposefully building intra-group relationships and cultivating a leadership pipeline. Forming group buy-in helped stabilize the groups and seemingly allowed them to perform at higher levels. We need to remind our groups that forming bonding capital within the organization as a whole, not simply within an executive board, is as important as connecting to other student leaders of other student organizations.

Advisors to student organizations served as a powerful force to push and challenge the student leaders in this study. As a person who advises several student groups, I have taken from this research a recommitment to be an active presence in my student leaders’ lives. Participants could speak at length about the positive impact of a committed advisor and they recognized when they did not have one. I leave this research knowing that the role of the student organization advisor is an important tool for building social capital both for the individual students and for the student group. To maximize the potential success of the organization, an advisor needs to be more than the proverbial “signature on a piece of paper.”

Student involvement remained an important and impactful method for engaging these students in the institution. These students wanted to feel like they mattered to someone at the institution. They wanted to feel like they were part of something bigger than themselves. There are many ways to engage students on campus, but the concept that social capital contributes to belonging is important. We need to ensure that our students—regardless of how they are involved on our campuses—feel like they are part of the fabric of the institution. The lens of social capital gives us a framework for thinking about how we connect students to the campus community, engaging them and creating a sense of belonging.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Higher Education Administration

Dear Student Leader,

My name is Kelly Jo Larsen, and I am currently a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program at Bowling Green State University. In order to fulfill the requirements of my degree program, I am conducting an original research study to investigate the social networks for LGBT student leaders in LGBT identity-based groups. I am contacting you because you have been identified as student leader (either currently serving in a leadership role or who previously served) of a LGBT student group at [institution name].

As part of this study, I plan on interviewing current or former student leaders who self-identify as members of the LGBT or Queer community who have served in a positional leadership role in a LGBT-identity based group. Participants must have held a leadership role in an LGBT student group for at least one semester and must be either a currently enrolled [institution name] undergraduate student or have graduated within the past twelve months from [institution name]. A positional leadership role is a formal elected or appointed position, such as president, treasurer, or event planner. I am interested in hearing about your experience as a student leader on campus, your relationships with other student leaders, and your connections to the overall campus. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

Exploring your perspectives will provide a better understanding of how LGBT student leaders of LGBT identity-based groups experience social networks on campus. Also, this study may aid in understanding how students navigate between multiple communities on campus. Individual participants may benefit from participation in this study as they will have the opportunity to have structured time to reflect on their personal experiences. Other than this reflection opportunity, there are not direct benefits to participating in this study.

If you choose to participate in this study, your involvement will consist of an audio recorded interview. The interview will take place in person and last between one and two hours. After the interview, you will be provided with, and asked to verify, transcriptions of our conversations. As I progress with my analysis, I will seek your feedback on emerging themes. The total time expected on your part for your participation in this study will be approximately 3.5 hours. This includes the interview, your review of the transcripts and analysis, and any email or phone exchanges we may have. Current student leaders may be asked to participate in an observation of their student organization. Participation in an observation is completely voluntary. Individuals may agree to participate in an interview but decline to participate in an observation. The time required to participate in an observation, if agreed upon, is determined by the length of the event selected for observation.
The nature of questions asked during interviews may explore personal matters; however, any risks you might experience are no more than expected in daily life. All project-related data and information will be protected, and your personal identity will be kept confidential. You will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym for the study to help protect your identity. Given the limited potential participant pool, however, it may be possible that a person with knowledge of the community will be able to identify participant in spite of the use of a pseudonym. The pseudonym you select will be used to identify your interview responses, files of your interview transcripts, and any other study related documents. The audio files and transcription files of the actual interviews will be kept in a password protected University computer until the completion of the study at which point these files will be destroyed. Any documents with identifying information, such as your signed consent form, will be stored separately, to which only I and my advisor will have access.

I hope you will be willing and able to help me in this study. If you are interested in being considered as a potential candidate for participation, or you have any questions about the research and/or your participation, please contact me at 419-819-7221 or klarsen@bgsu.edu. My dissertation advisor, Dr. Michael Coomes, may be reached at 419-372-7157 or mcoomes@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsr@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Kelly Jo Larsen  
Doctoral Student  
Higher Education Administration  
Bowling Green State University

330 Education Building  
Bowling Green, OH 43403  
Phone: 419-372-7382  
Fax: 419-372-9382  
Email: hesa@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for taking the time to speak to me. Your stories will provide me with a better understanding of the experiences of LGBT & Queer student leaders in LGBT identity-based groups. These interview questions are intended to be very open ended. I want you to share only what you are comfortable sharing with me. Do you have any questions before we get started?

1. Self-identity
   a. How would you describe yourself to me?
   b. This study looks at LGBT-identity based groups. Tell me about your leadership journey in your student group.
   c. What has been a defining moment in your time as a student leader?

2. Student Leadership
   a. What is the difference between being a member of your student group and being a leader in your student group?
      i. Follow up: Tell me how moving into a leadership role in your group has changed you, if it has.
      ii. How has moving into your leadership role affected others’ perceptions of you?
   b. What is the difference between simply being a student on campus and being considered a student leader?
      i. Follow up: How has your day to day life been affected by becoming a student leader?
   c. Tell me about a relationship you think has changed since you took on your leadership role. In what way has it changed?
      i. Follow up: That was a relationship that has had a positive/negative change.
         Can you give me an example of a relationship that has had a (opposite context) change?
   d. Can you give me an example of how a relationship with someone has influenced an action or decision you took in your organization?
   e. Tell me about a time there was conflict within your organization.
   f. There are formal groups, like your organization. Then there are informal groupings of people, or networks—people who are connected but not necessarily linked by membership. What networks on campus do you see yourself as a part of?
      i. What networks have you gained access to because of your position?
      ii. Has gaining access to these networks impacted or affected you?

3. Perceptions of others
   a. Think about a person you would consider a member in good standing in your student group. What does that person do that makes them a member?
      i. Follow up: What would you consider to be a leader in good standing?
         What does that leader do or not do?
   b. Tell me about a time where you felt conflicted about expectations of you by others.

4. Assistance
   a. When you have a problem in your group, who do you go to for assistance?
i. Follow up: Give me an example of a problem for which you’ve sought assistance. What did you do? What did the other person do? What was the outcome?
b. Who has influenced your time on campus so far?
   i. Follow up: Tell me a story about interacting with that person(s).
c. If your group had a concern with something on campus, how would you go about addressing that concern?
d. How do you find out information relevant to your group?
   i. Does it ever come outside of “official channels”?

5. Belonging
   a. Can you give me an example of an instance in which you’ve spent time with members of your group, outside of a meeting or event?
b. Think about your fellow student leaders. Give me an example of an instance you’ve spent time with your fellow student leaders outside a meeting or event.
c. Are there people or things that have made you feel more comfortable on campus?
d. Are there people or things that have made you feel less comfortable on campus?
e. When you took on your leadership role, did that affect how you feel on campus? Tell me about that.
APPENDIX C: CONSENT LETTER

Informed Consent Form for Interview Participants

My name is Kelly Jo Larsen and I am currently a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program at Bowling Green State University. In order to fulfill the requirements of my degree program, I am conducting an original research study to investigate social relationships for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student leaders in LGBT identity-based student groups.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of my research is to explore the social experiences of LGBT student leaders in LGBT identity-based groups. I am using the lens of social capital, a person’s interactions in social networks and relationships, as a way to gain a better understanding of student engagement and belonging on campus. Exploring these perspectives will provide me with a better understanding of how LGBT student leaders in LGBT identity-based groups experience social networks on campus. The purpose of this study is to contribute an understanding to the field regarding how these leadership roles may affect the collegiate experiences for these students. Individual participants may benefit from participation in this study as they will have the opportunity to have structured time to reflect on their personal experiences.

Procedure
As an interview participant in this study, your involvement will consist of an audio recorded interview with the researcher. The interview will take place in person and last between one and two hours. You will be provided a written transcript of our conversation to read and verify. You will have the opportunity to read and revise your responses. Furthermore, as I analyze the interviews for themes, I will seek your feedback. The total time expected on your part for your participation in this study will be approximately 3.5 hours. This includes the interview, your review of the transcripts and analysis, and any follow-up conversations we may have. You will also be provided with a copy of the informed consent document.

If you are in an active leadership role in an LGBT identity-based group I may ask you for permission to observe an organizational event or meeting. This observation is voluntary. Declining to participate in an observation will not affect your participation in this study.

Voluntary nature
Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. During the interview, you may decide to skip a question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University. There is no direct benefit to individuals for participating in this study.

Confidentiality Protection
All project-related data and information will be stored on a password-protected University computer that only I have access to, and your personal identity will be kept confidential. You have the opportunity to select a pseudonym for the study to help protect your identity. The pseudonym you select will be used to identify your interview responses, files of your interview transcripts, and any other study related documents. Given the small possible participant pool, an
individual with knowledge of the student organizational leadership on this campus may be able to deduce identities even with the use of pseudonyms. Participants may decline to answer any question and may end participation in the study at any time.

The audio files and transcription files of the actual interviews will be kept in a password protected University computer until the completion of the study at which point these files will be destroyed. All files and documents will be secured so that only the researcher and her advisor have access. Any documents with identifying information, such as your signed consent form, will be stored separately from other study documents, and also secured so that only the interviewer and her advisor have access.

Risks
The risks of participating in this study are minimal. The nature of questions asked during interviews may explore personal matters and choices; however, any risks you experience will be no more than expected in daily life. As a participant, you have the right to limit or end your participation at any time. Questions asked may bring forth emotional responses as you reflect upon your interactions with members of the community. In some cases, participants may wish to seek further support to process and understand these feelings. The Counseling Center is available to all currently enrolled BGSU students. To contact the Counseling Center, please call 419-372-2081.

As stated previously, all project-related data and information will be protected, and your personal identity will be kept strictly confidential. Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

Contact information
Please contact me if you have any questions about the research or your participation in the research. You may contact me at 419-819-7221 or klarsen@bgsu.edu. My dissertation advisor, Dr. Michael Coomes, may be reached at 419-372-7157 or mcoomes@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered, and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary.

☐ I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature ______________________  Participant Printed Name ______________________

Participant Email ______________________  Date ______________________

Inquirer’s Signature ______________________  Date ______________________

BGSU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE

BGSU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE

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APPENDIX D: HSRB APPROVAL

DATE: September 16, 2014

TO: Kelly Jo Larsen
    Bowling Green State University

FROM: Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [645928-3] Social Capital of LGBT Student Leaders in LGBT Identity-based Student Groups
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 15, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE: August 25, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those
modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 25 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on August 25, 2015. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.